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The Battle of Chile. First Run/Icarus Films,

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September 11, 1998, is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the military coup that overthrew the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende in Chile. One of the best ways to commemorate this tragic date is by recapturing the political struggles, dramas, and hopes that defined those who supported the Popular Unity government. This is what the film <cite>The Battle of Chile</cite> does, and it does it better than any other film on this period in Chilean history. <cite>The Battle of Chile</cite> vividly portrays the political situation in Chile before the September 11, 1973, coup and, in so doing, explains why the Chilean bourgeoisie and the U.S. government believed that only military intervention could save capitalism in Chile. By highlighting the workers' sense of their own empowerment, their profound politicization, and their willingness to struggle, the film also shows us just what the military needed to destroy. I could not help feeling a deep sense of loss and anger when I watched this film and reflected on the level of apathy, cynicism, and consumerism that seems to permeate so much of Chile today in contrast to the political engagement that defined Chilean life before the coup. <p> A team of six people, including the director Patricio Guzman, created <cite>The Battle of Chile</cite>. They worked with a low budget and, in some cases, very little experience, but with a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and dedication. After the coup, the military arrested four of the filmmakers. They subsequently went into exile, smuggled the film out of Chile, and finished it in Cuba. In 1974 the military disappeared Jorge Muller, the cameraman, and he is presumed to be dead. The film was widely shown in the U.S. in the 1970s, when political refugees from Chile flocked to the country and many North Americans organized against the Pinochet dictatorship. <p> First Run/Icarus Films has released <cite>The Battle of Chile</cite> on video, thus making it possible to show in the classroom. The film is in Spanish with easy-to-read English subtitles. I highly recommend it for classroom use. <p> The Battle of Chile is one of the most remarkable documentaries ever made. It stunned film critics and won numerous prizes in film festivals around the world, including Grand Prize from the Leipzig (1976), Grenoble (1977), and Brussels (1977) film festivals, to name a few. Tom Allen observes in <cite>The Village Voice</cite> that this movie "chronicles the death throes of a revolutionary government in its most crucial social context." Pauline Kael comments that "this documentary cross-section view of a collapsing government is surely unprecedented." <p> Yet, what I find most noteworthy about The Battle of Chile is not the sense of impending doom that both critics commented on (from the vantage point of more than two years after the coup), but the profound sense of optimism and political empowerment conveyed by the Chilean workers and political leaders whose voices the film has captured. It is this aspect of the film, above all, that leads me to recommend it for use in the class-

room. For many students, the idea of political struggle, let alone class struggle, social movements, popular power, and mass mobilizations are nebulous concepts, not realistic possibilities. <cite>The Battle of Chile</cite> effectively dispels any vagueness about what a life and death political struggle entails. It clearly and convincingly conveys what is at stake, what motivates people to be involved, and how ordinary people can become key actors in their own and their nation's history. It does so not by interviewing experts, the elite, or academics who discuss the actions of others, but by talking to the workers as they engage in the day-to-day business of politics. <p> The film is divided into three parts. It can either be shown in its totality (287 minutes) or separately, since each part stands on its own. The first part, "The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie," (106 minutes) opens with Chileans from across the political spectrum sharing their thoughts on the upcoming and very crucial March 1973 parliamentary elections. One can only note with irony the vehemence with which Allende's opponents denounce the lack of democracy in Chile, even as they prepare to vote in the elections and share their political opinions freely with the unknown individuals interviewing them. The opposition, composed of the rightist National Party (PN) and the more centrist Christian Democratic Party (PDC), defined the elections as a plebiscite on the Allende government and hoped to emerge from them with enough seats in Parliament to impeach Allende. The Popular Unity government, for its part, hoped to retain enough seats to thwart the opposition's plans and to show that, despite the tremendous obstacles it confronted, it maintained a significant amount of popular support. Although the opposition garnered more votes than did the Popular Unity, it did not gain the seats it needed to impeach Allende. Since their electoral strategy did not succeed, the PN, and much of the PDC, turned to the military as their remaining option to remove Allende. <p> This first section of the film depicts the efforts of the opposition and the U.S. government to undermine the Allende government. It explores the opposition's efforts to create shortages and discontent among the people through its organization of the black market and hoarding. The film then examines the successful work of the opposition legislators, who enjoyed a majority in Parliament, to block any government proposals. The transportation strike, organized by the <cite>gremio</cite> (guild) movement, was particularly critical to undermining the UP government because it made it very difficult for people and goods to reach their destinations. The last opposition tactic analyzed is the El Teniente copper strike, which challenged the UP's image as the government of the workers and caused a loss to it of 35 million dollars. <p> Although the film delineates the variety of tactics that the powerful opposition employed to undermine the Allende government, it highlights the efforts of the working class to confront and resist these plans. One example of this is the workers' response to the transportation strike. In scenes reminiscent of the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott, Chilean workers woke up before dawn and walked miles and miles and organized collective means of locomotion to make sure that everyone got to work. <p> This first section ends with the tancazo, the premature June 1973 coup attempt that failed because the military did not yet agree that it should overthrow Allende. In one dramatic incident, which foreshadows what is to come for so many in Chile, Argentine cameraman Leonard Hendrickson records his own death. As his camera films the military invading the streets of Santiago, one military officer takes out his pistol and coolly and deliberately murders Hendrickson. <p> Part II, "The Coup d'etat" (99 minutes), opens where Part I ended, the unsuccessful military coup of June 1973. At one point in this section we witness a remarkable conversation between General Carlos Prats and Minister of Defense Jose Toha (both of whom were subsequently murdered by the military following the 1973 coup) about how to proceed. How often do we get the opportunity to lis-

