

A detailed reflection of my neighbourhood

May 07 F

Una detallada Reflexión de mi barrio

Part 4

The Chilean Upper Classes

“What is the destiny of this long, narrow country which holds within the slender, rugged band of its geography the supreme sweetness of the fruit-filled central valley and the supreme harshness of the arid north, the land of nitrate? The economic contrasts between the industrial north and the agricultural centre and south, the spiritual and ethnic contrasts such as that between the Aristocracy and the People, expressive of such differing worlds and the contrast between popular and official versions of history – all of these mean that the spirit of Chile cannot be immediately grasped.”

The above is the introduction to an excellent essay written by the Venezuelan writer and intellectual Mariano Picón Salas, entitled **“Intuición de Chile”** and written in 1933 for Atenea, the cultural gazette published by the **Universidad de Concepción**. What follows is an attempt to answer his question, “What is the destiny of Chile?” Our point of departure will be to suggest that the destiny of this country has always rested on a certain group of people, with specific cultural and social traits and specific economic aims: the Chilean upper classes, known as the “aristocracy” but lacking that ‘cultural quality’ of the real aristocracy of Europe. These are the people who, for good or for ill, have directed the future and the destiny of Chile. In many respects, it has been a sad destiny, considering what the majority of the Chilean people has had to suffer, since the time of independence from Spain in the 19th century until the bloody dictatorship of Pinochet, which began in 1973.

A very influential social class builders of the following myth : Democracy, freedom and justice.

To refer to the Chilean upper classes is, in a way, to take a journey towards the darkest side of Chilean culture. By looking at the upper classes as a cultural component of Chilean history, one can discover why a specific barrio came to have the form it does. Thus, it would be impossible to talk about Carlos’s barrio, and his upbringing, without examining the history of Chile, since the barrios have been shaped by the manner in which the upper classes have managed to control the destiny of all the rest of the Chilean people. This state of affairs, which arose with the conquest of Chile in the 16th century, was strongly challenged by the government of Salvador Allende in the 1970s. In Allende’s view, Chile’s human and natural resources were never exploited in an appropriate manner by its rulers. What is more, democracy, freedom and justice were, in Allende’s view, still no more than clichés of the everyday language of Chileans. They have been, for most of Chilean history, meaningless abstractions, widely used by the bourgeoisie to protect their own class - nothing more, nothing less. Democracy, freedom and justice - concepts fundamental to human rights - were things the lower classes could only dream of. Carlos says, *“We have been educated to think of our country as having the longest history of democracy in Latin America. This is incorrect, a myth. On those occasions when the Chilean lower classes have risen up to ask for justice, freedom and democracy, they were always violently attacked by the murderous men of power”* . Government after government failed to fulfil the demands of the People, the demands of the majority,

and ended up giving its support to a minority: the bourgeoisie. Past Chilean governments, either of the right or of the centre, have tended to evade their responsibility to tackle the historic economic, social and political problems that, by the 1970s, were in urgent need of resolution. To begin with, Chile needed more democracy and profound economic changes which could guarantee a better distribution of wealth. In addition, the country needed far-reaching land reforms to guarantee fair treatment for those working the land. In other words, changes which would tackle urgent needs for: employment, education, housing, health services and the elimination of poverty. In the international arena, Chile urgently needed to change its economic relationship with the United States, its most important economic partner. This was particularly important because several very large U.S. corporations were exploiting the copper mines, Chile's most important industry. These large American corporations were taking the lion's share of the business and Allende thought fit to reverse this situation. Much required to be done.

The Allende government tried hard to encourage the lower classes to participate fully in the politics of the country in order to extend democracy. It was necessary, however, to raise the political consciousness of the people so they could take a direct role in the decision-making process. This was a key point, if they wanted to shift the balance of power in their favour. By forging a more democratic country, the lower classes would be giving themselves a chance to direct their own destiny and that of Chile. By 1973, Allende, from the point of view of the working class, was just beginning to succeed, amid great difficulties. For three years, the upper classes undermined Allende's successes. In September, 1973, democracy came to an end and, as in the old days, the upper classes took control of the destiny of the Chilean people. Pinochet, in effect, came to power to restore the old order on their behalf.

How the upper classes came about to impose on Chilean a legal dictatorship.

The Chilean upper classes came into existence as a result of the activities of three main groups of people. The first were the very rich landowners who held a large proportion of the best Chilean agricultural land in the centre and south of Chile. The second group were the entrepreneurs who made their fortunes in the mineral-rich Atacama desert, in the far north of the country. This land belonged to Perú and Bolivia until 1879, when Chile made war against these two countries in order to seize it. The third group were merchants operating in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the big cities, such as Santiago and Valparaíso. There is conclusive evidence, in the writings of respected Chilean and foreign historians and in works of literature, that these three groups built their power by forming a variety of alliances among themselves. In addition, they protected their economic interests by forging close links with very important and powerful institutions, such as the ecclesiastical establishment of the Catholic Church, the Judiciary, the Legislature, the Armed Forces, etc. The popular point of view is that to speak about all these institutions is really to speak of the high bourgeoisie. On a related point, to speak about Chilean law is to speak about rules designed to suit these groups in the labyrinthine world of Chilean society. In 1971, Allende, in conversation with Régis Debray, spoke of the bias that existed in the judicial system and in the laws that the bourgeoisie created to rob the indigenous people of Chile of their lands. *"The laws of the people are not the laws of the bourgeoisie. For example, they made laws that were very lenient to people who occupied land on the grounds that this was not a very serious offence; on the other hand, those who recovered their lands received very harsh treatment indeed at the*

