
NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF THE CHILEAN EXILES IN THE U.K.

SOME IDEAS CONCERNING THE RETURN OF CHILEAN EXILES

The recent political events in Chile show that the majority of the population is asking for an end to the oppressive regime and a return to democracy. This demand is more strongly expressed by different political and social sectors every day. International observers agree that the social and political isolation of the dictatorship is almost complete within Chilean society.

The new political situation in Chile has renewed the interest among the Chilean community in exile in the U.K. to return to their homeland. We have noticed during the last weeks that a deep discussion is taking place among the Chileans about the return and its realization in the near future. Another element which has also influenced the decision of a vast number of exiles is the recognition of the marginal role they play in British society. A vast proportion of the Chilean exiles has been unemployed since their arrival to the U.K.; a lot of them are unable to speak or understand the language, therefore have been unable to adapt themselves to the British community.

Due to the economic recession in this country, it is unlikely that this situation is going to have any fundamental changes. These two elements -the expectation of a breakdown of Pinochet's regime and the certainty that their assimilation to the British society is every day more difficult, has made an increasing number of exiles think about the return as something necessary and possible.

It is fundamental that we look to the complexity of the Chilean exile more deeply, to get to know its essence and understand the interest that the community shows in returning to Chile despite the enormous crisis which the Chilean economy is undergoing at the moment; a crisis which is clearly exposed by the amount of external debt which is about 18,500 million dollars, and with a service equivalent to more than 11% of exports. At the beginning of this year the international reserves were of 2,600 million dollars. This amount has been reduced now to only 600 million dollars, if we subtract the 700 million dollars which, according to non-official sources, should have been deposited in guarantee credits. This amount represents only a month and a half of current payments imports and non-financial and financial services. The shortage of current reserves, in the context of restricted international finances, despite the agreements with the IMF, burst last January. In fact, several financial institutions and enterprises had to stop their payments due to a policy which was highly restrictive and aimed at stopping the outflow of reserves and the inflow of imports. Under these circumstances the Pinochet Government accepted the imposition by foreign banks so that the State should guarantee the debt of the private sector, so that the foreign debt should be rescheduled. The main problem of this rescheduling is the fact that Chile's present economic policy does not allow a generation of significant capacity to pay because it has produced a deformation of the productive system which has no precedent in Chilean history. The balance of the last decade indicates that economic growth is practically zero. This is demonstrated by the fact that the per capita growth of income was only 0.9per-cent. The under-utilization of resources has become a permanent characteristic of the economy under the 'free-market' policy implemented by the dictatorship. The figures on unemployment,

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including people working for the 'Minimum Employment Programme', exceeds 30per-cent. Industrial production is 25per-cent down compared with the 1969-71 period. Land for basic foods and fruits went down 20per-cent in the last three years. Investment is only 13per-cent of the GNP, i.e. just one third of what it was in the 60s. Foreign investment has been rather poor despite the extremely favourable conditions granted by the Government. Real wages are 25per-cent down compared with 1970; and the trend to inequality still continues. Social expenditure per-capita is 10per-cent down compared with 1969-1971. Taking these figures into account, some people might wonder why the Chileans in exile want to return to the country at a moment when an unprecedented economic crisis is taking place in Chile.

The Chilean exile, like any other exile, is a long history of suffering; there is no such thing as a golden exile. Anyone in exile is a transplanted being who is fighting to meet their relatives, and to definitely return to their natural environment, their own country. At the same time the exile tends to feel that he/she is part of the social and political movement which is fighting to change the regime which is the cause of his/her exile, i.e. Pinochet's dictatorship. This commitment may be an obstacle to the creative integration of exiles into the society which has given them refuge. The desire to be a part of what is happening in Chile makes the Chilean exiles maintain a close and permanent contact with the social organisations which put forward democratic demands in Chile, particularly with organisations which are fighting for the return of exiles, such as the 'Comite de Familiares per el Retorno de los Exiliados' in Chile.

It is important to point out that this campaign for the 'Right to Return' was first launched in 1981, but until this moment it has not been successful. The reason for this state of affairs is due to the wrong emphasis on individual returns, which limited the political implications and the possibilities of transforming the campaign in a collective task of the exile, thus reducing the chances of getting international protection and support for those who were going back. There have been cases in which the experiences seem unfruitful due to the lack of an adequate programme. Therefore it is most important to generate an ordered mobilization of the exiles, of the democratic movements in the country and humanitarian international agencies in order to be able to gain enough strength to overcome difficulties; this would guarantee a minimal protection for those returning to Chile.

The mass mobilization for the right to return ought to be understood as a permanent struggle against oppression. The battle for the right to share the fate and destiny of millions of Chileans fighting for freedom, for a decent job, for respect of human rights and for clearing this atmosphere of oppression and repression in the country. They constitute a mass whose opinions, conceptions and contributions to solve the problems of the country are, more than ever, necessary in Chile. They do not only represent an undeniable influence, but also a considerable part of the social process in order to achieve freedom, progress and democracy.

The contribution of these people to the Chilean society is more valuable as they have been living in countries with the most varied social and political systems, and cultural climates, thus acquiring an intense and multifarious experience, enriched by their own contributions. It is, in short, a responsible exile, which, despite the difficulties created by the fact that we are living so far from our own homeland, has acquired new capabilities, has matured, and it is a new cultural ingredient of this country. Our exile has undoubtedly been a positive factor for this country.

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It is crucial, however, to recognize that, whatever the reasons, not all the exiles will go back to Chile. A good number will settle here. Many have already done that. Some are married to British people, others have children who were born here. We must be aware of this fact and respect those who have decided to remain here. However, it should be pointed out that those who want to return to Chile are much more than those who are going to stay. These people are putting pressure upon us to obtain material support from international agencies in order to return to Chile as soon as possible. It is crucial that we meet this demand effectively. If we don't set up the necessary infrastructure, an unplanned return might have disastrous social consequences. We are, therefore, asking the agencies to give us financial support in order to organise the responsible return of the refugees. We think the "retornados" should play an active role in Chilean society; so we should study projects of social development in Chile so as to reactivate the economy and create employment. Keeping in mind that there are agencies in Chile which are committed to the return of the exiles, it would be convenient for any project of return, funded by these international agencies, to support the agencies which are giving help with rent, housing, health, employment, education, adaptation and psycho-social problems of the children of the "retornados".

Finally, we would like to appeal to the Agencies to discuss the Return as a concrete phenomenon and as a mean of solving the problems of exile. Whatever measure the agencies take, it will undoubtedly help to solve one of the problems of the Chilean community in exile.

National Executive
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