

ACTION TAKEN BY THE GENERAL COUNCIL
ON CHILE

In August 1973 the General Council expressed the support of the British trade union movement for the democratically elected Popular Unity Government led by President Allende against which dissident elements were increasingly taking direct action, and for the Chilean trade unions in their resistance to attempts to overthrow the government. Congress adopted an emergency resolution in similar terms, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Labour Party, the ICFTU, the Chilean national trade union centre, CUT, and the Chilean Ambassador - who subsequently expressed his gratitude - were informed. On September 11 a violent military coup took place and the General Council immediately urged the British Government to take every possible step to help secure the restoration of constitutional government in Chile. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary expressed regret that violence should have erupted, but said that the government did not consider that it would be wise or even possible to intervene and that the restoration of constitutional government had to be left to the people of Chile, with the good wishes of the British Government for their success. The General Council were informed that the ICFTU were to bring the matter before the ILO and the UN and would watch closely the actions of the World Bank in regard to Chile, while the Labour Party drew attention to a statement made by their National Executive Committee, subsequently approved at their Annual Conference, condemning the hasty recognition of the military regime by the British Government, calling for the release of political prisoners and an end to terrorism, and declaring opposition to any further British aid or continuation of trade with Chile.

The General Council issued a further statement in October condemning recognition of the Chilean regime by the UK, and calling for the suspension of all assistance pending restoration of a constitutional democratic government. They approved a proposal of the ICFTU to set up a relief fund for Chilean trade unionists, and they informed the AFL-CIO of their attitude. It was subsequently reported that the Convention of the AFL-CIO, while expressing disagreement with the policies followed by the Allende government, had deeply deplored the loss of life in Chile, had called for an immediate halt to summary executions, and had insisted that the leaders of democratic forces in Chile should be permitted to come forward and restore genuine representative government.

In November the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary informed the General Council that recognition of the Chilean regime had depended on their effective control of the country and the need to protect British subjects and interests, and that it did not imply agreement with the regime or its policies. Britain provided no military aid to Chile and other aid consisted mainly of technical assistance and grants to students, while the attitude of the World Bank and its agencies was decided by all the countries represented in it.

The General Council's concern at the attitude of the Government was expressed by a delegation consisting of Mr. J.L. Jones, Mr. C.T.H. Plant, and Mr. L. Murray who met the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary in December and drew particular attention to the provision of arms on a commercial basis to Chile, to the refusal of the British Embassy, Santiago, to give asylum to those seeking refuge from the authorities, and to the general level of relations maintained by the British Government with the Chilean regime.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary repeated that the Government did not approve of the actions of the regime though they had also been critical of the policies of the Allende government, and added that they did not wish to interfere with normal commercial relationships which were beneficial to Britain. They had followed ordinary practice in regard to those seeking refuge within embassies, and there were no refugees in the Embassy in Santiago, but the Government might consider making representations on individual cases if any were brought to their attention. The General Council decided to ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to do so in the case of Mr. Luis Figueroa, the President of the CUT, who had taken refuge in the Swedish Embassy in Santiago but had been refused safe conduct out of the country.

At a later stage they also decided to raise the case of Mr. Hector Olivares, who had been detained by the authorities. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary replied that it seemed likely that the authorities would prefer charges against Mr. Figueroa, while Mr. Olivares was within the jurisdiction of the Chilean courts, and the British Government had no standing on which to base representations. He added that the Government had made representations to the Chilean authorities in a number of cases, and that it might be the reverse of helpful to do so in this case. The General Council decided to ask the British workers' representative to the ILO to raise the matter there. Further enquiries were made following the change of government in this country, particularly regarding the attitude of the Government to the further provision of aid by the UK or by international institutions, and in regard to reports that governments which were creditors of Chile were to meet to discuss renegotiations of the terms of Chilean debt. A reply was received in April 1974 stating that agreement had been reached on the rescheduling of the

debt, the British Government agreeing that the total should not be reduced, but that repayments should be extended, the British interest being to secure repayment of all the debt to this country as soon as possible. The Government had made a major change of direction in British policy towards Chile, deciding to suspend aid and to grant no new export licences for arms, losing no opportunity to make known their views about human rights in Chile, and taking a more liberal view regarding the admission of refugees to Britain. The General Council decided in May to raise with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary the serious concern that existed in the trade union movement at the provision of warships to the Chilean regime under commercial contract and they also decided to invite Mr. Figueroa to come to Britain in the hope that the invitation would assist him in leaving Chile. It was reported to the General Council in July that a number of persons who had taken refuge in foreign embassies in Chile, including Mr. Figueroa, had been allowed to leave the country, and subsequently two representatives of the CUT, including Mr. Figueroa, visited Britain at the invitation of the General Council.

In August 1974 the General Council enquired about the attitude of the British Government towards the recognition of the regime in Chile by the previous Government, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary replied that recognition did not imply approval of the regime or of its policies but acknowledged that it was in control and seemed likely to remain so in the immediate future. He stated that the withdrawal of the British Ambassador would have no impact on the Chilean authorities but that his continued presence could have a moderating influence, especially in the treatment of individuals.

Also in August the General Council asked the British Government to make the recognition of the Chilean debt to Britain subject to an assurance that human, political, and trade union freedoms would be restored, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary expressed the view that the imposition of political conditions would result in the non-payment of the debt with no disadvantage to Chile, and stated that the Government had linked representations to issues and occasions where they had effect, in the UN Economic and Social Council and at the International Labour Conference, for example. In January 1975 the General Council again expressed their opposition to the renegotiations and their attitude was conveyed by their representatives at a meeting with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary in February when it was said on behalf of the General Council that they would not wish the Government to help the Chilean regime in any way and that the regime should not be given any credibility whatever, by renegotiation of the external debt or otherwise. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary stated that there was no real difference between the views of the Government and those of the TUC and that the Government were not inclined to reschedule the debt, but the US Government and some others took a different view because they thought that the regime was open to influence. Further enquiries were made of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary concerning a proposed meeting of the Paris Club of countries creditors of Chile to discuss the rescheduling of the Chilean debt, and the Secretary of State replied on February 24 stating that rescheduling was still under consideration, it being taken into account that international pressure on the Chilean regime seemed to have some effect in bringing about the release of political prisoners, and that the arguments and

representatives of the TUC and of the Labour Party would be taken into consideration.

It was reported to the General Council meeting in March that on February 27 the Chancellor of the Exchequer had announced that Britain would not be attending the proposed meeting of the Paris Club to discuss the rescheduling of the debts falling due in 1975, and that the attitude of the Government to any further requests for rescheduling, and - it was hoped - that that of all other creditors, would take into account the policy on human rights of the Chilean authorities. The view was expressed in the General Council that their representations had not with success and that the decision of the Government was to be welcomed. Also in March the General Council agreed that a trade union conference on Chile should be held which would provide the opportunity for unions to express their views on the situation in that country.

Members of the General Council have signed a petition addressed to the Secretary General of the United Nations supporting a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the Protection of Human Rights in Chile.

Unions have contributed substantially to a TUC fund for Chilean trade unionists, and the General Council have donated £1,000 to the CUT, and £1,000 to a fund established by the ICFTU for relief in Chile and help to refugees. The General Council have also contributed towards an educational course for Chilean refugees arriving in Britain, and towards the costs of publication of two reports on the situation in Chile issued by the Chile Committee for Human Rights.