*hand of the law. In other words, the law does not punish people for occupying land, but it does punish them for recovering it. Why ? Because the estate owners were occupying the land belonging to the indigenous population of Chile and the native inhabitant who tried to recover his land fell victim to the full force of the law, which protects the estate owners.” . Pablo Neruda, the great Chilean poet once said, “Our Trujillo has almost always been the law”. This has been a “legal dictatorship”. Neruda’s comment still holds, if we examine the performance, in recent times, of the Chilean judicial system, which represented a very useful tool for General Augusto Pinochet in the commission of all types of atrocities for 17 years. On April 14, 1999, a Chilean judge ordered the seizure of the book : **El Libro Negro de la Justicia chilena** (“The Black Book of Chilean Justice”), written by the award-winning Chilean journalist, Alejandra Matus. Chilean High Court Judge Servando Jordán claimed that this book insulted the authorities and, as a result, Alejandra Matus was accused of contempt of court. In order to avoid prison, Matus had to flee to the United States, where she was granted political asylum. The Frei administration, although sympathetic towards her case, was powerless against the ruling. Matus is one of more than 30 people who have been prosecuted under the National Security Law since Chile returned to democratic rule in 1990. The National Security Law is just one of the legal institutions that provide special protection to the authorities against public criticism. “ *The thesis which I set forth in this book is that there has never existed in Chile a truly independent judiciary but rather a ‘service’, lacking in independence. This characteristic had tragic consequences during the military government, since its deference to the authorities of that regime resulted in the failure to protect the lives of hundred of persons*”. To write her book, Matus conducted 80 interviews and studied more than 100 documentary sources. In the **Palabras Preliminares** (“Preliminary Words”) of the book, Matus writes the following: “*The rigours of the National Security Law provide, as we know, protection to our administrative and political authorities, from the Generals to the members of the Judiciary and even the bishops. How many times was I censured because my articles touched some of these untouchables!*” Alejandra Matus’s case is consistent with the report written by Human Right Watch in November, 1998. (Library of the Congress Catalogue Card no. 98-88733, U.S.A.), which deals with freedom of expression in Chile after the Pinochet dictatorship. The underlying theme of the report is that, on this score, Chile is still a country where freedom of the press is very restricted. “*In today’s Chile, for instance, politicians, journalists and humourists who have made or published comments considered contemptuous by public officials have been arrested and convicted for undermining public order, and civilians who have criticised the armed forces have faced sedition charges in military court.*”. However, in April, 2001, the Chilean Senate approved a new press law that repealed ‘portions’ of the National Security Law that had been used to confiscate Alejandra Matus’s book. Nevertheless, Matus still remains in exile in the USA, with little hope that major changes will take place in Chile in relation to freedom of the press.*

A discussion

Historically, Chilean society has always been divided between a tiny minority, enjoying great privileges and advantages, a great majority, who have been perceived to be objectively disadvantaged. In this context, social order in Chile has been achieved by various means:

a) by laws designed to protect the powerful, as explained by Alejandra Matus

b) by creating a stable political and economic system which could allow a larger group of people to enjoy a much better standard of living than the great majority. This larger group is the middle classes, with relatively good educational standards and possessing the technical knowledge which equips them to obtain good jobs and better salaries than the great majority. However, this middle-class group is far from uniform. *“I have already mentioned that, in my barrio, there were skilled people, including teachers, living in relatively good homes, but near to shanty towns such as **la Nueva Matucana** and **El Chiflón del Diablo**. In relation to me, these people were lower middle-class, because some were professionals with a good education and a much better salary than mine. They could not, however, afford to live in the middle-class barrios, like **la Reina**.*

c) simply by force. This occurred when the disadvantaged said **“Basta!”** (*“Enough!”*) and demanded major changes, as happened in 1970. This was brought to an end when the army (a privileged body in most Latin American societies) decided to destroy, by brutal means, what had been achieved in a country which had always functioned under a diminished form of democracy. The 11th of September, 1973 was the end of many things in Chile, things that had been achieved through long political struggle. The question we need to ask ourselves is: what has been the social, psychological, economic and cultural impact of all the social forces interacting in Chilean society since the 19th century, when Chile achieved independence from Spain? What has been the impact on Chilean character and culture? There is plenty of work here for sociologists, ethnologists, anthropologists and political scientists – the politically correct, of course! *“What I do know is that the Chilean working class, including the middle classes, came to accept their fate, as dictated by the upper classes, as normal – something that I now find atrocious. There is no justification whatever for the enormous inequalities found in Chilean society throughout its history.”* Carlos explained that he does not believe that there exists a “Chilean character”, as such. What does exist, he feels, are types of Chileans whose characters have been shaped, not by their genes, but by their upbringing, the social and economic background of their families and the social interactions of these families in the barrios in which they live. Another way to see it, according to Carlos, is that Chilean national character, if it exists at all, has been defined by the failure of the various social forces which make up the Chilean state to promote equality in society. The legislature, the executive, central and local administration, the judiciary, the police and the armed forces are all institutions perceived by millions Chileans as acting on behalf of the powerful and not on behalf of the great majority of the people.

Foreign money for the ‘development of Chile’... What ? or to build their ‘little Chile’ in the barrios altos ?

History has shown that the landowners and entrepreneurs have always had little regard for the well being of their work forces and the future of their country. Hardship and misery for the lowest classes have always been the norm in Chile and, if any improvement has taken place in their condition, it has been due to centuries of painful struggles with the loss of thousands of lives. Landowners, merchants and entrepreneurs, who, by the 20th century, had become a recognisable upper class, had also benefited from the many weaknesses of the Chilean State which had allowed them to preserve old privileges and acquire new ones. They managed to create for themselves their own cosy kingdom, a “little Chile”, most visible in the barrios and the homes in which they live. They have their own set of values (normally very

Catholic) and cultural features expressed in their ultra-conservative outlook on life. Mariano Picón Salas has provided us with a description of the typical Chilean aristocrat, and of the manner of doing politics in Chile, at the end of the 19th century, a period in which such concepts as aristocracy, plutocracy and democracy formed a coherent cultural unit at the centre of upper class language and culture.

