

A Green Light for The Junta?

By Tom Wicker

Ana de Los Angeles Gonzales Gonzales is an indomitable Chilean woman whose husband, two sons and pregnant daughter-in-law have disappeared into the murky depths of the repression practiced by General Pinochet's ruling junta. To her demands for news of their whereabouts, the junta's answer is always the same: They are not under arrest, there is no order for their arrest and none for their detention.

Gabriela Bravo's husband, formerly a Socialist deputy, was seen being arrested by 40 Government agents over two years ago in downtown Santiago. Since then, the only word of him has been from a released political prisoner, who had seen him being tortured and beaten.

The husband of Ulda Ortiz Alvarido, a trade union leader, has simply disappeared, although he is known to have been arrested by the junta more than three years ago.

These three women have been recently in the United States, telling their stories in Washington, at the United Nations, to anyone who will listen. What will happen to them when they return to Chile, as they intend to do, remains to be seen; but their personal anguish lends reality to the continuing tragedy of Chile under the Pinochet regime.

That anguish is in ironic counterpoint to the testimony of Mark L. Schneider, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, who told a House subcommittee this week that the Carter Administration's human rights policy had led to the release of "some political prisoners" in more than a dozen countries, including Chile.

The Chilean women's experiences also underlined a study by a special U.N. committee, which reported this week that harassment, arrests, torture and other violations of human rights were continuing in that unhappy country, but on a somewhat reduced scale.

The three women and their missing husbands and kin are also a living reproach to General Pinochet's most recent defiance of the U.N. This followed a hunger strike in Santiago last June by 26 relatives of persons who had disappeared in Chile. The strike ended only when General Pinochet agreed to provide Secretary General Kurt Waldheim with information on the strikers' relatives within 90 days.

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The "information" provided on Sept. 23 was this statement (roughly translated): "The persons whose alleged disappearance is denounced are not presently under detention by any security organism in the territory of the Republic." This bland claim was made in the face of countless documents from witnesses testifying to the arrest of the "disappeared" persons.

In fact, Amnesty International has documented the disappearance of more than 1,500 people in Chile. The Vicariate of Solidarity of the Roman Catholic Church in Santiago claims to have airtight evidence—the testimony of at least two witnesses—for the arrest or detention of each of 568 persons by the junta, and good evidence—one witness each—for the arrest or detention of 1,200 more.

The U.N. committee report pointed out, however, that the "disappeared" person tactic is not being used so much anymore; instead, more people are being arrested and held for 48 hours, tortured, beaten and scared out of whatever they were doing to annoy or threaten the junta. Enough of the persons so intimidated are now among the one million Chileans in exile (about a tenth of the population) for word of the new tactic to get about.

The committee also reported evidence that violations of human rights were becoming institutionalized under General Pinochet; but the short-term

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arrest tactic is further evidence of the junta's flexibility in repression. After Terence A. Todman, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, visited Chile in August, for example, the junta announced the dissolution of DiNA, the dreaded security police. But Eugenio Velasco, a lawyer and diplomat expelled from Chile in 1976, has pointed out in an article in The New York Times that the law establishing DiNA's replacement, the National Information Center, was almost a replica of the law that had established DiNA.

That piece of duplicity may have been in Mr. Todman's mind when he reportedly promised the three Chilean women this week that the United States would support whatever steps Secretary General Waldheim may take in response to General Pinochet's contemptuous "report" of Sept. 23. U.N. sources say Mr. Waldheim is considering another effort to send a U.N. mission to Chile to investigate the human rights situation there. The junta has never yet allowed such a mission to enter the country, but if Washington put on the pressure this time, that might make a difference.

If, however, Mr. Waldheim, the U.S. and the international human rights movement do nothing more than denounce the junta's Sept. 23 statement, they will give General Pinochet a green light for more repression.

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