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Memorandum for the 40 Committee

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Nota de Archivo: *Summary: This memorandum provided a post-April 4 status report which argued that, despite the fact that the UP coalition gained nearly 50 percent of the vote in the April elections, the opposition regained confidence in itself. Source: National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Chile, 1971–72. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. A handwritten notation at the bottom of the first page reads, "Group discussion 26 May 71."*

Status Report on Chile in the Wake of the 4 April Elections

I. Summary of Election Results

A. Final election returns confirm predictions that President Salvador Allende's Marxist-oriented parties would fare well in the municipal elections, even though his Popular Unity (UP) coalition failed by a hair to capture their coveted popular majority of 50%. Government parties collectively (including the splinter Socialist USP which supports the government but is not a member of the UP) won 49.74% of the vote while the opposition (including independent candidates) obtained 48.90%. The remaining 1.36% of the vote comprised blank or voided ballots. An official printed bulletin issued by the Chilean Ministry of Interior excludes the independent, blank and voided ballots, allots each party higher percentages and shows the UP receiving 50.86% and the opposition 49.16%. This claim is gimmickry designed for propaganda purposes and is being contested by opposition parties.

B. Allende's authority within the UP has been strengthened by the elections, as was expected, and he has already warned the opposition that he will seek approval of his policies by plebiscite if opposition congressmen try to block his legislation. The opposition, however, has regained its confidence and now has both the will and the ability to resist because they, as does Allende, view the election results as a stand-off when they really expected a conclusive Allende victory.

C. A breakdown of municipal election results by party is as follows:

D. The above figures warrant the conclusion that the opposition ran a well-targeted and reasonably successful campaign by virtue of getting more individual municipal candidates elected than did the UP (923 as opposed to 766). Carmen Frei, former President Frei's daughter and the PDC standard-bearer in the municipal elections, won the highest national vote total, followed closely by National Party President Sergio Jarpa. Overall, these achievements helped to offset the opposition defeat in the separate 10th District Senate race, where UP candidate Adonis Sepulveda obtained 49.62% of the vote, winning more than the combined total of votes cast for his two opponents, Andres Zaldivar (PDC—32.08%) and Jorge Ovalle (PDR—15.17%). Zaldivar won a considerably higher proportion of the vote than the PDC obtained nationally for whatever consolation that was worth to the PDC.

II. Post-Election Political Trends

A. The UP

(1) The Communists have been supplanted by the Socialists as the principal force in the UP coalition. The PCCh's 16.9% is little more than its historic growth rate, and the PCCh's inability to move forward significantly despite its superior organization demonstrates both an ingrained resistance to Communism which has been built up in the electorate over the years and the success of the anti-PCCh electoral campaign waged by both the PDC and the PN. Allende and the PCCh itself are ascribing the PCCh's lack of progress to these PDC/PN attacks.

(2) The Socialist Party with 22.39% of the total vote was the biggest gainer, since it had received only 12.2% in the 1969 congressional election and 13.9% in the last municipal election in 1967. The PSis obviously the beneficiary of Allende's personal popularity and the traditional "honeymoon" era of a newly-elected president. Socialist predominance in the UP may reduce the depth of Chilean ties to the USSR, but it may also tend to anesthetize those sectors of the opposition whose primary concern has been the threat of a PCCh takeover in Chile. The PS victory also increases the likelihood of Chilean support to revolutionary groups in other countries.

(3) The big loser in these elections was the Radical Party (PR), once the center fulcrum of Chilean democracy, which sank to an all-time low of 8%. Despite its electoral losses, PR votes once again gave the required cutting edge to Allende's political power, and its presence in the UP coalition continues to provide the cloak of respectability that Allende both craves and needs. In his first post-election press interview, Allende recognized this when he made clear that there will be no change in the government's internal structure and that "the Radicals will continue to keep three Ministers because the system will continue as it has so far." Opposition parties will continue to try to split the Radicals away from the UP, but this goal will be difficult to achieve.

