

Interview with Ana María Pelusa

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Abstract

In this interview for Displaced Voices, Ana María Pelusa, a Chilean refugee who came to the UK in 1974, reflects on what the 50th anniversary of the Chilean coup means to her. Before dealing with the coup, its dreadful aftermath and what it felt like to arrive in Britain as a refugee, I began by asking her about her memories of life in Chile before the coup. We also spoke about her unrelenting struggle for justice for the victims of the Chilean dictatorship 50 years on and her recollections of Pinochet's arrest in London, 25 years ago this autumn. My sincere thanks to Ana María Pelusa for sharing her story with us.—TH

Ana María Pelusa [AMP]: Since childhood I was involved in politics. I was eight years old when my father used to send me to deliver documents to other members of his trade union because they were trying to create or to set up the Chilean TUC. And my father used to tell me get this bus and get off in that place and be careful with this document because these are some positions or proposals for that. And to me that was such an important document that more or less I had to guard it with my life. So finally, the Chilean TUC was set up in 1953 and I felt that in a way, although I was a young girl, I was very much part of that of the Chilean TUC.² When I was twelve years of age, I joined a political party that was the Socialist Party. But I didn't last there too long because as I told my father, I was not learning anything there...at that stage in my life I wanted a revolution in my country that was going to overthrow the injustices and end...the poverty and exploitation of the people.

Because I come from a shanty town. First of all, I am a shanty town dweller. I come from a very, very poor working-class background. In the shanty towns, solidarity is very much alive. We know that you don't have anything to eat and your neighbour will come and give you something. Your children don't have clothes and perhaps somebody else has some spare clothes and they could give them to you. So that is the solidarity of the people, for the people. So that's what I remember. But first-hand, I also experienced a lot of injustice and exploitation, so I wanted to change that. So, I joined a political party that didn't represent my ideas and I left it. And after that I just wanted to find out what can I do? Then I got married, I had four children and one day a political organisation was very much in the news constantly because of the daring actions that they carried out and that was the movement of revolutionary left, the MIR.³ And I

² La Central Unitaria de Trabadores (CUT) was founded in 1953 in Chile. For more details, see: <https://cut.cl/la-historia-de-la-cut/>

³ Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) was founded in 1965 in Chile. For more details, see: <https://mir-chile.cl/acerca-de/>

was in my house and I told my father you know what, these people are the ones that I would like to help and they represent more what I would like to do but I don't know how to get in touch with them. But one of my brothers was there and a few weeks later somebody approached me and they said we hear from your brother that you would like to help us and can we use your house for a meeting? And I said, of course, yes. And from then on, from that moment on, I got involved with the MIR.

And after that, to me everything was history because I got more and more involved with the MIR until I became a militant of that organisation. And I was very much involved with the struggle of the homeless people in Chile, with the seizures of land, to try to build a place, a plot of land where you can build something to live on. But when I say build, don't think about a structure with brick and cement. No, it was just a place where we could put up a few pieces of cardboard, perhaps, perhaps some wood panels or whatever that was going to be our homes. So, we carried out a lot of those issues of land.

Tanya Harmer [TH]: What memories do you have of the 1970 Chilean presidential election?

AMP: ... [I remember] I heard how my mother was celebrating in the shanty town, my mother went out and was dancing in the street until the early hours of the morning, just celebrating that finally they had a government that they could call their government, a government for the people. And I remember that my father said to us, well, I have struggled all my life to have a government that represents our interest, but unfortunately it is not going to last too long. They are not going to allow him to carry out his programme of the 40 measures that are going to benefit the country and the people.⁴ And he said it's not going to last long and we are going to have a military coup and we have to be prepared for that because once it happens, it will take us at least 50 years to overcome this loss.

TH: And during the Popular Unity, what were the three years after Allende's election and before the coup like?

