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The Chilean Junta's Advertising Campaign

In recent weeks, advertisements have appeared in several newspapers from the Chilean embassy in Washington or from groups associated with it. The ads are significant because they represent a departure from the standard behavior of juntas and dictatorships. Many of these waste little worry on world opinion, knowing first that their palaces can't be stormed by opinions and, second, the friendly giant—the United States—will not withdraw its aid merely because, as in South Korea, Brazil or South Vietnam, basic freedoms are denied. The Chilean ads are worth examining also, because they are the voice of a regime that in its 15 months of rule has been jailing, torturing and killing an unknown number of opponents. The government before it, led by Salvador Allende, was not run by saintliness, but this does nothing to justify the brutality that has been since institutionalized in Chile.

In being concerned that the public gets the right idea about Chile, the junta's ads run into trouble because they appear at a time when other views are being published. Thanks to such independent and reputable groups as the International Commission of Jurists, the Federation of American Scientists and Amnesty International, the public has been given reports about life—and death—in Chile since the coup.

The International Commission of Jurists, a Geneva-based organization that has consultative status with the United Nations, sent a mission to Chile last April at the request of the World Council of Churches. The commission reported in September, among other findings, that "although the military junta declared that the purpose of their coup was to 're-establish order and the constitutional law,' the coup itself was unconstitutional." In addition, "the declaration that the country is in a 'state of war' is a fiction which is maintained for the sake of the increased powers it confers upon the government." The commission reported that an estimated 60,000 persons were arrested and detained for at least 24 hours between the coup and the end of March 1974; about 9,000 to 10,000 were in custody by March, with another large wave of arrests since then. "A substantial number of those arrested have been subjected to torture . . . A number of people have died under torture and others have suffered permanent mental and nervous disability." In October, the commission released another document—"Chile: the Show and the Reality"—which continued the grim theme.

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The publicity was too much for the Chilean embassy. It came forth with a half-page advertisement in The Washington Post attempting to dismiss the commission's second document by saying it "has done nothing but indulge in the repetition of false information recently beamed by Radio Moscow." Such an assertion reinforces the obvious irony: it is exactly in the Soviet Union where indifference to civil rights and political secretiveness has become a perfected art. If anything, the Kremlin would be proud of the junta for moving on dissenters with such firmness.

The fixation with communism appeared in another ad. In an open letter

to me (from an embassy official) about a column I had done on Victor Jara, a Chilean folksinger, it was said that I "echoed the Radio Moscow version" of Jara's death. It is as though anyone who examines the policies of the junta is a dupe of the Kremlin.

In some of its ads, the junta goes beyond mere mindlessness, to issue attacks of a personal nature that have nothing to do with matters of substance. Thus, not only is the wife of Victor Jara slandered—by an insinuation that she is now masquerading as Jara's widow—but so also is the slain Jara. The ad referred to "some peculiar aspects of Jara's private behavior," noting that he was found once in "the company of homosexuals."

Another recent ad continues the smears, this one an attack on the widow of Salvador Allende. A group

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called "Accion de Mujeres de Chile" at the embassy address said: "Never could anyone explain why Salvador Allende did not trust the poor soul that appeared as his wife, Mrs. Hortensia Bussi de Allende. Salvador Allende allegedly deposited \$6 million in the name of his secretary-confidant-companion, not in the name of his legal wife. He gave a fleet of more than 50 automobiles to his secretary-confidant-companion, not to his wife. He brought three mansions in the most exclusive residential areas of Santiago in the name of his secretary-confidant-companion. He did not buy them in the name of his wife.

"The truth is that Salvador Allende never treated Hortensia Bussi the way a normal man treats his wife. Hortensia Bussi had to be a widow to become a wife."

These ads, with loudspeaker subtlety, reveal a style of crudity that other terrorist governments know enough to keep hidden. By jumping into print with personal smears the Chilean government is not only failing to defend itself—how can terror and violence be defended? but is also opening itself to the curiosity of people who otherwise may not have noticed recent events in that country. Flames are fanned, not doused. It would be a comic situation—the Chilean generals are giving juntas a bad name—except that the violation of human rights continues daily.

Reports of Chilean repression keep appearing. On Nov. 19, the Federation of American Scientists reported on the fates of physicians and health workers on the junta's enemy list. Fifteen doctors died and 300 were held for "long periods without being charged. A substantial number were tortured." Amnesty International says that "a vast but unknown number of people—estimates range from 5,000 to 30,000—have lost their lives since the coup." Last week, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported to the parent Organization of American States its finding of "extremely serious violations" of a number of civil and moral rights.

No ad from the Chilean embassy has yet appeared about these reports. It is hoped, though, that those who wrote them are not tuned in to Radio Moscow and have no "peculiar aspects" of private behavior. The junta is listening and watching.