

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

250 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017 212 986 7050

November 14, 1988

Mr. Ricardo Lagos Escobar
Augusto Leguía Norte 127-A
Santiago, Chile

Dear Ricardo:

I was sorry to miss you during my Americas Watch visit to Chile just before the plebiscite; however, I greatly admired the leadership that you gave to the entire process. And I must have been almost as delighted as you by the results of all your hard work.

Enclosed is a piece from today's Christian Science Minotor that Peter Hakim and I actually wrote a month ago. Chile has virtually disappeared from the news here since the immediate aftermath of the plebiscite. Perhaps the article will be a modest contribution to reviving attention in Washington.

Peter joins me in sending warm regards. Keep up the good fight!

Sincerely,



Peter D. Bell

enc.

OPINION

US policy toward Chile – a success

By Peter Hakim and Peter D. Bell

THE people of Chile won an important victory when they voted Oct. 5 to end Gen. Augusto Pinochet Ugarte's 15-year-old dictatorship. Credit for that victory went deservedly to the 16 opposition parties that joined together in the campaign for "No."

But it was also an achievement for United States policy, which – for the past few years – has intelligently promoted democratic change in Chile. By sticking with that policy through the current presidential transition and into the new administration, the US can assist Chile's democratic forces in their next struggle – the transformation of their electoral triumph into a genuine political opening and, ultimately, into free and democratic government.

US policy toward Chile has seen darker days. In 1970, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger turned to the Central Intelligence Agency to try to prevent Marxist Salvador Allende Gossens from becoming president. The US intervention failed to achieve its objective, but it cost the life of the commander-in-chief of Chile's armed forces and gave heart to extremists of the right and left.

For the next three years, Washington worked covertly – and not so covertly – to make the "Chilean economy scream," in Mr. Nixon's own words, and otherwise to destabilize the Allende government. Although there is no conclusive evidence of US involvement in

the actual overthrow of Mr. Allende, US actions helped create the conditions for the military coup that put Mr. Pinochet in power.

The Nixon and Ford administrations cultivated friendly relations with the new Pinochet regime. When then US Ambassador David Popper criticized Chile's human rights violations, he was advised by Dr. Kissinger to "stop the political science lectures." Only under Presi-

opened communication with opposition leaders, and he has supported their efforts to promote a peaceful turn toward democratic politics. In the last three years, the US has stood beside Chilean human rights advocates and has pressed Pinochet to drop his use of "emergency powers." When Pinochet turned a deaf ear, the administration stopped endorsing loans to Chile from international institutions and suspended certain trade preferences.

Last December, after Chile's main opposition groups had decided to challenge Pinochet in the constitutionally mandated plebiscite on his continued rule, President Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz authorized a statement of the ground rules that would have to be followed for the US to consider the plebiscite a fair contest. These coincided with major opposition demands, including access to television – which was ultimately granted and played a key role in the defeat of Pinochet.

The US did more than just exhort the Chilean government to run a clean election. The National Endowment for Democracy and its affiliated groups provided Chilean democrats with desperately needed resources to register voters, conduct polls, train poll-watchers, and get opposition views to the Chilean people. And just days before the plebiscite, Acting Secretary of State John Whitehead called in the Chilean ambassador to Washington to express concern about reports of a possible suspension of the vote. Moreover, congressional opinion and administration policy have been unified.

Chile faces a difficult period of transition as

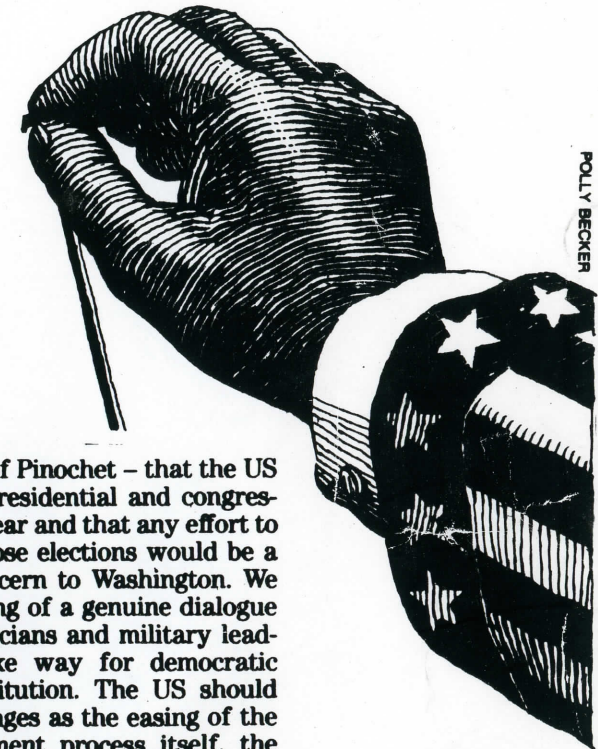
the meaning of the Oct. 5 plebiscite unfolds. On the one hand, the electoral defeat of Pinochet may produce the long-hoped-for return to democracy, especially if the armed forces agree to negotiate changes in the 1980 Constitution. On the other hand, if the military insists on rigid adherence to the Constitution, which was tailor-made to Pinochet's specifications, he could cling to the presidency until March 1990, and

instructed not to skip a beat in drumming home to Pinochet – and to all Chileans – the steadfast US support for a prompt, certain, and full return to democracy in Chile.