*“A gentleman of this period can be described as half urban and half rural, a kind of English gentleman adapted to the landscape of the central valley. Club life was, therefore, very important: it was essential to know how to tell, in one’s club, a mischievous and cunning Creole tale and be able to apply the same witty approach to business... to have a large estate, **un fundo**, with its ‘stud’ of selected animals - a rather expensive luxury, perhaps – but something to show off to one’s friends at party time on the estate, to gamble a large fortune on the stock exchange without removing from one’s mouth the imperturbable cigar which served to conceal any expression of concern, any grimace that might call one’s control into question – all these were the very forms and symbols of power in that era.*

A photograph, which we have seen in the National Library, portrays a Liberal convention in Santiago in the 1890s. It is a revealing document, which shows the strategy and the political style of the time. In the home of a rich Santiago gentleman, amid tall, imperial-style furniture and the copious rugs and hangings of an era which had no fondness for fresh air, some fifteen to twenty distinguished gentlemen are assembled, all dressed in identical black morning coats and the checked trousers which were made for the aristocracy by the French tailors of Santiago. These people embody, in their impassive faces and the manner in which they lean on their ornate, hand-crafted, silver-embossed walking sticks, the closed heart, the “togetherness” of the group. These fifteen or twenty gentlemen were Chilean politics. A decision taken by them was transmitted to the whole country via their friends, relatives and business clients...”

Carlos states that these were precisely the kind of people who continued to run Chile throughout the 20th century, the type of people who began to gamble with the future of Chile, to give away its main natural resources cheaply to unscrupulous foreign partners and to seek money from foreign banks for what they called ‘the development of Chile’. The fact of the matter is that millions of poor people never saw any of this money coming into ‘Chile’ from foreign banks. They saw nothing of the ‘development of Chile’ in their everyday lives. Services such as health services, education or a proper sewerage system simply did not exist and yet they, the poor, were responsible for paying back, with their hard work, the so-called “Chilean” national debt. *“It is scandalous. It has always been a mystery to me where these millions went. What is more, Chile accumulated throughout the years a large external debt which had to be paid off at very high rates of interest. This external debt grew larger, of course, during the Pinochet dictatorship. The Pinochet regime received millions from foreign banks and the question here is: were the poor the beneficiaries? If not, where did this money go? What we do know is that the banks were happy to lend money to the Pinochet regime and other Latin-American dictatorships of the 1970s. From the European and American banks’ point of view, it was very good business to have people like Pinochet in power because this was the type of customer who could spend millions in the arms industry of Europe and America, helping to create jobs there and producing enormous poverty in countries like Chile”.* Carlos’s point is supported by a series of papers in the book The European Challenge, published in Great Britain by the Latin American Bureau in 1982. One of these papers is by the journalist Simon Barrows and is called “Europe,

Latin America and the arms trade”. Barrows explores the “growing web of military links between Latin America and Western Europe.” In 1980, he says, Latin America spent an estimated US\$8.2 billion on military equipment, personnel and services, according to the authoritative Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). In his references to Chile, Barrows states that, calculating military expenditure as a proportion of GDP in 1979, Chile was at the top of the expenditure table with 9.4 per cent, compared with other countries in the region which spent well below this mark.

And what of the Chilean copper industry ? In less than twenty years, Chile’s copper industry was concentrated in a few hands - and these hands were American. It came to constitute a foreign enclave, one that would provide relatively little stimulus throughout the rest of the economy. The heavy reliance on capital and technology meant modest levels of employment for Chilean workers. The importation of equipment and parts did not give much business to Chilean manufacturers and most of the often large, profits were returned to parent companies in the U.S., instead of being invested in Chile. It is little wonder that resentment grew. Modern Latin America, Thomas E. Skimore, Peter H. Smith, Oxford University Press, 1992, 3rd edition. The Allende government and that of the United States came into conflict when Allende decided to nationalise the copper industry, a process already begun by the Christian Democrats, led by Eduardo Frei Montalva. All these elements helped to create the country we know today, a country of great social and economic contrasts.

The Landowners : Encomenderos, hacendados, latifundistas...explotadores.

Some members of the large landowner class can claim close historical links with the 15th century Catholic Spanish conquistadors. These conquistadors were commoners and illiterates in their own land. They were adventurers and fortune-hunters, European soldiers equipped with the technology to kill and with horses enabling them to travel long distances. It was these conquistadors who, in the 15th century, destroyed many ancient cities and temples and imposed by force their own culture, the Spanish language and the Catholic religion upon the original inhabitants of Latin America. During the colonial era, they became the **encomenderos**, granted great tracts of land, called **mercedes**, by their masters in Spain, as a reward for their exploits in ‘the Americas’. The **mercedes** provided with ‘Indians’ were known to historians as **las encomiendas** and the so-called ‘Indians’ became the slaves of the **encomenderos**, fated to die of hard work and disease. By the 19th century, **las mercedes** and **las encomiendas** no longer existed, but a powerful ruling class (**la clase señorial**) was already in place. The land of the **encomenderos** became known as **haciendas** and the people who owned them came to be known as **hacendados**. The **hacendados’** work force was the **peones** who were themselves **mestizos** (a racial blend of Indian and European). The **hacendados** became the Chilean landed class which, more or less until the 1970s, maintained in the Chilean countryside a feudal system of exploitation of the land. Maria Graham’s “Journal of Residence in Chile during 1822” tells how the bourgeoisie lived at that time in Valparaíso: “*The more elegant Parisian or London furniture is generally despatched unopened to Santiago, where the demand for articles of mere luxury is of course greater. The numbers of Piano-fortes brought from England is astonishing. There is scarcely a house without one.*” In Darwin’s A Naturalist’s Voyage Round the World one can find, in contrast, an account of the condition of the Chilean **peones** in 1834. “*They live,*” he said, “*almost exclusively on beans. This poverty must be chiefly owing to the feudal-like*

system on which the land is tilled : The landowner gives a small plot of ground to the labourer, for building on and cultivating, and in return has his services (or those of a proxy) for every day of his life, without any wages.” William D. Boyle, the American publisher of the Chicago Saturday Blade and the Chicago Ledger, in his travels in Chile in 1910, also noted the condition of the Chilean peasantry, stating that the owners of the haciendas acted very much like the feudal lords of bygone England, France and Germany. *“The Spaniard’s idea of “quality””, he said, “is that of the land-owner surrounded by a half-slave race of peons; he is, to this day, an actual lord.”* In the 1940s, one estate in Valparaiso employed 4,000 people who used their bare hands to work the land, without a single machine available to assist in their everyday tasks. One hardly dares mention what the wage of a **campesino** was then. What is known is that the landowners took full advantage of certain situations : *“For fifty years,”* wrote Archibald MacLeish in Fortune (May 1938), *“Chile was a sort of elegant remittance man among the nations of the earth. Year in, year out, she received her average royalty of £5.000,000 from nitrate fields largely operated by foreigners. Nitrates paid up to 68 per cent of her costs of government, relieving her ruling-class landowners of the unpleasant necessity of imposing taxes on themselves.”*

