

Wall Street Journal cites Chilean earthquake to praise Pinochet

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2 March 2010

In an editorial published Monday, “A Tale of Two Quakes,” the *Wall Street Journal* compares the outcome of the massive earthquake that hit Chile on Saturday with the dimensions of the human disaster that has unfolded in Haiti.

Citing the far greater scale of death and destruction in Haiti, the newspaper praises the comparatively higher level of preparedness for such a disaster in Chile, and writes: “But such preparation is also the luxury of a prosperous country, in contrast to destitute and ill-governed Haiti. Chile has benefited enormously in recent decades from the free-market reforms it passed in the 1970s under dictator Augusto Pinochet.”

One wants to respond, to coin a phrase, “Lie, but at least make sense.”

The Haitian people live in dire misery above all because the small island has been under the direct thumb of the US for a century, having experienced military occupations, some lasting for decades, on several occasions. The US propped up the regimes of the hated and brutal Duvaliers, father and son, for thirty years, from 1957 to 1986.

In the most recent period, Washington and the global financial community have imposed “free market” policies on Haiti—precisely the policies that the *Journal* claims saved Chile from a massive loss of life in its earthquake—with disastrous consequences for the Haitian population. The small farmers in Haiti have been ruined and crowded into Port-au-Prince’s horrific slums, the worst in the Western hemisphere. Whatever infrastructure and social fabric previously existed have been devastated, compounding the toll of death and destruction from the January 12 quake.

Chile’s historical and social development is different. It won independence from Spain in 1818, and although the social structure remained largely intact and the population enjoyed few benefits from independence, the country did not experience the direct domination of the US as Haiti did.

In any event, Chile can be said to be “prosperous” only if one focuses on the conditions of the wealthy. The CIA-backed military dictatorship that took power in September 1973, overthrowing the Allende “Popular Unity” government, killed tens of thousands of political opponents, torturing an equal or larger number in the most barbaric fashion. This is the regime the *Journal* holds up as a model.

Rule by Pinochet’s sadistic torturers (advised by economist Milton Friedman and other “free market” theoreticians) created the basis for the “Chilean miracle,” which, again, was a miracle only for the country’s wealthy.

In the aftermath of Pinochet’s coup, the country experienced the sharpest rise in joblessness and most severe drop in wages in South American history. Between 1974 and 1975, as thousands of left-wingers, academics and trade unionists were being mutilated and killed in secret prisons, the unemployment rate doubled. By 1983, nearly 35 percent of the work force was unemployed. This led to a wave strikes, and again tens of thousands were rounded up by Pinochet’s forces.

What the *Journal* so admires about Chile of the 1970s and 1980s was the vast transfer of wealth that took place, enforced by the military and secret police. By the time Pinochet was forced to give up power in 1990, the caloric intake of the average Chilean had fallen by some 20

percent.

Between 1980 and 1989, the wealthiest 10 percent of the population increased its share of the national wealth from 36.5 percent to 46.8 percent; conversely, the bottom 50 percent of the population saw their share fall from 20.4 percent to 16.8 percent.

Two decades later, Chile remains one of the most socially unequal countries in the world. As a 2009 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development study noted, “Chile has a high level of income inequality compared to other countries... Income inequality in Chile is high even by the standard of Latin America, the region with the highest levels of inequality in the world.”

Chile was ranked behind only Brazil and Colombia on the continent in terms of income inequality at the beginning of the last decade.

In any event, the *Journal*’s rosy picture of the Chilean disaster is called into question by various news accounts. The *Globe and Mail* (Canada) reports that Chilean authorities “are now saying the [death] toll could be ‘in the thousands.’” Rescue crews, the newspaper notes, were struggling “to assess the damage and raced to reach trapped survivors in the numerous tiny, isolated coastal towns that bore the brunt of Saturday morning’s quake.”

As for the *Journal*’s smug reference to “Chile’s stricter building codes,” the *Globe and Mail* reporter notes, “the reality is quite different in smaller towns like Constitucion [a resort and fishing town]. In areas with shortages of affordable housing... ‘people built houses wherever they lived’—shantytowns built of a mix of wood and cement.”

Meanwhile, the Chilean regime has dispatched police and readied the armed forces to suppress “looters,” i.e., the “desperate residents [who] scrounged for water and supplies inside empty and damaged supermarkets,” according to CNN. “Authorities used tear gas and water cannons” to disperse the residents.

The cable channel also reported that in Concepcion, a provincial capital, “there were not enough police to control all those seeking food and supplies from stores. Some became desperate as supermarkets closed and gas was unavailable.”

Praise for Pinochet is nothing ~~new~~ for the one of its idols, Britain’s former prime minister Margaret Thatcher, the mouthpiece of Wall Street has weighed in numerous times on the side of the murderous Chilean regime and its chief.

On the occasion of Pinochet’s (temporary) detention by British authorities in October 1998, the *Journal* gnashed its teeth and proclaimed that the general had “headed the coup that saved his country.” Under the military, the newspaper asserted, Chile was transformed “from a Communist beachhead to an example of successful free-market reform.”

At the time of the hated dictator’s death in December 2006, the *Journal* declared that Pinochet “took power in a coup in 1973, but ultimately he created an environment where democratic institutions would prevail.” He supported “free-market reforms that have made Chile prosperous and the envy of its neighbors.”

The *Journal*’s affection for Pinochet brings to mind the famous phrase about Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, “He made the trains run on time.” The newspaper’s editors have a natural inclination for authoritarianism and dictatorship.

They would be very pleased if the working class and political opponents of capitalism in the US could be dealt with as they were by Pinochet. The editorial board, speaking for the biggest financial looters, dreams of police and military on the streets and internment camps for socialists.

None of this pro-fascist filth evokes any sort of a protest from the liberal media in the US. The *Journal* counts on the utter cowardice of the *New York Times* and other such pillars of the liberal establishment, as well as on the latter’s own increasingly anti-democratic sentiments.



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