AMP: They were fantastic. I always say that [as a member of the MIR] I didn't vote for Allende as a president, but I did vote in the last election before the coup. It was in March that year when we needed to show the right wing that Allende wasn't alone, that he had the support of the people. So, we all went, whoever had the right to vote, we all went to cast our vote in support of one of the political parties of the Popular Unity. And of course, the percentage of vote at that time really increased for Allende. So, they knew that there was support. [And] when I say that, although I didn't vote for Allende, I must recognise that during those three years of his government in the shanty town where I was based, where I was doing all my political work, I could see the women for the first time not looking haggard and sad and tired with worry of what I am going to give my child to eat today? But with a big smile on their face and the security that they were happy and their children, for the first time I saw children in the shanty

⁴These '40 measures' were included in the Popular Unity's manifesto: 'Programa basico de la Unidad Popular' (1969), available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/espanol/allende/1969/diciembre17.htm>

town, all of them wearing shoes, all of them had proper clothes in winter, all of them were well dressed...

During the Popular Unity government...[Allende's] priority was first of all the well-being of women and children. And for that reason, children had access to health, but also to the half litre of milk every day that before [this] they didn't. I remember that for years and years I was allergic to milk because when I grew up, they never gave me milk because my parents couldn't afford it. So, I was allergic to it because if you are not used to something, you develop that intolerance, while during the Allende government, my children, the children of my neighbours in the shanty towns, everybody was just happy. They were well dressed, well fed and people were happy. And I remember during those years all the young people that used to go out and we had demonstrations. [We had] the joy of having something bigger than us because it was a dream that everybody was aiming for.

TH: Can you tell us about the build-up to the coup, the coup and the immediate aftermath?

AMP: When the first attempt of military coup took place in June [1973], that was called the 'tanquetazo'. I remember that the people from the shanty town just rushed to the presidential palace to defend the government. But that was just – it was the first attempt of them to trying to see how the people were going to react, [and] that is why, because they knew that the people were going to support the government, when the military coup actually took place on the 11 September, it was with such brutality.

I wasn't in the shanty town at the time...I was at one of my brother's houses, my brother is dead now, and he went out to work and then he came back very soon and he said a military coup is taking place. And I still remember that my brother was just hitting the wall and he said and we don't have anything. And there are tanks on every street corner and there's army personnel shooting to anybody that is around and we don't have anything to go and defend the government because that was exactly what happened.

And then after, because there was a curfew...it was after midday...two days after [the coup], they allowed people to leave their houses to buy bread or whatever. So I went back to the shanty town where I was a leader and a delegation of women without their children went up to me and they said, Pelusa, we have left our children with our husbands and we want to go and fight for the president...And I told those women, I'm sorry, but I don't have any weapons with me. And I'll never forget what they told me that day. It was a Chilean expression that I don't know in English...they said, 'se te aconcharon los meaos'... In other words, are you so scared? Are you scared now? Are you retracting everything that you have said before? You don't want to go and fight? And I said, it's not that, it's just that I don't have any weapons. So how are we going to go and fight? With what? That same night, a group of about twelve young people, not from my shanty town...[came] looking for me because they wanted me to organise them so we could organise some kind of resistance. And again, I said, look, I don't have any weapons with me and you cannot stay here because...if there is a raid tonight or tomorrow, you are only going to put your life at risk. And we don't have any weapons... We didn't have any weapons to really to carry out a defence of the government.

So that was it. And then after that, everything was, as they say, history, because I was on the run, I was hunted. Until finally I was arrested and taken to a torture centre called Cerro Chena, and from there, because I am a woman from a shanty town...[they assumed] I was a stupid woman...How can women have any kind of ideas in their mind? They must be stupid. So, all the time when I was interrogated, I was trying to pretend that I was this very stupid, ignorant person, but knowing quite well that I was arrested because I was *La Pelusa*, the militant of the MIR.

