

# Chile: Hard Times

## THE POLITICS OF LAND REFORM IN CHILE

*Public Policy, Political Institutions, and Social Change.*

By Robert R. Kaufman.

321 pp. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. \$12.

## AGRARIAN REFORM IN CHILE

*An Economic Study.*

By Jeannine Swift.

125 pp. Lexington, Mass.: Heath-Lexington Books. \$10.

## WE MUST MAKE HASTE—SLOWLY

*The Process of Revolution in Chile.*

By David J. Morris.

307 pp. New York:

Random House, cloth, \$8.95.

Vintage, paper, \$2.45.

## THE CHILEAN ROAD TO SOCIALISM

*Edited with an introduction*

by Dale L. Johnson.

546 pp. New York:

Doubleday-Anchor. Paper, \$2.95.

## THE TRIUMPH OF ALLENDE

*Chile's Legal Revolution.*

By Richard E. Feinberg.

276 pp. New York:

New American Library. Paper, \$1.25.

## NEW CHILE

*By the North American Congress on Latin America.*

208 pp. Berkeley, Calif.,

and New York:

NACLA. Paper, \$2.50.

## SMALL EARTHQUAKE IN CHILE

*A Report from the Andean Nations.*

By Alistair Horne.

34 p. New York:

The Viking Press. \$12.50.

By **NORMAN GALL**

Under the Marxist regime of President Salvador Allende, Chilean democracy is surviving despite the kind of political and economic stresses that by now might well have wrecked the democratic system in the United States. In the teeth of Chile's worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, with serious food shortages, production difficulties and inflation this year running at an annual rate of 247 per cent, Allende's Unidad Popular coalition led by the Communists and socialists increased its Congressional representation in last March's critical parliamentary elections. The U.P. still is,

Norman Gall writes and lectures on Latin America for the American Universities Field Staff.

however, a faction-ridden minority coalition of six parties, as it was when President Allende was elected in 1970 with only 36 per cent of the vote and a plurality of 1.4 per cent.

While the survival of this Government is less in doubt today, Chile is entering another hard winter with street violence, extremists' seizures of factories and wholesale distributorships and worsening shortages of all kinds. Recently Allende has told his people that Chile will not be able to import all the wheat it needs to make up for declines in farm production, that the 1970's will be "the decade of hunger in Latin America," and that "Chile lives difficult times, which will be even harder in the future."

Chile is one of the world's most civilized political communities, and

while her political rhetoric is often inflammatory, her internal struggles have generated much less violence over the past 50 years than those of most European countries. Chile's chronic inflation over the past century—sorely aggravated under Allende, more than doubling the previous record of 83 per cent set in 1955—may simply be the result of urbanizing earlier than most other Latin American countries because of her nitrate prosperity of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The consequent urban migrations grossly inflated the cost of social overhead and economic development, while Chile lacked (and still lacks) the agricultural and industrial infrastructure needed to support so many of its people in cities. Thus Chilean politics became early in this century

a competition for support from the urban poor and a threadbare middle class stranded in the cities after the collapse of the nitrate industry. Meanwhile politicians kept farm prices artificially low to avoid worsening the hardships of urban voters. "A general urban interest in cheaper food conflicted in the short run with the need to provide market incentives to old and new rural proprietors," Robert R. Kaufman observes in his incisive study of "The Politics of Land Reform in Chile," which mainly covers the efforts at reform under the progressive Christian Democratic regime of Eduardo Frei (1964-70), "The paradox of urban society was that while a majority was probably weakly inclined toward land reform, it was strongly opposed to paying the costs that would be incurred in such a program."

Kaufman, who teaches politics at Rutgers, ably shows how the agrarian question helped shape the character of Chilean politics in the 1960's and of the U.P. regime of the 1970's: the steady weakening of the political Center after 1965 and the strengthening of the Left and Right; the split of the Christian Democrats in 1969 over the pace of Frei's agrarian reform, sealing the party's defeat in the 1970 election; the linkage between land reform and copper legislation before the Chilean Congress at the same time, involving Frei's plan to double copper production and to buy partial state ownership of the mines — a dearer goal for him than land reform — that led Frei to grant tax concessions to the copper companies and to weaken the land-reform bill in exchange for the Right's backing on copper.

