

WikiLeaks cables confirm collusion between Vatican and dictators

Marc Wells
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Julian Assange's WikiLeaks released a new archive of 1.3 million diplomatic cables and intelligence records last Monday encompassing the years 1973 through 1976, dubbed "The Kissinger Cables."

The database includes documents revealing the ruthless operations led by the US worldwide, at a time when the international working class was on the offensive and the bourgeoisie was waging a ruthless counterattack.

Among the cables, a series of diplomatic communications exposes the relationships between the Vatican and a number of dictatorial regimes, from Chile's Augusto Pinochet to Argentina's Jorge Rafael Videla to Spain's Francisco Franco.

On September 11, 1973, a CIA-backed coup led by general Pinochet overthrew the elected government of Socialist Party President Salvador Allende. In Pinochet's 17-year dictatorship, thousands of left-wing activists, students, trade unionists and anyone suspected of opposing Chilean and international capital were killed or disappeared by the regime. Hundreds of thousands were jailed and tortured, or sent into exile.

The names of these criminal state operations, such as "Operation Condor" or "The Caravan of Death" are forever embedded in the consciousness of Chilean workers. Pinochet's "struggle against Marxism" remains one of the most violent developments in the history of the 20th century.

The main goal of such struggle was to destroy the working class and its organizations, both physically and through the imposition of aggressive economic policies of privatization and deregulation. These created a model of enrichment by a small oligarchy for the following decades.

Many governments joined this "struggle," with the US leading the pack. President Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger allocated \$8 million for the campaign to destabilize Allende. While maintaining an appearance of liberal reforms and a more relaxed policy toward the USSR initiated by John XXIII, the Vatican, led by Pope Paul VI, lent support to the Chilean dictator.

In a cable dated October 18, 1973, Archbishop Giovanni

Benelli, Vatican Deputy Secretary of State, denied the crimes committed by Pinochet's junta, expressing "his and Pope's grave concern over successful international leftist campaign to misconstrue completely realities of Chilean situation."

More precisely, the cable documents Benelli's view on the "exaggerated coverage of events as possibly greatest success of communist propaganda, and highlighted fact that even moderate and conservative circles seem quite disposed to believe grossest lies about Chilean junta's excesses."

His source of information was Cardinal Raúl Silva, a staunch opponent of communism. According to the cable, "Cardinal Silva and Chilean Episcopate in general have assured Pope Paul that junta making every effort to return to normal and that stories alleging brutal reprisals in international media secret are unfounded."

The role played by figures like Silva or Paul VI himself—promoted as "progressives" at the time—emerges quite clearly in these documents. Benelli states that "validity and sincerity of Cardinal Silva cannot be challenged since Silva is known internationally as one of Church's leading progressives who, moreover, gave tacit support to President Allende."

This evidence shows not only the denial of Pinochet's crimes by the Vatican and the Chilean Church: it reveals the bankruptcy of the Allende government, which based itself on relations with layers of the Church that were completely hostile to it.

In fact, the Archbishop states that, "leftist forces have greatly cut losses by convincing world that Allende's fall due exclusively to fascist and external forces rather than to shortcomings of Allende's own policies as is rightly case."

If there is any objective truth in Benelli's statement, it is the fact that Pinochet, who was appointed by Allende as head of the armed forces, took advantage of the political environment created by Allende's retreat from the reforms he had promised. Allende was himself a capitalist politician, promoting a "Chilean road to socialism" but fundamentally committed to demobilizing the working class. This prepared

the field for a right-wing military takeover.

In November 1973, in the immediate aftermath of Pinochet's coup, another cable documents negotiations for the renewal and revision of the Concordat, originally signed in 1953, between the Vatican and the fascist regime of Francisco Franco in Spain, which effectively rejected the principle of separation between state and Church.

Archbishop Agostino Casaroli—the Vatican's Secretary of Public Affairs at the time and another “*Ostpolitik* reformist” figure who developed new relations with Eastern European countries in an attempt to boost the Church's influence in Stalinist-ruled countries—met with Spanish officials. It was agreed that a low profile be maintained.

There were several reasons for this: first, events in Chile had created immense opposition among workers and students, and the Church risked being publicly exposed as an ally of dictatorial regimes. Secondly, there were disagreements inside the Vatican itself on how to best manage the Vatican's image and distance it from fascist dictators.

A cable dated November 7, 1973 states that a “difference of views between the Vatican and the Spanish Episcopate is on the fundamental question of whether there should be a new Concordat negotiated.” The record shows that the Episcopate was “amenable to partial accords or revisions of the 1953 one, since they believe a new Concordat might once again associate the Church with the regime” while they are “trying to disassociate the Church from the GoS [Government of Spain] in the eyes of the Spanish public.”

While layers of the ecclesiastic hierarchy were concerned that after Franco's death negotiating terms would be less favorable and were pushing for a new deal, the “liberal,” “progressive” section of the Vatican sought to “maintain its liberal image if only partial accords on the most vital points of friction” were renegotiated.

Contrary to Casaroli's request to keep the visit under the radar, Franco's regime “promoted extensive press and television coverage of the visit,” provoking a reaction from the Vatican. According to the Italian publication *l'Espresso*, Casaroli protested to a Spanish minister for “the offensive violation of the reassurances received from the Spanish government to maintain a low profile.”

A few years later, on March 24, 1976, Argentine Commander Jorge Rafael Videla headed the coup that overthrew President Isabel Perón, wife of former President Juan Perón. Videla ran a brutal police state, adopting free-market economic policies similar to Pinochet's. His regime, infamously associated with the “Dirty War” and “Operation Condor,” became synonymous with disappearances, murder and torture.

Videla's close accomplice in the coup and the military

dictatorship that followed was Navy Admiral Emilio Massera. New cables show the close ties between Massera and Pio Laghi, Apostolic nuncio (Holy See diplomat) in Argentina.

A cable dated November 7, 1975 reveals that Laghi “talked with Admiral Massera early November 5 on same subject [President Perón], and recently with many other participants. Nuncio [Laghi]'s analysis was that Mrs. Perón must leave as soon as possible by leave of absence, resignation, or *golpe*”—that is, a coup.

Besides being a close friend of Massera, Laghi was well respected in military and diplomatic circles. As the same cable confirms, “Nuncio is well connected and is astute observer. His overall conclusion was that she is finished. Only form of departure remains in question. However, he commented, it could take longer than expected and be an agonizing process.”

Ultimately, the real agony was experienced by tens of thousands of workers, students and political activists, labeled “terrorists,” who actually fought in opposition to the state terrorism which characterized the Videla regime, but were either killed or tortured, jailed and disappeared.

Pio Laghi was more than a known entity for the US government. In a cable dated May 14, 1974, Laghi is depicted as “highly educated, personable, speaks excellent English, and is well disposed toward the United States.”

These revelations shed light on the recent installation of the new Pope Francis, the former Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The new Pontiff is deeply implicated in the “Dirty War” waged by the Argentine military junta (see “The ‘Dirty War’ Pope”).



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