

Twelve years ago on 11 September 1973, the Chilean Popular Unity Government under President Salvador Allende, was overthrown by a military coup. Allende himself was murdered and as many as 50 000 Chilean socialists, communists, trade unionists, youth, workers, and peasants were tortured and killed. This bloody coup was led by General Pinochet and supported by American imperialism, the Chilean army and the Chilean bourgeoisie.

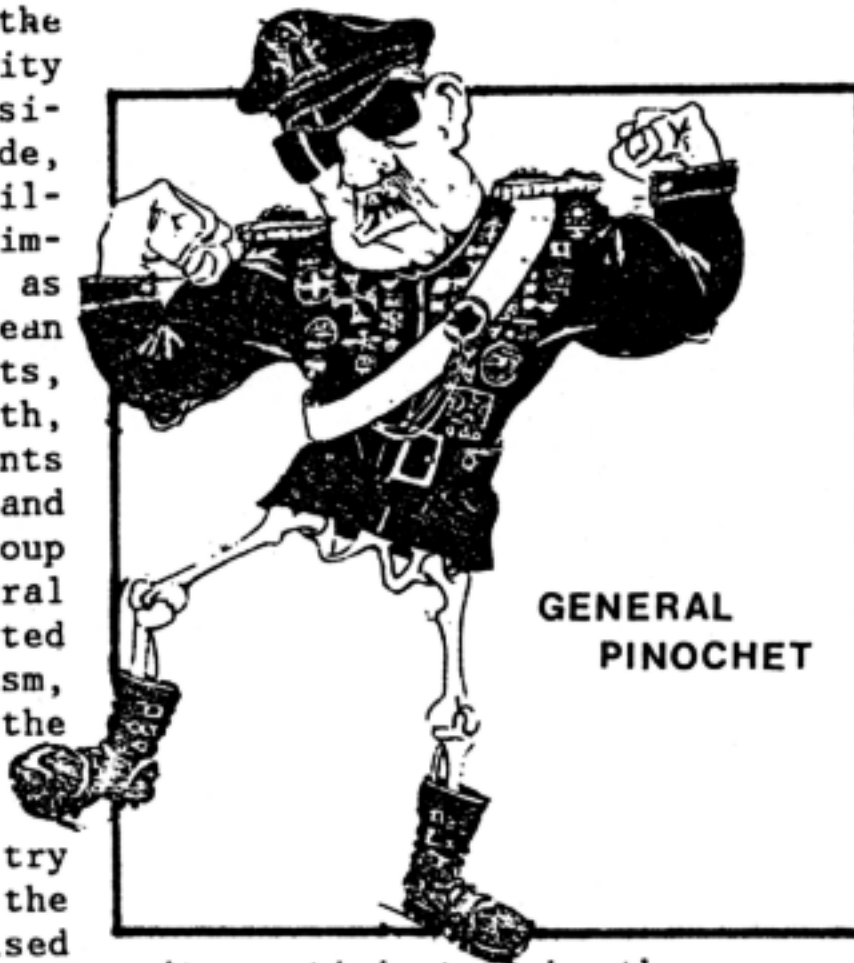
In this article we try and answer the questions: Who comprised the Popular Unity Government? Why was the military takeover successful? Most importantly, what lessons does this tragic episode in the history of international resistance to oppression and exploitation hold for our struggle in Azania?

POPULAR UNITY

The Popular Unity (UP) government was dominated by the Socialist Party (SP) and the Communist Party (CP). Both had considerable support among the working class and the youth.

The SP was founded in 1933 by Salvador Allende, amongst others. The party was founded because socialists felt that the CP was incapable of responding to the needs of the Chilean working class. The SP represented an attempt to build a working-class party based on Marxism, but not under the domination of the Soviet Union.

The CP was since the late 30's a party of class collaboration. In 1954



GENERAL PINOCHET

it participated in the government of right-wing Radical Party leader, Gonzales Videla. The CP excused this participation by quoting the pre-election rhetoric of Videla, which promised the working masses everything that they wanted in addition to the moon. But the Radical Party as a major bourgeois party could not in any way serve the interests of the working class. Videla used the CP support to contain the rising working class upsurge (there were three CP leaders in Videla's cabinet) and when this task was completed, he banned the CP and unleashed a ferocious repression against the workers.

ALLENDE

The UP was elected in 1970. Salvador Allende was elected President on the basis of a minority vote. The Chilean bourgeoisie could not agree on one candidate and instead, put two in the field. This ensured the victory of Allende.

