

Political and Economic Relations between Czechoslovakia and the Military Regimes of the Southern Cone in the 1970s and 1980s

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Based on unpublished archival documents, this work analyses the relations between Czechoslovakia and the military regimes in Argentina (1976–1983), Uruguay (1973–1985) and Chile (1973–1989). Besides Czechoslovakia, attention is also devoted to the Soviet Union which had a significant influence on Czechoslovakia's foreign policy during this period. The first section discusses the reasons why Moscow adopted completely different policies towards these seemingly similar governments. Other sections are then dedicated to political relations Czechoslovakia maintained to the aforementioned countries. The final section assesses the economic relations between Czechoslovakia and the military regimes of the Southern Cone states.

Keywords: International Relations, Military Regimes, Southern Cone, Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union



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Introduction

The installation of military regimes in Latin American during the second half of the 20th century was a part of a complex process which should be understood in the context of Cold War tensions between the proverbial “East” and “West.” Influenced by the success of the Cu-

ban Revolution in the 1960s, the US launched a fierce offensive on the American continent against the advances of the USSR-led bloc which would include both, more or less, acceptable or reasonable measures within the capitalist framework and resorted to organised violence. By the military regimes of the Southern Cone in the 1970s and 1980s this work understands the governments in Uruguay from 1973–1985, Chile from 1973–1989 and Argentina from 1976–1983. The ideological backbone of these governments was the North American “National Security Doctrine” which stated that the army was obliged to intervene if there was a threat by an internal enemy. The involvement of army officers in politics by means of coups d’état which were motivated by the elimination of the left-wing subversion and the establishment of political and economic stability resulted in “state terrorism” and the implementation of new socioeconomic models.

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Although there was a certain degree of resemblance among the military regimes in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, the ideologically antagonistic countries of the Eastern bloc made distinctions between them. How is it possible that in Eastern Europe General Augusto Pinochet was presented as the “bloodiest” dictator of Latin America, while the crimes of the Argentine military junta, which claimed considerably more victims, were practically ignored? Why did the countries of the Eastern bloc maintain relations with Uruguay if they labelled the ruling civil-military regime as a ‘fascist civil-military dictatorship,’ often adding that ‘in essence, it is not different from the fascist dictatorship in Chile?’ These questions will be answered in the first part of this work which analyses Moscow’s interests in the stated countries. The subsequent sections, based on archival materials, analyses the example of Czechoslovakia, i.e. political and economic relations of this country with the military governments of the Southern Cone.

Soviet Interests:

Reasons for Maintaining or Suspending Relations

From its very beginnings, the USSR perceived Latin America as a sphere of US influence and its interests in the region reflected this and were limited. However, relatively more attention was paid to the Southern Cone countries which traditionally belonged to more socially and economically developed countries in the region. Argentina showed great

economic potential, Chile had the most robust communist party on the continent and Uruguay was of strategic importance for the USSR.

Throughout the 1960s, relations with Argentina were tense, though an easing of tensions began in the early 1970s at roughly the same time that the USSR's attention focused on developments in Chile, where, following the election of Salvador Allende (1970 [1973]), the two countries enjoyed close relations. Despite scepticism of the so-called "Chilean experiment" caused by divisions within the government coalition as well as by the pressure of domestic and foreign opposition, Chile became – after Cuba – the most significant political (not economic) partner of the Eastern bloc in Latin America. This resulted in a number of bilateral contracts and cultural agreements being signed though many remained confined to the paper they were printed on and did not materialise into functioning engagements. The same could be said of the financial aid granted by the Eastern bloc to Allende's government; it was minimal and therefore insufficient.

Uruguay was, from the mid-1950s, in the midst of a severe economic crisis which later transformed into political paralysis. On 27 June 1973 Uruguayan Armed Forces seized power, although (then) President Juan María Bordaberry officially remained in office. Both chambers of parliament and trade unions were dissolved and members of the left-wing were violently persecuted. Despite this, the USSR did not suspend relations and renouncing its positions in the country and acted in the same pragmatic manner as it did in the case of Brazil, nine years previously.