But somehow, because it wasn't my turn to die, I came out alive...Not without any scars, but I came out alive, [and] un-known to me, a group of nuns and priests, of the nuns and priests for socialism that I was working with...were trying to get me out of the country, but they didn't know how to find me because once I was released and I was placed on the house arrest, I went on the run, so nobody knew where I was. And I was sleeping here and there and everywhere...in every street, every house [of] every friend, every comrade that [I] used to have, everybody was trying to escape alive, trying to survive. And at the same time, we were trying to carry out resistance activities, which was absolutely crazy. It was absolutely crazy.

TH: But by being alive, you were resisting.

AMP: Yes, exactly. We won by being alive all this time. But that is one of the things that happened.

TH: How did you come to Britain, then?

AMP: As I say, the nuns and priests were trying to get me out of Chile...nuns and priests that were working in the shanty towns [where] they used to carry out mass in a house with a bit of bread, normal bread, etcetera, and just a conversation about the love of God, Jesus, etcetera, etcetera. Not a normal mass. It was a very down to earth kind of celebration and finally, somehow, because, as I said, I wasn't meant to die, a message reached me that I had to go to the British Embassy because a delegation of MPs was arriving in Chile. British MPs. And I had to go [to ask for] political asylum, but I [also] had to look after Peter, a Navy deserter, an 18- or 19-year-old young man. Could I please make sure that he was safe? And I said, what...?! They are asking me to look after the deserter. Can you imagine? We get caught, him a deserter and I, a wanted person. That was going to be the end. So anyway, we managed to do that. I managed to get that man. We went to the embassy, we asked for political asylum.

TH: So, you arrived in England in 1974 with your partner and four children. What was it like to arrive as a refugee in Britain?

AMP: We came to England with the clothes that we had in our back. Not even a pair of socks or not even a coat, just with the clothes that we did have, on our back...I didn't speak a word of English. I only went to five years of primary school and I got my secondary licence as a free student when I was 28 years of age...At the airport they were asking us, who are you? What do you want? But nobody could understand. So, my children said, Mummy, what did they say? And I said, they are saying that you have to go and sit down over there because it's going to take us some time to get out of here. And I say that because I realised that if my children knew that I was so lost, their own sense of security was going to be so threatened that they were

going to be affected by that. So, my only way to protect them was to pretend that, yes, I understand, but you have to wait. So that's what I did, just to protect them. And I arrived here in England and I was sent to a hostel outside London in Camberley, next to Virginia Water, where Pinochet was [later under] house arrest, and my children were put in a school, they were registered at school and I was sent a couple of days, one day a week, to have some English classes. But the teacher spoke Spanish, so it was very little that I could learn.

A few months later, I was given a flat here in London. And as I say, my English was absolutely, almost non-existent. I could read by then. I had learned how to read English, but I couldn't speak English and I could understand what people were saying, but I couldn't for the life of me reply properly. And I was in my flat for about eight months, feeling sorry for myself, I guess, feeling really, really depressed, because I thought about my family, my friends, my comrades and the situation that was happening back at home. And I was in a safer place and I had food on my table every day while my people back there were suffering such horrendous conditions. So, one day I was just crying in my front room and I used to talk to myself all the time. So, I said to myself, Pelusa, do you feel sorry for what is happening? Then do something! Get out of the seat and go and denounce what is happening in Chile. You don't know how to do it? Fine, find a way. But you have to get out of here and you have to do something to help our people back there.

So from that day on, I went out and I bought...*Timeout* magazine that had fringe meetings [listed]. In those days, all the fringe meetings were free and everywhere and they were talking about women and these women and that, etcetera. So, I decided well, I will join all these meetings about women. And I went and I listened...and I said ah I know what they are talking about, so okay, excuse me, I want to speak. I am Chilean. And in my very broken English, I am Chilean. I am a refugee. In my country...my women are suffering because this and the other...and we need your solidarity. We need you to support us and we need you to denounce what is happening. And the women were so patient to listen because my English was absolutely...Tarzan was speaking better English than me in those days.

But that was the situation. And I started going from one meeting to another meeting to another meeting and gradually I got involved with the women's movement. At the start, I didn't understand that as a woman I had issues myself. But gradually I started learning from going to so many meetings and from trying to link that struggle with the struggle of the women back at home and with the struggle of my people. That's how I got involved.

