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Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

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10. Subj: When Klatch Means Country. (Part I of Two Parts).

1. Summary: If the US is as much an idea as a community then Chile is as much a klatch as a country. I return to this first impression of 27 months ago to reaffirm my convictions that Chile is one of the calmer and more decent places on Earth, that its democracy, like our own, has an extraordinary resilence and that the high decibel count of Santiago is mostly the sound of open safety valves and not the hiss of suppressed furies. This new year will be noisier than ever; those who feast on conspiratorial crumbs will have rich fare for the next nine months before a new President is elected. For my part, I see little that will endanger US real interests in the country, in the area or in the hemisphere. Rather, as a result of the unburdening of the historical hand-me-down (the copper ownership issue) that placed our relations with Chile in permanent imbalance, I foresee gradually improving opportunities for both countries to arrive at a healthier relationship consonant with President Nixon's partnership policy and Chile's search for self-sustaining independence. End summary.

2. On Christmas night, the Marxist-dominated TV Channel 9 offered General Viaux as its journalistic scoop of the year. The central figure of the October 21 military "uprising" here responded to more than a dozen respectfully-worded questions from practically all of Chile's top politicians (among them the Marxists' Allende, Teitelboim, Baltra and Tarud, the POC's Tomic and Fuentealba and the Nacionalies' Jarpa) which were read by one of Castro's most active supporters in Santiago. To put this event in American terms, one would have to imagine General MacArthur shortly after his removal from active duty appearing on Peking radio to answer questions from our leading politicos read by Stokely Carmichael. That Viaux spent the best part of an hour repeating with all the spontaneity of a pneumatic drill his disclaimers of any political ambitions is less relevant to an understanding of Chile than that this TV happening took place.

3. Similarly on Christmas day, the most serious and widely read of all newspapers in Chile, El Mercurio, published a two-column front-page top-head as the day's biggest news an inviting story on how to emigrate to Australia. The article blurbed the local Australian Embassy's efforts to promote an exodus and noted rather sadly that the Chilean colony down under numbered only one thousand. It added cheerfully that business was definitely picking up. Other Latin lands would surely condemn such journalism as treasonable; Anglo-Saxons might view an equivalent article in the Times as a put on. In Chile it was recognized as El Mercurio's manner of making a political argument.

4. For the past week the parties of the Left have been staging a marathon debate on who should carry their popular front standard in the elections of next September. No literate Chilean could possibly swallow Marxist proposition that such unity exists or that the "program" adopted earlier by the parties was more important than the candidate chosen to carry it out. But

the masquerade is played out as if there were a genuine hold-your-breath public interest in the chances of each of the five declared runners. Hardly anyone in the media says the obvious—that the Communists' Neruda is anxious to return to his poems and his peregrinations in dollar lands, that Tarud is a soul with slick hair and that the Radicals' Baltra, despite his "front-running" position, was left at the gate. The play is the thing and the players take their roles so earnestly that the charade becomes captivating to them.

5. So it was too with the military effervescence of October. No coup in South America could be carried out in the farcical manner of General Viaux. The people of Santiago rightly remained on the sidelines, not because they have little commitment to their democracy, but because they have had too much experience with how political affairs are conducted here. Drama, sensation and noise are the essential elements; violence, turmoil and repression are extraneous. That is why Chileans take rumors of earthquakes seriously; what is truly threatening is not predictable, it not acted out in the open, is not an extension of the coffee-house klatch.

6. These observations are not intended to be read as indifference to what most successful Communist Party in the hemisphere is seeking to accomplish nor to where an aimless military may go nor to how democracy can be sapped by egocentric posturings of politicians. Nor are they designed to present a rosier-than-reality view of Chile and its government. I would only seek to restore balance to a perspective whose headliner hues are more superficial than real. (End Part I)