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### **Chilean libraries during and after the dictatorship**

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#### ***ABSTRACT***

##### *Chilean Libraries During and After the Dictatorship*

*Chile was under the Pinochet military dictatorship for 27 years. This dictatorship had a profound affect upon the intellectual life of the country and upon intellectual institutions such as libraries and universities. Libraries were prohibited from circulating or offering any works that could be defined as left wing (military defined left wing) and were largely staffed by Pinched sympathisers. Most intellectual and creative works were produced outside the country during these years. Important steps have been taken since the return to democracy to recover these works, and share with the public declassified documents concerning the American involvement in the military coup. Human rights archives from the period have been included in the UNESCO Memory of the World project.*

Chile was the under military dictatorship for 17 years, from September 1973 to March 1990. Salvador Allende, the socialist President of the time had begun State control of the economy. Mineral resources, foreign banks, and monopolistic enterprises were nationalised and land reform accelerated. In addition, Allende initiated a redistribution of income, raised wages, and controlled prices. Opposition to his program, however, was strong from the beginning, and by 1972 the result was seen in severe economic problems and a sharply polarised citizenry. The situation grew still more critical in 1973, when skyrocketing prices, food shortages (caused by the reduction of foreign credits), strikes, and political violence

brought Chile to the brink of chaos. The crisis was aggravated by the United States, which worked to undermine the Allende regime. The climax came on September 11, 1973, when the military forces seized power; in the course of the coup d'état, President Allende committed suicide.

The military ruled through a junta headed by General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte. It immediately suspended the constitution, dissolved Congress, imposed strict censorship, and banned all political parties. In addition, it embarked on a campaign of terror against leftist (or rather military defined leftist) elements in the country. His main targets were; people who were involved with leftist political parties or the Popular Unity government; trade unionists; representatives from the cultural world, intellectuals and university staff and students; human rights activists; members of opposition groups and anyone who was associated with or related to these people.

Thousands of people were detained throughout Chile on the day of the coup and the days, which followed. According to Amnesty International and the United Nations' Human Rights Committee, 250,000 Chileans had been detained for political reasons by the end of 1973. Summary executions, disappearances and killings in false-armed confrontations became the norm. Neighbours, colleagues and others began denouncing each other, a practice encouraged by the military Junta and which became part of Chilean society at the beginning of the dictatorship. A state of siege was declared throughout Chile and was extended, except for brief periods, until 1987. This meant that all legal cases involving infractions of State of Siege regulations were transferred from the civilian courts to war-time military institutions.

The dictatorship defined the social conflict, which had permeated Chilean society immediately before the coup as a "war" and the concept of the "enemy within" as well as the National Security Doctrine were imposed throughout the nation. The enemy within was the Communist, the Marxist, the Socialist, the revolutionary, the subversive, indeed, anyone perceived by the military to constitute a challenge to the new established order.

This had immediate ramifications in all the libraries and private collections of books in the country, as any form of Marxist or left leaning literature, films, artworks or broadcasts were banned. The National Library was unable to lend any kind of left leaning newspaper, magazines or reviews and all the books with any Marxist orientation could not be offered to the public. Books by national authors such as Nicanor Parra, Marta Harnecker plus the typical international texts by Lenin, Stalin and Rosa Luxemburg etc. as well as basic scientific texts like *La Revolución del Atomo*, were banned. At times, the lack of literary education of some of the members of the military carrying out the book purges reached ridiculous levels, with seizures of books by the Marx Brothers, for example.

Book burnings did occur in some libraries but were they not carried out on a massive or systematic scale. Rather, private collections of prominent left wing intellectuals, union leaders or Communist party members were destroyed. During the first few months of the dictatorship it was not uncommon to see piles of books being burnt on street corners throughout the middle class and poorer sections of Santiago. Many families themselves opted to burn files and books rather than risk arrest.

Most libraries reacted to the dictatorship by hiding, rather than destroying, the materials that were likely to cause problems. They self-censored their collections to be able to continue in existence, without continual harassment. The National Library simply removed the cards for the prohibited books from the public catalogue and opened up a secret file for these records within each section of the library. The materials themselves remained in their original locations and were not disturbed. Public libraries removed banned books from the shelves, but kept them hidden in the library.

Access to these hidden works very much depended upon the political views of the library staff themselves. Not all Chileans were against the military dictatorship. Some libraries openly collaborated with the regime and were happy to restrict access to certain types of proscribed information. Other library staff provided access to all the information in their possession and used their networks to obtain other information required by their users.