And then gradually we created here an organisation of Chileans that was called Chile Democrático. And I started organising the Chilean women from north to south of Great Britain and trying to discuss feminist issues with them, but at the same time trying to help them with their own issues, with their own problems, [including] personal problems with their children. They couldn't speak English, so we needed to try to find [a way to help them] speak English, and the children as well, because some of them arrived here, so they were speaking English, but they didn't speak Spanish. So we had to organise a school to teach them Spanish. And we had two schools here in London, one in the south, one in the north. One was Escuela Amanecer

in the south [in Deptford]. In the north El Niño Luchin around Highbury and Islington...So that's what we did. I had to organise that because I was the chairperson of Chilean Women's Organisation.



TH: This year not only marks 50 years since the coup in Chile but also 25 years since Pinochet's arrest in London. Can you tell us what it felt like when he was arrested?

AMP: Well, first of all, I was working all night, because I was working nights [as a cleaner] from 10:00 at night until 06:00 in the morning...So I came home and my eldest son opened the

door and he said that he told me that Pinochet was arrested. But if he had said that to me, I would have heard. Perhaps, I was so exhausted that I didn't hear. So anyway, at around 10:00 in the morning, my phone rang and it's Dante, a European friend that was one of the... founder members of a Uruguayan organisation called Tupamaros. So Dante said to me, Pelusa *Che* (he started talking to me in his language) and I said who has been arrested, Dante ? He said *el boludo* de Pinochet. And I said, what? Dante, what are you saying? He said, Pinochet has been arrested here in London. So, I said, Dante, I have to go, I have to go. So I put the phone down and I called my eldest son and I said, Marmo, Dante, says that Pinochet has been arrested. And he said, Mummy, I told you. I said, if you had told me, I would have heard. And I said, put the television on. So, my son put the television on. And in those days we had Ceefax...yes, we are talking about... 25 years ago!

[So] Ceefax was on. But for the life of me, I couldn't read, I wasn't...I couldn't read, I couldn't see. And I said, where does it say he was arrested. Mummy, it's said there, but where, I couldn't see. And I was so frantic, I just wanted to know. So anyway, finally I saw that Pinochet had been arrested here. And I was elated, I was happy, but at the same time I was scared. So, the first thing that I did, I called my sister back at home, one of my sisters, and I said, Pinochet is being arrested here in London. And she was preparing that day to go to a meeting of PRAIS⁵, a health organisation set up for victims of the dictatorship. And she said, I have a meeting with companions later on, so I will start calling them and tell them this. And all of a sudden, when I was talking to her, I started crying, but when I mean crying, not [tears] coming down my face, no, I was just I was just screaming. And she said, I understand. And I said no. I said, you cannot [crying]... anyway, you cannot understand because it was difficult to understand how you feel inside yourself.

Pinochet that person that said not even a leaf can move without me knowing. All of a sudden, he's arrested in London. And I started calling my friends after that and I called my best friend, my sister, my English friend and sister that also passed away. And I said, Gabby Pinochet has been arrested. Here London. And my friend said... hi, Pelusa, how are you? And I said, you know what? I want to open the window, shout to the world, Pinochet has been arrested! It was a feeling of happiness and disbelief, because it was unbelievable. We had tried so many times to arrest him, we had tried so many times to catch him, but finally it happened...I felt so scared that he was going to escape. That they were going to let him go. And I remember that I took to my bed, I went to my bed and like a foetus, I just was in my bed and I said, but he's going to escape...they are going to let him go.

