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# EXPRESS

## THE EAST BAY'S FREE WEEKLY

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### Battle of Chile Continues

**THE BATTLE OF CHILE**, Part III: *The Power of the People*. Directed by Patricio Guzman. Edited by Pedro Chaskel. Photographed by Jorge Muller. Produced by Equipo Tercer Ano with the collaboration of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) (1973-1979). In black and white with English subtitles and English narration. Playing one night only, Wednesday, April 16, Wheeler Auditorium, UCB.

By Michael Covino

*The Battle of Chile*, Parts I ("The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie") and II ("The Coup d'Etat"), first viewed in this country in January of 1978 (completed in Cuba in 1976), rendered in just over three hours a startlingly vivid and complex picture of a country falling to pieces. It was a high voltage case study of the economic, political, psychological, and, finally, military destruction of a constitutional government. What made the film particularly fascinating, and particularly bleak, was that it was clear the filmmakers knew exactly where to be, in what direction to aim their single Eclair camera and Nagra sound recorder, and what sorts of things to expect—moments in advance at street demonstrations as well as months in advance in terms of the final outcome. It was a documentary that felt plotted, moving towards its denouement with an almost tragic inevitability. Director Patricio Guzman and his crew had their fingers on the country's pulse in a way that President Allende, unfortunately, didn't. They caught almost all of it—from the early, jubilant mass rallies for the Popular Unity government, to the infamous middle-class "march of the pots," to the final aerial bombardment of the Presidential palace where Allende died defending the democracy that the Chilean military leaders and the United States—represented by its destroyers cruising off the Chilean coast and monitoring the events—no longer had any use for.

Part III: "The Power of the People," which will be shown at UC

Berkeley's Wheeler Auditorium Wednesday night, opens in 1972, after Allende has been in power for some eighteen months; it opens during a massive street demonstration where the surging crowds are chanting, "Allende, you know the right has got to go." They're not chanting *with* Allende, they're chanting *at* him. It's a charged atmosphere. Soldiers patrol the perimeters of the crowd, scanning the roofs with their automatic weapons. A voice-over narration accompanies all this; a woman ticks off in English the accomplishments of the revolution in the first eighteen months: nationalization of the copper industry, land redistribution, and so forth. Her narration is alternated with the crowd's chanting which is faded in and out almost rhythmically.

Then the viewer is assailed with a fusillade of low-angle, frontal shots of parked trucks. The trucks are hulking, ominous images even if one isn't aware of what they represent: that is, the beginning of the end of the Chilean socialist experiment, set in motion by the CIA bankrolled truckers' strike that paralyzed the nation. In close-up we see a trucking leader delivering a speech; his face is passionate, he tells of how his men are ready to face poverty, ruin, anything, and to face it with the resolute courage and dignity that is the heritage of the Chilean people, and he means it too. At just the right moment—and Guzman almost always knows the right moment—the camera zooms back, showing that the speaker is surrounded by a crowd of hefty, obviously well-fed truckers. These are people who, under no circumstances, want to trim down.

Early in the century Sorrel wrote, "It is in strikes that the proletariat asserts its existence... The strike is a phenomenon of war." What Sorrel could not possibly have foreseen was the stunning originality of the Chilean bour-



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geoisie—the strike as an act of war in which the bourgeoisie gets a chance to assert *its* existence. Joining the truckers, were executives, technicians, the chief engineers in the factories, professionals. Rich people went out on strike against poor people. And it is this strike against the Popular Unity government that leads into the heart of the movie, which is the heart of the Chilean revolution—the occupation and operation of the factories and farms by ordinary workers and peasants, and their creation of what amounted to a shadow government, the simultaneous creation of thousands of grassroots committees and organizations for the distribution of food and medical supplies, to provide social services, for self-defense, etc. Most of the remainder of the movie consists of interviews with workers in different sectors of the economy, interviews which are presented chronologically so that as we approach the date of the coup the increasing urgency in their voices takes on added significance. They want Allende to take more authoritative actions, to arm the workers, redistribute land faster, break up the military elite, and more. We watch and hear these workers as they grow in-

creasingly militant and frightened over the months, and we realize that they were right.

Urgency too is implicit in the filmmakers' methods of interviewing: on the jobs, in the factories. There's no time to stop and expound upon things in a leisurely fashion. Keep working while talking. Try to make yourself heard above the pounding of the machinery. This, Part III of *The Battle of Chile*, is the marrow—revolution for most of these workers means continuing to do what they have always done, working hard in the factories, but this time it's for themselves not for the factory owners, and it's with the eventual hope of change. After the 1973 elections, which were an unsuccessful attempt by the Christian Democratic party to recall Allende, the workers' chant becomes, "Create, create, a people's state." Many of the workers no longer even have faith in Allende and begin calling for the creation of an alternative power structure, something on equal footing with the state, or more exactly, on equal footing with the military which is starting to separate *itself* from the state. Perhaps a few too many workers speak of the need to "build worker's power" and to

"defeat the bourgeoisie and US imperialism" in phrases which, through sheer repetition, cause one to lose sight of the original meanings. But what comes across clearly in their speeches—which are no more rhetorical than those of truckers who keep invoking "dignity" and "courage"—is the angry urgency, the plaintive urgency, the fear of what's in the offing, and the deep sense of betrayal at Allende for having allowed the revolution, *their* revolution, to bog down in bourgeois legal games.

This is a no-nonsense film free of apologies, free of wishful thinking. Part of its strength, its effectiveness, and its intelligence, is the filmmakers' willingness to present all the contradictions of the situation. Hence when Allende announces that he is bringing some military heads into the cabinet, most interviewed workers say, "Well, this must be a good thing if this is what Allende wants. He must know what he's doing. The military will protect us." Only one worker shakes his head and says, "I don't like it. The military have no place in a democratic government."

In the film's last sequence the camera zooms in across a barren plateau, toward the distant mountains where a nitrates factory has been taken over by its workers. "Imperialism has created a blockade," one nitrates worker complains. "We're not getting the spare parts we need." Another worker delightedly explains how he fitted two old pieces together to come up with the spare part he needed. Deprivation is making him more resourceful. Still another intones gloomily, "Things are coming to a head and the enemy is very well prepared." And the last worker interviewed promises, "We'll meet again, comrades." This line is repeated as the camera zooms back out across the rocky plateau, away from the nitrates factory and the mountains. Thus ends Part III, the concluding section of *The Battle of Chile*. But the repetition of the last line "We'll meet again, comrades," as the camera withdraws has the intended resonance. The *Battle of Chile* is not concluded.