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Speaker 1: From Communication Center, the University of Texas at Austin, this is Latin American Review, produced by The Institute of Latin American Studies in association with Communication Center at UT Austin. This series provides a weekly analysis of important events occurring in Latin America and commentary on Latin American culture and society from a humanistic perspective.

Bill Jorda: This is Bill Jorda with Richard Goodman, Jim Engel, and Frank Tavares with this week's report on Latin America. In this week's program, we have a special report, an oral history of the 1973 Chilean coup on this fifth anniversary of that event. We have reconstructed the coup from two viewpoints. One of course is the perspective of the military obtained from statements and live broadcasts at the time of the coup. The other perspective is that of the Allende government obtained from Orlando Letelier, Allende's Minister of Defense at the time of the revolution. A few months after we spoke with Mr. Letelier, he was assassinated in Washington, DC. Toward the end of the program, we'll have a summary of the current situation in Chile.

Speaker 3: The 1973 military coup in Chile has been one of the most controversial political events in recent Latin American history. Internationally, the military government that overthrew Allende was viewed by many as neo-fascist because of the heavy-handed tactics used by the military to purge suspected Marxists and many non-Marxists who had been associated with the Allende government. The military's alleged violations of the human rights have remained an issue of international concern. The allegations have seriously damaged Chile's image abroad and, therefore, her relations with other nations.

The Chilean coup of 1973 was unlike most coups in Latin America. First, Chile had perhaps the strongest tradition of constitutional democracy of any country in Latin America. It was a tribute to constitutional procedure that President Allende was the first Marxist head of state in the world to come to power in a democratic election. The coup was also more violent than many others. It brought a change in the economic, social, and political ideology of the nation, an abrupt reversal in the nature of government. It was to be an overnight change from the extreme left to the extreme right.

One of the best ways to obtain a historical perspective is through an oral history of the events and aftermath of September 1973. One source of oral history of the coup is a record album released by Radio Agricultura of Chile. It's a two-record album which provides the military's view of the period preceding the coup and their justification for having broken constitutional norms. It was widely circulated in Chile and was titled [Spanish 00:03:02], The Eleventh. The

narrator begins with his description of what happened in Chile. [Spanish 00:03:09].

Speaker 4: In September 1973, Chile completed 163 years of independence. In 1810, our dependence was eliminated, enabling Chile to find its own destiny. In another September in 1970 in a free and constitutional election, Marxism came into power. With the support of one-third of the electorate, Chile had started on what was called the Chilean road to socialism. On September 4, 1973, the Unidad Popular regime completed the third anniversary of its victory, but in a country in ruins with a war-torn economy without having been in war. Chileans of every persuasion asked for a change in government policy, but the government would not listen. There were others outside the government who did hear those cries who had not forgotten their pledge to defend their nation, a nation that was being blindly led down a false path.

The armed forces had not issued an opinion, but they were taking note of what was happening. When the situation became intolerable, a new day in September dawned, one that changed the direction of our country which had been following the wrong path for three years. It was a long day, tense and determined, and it began before dawn in the barracks of the armed forces.

Bill Jorda: That account from the recording [Spanish 00:04:40] gives the view of those who supported the military coup. We obtained a different perspective from Orlando Letelier, a prominent member of the Allende government who was assassinated in September 1976. Letelier served as Chile's ambassador to the United States in the first years of the Allende government and was Minister of Defense at the time of the coup. He was with Allende immediately before the coup and was one of the first members of the government arrested. Letelier spoke with Jim Engel and Ed Gleb a few months before his assassination in September 1976. He described how he first became aware that a coup was underway.

Orlando Letelie...: I was Minister of Defense and I was in charge of the [inaudible 00:05:27] when I first became the minister for the first [inaudible 00:05:31] was out of the country and was just coming back that night. The 10th of September, I was with President Allende because we were helping him. It was two other ministers, to write, to prepare a speech in which he was going to announce the 11th, a referendum. He was going to call for a referendum in order to solve the democratic means, let us say, the big situation that exists between the opposition and the government. On Sunday, the day before, he had called General Pinochet and he had told him that the government was going to announce a referendum, a plebiscite. Then this moved the armed forces to accelerate the coup and instead of making it on Thursday as they had planned, to make it on Tuesday because of course after president had announced the referendum, the general political conditions were going to be different.

