

Importing Allende's Line

Dec. 21, 1972

By WILLIAM H. MARSHNER

WASHINGTON, D.C. — At the end of last month the Latin American Bureau of the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) set up shop as America's foremost importers of Chilean-Marxist propaganda. But the Chilean supplier was not the foundering Allende government; it was a committee of eighty American missionaries of various denominations working in Chile.

This committee, calling itself the "Missioners Committee On International Awareness" (Casilla 5497, Correo 3, Santiago de Chile), wrote what it calls a "letter" to all the leaders of religious opinion in America. The "letter" was actually a booklet of twenty-four pages, including several black and white photographs. The cover, printed in blue and white, featured a collage of commercial signs and brand names from American products sold in Chile — all illegibly overlaid with some verses from the Prophet Isaiah. Here is how the authors summarized their theme: "While we realize that the problems of dehumanization and poverty are many and complex, we write to you about capitalism and within it the one aspect we consider pivotal in causing suffering and oppression in Chile and Latin America: overseas private investment from the United States" (p. 3).

This view of American overseas investment so pleased and delighted the Latin American Bureau of the USCC (Did you know, by the way, that our Latin American Bureau is an official affiliate of IDOC? Do our Bishops know that?) that the Bureau decided to reprint the "letter" by the thousands and send it to everybody the Chileans had missed. So now the "letter" is a much more attractive gray booklet (eleven pages) with a smiling, poster-art "peasant" on the cover and with the title, **Letter From Chile**. Henceforth, all page references will be to this American edition.

Also delighted with this economically and theologically incompetent attack on the United States was one James R. Jennings, associate director of the USCC Division of Justice and Peace (from which his boss, Msgr. Marvin Bordelon, has just resigned). Jennings composed a three-part commentary on the **Letter for NC News** (packets of November 29th and 30th) in which, if anything, he states the missionaries case in terms even more obnoxious than the ones they themselves had chosen. He says, for example, that "unless Christians in the United States act in a more Christian manner toward

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Latin Americans they have no business sending missionaries there to preach the Christian message . . . it is American Catholics who are in serious need of redemption."

Now, what is this evil thing that American Christians are doing to Chile? Well, according to Jennings and the eighty missionaries, it is economic exploitation. Apparently, it comes as an immense surprise to these churchmen that American businesses make money off their foreign investments. They complain, for example, that "between 1950 and 1967 the net investment which flowed into Chile was \$257,000,000; the outflow of profits and dividends was \$1,000,000,000, about four times the net investment" (p. 3). Since I am not an economist, I will not comment on these and other statistics

(of which I am totally skeptical). I merely point out, common sense, that an "outflow" of profit can't impoverish anybody since all profit is surplus wealth remaining after all expenses (e.g., Chilean payrolls) have been met. Without the American company, the profit does not exist for anybody. Potentially, to be sure, a Chilean firm might be doing the same business and pocketing the profits (keeping the capital in Chile). But it is absurd to speak of potential firms and potential pockets as being robbed or exploited as if they were actual pockets. You can't rob what doesn't exist. So all the talk about exploitation is just sour grapes; it is some people enviously watching other people make money.

An objection to this position might be raised in the case of the gigantic copper mining industry (which Allende has nationalized). Previously, American companies mined Chile's copper and kept the profits. Now it does seem unfair that a nation (or better: its natives) should not profit most from its own natural resources. But many other countries have faced this problem; they have worked out strict arrangements with foreign investors to gain gradual control, to specify that

profits be spent locally, etc. So, once again, the histrionics of Chilean Marxists (and their American clerical friends) are not convincing. They are also fatuous. For example, the missionaries claim that when all the wicked capitalist structures have been overturned, "the common man in the United States and the common man in Chile" will turn out to have the same interests (p. 9). But how? If Chilean copper is to do Chileans any good, it must be sold dear; if it is to do Americans any good, it must be bought cheap. Nothing will overcome this fundamental conflict of interest.

From an economic point of view then, it is evident, even to the non-specialist, that the Letter From Chile is junk mail. Much more interesting to this reviewer, is the theological point of view. The Letter From Chile, like Mr. Jennings' commentary in *NC News*, is a classic case of what has come to be known as the "theology of liberation." Attacked in the strongest terms in Cardinal Wright's Intervention to the Spanish Bishops, this theology is sweeping Latin America and also making gains in the United States. In a subsequent issue, God willing, I shall comment in detail on the theology of liberation.

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Msgr. Bordelon Quits - Pressure Rumored

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congressional testimony in these areas; and the production and distribution by the Division of annual 'peace packets' dealing with such issues as racism, corporate responsibility, pacifism," etc., according to a press release from the National Catholic Office of Information.

According to the same release, Bordelon said: "I am not optimistic about the immediate prospects of American Catholics dealing seriously with some of our fundamental problems — we are materially too rich and parochial to tackle these root questions with realism and sufficient sacrifice. I am confident, however, that in the

long run, sufficient numbers of Christians and other men of good will can and will recover a more realistic sense of priorities and redirect their energies toward the needs of all men on the planet. I am thus delighted that the USCC plans to continue the program which has been launched."

It remains to be seen what effect Msgr. Bordelon's resignation will have on these USCC policies as well as on the standing of Msgr. Gremillion and other members of their circle. Rumored as likely to succeed Bordelon is James R. Jennings, presently an employee of Bordelon's Division. (For more on Mr. Jennings, see elsewhere in this issue the article on the letter from Chile.)