
Committee To Protect Journalists

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November 1987

ATTACKS AND RESTRICTIONS ON THE PRESS IN CHILE

October 1985 - October 1987

In the spring of this year, the government allowed two opposition dailies -- La Epoca and Fortin Mapocho -- to publish, the first since General Augusto Pinochet seized power in 1973. Further, a number of lively opposition magazines, in existence since the late '70s and early '80s, offer blunt criticism of the regime and provide a forum for spirited political debate.

Despite this margin of tolerance, freedom of the press is not a right firmly entrenched in Chile. Under two states of siege imposed by the government during the last three years (which lasted a total of 11 months), nearly all of the opposition press was shut down. Just over a year ago, an editor of a leading opposition magazine was found murdered only hours after a group of armed men dragged him from his home. Several journalists have received anonymous telephone death threats. Editors and reporters are jailed with alarming regularity, held for as much as two months, then released only to have charges hanging over their heads. Foreign correspondents have also been arrested, censored and intimidated. In short, press freedom in Chile is a precarious and limited commodity.

The following chronology of attacks and restrictions on the media is based on press reports and information from contacts in Chile. It should not be regarded as exhaustive as a great many incidents, such as threats, go unreported because Chileans consider them the norm.

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1987

October 29 - New legislation takes effect which forbids media from reporting on the activities or opinions of Marxists. Offenders are subject to heavy fines and can be barred from working as journalists; publications can be suspended for up to ten issues. The legislation also prohibits Marxists from the journalism profession.

October 9 - Freelance investigative journalist MONICA GONZALEZ is arrested for publishing an interview in Analisis magazine with prominent Christian Democrat Andres Zaldivar in which he describes President Pinochet as "coarse, of low intellectual level, and brutally audacious." Gonzalez, who is charged with insulting the president, is roughly treated by guards taking her from the courthouse to the prison, and held for two weeks before being released on bail. Charges against her are pending.

September 18 - Police raid the house in which freelance U.S. journalist DANIEL WEISS is staying, rouse him from his bed at gunpoint, question him and search the house and his belongings. Police eventually leave, saying they were looking for a colonel who was kidnapped September 1. (Since the colonel was abducted by a guerrilla group opposed to the regime, authorities had launched hundreds of raids throughout Santiago. Weiss believes, however, that the raids appear to be a pretext to harass the press and the opposition.) One agent tells Weiss, "You don't write good things about Chile."

September 3 - Freelance U.S. journalist DANIEL WEISS is briefly detained while standing near police who were cutting down protest banners. He is taken to the police station, questioned and held about 45 minutes. His requests to call the U.S. Embassy are denied.

August 27 - September 5 - MARIA OLIVIA MONCKEBERG, a journalist with Analisis and a leader of the Colegio de Periodistas (the journalists' association), receives anonymous telephone death threats.

August 25 - Apsi associate editor SERGIO MARRAS is arrested and charged under military law with insulting General Pinochet in a satirical issue of the magazine. He is not released on bail until October 22. Charges against him are pending.

August 24 - Apsi editor MARCELO CONTRERAS is arrested and charged with insulting President Pinochet in a special satirical issue of the magazine. He is charged under military law which contains fewer provisions for due process than civilian law. He is held until October 22 before being released on bail. Charges against him are pending.

August 19 - Authorities confiscate 30,000 copies of a special satirical issue of the opposition Apsi magazine entitled, "The Thousand Faces of Pinochet."

August 2 - Chilean writer and journalist ARIEL DORFMAN is barred from entering Chile after he arrives at the Santiago Airport. (An outspoken critic of the regime, Dorfman was banned from the country after the 1973 coup, but was allowed to return to Chile in 1983 and has visited the country several times since then.) On August 11, the government announces that Dorfman may return and he travels to Chile on August 15.

July - Analisis director JUAN PABLO CARDENAS begins serving a one-and-a-half year sentence of nighttime imprisonment after being convicted of slandering President Pinochet in articles appearing in his magazine. Under the terms of the sentence, he must report to the jail by 10:00 p.m. and leave by 6:00 each morning. (See July 29, 1986 entry.)