On Chile

On 11 September 1973, soon after the coup d'état in Uruguay, the allied government of Allende in Chile was overthrown. Ten days later (21 September 1973), the USSR suspended diplomatic relations with Chile as did the other countries of the Eastern bloc with the sole exception of Romania.¹ The suspension of relations was not a clear-cut decision for the Soviet leadership which, over the following ten days, faced a fundamental dilemma since the Minister of External Relations, Andrei Gromyko, and his staff, opposed such a suspension. However, several ideologues from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR held a different opinion and Mikhail Suslov and Boris

Ponomarev advocated a full diplomatic freeze emphasising that Chile was not of significant economic or strategic importance to the USSR.² And there was the much propaganda value for the USSR in the Chilean coup. Indeed, Allende's death as a communist "martyr," followed by severe anti-left repressions, coupled with the US's explicit role helped garnish international support for the USSR while diverting attention away from the violation of human rights in the USSR itself and did much to rehabilitate the USSR's public image following the 1968 Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia.

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Soon afterwards, a massive campaign was launched in the communist countries, which presented Augusto Pinochet as an exponent of modern fascism supported by the US. This propaganda campaign proved to be extremely successful as human rights abuse in Chile drew more attention of the international press than regimes with undoubtedly more victims. Thus, Pinochet was often regarded as the most brutal dictator of Latin America, despite the fact that this reputation was to a great extent unjustified and exaggerated.

In the Machiavellian thinking of communist propaganda it was necessary to create an antipole to Pinochet; Allende was presented as a murdered martyr and became one of the most popular left-wing icons in Latin America as well as in leftist circles in Western Europe. A similar fate awaited songwriter Victor Jara and a few days following the Chilean coup he was murdered at the National Stadium and his death evoked a strong response among artists. As Allende was a representative of a socialist party, Moscow sought to create a secondary heroic cult of a communist leader, who could be better identified with its ideology. Luis Corvalán, a general secretary of the communist party, who was following the coup imprisoned on the Dawson Island in the Strait of Magellan together with several former ministers of Allende's government, seemed to be a perfect choice. The image of Corvalán as a martyr and a symbol of resistance were created on the basis of exaggeration of his moral qualities and vivid depiction of his detention.

On Argentina

At the time of Allende's fall, the attention of Moscow had already been focused on Argentina, where in the spring of 1973 Peronists, after almost two decades, resumed power. Argentina together with Brazil

showed the greatest potential for the development of relations, and in the mid-1970s, the USSR became the greatest purchaser of Argentine goods. The USSR followed the escalating political radicalisation and deepening economic crisis with growing tension and was aware that any possibility of intervening in the course of events was faint. In the given situation, a military intervention against the non-functional government seemed inevitable.

The military coup of 24 March 1976 was well-received as the group around Jorge Rafael Videla was in Moscow regarded as a “democratic wing” protecting the polity against the spread of fascism which could lead to “another Chile.”³ This is also confirmed by an analysis of possible prospects of mutual relations drawn up by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 1976 where it was noted that

It can be assumed that if General Videla and his government stay in power, the current level of relations will be kept. However, its deterioration cannot be ruled out, should a violent coup by right-wing or fascist forces occur in the country, as the influence of these forces on the overall development of the country is evident.⁴

The military government in Argentina declared war on subversion framed in terms of the national security doctrine and named it the National Reorganisation Process. Unlike the junta in Chile, the aim of this government was not the elimination of the Communist party, but of radical left-wing groups, with whose ideas the USSR did not identify. The main reasons of the tolerant or even friendly approach of the USSR to the Argentine government lay in its economic and strategic orientation. In line with the government, Soviet analysts also firmly refused the comparison with the Chilean coup and, by contrast, pointed out its legitimacy in tackling the serious economic situation of the country and suppressing far-right *and* far-left groups. On 03 April Moscow, followed by other states of the Eastern bloc, recognised the new Argentine government. Castro's Cuba – at that time under heavy Soviet influence – followed this example and, for the first time, recognised a Latin American right-wing military government. The junta in Argentina thus maintained diplomatic relations with all socialist countries with the exception of North Korea.