Well, that night, I was with him and about two o'clock, let us say, in the morning, I went back to my apartment. I used to live in downtown. At 6:23 or 24, and I remember exactly because I have my watch over my night table, I

receive a call from President Allende saying that there was some movement of the navy, that he had just received a call from Valparaiso, from the main port in Chile announcing him that there was some movement of the navy. As you know, the navy was supposedly operating with the American Navy in the so-called Operation Unitas, but they came back during the night to Chilean port and they occupied Valparaiso. Then I started trying to call Pinochet and the three head of staff of the different branches. I went to La Moneda, to the government palace where I met President Allende for a few minutes. Then we decided that somebody had to enter to the Ministry of Defense because that was the center for the coordination of all the operations of the people that were organizing the coup.

Now, President Allende had the impression that there were some officers and generals that were going to be loyal, the so-called group of the constitutionalists. He thought that among them Pinochet was one of them. He also thought that perhaps they have arrested Pinochet and then he asked me, "Well somebody has to enter there and to try to see what's possible to do." So I did. I tried to enter alone. When I was entering to the lobby, let us say, of the Ministry of Defense, there was a Green Beret officer that said, "Well allow the minister to enter," and for a seconds, I saw that perhaps that Allende was right, that still there were some kind of possibilities of talking with somebody and to find some kind of officers that were going to defend the government, but after entering about 10 yards within the lobby, I received the first [inaudible 00:09:06] in my back with the point of a submachine gun. Then when I fall to the floor, I was surround by about 25 soldiers aiming at me with their submachine guns, among them my own bodyguard that was a member of the Chilean Marines, let us say. Then I was put in the basement there, then taken to another military unit, later on sent to the concentration camp in Dawson Island.

- Jim Engel: How did they announce the coup to you? Did they notify you that you were being taken prisoner, that a coup was underway?
- Orlando Letelie...: No, there was a kind of physical action against me and then of course they were ... At that moment, they were starting to announce by several radios they had took control of, that a junta was in charge of the country and they were starting the bombing of the government palace. [Spanish 00:10:21].
- Speaker 3: At 8:30 AM, September 11, 1973, radio stations throughout Chile began an historic broadcast with the Chilean national anthem.
- Speaker 4: Chileans listening to their radios that morning heard the following announcement from a military spokesman. [Spanish 00:11:32].
- Because of, one, the grave social and moral crises through which the country is passing; two, the incapacity of the government to control the chaos; three, the constant growth of paramilitary groups trained by the parties of the Popular Unity that are carrying the Chilean people toward an inevitable civil war, the armed forces and police have decided, one, the president of the republic ought

to proceed immediately to hand over his duties to the armed forces and police of Chile; the armed forces and police are united in order to begin the historic and responsible mission of fighting for the liberation of the homeland and to avoid that our country should fall under the Marxist yoke and to look for the restoration of order and legality; three, the workers of Chile can be certain that the economic and social advances that have been obtained to date will not suffer fundamental modifications; four, the press, radio, and TV loyal to the Popular Unity should suspend all activity immediately, not doing so will result in air and ground attack; five, the people of Santiago ought to remain in their houses in order to avoid innocent victims.

Signed by the four members of the military junta generals: Augusto Pinochet, Army; Jose Tiribio Merino Castro, Navy; Gustavo Leigh Guzman, Air Force; Cesar Mendoza Duran, Chief of Chilean Police.

Speaker 3: Letelier was taken prisoner along with many other intellectuals of Allende's government. He talked about his experiences on Dawson Island near the Antarctic where he was imprisoned for a year.

Orlando Letelie...: In Dawson Island, they put what they generally called the beeps or the intellectuals of the Popular Unity. We were 40, 37 people from Santiago and seven persons from Valparaiso. Beside that was a big group of people that were in another part of the camp from Punta Arenas, from the southern part of Chile. In our group of 40, we have a member of the cabinet, Jose [inaudible 00:13:46] was a member that was the Minister of Economics. All the members of the cabinet and the presidents of some universities, several senators, and some congressmen, the mayor of Valparaiso, the main port, the governor of the province of Santiago, the Secretary General of the Communist Party, Luis Corvalan, and let us say the leaders of the political parties of the Popular Unity Coalition, [inaudible 00:14:22] and other people.

The conditions there well were quite serious. Some of the people that were there died during their imprisonment. One of them, Jose Toha, that used to be, before myself, Minister of Defense. You have to imagine that this is an island in the southern part of the Magallanes Strait quite close to Antarctic.

Jim Engel: Antarctic.

Orlando Letelie...: The conditions there is almost always below zero and we have the labor force, forced labor to fulfill, digging, different kind of things, digging almost everyday. At the beginning when they have enough food, we had only lentils in a little can for about three months. Then I lost, for instance, about 40 pounds in two months and that creates also some kind of physical problems for several people. The people were always taken out for torture. We had very often simulated executions. We're taken out of the place in the middle of the night. Some people disappear and after three or four days, they came back again. The conditions were very, very bad, but human being is incredible. Human being is

able to prepare himself for situation to which never thought that he could be involved in.