July - Government files charges against the directors of the dailies La Epoca and Fortin Mapocho, and the weeklies Analisis and Apsi for running a paid advertisement from the proscribed Communist Party.

June - Analisis journalist MARIA OLIVIA MONCKEBERG reports receiving six anonymous telephone death threats warning her and fellow journalists MONICA GONZALEZ and PATRICIA VERDUGO to stop their professional activities.

June 25 - La Voz de la Costa radio station in Osorno is fired on by an unidentified gunman; an announcer, MARCELO ZURITA, is wounded.

June 25 - Analisis journalist MARIA OLIVIA MONCKEBERG's car catches fire while she and her husband, a labor lawyer, are driving; tampering is evident.

May 29 - A court orders the arrest of Fortin Mapocho director FELIPE POZO and journalist GILBERTO PALACIOS for a 1986 article that criticized conscription and conditions in the armed services. The two are charged with insulting the military and held for three weeks before being released on bail. Charges are pending against them.

April 13 - Persons identifying themselves as members of the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front, an armed guerrilla group, raid nine radio stations and force staff to broadcast a prepared tape of music and a political statement. The offices of the Associated Press are also raided, and guerrillas tie up two staff members and paint slogans on the wall.

April 9 - Unidentified persons break into the house of UPI bureau chief ANTHONY BOADLE, search the house, examine documents, steal a personal computer, but leave other exposed valuables behind. Police investigating the incident tell Boadle it does not appear to be a routine burglary.

April 7 - West German radio reporter THOMAS NACHTIGALL, who travels frequently to Chile, is assaulted by two unidentified men while trying to take pictures of police arresting a vendor. When Nachtigall later spots one of the men in a police van and tries to take his picture, the reporter is arrested and his address is taken. He does not go home that night. The next day neighbors report that plainclothesmen had come looking for him. He leaves for Peru the following day.

April 3 - Police arrest CBS cameraman LEOPOLDO CORREA POBLETE while he is covering a public mass held by the Pope and detain him for nine hours.

March 26 - GUILLERMO TORRES, the general secretary of the Colegio de Periodistas, receives a threatening note at his home and files for police protection on March 28. On March 29, an anonymous phone caller tells him the "police protection isn't going to do you a damn bit of good."

March 18 - Photographer Santiago Oyarzo Perez, who works with Cauce magazine and the Dutch Conosur agency, is seized by men in civilian clothes who identify themselves as security agents, while covering a protest rally. Abductors drive him around for two hours, question and threaten him. Before being released, his camera, documents and eyeglasses are taken. In June, Oyarzo leaves for Spain, saying he fears for his life.

1986

November 12 - A letter is found under the door of the Colegio de Periodistas signed by the "September 7 Command" threatening 12 Colegio leaders: RENATO MILLAS, MAX LEULIE, ANTONIO CABELLO, LUIS ARNES, ORIANA ZORRILLA, PABLO PORTALES, GUSTAVO PUELLER, FELIDOR CONTRERAS, GUILLERMO TORRES, JORGE ANDRES RICHARDS, CLARIBEL PEREZ and MANUEL MERCADO. The communique warns that the Colegio would "explode with red" if it did not stop its activities, and says that "Carrasco was only the first." (Analisis editor Jose Carrasco was murdered September 8 - see entry.)

October 8 - Police break up a memorial service for murdered Analisis journalist Jose Carrasco, using tear gas to disperse about 200 journalists and friends.

October 2 - First Lady Lucia Hiriart de Pinochet publicly advocates restrictions on the foreign press to control the flow of negative news.

September 28 & 30 - The pro-government daily El Mercurio runs editorials accusing foreign news agencies of employing government opponents, and calls for an investigation.

September 22 - Analisis journalist MARIA OLIVIA MONCKEBERG is briefly detained at the Santiago Airport as she is leaving for a visit to the U.S. Police search her bags and confiscate tapes, videos, issues of Analisis and photographs.