(*“Inside Latin America”*, John Gunther, Morrison and Gibb, Edinburgh, 1942, p.212)

Carlos points out that it is interesting that, in 1931, a little book was published in England, called South America, The Land of the Future by Kenneth G. Grubb of the World Dominion Movement, for years a missionary on that continent. Grubb pointed to the fact that *“A great many Indians are virtually slaves. They work as peons on the large estates and they remain in the debt of their ‘owners’. They are given a plot of ground and two or three days in the week on which they can cultivate it, and sometimes they receive a small payment. This, however, must be spent at the **patron**’s store where prices are high and debts are soon contracted. Should a **peon** show sign of being able to pay off his debt, a liberal ration of alcohol will soon bring him to a condition when his acquisitive ambitions can be stimulated. This system, inherited from colonial days, debases and enslaves the mind and robs the Indians of decision and character”*. Grubb’s account relates to the Andes of Peru, but has a close equivalent in the north of Chile, in the manner in which the **campesinos** are treated and also in the condition of the nitrate workers, exemplified in the story of **La Escuela Santa Maria de Iquique** (see below), where the parallels are all too visible. According to a census of 1967, 4% of the Chilean population owned about 80% of the land. So bad was the situation in the countryside that Cardinal Silva Henríquez decided, on his own initiative and amid stiff opposition from the rest of the Chilean clergy, to give away to the **campesinos** some lands owned by the Catholic Church. He said that his proposal was twice refused by two different councils of the Church. This land, he was sternly told, had been donated to the Catholic Church and not to the **campesinos**. *“The only road open to me,”* Cardinal Henríquez explained, *“was to go to Rome and ask Pope John to help me. When I explained to him my intentions, he looked at me and then he winked and said, I will help you !”* (*me guiñó un ojo y me dijo: yo ayudaré!*). Pedro Minay Pizarro, a leader of the **Confederación Campesina**, the Peasant Union, during the 1960s, said that the **campesinos** were second class citizens and lived very badly. Their wages were inferior to those of any workers in Chile. They worked **de sol a sol**, that is, from day-break until dawn. Some owners of the big **haciendas** and **fundos** did not live in Chile but in Europe. Many right-wingers closely associated with Pinochet claimed that reforms were an abuse of power on the part of the Government of the day. Maria Angelica Cristi, for example,

said that many **hacendados** suffered greatly as a result of government land reforms. However, Marcela Serrano, a well known Chilean writer, said that her family, who owned an estate in the 1960s, accepted agrarian reform : “*We gave the key of our estate (fundo) to the Government authority and then I cried in my room for five days.*”. The sociologist, Manuel Antonio Garretón, a leader of the Student Union of the **Universidad Católica** in the period 1963-1964, said that what was being carried through in the 1960s was much more than an agrarian reform. It was about giving full Chilean citizenship to the **campesinos**. The most important thing, he said, was to give about 400,000 people and their families the right to be members of a larger community. Taken from the documentary, “Los Jóvenes Rebeldes de los 1960s”, by Televisión Nacional de Chile, 2001. If Darwin could have visited Chile again in the 1960s, he would have observed that nothing had changed in the living and working condition of the Chilean peasantry : they lived in huts, with no electricity or running water, no education and no future. Allende offered the Chilean lower classes of the 1970s a distinctive brand of Chilean Socialism to overcome pressing realities. But even Régis Debray, the left-wing French intellectual, in his conversation with him in 1971, seemed not very convinced of Allende’s ability to carry through his socialist program in a country run by a bourgeoisie which Debray called one of the least stupid in the world.

The Entrepreneurs : Salitre, metals, El Mercurio, speculative business.

According to Julio Heise, (Historia de Chile, el periodo Parlamentario 1861-1925, tomo I, 1974) until the dawn of the 20th century, the agrarian bourgeoisie resisted the idea of abandoning the rural era to become a class of entrepreneurs. Heise states that the great creators of Chilean industries and large capitalist businesses were foreigners or their direct descendants – English and Americans, who arrived in Chile in the 19th century and German, Italian and French immigrants, who arrived later. These were the people who developed commerce and started the exploitation of the natural resources in the centre as well as in North and South of Chile. Such names as Edwards, Subercaseaux, Cousiño, Gallo, Urmeneta are among the Chilean entrepreneurs who became immensely rich by exploiting the country’s natural resources. These people created immense wealth for themselves, incredible hardship for their workers (miners) and, sadly, no future for Chile - in the sense that they led the way towards a type of economy based on the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources. This trend continues even today. The Edwardses, for example, are a well known upper-class Chilean family involved in speculative business, Chilean politics, and the press since the 19th century. As we shall see, the most sinister side of the Edwards family surfaced during the Allende government and helped effectively to bring his elected government down. Already by the second quarter of the 19th century, one of the Edwardses (Agustín Edwards Ossandon) became, as a result of numerous profitable speculations, one of the richest capitalists in Chile. In 1871-72, he stockpiled as much copper as he could lay his hands on, drove the world copper price up by 50 percent in eight months, and realised a personal profit estimated at 1.5 million pesos. A history of Chile 1808-1994 by Simon Collier and William F. Sater, Cambridge Latin American Studies.)

