

Progressive journalism resisted the coup d'état in Chile



By Carmen Esquivel Sarría

After the coup d'état in Chile many media professionals were murdered or disappeared and left-wing media closed down, but journalism resisted, reflects journalist Guillermo Torres 50 years later. In 1973 Torres worked at the newspaper El Siglo and at night he did a newscast at the Universidad Técnica del Estado (UTE), today Universidad de Santiago de Chile.

During a conversation with Prensa Latina he recalls that on September 11, when the coup against the government of President Salvador Allende took place, he was at UTE, from where he saw the bombing of La Moneda Palace and the University was also attacked with bazookas.

There were about 600 of us inside the campus, including professors, students and administrative personnel, and they let us leave, there was a curfew.

The next day, he said, we were taken to the Chile Stadium, which today bears the name of Víctor Jara in homage to the singer-songwriter and head of university extension murdered by the dictatorship.

Guillermo Torres was imprisoned for two years in the Chacabuco concentration camp in the north of the country. In 1975 he was expelled from the country and went into exile in the former German Democratic Republic and Italy, until he was able to return in 1984.

Protagonist of the events of September 11, the journalist tells that when the coup d'état took place, headed by Augusto Pinochet, the antennas of Radio Corporación, of the Socialist Party, and of Radio Magallanes, belonging to the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), were bombed.

They also demolished those of the UTE radio station, closed down all left-wing media and occupied the facilities of Televisión Nacional (National Television).

During the dictatorship, 38 journalists were murdered or disappeared, the repression was very strong, however, soon after, clandestine bulletins began to appear, such as Unidad Antifascista, of the Communist Party; Unidad y Lucha, of the Socialist Party, and El Rebelde, of the MIR, he recalls.

Correspondence in the concentration camps was censored, but those of us who were there managed, through some codes, to send information about what was going on inside, he said.

Meanwhile, the television channels, radio and written media controlled by the regime concealed all human rights violations.

He referred to the case of El Mercurio, which played a key role in the coup d'état, and even the owner of that newspaper, Agustín Edwards, met with the then president of the United States, Richard Nixon, and CIA officials to prevent Allende from taking power.

There is a very important book that has just come out, entitled Pinochet declassified, which shows the entire role of El Mercurio in promoting the institutional rupture, he reported.

Guillermo Torres was president of the Chilean College of Journalists from 2002 to 2004, held other positions in that organization for 15 years and was also treasurer of the Latin American Federation of Journalists (Felap).

Half a century after the events of September 11, he participated in a forum organized by El Siglo entitled La prensa y el golpe de Estado (The press and the coup d'état).

In his statements to this agency, he affirmed that the clandestine media and also the democratic media that circulated legally played a very important role in the fall of the dictatorship, something recognized by all political sectors, although now many forget it.

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