Czechoslovakia's Relations to the Southern Cone States

Czechoslovakia and Chile

Czechoslovakia broke off diplomatic relations with Chile two weeks after the coup, on 25 September 1973. Following the Soviet example, Czechoslovakia launched a massive campaign denouncing the events in Chile. Besides the activities in support of Luis Corvalán, Czechoslovakia was also the co-author of the motions for resolutions concerning the restoration of human rights and the request for the liberation of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Clodomir Almeyda. Both resolutions were approved by the UN General Assembly on 6 November 1974.⁵ Centres of solidarity with Chile were established at all Czechoslovak universities and telegrams protesting against the military government as well as calling for the support of prominent figures were sent.⁶ The International Conference of Solidarity, held in Paris in June 1974 and chaired by Francois Mitterrand, contributed to the establishment of the most important organisation in support of Chile: the Czechoslovak Committee for the Defence of the Chilean People's Rights. The committee appointed Ján Marko, a deputy and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, as the first president.⁷ In addition to promotional activities (lectures, exhibitions, leaflets), the committee cooperated closely with the Czechoslovak Radio and the Czechoslovak News Agency. Since September 1973, Radio Praga broadcasted a programme called *Chile Acusa y advierte* (Chile Accuses and Warns) for 5–15 minutes daily.⁸ Other radio programmes were broadcasted to Chile from Moscow, Berlin and Havana.

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Songs were a particularly popular form of propaganda at the time. Czechoslovak music propaganda is mainly associated with the Festival of Political Song in Sokolov, which was held annually from 1973 to 1988. The second edition took place less than a half year after the Chilean coup and was strongly associated with this event; it was called "Solidarity with Chile" and a guitar with a clenched fist became the symbol of the festival.⁹

In January 1975, Hortensia Allende, widow of the former president living in exile in Mexico, during her visit of Prague complained that Czechoslovakia had accepted only a small number of Chilean exiles.¹⁰ The leader of Chilean socialists, Carlos Altamirano, also criticised the

attitude of Czechoslovakia at a conference held in Berlin in February 1974. He said that Czechoslovakia, unlike other socialist countries, provided Chile only with verbal aid.¹¹ It was true that in the first days following the coup that Czechoslovakia's diplomatic mission in Santiago did not grant many requests for asylum. Any potential applicant had to receive a recommendation by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Chile, which then had to be approved by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Other requests had no chance of success. However, this decision also depended on Moscow. Czechoslovakia, where many Latin American students expressed their support for the reform movement known as the Prague Spring and denounced the invasion by the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968 (so did the leadership of the Socialist Party of Chile), was not regarded as a suitable destination by the Soviets.

Nevertheless, Czechoslovakia later accepted several Chilean communists who worked in international organisations seated in Prague. The most prominent members of the Communist Party of Chile resided in Moscow. However, if they were dismissed from the Central Committee, a new job was proposed to them in another country. Prague seemed to be an ideal choice in this respect, because it seated numerous international left-wing organisations. José Oyarce, a former Minister of Finance and Economy in Allende's government, moved from Moscow to Prague to become a coordinator of the PCCN's activities in Czechoslovakia.¹² Another example is Luis Figueros, who worked there at the secretariat of the World Federation of Trade Unions.¹³ Mireya Baltra, who in 1972 replaced Oyarce as a minister in Allende's government, also worked in this organisation. In 1975 she settled in Prague, where she promoted world solidarity with Chile. After nine years, she moved to Cuba and returned to her home country in secrecy in 1987.¹⁴ Czechoslovakia was the destination of Chilean artists as well, such as the dancer Gastón Baltra and songwriter and poet Osvaldo "Gitano" Rodríguez.

Czechoslovakia's policy towards Chile was not limited to expressing solidarity and using the coup for propaganda purposes only. The claims made by Carlos Altamirano that Prague provided Chile, unlike other socialist countries, only with a verbal aid, are not accurate especially in view of the activities of the Czechoslovak secret services (Altamirano was not aware of them). In fact, Czechoslovakia granted

the request of the GDR and in cooperation with its *rezidentura* carried out activities in support of Chilean communists. The main reason of the East German involvement in the country was the personal interest of the chief state and party official Erich Honecker in the fate of the persecuted opposition. His daughter Sonia married Leandro Yañez, a close friend of Carlos Altamirano, the general secretary of the Chilean Socialist Party and the leader of its radical wing.¹⁵ The primary task of the East German intelligence service was to ensure communication between the members of the Communist Party of Chile (underground) and Europe. Their work did not have an entirely intelligence character, it resembled more of an international support. The materials which the GDR received from Chile were passed on to the head of the international department of the PCCM and then were sent to the Central Committee of the party in Moscow.¹⁶

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Under *Operation Andromeda*, three Czechoslovak agents worked in Chile from 1975, issuing false passports. In the event that East German agents were expelled, they were supposed to assume their roles. However, this never happened and Czechoslovak agents never engaged in direct cooperation. After 1977, Chilean communists began to return to their homeland and the party leadership requested that material support was focused on the internal conflict.¹⁷ The East German intelligence service thus ceased to be the only communications channel and its importance gradually diminished. Under the mutual agreement of February 1980, *Operation Andromeda* was concluded by the end of the year after five years and the Czechoslovak *rezidentura* was liquidated.