Agustín Edwards MacClure was, by 1942, the owner of **El Mercurio**, founded in Valparaíso in 1827. **El Mercurio** is the most controversial right-wing newspaper in Chile. In 1970, it was being run by another Edwards - Agustín Edwards Eastman - a very powerful opponent of the Allende government. Mr Edwards, a very rich man, and never elected by the people of Chile to represent them in any capacity whatever,

had the power, outwith Chile's legal institutions, to manipulate Chilean history in any way he pleased. Mr Edwards himself, and his newspaper **El Mercurio**, are closely linked with the terrible coup carried out by Pinochet in Chile in 1973. It is interesting to note that Roberto Thieme, in an interview in the Chilean electronic newspaper **El Mostrador** of the 18th of May, 2001, said that **El Mercurio** and the Edwards Group had a great responsibility in helping the United States to create a terror campaign in Chile. **El Mercurio**, he said, channelled American money to destabilise the Allende government. *" it is an undeniable fact that everything that was done after the coup by the military regime was organised and supported by El Mercurio and the Edwards Group...Edwards had a greater responsibility than Pinochet in the outcome of the Coup"*. Roberto Thieme is a former secretary of the ultra-right wing movement **Patria y Libertad**, which operated freely during the government of Allende. This side of the history of the 'Chilean' Edwardses is remarkably sad since, because of their actions, millions of Chileans began immediately to suffer the tragic consequences of US interference in Chile.. *" Yes... it is sad. This is a fact that has been widely reported in Chile and abroad and is based on classified CIA reports released recently by that American Agency. These Pentagon documents tell the story of how Mr Agustín Edwards, in 1970, and again soon after the democratic election of Salvador Allende, met Mr Nixon and, consequently, the CIA director Richard Helms in order to get help to stop Allende coming to power. According to **Informe Especial**, a very competent Chilean current affairs TV program, the story was related by Henry Kissinger.*

***El Mercurio** appears also to have received from the CIA hundreds of thousands of dollars. Not only this, but it also received money from other American interests in Chile, such as ITT."* **Informe Especial**, investigated these claims and **El Mercurio** reacted angrily to the suggestions made by the TV programme. In reply, Santiago Pavlovic, the presenter of **Informe Especial**, wrote, in the Chilean electronic newspaper, **El Mostrador** of the 30th Nov., 2000, an article entitled **Consideraciones sobre reportaje de El Mercurio**. Here Mr Pavlovic said that **Informe Especial** had tried hard to contact Mr Edwards about the CIA report but, sadly, Mr Agustín Edwards decided to remain silent and refused to be interviewed. If he had been, he would probably have argued that in 1973 he was indeed representing democracy and the freedom of the press under a Socialist-Communist Government. Carlos has said that Chileans have to thank Mr Edwards, his newspaper and his social class for helping to destroy democracy, freedom of the Press and freedom of association in Chile, and for the most terrible violations of human rights ever seen in that country. **Informe Especial** (June 2000) has recently shown the Chilean people the revolting story of the so-called "Caravan of Death" – a journey in which, in 1973, a Puma helicopter with a group of Army officers commanded by General Arellano Stark travelled the length of the "long, slender country" with the sole purpose of torturing and killing innocent people being held, after the coup, in military barracks. The programme gives an horrific account of the atrocities, provided by General Lagos, a former army General under Pinochet, who could not stomach what his institution was doing to fellow Chileans. Many vivid accounts are provided in the TV programme by former prisoners, members of the victims' families, former army officers, members of the public with first-hand experience and Catholic Priests. It is this particular case for which General Pinochet is, at this very moment, being tried in Chile by **juez** Guzman before a jury appointed by the Chilean High Court. It does appear that judge Guzman has sufficient proof to show that Pinochet had direct responsibility in the horrible torture and killing of Chileans. One may wonder if the Edwards family, and

indeed the Pinochet supporters in Chile and abroad, watched Informe Especial. Carlos did and he was shocked by what he saw. “*There is no doubt that Mr Edwards represents the worst of the Chilean upper class and his newspaper **El Mercurio**, the newspaper of the Chilean bourgeoisie, represents the worst of the printed word in Chilean society today*”.

What the travellers saw in Lota and Santiago some time ago.

People tend to forget that Salvador Allende came to power as a result of the incredible inequalities created by a political and economic system put in place by the Chilean bourgeoisie. As the lower classes began to flee the hardships of the countryside - bad treatment at the hands of the landowners, lack of opportunities in the country-side etc. – they tended to head towards Santiago in search of a better future. But life in the capital was no better and they found themselves living in places that lacked the most essential amenities. They began to move into the infamous **conventillos**, of which there were two thousand in Santiago alone between the years 1900 and 1910. They came to work and to be exposed to another type of **patrones** - the factory owners, a group which Carlos had plenty of opportunity to get to know. The **patrones** were experts in exploiting cheap labour. By the 1920s and 1930s, millions of people in many parts of Santiago, and in other cities and towns in Chile, did not have access to adequate drinking water. “*This is the time when both my parents were born*”. By the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, a great majority of Chileans still lived very poorly and were exposed to all types of disease. Bad health services were the norm, higher education existed for the few, and a house of one’s own was a dream. “*This is the time when my mother died at the age of 30. I was nine months old. Her death could have perfectly well been prevented*”. The 1960s and 1970s were the era of Carlos’s childhood and youth and a great deal of poverty, at all levels, was still common in Chile. “*This is the period when my father died. He was fifty and his death, like that of my mother, could also have perfectly well been prevented, if we could have afforded to have, in our country, a proper health service for the working class*”. Carlos’ father died in the **hospital** San Juan de Dios located in Matucana St. In this same street lived Alejandro Jodorowski, the famous Chilean writer, poet, playwright and filmmaker, best known for **El topo**, a famous surrealist film of the 1970s. “*Jodorowski left Matucana St. partly because the hospital of this **barrio popular** (working class barrio) could not guarantee him and his family good health care, and partly because the area could not provide him with the stimulus he needed in exploring the rich symbolism found in Chilean culture*”.