One of the most interesting examples of ingenuity aimed at protecting books took place at the University of Chile. At this time, the faculty of Physical Sciences and Mathematics, of which Nicanor Parra was a professor, included a Department of Humanities; a radical idea for the time, aimed at ensuring that Chile's future engineers would take the time to reflect upon the humanities and society. When the coup occurred, the Dean of the faculty asked the library to keep any books that it would be dangerous for students to have in their possession, so that they could still access them, without running personal risk. Thus, key works needed to study literature, philosophy and history were "hidden" in the faculty ostensibly dedicated to engineering and could be accessed by students from other areas.

It has often been noted that the worst kind of censorship is self-censorship, which arises out of fear in regimes of terror. This is indeed the case in Chile, where many students and members of the public were too frightened to ask for the materials that they required in the libraries. The internal system of spying by Pinochet supporters was so well developed throughout the dictatorship that people were afraid of being denounced by the library staff or by the person standing beside them. The list of prohibited books was in fact extended way beyond that provided by the dictatorship, by the fear that the public felt to ask for may material that could misinterpreted as subversive.

More than book burnings, or banning books, great damage was caused to the libraries during the dictatorship as a result of the "cultural" policies that were introduced. Public libraries were not given any central government budgets; rather they were passed over to the municipalities, as also happened with the schools. Their collections were to be developed on the basis of "selected" community donations, meaning in reality, that the libraries became filled up with all the useless books that no longer interested wealthier citizens. The only books that were able to be bought were those listed by the regime. It was not possible to buy outside this list. Public libraries also acted under draconian administrative controls with closed stacks and very restricted use by the community. They were also largely staffed by Pinochet sympathisers. Community members themselves would sometimes deface catalogue cards for works by Pablo Neruda (a Communist). Unlike many state institutions (especially the universities), the National Library maintained civilian directors throughout the dictatorship, but as the Director of the National Library is a political appointment, these directors were obviously sympathetic to the regime. It

suffered serious budget restrictions, which directly affected its ability to develop the collections. The damage from this lack of funding, which in real terms has never been restored to pre-dictatorship levels, can still be felt today.

Another very important repercussion of the dictatorship on the National Library was produced by the dispersion of Chilean creators and intellectuals that occurred after the coup. These Chileans began to produce and publish in other countries and as a result of the isolation of Chile at this time, and the ban on receiving these works; it was virtually impossible to fulfil the Library's mission as the repository of the intellectual and creative production of Chile. The Library also could not collect the body of important works produced clandestinely during the dictatorship. Much of this material is now irretrievable and an important part of Chile's cultural history has been lost.

With the return to democracy, the situation of the libraries has been gradually improving. The public libraries are actively inviting community participation in their management, have broadened their collections and have open shelving. The National Library has replaced the "missing" registers in the catalogue and is now making efforts to collect the intellectual and creative production of the over one million Chileans that were living in exile during the dictatorship. The Chilean Foreign Affairs Office (Dirección de Comunidades Chilenas en el Exterior), Chileans still living in other countries, other National Libraries and educational institutions of all kinds are assisting in locating these works and sending a copy to Chile so that they can form part of the "Biblioteca del Reencuentro". Important collections have already been received from France, Sweden and Canada.

The National Library has also received and made public the documents released by the Chile Declassification Project in the United States. President Clinton ordered all US agencies to "retrieve and review for declassification documents that shed light on human rights abuses, terrorism and other acts of political violence in Chile". Over 7,500 formerly secret records have been released, mostly from the State Department. Unfortunately, the CIA whose documents have most to contribute to a greater understanding of the conditions leading to the dictatorship and American involvement, have refused to release even censored documents arguing that they "present a pattern of activity that had the effect of revealing intelligence methods that have been employed world-wide".

Finally, the National Archive of Chile, part of the Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums, has proposed and had proclaimed as Memory of the World (UNESCO), eight human rights archives that were collected and maintained in Chile from 1974 – 1990. These archives were collected throughout the dictatorship by non-government organisations: Agrupación de Familiares Detenidos Desaparecidos (Families of Disappeared People), the Chilean Commission for Human Rights, Corporación CODEPU, Corporation for Justice and Democracy, Social Support Foundation of the Christian Churches (FASIC), Foundation for the Protection of Affected Children in States of Emergency, a film archive of footage related to human rights (Productora Nueva Imagen) and the Foundation of the Archives of the Solidarity Vicariate, records kept by the Catholic Church. These records, both of human rights abuses and significantly of the defence of human rights in Chile, are now being preserved and will be accessible to the public both inside and outside Chile.