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Speech to the First Conference of Left Journalists¹

Salvador Allende
(Chile, 1971)

Very warm and cordial greetings to the *compañeros* who have come from the provinces of Chile, and to the organizers of this first conference, which is so extraordinarily important. I emphasize its significance which only makes it proper that our friends and *compañeros* be present representing the parties and popular movements which form the basis of the government. Greetings to *compañero* Minister Carlos Cortés and to the Popular Unity legislators whose presence here indicates the importance that they attach to this extraordinary assembly of you all.

Surely the workers could not be absent, hence the presence of the CUT² representatives, and I must point out especially, the representatives of the *asentamientos*.³ The peasants understand that they can no longer be absent from any meeting where the people, in this case, the people in journalism, meet to discuss our problems and the future of our country.

First of all, I wish to express my appreciation for the courage, the spirit of sacrifice, and the determination shown by so many of you, by the overwhelming majority of you, in the different battles we have waged in the struggle of the Chilean people which culminated in the victory of September fourth.⁴

I wish to say that this courage is all the more praiseworthy considering the difficulty that you experienced because of the domination and intransigence of the news media owners. Your contribution led not to the victory of one man, but to the victory of the people. I believe that this conference has an extraordinary importance. In my judgement, it is the beginning of what we have called Operation Truth, which will bring writers, journalists, artists and intellectuals to Chile from all over the world, and which must count on your fundamental support. We do not want this to be the initiative of the Government. We want those who come here to be able to dialogue and to know that it is the writers, the artists and the journalists who will guide them in the direction they should follow to understand exactly the process that our nation is living. For this reason I ask you, as one of your primary tasks, to

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become the pillar of Operation Truth, which will correct the confused image of us which has been presented abroad and, as well, show how Chile in its struggle, is, and will continue to be, a formal democracy which we intend to transform into an authentic social and economic democracy. [APPLAUSE] Don't applaud me, because behind a microphone, with applause, I am a lost man.

It seems to me that there is little that I can add to the words already spoken by my friends and *compañeros* Manuel Cabieses and Felidor Contreras, who with deep insight offered a correct interpretation of the reality of the process that Chile is living, and of your work in bourgeois society. In any case, it is right to emphasize, as we all know perfectly well, that the mass media constitute a material advantage for those who have been rightly called the news industrialists.

We know how very hard it is for the journalist who thinks as a revolutionary, who has a revolutionary ideology, to be restricted in the expression of his ideas by businesses whose attitude is directed toward defending the privileges of the few and denying the rights of the many. And often, lamentably, denying the urgent need for Chile to become an economically independent and politically sovereign country. This is why it seems justified for me to point out that objectivity, as such, cannot exist if we believe that in this bourgeois society there is and must be a confrontation between groups and sectors, between social classes. Those holding power, defending their interests and privileges, have been the minority classes, among which are the owners of the press and news media. That is why we must insist that the left journalist be all the more committed to the workers' struggle, to the peoples' struggle, to the great Chilean battle. Many times I have expressed this, and I believe that you, given your high cultural and intellectual level, will well understand this even more than others.

This battle of ours is neither the struggle of one man, nor that of a group of political parties. It is the great fight of a people that wants to break out of the economic dependency which implies political dependency. It is the great historical battle to transform a society, and to make the structural changes which will prevent man from exploiting man. It is the great battle for a new society. I have said that only the people, a people who are organized, disciplined and aware can bring about the results implicit in a revolutionary process. And you are part of the people. You are the people. A sector of the people who, despite the social conditions and the system, has gained access to a better education, and higher intellectual and cultural levels. You therefore must be the vanguard of revolutionary thought, a thought sustained and augmented by the daily struggles that we are living. The left journalist must be

conscious of the commitment he owes to this unending battle that we are waging to make the Chileans a free people in control of their own destiny.