Nevin O. Winter’s book Chile and her People of Today, published by the Colonial Press in 1912, observed the incredible social contrasts at that time in Santiago.

“*The poorer Chileans are a hard working people - the most industrious of the South Americans. A walk through the sections of the city occupied by them shows much grinding poverty. Across the Mapocho, penury stretches on all sides. The dwellings are low, with floors oftentimes below the street level and the interiors show unsanitary conditions and an entire lack of comfort of life, let alone decencies.*” Carlos believes that Winter is undoubtedly referring to the type of dwellings that, at a latter stage, became the shanty town he knew as **La Nueva Matucana**. Around 1910, there were in Santiago many charitable institutions and among them was a very large orphan asylum, which used to care for many unfortunate children, often of unknown parentage. Carlos describes the method of reception of these children.

“ Yeah! I read that in the rear wall of the orphanage there was an opening with a wooden box in it which swung in and out. The mother wishing to get rid of her baby placed the little child in the box and swung it inwards. The automatic ringing of a bell notified the nuns inside and the baby was taken charge of by them. No effort was ever made to find the mother.” This story of deprivation contrasted greatly with the life-styles of other Chileans of this period. Here is Winter talking about another very well-known upper-class Chilean family, the Cousiño family.

“Lota, a mining town in the cold south of Chile was founded by Matias Cousiño, who opened up the mines and established smelter works in 1885. The company owns a large amount of properties and employs thousands of men. It furnished huts, free medical attendance, a church, schools and a hospital for its employees”. Incidentally, all the amenities that the Cousiño granted his workers came as a result of a long struggle by the coal-miners. “ The sight of this town is the wonderful palace built by his widow, which was constructed at a cost of many thousands of dollars. It is a *château* of white Italian marble, and stands in the centre of a French landscaped garden. There are ravines, fountains, estuary, arbours, terraces, grottoes, artificial lakes and a small zoological exhibit in the grounds. It blends English landscape gardening with some original ideas. Few country homes in Europe can compare with it. It is said that all the material was brought from France in the Señora Cousiño’s own ship...” Enrico Rocca, an Italian travelling in Chile in 1924, described his experiences at Lota in his book *Avventura Sudamericana*, Edizioni Alpes-Milano, 1926. Rocca began by calling the coal mine at Lota “*l’inferno a trecento metri sotto il parco incantevole*” (the Inferno three hundred metres below the enchanting park). He contrasted the modernity of the machinery in use at the coal mine and the extraordinary beauty of the Cousiño Park with the terrible working conditions in the coal mines running immediately below it: “ *Una grú mostruosa trae alla luce, sinistramente cigolando, i carrelli; uomini neri li sospingono sui binari, donne sùdice come streghe del sabba fanno il vaglio del carbone lungo il piano inclinato que porta il materiale al molo d’imbarco. E tutto procede tra fischi laceranti, squilli improvvisi di campanacci, gutturali urla disumane*”. (a monstrous crane brings to light, squeaking in a sinister way, the trolleys; black men push them along the tracks, dirty women looking like witches at the Sabbath, check the coal along the slope that takes it to the docks. It all takes place among piercing whistles, sudden bell ringing, inhuman guttural screaming). Meanwhile, in Santiago, amid the many shanty towns, Nevin O. Winter tells us of another magnificent palace belonging to the same family, built between 1875 and 1879. “*One of the finest private residences in South America is that belonging to the Cousiño family which was erected by the late Señora Isidora Cousiño It was designed by a famous French Architect and will compared favourably with those of New York. It is imposing. Its interior scenes are elaborate; they are all French scenes, as the work was done by French artists. She was a remarkable woman and her chief concern was to expend her enormous income. Her extravagance was frequently the gossip of Europe as well as her native land. Herself the richest woman in Chile before marriage, she married the richest man and all his wealth was willed to her at his death. She had millions of dollars in herds, mines, railroads, steamships, real estate etc.*”.

The story of the School of Santa Maria de Iquique

Since Carlos is a politically motivated singer with a strong interest in Chilean history, he is very familiar with the famous Cantata “Santa Maria de Iquique”, the celebrated

musical work by Luis Advis, sung by the great Quilapayun and the lovely voice of Hector Duvauchelle. This work was produced during the time of Allende, and those Chileans who knew almost nothing about the atrocities which had taken place many years before in an ordinary provincial school, were suddenly brought face to face with a very important part of Chilean history. I asked Carlos about the story. “Santa Maria de Iquique”, he said, “ It is an horrific tale of events that took place in the Atacama desert in the northern city of Iquique, on the 21st of December, 1907. On this day, about 10,000 striking miners, with their children, wives and other members of their families, met in Iquique, at the School of Santa Maria de Iquique and at **la Plaza Manuel Montt**. By about two in the afternoon, between 5,000 and 6,000 miners and their families had assembled at the school, amid mounting tension. The military commander, General Roberto Silva Renard, having failed to persuade the miners to return to their places of work, ordered a machine-gun attack on the school, which killed several hundred people. According to the local conservative newspaper, El Tarapaca, of 24th December, 1907, General Renard had negotiated for two hours with the strikers, but in vain. The strikers even dared to “violently offend the honour of the military authority”. Why did they refuse to move to the ‘Club of Sport’ (the English name was used), as ordered? Why, said El Tarapaca, did the miners adopt such a rebellious attitude (**una actitud sediciosa**)? The newspaper then blamed the miners’ leaders - and the miners themselves for following their leaders’ dictates - without weighing the consequences of their actions. Then it added : it would be unfair of us not to applaud the **Señores** military leaders stationed at Iquique, who had to undertake such an arduous task.

This 1907 strike became known as **La huelga de los 18 peniques**, “the 18 Pence Strike” (note the English dimension to the story: the Chilean currency at the time was actually called the **peso**). Neither Renard, as a representative of the Chilean army and of the powerful economic interests of the time, nor the Tarapaca newspapers, nor the Chilean Government of the day could understand why the strikers refused to move from the school. “ *They refused to move because they wanted some basic human rights and some human decency restored*”.

