

Augusto Pinochet
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Although General Augusto Pinochet is commonly seen by Americans as the stereotypical dictator, bent on dominating his country and killing innocent civilians without just cause, his actual rise and rule was ridiculed with holes in his power. Although he is hated today for his crimes against humanity, under him Chile became a powerful economy in South America, and he succeeded in accomplishing a peaceful transition to a democratic government once again.

Chile before Pinochet had a republican government, but under the democratically elected Salvador Allende, the nation headed towards socialism. Allende, as part of the Unidad Popular party, had a distinct goal of manipulating companies and labor to approach the “Chilean way to Socialism” (Zapata 85). Through this type of manipulation, there was a marked increase in the number of strikes in the country, and as the Marxist government under Allende clashed with the traditionally strong labor movement within Chile, tensions arose. Eventually, this culminating in opposing political powers through their strength behind supporting strikes, such as the *El Teniente* copper strike, which was able to help discredit the Allende government (Zapata 94). This type of economic failure resulted in waves of unrest within the general population, as well as a growing politically unease throughout the area.

Due to his economic policies, Allende was not particular popular within Chile, but he was just as hated within the United States. Although there were Chilean solidarity groups within the United States that supported the democratic socialism that Allende pursued, the United States media still continued to view Allende as a tyrant, with Newsweek publishing articles of “Chile under the Gun”, referring to Allende (Power 51). This leads up to the United States Central Intelligence Agency becoming involved in the issue, engaging in “financial subsidies” for an anti-Allende campaign within the country weeks before the coup, as well as further subsidies that

remain classified by the CIA (Steenland 22). This type of outside pressure is relatively different from other coups, as America entered a new stage of interventionism within Latin America.

As a result of the political opposition driving internal economic failures as well as the external enemies that Chile had, the strains of revolution moved closer and closer. Although it failed badly, the Tank Putsch, or the Tanquetazo, allowed for the citizens to realize that revolution was a potential alternative to the current system of government. As it was very close to the Military coup and was also driven by military members, it is possible that this early attempt at revolution paved the road for the Military Junta to form and eventually take over. There were clear social problems that were revealed during this time.

Pinochet's early history is not well studied, as he was the son of two military parents. Raised in military school, he quickly climbed the military ladder, becoming an Officer Chief of Staff, Major, Sub-director of the War Academy and finally the Commander in Chief of the Chilean army. Although he did not see active service until the day of the actual coup, he was said to have studied geopolitics very well. His appointment as Commander in Chief was directly from Allende himself, as he was a trusted member of his cabinet for a long time, which allows the conclusion that Pinochet did not have a firm ideology at the beginning of his rise. Although there is conflicted studies over if Pinochet was a clever detractor or a clueless man, it remains that his control over the military may be one of the only reasons he was able to take part in the coup (Steenland 15). However, he remained as one of the weakest links within the military Junta that took over the country. On the morning of September 11, 1973, the coup by the Navy, Air Force and the Army was in full effect, and by that afternoon they surrounded the presidential palace and claimed victory over the country (Steenland 15). In a short bloody coup, the constitutional government was replaced by a ruling military Junta, where Pinochet was a key member.

As a result of the coup, the regime entered a period of discovery and revitalization under the Junta. In the early days of this establishment period, there was a considerable amount of confusion as the regime settled down to rule over the country. However, one thing was clear: there was the clear execution of other political parties as soon as the new Junta took over. Immediately, the Caravan of Death as well as Operation Condor began, which both prosecuted political prisoners, specifically communists (Collins 27). These operations were not limited to Chile, but were part of the “Dirty War” that the United States was heavily assisting in fighting against the communists within Latin America. This piece of foreign relations aid helped legitimize the power of Pinochet’s regime. The Rettig Report, published after Pinochet’s departure from office, details the 2279 people who were killed for political reasons during this reign of terror, establishing Pinochet’s group as the standard dictators (Rettig, 152). This kind of oppressive manner was continued through the political actions of the Junta, banning all leftist parties as it established itself as the single party over all of Chile.

Through this time period, the ideology of Pinochet and the Junta began to be shaped by the “Chicago Boys”, or several Chilean economists who were sent to the University of Chicago to be trained (Moffitt 35). They returned before the coup with a plan for getting the country out of its rampant inflation and restoring its competitive nature by using the free market, and developed the El Ladrillo, or The Brick, as a manual for Pinochet’s regime to use (Silvia 392). As a result, the development of Chile’s economy was actually rather accelerated during this time period, outpacing many other Latin American countries. This idea of the Free Market became a critical component of Pinochet’s ideology, although he did change later on.