So, the next day, I went to the clinic alongside all my other comrades, friends...and we were hugging and crying and we couldn't believe it. It was a feeling of, this is not real, but it was real. So, we were there, we were able to shout that we wanted justice and all that. And from

⁵ Programa de Reparación y Atención en Salud, Ministerio de Salud, Chile. For more information, see: <https://www.chileatiende.gob.cl/fichas/113212-programa-de-reparacion-y-atencion-en-salud-prais-ministerio-de-salud>

then on, I was in the picket...until the last day when Pinochet was sent back home. But it was indescribable feeling...And then you say, it's not going to happen, we are never going to have justice. Because at the end of the day, 50 years have passed by now and impunity continues. And Pinochet never paid for his crimes. And the only time that we saw Pinochet in a court was in Belmarsh. And I still remember how happy I was when I saw the car with Pinochet covered with coats...to go into the cold in Belmarsh. That was unbelievable.

TH: It also meant reliving everything that had happened?

AMP: That's what I mean, you relive everything. So, the fear comes back to you...It was overwhelming. It was a confluence of different feelings that were just engulfing you...it was pulling me from one place to another...one moment I was on the top of the world and then the next moment I was... so it was just like a yoyo of emotions.

TH: Can you tell me about the days of the picket, how you mobilised and fought collectively to make sure he didn't get released?

AMP: So many things happened. We had to do and create so many activities...to keep not only the Pinochet news on the news [but also] to put pressure on the politicians not to send him back home, that we started creating different things. And we had the picket from the morning outside Parliament, then in the evening in Parliament the square, then we had a picket outside the High Court and we had a picket outside the Court of Justice because the Court of justice was the first one that said that as a president, he had immunity. And that was a few days after [he was arrested], I think it was on the Monday or Tuesday that the Court said he has immunity. And I remember that a few of us were there and we were so distraught and we were shouting, we want justice! So that was from the beginning. We knew that it was a struggle that we didn't know if we were going to win or not.

The Court and the politicians were there [with] us in the middle, trying to create as much noise and as denounce as loud as we could the atrocities committed by Pinochet to...convince people to allow him to go to Spain to face justice... [I] remember when Jack Straw said the first time that he had leave to proceed...[he] didn't say he [could] be extradited, but he gave leave to proceed to the Court...And I remember that I had been in the picket for three days working at night and three days on the picket without going back home.



Ana María Pelusa on the picket, c.October 1998.

TH: When did you sleep?

AMP. I wasn't sleeping...I remember that the night before I said to my comrade, tomorrow I am going home because I needed to change my clothes, I needed to have a shower. And I said, I am going home, so I am not coming to the picket. So off I went after because I was working at night and during the day I was cleaning houses until about two or three in the afternoon. And after that I was going back to the picket. So, I finished cleaning houses and I went back home and the phone rang and it was a woman from Chile asking me what is happening in London? And I said with Pinochet? And I said, as far as I know, nothing. And I said, I haven't been to the picket today, so I don't know. She said, they say that he's going to be extradited. And I said, no, I haven't heard anything. And I said, if I hear anything, I will let you know. So, the woman gave me the phone number she was calling from [in] Chile. And then a minute later my youngest son phoned me and...very happy...said to me, it's extradition, Mummy, the extradition. And I said, what? He said, yes, Jack Straw said that he gives the right to proceed....And I was crying and laughing...Then finally I remembered the woman that called me from Chile so I ran to my telephone and I called and I said is Jimena there? It was a woman called Jimena and I called and they said no, she just left the office. And I said could you tell her that I am calling from London, [and they] said, yeah, wait. So, they called her and the woman came to the phone and I said Jack Straw has given the right to proceed and the woman also shouted extradition! And there was a big noise there but I didn't know that I was calling...the press office in the Presidential Palace where all the press, all the corporate press meet like here down in Downing Street...

But after this I said I have to have a shower and I am going out. And I went out back to the picket...from Forest Hill to Westminster and I was crying on the train but I didn't mind because I wasn't crying because I was sad...I was so happy. And I came back to the picket. And I remember that from there I had to go back to work at ten o'clock but very reluctantly because I wanted to be among my comrades, among my brothers and sisters with whom we had been fighting all that time, [for] so long for that moment to hear that he could be extradited. But we didn't know that the process was going to take forever and ever and ever. [It] took 503 days.