Washington should leave no doubt – whether among supporters or opponents of Pinochet – that the US expects competitive presidential and congressional elections next year and that any effort to postpone or cancel those elections would be a matter of gravest concern to Washington. We should urge the opening of a genuine dialogue between civilian politicians and military leaders which could make way for democratic changes in the Constitution. The US should support such key changes as the easing of the constitutional amendment process itself, the free election of all members of the new Congress, and the withdrawal of the military from politics.

The US can also help a democratic transition by encouraging the opposition parties to pull together, as they did so effectively in their campaign for the "No" vote. But we should not lose patience and attempt to intervene if tensions within the opposition become more pronounced. We should remain broadly supportive of democracy, while carefully avoiding even the appearance of favoring any particular parties or candidates. The broader the range of parties subscribing to an open and fair political framework, the better.

A key issue of contention among Chile's many political forces will be the role of the Communist Party in a democratic Chile: Should it enjoy the rights and guarantees of other parties if it pledges adherence to the rules that govern them? This is a decision the Chileans must resolve themselves.



POLY BECKER

he was advised by Dr. Kissinger to "stop the political science lectures." Only under President Carter did US policy openly confront the dictatorship. The Carter administration - which took office soon after the assassination of former Defense Minister Orlando Letelier in Washington by Chilean agents - publicly attacked the regime's abuse of human rights, voted against loans to Chile by international organizations, and received opposition leaders in Washington.

The first instinct of the Reagan White House was to reverse the Carter approach and reestablish friendly relations with Chile and other military governments in Latin America. The administration quickly sent Jeane Kirkpatrick and other senior emissaries to Chile to mend fences, and it appointed an unabashed supporter of Pinochet as ambassador. It also invited the Chilean Navy to renew joint maneuvers, sought to reestablish military sales to the Chilean armed forces, and refrained from public criticism of human rights abuses.

In late 1985, however, the Reagan administration changed course. With the appointment of Harry Barnes as the ambassador to Chile, the US distanced itself from the Pinochet regime, aligned increasingly with the growing democratic opposition in Chile, and pressed for greater respect for human rights and political freedoms. Some analysts attribute this conversion to the administration's fear that Pinochet's repression of all opposition was actually strengthening the extreme left and even sowing the seeds of armed insurrection. Others suggest it was the administration's need to bolster its policy toward Central America. It was hardly credible to be financing a military insurgency in the name of bringing democracy to Nicaragua, while coddling a dictatorship in Chile.

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lor-made to Pinochet's specifications, he could cling to the presidency until March 1990, and later cast a continuing shadow over Chilean politics as commander of the Army and a senator-for-life. Key constitutional issues must be resolved, such as the exclusion of leftist parties from Chilean politics and the continuing role of the military within a civilian government.

The US can play a useful and important part in Chile's political transition by sustaining the basic thrust of its current policy. Not only has the policy been right, it has enjoyed wide bipartisan support in the US, it reflects majority opinion in Chile, and it has been successful. There are those who will urge heavy-handed interventionism to force the pace of events in Chile. Others will call for a relaxation of US pressure and a return to "normal" relations with the military government. Washington should resist either of these extremes.

Chileans will be anxiously awaiting some sign of what - if anything - the change of administrations in Washington portends. They must be reassured that the US will remain firm in its commitment to a democratic Chile. At the end of this month, Mr. Barnes is scheduled to leave Chile, and soon thereafter will be replaced by Charles Gillespie, another career diplomat. It is critical that the new ambassador be

must resolve themselves. Although the US would have to consider economic sanctions if Pinochet returned to his repressive ways, sanctions at this point would not be useful. Instead, Washington should convince American and Chilean businesses and multilateral lenders of the importance of democratic stability for maintaining economic growth. The US should work in concert with allies in Western Europe and South America, leaving no doubt of unity in the aim of welcoming Chile back into the international democratic community.

Americans can feel good about recent US policy in Chile. We will feel even better when Pinochet is finally replaced by a civilian president, when a freely elected Congress takes office, and when the armed forces return to their barracks. These are goals that democrats in Chile and the US share. But only Chileans, bridging the differences that have long divided them, can bring democracy again to Chile. They deserve our help.

Peter Hakim is staff director of the Inter-American Dialogue. Peter D. Bell, the Dialogue's co-vice-chairman and president of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, led an Americas Watch delegation to Chile in September to monitor preparations for the plebiscite.

