DECLASSIFIED // SECRET; PRIORITY; LIMDIS

Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

Identificador Archival:	frus:frus1969-76v21/d77
Agencia Emisora:	Departamento de Estado
Fecha del Documento:	1970-09-11
Colección / Serie:	FRUS 1969–1976, vol. XXI: Chile, 1969–1973

Nota de Archivo: *Santiago. Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 15 CHILE. Secret; Priority; Limdis. Repeated to Asunción, Bogotá, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Guatemala, La Paz, Lima, Mexico City, Montevideo, Panama, Quito, Rio de Janeiro, San Salvador, Santo Domingo, and USCINCSO.*

3640. Subj: Some Hope for Chile? Ref: Santiago 3537, 3538.

1. Last Saturday night, President Frei, mulling the election results, was like a quarterback of the last place Falcons after being battered by the Vikings rush for 59 minutes. With only 50 seconds to go, it was fourth and 12 with the ball on his one inch line. Even the wives knew the call. As the hobbled quarterback took the snap, he bobbled the ball and stumbled like a holy roller in communion with a higher power. Somehow he faded to the white line of the end zone before flopping an end over end (shades of Joe Kapp!) pass to his aged, unhinged right end, Alessandri. The receiver brought the crowd to its feet with his famed St. Vitus step, a kind of palsied shuffle that caught napping the left safety, Allende, a ball-stealer of no mean repute. Squeaks of hope and roars of anguish welled from the stands as Alessandri clutched for the ball and fell across the sideline with Allende atop. First down and ten, the ref ruled, as the Vikings stormed from their bench. When, to coin a phrase, the rhubarb ended, the ball was on the 13 and shifty Frei quickly ran off a series of short flips that bought it to the 24. Now there were 43 seconds left and the Vikings with their eleven best fielded were spoiling for blood.

2. We have 43 days to go in what might well be the last of the complex Chilean political dramas. Without doubt, it is of transcendental importance and certainly no “game.” The sequence that has produced a ray of hope for the beleaguered defenders of democracy are:

A. A midweek statement by defeated Alessandri stating he would not accept election by Congress Oct 24th to be President and would resign. What he actually meant was that if Congress should elect him over Allende, he would step aside for Frei or possibly another PDCer in new elections. Considering the compatibility of Alessandri and Frei, this maneuver might be compared to, say, President Hoover stepping aside for President Roosevelt.

B. The Armed Forces after goose-stepping through pro-forma bluster discovered to no one’s surprise that they are paper tigers. They cannot count on their troops, they believe and they cannot count on each other, they know. In any event, it has been so long since they acted like an army and so long since they learned to behave with civility in a democratic structure that they are more like Ferdinand the Bull than their Spanish progenitors. Frei steered them with dexterity into self-satisfying support of his constitutional play. (Whether they can stay there or will succumb to the lures of Allende cum Tomic is not an entirely closed question.)

C. The Christian Democratic Party, a disparate collection of politicians covered by an umbrella with stripes of trompe l’oeil morality and genuine populism, initially behaved like Gadarene swine. Tomic led them to the Marxist slaughter-house by embracing Allende before TV last Saturday; his troupe of fools and knaves rushed behind in his

footsteps. But by mid-week because of the indecent haste with which the Popular Unity forces sought to seal their relative majority of 36 percent of the vote as a “popular” mandate and because of the heavy-handed efforts of the Marxists to silence the voices of dissent and because so many of Chile’s professionals began to leave the country, second thoughts in this land of the eternal second thought began to assail some of the more pragmatic members of the delusion-prone party. (With some, second-thoughts probably came when it became apparent that situation permitted party construct strong position from which to bargain with and extract concessions from Allende.)

D. The Alessandri supporters, at least those who could keep their heads, recognized that Frei was their only chance and that even if his long-shot gamble paid off, they would no longer enjoy their former privileges. As several have told me, they did not realize how deep and broad was the Chilean desire for reform. Hence they are rallying behind Frei in their way to save the country and their honor. They are fighting for the right to live in Chile.

E. A number of truly independent figures, men whom I know who have broken with Frei for not pushing reforms fast enough or for accelerating them, have rallied to his cause too. They include some of the best minds in this country and their adherence is a meaningful plus in organizational and brain power.

F. The Church in the form of Cardinal Silva has remained as silent and as prudent as can a church with no great influence over the mass and with too few clergy to do much more than steer for safety. However the Cardinal will take those symbolic actions necessary to help Frei when and if the moment presents.

3. We have described in a series of cables how the Communists and Allende have reacted to this new opening to the future. The strongest weapons they have are their encroachments on the freedom of expression combined, as it is, with the trumpeted menace of civil war. The Communists are as united, energetic, cool, determined and effective as they were during the campaign they won for Allende. They are employing sedatives and scares, indeed every weapon in the manual, as we have reported in other messages. Even the Alessandrista traders in the central markets are impressed by promises from Allendistas that their profit margins will be increased from 20 pct to 30 pct.

4. It was the threat of civil war that frightened enough of the middle class women into voting for Tomic instead of Alessandri last Friday and thus providing Allende with his first placement. It was and is the threat of violence that has stopped the saber-rattlers in the Army. Fear for country and for personal future combined with artful blandishments are dividing the Armed Forces and creating a mood of rationalizing Allende’s right to the Presidency. Similarly the Christian Democratic Deputies and Senators are torn and many who might fight to the end want guarantees of some way out of Chile if they lose the struggle.

5. I would not be surprised if the two camps—Frei’s and Allende’s—turn the country’s most patriotic holiday of September 18th into a turbulent outpouring of partisans. At the least Frei, who is the focus for the military parade, will be acclaimed by a mob his supporters are organizing.

6. At this juncture his team believes it has 38 of the 74 PDC Congressmen firmly aligned (the seventy-fifth PDCer had been in a coma for five months). With the 45 Alessandristas in Congress and perhaps five radical defectors, the paper total at this point would thus be 88 for the phantom Alessandri. On the other side, there are 75 Allendistas plus 17 PDCers who currently favor the Marxist solution for a total of 91. And in the middle are 19 PDCers still sitting on the fence. The PDC in its declaration last night by Party President Prado has kept all options open, thanks to Frei’s stage-managing of defensive forces against Tomic’s death wish.

7. Frei has kept himself and his name out of all compromising positions. He acts officially as the President of all Chileans. He refuses to recognize Allende as President-elect (although no less than the President of the Inter-American Bank in Washington, Felipe Herrera, has made such an indecorous commitment). He refuses to establish political liaison with

Allende although he has acceded to requests of first the Allende and then the Alessandri forces to have liaison with the Minister of Finance in the latter's efforts to stabilize the worsening economic situation. He refuses to allow anyone to mention his name as the future candidate for a runoff against Allende; instead he posits others.

8. In short, for a hobbled player, he is surprising alert and alive in a long-odds game that will get very rough indeed as those seconds tick off before Oct 24th.