During those 503 days we carried out a lot of different activities that had different meanings to us. In the Wentworth Estate, in Virginia Water we had...a stage play with a white mask and dress in black. We had a play where I say I am Maria Burtillos, I was this, that and then I was killed on this day, then a man says I was this and that and I was killed...

So, we were representing all of them but then one day we decided that... hey, here in England in November they have Remembrance Days. Why don't we have the same here in Parliament Square? We decided, yes, we can plant crosses...in Parliament Square. Do we need permit? We don't know, but let us do that. So, for a few weeks we started creating the crosses. It's more than 3000 crosses and not only crosses, but also a stick with only a name: crosses for the executed, the ones that we already know that are dead. But the little stick with a piece of paper with the name was for the Disappeared. And the day arrived when we planted all the crosses in Parliament Square...Men, women and children, everybody that was helping that day...started very early in the morning, measuring, we had measured the square before, but

measuring again, where [crosses] had to go, etcetera, etcetera. Everything was like a military precision. This is what we had to do, and very fast, because somebody [could have] come and tell us that we [could not] do it, so we [had] to do it fast.

So that's what we did. And while we were doing that, a woman said [can] you imagine this to be a woodland, a tree for each one of the Disappeared, for each one of the executed? And we said, good idea. So, we started contacting all the people that used to come from Europe to support us in the picket. Could you plant a tree for [one of the] Disappeared? Could you do this that? So, we planted the first tree here...and then in Italy, in different countries, in total, in eleven countries, [and] even one tree in Chile was planted and, quickly, we created a virtual woodland of memory. And then we said but we should plant the forest in Chile, un 'bosque de la memoria' [Forest of Memory].⁶ So we started working towards that. And every anniversary of the day when Pinochet was arrested, we have a party. We raise money and we raise enough money to buy a plot of land in Curacautín. And this year [2023], in May, we started the first planting of the first 25 trees there. And so far, we have planted more than 800 trees.

Our project is a project of women, because the majority of us are women [with] only two men in our group. It's not a project of all the Chilean community, it's a project a few of us [started] that will keep that dream alive. And we hope that we are going to fulfil that dream and have a forest of memory where every victim will have a tree and every tree is alive and every life is life for the planet as well.

TH: What happened when Pinochet was sent back?

AMP: When Pinochet was finally sent back home, I remember because I wasn't home from that Sunday until the last day. I remember we went [to picket the house where he was detained] the night before and it was about 20 centigrade below zero. And we went to Wentworth State in Virginia Water and we took our jackets [off] and we started putting our panels and pictures of the Disappeared up...we were very fast doing that because we had done it so many times that in no time at all it [was] done. Then when I went to pick up my jacket from the floor, I couldn't because as my body was hot and the jacket was hot, it had stuck to the ground, frozen to the ground.

So that day, that morning before Pinochet was... because we knew more or less, we had the hunch that he was going to be [sent] home, we decided, I decided at around five in the morning to start reading the list of the Disappeared...each one of them not to miss any one of them. Then at eight in the morning I looked at the group of my comrades because I was in a corner and I saw their faces and I said to myself he's been sent home. But I said I have to keep on going because this is our purpose to read the names of all the victims aloud today. So about ten more names were left...when suddenly I went kind of dizzy...And I said, Jimmy, you continue...and he started crying. And I said, no, Gloria, you continue reading. And Gloria again

⁶ For more information, please see Gloria Miqueles' article in this special issue, 'A Forest of Memory' or visit ecomemoria.cl

started crying...And when I saw that they were crying...I knew that the bastard was [going] to be sent home, I said with dignity, we don't cry, okay?

So, I started reading and I finished reading the names, but I was so mad that they were going to cry and I said don't let them see us crying. And then after that, of course, there was some press coming to ask us, how do you feel about him being sent home? And they asked me...do you hate him? And I said no. I don't hate. I don't hate him. Because if I hate that person, I will be as bad as he is because what he did was because he hated us. So, I don't give him that pleasure of poisoning my mind and my soul by hating. What I wanted was justice. And we have been robbed of that justice today, but that's it.