While Allende had promised in his 1970 election campaign merely to lay the foundations for socialism rather than to transform Chile by swift strokes into Latin America's second Marxist-Leninist state, the Unidad Popular already has brought Chile far along the road toward socialism by moving the key elements of the economy into the state sector. The land reform begun under Frei has been greatly accelerated within and sometimes beyond legal limits, with virtually all the large and medium-sized farms, or half of Chile's arable land, now in the hands of peasants under state supervision. In addition, the big United States-owned copper mines—the mainstay of Chile's export economy—have been nationalized, as well as the nitrate, coal, iron and steel industries, nearly all the private banks and many factories and wholesale distributorships. It must be remembered, however, that for decades now Chile has been a heavily bureaucratized society, and Allende's actions in land reform, banking and copper merely accelerated trends set in motion under previous Governments.

In an important forthcoming book

Salvador Allende.  
Drawing by M. M. Prechte.



on the political economy of Chilean copper since World War II, Theodore H. Moran of the Brookings Institution reports that leading Chilean conservatives long had called for nationalization of the American copper companies because they felt that these foreign interests were unjustly favored over local landlords and capitalists in tax and investment legislation. For this reason, and because of the general fury at the American companies reaping huge profits from the soaring world copper prices during the Vietnam war, all factions in the Chilean Congress—Right, Center and Left—backed the constitutional amendment submitted by President Allende in 1971 that empowered him to nationalize Big Copper without compensation.

It appears now that the managerial and political problems in the nationalized copper mines that have cut into production can be solved much more readily than the mess in Chilean agriculture. While neither Kaufman's book nor Jeannine Swift's "Agrarian Reform in Chile: An Economic Study" deal with the Allende land reform, these two fine studies dovetail each other in stating the underlying political and economic problems of Chilean agriculture. President-elect Allende told this reviewer in October, 1970: "Chile cannot continue as a country that must import each year \$160-million worth of meat, wheat, lard, butter, and vegetable oils, when there is enough good land to feed twice our population." However, in 1971, Allende's first year in office, Chile imported more than twice that \$160-million worth of food, in 1972 imported upwards of \$400-million, and this year is in great trouble because of the price inflation and grain scarcity generated by the United States-Soviet wheat deal.

Miss Swift, who teaches economics at the State University of New York at Geneseo, endorses Allende's view of the poor use of Chile's best farmland. She writes that "between 30 and 40 per cent of the irrigated land in the Central Valley of Chile (the most important agricultural area as well as the area where irrigation is most important) is in natural pasture. This land could be used for either crops or artificial pasture, which would triple the number of animals that could be fed annually." While Miss Swift is critical of the slower and more cautious Frei land reform, concluding that the goal of giving land rights to only 100,000 peasants in six years was "probably unrealistic," both production and acreage planted on the expropriated farms she studied remained pretty much the same in peasant hands. Since 1939 the annual rise in farm production has been well below the population growth rate, but the traditional stagnation in Chilean agriculture and the managerial problems

of past land-reform efforts both pale before the sharp declines in food production in 1972 and 1973.

Between the farms that were seized illegally over the past 30 months and those expropriated under the 1967 land-reform law, some 3,200 farms have come under the jurisdiction of CORA (Corporación de la Reforma Agraria), many more than this understaffed, underfinanced and politically divided agency could help with technical and logistical support. In his "We Must Make Haste—Slowly," David J. Morris, a young teacher and freelance journalist who spent a few months in Chile in early 1971, quotes a local leader of the Communist-Socialist Ranquil peasant federation who complains at a national meeting that, "We are drowning in bureaucratism . . . We know how the functionaries of agriculture distort and subvert the policy of the Unidad Popular coalition with respect to agrarian reform. We know about the delay of credits, the delay of seeds for the *compañeros* of the *asentamientos* [land reform settlements]."

Unfortunately, Allende exercises too little control over the sprawling Chilean state apparatus, and spends too much time mediating between rival leftist factions that constantly jockey for political control of key bureaucracies like CORA and CODELCO, the state copper corporation. His own Socialist party, which he does not control, is a mixed bag of Maoists, Trotskyites, Castroites and old-fashioned Social Democrats; its ruling faction tends to side with the Castroite MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) in its furious polemics with the more moderate Communist party over the pace of revolution ("Advance to Consolidate," or "Consolidate to Advance") and over legality vs. illegality in revolutionary methods.

A young and small Castroite movement that had begun a guerrilla insurrection in the late 1960's until overtaken by Allende's surprise election victory, the MIR managed to become by 1972 one of the main focuses of controversy in Chilean politics. The MIR has done this by switching from its guerrilla tactics to an audacious mobilization of some of the most marginal elements of Chilean society: *afuerinos* (literally, "outsiders," or rural migrant workers), urban squatters, land-hungry Mapuche Indians and nonunionized factory workers.

