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LA BATALLA DE CHILE

THE BATTLE OF CHILE)

Chile/Cuba 1973-1975. Production: Equipo Tercer Año/ICAIC. Direction, script: Patricio Guzmán. Photography: Jorge Muller. Editing: Pedro Chaskel.

100 mts

The 'Battle of Chile', part one, is a detailed analysis of events mid-way between the lorry-drivers' strike in October, 1972, and the attack of the Moneda at the beginning of September, 1973. The elections are coming up, Patricio Guzmán and his assistants let both supporters and opponents of the Popular Unity party have a chance to speak. Their replies, as he and his team collected them (the way his team coaxed them out and he edited them), are a poem of their own, a true commentary on the situation in Chile on the eve of the assassination of President Allende and the takeover by the Junta. The Popular Unity party is returned to Parliament with a strengthened majority, but the bourgeoisie is in place and first it is Eduardo Frei's Christian Democrat party which systematically stands in the way and uses various legal procedures to block the government's courses of action. Successive ministers are deposed, with no other aim in view than to completely paralyse the machinery of government. Allende is knocked for six at his own game of democracy.

The height of daring, or, more accurately, of dialectical clarity: Patricio Guzmán does not hesitate to tackle a tragic fact, that the copper miners come out against the Popular Unity, driven on by leaders closely associated with the trade unions of the "free" world. Here, the film reaches its peak: reality communicates itself directly - as does, moreover, the whole film, a film which will perhaps remain the first masterpiece in a new-style political analysis which distils off the reality experienced by the people. And in doing so puts back in their rightful place such important films as 'Section spéciale' and 'Les Ordres', valuable as they are in the context of the commercial cinema. The President is at the heart of the action, if one can put it that way, intervening at the moment, a man in whom word and deed are intimately linked.

Patricio Guzmán shot the whole of his film - apparently before the Junta's coup - with a team of six people constantly on the spot, with as many cameras and tape-recorders. Only a socialist country with a socialist consciousness could allow such work to be done, the logical conclusion of which is the fact that work had to be finished in Cuba.

Even if many well known filmmakers appear on the credits - like Pedro Chaskel, another Chilean director, Julio Garcia Espinoza, a Cuban director, and Chris Marker - the work is quite obviously due to a single man. Not because of some concern for pre-eminence, but perhaps because the job of conception, of directing and of putting the film together well merits that of a Bresson or Fellini, except that we are on a totally different planet.

(Le Monde, Paris, May 21, 1975)