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A TERRIFYING HISTORY LESSON

YOU watch 'The Battle of Chile, The Fight of an Unarmed People' at the Longford and you wish you could pretend this searing film was fiction.

You cannot. It is straight, grainy, graphic documentary (admittedly overlaid with a rigid Marxist narration) of the 1973 events that led to the overthrow of the democratically elected Popular Unity Government of Salvador Allende.

And because you know the outcome, this mounting drama assumes an agonising, doom-laden inevitability.

The Longford's last film on the subject, 'La Spirale', was a complex political detective story, analysing the long-term strategy of US business and the CIA in engineering the overthrow.

It was no less accusatory, but it was more of a thesis, more schematic.

The complementary 'Battle of Chile', directed by Patricio Guzman and shot by daring South American cameramen using black and white stock supplied by the French cinema-verite man Chris Marker, is a documentary of great impact, made with one camera located right in the thick of history.

This team of six appears to have been in the right place at the right time, whether it was the middle of an impassioned politi-



Salvador Allende: film about the overthrow of his government has terrifying lessons.

cal meeting, or riot and gunfire.

Three and a quarter hours long, in two parts, the film opens with the 1973 Chilean elections, deals with 'The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie', then with 'The Coup d'Etat' itself.

In illustrating the tactics (parliamentary boycott, attempted impeachment of Ministers, student riots, truck owners' strike) designed to weaken Allende's precarious hold and create economic chaos, it covers the divisions of the Left as well as the scheming of the Right.

Objective except for its com-

mitted sound track, it avoids emotionalism and creates no individual heroes.

But it leaves us asking ever-relevant questions about the extent to which those "born to rule" will ever permit a democracy to effect real economic change.

Footage of TV street interviews and factory discussions is intercut with public speeches and enormous chanting demonstrations. A probing hand-held camera follows officials of government, unions, army and police into the crowds in this bewildered country.

By these methods we become first-hand witnesses to the collapse of a democracy.

One can only salute the bravery of these film makers. They had each day's rushes, infiltrated the fascist camp with false credentials, and some were arrested after the coup.

Miraculously, they still managed to smuggle all their film out of Chile — together with the crew, except for the chief cameraman, Jorge Muller, who was seized by secret police and never heard of again.

Their picture also contains one of the most spinechilling scenes of actuality ever recorded.

In a shot recalling the Australian Damien Parer's last piece of film in World War II, an Argentinean cameraman films his own death at the hands of the army — his camera still turning with a dead finger on the trigger.

Here is a unique historical film, unique because no documentation of insurrection has ever recorded events with such immediacy in such comprehensive detail.

As a reminder of six-year-old events that are too easily forgotten — a reminder of a country still suffering the same murder, torture and political repression — 'The Battle of Chile' provides some terrifying lessons for the future.

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(Note: 2 national newspapers, Nation Review & The National Times carried reviews at time of Sydney release.