

September 11, 1973: Remembering Canada's Support for the Right Wing Coup in Chile

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On Sept. 11, 1973, the democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende, was overthrown by General Augusto Pinochet. In the aftermath, [3,000](#) leftists were murdered, tens of thousands tortured and [hundreds of thousands](#) driven from the country.

Since it doesn't serve to justify further domination by the powerful, few in the Canadian media will commemorate the 'original 9/11'. Even fewer will recognize Canada's role in the US-backed coup.

The Pierre Trudeau government was hostile to Allende's elected government. In 1964 Eduardo Frei defeated the openly Marxist Allende in presidential elections. Worried about growing support for socialism, Ottawa gave [\\$8.6 million](#) to Frei's Chile, its first aid to a South American country. When Allende won the next election Canadian assistance disappeared. Export Development Canada (EDC) also refused to finance Canadian exports to Chile, which contributed to a reduction in trade between the two countries. This suspension of EDC credits led Chile's Minister of Finance to criticize Canada's "[banker's attitude](#)". But suspending bilateral assistance and export insurance was not enough. In 1972 Ottawa joined Washington in voting to cut off all money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to the Chilean government. (When Allende was first elected western banks, including Canada's, withdrew from Chile.)

From economic asphyxiation to diplomatic isolation Ottawa's policy towards Allende's Chile was clear. After he won office in 1970 Allende invited Pierre Trudeau to visit Santiago. Ottawa refused "[for fear](#) of alienating rightist elements in Chile and elsewhere."

Days after Pinochet ousted Allende, Andrew Ross, Canada's ambassador to Chile cabled External Affairs: "Reprisals and searches have created panic atmosphere affecting particularly expatriates including the [riffraff of the Latin American Left](#) to whom Allende gave asylum ... the country has been on a prolonged political binge under the elected Allende government and the junta has assumed the probably thankless task of *sobering Chile up*." Thousands were incarcerated, tortured and killed in "sobering Chile up".

Within three weeks of the coup, Canada recognized Pinochet's military junta. Ross stated:

"[I can see no](#) useful purpose to withholding recognition unduly. Indeed, such action might even tend to delay Chile's eventual return to the democratic

process.”

Pinochet stepped down 17 years later.

Diplomatic support for Pinochet led to economic assistance. Just after the coup Canada voted for a \$22 million (\$100 million in today’s money) Inter American Development Bank loan “rushed through the bank with embarrassing haste.” Ottawa immediately endorsed sending \$95 million from the International Monetary Fund to Chile and supported renegotiating the country’s debt held by the Paris Club. After refusing to provide credits to the elected government, on October 2nd, 1973, EDC announced it was granting \$5 million in credit to Chile’s central bank to purchase six Twin Otter aircraft from De Havilland, which could carry troops to and from short makeshift strips.

By 1978, Canadian support for the coup d’etat was significant. It included:

- Support for \$810 million in multilateral loans with Canada’s share amounting to about \$40 million.
- Five EDC facilities worth between \$15 and \$30 million.
- Two Canadian debt re-schedulings for Chile, equivalent to additional loans of approximately \$5 million.
- Twenty loans by Canadian chartered banks worth more than \$100 million, including a 1977 loan by Toronto Dominion to DINA (Pinochet’s secret police) to purchase equipment.
- Direct investments by Canadian companies valued at nearly \$1 billion.

A 1976 Latin America Working Group Letter noted that “Canadian economic relations, in the form of bank loans, investments and government supported financial assistance have helped consolidate the Chilean dictatorship and, by granting it a mantle of respectability and financial endorsement, have encouraged its continued violation of human rights.”

Canadian leftists were outraged at Ottawa’s support for the coup and its unwillingness to accept refugees hunted by the military regime. Many denounced the federal government’s policy and some (my mother among them) occupied various Chilean and Canadian government offices in protest. The federal government was surprised at the scope of the opposition, which curtailed some support for the junta. A 1974 cabinet document lamented that “[the attention](#)... focused on the Chilean Government’s use of repression against its opponents has led to an unfavourable reaction among the Canadian public – a reaction which will not permit any significant increase in Canadian aid to this country.”

The Pierre Trudeau government sought to placate protesters by allowing [7,000 refugees](#) from Pinochet’s regime asylum in Canada. But, they continued to support the dictatorship directly responsible for the refugee problem.

We should remember Canada’s role in the ‘original 9/11’ and vow to fight any future similar moves by our government.

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