The facts which cannot be ignored

For half a century, between the years 1880 and 1930, the exploitation of the **salitre** (nitrate) created revenues for the Chilean State and great wealth for well-known Chilean and English entrepreneurs, such as North, Gibbs, Harvey, Humberstone, Edwards, Ossa, and so on. One of them, the Englishman John Thomas North, who was known as the ‘Nitrate King’, managed to secure a large share of the industry at comparatively low cost (Harold Blakemore, Chile Since Independence, Cambridge University Press, 1993). However, those who were mainly involved in creating wealth for the Chilean state and for the entrepreneurs lived and worked like slaves, while the entrepreneurs lived in great luxury. This was the focal point of the conflict. Thousands of people came from the deep south of Chile **enganchados** (lured) by the prospect of hard work, but for good money. The reality was that these people ended up working in extreme and dangerous conditions. Nothing in the world can fully portray the experiences of the miners of the north of Chile but, we can get a realistic impression by reading the following extract from A History of Chile 1808-1994 by Simon Collier and William F. Sater, Cambridge Latin American Studies, 1996 . “*Often carrying sacks weighing more than 140 kg. (300 lbs), miners constantly had to thread their way between explosions, falling debris, and moving cars or railcars. The refineries were no less perilous.*”

*Labouring in plants filled with steam or dust, workers had to avoid falling into massive grinding machines or the vats filled with scalding liquids. The accident rate, in a business singularly reluctant to introduce safety measures, was predictably high. Given the lack of facilities, most accidents were either fatal or permanently disabling...The men who dug the **caliche** lived in mining camps out on the arid **pampas**. Their shanties, often constructed of chunks of desert and roofed in zinc, afforded little or no protection against the extremes of temperature for which the Great North of the country is notorious. Without running water or even sewers, the miners and their families easily succumbed to ever-present epidemic diseases or tuberculosis. While the managers of the **salitreras**, the 140 saltpetre processing plants, enjoyed access to imported delicacies, the great mass of the nitrate miners had to satisfy their appetites at the **pulperías**, company stores which often sold shoddy goods at inflated prices. Some of the **pulperías** made enormous profits, sometimes as much as 30% but, isolated in the camps, the miners had perforce to deal with them. Indeed, since many workers received their pay in **fichas** (tokens or chits), they were obliged either to patronise the company store or to sell their scrip, at a heavy discount, to local merchants.”*

The First World War prevented the normal supply of nitrate (**salitre**) to the German factories which utilised it as a fertiliser and gunpowder. This forced the Germans to seek an artificial substitute for **salitre**, and in this they succeeded. The Germans created **salitre sintético** and were able to produce this at a lower cost for the industrialised countries. This was the beginning of the collapse of this important Chilean industry. People soon began to leave the **salitreras** and the desert was left with nothing but ghost towns and painful stories. During the Pinochet regime, however, a concentration camp was created at the **Oficina Chacabuco**, one of the famous **salitreras** of the past. Here, many Chilean prisoners were tortured and killed. Thus, the **salitrera** become, once again, a focus of Chilean history, involving another Chilean general eager to defend the interest of the upper classes. In the midst of the broad, arid desert, Renard and Pinochet had the last laugh.

Carlos set music to a poem known as **Libre** (“Free”). It was written in 1974, by “Santiago” in the aforementioned Pinochet concentration camp in the abandoned **salitrera** of Chacabuco. “Santiago”, not his real name, was a prisoner there and, in the poem, he evokes the sad past of the **salitrera**, linking it to the present, equally sad situation of the detainees. History, he says, is repeated: life was locked up in a cage in the desert, reviving painful memories of the past.

Libre

Villorrio destruido y fantasmal
Chacabuco perdido en el desierto
aldea calcinada en suelo muerto
osamenta de un pueblo en el erial

Extinguida la veta mineral
quedose el casorio esteril yerto
el arenal en su costado abierto
de donde se fugaron hombre y sal

La historia luego lîo una historia añeja
encerraron la vida en una reja
reviviendo la aldea por su mal.

The Chilean upper classes love playing God and they are a bunch of sinners.

The Chilean upper classes behave and function as a unique body in Chilean society. They have the notion that they really are omniscient. *“ In Chile, people will say : **son una raza aparte**. If the Christian upper classes believe that God is omniscient, then the upper classes have made the Chilean lower classes believe that they are God and, by all accounts, they are indeed God in Chilean society”*. They use the language of God and the Catholic religion as a platform to demonstrate their Christian values. They go to mass and conduct programmes, on paternalistic lines, to help the poor in order to demonstrate their Christian commitment. In political terms, they are masters of distorting the language, especially when it comes to the use of the political word **“Libertad”** (“Freedom”)! . The Freedom they have always wanted was the one that would allow them to continue to rule. Their power, however, was strongly challenged when Allende won the election in 1970. As they were unable to stop him by democratic means, they created an extreme right-wing group known as **“Patria y Libertad”** (“Homeland and Liberty”), led by an ultra-reactionary lawyer called Pablo Rodríguez. This obscure, middle-class figure is the lawyer currently representing General Pinochet in the Chilean courts . Right-wing groups like this were responsible for the killing, in 1970, of the Chilean Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, General René Schneider. Their aim was to create panic in the Army and to force them to take power and thus prevent Allende becoming president, in other words to prevent the coming to power of the lower classes, always excluded from the political process in Chile. Homeland and Liberty was there to impose terror on the lower-class supporters of Allende. Homeland and Liberty, founded in 1971, sought to use terrorism and killings to crush the enthusiasm of the million of **rotos** happy with the coming of Salvador Allende. Among the casualties in this campaign was Salvador Allende’ personal naval aide, Commander Arturo Araya, killed in July 1973. **Patria y Libertad** received funds from the CIA, as was established by the Church Commission of the US Senate. *El Mundo*, Tuesday 1st December, 1998. Pablo Rodríguez was the equivalent in Chile in the 1970s of Jorge González Von Marées, the leader of the Chilean Nazi Party during the 1930s and 1940s , who, on September 5th, 1938 was involved in an attempted coup d’état. If the upper classes have had their own paramilitary groups to defend their interests in time of need, they also have their own heroes, of whom Pinochet is the latest. Carlos says, *“But they also have their own historians to project to Chilean children their distorted views of historical events. I have in my home a copy of **El Manual de Historia de Chile** by Francisco Frías Valenzuela, a former academic of the Universidad de Chile, published by Editorial Nascimento, Santiago de Chile, 1984. This very poorly informed text is typical of an educational system which has failed the lowest class in Chile. The lack of objectivity in this book about our history is very clear. By reading it, and in particular the part dedicated to the period of the Government of Salvador Allende, one immediately observes the author’s hatred for Allende and his support for Pinochet. One sees his contempt for people like me who supported Popular Unity. Obviously, Mr Valenzuela says nothing of the atrocities committed by the Pinochet regime and the role of *El Mercurio* against the elected government of Salvador Allende, information which has been circulating for years in the work of the good and serious historians”*.

