



UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Department of Social Development and World Peace

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Office of International Justice and Peace

December 4, 1984

MEMORANDUM

TO: Msgr. Daniel Hoyer
Rev. Robert Lynch
Rev. Bryan Hehir
Mr. Thomas Quigley

RE: Visit to Santiago, Chile, November 20 - December 2, 1984

While the original purpose of my trip to Chile was to participate in a meeting of Holy Cross religious working in Latin America with the General Administration and Provincials of Holy Cross, recent events in Chile required me to spend much more time with representatives of the Chilean Church than I had originally planned.

During the twelve days that I was in Chile, I met with the following persons:

Archbishop Bernardino Piñera, Archbishop of La Serena and President of the Chilean Episcopal Conference

Bishop Sergio Contreras, Bishop of Temuco and Secretary General of the Chilean Episcopal Conference

Archbishop Juan Francisco Fresno, Archbishop of Santiago

Bishop Sergio Valech, Auxiliary of Santiago

Bishop Jorge Hourton, Auxiliary of Santiago

Rev. Christian Precht, Vicar General, Archdiocese of Santiago

Members of the Justice and Peace Commission, Chilean Episcopal Conference

Faculty and staff members, Academia de Humanismo Cristiano

Priests and religious working and living in the poblaciones of Santiago

Political activists from parties in the center and on the left of the political spectrum

I regret that I did not have an opportunity to meet with Cardinal Silva as planned. Instead of returning to Chile from New York, he changed his plans and went to Rome for the formal signing of the treaty between Argentina and Chile concerning the Beagle Straits.

I do not think that I need to attempt a description of present conditions in Chile. The newspaper and news magazine reports that have appeared in the United States during the past month are for the most part quite accurate. A state of seige was declared on November 6 and all constitutional and legal rights 'suspended.' A curfew is in effect each night (with variable hours), and the military presence is overwhelming. It was not at all unusual to see six or eight truckloads of heavily armed soldiers driving through the streets on the way to a 'search and seizure' mission in one of the poblaciones or slums. Helicopters continuously fly over the city, and the sound of gun fire in the background has become one of the facts of life. Unemployment in some sectors is running at 50%, and there is plenty of evidence of malnutrition and hunger. The Chilean government has instituted a reign of terror against its own citizens, but, despite this, two days of national protest and strike occurred while I was there. Censorship is near complete, and newspapers, magazines, radio and television are subject to its terms. Some periodicals have been closed. The news that does get through comes either from a clandestine news report, the "Carta de los Periodistas," or from foreign radio broadcasts (e.g., Radio Moscow, Radio France, and Argentinian radio stations).

With regard to the proposed initiative of the World Bank concerning Chile, I discussed this matter in some detail with Bishop Contreras, Secretary General of the Chilean Episcopal Conference. He does not believe that any new loans to Chile will result, under the Pinochet government, in benefit to the poor. He suggested that I proceed in a quiet and low-profile manner to see if the World Bank and commercial banks will attempt to negotiate political conditions. (Since my return yesterday, I have learned that recent developments in Chile may cause the bankers to postpone this Chilean project indefinitely.)

In addition to our discussion of the World Bank initiative, Bishop Contreras also addressed the subject of church-state relations in Chile. He noted that the government now views the Church as "enemy," and there is little communication between the government and the Church. Bishop Contreras ruefully stated that the government has not yet done to the Church all that it can do. A few days after this conversation, the government proposed new regulations pertaining to foreigners residing in Chile and these are widely believed to be aimed primarily at foreign priests and religious. Bishop Contreras pointed out that the people of Chile are absolutely polarized. He believes, as does Cardinal Silva, that Pinochet, through his increasingly oppressive behavior, is radicalizing the opposition and weakening the

the moderate center. Cardinal Silva has said in this connection that if the government persists in labeling bishops, priests, and religious as "communists," then the people will come to believe that the Communist Party cannot be all bad.

Bishop Contreras would like to see as much publicity as possible given to the actions of the Chilean government blocking or preventing communication by the bishops with the Chilean people. For example, the Church-owned radio station, Radio Chilena, is heavily censored, and newspapers were not permitted to publish a pastoral letter of Archbishop Fresno. We would propose to translate and publish in "Origins" this pastoral letter of Archbishop Fresno, and I would recommend a statement on the subject by Bishop Malone as President of our Conference. I think that the State Department can then be addressed on this subject.

Finally, Bishop Contreras believes that a visit by a team of bishops from the United States would be very helpful, and I suspect that a formal letter of invitation will be forthcoming.

This idea of a visit by a group of United States bishops was heartily endorsed by Archbishop Fresno at a subsequent meeting that I had with him.

During my stay in Chile, two days of national protest (dias de protesta) were called by the opposition. Despite the massive efforts by the military to create an atmosphere of terror and thus subdue the populace, the people were not daunted and the protest can be said to have been at least partially successful. The Church is very much present at such times; chapels in the poblaciones become first-aid stations during the days of protest and they are attended by priests, seminarians or religious and by medical personnel and lawyers.

It is hard to find signs for hope for concrete change in the near future. There is no evidence that Pinochet is willing to consider any transition from dictatorship to democracy. And the Communist Party of Chile has apparently abandoned its commitment to electoral and legislative change and now recognizes the need for armed insurgency. Again, all of this weakens the center. The poblaciones and the universities are at a potentially explosive point.

The mention of the universities reminds me of an action by Cardinal Baum that was described to me by several people as "scandalous." Following upon the coup of 1973, the rectors of the public and private universities of Chile were deposed and general officers of the Armed Forces installed as rectors. Since that time, the imposed rector of the Catholic University of Chile has been Admiral Swett. Apparently, Cardinal Baum recently sent a letter to Admiral Swett praising the "Christian" nature of his administration of the university and comparing his administration quite favorably with the administrations that had

preceded him. People were genuinely outraged by this action by Baum. I gather that copies of this letter were distributed by the Admiral to the members of the university faculty and staff.

A few random comments: (1) the United States Ambassador to Chile is seen as favoring the ideological right and he is quoted as having said that the main issue is one of 'national security.' He is alleged to have attempted to influence U.S. foundations against the funding of moderate think-tanks such as those operated by Chilean Christian Democrats. (2) On the other hand, the Chilean Ambassador to the United States is apparently the foster son of Pinochet. (3) Catholic Relief Services came in for high praise; people commented that there had been significant changes in the last year or so in the way in which CRS operates. (4) And, finally, I suspect that if things in Chile continue on their present course, in a few years' time we will see that Nicaragua was child's play by comparison.

Rev. William M. Lewers, C.S.C.
Director

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