But the UP was in a minority and dependent on Christian Democratic support. In order for Allende to be confirmed in office, he had to give certain guarantees to Parliament, which were embedded in the constitution and which gave an undertaking that the UP would not destroy the system of liberal democracy and the state apparatus.

MIR

This compromise was strongly attacked by the MIR (revolutionary left movement not part of the UP) and the SP youth. Both groups contended that to achieve office under these conditions would be like putting one's head on the chopping block. The overwhelming majority of the UP, however, supported the concessions as tactical' and Allende assumed power in November 1970.

The first year of the UP saw the Allende administration carrying out a number of important reforms as had been promised in the UP



AFTER THE COUP: Hundreds of thousands of Popular Unity supporters and opponents of the Junta were herded into cells in the Santiago stadium immediately after the coup. They suffered systematic torture - hundreds died and others are incarcerated in the Junta's prison camps.

CHILE



programme. Certainly, there can be no doubt that many of these measures were immensely popular with the oppressed strata of Chilean society and that it had made a big impact. Beginning with the free distribution of half a litre milk for all children, a number of new laws were passed to increase and develop the existing social services, a ceiling was placed on all government salaries, political prisoners were released, and the riot police was disbanded.

NATIONALISATION

Major nationalisation was also begun. In many cases, workers occupied factories thus forcing the UP government to nationalise them in order to maintain production. This upset the Chilean bourgeoisie and imperialism. In spite of the CP's attempts at trying to reach agreement with the Christian Democrats and the bourgeoisie, the UP as a whole was forced to give in to some of the demands of the militant working class. If they did not, large sections of the working class would have moved to the MIR and the revolutionary left in general.

The UP was in a dilemma - it could not satisfy imperialism by containing the mass movement

and neither was it able to satisfy the hopes and aspirations which its victory had aroused in the broad working class and peasant masses. Why was this the case? Fidel Castro expressed it clearly in his speech on Chile in Havana on 28 September 1973: "In the first place there was an intact bourgeois apparatus. There were armed forces that called themselves apolitical, institutional, that is apparently neutral in the revolutionary process. There was the bourgeois parliament where a majority of members jumped to the tune of the ruling classes. There was a judicial system which was completely subservient to the reactionaries."



PEASANTS' SELF DEFENCE: Before the coup many groups of workers and peasants spontaneously organised to defend themselves. Others did so under the MIR. The Popular Unity not only failed to support such moves but took action to suppress them.

STATE

The key problem, therefore, was how to smash the state apparatus of the bourgeoisie. There was a complete failure to understand the nature of the Chilean army and its functions. There was a failure to see that the creation of an alternative apparatus based on

the workers and peasants was of vital importance if the bourgeoisie was going to be defeated.

BOURGEOISIE

By the autumn of 1972, the bourgeoisie had mounted its offensive. It went on strike against the UP. Within a week, roads were blocked, production centres were abandoned, and transport was withdrawn. Faced with the life and death question of the organisation of production and distribution, the working class developed those organisations by which it could organise activities itself - the *Comités Industriales* (local workers action committees)

The owners' strike saw their development as an apparatus existing alongside the state, and capable of taking on more and more of the functions of the state and the ruling class. It was this increasing radicalisation that was posing problems for the right-wing inside the UP (i.e. the CP and the SP right), who wanted to return to the bourgeoisie the factories taken over by the workers during the 'strike of the bourgeoisie'.

DILEMMA

Faced with growing inflation, the public workers staged a strike for higher wages. The government branded them as 'agents of the right', like those who took part in the illegal occupations of the factories and the land. The left SP paper wrote: "It is us or the rich... There is going to be another bosses' strike, and the government is handing back the plants to the fascists

so that they can make another try... Either the drones are going to leave the honeycomb or they will come back to rule the country with blood and fire. The big problem is that we are in the plants and we are not going to give them back. The government said for us to make those plants produce, and we did, and now we are not going to give them back. What is the government going to do? Shoot us? They didn't drive the rich out of the enclaves where they were holding the trucks. Are they going to drive us government - supporters out of the plants? What a dilemma, Companero Presidente!"

The dilemma was answered by the UP : The leading naval and military chiefs were brought into the cabinet in an attempt to create stability and no doubt 'unify the nation'!