Week of September 15 - Several journalists receive death threats, including PABLO PORTALES, an official in the journalists union; JORGE ANDRES RICHARDS, a journalist with Apsi, an official in the journalists union, and a stringer for Mexican radio; and FERNANDO VILLAGRAN, a staff member of Apsi. Also, armed men dressed in civilian clothes come to Portales' house at night but he is not there.

September 10 - Riot police swinging clubs attack several hundred people, about half of them journalists, who have gathered for the funeral of murdered journalist Jose Carrasco.

September 10 - In the third edict issued under the state of siege, the government bans the Italian news agency ANSA from transmitting stories, accusing it of "divulging tendentious and false information about the armed forces." The ban is lifted September 27.

September 8 - The body of Analisis foreign editor JOSE CARRASCO TAPIA is found near a cemetery in suburban Santiago, following his abduction by armed men. After he is taken from his home at 5:00 a.m., it is widely reported in the press that he has been arrested. A group calling itself the September 11 Command later claims responsibility for the murder and says that his killing, as well as that of three others, is in retaliation for the killing of five guards in the September 7 attack on Pinochet's motorcade. No significant progress has been made in finding his killers.

September 8 - The second edict issued under the newly imposed state of siege bans Reuters and Latin Reuters from transmitting stories from Chile. The ban is lifted September 16.

September 8 - The government issues a state of siege, and the first edict issued under the emergency measure closes six opposition publications: Analisis, Apsi, Cauce, Fortin Mapocho, Hoy and La Bicicleta. Also, security forces confiscate all current issues. Hoy is allowed to reopen on September 14 and Apsi in early December. The others remain closed until the state of siege is lifted on January 5, 1987.

Week of September 8 - A number of journalists receive death threats, among them PATRICIO ACEVEDO of Analisis; ENRIQUE ACEVEDO VALDES of Radio Cooperativa in Valparaiso; MARIO GOMEZ LOPEZ of Radio Chilena and Radio Carrera; JUAN JORGE FAUNDES of Cauce and a staff editor for EFE news agency; and JOSE AGURTO, a Chilean photographer working for Reuters. Gomez Lopez, Agurto and Faundes leave the country.

Week of September 8 - Armed men dressed in civilian clothes visit the homes of several journalists at night, including JORGE LAVANDERO, president of the board of Fortin Mapocho, FELIPE POZO, director of Fortin Mapocho and MARCELO CONTRERAS, director of Apsi. The three are not home when the men arrive.

September 1 - The current issue of Analisis, which contains an article about the government's discovery of a clandestine arms cache, is confiscated and the magazine is suspended for the next two weeks. The courts later overturn the suspension.

August - The longtime editor of the mainstream daily Las Ultimas Noticias, HECTOR OLAVE, is fired. According to other editors, his dismissal stems from the government's anger about an article quoting persons who are skeptical about the government's claim of a discovery of a clandestine arms cache.

August 31 - Cauce editor JUAN JORGE FAUNDES is arrested on charges of painting slogans on a wall. His case is transferred to a military court, where he is charged in connection with an article appearing in the magazine, entitled "Arsenal of Doubt", (see week of August 25 entry) and released a few days later.

August 31 - The current issue of Cauce, which includes a follow-up article about the government's discovery of a clandestine arms cache, is confiscated.

Week of August 25 - A number of journalists with Cauce magazine are arrested on charges of slandering the military in connection with the article "Arsenal of Doubt", which expresses skepticism about the military's recent discovery of a large arms cache in the northern part of the country. The issue is also confiscated. Those arrested include: GONZALO FIGUEROA, JORGE OVALLE QUIROZ, ARIEL POBLETE (the author of the article), CLAUDIA LANZAROTTI, EGUENIO GONZALEZ and MARCIA PINEDA. Although the others are released within a few days, Figueroa and Poblete are held until mid-September and released on bail.

