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Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

Identificador Archival:	frus:frus1969-76v21/d99
Agencia Emisora:	Departamento de Estado
Fecha del Documento:	1970-09-16
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; Immediate; Limdis. Repeated to U.S. Southern Command and Asunción, Bogotá, Bonn, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Guatemala, Kingston, La Paz, Lima, Managua, Mexico City, Montevideo, Moscow, Panama, Paris, Port au Prince, Port of Spain, Quito, Rio de Janeiro, Rome, San José, San Salvador, Santo Domingo, Tegucigalpa, London, The Hague, Madrid, Brussels, and the U.S. Mission to NATO.*

3741. Subj: The Communists Take Over Chile.

1. There is a graveyard smell to Chile, the fumes of a democracy in decomposition. They stank in my nostrils in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and they are no less sickening here today.

2. President Frei is more clear-minded than Benes. He has no doubts that Allende means Communism, but he is frozen by indecision, by self-pity, by an unwillingness to risk all for democracy. He wants an excuse for action and the certainty of success.

3. Frei has his potential Masaryks although here there will be no demonstrations; rather, if Allende comes to power, they will either slip out of the country or fade away.

4. For the moment, Frei and his supporters from both the PDC and Alessandri camps are engaged in an under cover organizational operation that is unknown to a public that is being hammered only by Allende propaganda. They want to keep open the option of what I have accurately called a Rube Golderg contraption—a vote in the congressional runoff Oct 24th for Alessandri who would renounce the Presidency and thus provoke new elections in which Frei would run.

5. But there is an essential difference between the Christian Democrats-with-Frei and the Alessandri people. The former are also thinking that if this ploy does not work, then as a fallback, the PDC will negotiate such “guarantees” from the triumphant Popular Front as to assure a chance of maintaining democracy in Chile.

6. The current Christian Democratic leadership is concentrating on these illusory “guaranties.” Negotiations are underway on different levels between PDCers and Allendistas. The defeated candidate, Radomiro Tomic spoke at length in the Party National Council Monday night in favor of immediate recognition of Allende as the President-elect. He was answered effectively by Frei’s men who are seeking the conflicting yet convergent goals of electing Frei and of extracting maximum safeguards.

7. The economic situation in the country is not good in the short-term. The refusal of many entrepreneurs to risk capital, the stoppage of most private construction, the universal insistence on cash only transactions, the widespread conversion of currency to dollars, the slow but steady layoffs of workers, the downturn in production and considerable emissions by the state of currency will doubtless add considerably to the high inflationary rate (30 pct as of Sept 1) and other economic

problems. It could have a snowball effect. Rather than seek to use this deterioration to his political advantage, Frei is employing govt resources to stabilize the economy, as Allende wishes.

8. Similarly the Armed Forces, more a trade union than anything else (as I stated during last October's army sitdown strike) is only willing to support constitutional processes. Frei will give them no order to act and will take no action to provoke their action. The Armed Forces CINCs have refused a suggestion from a high Frei lieutenant to issue a public statement that they support the constitution and that they will guarantee the law and order necessary for such processes. By choosing silence, they are in effect endorsing the spurious Communist-Socialist threat of civil war if Allende is blocked from the Presidency.

9. The Armed Forces have also requested the supporters of Frei to tone down the major demonstration planned in favor of the President on the most patriotic of Chilean holidays, Sept. 19th, when the three services put on their major parade of the year. They wish no banners or signs in favor of Frei because they consider political action to be a disruption of the one day of the year that is truly the military's. The Armed Forces are by and large convinced that if they retain their "professionalism"—the word is used in the conditions set forth by the PDC in its talks with Allende & Co—democracy will be maintained in Chile. Equally innocently, they assume there will be no disruptions between Chile and the US that could affect them and they are reinforced in this view by the almost complete disappearance of US military support for Chile in the past three years. (The end in 1967 of grant milaid, the congressional restrictions on sales, the modest ceilings on MAP sales and the almost complete disappearance of CONUS training have had the depressing effect we have long been forecasting.)