I think that the kind of human relationship that develop among ourselves there, I have to say that there were many people that I had seen only once or twice in my life, was very important of course when we were isolated, being thrown in situation and the situation was worse because we didn't have any kind of contact with our family at the beginning. We are not allowed to have any kind of legal advice of course, not any kind of procedure. We didn't know when one of our representatives talking with the head of the concentration camp asked for having legal advice or to have a lawyer there. They say, "What for do you need a lawyer? We don't have any charges against you. Go back to the camp." Was that kind of irrational situation, extraordinary brutal one on many occasions, but well still there are 13 people of that group that are imprisoned in Chile.

As you know, I was released at the end of '74 through the action of the government of Venezuela that sent a member of the cabinet, the governor of Caracas, to let us say negotiate or to discuss with Pinochet my release. Then one day, I was taken out of ... At the time, I was already in another camp near Santiago. I was put out of that camp about seven o'clock one evening without knowing whether it was official, where they are taking me. Finally, of course all this is with a hood on your head, handcuffed, and with all that kind of situation to degrade you, but finally we arrived to a beautiful house that was the embassy of Venezuela and a few hours later, I was in a plane flying to Caracas.

Jim Engel: During interrogation, what was it that the military was trying to get from the intellectuals of Popular Unity?

Orlando Letelie...: I think that really what they wanted was to create some kind of physical and psychological distraction. That's my own personal experience because, for instance, I was interrogated for 11 hours asking me to sign a confession saying that I had paid \$70,000 to the American newsman Jack Anderson that made, let us say, the disclosure of ITT actions in Chile in order to prevent President Allende inauguration. They said, "Well we have the check because you met with him in the press building when you were ambassador in Washington in the press building and you pay \$70,000. We have here a copy of the check." I ask to see the copy of the check. I have to say that it is almost incredible because I have lived for many years in Washington, but I have never met Jack Anderson. If you see that case, it's something that you cannot believe, that for 11 hours I was under interrogation in not a very friendly way just to try to get a statement from me saying that I had paid \$70,000 to Mr. Jack Anderson.

Jim Engel: So it wasn't so much trying to get information out of you as it was to try to discredit the intellectuals of the-

Orlando Letelie...: Yeah, and to create ... For instance, I was always asking ... As you remember, in order to justify the coup in front of the public opinion and internationally also, they develop the so-called Z Plan in which they said that they had discovered a

plan for killing all the officers and killing the most important people in the different cities and sort. Then when they were interrogating me, I always ask them, "Why don't you ask me about the Z Plan?" Because being the Minister of Defense and a member of the Socialist Party, I had to be the author of the list to be involved on that. Then the officer that was interrogating me say, "No, we're not going to talk about that. We're not going to," because they already knew that that was just an invention that they had created. I never was interrogated about the Z Plan although they were putting it in the papers of course that the Z Plan exists and I was one of those that was involved on that.

Particularly in my case at least, they didn't want to get any kind of information. In other cases, particularly in relation with the organization of the parties in the different provinces of Chile, they wanted information in order to know who was a member of the Socialist Party, who was a member of the radical party, who was a member of the Christian left. They tortured people in order to get that kind of information.

Bill Jorda:

Only a few months after Orlando Letelier gave this account of the 1973 military takeover, he was killed by an assassin's bomb in downtown Washington, DC. Michael Townley, a US citizen who once worked for the Chilean Secret Police, has now admitted that he placed the bomb under Letelier's car. Granted partial immunity in return for his testimony, Townley has also implicated several Chilean government officials in the murder. A US grand jury recently issued formal indictments in the case against three former Chilean Army officers. The implication of Chilean officials in the Letelier murder is one of Pinochet's biggest setbacks since the 1973 coup.

The most important figure indicted in the case is General Manuel Contreras Sepulveda, former director of DINA, the secret police organization that was later reorganized and renamed. Before being dismantled last year, DINA was one of the most controversial components of the Pinochet government. Its director, General Contreras, had long been attacked by opposition groups as the individual most responsible for the junta's repressive tendencies. Opponents of the junta began to allege that Contreras and DINA were involved in Orlando Letelier's murder immediately after the assassination took place in September 1976. No direct evidence of DINA involvement appeared to exist, however, and Pinochet managed to deny governmental complicity.

It was a major setback for Pinochet then when Contreras and two of his colleagues were indicted in the Letelier case this summer. Not only did the indictments directly implicate the government in the Letelier murder. They also rekindled the broader issue of human rights in Chile in general. Combined with renewed controversy over missing political prisoners and a new investigation by the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the Letelier breakthroughs have put Pinochet back on the international defensive on human rights.

