

Western Oregon University

Digital Commons@WOU

Student Theses, Papers and Projects (History)

Department of History

5-30-2005

[Salvador Allende]

Matthew Jirges

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/his>



Part of the [Latin American History Commons](#), and the [Political History Commons](#)

Matthew Jirges
History 352
5/30/05

My purpose in this paper is to analyze the presidency of Salvador Allende and the causes of his overthrow in 1973.

Salvador Allende Gossens was born July 26th, 1908, in the town of Valparaiso. He graduated from the university of Chile as a medical doctor in 1933. He became a Marxist and joined the Chilean socialist party at an early age. Before being elected president in 1970 he had served as senator and the president of the Chilean senate. He ran for president in 1952, 1958, and 1964, losing all three times. He won the presidency as leader of the *Unidad Popular* (popular Unity) party. He did not win by a majority. He received 36.2% of the vote while Jorge Alessandri received 34.9%. The Christian Democrat candidate, Radomiro Tomic, got 27.8%. The decision went to the Chilean congress, where it was customary to vote for the candidate that received the most votes. He was appointed president by congress with the stipulation that he would respect the Chilean constitution during his presidency. He quickly nationalized many Chilean industries such as copper and banking, reformed the educational and health care system and continued the agrarian reforms of president Frei. In 1971 he reestablished diplomatic relations with Cuba, despite an agreement of American states that none of them would. His economic policies resulted in high inflation and widespread discontent among the middle and lower classes. He was continually at odds with the congress, which

was dominated by Christian Democrats. He tried to solve this problem by ruling by decree. The agrarian reforms that he introduced resulted in major food shortages, his nationalization of various industries failed due to internal disputes among the workers who were supposed to run them. Two strikes, by truck drivers, finally wrecked the economy and soon he was facing discontent from within his own party. A week before the coup that overthrew his government the congress asked the military to intervene to reestablish order. On September 11th, 1973, the military did just that, installing a military dictatorship, and Allende died that very same day in the residential palace.

Allende's presidency got a rocky start. The United States tried from the beginning to keep him out of office, for fear of a communist threat in South America. The CIA set aside 125,000 dollars for anti-Allende propaganda which was later increased to 300,000.¹ After the popular election the CIA drew up an intelligence report that stated that if Allende came to power that, while there were no vital U.S. interests in Chile, there would be "Tangible economic loss," and they would be a threat to "hemispheric cohesion" and "a definite psychological advance for the Marxist idea."² The U.S. was worried about the effect a democratically elected Marxist would have on the elections in other Latin American countries. The economic losses would be the American businesses in Chile that feared they would be nationalized. The U.S. decided that they would be unable to incite

a military coup at this time. The U.S. State Departments instructions to the Ambassador to Chile, Edward Korry, were to "do all possible, short of a Dominican Republic type action, to keep Allende from taking power."³ Korry then relayed to the current president Frei that "not a nut or bolt will be allowed to enter Chile under Allende."⁴ This of course meant economic sanction and withdrawal of financial aid. The CIA then tried to persuade Eduardo Frei and his party to vote in congress for Jorge Allessandri. After he was made president, he was to resign after one day, thereby making Frei eligible to become president again. This plan was abandoned by the congress.

The CIA then embarked on the plan known as "Track II." This was in fact a plan to incite a military coup, with 10 million dollars being set aside for this project, though it was in a White House meeting of Nixon, Kissinger, Richard Helms, and Attorney General John Mitchell it was agreed that there was only a "one in ten chance of saving Chile."⁵ The CIA alone was responsible for this. The 40 Committee, State Department, Ambassador, and the Embassy were not to be informed. The reason for this drastic action can be understood from the United States perspective. They were in the middle of a Cold War with Soviet Russia, and this was seen as an extension of that conflict. They were fighting the communists in Vietnam, they were facing a possible war in the Middle East, and they saw the Syrian attack on Jordan, a U.S. ally, as Soviet backed. They feared that if Allende came to power that a dictatorship like Cuba would be set up and that nearby Latin American countries would go socialist or communist.⁶ None of

this prevented Allende from becoming president.

When he came to power he immediately started upon his plan of socialist change, what he called "*La via chilena al socialismo*," the Chilean way to socialism. In his first year as president, Allende raised wages in both nationalized and private businesses by 35-40%.⁷ With the nationalization of other industries under way, it allowed more jobs to be created. More workers meant more production and Chile reported a 12% increase in industrial production in 1971.⁸ This boom in production did not last very long, because the increase of workers rose to a point where there were too many. They were being paid for little or no production. At the same time the demand around the world for copper declined. Bad for Chile because copper was it's main export. Also in 1971 there were three workers strikes, the coal miners in July, the copper miners in August, and railroad workers for nearly two months in mid year, all over wage disputes.⁹

Fidel Castro visited Chile, arriving on November 10th, 1971. The visit profited both sides, showing the world that Cuba had another ally, and the same was true on Allende's side.¹⁰ This worried the United States, fueling their fears that Chile was heading down the same road Cuba had. The March of the Empty Pots was a protest that occurred on the day of Castro's departure from Chile. More than 5,000 women marched the streets of Santiago to protest food shortages. Young socialists threw rocks into the crowd and police fired rounds of tear gas, and street fights

between men of opposing ideologies took place. This march showed that Allende's promise of socialist revolution without the suffering of the Chilean people was not happening. The food shortages also served to bolster the Black market in Chile. If people were willing to pay higher prices, they could get the items they wanted despite the rationing.