10. The Christian Democrats are the lever Frei (and everyone else) wants to pull. But it is a divided party—some would say split between knaves and fools. A few have no illusions about Allende's dependence on the Communists and, therefore, the nigh-inevitability of the future structure and direction of Chile. These few, who are leading the organizational effort on behalf of Frei, have been directly threatened by "friends" with the loss of everything if they do not desist; "everything" has been spelled out to include murder. They, in turn, have recruited perhaps a total of 38 PDC Deputies and Senators of the party's representation of 74 who are more or less pledged to vote for Alessandri in the runoff. Opposed to them are, by their count, perhaps 18 who favor Allende's accession. Thus in mathematical terms, Alessandri could count on his 45 supporters, 38 PDCers and at least five and perhaps ten radical defectors or a total of between 88 and 93 of the 199 congressional votes.

11. But a paper tally can be as misleading as polls. Not only do the Communists believe they have 30 certain PDC votes in support of Allende plus the minimum of 75 they count as being firmly in the Allende camp (an absolute majority of 105) but more importantly the PCCh is cock-a-hoop with confidence that they have all the trends in their favor. Their skillful blend of mass terror via the civil war threat, private terror against holdouts, negotiations with the PSC and almost complete control of the media and universities is, in their view, an unexcelled elixir. As Baudelaire said of the devil: "and the rich metal of our own volition is vaporized by that sage alchemist."

12. Will, that most precious of all faculties, is not one of Frei's trademarks. "Will is what appears most clearly in a masterwork," said Valery. "No vagueness as to ways and means. No uncertainty as to objective." Frei has at least three objectives: to act as President of Chile without exposing himself to anyone's darts; to be a shadowy alternative to Allende; and to rationalize the deal that his PDC might strike with Allende. If he cannot choose soon, that most clear-minded and cohesive force in Chile, the Communist Party, will do it for him. Allende is their masterwork in Latin America and they do not lack for purpose or will.

13. I can hardly blame Frei when I read the world press. There is hardly a flicker of interest in the disappearance of South America's exemplar of democracy; there is hardly any awareness abroad of how the press is being silenced, how the radio

and TV is almost totally in Communist-Socialist control, of how the Army has been cowed and the politicians terrorized. If our and the European press can rationalize what is doubtless the most important event in this hemisphere since Castro, why should not Chilean politicians indulge in the almost unlimited human capacity for adaptability?

14. A few postscripts of some import:

A. Tomic in his plea for Allende told the PDC that the “rightists and the State Department” are the only opponents. Tomic is doubtless referring to the Dept’s statement and my echo of it to Allende’s emissary last week that the constitutional process is still underway, a statement that a man of Tomic’s persuasion could only interpret as support of the Rube contraption.

B. The leftist press is applauding Foreign Minister Valdes for having circularized his Missions to counter, as Clarin put it, “conspiratorial maneuvers of ultra right Chileans and actions such as those of New York Times and is intended to support true situation and future of Chile.”

C. The secret negotiations between the PDC and Popular Unity on the army include discussions of a secret annex proposed by the PDC to maintain the present high command for one year and then any change with their approval.

D. The Frei camp is concentrating on gaining delegates to the PDC party junta that will take the final decision sometime in October.

E. Frei had a talk in Vina del Mar with OAS SecGen Galo Plaza that may have shaken that gentleman’s view that Communism could not happen in Chile. Other Latin Americans attending OAS conference there have also begun to have second thoughts.

F. The only strong voice of press dissent—El Mercurio of Chile—is still thundering in its editorial columns but nowhere else. Its management is under such threat of physical harm that it is questionable if the paper can resist the terror campaign.

G. The Cardinal of Chile has just been dissuaded for the third time from making his call on Allende. Unless there is divine intervention, he may soon go the way of all flesh. And the faithful will flock behind him in an over-powering wave.

H. The French Ambassador is busily seeking a deal with Allende. In return for recognition there would be major advantages for French firms. Can the British be far behind? Or the Italians?