I want justice. That's what we aim for. We want justice. That was my involvement with the picket. But we did so many things. I remember the first march...from Millwall down to Trafalgar Square and we didn't have enough Chilean flags....so, I paid a woman 50 pounds. In those days was quite a bit of money for six Chilean flags. And she made me some massive Chilean flags and...I took the poles off my curtains in my house [for] the flag...And up till today, I haven't put back the curtains in my house. Many years later, my house doesn't have curtains...I like the light. So that was it... we have six massive flags. But we were just carrying out activities with money from our own pocket because that's what we wanted, to keep the memories alive.

It's like when I went one day, I was working and I got a phone call from Jimmy: Pelusa you have to go to a newspaper because you have to make a phone call to the Fundación Pinochet. Are you crazy? They will recognise my voice. There's nobody here, so you have to go. I said, okay, it's on you, because I will go. And I went to a newspaper and I made a blind phone call to the Fundación Pinochet. What happened is that while Pinochet was under house arrest here, they started paying people to come here. They paid [for] the ticket. They paid ten pounds per hour to stand there to support Pinochet outside the court and outside the parliament....So I went and I pretended that I was a Pinochet supporter. I was in a little room with the phone...[and I called and had to] pretend that I am a *Pinochetista*. And I said I wanted... I am so worried about my General in London and I want to go there. My friend went, and I know that you paid [for] her the ticket and you paid her to stay there and I don't have the means, but I am worried about my General, so I want to go. Could you do the same for me? Yes, we can do that [they said]. But the General that takes the decision is not here at the moment. Okay, but I am so worried and I kept on insisting that I was worried about Pinochet. So, finally, the man said, look, the General that makes the decision is not here. [So] I said, and when I call for [the General later] what is your name? Whom should I ask for? And he said Claudio Meya. And I said, oh, thank you, Mr Meya. And I said to the journalist that was outside the window, we got them with [a] name and everything. [At the same time], my sister-in-law, the widow of my brother, was working in La Union Club [in Santiago]; she was a cook there and she could also hear the fascists, the old fascists talking about sending and paying people to come over here.

CHILEAN GENERAL FLIES IN PICKETS

Free Pinochet protesters are £9 an hour rent-a-mob living free in 4-star luxury

EXCLUSIVE by GRAHAM JOHNSON and RONA CUMMINS

A GROUP headed by General Pinochet is flying his supporters in from Chile - then paying them £9 an hour to stage phoney demonstrations outside the Houses of Parliament.

The rent-a-mob have their flights paid for and work six-day shifts. Many of them are servants of rich right-wing Chilean businessmen, army chiefs and politicians. Others are hard-up students tempted by a free holiday.

Pinochet's flying pickets are put up to intimidate the anti-Pinochet lobby and enjoy social parties. They are even being treated to rights-seeing tours of London.

But despite the inducements, some "supporters" have not been happy with their pay and conditions - and now they are demanding overtime.

The Sunday Mirror has learned that three men, who were flown to Chile - then flown to London - to act as "supporters" for Pinochet's flying pickets. They are being treated to rights-seeing tours of London by the Law Lords.

They also wanted extra cash for being outside in the cold, and compensation for some threats caused by protesters shouting.

When their claims were dismissed by Pinochet's campaign organisers, the women briefly threatened to sue - but were then told they were sent home.

Chilean newspaper *Mundo* writes: "I have no opinion on Pinochet either way," she said. "But it's well known that

TO DEMONSTRATE OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT...AND NOW THEY DEMAND OVERTIME

PAID TO PROTEST: Pinochet's rent-a-mob protest outside the House of Lords, with Pinochet Foundation chief Luis Cortes (front right)

about it lately. There was a discussion whether to turn 100,000 more or 200,000. They were so desperate, they talked about going in some of the waltzes."

An undercover reporter infiltrated the Pinochet supporters posted outside Parliament.