It is therefore right to point out that at this moment, the left journalist must learn that his struggle, and our struggle, is all the more difficult. I say, our struggle, because I believe and maintain that it is true. You are, as the people, a part of the government. The people have become the government and the government is the people's. Nevertheless, we must not forget that the road which we rightly call Chilean breaks the traditional models; we are given the battles within the framework of bourgeois democracy, and the laws that this bourgeois democracy has dictated. And it is within this framework that we are seeking the ways to realize the great and deep transformations which Chile demands and needs in the economic, social and political domains. We must note, therefore, that we have committed ourselves to the freedom of information. By this we mean that we are not looking for a news monopoly. Thus the struggle of the people's government within this framework is much more difficult than that of other nations, who, by means of insurgency or weapons, have taken power and control of the government. We are voluntarily limited, because of previous commitments and, therefore, *compañeros* left journalists, as you know perfectly well, the other side will continue to capitalize on their control over the information media, continuing their distortion of the news and their malicious misrepresentation of government positions. Because of this, your struggle and ours is much more difficult. A great political consciousness is needed to raise the level of the masses and to make of every left journalist someone not only committed in his professional practice to the revolutionary tasks of the Popular Government and the people of Chile, but also someone linked with the popular masses who will take upon himself, in addition to his working hours, the voluntary work of raising the political level of the immense majority of Chileans, so that they understand our determination to take these historical steps.

In this assembly there is no point in defining the term *gremialismo*⁵, and that behind this attitude, many will try to avoid, either confusedly, cunningly or openly, a clear pronouncement on what should be the function of a genuine professional association. As *compañero* Felidor Contreras stated here:

The left journalists are not the overwhelming majority, nor do they control the organs of the professional associations. They must therefore accentuate the dialogue with those who still do not understand the revolutionary steps which Chile has taken and will continue to take.

Thus, along with my greetings to you at the beginning of my talk, I want to extend greetings to those journalists of the Christian Democratic Party who had the courage to express their solidarity here with the left journalists. This shows that they, too, understand the obligation they owe to the anti-imperialist and revolutionary struggle which lies ahead of the people and government of Chile.

Next, I want to point out that it is in the unity of the journalists of the authentic left, already proven in many battles, as well as in the ideas concerning the problem of the professional association – authentically defined – that we have the possibility of attracting hundreds of journalists to swell our ranks, as they become conscious of their situation. There must be much frustration on the part of many journalists who are limited, as we said earlier, by the interests of the news industrialists. Therefore, the battle in which you are engaged must be brought to your professional association, so that after discussion based on a respect for other ideas, but with the strength of our convictions, we may convince more and more journalists who still hesitate to take a position today, but who, tomorrow, understanding your exemplary struggle and the ideas of your program, and with the conviction that we are fighting for the greater good, will come to join your great action.

At the same time, I want to point out that if we bring up the problem of the professional association, it is because the government, as such, has shown an absolute respect and excessive tolerance for the journalists and certainly for the businesses that fight against us. When I say excessive tolerance, I know that tomorrow someone will declare that this was a threat. No! I want to emphasize this to show how a people and a government are not afraid when they know that the people understand what the government is doing.

For instance, there is a radio station whose president is a foreigner. Its name is Radio Balmaceda.⁶ This station's broadcasting license expired two years ago. As President of Chile I could deport the foreigner who pays people to defame the Chilean people and their government. And I could choose that station because its license has expired. I did not choose to do it because I know that the Chilean people are not going to be taken in by what is said on that station.

I have had only one position and I will explain it here today as I did yesterday to the national and regional leaders of the *Cotegio de Periodistas*.⁷ It was I who instructed the compañero Press Secretary of the Moneda to say that he would not allow the representative of the magazine SEPA⁸ to be present at an interview and press conference with foreign and Chilean journalists who cover the Moneda, and I want it to be clear why I did this. SEPA is not a news magazine. It is a group of seditious magazines which, from first to last line, not

only deform, slander and lie, but have also been creating a climate destined to break the institutional bases of the country. They have spared nothing and no one has escaped insult and slander. In my home, I cannot accept this. I say my home because it is the home the Chilean people have entrusted to me, for six years at least – and I want you all to know that I am going to fulfil the six years very well. I am not prepared to maintain a weak unmanly, or worse, undignified attitude. In the house which I occupy, the house of the Presidents of Chile, I cannot allow delinquents to walk through the corridors as naturally as you do, for they are not journalists. My position is neither domineering nor impetuous. In the Moneda, you will find the rest of the journalists of the opposition newspapers and they have a legitimate right to be there. And I have not forbidden them to enter, even in the areas where the Press Staff of the Moneda have their meetings. What I have said, and I hope you will pardon the expression, is that I will not tolerate⁹ these people– who are not true journalists representing news magazines – in the same house, halls, rooms and offices where I have to do my daily work.