In the late 1970s, the attention of USSR shifted to events which had more geopolitical importance (Iran, Afghanistan) or prestige (the Olympic Games in Moscow). The gradual decline in the significance of the Chilean issue meant that the country practically disappeared from Czechoslovakia's official documents. More attention is focused on Chile only in 1988 in connection with its democratisation. Following Pinochet's 1988 referendum defeat political tensions significantly eased.

Czechoslovakia and Uruguay

After the civil-military government came to power in June 1973, Prague assigned the Czechoslovak embassy with the task of

maintaining and, as circumstances allow, expanding the relations with the current and new officials. Contact with the progressive opposition, mainly the Communist Party of Uruguay, should be cultivated in order not to interfere with and threaten the position of the Czechoslovak diplomatic mission.¹⁸

Government officials in Uruguay did not officially act against any socialist country and there were no provocative or hostile actions in mutual relations. This task was performed, instead, by the mass media, which published a long string of negative articles about Czechoslovakia such as mysterious weapons caches of Czechoslovak origin. Czechoslovak media coverage of Uruguay displayed similar tendencies.¹⁹

In an effort to eliminate subversion, the civil-military government turned Uruguay into a country with the highest number of prisoners, per capita, in Latin America. In a short time, several public buildings, old steamers and the stadium El Cilindro in Montevideo, which hosted the 1967 basketball world cup, were rebranded as prisons. Left-wing party officials were jailed as well, including the founder of Frente Amplio Líber Seregni and the general secretary of the Communist Party Rodney Arismendi. Both were released after a few months. While Seregni remained in Uruguay and was later arrested again, Arismendi went into exile in Moscow. In connection to their pardon, chargé d' affaires Kouřil attempted to evaluate the development of mutual relations:

The overall policy of the Uruguayan government towards the diplomatic mission may be characterised by seeking not to develop any contacts with the exception of economic contacts and only those which bring one-sided advantages to Uruguay or those which are necessary for the economy. In the oncoming period, the relations towards the diplomatic mission are expected to remain at the present level if no significant change occurs on the domestic political scene. After the events in Chile, the dictatorship is probably afraid of any steps which could lead to its isolation on an international level. This is indicated, among others, by the release of General Seregni and Arismendi, facilitated by a huge international campaign.²⁰

In August 1975, Arismendi visited Czechoslovakia with his wife for a three-week medicinal treatment. During the dictatorship, many of his articles were published in the *Rudé právo* newspaper. For example, the

25 October 1975 issue includes an in-depth interview about the politics, culture and human rights violation in Uruguay:

Bordaberry had no scruples about repeating the Hitlerian extreme and ordered to burn and destroy unwanted books and records. Thousands of books were destroyed, not only political ones, but also fundamental works of national and world philosophy. Over forty lorries full of books gathered at one place to dispose of the books. Traditional cultural institutes which cooperated with socialist countries were closed and their employees arrested. (...) The prison guards use brutal torture. They attach electric wires to the prisoners' genitalia, nose, the most sensitive parts of human body, immerse their heads into dirty, foul-smelling water, torture sons in front of their fathers, fathers in front of their sons.²¹

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Arismendi also refers to a decree on Marxist subversion issued on 6 June 1975 which prohibited the dissemination of 'subversive Marxist materials.' This regulation also applied to shipments of printed material from socialist countries and seized material was burnt in bulk. The bulletin of the Czechoslovak Embassy which was, until then, later distributed to Argentina and Bolivia ceased to be published and the diplomatic mission in Lima assumed responsibility for its publication.²²

As in the case of Chile, Czechoslovakia and other countries of the Eastern bloc became one of the major critics of human rights violation in Uruguay. Various organisations, such as the Central Trade Union Council, the Czechoslovak Women's Union, the Czechoslovak Union of Anti-fascist Resistance Fighters, the Czechoslovak Committee of Solidarity with the Nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Czechoslovak Red Cross, sent protest telegrams to Uruguay on a regular basis. The anniversary of the coup was commemorated on 26 July. On 13 December 1976, on the occasion of Liber Seregni's birthday, the Central Committee of the National Front issued a declaration which strongly denounced the 'terror and persecution of progressive and democratic forces in Uruguay and demanded an immediate release of general Liber Seregni and all other Uruguayan patriots held in prison.' The protests of the World Federation of Trade Unions and other international organisations based in Prague were presented in Uruguay as 'the protests of Prague' to create the impression that this is the opinion of Czechoslovak government officials which in this way intervened in

the internal affairs of the country. This is epitomised in the declaration of President Bordaberry from 2 March 1975, which appeared in all Uruguayan media.²³

