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Nota de Archivo: *Summary: This INR Intelligence Note reported that the surge in strikes in mid-1972 was politically and economically motivated. It concluded that the unrest would not lead to the unseating of Allende. Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 15–1 CHILE. Confidential. Drafted by Jorgenson, Arenales, and Misback; approved by Summ; and released by Mark.*

CHILE: MAJOR CHALLENGE TO PRESIDENT ALLENDE

The current middle class strike wave is the most serious challenge to Allende to date, but is not likely to topple his government. Motivated primarily by basic political and economic grievances, the breadth of support for the protest has surprised even opposition political leaders. No one political group is in effective control of events, and no common goals have emerged. The military is exerting behind-the-scenes pressure for accommodation and hopes to avoid more direct intervention in the situation. While Allende is expected to weather the crisis, economic and political tensions and grievances will almost certainly result in additional challenges as the scheduled March 1973 congressional elections approach.

Protest politically motivated. The underlying cause of the current confrontation in Chile is an accumulation of general grievances and fears triggered by the specific bread-and-butter complaints of individual transport owners. Continuing threats to political freedoms and to what remains of the private sector have stimulated support from other groups. The manner in which the situation has evolved suggests that there was some pre-planning and an orchestration of support by elements not immediately concerned with the transport industry, primarily business and professional groups. There has not been agreement on goals, however.

Moves toward confrontation. Opposition political parties have been carried along by force of circumstances and appear to have been surprised by the intensity and breadth of support for the strikers. They have taken advantage of the situation to air a broad range of complaints, and have spurned overtures by Allende to discuss the situation. Opposition political leaders are not in effective control of events, however. Awareness that chance developments could further weaken their control argues strongly in favor of early accommodation. Should the situation deteriorate further, demands that Allende make significant political and economic concessions can be expected to escalate. The danger exists that when and if Allende offered such concessions, political leaders on both sides of the spectrum would not be able to convince the more militant of their followers of the need for compromise. So far there has been relatively little violence, but acts of sabotage or worsening street confrontations would harden attitudes on both sides.

Armed Forces: reluctant arbiters. The Armed Forces have been drawn reluctantly into the situation by having had thrust upon them the unwelcome task of maintaining public order by enforcing government edicts. Military leaders remain hopeful that Chile’s political leadership will resolve the current situation, and are working behind the scenes to encourage

this development. They are attempting to play the role of neutral arbiter—for example, by monitoring radio broadcasts to assure balanced news reporting. It is highly unlikely that the military would initiate a move to assume direct control of events or of the government until it were convinced that other remedies had been exhausted. The military is neither confident of its own capacity to govern nor does it have a program whereby to do so. Should the positions of both the opposition and the government harden, the military would apply ever-increasing pressure to both sides in an effort to force an accommodation. The military would physically intervene only after continuing, increasing, and uncontrolled disorders, or a clearly perceived threat to Chile's constitution and institutions had provided what it considered sufficient justification to act.

Prognosis: fair. Allende's chances of weathering the present crisis are better than even. To do so, however, he will have to devise some formula whereby to satisfy the opposition that he has made meaningful concessions while appearing to his supporters to have arrived at the best solution possible under the circumstances. The disarray of his Popular Unity coalition probably affords Allende somewhat more room to maneuver with the opposition than would be the case in a more tranquil situation.

More troubles ahead. The present confrontation is the latest in a series of crises, each of which has had the effect of lowering the level of political tolerance and increasing the tensions of subsequent developments. Assuming the resolution of the present situation, the momentum generated by such tensions and by continuing economic deterioration will almost certainly cause additional confrontations in the not-too-distant future. These will further constrain the ability of each of the principal actors—Allende, the Opposition, and the Armed Forces—to operate within the democratic framework as the March 1973 elections approach.