A seditious process is taking place. And because of this I have called upon the people and denounced it. The fundamental base of this seditious process is the distortion of facts on both a national and an international level. Left journalists must be aware of this. We will not accept that the professional association be used as an excuse to provide impunity for those who attack the people, Chile and the government which the people elected.

I want to point out that the left journalist, because this is the first time we are in government, today has more opportunities to function, work and produce. I also want to mention that the left journalist has more access to technical means, although they must be refined and improved. We are eager for the left journalists to be the best qualified and the best trained. Our desire and aspiration is that you, in addition to your place on the left, will also be recognized for your professional merit, for the action that you carry out, not just for the strength of your convictions, but also, I repeat, for your training. The left journalist thus is obligated to study more, be better prepared, to be solid enough to give force to his commentaries, to the content of his articles, to every one of the columns he writes daily. I also think that it is the obligation of the journalist to convey information to the masses and to find the most ample forms possible to do this. And I think, as I already pointed out here, that left journalists are obliged to do voluntary work, along with their tasks in the news media. Who could raise the political consciousness of the popular sectors better than you? Who but you could teach the people in the marginal villages or the slums the why of a news story or commentary? Who is better qualified than you to make them understand the relations between the businesses and the broadcasting networks, and the business that is done with

the news? Who is better suited than you to take the trouble to express through the spoken word what you have already expressed through the written word? The workers in the coal mines, and in the nationalized industries, in the saltpetre and copper mines, have responded to this challenge and are now producing more. And I know that the peasants today are aware that they must work the land more because Chile needs more food for its people and the peasants are an essential factor in this process. They must also understand that the process of cultivating and exploiting the land is part of the great process of national economic development, the same way that the copper worker must understand that the surplus provided by the Chilean economy must be used to serve Chile and the Chileans. Thus, because of your education and because of the nature of the media, you are best suited to undertake another type of voluntary work; and if the peasants and workers can do it, professionals like yourselves should not lag behind in the important task of raising the consciousness of the popular masses. I want to see you united with the people in the slums, carrying the revolutionary message of the people and the Popular Government.

Now it seems to me that there is another means of persuasion, in spite of the indifference of some and the stubbornness of others, to put the businessmen in a difficult situation. Why not coordinate a large-scale campaign in the national interest? We are, for instance, faced with a certain matter, the most important event in the history of Chile: recovering for ourselves the essential wealth of the country, copper. But it is not just by passing a law or a constitutional reform that we will be able to nationalize this wealth. There will be a whole process involved, and during this process, until we are finally the owners of this wealth, which – I repeat – is essential, we will have extraordinary difficulties and will have to confront dangers and threats to the normal development of our economy. We are going to offend vested interests, although we do not want to, for our purpose is not to appropriate what belongs to someone else. Yet it will still be said that the indemnities which, after careful study, we find we can afford to pay, are too small, and that we have destroyed the international confidence of the investors. Therefore, it must be understood that this battle is for Chile and the people. And that it is a battle to which we must all be committed, because it is impossible to break Chile's economic dependency, and begin our economic development, if Chile is not master of its essential wealth. We must make it clear that without a change in our whole system it will be impossible for Chile to reduce the enormous distance between the development attained by the industrialized capitalist countries and the socialist countries, and the backwardness of the developing countries, with their moral and physical misery against which they struggle helplessly; in which Latin America, for instance, struggles hopelessly. It is up to you to contribute the strength of your convictions by explaining that the struggle for copper implies more than just conquering and defeating hostility; it also implies projecting to the rest of the

