

TRADES UNION CONGRESS

CHILE AND SPAIN : MEETING WITH THE
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH
SECRETARY

1. A delegation of the General Council composed of Mr. Murray, Mr. Jones and Mr. Plant called on the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on December 19 to express the concern of the General Council with regard to the Chilean situation. They also raised the issue of the trial of ten trade unionists in Spain.

Chile

2. The delegation expressed their concern at the level of relations which the British government maintained with the military regime which had overthrown a democratically elected government. They also conveyed the objection of the General Council to the refusal of the British embassy in Santiago to give asylum to people hunted by the authorities, and to the assistance provided to the Chilean regime, in particular the provision of arms and of financial aid. The delegation pointed out that the actions of the British government compared unfavourably with the action of other governments which had allowed their embassies to provide asylum and which were helping to resettle refugees in their own countries, and they urged that people who wished to leave Chile should be helped and that those who wanted to settle in Britain should be allowed to do so.

3. The delegation pointed out that at the ILO Governing Body meeting in Geneva it had been agreed by all sides that a tripartite delegation should go to Chile to observe the situation and that enquiries were being made of the Chilean authorities to find out whether they would accept such a delegation.

4. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary stated that the government would have no objection to a tripartite ILO mission going to Chile, provided that the authorities there agreed, and that individuals wishing to come here would have their applications processed in the ordinary way, it being an administrative matter. The licensing of arms sales was under the control of the government but they would be unhappy to cancel current projects, involving ships and aircraft, which provided employment. The cancellation of contracts would entail the forfeit of large sums, and the taxpayers would have to foot the bill.

5. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary stated that the function of an embassy was to help UK citizens and represent the UK government in the country concerned by maintaining contact with the government in power. He did not think that embassies should be used as sanctuaries. The Swedes had got into trouble because of their actions in Santiago, and in any case the use of the British embassy in Chile for this purpose would encourage crowds of people to seek refuge there, and in British embassies in other countries, and in particular in the Soviet Union. Embassies would take in people who were being physically attacked close by, but crowds of refugees should not be

encouraged. If an individual went to an embassy to make arrangements to come to Britain, the Ambassador or his representative would see him. Fifteen heads of families had so far come to this country from Chile and others would be following, but people wishing to come here should give Britain as their first choice and very few had done so.

6. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary stated that he did not think that financial and technical aid being provided to Chile should be discontinued. In any case very little was being provided. A grant of £750,000 for a steelworks, made about five years previously, had almost run out and there was also some technical assistance to small farmers amounting to £369,000. No new assistance had been provided since the coup and the situation was to be looked at again although he doubted whether at present the situation in Chile warranted the provision of aid. The government, however, would not withhold aid simply because of the way a regime had come to power. If the Chilean regime was illegal then the governments of many other countries, such as those of the Soviet Union, Lybia and Cuba were also illegal.

7. He thought that the economic situation in Chile was picking up a little since the downfall of Allende whose government had all but destroyed the economy. Allende had carried out many unwise doctrinaire plans, such as the breaking up of viable concerns, and Chile had become uncreditworthy, leading to a withdrawal of credit by many countries including the United States. Britain, however, had kept up an admittedly nominal amount of credit, about £50,000, and was one of the few western countries which had done so. The question of any future aid would be a bargaining counter to be kept in reserve.

8. The government had recognised the Chilean regime because it was in control of the country, following usual British practice which had been applied in other cases such as those of Argentina and Cuba. Recognition was a practical matter to help protect UK citizens which should be left to the government to judge on its merits. Prior to the coup Cuba had been sending large amounts of arms to Chile, as they did throughout South America to encourage subversive groups, and the situation in Chile had been leading towards a civil war. The armed forces had traditionally not supported any political party on the right or on the left, and they maintained that they had been shooting people who had been shooting at them. Nevertheless it seemed that several thousands of people had been killed. It remained to be seen whether the Chilean authorities would now have the confidence to act more liberally.

9. The delegation pointed out that they were not arguing for or against the merits of the policies of the Allende administration. They expressed their concern at the intention of the government to allow the continuation of financial and military assistance which was sustaining an illegal and inhuman regime. Many of the people who had been killed had been ordinary trade unionists carrying out what would be regarded in this country as normal trade union functions, unarmed, and a number of whom had been shot whilst in detention in the stadium in Santiago. The delegation asked whether these killings could be investigated and whether representations could be made for any

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trials to be open. They also stated that they were not asking for crowds to be admitted in the British embassy, but that a relatively small number of prominent trade unionists (and perhaps others) who were in grave physical danger should be helped to escape.

10. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary stated that the Ambassador had already made representations on behalf of individuals, and that further approaches might be made although it should be borne in mind that pressure might be counterproductive and put individuals concerned in greater danger. The Ambassador would have to exercise his judgement on each case. Meanwhile the government were receiving reports from the embassy.

Spain

11. The delegation brought to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary the concern of the General Council at the trial, due to open on December 20, of ten members of the Spanish Workers' Commissions. The delegation informed him that the ten men had been kept in jail for eighteen months without trial and that the General Council were anxious that representations be made for the trial to be open. They also expressed the view that the prisoners should be freed immediately, since they had been held for eighteen months already.

12. The delegation pointed out that the ILO had asked to be allowed to send observers to be present at the trial, and that although the previous Spanish Ambassador had promised to inform the TUC of the date of the trial, this information had not been given. The fear was expressed that the trial was being held over the Christmas period to minimise outside interest.

13. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary replied that he would find out the facts of the situation through the embassy in Spain. It was conceivable that it would be possible for an observer to be present and he would let the TUC know of the outcome of the enquiries he would make.

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