

Notes for November 18 Ministry of Foreign Relations
Luncheon Comments

It is wonderful to be back in Chile once again, and especially to be reunited here with so many good friends. This is one of the most pleasant things that have happened to me in this long and unusual year.

Yesterday I spoke to a Congressional Luncheon group in Valparaiso. I expressed my entirely personal views as to the importance of the human rights cause, and how I believe human rights has become the authentic world revolution - peaceful, democratic and effective, so long as we keep it honest. Here with you this afternoon I would like to emphasize, very briefly, two factors which I personally feel are very important in relations between our two governments. The first is dialogue. The second is the democratic left.

First, dialogue. Back in the years following the overthrow of Allende I was impressed and depressed by the inadequate dialogue between Chile's democratic opposition and the State Department. I had many democratic Chilean friends, of course, most of them refugees. And we were talking day and night. But few of them came to the Department, and that was a bad mistake. So I began to urge my Chilean friends to come to the Human Rights Bureau, to discuss the situation in Chile, to seek U. S. help for Chilean democracy and human rights, to make specific recommendations for U. S. action, etc. One of the first Chileans I pushed in this direction was Sergio Bitar, who was at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington for a year. Sergio was skeptical, but he agreed to come to our Bureau. The conversation went well and I kept urging others to come. Elliott Abrams was the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights at that time, and after several months he became quite receptive to these visits and conversations. Indeed, the dialogue developed very quickly, to our mutual benefit. As a matter of fact the dialogue began to dominate our Bureau's schedule. I recall one occasion when I went into Abrams' office to remind him that four more Chileans were coming to see him the following morning. Elliott groaned and responded that he just wouldn't have time. I remarked that I appreciated the fact that he was spending more time on Chile than on any other country in the world. Whereupon Elliott put both hands to his head and cried: "For God's sake, George, I'm spending more time on Chile than on all the rest of the world combined". And when Dick Schifter replaced Abrams in our Bureau, in 1985, he was equally supportive of these meetings, and very effective in behalf of human rights in Chile. So much for dialogue.

Now for the democratic left. For many people "leftist" is a pejorative term. There is often a failure to distinguish between, on the one hand, the democratic left, those who call for profound political, social and economic change, but with full protection of human rights and, on the other hand, the anti-democratic left, those who see Leninist dictatorship as the solution to all the problems of the human race. In the case of Chile I was convinced that there would be no transition to democracy without the cooperation of the democratic wing of the Socialist Party. And I pushed my Socialist friends hard, urging them to reject Leninism and to take an honest and consistent position in favor of democracy and human rights in their visits to the State Department. When they did that it had a very favorable impact, not only in Chile but also in the U. S. It was around that time I arranged for my friend here, Carlos Portales, to speak at the State Department's Open Forum, and, of course, Carlos made good use of that opportunity.

Now before we leave the democratic left let me tell you another true story. As some of you know, I am an old Eastern European hand, having served in both Moscow and Warsaw. And so I was present when Dick Schifter chaired our first Washington meeting with the Soviet human rights delegation, led by Yuri Reshetov. As we sat down with the Russians Schifter leaned forward to Reshetov and said: "Yuri, before we begin, I think I should introduce George Lister. He is the State Department Menshevik." Reshetov stared at me incredulously for a moment and then extended his hand, remarking: "Well, well, we have Mensheviks with us too, now".

Now we are coming to a new stage in Chilean-U.S. relations, and we will soon have a new Administration in Washington. Both of our countries are democratic, but with many shortcomings. To cite just one example in each case, we are confronted with serious and urgent economic problems, and you have a large number of people who are living in abject poverty with deep feelings of class alienation. Both of our countries have come a long way, but we both have a long way to go. Dialogue will continue to be a key in our relations. Please let me know whenever you feel I can be of help in developing your contacts with the State Department and Congress. And as for the democratic left, I would say to our Socialist friends that just as they may want my government to oppose dictatorships of the right as well as the left, it is equally important that they oppose dictatorships of the left as well as the right. The same human rights standard should be applied to all of us. If we do that I am convinced that we will win. Thank you for listening. And Long Live Democratic Chile!