ten in when leaders debate whether or not the government should declare a state of siege? Most of this section, however, focuses on the question that runs through the entire film. Knowing, as many people then did (at least theoretically) that the opposition and the U.S. government were planning a coup, what was to be done? The film accurately presents the debate that existed within the left, should we accelerate the process and prepare for an armed confrontation or, alternatively, should we attempt to build an alliance with the PDC and prevent it from siding completely with the right? The filmmakers' sympathies for the former option are clear. In interviews with individuals and through footage of the mass, pro-government demonstrations that punctuated the months prior to the coup, the filmmakers convey the impression that the majority of base level supporters wanted a <cite>mano dura</cite> (firm hand) against the <cite>momias</cite>, literally the mummies or the bourgeoisie, the dead and dying class. As they march the people chant "<cite>Crear, Crear, Milicia Popular</cite>" (Create, Create, the People's Militia). In interview after interview, workers question the government's timidity and make it clear that they want weapons to defend themselves. <p> A second theme of this and the other two sections is <cite>Poder Popular</cite>, popular power. In the industrialized sections of Santiago workers took over their factories and set up <cite>cordones industriales</cite>, organizations which united workers in the same industrial belts, specifically Los Cerillos, Vicuna Mackenna, and Puente Alto. The <cite>cordones industriales</cite> were both an expression of workers taking control of their work situation and a means to defend themselves against attacks from the opposition. The workers' initiative and development of the <cite>cordones industriales</cite> led some party and government officials to ask whether or not the workers were forming parallel organizations, a possibility that much of the government and CUT (Central Unica de Trabajadores, the Central Workers Union which grouped together the unions supportive of the government), disagreed with. In one memorable scene, a CUT official meets with workers to discuss the issue of the workers taking over their factories and initiating the <cite>cordones industriales</cite>. One worker challenges the CUT official's disapproval of the workers' actions by asking, "Don't you have faith in popular power? Doesn't the president have faith in the organizations we create?" <p> In one particularly powerful scene, we witness the memorial service for Commander Araya Peters, Allende's naval aide-de-camp, whom the right most likely murdered. As the camera pans the faces of the top military officials gathered for the service, a dirge plays. The film clearly conveys that we are watching the death of the Popular Unity government, not just that of one loyal military officer. Part II concludes with Allende's final speech, the bombing of La Moneda, the presidential palace, and the Junta's declaration upon seizing power. <p> Part III, "The Power of the People" (82 minutes), is dedicated to murdered cameraman Jorge Muller. Part III, completed two years after Parts I and II, takes up many of the themes examined earlier. It opens with panoramic pictures of thousands of parked buses whose drivers are avid participants in the October 1972 transportation strike and includes interviews with and speeches by several of the leaders of the <cite>gremio</cite> movement. Patricio Guzman, the director, does this in order to establish the severity of the crisis provoked by the opposition and to lay a basis for understanding the workers' formation of the <cite>cordones industriales</cite> and the people's demand for popular power. <p> Part III continues the focus on the workers and the <cite>cordones industriales</cite>, but it broadens the meaning of <cite>poder popular</cite> by going out of the factories and into the poor and working class neighborhoods to discusses the establishment of the <cite>comandos comunales</cite>. The <cite>comandos comunales</cite> promoted organic unity and joint action among workers, peas-

ants, students, and housewives by linking their struggles together and by heightening the involvement of people, especially women, on the neighborhood level. Because the focus is on the neighborhoods, the realm inhabited by most Chilean women, women appear in the film in more sizable numbers than they had previously. In order to counter the black markets and hoarding sponsored by the opposition, the Popular Unity government urged the formation of JAPs, <cite>Juntas de Abastecimiento Popular</cite>, or Popular Committees of Distribution. The film records how they functioned and illustrates the ability of people to organize their communities and their lives in the face of overwhelming odds. <p> One other theme that runs through the entire film is the role played by the U.S. government in weakening and then overthrowing the UP government. When the film discusses the <cite>gremio</cite> movement, it notes that the U.S.-sponsored AIFLD financed the <cite>gremios</cite> and trained many of the group's leaders. When it discusses the coup, it points out that between 1950 and1973 the U.S. military trained 4,000 Chilean officers at the School of the Americas in Panama. This is important because in recent years the U.S. responsibility for the coup in Chile has receded from memory or been pushed to the background. Instead, it seems, much of the focus has been on the internal weaknesses of the Popular Unity government, as if they were the primary explanation for the coup. While it is vitally important to analyze the UP's shortcomings, the government's deficiencies were not the principal causes of its defeat. To develop a more realistic assessment of why the coup was successful, we must look to the combination of factors responsible for it. These include, I believe, the UP's weaknesses, but also the strength of the Chilean bourgeoisie and the power of the U.S. government. <p> One weakness of the film, which is not exclusively a shortcoming of the film crew but reflects the UP's politics in general, is the focus on the male worker to the exclusion of working-class women. Although women are occasionally interviewed in the mass demonstrations and the factories, and women's roles in the JAPs are highlighted, their lives and demands are never clearly portrayed in the movie. It is clear that the filmmakers wanted to examine workers and for them, as for many in the Popular Unity, a worker meant a member of the industrial work force. This is unfortunate because what the film conveys is not the entire working class's experience of the Popular Unity but, primarily, that of the men's. <p> One scene that has stuck in my mind since I first saw this movie shows a young boy running through the streets of Santiago, pulling a heavily-laden wooden cart. As he goes "Venceremos," We Will Win, the theme song of the Popular Unity, is played slowly on a flute. I am not sure what the director intended to convey to the audience, but this scene illustrates to me why the Popular Unity government came to power: to end the exploitation that forces a young boy to survive in the twentieth century by hauling a cart through one of the more industrialized cities of Latin America.

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