B. The Opposition

(1) General

There is no doubt that the April elections were held at a time most favorable to the UP, which had taken a number of very popular actions while the negative economic effect of inflationary measures (such as increasing the money supply by some 80% over a year ago) had yet to become apparent. Despite these disadvantages and the strong personal appeal and charisma of Allende, opposition parties did much better than expected. The PDC remains the largest single party in Chile. The PN continues to be a significant political force and provides the opposition with a desirable centrist personality. All opposition parties could gain at UP expense if the country moves into an economic crisis in the months ahead. As stated before, the election results have restored the opposition's confidence in its political viability despite a strong current of pessimism during the elections.

(2) The PDC

The PDC, still the strongest single party in Chile, obtained a total vote of 26%, which is not far below the 28.1% received by Tomic, PDC candidate in the 1970 presidential elections.

The PDC leaders believe the inconclusiveness of the municipal elections, in terms of Allende's desire for a clear majority mandate, has reduced the appeal of the UP among potential PDC defectors. At the same time, they realize that the next goal of the UP will be to split the PDC by attracting its leftist sector into the government. Intelligence reports indicate that Allende plans to make a public call for the PDC to join the UP in working "for the benefit of the country", branding those who refuse as "obstructionists" and offering government posts and other favors to those willing to defect to the UP. There will probably be some defections from the left wing of the PDC to the UP which conceivably could provide the UP with control of the Senate. On the other hand, the PDC as a whole has emerged from the election with a clear anti-Marxist orientation and would probably become more cohesive and effective in this respect if its more radical left-wing leadership departs.

Since the election, PDC contacts have indicated party determination to continue its efforts to strengthen the PDC's organizational structure, particularly among women, peasant, labor and neighborhood groups, and to further boost its media and propaganda capabilities.

(3) The PN

The PN was quite content with its 18.12% of the total vote and particularly jubilant about the PN being able to win this voting percentage without the appeal of a national figure such as Alessandri (who was supported by the party in the 1970 presidential election).

The PN is planning to strengthen the party organization in anticipation of the 1973 congressional elections. In the meantime, its leadership will continue to attack strongly the Communist Party, using its radio and newspaper ("La Tribuna", whose circulation is growing steadily and has now reached 7,000 copies daily) to blame the Communists for everything that goes wrong in the economy and elsewhere. [2 lines not declassified]

(4) The PDR

The PDR, a splinter party generally considered to be without any political future, was able to obtain 3.8% of the total vote, or almost half the total vote of its parent Radical Party which forms part of the government coalition and might have been expected to gain as did the other UP parties. The PDR will continue to provide a haven for Radical Party members disenchanted with their party's leftist leadership and discouraged by its poor electoral performance.

III. Effectiveness of Support to Opposition Parties

In January 1971, when the Committee authorized financial support of Chilean opposition parties for the April municipal elections [less than 1 line not declassified] it was widely accepted that the UP might well achieve its goal of a popular electoral majority; with most, it was a question of how fine a majority. That prospect made it important that the opposition parties be enabled "to make a vigorous electoral effort to maintain the morale of their supporters, evidence party vitality, and strengthen those factions within their respective parties which are willing to make a united effort to maintain democratic freedoms". At least in Chilean eyes, these objectives have all been achieved. Specifically, the fruits of U.S. Government financial assistance have been:

—To deny Allende the clear popular majority he sought. He will now have to reconsider his concept of national plebiscites to push through revolutionary programs since he cannot be sure of winning the support he needs. He has already done so in the case of his much publicized desire for a unicameral congress.

—The political opposition has successfully challenged the UP. The most timid sector of Chilean society (the monied and privileged, many of whom were prepared to leave Chile if the UP received 51% of the vote), has now become more optimistic and is to a large extent remaining in the country. They are encouraged not only by the results of the election but by the demonstrated willingness of the opposition parties to fight.

—The opposition parties have regained their confidence and have both the will and the ability to resist the UP. Official figures released by the Ministry of Interior indicate that opposition elected 923 municipal councilmen as compared with 766 councilmen elected by the UP.

—The opposition parties now have media capabilities which will be of great and continuing value in opposing the UP. The PDC is about to complete the purchase of Radio Cooperativa, and PN is continuing to make effective use of the newspaper "La Tribuna" and of Radio Agricultura.

[2 paragraphs (11½ lines) not declassified]

The future is not necessarily bright, as Allende will attempt to fulfill his promise to “make haste slowly but implacably” in carrying out his revolution, but at the least the opposition is buying time and remaining viable.