WORKERS DEFEND

On 29 June 1973, a coup was attempted. The most important feature of this abortive coup was the reaction it aroused in the working class. Factory occupations and a strengthening of the Cordones Industriales greeted the abortive uprising. Defence committees were strengthened and partially armed. However, it is important to note that the Chilean Workers' Union (CUT), dominated by the SP and CP, did not call a general strike and prepare the workers for struggle. While some independent initiatives outflanked the trade union and CP leaders, they were few and far be-

tween. Nearly a million workers marched on the evening of 29 June and demanded that Allende dissolve parliament and execute the plotters. This was not done. The government adopted a fatalistic attitude coupled with a naive belief in the armed forces.

COUP

On 11 September, the Chilean military with the backing of all the ruling parties of the rich and the fascists, launched a coup d'etat. At the Moneda Palace, Salvador Allende refused to surrender or resign and chose to fight. His last message, dictated as he was firing at the attackers was : "That is how we write the first page of this history. My people and Latin America will write the rest." A few minutes later he was machine - gunned to death.

CHILE TODAY

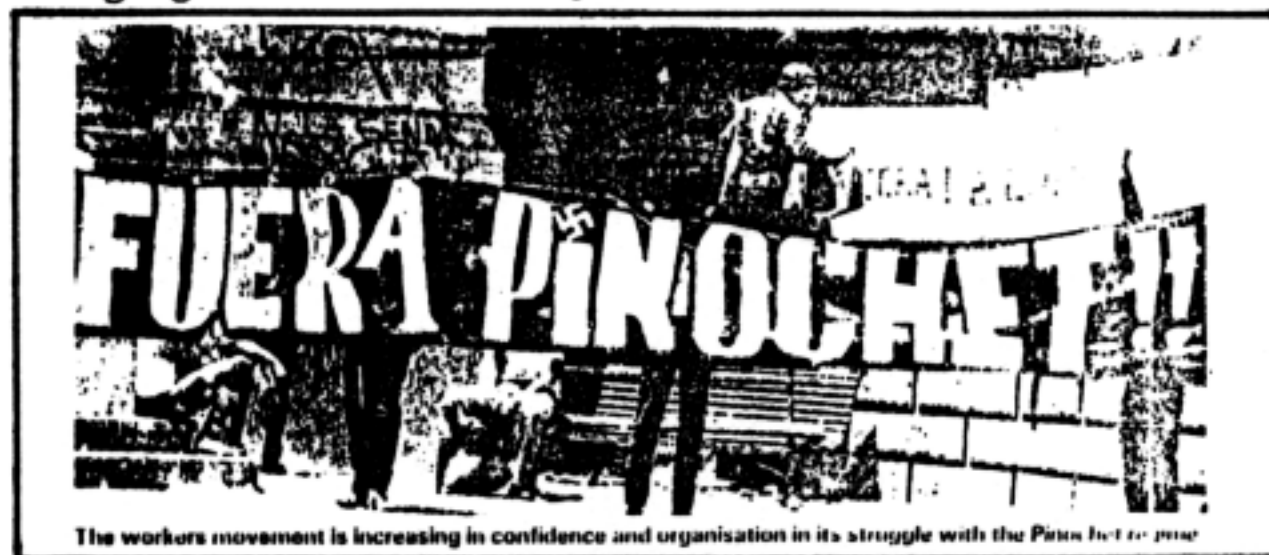
Today, Chile shows all the symptoms of a society in terminal decay. Homelessness has now reached a staggering one third of the population. There are three or four families living in one small shack. Diseases such as typhoid that were supposedly eradicated at the end of the last century have re-appeared. There has even been an outbreak of gangrene in the hospi-

tals. In the shanty towns, the level of poverty has reached tremendous proportions. Unemployment among the youth sometimes reaches 90% in certain areas. The willingness to struggle by the workers and youth in Chile continues. Very often barricades are set up, and demonstrations occur. In the past year, 750 000 people have been arrested.

LESSONS

The fatal mistake the UP made was to believe that socialism could be brought about through parliament. The old state machinery - in particular the army - was left intact when the UP came into power. Independent workers' organisations were discouraged. Thus when the rich and powerful in Chile felt that Allende's reforms had gone far enough, a vestive military was ready to unleash the bloodbath of 11 September 1973.

In our country, people under the guise of a broad anti - apartheid front are leaving the door open to an alliance with sections of the bourgeoisie. We have seen the treachery of the capitalists over and over again. Let us not also learn the hard way!



The workers movement is increasing in confidence and organisation in its struggle with the Pinochet regime