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MOVIE REVIEWS

A Greek Tragedy Unfolds in Chile

BY KEVIN THOMAS

Times Staff Writer

Patricio Guzman's "The Battle of Chile" (at the Fox Venice tonight and Thursday only) is a grueling, remarkable documentary of a country hurtling toward chaos with the inevitability of Greek tragedy. Divided into two parts—"The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie" (100 min.) and "The Coup d'Etat" (91 min.)—this monumental undertaking is an utterly unique and awesomely sweeping record of political upheaval that proceeds in a brisk, straightforward fashion from an up-front leftist point of view.

Guzman and his five technicians—Federico Elton, Jorge Muller (imprisoned and reportedly tortured after the September, 1973, coup), Bernardo Menz, Jose Pino and Marta Harnecker—were incredibly brave in reporting history in

the making, plunging into the midst of riots and gunfire as well as the stately halls of government and political meetings of the oppressed and angry working class.

As the tumultuous, traumatic events of 1973 unfold, beginning in March with the leftist victories in the congressional elections, there emerges a massively scaled portrait of a society in which the wealthy right wing, aided and abetted by the United States, commences to declare war on the world's first freely elected Marxist government.

"The Battle of Chile" is above all a classic confrontation between the haves and have-nots that could not be more timely or universal. Its particular tragedy is that the paranoia among the warring elements escalates so fiercely and rapidly that a coalition of moderates becomes impossible. Seen and heard only in public declarations—"The Battle of Chile" is a virtual newsreel visually—Salvador Allende himself comes across as singularly brave and intelligent.

Indeed, for all its Marxist commitment, "The Battle of Chile" (Times-rated: Mature) expresses powerfully a passionate, anguished concern for freedom and justice instead of merely concerning itself with propagandizing communism. Its primary concern is in fact not with a particular form of government but with the right of a people to choose for itself what kind of government it shall have—and without foreign intervention.

'THE BATTLE OF CHILE'

A Tricontinental Film Center release of an Equipo Tercer Ano production in collaboration with the Cuban Film Institute and Chris Marker. Director Patricio Guzman. Technicians Federico Elton, Jorge Muller, Bernardo Menz, Jose Pino, Marta Harnecker. In Spanish, with English subtitles and narration.

Running time: 3 hr. 11 min.

Times-rated: Mature.