The MIR land seizures met a felt need in the countryside because, while half of Chile's arable land has been expropriated, only about 10 per cent of the rural labor force has so far received land rights. Moreover, as Kaufman observes, "neither the Communists nor the Socialists were particularly interested in directing their attention to the *afuerino* stratum." Nevertheless, while the MIR-or-

ganized land invasions have contributed to the decline in farm production over the past two years, the MIR has turned with great coldness in recent weeks to political exploitation of the food shortages in the cities by organizing hunger marches and seizures of wholesale distributorships by urban squatters.

Unfortunately, while backing the extremist faction within Allende's coalition, the New Left assigns little priority in its books to the survival of a functioning democracy, and they tend to ignore the underlying continuities in Chilean politics that have held this democracy together so far. In his introduction to his "documentary" anthology, "The Chilean Road to Socialism," Dale Johnson, who teaches sociology at Livingston College, Rutgers, announced that "I have chosen not to editorialize" in a book "designed to bring American readers information, analysis and perspective on what is happening in Chile." While this book brings some key U.P. documents into English for the first time and contains a fine essay by Franz Vanderschueren on squatter settlements in Santiago, it is otherwise difficult to think of a more infantile and tendentious presentation of the case for Chilean Marxism. One is distressed to find that Fidel Castro has a more prominent place here than Salvador Allende, that nearly all the "documents" are drawn from New Left sources in Chile and the United States (even those purporting to represent the Christian Democrat and right-wing viewpoints), that no mention is made of the 1972 economic crisis or the self-critical documents of the Chilean Communist party aimed at reorienting U.P. economic policy.

In his own essay on "Chile and the Forces of Counterrevolution," Johnson writes that children's school uniforms "mysteriously disappear from the market" as part of a right-wing plot at the beginning of the past school year, greatly embarrassing the Allende regime. However, delivering the Politburo's report to the Communist party plenum on March 15, 1972, Orlando Millas (now Allende's Economics Minister) denounced the "cronism, political patronage quotas, sectarian proselytization, waste and inefficiency" in newly nationalized factories run by "bureaucratic organisms like the Textile Sector Committee, whose incapacity was once again evident in its failure to program a timely supply of school uniforms."

"The Triumph of Allende," by Richard E. Feinberg, a former Peace Corps volunteer in Chile, is a perceptive though somewhat one-sided account of the 1970 election and Allende's first months in office that is laced with trenchant observations on the Chilean character. Morris's "We Must Make Haste—Slowly" is more balanced but less incisive.

By far the most valuable of these New Left books is "New Chile" by the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA). For years now NACLA, in its monthly Latin America & Empire Report, has been publishing detailed and accurate information on such subjects as "U.S. Arms Sales to the Third World," "A.I.D. in the Dominican Republic—An Inside View," "U.S. Military and Police Operations in the Third World" and "Nickel Imperialism: Strategic Raw Materials." These radical reports, while making little pretense of conventional objectivity, usually are well-researched and clearly written. The present NACLA book is a compilation of its Chile reports going back to 1969. It is a rich quarry of hard facts, attractively illustrated and containing detailed and informative charts on foreign investment in Chile, foreign aid and the foreign debt, copper economics and a chronology of major nationalizations during Allende's first year. While I might quarrel with some of the polemical distortions in the presentation of its data, few books give us so much detailed information on contemporary Chile.

The climax of British journalist Alistair Horne's chatty travelogue, "Small Earthquake in Chile," is his 1971 trip to the southern province of Cautin to view the MIR-organized land seizures among the Mapuche Indians, and to interview the notorious Comandante Pepe, the moustachioed young leader of the MIR "guerrillas" in the Liquiñe forests near the Argentine frontier. "It is likely that there will be a right-wing coup within the year," Comandante Pepe tells Horne. "There is no such thing as peaceful coexistence—it is just not possible in South America. . . . Civil war in Chile is inevitable." However, despite many such predictions and many provocative maneuvers by extremists of the left and right, both the much-discussed military coup and the much-discussed civil war have failed to materialize.

Although Chile is entering a period of great hardship over the next few months, the urban poor do not seem to have given up yet on the Unidad Popular regime, despite its botched economic policies and its political incoherence. Chile's democratic traditions remain strong. Allende's wily tactical maneuvers have kept his jerry-built coalition intact, while he has stopped short of actions that would drive the mainstream of his political opposition into desperation. It seems clear by now that the army will not seize power in the absence of flagrant constitutional violations or a total economic collapse. If these possibilities do not materialize in the coming Chilean winter, then democracy should hold together and its survival, by itself, will be a major political achievement of the Chilean people. ■