In the Chile of today (2001), the realities of life in million of Chilean homes are still very harsh. We can see glimpses of these in the hugely popular TV programme

“Buenas Tardes, Eli”. Every day, Eli tries very hard to appeal on camera to those who can help to meet the urgent needs of people from all over the country. Children and old people are the main focus of attention in the programme. Housing, health services, social exclusion, and jobs are the things which clearly require the government’s attention. In Eli’s TV show, it is clear that Chile is very much a divided society, as most of the social and economic problems she attempts to solve originate in the poor barrios of Chile. She also exposes the way in which many Chilean institutions fail to respond to the needs of the people, either because some local councils in working class areas do not have resources or because the organisation in these councils is deficient. People themselves are ill informed about what is available. Many people, for instance, do not even know what their rights are. What is clear is that Eli and her team provide a valuable social service to the community and many of her viewers respond positively to her requests. The people who do not respond are the upper classes, many of whose members still try to avoid paying taxes to the Chilean State, taxes which could help to improve things in the poor barrios of Chile.

The enemy of the Chilean working class in recent years has been the economic policy of the Pinochet dictatorship, which gave Chileans the false illusion of prosperity. These policies were not dismantled with the arrival of democracy in 1990, as the Chilean economist David Hojman explained in his book *‘Chile’* (published in Britain by The Macmillan Press in 1993). *“Many former members of the democratic opposition to the Pinochet regime during the 1980s now find it difficult to separate the largely successful free market economic model of that regime from the repressive political climate under which the model was implemented for the first time.”* These economic policies, castigating the lower classes, brought to the fore a new type of successful entrepreneur known in Chile and Latin America as **los Jaguares** (“the Jaguars”), people who do not recognise national responsibilities, if they feel that their economic interests are in jeopardy. Reaffirming what Liebknecht once said ; in the world there are only two fatherlands: that of the rich and that of the poor. On the 4th of May, 2001, one of these “Jaguars”, Señor Ricardo Aristía, was forced to respond to criticism of the **impresarios** (entrepreneurs) by the Chilean government. They were accused of investing their money abroad, instead of in their own country with a view to creating jobs, as unemployment was rising. Even the conservative Catholic Church publicly agreed with the Government on this score. However, Señor Aristía told the Chilean media that Chilean **impresarios** have *“an ethical and a moral responsibility to preserve the patrimony of the business. If today’s Chile is not attractive to investors, then it the right of the Chileans to do what they want. We have to respond to our shareholders”*. It clear that this Chilean gentleman, and the people he represents, does not care if the Chilean workers and their families have money to buy food or not. What the **Jaguars** wanted to do was to boycott the Government of Lagos because the people currently in Government are not Pinochet’s men, and Lagos is a reformed socialist. Pinochet, as we know, has been put on trial in Chile after returning from his detention in London and the Chilean right is very upset about this. These people get upset very quickly when their demands are not met. Mr Aristía speaks of ‘ethics and morals’. How dare he - when the lowest classes of Chile and the Chilean state have never had a fair deal from people like him? Let us go back a few years in Chilean history to see the magnificent opportunism of some **impresarios** and how their actions have an effect on those who have nothing. Professor Edwin Williamson, the Chair of Hispanic Studies at the University of

Edinburgh and one of Carlos's former lecturers, enlightens us on this point. *“Chile was particularly hard hit by the world recession of the early 1980s because its experiment in economic deregulation had made it extremely vulnerable to fluctuation in the international capital markets. Moreover, its efforts to control inflation had led it to maintain an artificially high exchange rate for too long. This had damaged export performance, sucking in imports and leading to a consumer boom which produced deficits in the balance of payments. The climate of financial instability encouraged capital flight, excessive borrowing and speculation, instead of productive investment. It also encouraged the concentration of capital in a few large groups (conglomerates) which enjoyed favoured access to private foreign loans. Indeed, the consumer boom enjoyed by the upper and middle classes in 1976-81 had been financed by huge levels of private borrowing from foreign banks. But, in 1982, after international rates had gone up sharply, the government felt the need to nationalise banks and other groups in order to salvage the country's financial system. Thus, the massive private debt was passed on to the state and Chile become one of the most indebted nations in Latin America, with a foreign debt of \$17 billion and interest payments amounting to 49.5 per cent of export earnings. By nationalising the foreign debt, the regime had effectively made it the collective responsibility of the people of Chile to pay off the mountain of credit amassed by the privileged conglomerates during the boom of the late 1970s.”* Edward Williamson, Chile : Democracy, Revolution and Dictatorships, The Penguin History of Latin America, 1992. The regime in question is, of course, that of Pinochet. The Chilean ruling classes of the 1970s and 1980s can be described, therefore, as unscrupulous people with very little regard for the progress of Chile and that of the working classes. Carlos has said *“After so many years of thinking about Chile and my barrio, I really feel that Rolando was right to make us look at the Chiflón as part of Chilean history, because poverty and deprivation were, in great part, created artificially by the very selfish people found in the Chilean ruling classes. Sadly this is still the case in the Chile of today.”*