July 29 - Analisis editor-in-chief JUAN PABLO CARDENAS is jailed on charges of insulting President Pinochet for articles appearing in the magazine. He is released on bail August 26. After a series of verdicts and appeals, Cardenas is finally sentenced to spending one-and-a-half years of nighttime imprisonment (see July 1987 entry).

July 29 - The current issue of Analisis is confiscated by authorities and the next two issues are banned. The magazine's cover carries the headline "Pinochet Solo" (Pinochet Alone), referring to the gradual desertion of Pinochet's supporters.

July 3 - Charges are filed against 29 editors, reporters and contributors to Analisis magazine in connection with articles from January through June of this year.

July 3 - Cauce editor JUAN JORGE FAUNDES is charged under the Internal Security Law in connection with an interview published in the magazine with leaders of the Leftist Revolutionary Movement, a small group that favors armed opposition to the government.

July 3 - A soldier fires buckshot at the vehicle of a West German television crew as they are leaving a slum area in Santiago. The driver is injured.

July 2 - RODRIGO ROJAS DE NEGRI, a 19-year-old training to become a photographer, is severely beaten and set on fire by security forces, according to witnesses on the scene. A U.S. resident who had only recently returned to his native country, Rojas dies of burn wounds four days later.

July 2 - Radio Chilena, Radio Cooperativa, Radio Santiago, and Radio Carrera are banned from broadcasting news, effectively removing the chief source of information about events in Chile during two days of national protest. The ban is lifted after four days.

June 19 - ALVARO HOPPE of Apsi is clubbed unconscious by police as he leaves the scene of a women's demonstration.

May 9 - A Radio Chilena journalist attempting to cover a shantytown raid is beaten by police.

May 7 - Visnews cameraman RAUL CUEVAS, covering a police raid of a shantytown in Santiago, is stopped by civilians wearing yellow armbands and using radios who confiscate two unused cassettes. Cuevas is told he can recover his materials in the offices of the National Social Communications Agency.

May 1 - During May Day demonstration, several correspondents are stopped by security forces and their materials are seized. The journalists include Reuters photographer Jose AGURTO, German reporter HEINZ-GEORG KOHLER, and Canadian Globe and Mail correspondent PAUL KNOX. In addition, Agurto is beaten by a soldier with a rifle butt and is treated for facial wounds and a broken arm.

April 30 - Correspondents MALCOLM COAD of the Guardian and the Washington Post and SIMON ALTERMAN of Reuters are forced into a vehicle by police and expelled from a shantytown in Santiago where they are covering police raids. Alterman's notebook is read by police.

April 29 - Police seize film of correspondents attempting to cover raids on shantytowns in Santiago. Journalists include JOSE AGURTO of Reuters, MARCO UGARTE of Agence France-Presse and SANTIAGO LLANQUIN of the Associated Press.

March 31 - LEOPOLDO CORREA POBLETE, covering a student demonstration for CBS television, is hit with a teargas bomb launched by the police. He is standing at a distance from the students. He requires several stitches to a gash on the head.

February 26 - Analisis editor FERNANDO PAULSEN is arrested on charges of slandering the police in connection with a story in an August 1985 issue alleging police involvement in the killing of three Communist Party leaders in March 1985. He is held for more than three weeks.

February 21 - NELSON MUNOZ, a journalist with Hoy, is detained while covering a demonstration protesting the detention of an opposition leader. He is released a few hours later.

1985

December 10 - Fortin Mapocho journalists CLAUDIO PEREZ and OSCAR NAVARRO are arrested and roughed up by security forces while covering a Human Rights Day march. The reporters are held for nine days, charged with assaulting police and released on bail.

December 4 - Father RENATO HEVIA, director of the monthly Jesuit publication Mensaje, is arrested on charges of insulting General Pinochet and breaking security laws in connection with articles and editorials appearing in the magazine. He is held for two weeks before being released on bail.

October 11 - Analisis editor JUAN PABLO CARDENAS receives telephone death threats.

October 8 - While covering a student assembly at the University of Santiago, journalist CARLOS TOBAR is kicked and choked by thugs who later take refuge in the Dean's office.