In the late 1970s, tensions partly eased. As in the case of Argentina, such a thaw was caused by the deterioration of relations with the US which generated increased interest of Uruguay in East European markets. From January 1978, the Czechoslovak Embassy could again publish its monthly bulletin *Checoslovaquia actual* (approximately 130 copies), which became the only means of national promotion.²⁴ In February 1980, after a seven years absence, an ambassador was appointed as the head of the Uruguayan diplomatic mission in Prague. The commercial exchange increased, particularly Uruguayan exports to Czechoslovakia. This was reflected in the visit of Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade, Jaroslav Jakubec, in June 1982, which included the signing of a commercial agreement. This was the only visit at the highest level during the civil-military government.²⁵ Nevertheless, members of the Uruguayan opposition continued to visit Czechoslovakia. In May 1980, a delegation of the Broad Front headed by Hugo Villar visited Czechoslovakia and Rodney Arismendi paid an official visit three years later when President Gustáv Husák awarded him with the Order of Friendship on the occasion of his 70th birthday.²⁶

Czechoslovakia and Argentina

Human rights violations, which became a major foreign political topic of US President Jimmy Carter's administration, presented a serious obstacle at efforts to improve relations between Argentina and the US. The EEC countries also reduced their economic cooperation and joined the campaign pointing out the brutal methods of the Argentine government. Relations with Brazil were already cold mainly due to the Brazilian-Paraguayan agreement to build the Itaipu Dam. The protracted border disputes seriously deteriorated the relations with Chile. Argentina was facing international isolation and the situation called for a change in viewing the Eastern bloc.

The junta, which proclaimed itself as "pro-Western" and "anti-communist," was virtually forced to maintain and extend economic relations with socialist countries. These countries, in return, ignored the violations of human rights. At the time of rising pressures from the

West on the Argentine government, Moscow acted in its support and impeded sending a special investigation committee to Argentina. The Soviet Union was certainly aware of its own shortcomings in the human rights department. On the other hand, it is important to consider the massive propaganda campaign led by the USSR in support of the left wing in Chile and to a lesser extent also in Uruguay.

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Czechoslovak-Argentine relations were, in this period, limited almost exclusively to the economic area. Political relations were practically non-existent, with the exception of foreign ministers meeting at UN sessions. Although the Argentine government was not opposed to relations with leading government officials of the socialist countries, it strove to avoid publicity. The general rule was to publish only news agency reports taken from Western sources. Cultural programmes and sporting events constituted exceptions.²⁷ The Czechoslovak Embassy described the mutual relation many times as "correct." The 1977 reports, for example, stated that the 'attitude of Videla's government to Czechoslovakia remained correct and our diplomatic mission did not encounter any provocation or discrimination by the authorities throughout the year²⁸ [and that] This correctness of the military government, which can be characterised as moderate right-wing, is motivated mainly by Argentina's commercial interests.'²⁹ A 1979 report states that 'mutual relations are correct and it is possible to say that to a certain extent more favourable than towards some other countries of the socialist camp.'³⁰

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979) created a serious foreign policy dilemma: the Argentine government originally intended to support the North American proposal of trade embargo in exchange for abandoning the campaign which criticised human rights violation and lifting the embargo on weapon imports and granting credit.³¹ Although Argentina denounced the Soviet intervention at the UN and joined the boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow, when Washington refused to back its proposal, it took advantage of the situation. In July 1980, Argentina signed an agreement with the USSR on the purchase of 22.5 million tonnes of grain over the next five years. The following year, the parties agreed on an increase in the imports of Argentine meat to 100,000 tonnes. Carter's grain embargo was thus paralysed by the Argentine policy.³²

Moscow was well informed about the possibility of the invasion. Despite verbal support, the USSR acted cautiously in the diplomatic sphere and its primary effort was to avoid any direct intervention in the conflict.