world the true picture that this struggle is not a retaliation but a fundamental need for Chile and its destiny. You must clarify our situation, so that the people understand the responsibility we assumed when the technicians who had worked in these companies began leaving Chile because they are part of companies that have their roots and investments in other latitudes and because these companies can, unquestionably, offer these technicians better material conditions elsewhere. You must make them understand that because of our lenience, foolishness, incompetence or cowardice, it has been taken for granted that in Chile, Chilean technicians could only rise to a certain level of management in these companies, and as a result we now are faced with technical difficulties which we will overcome, but which are extraordinarily difficult to overcome. You yourselves must understand the responsibility of the copper workers. It is upsetting and a cause of great worry for me, *compañeros* of the press, to see the lack of comprehension concerning the nature of the problem which Chile is living, and the revolutionary steps we have taken. When the readjustments¹⁰ were proposed, for example, and the CUT acted responsibly in arriving at an agreement with the government, we were faced with the readjustment of the public sector and all that a readjustment law represents – a law which was bound to begin the rise in the cost of living. However, the CUT must plan its action not only in function of the justice of the readjustments but also in function of the structural changes that Chile needs. On the other hand, there are *compañeros* who do not understand that if we have proposed, for instance, a maximum readjustment of 35% in the public sector, it is because this sector, in function of what it represents for the national interest, could make demands which would destroy any possibility of controlling inflation and stabilizing prices. How can we make them understand that the present stage in Chilean history is one in which there is exceptional purchasing power in the hands of the popular masses, because the readjustments have come at the same time as price controls? We must make them see that the stocks are being exhausted and that we have to increase our productivity so that in two or three months we don't find ourselves in the position of being unable to meet the legitimate demands and needs of the people.

Right now, for instance, there are already signs of dishonest attempts by certain industrialists who are asking higher prices for delivering materials. To whom? To the shopkeepers who put them at the disposal of the public. You must understand that here you can make an essential contribution. Isn't it obvious that we can no longer tolerate the absenteeism which in some of Chile's basic industries has reached the point of workers and employees being absent once or twice a week? And which in some companies has reached incredible levels. It must be emphasized, for instance, that the copper workers must work an extra half hour, hour or two hours, voluntarily, every week, because by producing more

copper, Chile can save itself from the economic crisis to which we are being led. It must be explained that the copper workers are not themselves the owners of the copper mines, but are owners only to the extent that they are part of the people, and that these essential riches belong to all the Chilean people. We cannot allow certain sectors to pressure for privileges while thousands of Chileans are without jobs and even without a piece of bread.

It is therefore necessary to push – I deliberately use the word – to mentally and not physically push a lot of people and even drive the companies crazy. For example, what arguments, and what means could they use to prevent all of the newspapers from launching a big campaign on behalf of children, a campaign against infantile diarrhoea, or a campaign, for instance, for the winter? It would be a way of placing them on the chopping block and forcing them to see that there are problems that go beyond their bastard interests, and that these problems are not for our benefit except in function of the greater national interest. Therefore, I suggest to you, *compañeros*, that you find a way to make these companies understand, even if it hurts them, that they cannot ignore facts that are as important for our future as those concerning the children of Chile and the aged of the nation. I-ow to protect people from inclement weather, when they have always been splashed by the mud, when the wind and rain has always whipped through their feeble house, what they can call a house, where they have been living. Similarly, and I will end on this note, I want to tell you, and you have already expressed it here, that unity, your unity, strengthens the output of each of you by 30 percent – and today we have it and more – in the news media. If perhaps there is uniform thought, a vigilant attitude, and understanding of the great historical task, and if every left journalist understands that his destiny is a battle front and struggle, we will be able to exert an even stronger influence, growing deeper in the national consciousness. But this must be supported first in the united will, in the strong united will of the left journalists. Let there be no division, let there be no distrust, let there be no fratricide among us.