Although the military Junta was able to be supreme to every other part of the country, the xJunta was a rather democratic place internally. Although the Junta arrived with no experience or

ideology, they soon adopted a complicated system of balancing each of the members of the Junta. Even though Pinochet distanced himself from the Junta by December 1974, becoming the President of the Republic, he was still constrained by laws of unanimity within the Junta (Barros 12). Any one leader of an armed force could have the power of veto, so he didn't have true power during this time. Pinochet was not yet able to exert dominance over the Junta, therefore, he did not have enough power to exert dominance over the country.

However, the 1980 Constitution that the Junta drafted showed that not all members of the Junta were committed to a prolonged dictatorship. Although it seemed to increase Pinochet's legitimacy, it also reflected how "the commanders of the navy and the air force refused to countenance permanent authoritarianism and demanded an agreement on the nature of the successor civilian regime" (Barros 15). Not only did the constitution further Pinochet's personal legitimacy, but it also set up the process for his fall as well as served to limit his individual power over the nation. Therefore, even as he became the supreme ruler after the 1980 Plebiscite, he was still limited in many ways and did not introduce drastic changes to the nation other than the continued suppression of political prisoners.

Pinochet did ascend to the state of rule over the country during the 1980 Plebiscite, where the people of Chile voted to approve the new Constitution, overturning the 1925 Constitution and giving Pinochet 8 years of established power over the nation. Pinochet claimed a 67% majority support for his rule, and amidst the period of economic growth within Chile, began his era of rule (SLAS 277). Although he did not do much to radically upset the delicate political framework of the military Junta, he took the title of being the leader of the party.

However, this period did not last for a long time. Soon afterwards, the 1982 recession hit all of Latin America. Chile, with its currency pegged to the United States dollar and most

economic safeguards turned off, suffered through a rather tumultuous time. Although it did not quite reach the level of turmoil evident during Allende's final days, it did reach a large fever pitch. Afterwards, the Pinochet regime slightly backtracked from their ideology of having free markets, giving in to more socialistic movements on the cultural side, such as increased healthcare and other plans. The recession did not last for a prolonged period of time, and was actually followed by what is today called the "Miracle of Chile", a period of economic growth that was keenly created due to a dramatic shift by the government in order to compensate (Kurtz 3). This adaptation to the free market was a distinct feature of Pinochet, and perhaps one of the reasons why the United States maintained decent relationships with the dictatorship. Under those circumstances, it is fair to say that although Pinochet may not have come in with clear ideas, after he took a stance against the socialistic/Marxist nature of Allende, he was able to see his country through and stuck with the ideas of the free market. As a result, while he is always criticized for his murders, many attribute the peaceful transition to a democratic society to his actions here.

Throughout the period when he had complete rule, Pinochet continued to be rather civil towards the rest of the world. He led Chile as one of the first Latin American countries to have Free Trade Agreements with Asia, while allowing more multinational corporations to engage in business within Chile (Codevilla 129). Internally, Chile had one of the lowest infant mortality rates within Latin America due to the socialist nature of the public health sector, and the nation as a whole prospered. Despite all of his crimes against humanity, he seemed to have helped his nation.

Pinochet was a very interesting case, and despite having seven years of rule, he did have an odd downfall. Although we learned of how the fall of a single leader does not necessarily

mean the fall of the party, because Pinochet did not truly found a political party to begin with, that does not really apply here. Instead, during the 1988 Plebiscite for confirmation, he was voted out of office, and peacefully transitioned to a position as “Senator for Life”. While many people attribute this to how Pinochet always maintained a policy of “Protected Democracy”, it is also possible that this was a result of Pinochet never having solid control or a desire for absolute power in the country (Ensalaco 410).

Pinochet was not the standard dictator that Americans seem to think of; although he did kill more than a fair share of people in order to cement his rule, he was able to lead his country towards a system of free trade that is rarely paralleled anywhere else. Through his gentle rise as the leader, to his controlled power by the Junta, Pinochet’s rule was carefully controlled and allowed for the reemergence of Chile onto the national stage.

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