Another old problem that has come back to haunt Pinochet in recent months is internal division within the ruling junta. After years of reported friction among

the military leaders who control the government, Pinochet recently forced Air Force General Gustavo Leigh out of Chile's four-man junta. Leigh had been openly critical of many of Pinochet's policies and had been particularly outspoken in calling for a more rapid return to civilian rule. In his August declaration announcing Leigh's dismissal, Pinochet admitted that the two leaders had disagreed on fundamental issues. In words that junta opponents might consider more praise than criticism, Pinochet said that General Leigh had demonstrated a progressive withdrawal from the line of action and thinking that inspired the movement of September 11, 1973.

Speaker 4: The pretext for Leigh's dismissal was a controversial interview given by Leigh to an Italian newspaper. Leigh's remarks in that interview, however, differed only slightly from his earlier statements. He called for a speedier timetable for a democratic transition and expressed concern over possible governmental involvement in the Letelier assassination. Probably more disturbing to Pinochet were Leigh's overtures to the Christian Democratic Party, the largest and most influential civilian group opposing Pinochet. Furthermore, General Leigh's criticisms of Pinochet were backed by the rest of the Air Force hierarchy, weakening Pinochet's claims of military unity. When Leigh was fired, 18 top Air Force officers resigned in protest. The top ranks were immediately filled with officers more loyal to Pinochet, but the episode had the irreversible effect of shattering the façade of military solidarity that Pinochet had maintained for nearly five years.

Bill Jorda: The firing of General Leigh demonstrates that not all is well within the junta or the Chilean political structure in general, but in spite of military division, civilian demands for democratization, and uncertainty over the outcome of the Letelier investigation, Pinochet appears to be fairly secure in his position. As the regime celebrated its fifth anniversary, it had the luxury of pointing out that the country is more sound economically than at any time since the 1973 coup. Rising copper prices have helped boost foreign exchange reserves and the hyperinflation of the mid-70s has been drastically reduced.

Critics respond that, while the junta has succeeded in economic stabilization, it has been at the expense of Chilean lower classes who have carried the burden of five years of recessionary austerity measures. Unemployment is still more than 12% and the junta's cutbacks and governmental expenditures have eliminated numerous social welfare programs, but the junta has won a good deal of middle class support by its successes in easing inflation and stabilizing Chile's international economic position. As a result, most middle class opposition focuses on more political issues than on economic ones. Pinochet may eventually be pressured into some speeding up of the transition to civilian rule, but it appears unlikely that he will have to make any other major changes in governmental direction.

Jim Engel: The biggest issues hanging over Pinochet at this time then appears to be the Letelier investigation. The US Justice Department wants Pinochet to extradite the three indicted Army officers for trial in the United States. It appears unlikely,

however, that Pinochet would cooperate. Public sentiment in Chile could side with Pinochet in fighting with the US over extradition since Pinochet could capitalize on strong feelings of national sovereignty. US pressure could be intense, but thus far, the Carter administration has chosen to fight for extradition on purely legal terms. When Congress recently voted to cut off all arms sales to Chile until the indicted Chileans are extradited, the administration successfully persuaded the legislators to rescind the cutoff so that extradition can first be pursued through strictly legal channels.

Pinochet clearly has no easy way out of the Letelier matter. If he resists extradition, he may provoke a disastrous international crisis. If he goes through with extradition, he may lose face within Chile and, more importantly, will have to suffer the consequences of the Letelier assassination. Some observers feel that Pinochet is too close to the indicted officers to survive a thorough inquiry and that a major reorganization of the junta could be necessary to remove officers tainted by a US trial.

Bill Jorda:

Although civilian opposition groups like the Christian Democrats may capitalize on Pinochet's vulnerability in the Letelier case, the military appears unlikely to turn over the government anytime soon. Even if Pinochet is personally undermined by the Letelier controversy, the direction of the junta probably would not change dramatically. General Leigh and other advocates of a more rapid return to democracy are now out of the government and the junta generally reacts negatively to outside civilian pressure. Thus, despite wishful thinking by many observers, Chile, once the model democracy of South America, seems destined for a few more years of military rule. That is not to say that democracy is dead in Chile, for it has survived several very difficult years. If patience is truly a virtue, Chile's Christian Democrats are perhaps the most virtuous politicians in the world. A comprehensive prognosis of Chile's political future must wait until the dust settles in the Letelier case, but without a major shakeup in the military, democratic civilian rule is likely to continue to be a desire rather than a reality.

And that's this week's report from Latin America. This is Bill Jorda with Richard Goodman, Jim Engel, and Frank Tavares inviting you to join us again next week.

Speaker 1:

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