

# The *Wall Street Journal* defends Pinochet

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22 October 1998

While many in the American media have hedged their responses to the arrest of General Augusto Pinochet, the *Wall Street Journal* on October 20 published a virtual brief for the former Chilean military dictator, defending his long record of brutality and political repression.

No one that follows the *Wall Street Journal* will be surprised by this editorial's defense of the interests of American big business and its rabid anticommunism. It is typical of the newspaper's editorial page that the detention of Pinochet should lead to a paroxysm of rage against Cuban President Fidel Castro, with a headline, "Arrest Fidel!"

Nevertheless, the column should be noted because of the Journal's unashamed support for the overthrow of a democratically-elected government, and Pinochet's torture and execution of tens of thousands of workers, youth and peasants. This editorial should be saved for the record and referred to the next time the *Wall Street Journal* denounces an insurgent movement of the working class as an attack on "the rule of law."

The column makes nonsense of the claims that there is some necessary connection between capitalism and democracy. On the contrary, the Journal speaks for the most ruthless sections of big business, which are prepared to dispense with their professed concern for democratic rights and institutions whenever their profits and property are seriously threatened.

The Journal makes the absurd charge that the bloodbath in Chile was not the fault of Pinochet and his CIA backers, but of Castro, Chilean President Salvador Allende and those who were murdered by Pinochet and his henchmen. "His [Castro's] attempts to spread revolution," the Journal says, "gave life to the brutal military dictatorships that once marred the Latin scene." The September 1973 coup led by Pinochet "saved his country."

The Journal justifies the overthrow of the government

by implying that Allende was not a legitimate president because he only received a 36 percent plurality in 1970. But most American presidents, including President Clinton, were elected by an even smaller percentage of eligible voters. Does this mean that the Journal considers them illegitimate and subject to military coups?

The newspaper makes it clear that Allende's greatest crime was, under the pressure of a wave of strikes, factory occupations and mass protests of urban and rural workers, carrying out policies which threatened the interests of American multinationals like Anaconda Copper and ITT, and the Wall Street banks.

The Journal praises Pinochet for transforming Chile from "a Communist beachhead to an example of successful free-market reform" which has inspired similar measures throughout the continent and the developing world. In the coup's aftermath, property nationalized under Allende was returned immediately to the foreign multinationals, the right to strike and to union representation was abolished, wage levels were cut in half and tens of thousands of jobs destroyed. Indeed, this pattern of impoverishing the working class of which the *Wall Street Journal* so highly approves has since been imposed in many other countries.

The Journal claims that Pinochet's decision to step down proves that he has left Chile a "free and prospering" democracy. The general left power under the urging of sections of Chilean big business, as well as his former US backers, who feared the growing popular opposition to his dictatorship. Before leaving office Pinochet imposed restrictions on the power of the civilian government which guaranteed the military control of key institutions, banned left-wing parties from elections and granted immunity to all of those, including himself, who were implicated in criminal acts during his dictatorship.

Police and military repression in Chile have not

ended. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the coup last month heavily armed police dispatched by Christian Democratic President Eduardo Frei fired on protesters, killing two, and arrested hundreds of demonstrators in Santiago. As for prosperity, more than 35 percent of the urban and rural households in Chile are impoverished and the yearly per capita income is little more than \$3,000.

The Journal editorial concludes worriedly that Pinochet's arrest might mean the world is beginning "a program of wholesale revenge against dictators who drop their defenses." The newspaper cites China's Stalinist leaders, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and the South Korean generals—whose regimes have all served Wall Street's interests—as other potential targets. Those the Journal fails to include are the US accomplices of Pinochet, such as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the CIA officials and leaders of corporate America who also have blood on their hands.



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