

The Two Faces of Chile's New Era: A Fearful Woman and a Relieved One

By MARVINE HOWE
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SANTIAGO, Chile, Oct. 9—Chile, nearly a month after the military coup against President Salvador Allende Gossens, can be summed up in a tale of two women: a winner and a loser.

The ruling military junta has denied there are any victors or vanquished but the country is apparently more than ever polarized between left and right.

Loreto Guerrero Correa, a sociologist and interpreter, feels "immense relief that the country has been freed from the threat of a Marxist dictatorship" and has faith that the military will restore order and democratic rule. She is representative of the vast majority of middle-class women who played an active role in opposition to the Allende Government and now firmly support the junta.

The other woman and her family were militant supporters of the Allende regime. Laura (not her real name) says that her husband has been arrested and many of her friends have disappeared in the severe repression that followed the military takeover. "We are afraid, impotent, without direction," Laura says, referring to a minority of intellectuals and much of the working class.

Loreto, who is 30 years old, is married to a professor of chemical engineering and they and their three children live in a modest, comfortable home in the fashionable Vitacura district.

"As a sociologist, I couldn't work in the university or in public agencies because the Marxists insisted that we belong to one of the left-wing parties," she said, adding that she is not a member of a political party but voted Christian Democratic.

She speaks with bitterness of life under the Allende regime. "Everything was scarce," she said. "I'd go to the supermarket and come home with empty hands. By the end of last year there wasn't even any meat on the black market. Chileans are meat eaters; we don't know how to eat fish and there were no canned substitutes."

She complained of cultural privations: "We felt completely cut off. Musicians, ballets, American movies stopped coming because there were no dollars to pay for them. All we had were spaghetti, cowboy films and Russian, Czech or Hungarian film festivals—which were sometimes good but always political. It was the same with foreign books and magazines—they simply stopped coming in."

Laura's recollections of the Allende era are totally different. "It was a time of great hope for the workers, a time of basic social change," she said.

"Above all, Allende preserved our basic values: love for liberty and democracy, freedom of the press, admiration for foreigners, everything that the military have done away with."

Laura is 39, married, with three children, and her home is in the middle-class neighborhood of La Reina. She used to send her children to a private school but transferred them to a public school after they were persecuted by their classmates as "leftists."

She used to spend much of her time working as a monitor in the Women's Centers in the slum districts of Santiago. She does not belong to a political party, but took part in the Patriotic Women's Front, not a party organization. It was set up a year ago to support the Allende Government and has now been dissolved.

Loreto welcomed the coup d'état, wishing that it had come sooner to avoid the "economic, social and moral bankruptcy."

"The armed forces didn't act alone," she insists. "They are strongly backed by the majority of the people—business and professionals, university circles, tradesmen and workers—who expressed their opposition to the Marxist regime through different channels."

"I trust the military as human beings," Loreto says confidently. "I think they are honest and don't want power. They merely want to set things in order and will

go back to the barracks when things are normalized."

The next six months, she feels, will be "rough." She does not like the raids and arrests taking place around the country, but considers them "a necessary evil." If the military wanted to raid her own house, she would consider that "they are protecting us."

Loreto also approves of the current drive against the left-wing political exiles—Bolivians, Brazilians, Uruguayans and other Latin Americans sheltered here under the Allende regime. "There were 13,000 of them who were going to kill us—Tupamaros and people like that," she says, repeating the junta's line.

Her only reservations toward the military involve its intervention in the universities. As a sociologist, she cannot approve of the decision to shut down the school of sociology at the University of Chile or the journalism and communications school at the Catholic University. But she said she understood the measures, because those schools were "dominated" by Marxists.

She expressed hope that things would be back to normal at the universities by the next term, in March.

"We were glad when the military took over because we had been waiting for it to happen for a long time," Loreto said. "But we had all hoped it would be a coup

without violence. We cannot rejoice now, because thousands of Chileans have been killed.

"But there was no alternative. The country had reached such an extreme state of chaos that the only choice was between a Marxist dictatorship or a military takeover and we all preferred the military.

Laura, on the other hand, speaks without hope. She tells of innumerable cases of repression, among the workers who sympathized with the ousted government, and of "accidents."

"I have seen, in my neighborhood, an old man, a Christian Democrat, shot dead because he went out on the balcony after curfew," she said. "They killed a father who had gone to get his child in the streets after curfew and a boy who crossed the street to see his fiancée."

Laura speaks of the fear of the people in the working-class districts, where she works: Of old women who came to her asking for poison to take to their sons, held with other suspected leftists in the National Stadium, which was converted into a prison; of bodies dumped by military trucks after curfew, so disfigured by being beaten that they cannot be recognized; of the huge layoffs of workers, dismissed because they supported the Allende regime; of people who cannot find jobs anywhere else.