Sunday Mirror investigators watched one of them but never spoke at a black passer-by while others threatened tourists and chased some contraband fornicators.

They had been whisked into a frenzy by a hard-core of Pinochet's military henchmen.

The so-called mob screened Pinochet's military henchmen. Pinochet, in its own words, has done nothing wrong. Let him go free."

The mob's flights were blocked by Chilean travel agent services. Travel. The hotel was arranged by British-based Fourth Dimension Travel 15 on behalf of Santiago-based Europe Travel.

"This week's group were the third shift to come for a six-day stay. They returned via Gatwick airport on Thursday night. They

made on Flight BA2027 back to Santiago had been booked by Europe Travel at £700 return. Their plush hotel rooms had also been paid for by Europe Travel and booked by Pinochet Foundation, who would then name their biggest clients.

One Santiago student, Christian Campora, had his hand "rotten" - including drinks - paid for by Luis Cortes, the executive director of the Pinochet Foundation.

Luis says Mr Cortes said: "Those who want to go to London and do not have the means to do so will be supported by Pinochet and by the Foundation itself."

At the end of each day the national song of Chile is sung and tears are shed.

The protesters returned to the double London Metropolitan Hotel in Edgware Road in London. But the demonstrators are draining the resources of the Pinochet Foundation.

Fernando Barro, who heads a pro-Pinochet support group, said: "A lot of people were brought over at first. But now we are running out of money."

ROYAL CUPID EXPOSED JUDGE'S AMNESTY LINK

ROYAL cupid Luis Santa Cruz was the secret informant who exposed a Law Lord's link with Amnesty International - linking General Pinochet's trial.

The Chilean aristocrat, who has introduced Prince Charles to Camilla Parker Bowles 20 years ago, "watched" on Lord Hoffmann because of her mother's relationship to Pinochet's trial.

She was told about Lord Hoffmann's work with the human rights charity at Prince Charles's 40th birthday party at Highgrove on November 11.

The Prince's godfather to one of Santa Cruz's children.

Eleven days later the Law Lord said that Pinochet's extradition to Spain for the murder and torture of Spanish citizens during his 1973 military coup was legal.

Santa Cruz, Prince Charles's first godfather, and Pinochet's Chilean legal team of the group who had picked up. They passed it on to their British counterparts, who filed for an appeal.

A source in Chile said: "She is very proud that it was her information that saved Pinochet."

Sunday Mirror, 31 January 1999.

TH: It was an extraordinary effort. And all of it, it wasn't automatic. All of it was time, effort, no sleep, energy.

AMP: It was every night. Everybody. It was freezing cold outside the Parliament. But we had some soup made with leftovers...that Kiko, the owner of El Vergel restaurant, used to bring every night to help us to stay there. And during the day, different people used to come with flags, with coffee, tea, things like that, for those that had been there longer than them. And everything was done from our own pockets. We didn't have any help from anywhere else. So, every publicity, everything that we did, even to hire the buses to take us to Wentworth Estate every Saturday, we had to pay from our own pocket. Nobody was helping us with that. Except once...somebody from Switzerland...sent us enough money to pay for one Saturday to hire one of those buses.

*

TH: As this is the 50th anniversary of the coup, can I ask you what this anniversary means to you?

AMP: To me, 50 years means 50 years of the death of democracy in my country. Because [although] for the last 33 years we have had – inverted commas – democracy in Chile, it really hasn't been the kind of democracy where people can live freely, where the country, its resources are [for] the service of the people. So, all this is just 'un espejismo' [a mirage], it's not reality. Because as I said, for 50 years, [we have lived with] the death of democracy and impunity, the worst scene of this is the impunity...that started with Patricio Aylwin [who said] that we [were] going to have justice 'en la medida de lo posible' [as far as possible]...But don't expect too much. But don't expect too much; 'en la medida de lo posible' meant impunity and immunity for the criminals. So, to me this 50 years is 50 years of constant struggle to denounce, constant struggle to keep on denouncing, the atrocities that took place, to keep the memories of my brothers and sisters alive.