

Factories Are Bases of Power

By Marlise Simons

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SANTIAGO, Sept. 9—Carmen Molina has been a factory worker for 26 of her 48 years. These days she punctures bronze disks at a heavy equipment plant on the edge of the Chilean capital and earns enough to keep herself and her teenage son.

Last week, Carmen and some 450 coworkers hung their factory with flags and garlands, pulled their tables out in the patio and served a lunch of barbecued horse meat and wine. It was exactly two years since workers seized the Rittig factory from its German owners, and three years since the election of Salvador Allende, Chile's Marxist president.

Carmen says she voted for Allende "because he is for the workers, but I don't really understand anything about Marxism or Leninism. They tell us that the factory belongs to us now. I think that's smoke in our eyes. I know very well it belongs to the state."

She raises her voice over an electric guitar and a harmonica blasting folk music from an outdoor bandstand with the snowtopped Andes for a background.

"My work hasn't changed since the takeover," Carmen shouts, "but we are at peace now. We've always been ordered what to do. Take it or leave it, you know. Now, I am allowed to give my opinion."

The Rittig factory is one of almost 300 taken over by

the state or "occupied" by workers since Chile voted for its ruling Popular Unity coalition in 1970, and Allende put the country "on the road to socialism."

A Copper Guevara

Rittig's administrative office is now hung with portraits of Lenin, Marx and Che Guevara hammered out in copper and a forgotten 1970 Lufthansa calendar, a token of its German former owner, who has now set up a factory in Peru.

In the office was the plant administrator, Jorge Cereceda, 44, a softspoken founding member of the extreme Leftist Revolutionary Movement (MIR) who switched to the Socialist Party after being disenchanted "with the MIR's increasingly rigid and military attitudes."

Cereceda explained the "takeover strategy" at Rittig, and many other factories. A 1932 law, promulgated by a short-lived Socialist government, stipulates that the state can "intervene" in companies manufacturing "products of national importance" if production is endangered by labor conflicts.

"So workers create conflicts with the owners and oppose solutions until a stalemate is reached. The workers' assembly then votes for state ownership and asks the government's Development Corporation to take over. It says it does not have the means to buy out the owner and refuses to expropriate. Then the workers just 'seize' the factory. In

Rittig's case, the government finally paid the owner a token sum."

State intervention in Chile's economy has now run the gamut from strictly legal procedures, like the nationalization of copper with the explicit approval of congress to government purchase of all banking stocks, to direct seizures of the factories by the workers, who no longer bother to wait for a green light from the government.

Impetus From the Left

Predictably, the impetus for the seizures, has come from the MIR and the most militant wing of the Socialist Party, impatient with Allende and the Communist Party who advocate a "moderate revolution," legally ratifying each step.

While factories have been taken over ever since Allende's arrival, it was the "bosses' offensive" of last October, when truck owners and white collar workers virtually stopped the country for a month which led to turning Chile's industries into the sources of "People's Power."

With the majority of blue collar workers supporting Allende, the seized factories were divided into industrial zones, chiefly to guarantee continued supplies and uninterrupted production. The zones began to coordinate closely for political action. At the top, they are grouped into provincial organizations. Below, they link into "neighborhood commands" of the working-class area.

They also coordinate with revolutionary peasant groups.

Since the number of workers organized in these factories doubled after the unsuccessful military uprising in June, they are now the government's most conspicuous and strongest power base. Santiago's 10 industrial zones include more than 100,000 workers, who "mobilize" in case of a threatened coup, respond when the government calls for a demonstration of support and warn the government that they will not accept any watering down of the revolution in deals with the political opposition.

Guardians of Revolutions

Government officials confess that slowly but surely these factory workers have replaced the government as "the guardians of the Chilean revolution" they are an embarrassment to Allende, who is caught between the polarizing attitudes of his own supporters and of the opposition.

As the workers have adopted a more combative attitude toward "pushing the revolution forward," the opposition's fear of what they call the "people's army" is also growing. A leading member of the Christian Democratic Party recently remarked, "the workers are so well organized and so determined that one of them is worth five of us."

Chile's armed forces who

for Chilean Left

regard the workers as a potential parallel army, are conducting raids for arms caches in the factories. The military are even disregarding their own regulations, forbidding them to carry large-caliber weapons or to stage searches later "than one hour after sunset."

At the Cerrillos, whose 142 affiliated factories makes it one of Santiago's largest, leader Hernan

Ortega disputed the notion that the workers constitute a People's Army.

"We have no arms," says Ortega, 25, an intense member of the Socialist Party. "Our value is that of a psychological barrier."

Ortega says he is convinced that no government can defeat the workers because "they are no longer responding in line with their own political parties.

Since Allende, more and more workers defend the interests of their class." Proof of this, Ortega explains, is that workers of the opposition Christian Democrat and National parties are now joining factory, vigilance committees, and are refusing to join anti-government strikes. They are equally adamant about not returning seized factories to their former owners, he said.