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Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

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Nota de Archivo: *Santiago. Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 774, Country Files, Latin America, Chile, Vol. II, Jan 70–Nov. 70. Confidential. The document is printed from a retyped copy of telegram 3499 from Santiago, September 5, 0858Z. This copy of the telegram was submitted to President Nixon under cover of a September 9 memorandum from Kissinger stating the following: "Attached is a cable from Ambassador Korry commenting on the Chilean election. It was written on September 4, as the final results became known. It is an important cable which I think you will find of interest. In it Korry notes that Allende's triumph appears final; he notes the mistakes of his opponents that permitted the Marxist's triumph. He describes the characteristics which he believes will make it relatively easy for Allende to bring about a socialist state within constitutional framework. He observes*

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1. Chile voted calmly to have a Marxist-Leninist state, the first nation in the world to make this choice freely and knowingly. Dr. Salvador Allende proved the wisdom of Soviet policy in Latin America by scoring the revolutionary tactic of his model, Fidel Castro, to pursue an electoral path to power. His margin is only about one percent but it is large enough in the Chilean constitutional framework to nail down his triumph as final. There is no reason to believe that the Chilean armed forces will unleash a civil war or that any other intervening miracle will undo his victory. It is a sad fact that Chile has taken the path to communism with only a little more than a third (36 pct.) of the nation approving this choice, but it is an immutable fact. It will have the most profound effect on Latin America and beyond; we have suffered a grievous defeat; the consequences will be domestic and international; the repercussions will have immediate impact in some lands and delayed effect in others.

2. We have been living with a corpse in our midst for some time and its name is Chile. The decomposition is no less malodorous because of the civility which accompanies it. Chileans could as usual chatter endlessly on television and radio and in the early hours today as if nothing had changed and the screen switched from variety shows to roundtables of politicians pontificating as foolishly as ever. Chileans like to die peacefully with their mouths open.

3. Preliminary analysis of the results (I write this with votes still to be counted but the stink of defeat is evident and the mounting roar of Allendistas acclaiming their victory arises from the streets below) show that Allende got every bit of the 35 pct. we had feared plus more women in the low income neighborhoods. He also benefitted from the switch in Santiago of middle class women from the aging Alessandri to the prattling Tomic. In their majority the females opted for law and order as represented by Alessandri, but enough thought they had nothing to lose with Allende and others were seduced by the lure of the center where Tomic stood.

4. Allende did not equal his 39 pct. of 1965. He did not come close to the 46 pct. that was the sum of the parties that formed the Popular Unity. It is obvious that the clientele of the Radical Party deserted him in droves. But it is equally evident as I wrote on election eve that 65 pct. of Chile is anti-right and Alessandri was so identified with that position that he could gain the predictable 5 pct. minimum and no more.

5. There were no surprises in the year-long campaign, no sudden “events” that affected voters decisions. We erred by one percent on Allende, predicted the Tomic vote and were only 2.5 pct. off on the Alessandri prediction. But the Communist Party, whose leadership has been matched by the coldness of its calculations predicted the Allende vote as 36 pct and the Alessandri tally as 4 pct. They were almost dead on target. If anyone thinks that such a party will not fully exploit the Allende Presidency to impose on Chile a communist structure, I suggest they ponder the dead reckoning of these cool customers. I would also recommend that they reflect upon the ease with which the BVIU [garble—PCCh?] took absolute control of some 80 pct of the more than 8,000 Popular Unity committees that were formed in the country for the campaign, with what facility they managed the formation of the phoney popular front and with what skill they steered their choice, Allende, into the nomination of the heterogeneous grouping.

6. The potency of the Communist Party and the poverty of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) can best be seen with regard to Cuba. The PCCh convinced Castro to play their game, to call off the Mod Squad of Socialist extremists known as the MIR and thus deprive Alessandri of much of the law and order issue on which his campaign was so largely rested. The PDC through that No. 1 grave-digger of Chilean democracy, Foreign Minister Gabriel Valdes, chose to appease Castro. Just as he argued with us that the way to contain Castro was to give a free hand and to “assimilate” Cuba, so too did he and the PDC hand the shovels for their own graves to the left in Chile. They ceded on every issue this year to the PCCh and to the Socialists; they played the card of anti-Americanism and legitimized Castro and the left. They considered me innocent and uncouth for pointing out that they were not harming the US but destroying themselves. They should be given neither sympathy nor salvation. Mistrust is indeed “the mother of safety” and I cannot imagine wisdom without it.