The government maintained that it was not rationing, but "food distribution." On January 10th, 1973, Fernando Flores, Minister of Economy, announced a government monopoly on the distribution of thirty different foodstuffs. Families were to be given food on quotas. Rear Admiral Huerta resigned from his post of Minister of Public Works over this, which angered the navy considerably.¹¹

Another policy that was unpopular was the plan for a unified school. The plan called for private as well as public schools to adopt the new curriculum. This enraged the Catholic Church as well as the Christian democrats, fearing that they would have to subject their children to state-approved education. The Catholic Church condemned the plan. The education plan also angered the military. This was also one of the things that was supposed to be prevented by the Statute of Democratic Guarantees.¹² The Tancazo crisis started Allende's government on the path to chaos. The problem lay with the fact that the government to get rid of the recently negotiated pay raises they had given the miners in the Tancazo area. They promptly went on strike. Violent clashes

between miners and policemen to place in Rancagua where the mine was located. The strike started in April and was not resolved until June.

After the uprising, Allende's government was going through constant changes. Allende was constantly changing cabinet members to appease different factions. From the time right before the uprising to Allende's overthrow his cabinet went through three major overhauls.¹³ The Military finally took matters into its own hands on September 11th, 1973, overthrowing Allende and setting up a military government that was to last until 1990.

Plots to overthrow Allende became much more plausible after the Tancazo crisis. Officers of the 2nd armored division planned to collaborate with the Patria Y Libertad movement. The plan was to send five tanks to the president's private house, capture and detain him. This plan was discovered and aborted after the higher officers in the army found out about it.¹⁴ A few days later, on June 28th, Colonel Souper and seven of his junior officers manned a tank and again in collaboration with the Patria Y Libertad, fired on the Ministry of defense and engaged fire with Allende's guard.¹⁵

The main catalyst to end Allende's control of the government was the resignation of General Prat, his number one man in the army and his most trusted military advisor. General Pinochet replaced him. His remark was that Prat's resignation removed the "last major obstacle" to the coup.¹⁶ The August 22nd decision of the chamber of deputies that declared government reform actions as

unconstitutional opened the door for military intervention, since it practically declared that the civilian government could no longer rule. Pinochet refused to dismiss and force to retire a number of generals that Allende suspected of being plotters on the grounds that he could not on his first day in office because it would make him look like a puppet, but he accepted the resignations of two loyalist generals on the same day.¹⁷ By this time it was clear that a Putsch was underway.

The main causes of Allende's overthrow are many. The main points are that he was a socialist in power, and that he was in power legitimately. The U.S. intervened, financially and in other ways, but not directly, fearing that Chile would turn into another Cuba, and that it would create a sphere of influence over other countries in South America and encourage them to go socialist. They tried to stop this for fear of losing a greater battle that they were involved in with Soviet Russia. Allende's own reforms, such as his wage increases and his nationalization of so many industries and the hiring of workers that weren't needed wrecked his economy. His land reforms were too much too soon. By redistributing the land of large farmers so quickly he made it impossible to keep up supply of foodstuffs. The growing discontent lead to open rebellions which he could no longer control until he finally lost support from inside his own party and the military stepped in and restored order.

Endnotes.

- 1.Sigmund, Paul, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964 - 1976*. Pg. 102.
- 2.Sigmund, Paul, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964 - 1976*. Pg. 113.
- 3.Sigmund, Paul, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964 - 1976*. Pg. 114.
- 4.Sigmund, Paul, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964 - 1976*. Pg. 114.
- 5.Sigmund, Paul, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964 - 1976*. Pg. 115.
- 6.Kaufman, Edy, *Crisis in Allende's Chile: New Perspectives*. Pg. 5.
- 7.Rector, John, *The History of Chile*, Pg. 173.
- 8.Davis, Nathaniel, *The Last Two Years of Salvador Allende*. Pg. 17.
- 9.Davis, Nathaniel, *The Last Two Years of Salvador Allende*. Pg. 19.
- 10.Davis, Nathaniel, *The Last Two Years of Salvador Allende*. Pg. 42.
- 11.Davis, Nathaniel, *The Last Two Years of Salvador Allende*. Pg. 134.
- 12.Davis, Nathaniel, *The Last Two Years of Salvador Allende*. Pg. 135.
- 13.Davis, Nathaniel, *The Last Two Years of Salvador Allende*. Pg. 176.
- 14.Kaufman, Edy, *Crisis in Allende's Chile: New Perspectives*. Pg. 252/53.
- 15.Kaufman, Edy, *Crisis in Allende's Chile: New Perspectives*. Pg. 253.
- 16.Kaufman, Edy, *Crisis in Allende's Chile: New Perspectives*. Pg. 285.
- 17.Kaufman, Edy, *Crisis in Allende's Chile: New Perspectives*. Pg. 288.

Bibliography.

Sigmund, Paul E. *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964 - 1976*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977.

Kaufman, Edy. *Crisis in Allende's Chile: New Perspectives*. New York: Preager Publishers, 1988.

Rector, John L. *The History of Chile*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003.

Davis, Nathaniel. *The Last Two Years of Salvador Allende*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.