

## The Popular Unity Government (1970-1973)

Under the leadership of Salvador Allende, the Popular Unity coalition came to power in 1970 with the goal of building socialism through democratic means. Its political platform called for the construction of a People's State and a planned economy.

<i>Venceremos, venceremos, con Allende en septiembre a vencer. Venceremos, venceremos, ¡la Unidad Popular al poder!" (Himno Venceremos)</i>	<i>We shall win, we shall win with Allende in September we shall win We shall win, we shall win The Popular Unity shall take power! (Popular Unity campaign song)</i>
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With the inauguration of Salvador Allende Gossens as the President of Chile on November 4, 1970, the country began the most ambitious process of social, economic, and political changes that had ever been seen in its history. As the standard-bearer of the Popular Unity coalition, Allende not only became the first socialist leader in the world to be democratically elected, but also the first to lead the conversion to socialism by peaceful means, which became known as the "Chilean Path to Socialism".

The government's program included the construction of a People's State and a largely state-owned planned economy. Although the law nationalizing the copper industry was adopted without congressional opposition, the state's attempts to take over other large-scale enterprises did meet with significant opposition. Without a parliamentary majority, the government made use of a largely forgotten decree from the Socialist Republic of 1932 that was still in effect. This allowed the Popular Unity government to expropriate any industry that was considered to be strategic for the economy. In addition to expropriation, which was generally preceded by the takeover of an enterprise by its workers, the government utilized other mechanisms such as stock purchases that allowed it to take control of around 80 percent of industrial enterprises and an important number of banks.

In the farming sector, the agrarian reform initiated by the government of Jorge Alessandri and accelerated by the administration of Eduardo Frei Montalva was deepened, achieving the redistribution of 4,400 properties, in addition to the more than 2,000 seizures of lands by the rural men and women who worked them.

In the area of health, hospitals became better equipped and a system was put into place to guarantee a half liter of milk daily to every child in the country. In education, advances in preschool, elementary, and vocational instruction were made and access to higher education was broadened. The most emblematic education project was the so-called Unified National School System [Escuela Nacional Unificada]. At the same time, the government's cultural policy was never clearly defined, something that was widely debated in *La Quinta Rueda* [The Fifth Wheel, a cultural magazine]. Nevertheless, the government sponsored many cultural initiatives, such as the creation of the Quimantú publishing house and new forms of musical expression, such as the Chilean New Song.

Social spending led to a growing budget deficit that the government tried to resolve by expanding the money supply. This generated an inflationary spiral that was aggravated by severe problems with the shortage of goods, brought about in part by hoarding and sabotage on the part of business owners. In addition the government faced virulent opposition from the conservative National Party, which was later joined by the Christian Democrats that had initially supported the election of Allende and his government program. Business and occupational associations also rejected the government's program, including doctors, retail store owners, truckers, and some miners. On the internal front, the government found itself strapped by the divisions among the sectors that wanted to accelerate and deepen the revolutionary process (Movement of the Revolutionary Left; Unitary Popular Action Movement; and one faction of the Socialist Party) and others that wanted to consolidate the process (the Communist Party; the Radical Party; the Worker-Peasant Unitary Popular Action Movement; and another faction of the Socialist Party headed by Allende himself).

The unexpectedly strong showing by the Popular Unity coalition in the parliamentary elections of March 1973 simply encouraged some sectors of the opposition to support a military coup. Although this option was thwarted on June 29, 1973, in the failed coup attempt known as El Tanquetazo [The Tank Attack], it was clear to Salvador Allende that only a strong demonstration of public support would allow his government to remain viable. His idea of convoking a plebiscite, however, never came to pass, as on September 11 of that year his government was overthrown by the armed forces headed by General Augusto Pinochet, marking the end of the Popular Unity government.

**SOURCE:** MemoriaChilena, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, retrieved on July 14, 2014 from <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-31433.html>.