7. I have confessed repeatedly in these communications my equal distrust of a Right that blindly and greedily pursued its interests, wandering in a myopia of arrogant stupidity. They disdained organization and deliberately scorned the one element of their forces that had some semblance of structure, the National Party. The preached vengeance against the Christian Democrats whom they regarded as a more justifiable enemy because of its betrayal of class than their class enemy, the Communists. They fought the first rule of nature, of change, and insolently believed that time stands still. They only tolerated the few modernists in their midsts, men who were certainly no less rich, no less self-interested, but who at least understood the flux in which we are all caught.

8. Allende was smarter. He was persuaded by the Communists to stick to bread and butter issues, to project a personality with broader appeal than a rigid and cynical doctrinaire. With 60 pct of Chile still poor and with inflation and unemployment the rock-bottom electoral issues, it is truly surprising that only 36 pct. voted for him.

9. We too were misled by the polls I have so often mocked. The Gallup and much respected CESEC polls were way off the beam. They predicted 41.5 pct for Alessandri and although the Embassy calculated an actual vote of 36.5 pct. for Alessandri, I was enough influenced by these foolish samplings to increase the projection to 38 pct. Voters are not Gaderene swine; in a society with 90 pct. literacy, they can be quite bloody-minded about their interests. And when the candidate of the government party preaches that the system in which they live is rotten and issues the call for revolution, it is not surprising that enough decide to place their faith in the genuine article.

10. I briefed the US press a few days ago on why I was convinced beyond any doubt that Chile alone in the western and democratic world had the objective conditions to permit a unique constitutional transition to a Communist state by an Allende government without the usual rough stuff. The ten reasons are:

a. Allende and his Socialist Party and the PCCh have a revolutionary program that is the product of a lengthy evolution in the country. They have the conviction, the organization and the power base.

b. The Presidency of Chile has almost unique powers and with the latest constitutional reform that will take effect with the new government, that authority will be further strengthened.

c. The bureaucracy of Chile is statist-minded and the majority of congress is very amenable to further state control. There has never been much true private enterprise in Chile and the large businesses have also depended on government favor for their profits, their initial capital and their protection. Proposals to nationalize foreign enterprises and the critical banking and insurance sector will not encounter serious opposition.

d. The big business sector of Chile is fragile and thinly based. It can be eliminated with far greater ease than in, say, a France or Italy.

e. The political right depend upon the economic right. The elimination of the latter dooms the former. And as this process proceeds, will tear apart the PDC in the same salami-slicing method that the Communists employed these past six years in a totally free society to destroy that other mainstay of the center, the Radical Party.

f. The free press in Chile is represented primarily by the El Mercurio group. This enterprise, owned by Augustin Edwards supported Frei in 1964 and since. This time it went all out against the Communists and became the great thunderer for Alessandri. It is doomed. And “it” means the only respectable journal in the country plus a large number of satellite newspapers in Santiago and through the country. It will be eliminated not by nationalization, I predict, but by an irresistible squeeze through the government’s control of paper supply and prices, the government’s use of advertising and the disappearance of meaningful and free private enterprise. Democracy depends ultimately on the freedom of expression. To still the loudest voice is to silence dissent. Of the three TV channels in Santiago, in a still free society, one is totally controlled by the Marxist-Leninists of the University of Chile, another is controlled by a combination of Marxists and very left wing Christian Democrats of the Catholic University and the third is the State’s.

g. Chile has an almost unique system for the naming of its military command. Not only does the President have the greatest influence on the selection of service and carabinero chiefs but more significantly the officers selected automatically retire all those over whom they have passed on the seniority list. No more facile instrument was ever devised to eliminate by legal and traditional methods a broad chunk of opposition.

h. Economically, Chile is in the best shape ever. It has $500,000,000 (M) in hard reserves, more per capita than the US. Starting next year it will be the second largest copper producer in the world, surpassing the Soviet Union, thanks to the enormous investment of US companies. There will be no lack of markets; Chile’s prime customers are western Europe and Japan. As in the case of Cuba, these mercantilist nations will happily be ready to pick up basement bargains on copper. An Allende regime will also save a large outflow of hard currencies in profits, amortization, license payments and may even default on the three/quarters of a billion dollars that it owes to AID and the Ex-Im Bank. The point is that it need not face any economic squeeze for some time.

i. Chile is really an island. Its three neighbors have sufficient problems to eschew any pressures on this country.

j. There is no country on earth that is so far from the two superpowers and Red China. It is not Poland nor is it Mexico.

11. In sum, it will not require any massive commitment from anyone. The Soviet Union will move with caution to expand its base. It need not risk much soon. Chile is not another Cuban drain on Moscow’s resources. It will take years before the dead-weight of the new system will crush the economy of the country.

12. It is lamentably the US that will have to move faster. Tomorrow we shall report on the measures we are taking to prepare for the new era.

13. Leadership depends upon, if I may use the Spanish, cabeza, corazon, and cajones—head, heart and guts. In Chile they counted upon chachara—chatter.