Popular Unity made possible the victory of the people. Popular Unity is the defence of the Popular Government. Unity will be the granite wall against which the seditious attempts, from the outside or the inside, will be smashed to pieces. Popular Unity will permit the denunciation of economic oppression and the illegal attempts at subversion. Popular Unity is and will be the definitive weapon with which we can have the certitude of ideologically crushing our enemies. Thus, I have pointed out, both before and after the municipal electoral battle, that if the votes are important, they are much more important in giving every voter a revolutionary consciousness. When we won a million votes, 50-60 thousand of them were a job. Now that we have won a million four-hundred thousand votes, it is a much harder job, a

much more profound and more necessary one. We cannot allow only a transitory enthusiasm, a desire to go to vote to show that we are the majority, to be kept like that. We need those one million four-hundred thousand votes to be converted into one million four-hundred thousand revolutionary consciousnesses who understand perfectly the meaning of the struggle of the people and Chile. Here, too, you have a big job to do, and I insist on it, *compañeros*, because it is essential. History teaches us that populist movements, groups, parties or currents of opinion have grown like weeds, only to disappear with time. What interests me is the consciousness, the backbone, the granite base of workers who have not only a class consciousness but also the strength of conviction which grows out of dialogue and above all, ideological discussion. What lies ahead of us is thus to make of those one million four-hundred thousand votes, which for the defeated parties are simply votes, one million four-hundred thousand granite consciousnesses which will defend the present and future of our nation.

Although it is not up to me personally to propose this, it seems useful and necessary for me to say that you should fight to change the by-laws of the *Colegio de Periodistas*. Furthermore – and why not say it – you should examine the ways in which your presence could be more effective in the news companies during this period of transition. You can fight for the right of journalists to write a page or part of a page expressing what they really think, weekly or better yet, daily. I believe too that it should not be forgotten that in journalism also, there is the possibility of cooperatives which would make the owners of the broadcast media not the businessmen, but rather all of the workers of these firms.

I think it is essential to modify the by-laws of the *Colegio de Periodistas* to also give it more authority so that you can better defend your material interests. It is right that these demands be made, but more than that, you have the right to expect that the dignity and future of the profession be respected. I also believe that a *Colegio de Periodistas*, upon which your thought has been impressed, will have a new meaning and a new concept of journalist ethics, and will have the authority to separate the news merchants and those who are well-paid for writing insults on a per- line basis from those others who defend ideas and principles. This is why I stated recently in Valparaiso, that I have respect, not for objective journalism which does not exist, but for a journalism that has ideas and principles – as long as they are real ideas and principles – and the conviction to defend them within the framework of an honest professional ethic.

Therefore, by way of conclusion, it would be worthwhile for left journalists to remember the past and look back at the beginnings of our country, when the “friar of good death” [Camillo

Henriquez] began to create a consciousness which would strengthen the spirit of national independence. It would be worthwhile to remember Luis Emilio Recabarren,¹¹ who implanted the great and fertile seed of rebellion and of class dignity in the small working-class newspapers and in the consciousness of the workers. It would be worthwhile to remember a journalist who was shot down because he denounced crimes: Meza Bell. It would be worthwhile to remember someone else who also fought for his country, who often was not able to practice journalism but who worked as a bookseller, and had other activities. A man who understood that there are no limits in the people's struggle and who irrigated another country with his generous blood, showing to what point a man's life can be consistent with his ideas: Elmo Catalàn.¹²

Notes

1. This text was presented as the inaugural address to the First Conference of Left Journalists held in Santiago de Chile on 13 April 1971. Translated from the Spanish transcript by Mary C. Axtmann and Arturo I. Torrecilla. English translation Copyright International General, 1981.
2. The Central Unica de Trabajadores; the Unified Central Trade Union. (This and following footnotes are by the translators.)
3. Agricultural units established by the agrarian reform program under Christian-Democrat President Frei
4. 4 September 1970 was the date of the electoral victory of the Popular Unity government.
5. An allusion to the problem of corporatism, and the right-wing control of the Journalist professional association.
6. This radio station was owned by the Christian Democrats and actively fought the Popular Unity Government, and, in fact, was closed, but by the fascist junta on 21 January 1976 for "anti-patriotic" propaganda.
7. The journalist professional association, which brings together all the local, regional, and national chapters of the organization.
8. A right-wing magazine linked to the fascist movement Patria y Libertad.
9. "Tener las aguantaderas"; in popular language "to hold it in."
10. Pay scale increases
11. Luis Emilio Recabarren was a typography worker, who later founded the Chilean Communist Party.
12. Elmo Catalàn, author of *La propaganda política: instrumento de presión política*, 1967, participated in the Bolivian guerrilla struggle and was killed there in 1970.