1981 saw significant changes in the Argentine junta. In March Videla was replaced by Roberto Viola and in December Leopoldo Galtieri was appointed the Head of State. The new government decided to solve the decades-long conflict with the UK over the Falkland Islands. The acquisition of the islands was supposed to restore public support which was lost due to the extreme inflation, sharp decrease in real wages and political repressions. On 02 April, Argentina launched a military invasion of the islands. The next day, the UN adopted a resolution urging Argentina to withdraw its troops. The United Kingdom received support of the majority of European countries and on 16 April the EEC imposed economic sanctions on Argentina. On 04 June, the UN called for a truce. Nine states, including Poland and the USSR, voted in favour of the armistice which would imply *de facto* Argentinian retention of the islands. However, the UK's veto power ensured that the initiative did not have a chance of succeeding.³³ The result of the two-month conflict was the restoration of British administration over the islands.

Moscow was well informed about the possibility of the invasion. Despite verbal support, the USSR acted cautiously in the diplomatic sphere and its primary effort was to avoid any direct intervention in the conflict. This is also evidenced in the above-mentioned UN vote of 03 April when the USSR, despite its veto power, abstained. Confronting the UK could have had far-reaching political and economic impacts and Argentina, despite its support during the Afghan war, was simply not worth the trouble. Therefore, the USSR never confirmed having provided the Argentines with satellite images of the region and offering them the purchase of sophisticated weapons (including missiles and aircrafts).³⁴

In spite of the limited practical support, a massive propaganda campaign was conducted in the Eastern bloc. From May 1982 until the late 1980s, the documents of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs

on this issue always used the following sentence in the introduction: 'In compliance with the Soviet policy, Czechoslovakia considers the Malvinas dispute as a colonial anachronism and treats it as part of the complex issue of decolonisation as enshrined in the UN declaration of 1960 and other UN decisions.' Czechoslovak media covered the issue extensively. No other foreign event attracted more media attention in spring 1982. During the culminating events (22 May–2 June) the war appeared on the front page of the most important broadsheet *Rudé právo* every day. Between April and June, more than one third of the front pages of this newspaper were dedicated to this issue. The articles were clearly biased in favour of Argentina. The UK was labelled as an aggressor which was supported by the US.

It is interesting to observe the development of the name of the islands. In Czechoslovakia the Falklands was an established name which was used in maps and encyclopaedias, therefore it was commonly used at the beginning of the conflict. From mid-April, the *Rudé právo* newspaper began to use the Argentine equivalent in brackets after the British name – the Falklands (Malvinas). From late April, the name Malvinas came first – the Malvinas (Falklands) and in May the British name slowly started to disappear. Similarly, the name of the capital city underwent various changes. The original Port Stanley was replaced by Port Stanley (Puerto Argentino) and finally by Puerto Argentino. While on the maps from 08 April and 01 May the two main islands are labelled as West Falkland and East Falkland, on 25 May they are already labelled as Gran Malvina and Soledad. The *Rudé právo* newspaper strictly used the name Malvinas even when it referred to the UK government declarations. For example, a caricature published on 28 June, when the outcome of the war was already decided, depicts the UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at a reading desk with the caption 'The Prime Minister of the UK Government on an extraordinary session of the UN on disarmament: *I am sorry for the delay of my peace speech. I was held up by waging war on the Malvinas.*'³⁵

The approach of socialist countries to the resolution of the conflict was also an impulse to the improvement of mutual political relations.³⁶ Argentine President Reynaldo Bignone, who replaced Galtieri on 01 July due to the lost war, thanked the Czechoslovak President, Gustav Husák, for supporting the resolution on the Malvinas discussed in the UN. By their approach the Eastern bloc countries achieved that the an-

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ti-communist campaign in Argentine media eased and the Argentine public even warmed.³⁷ In contrast, the attitude of the US which during the war supported the UK side clearly showed their interest in the fall of the military regime and the formation of a new government which would act in line with their global intentions. For the junta, unsuccessful both in terms of politics and economy, this lost war was the final blow which triggered its transition towards democracy.

Economic Relations between Czechoslovakia and the Southern Cone

The following table dedicated to the commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Latin America (with the exception of socialist Cuba) from 1975–1981 reveals that anti-communist military regimes were major commercial partners of Czechoslovakia, i.e. Brazil (1964–1985) and Argentina (1976–1983). Other significant partners in this period were countries with authoritarian military governments in power; Bolivia, Ecuador (until 1979), Peru (until 1980) and Uruguay.

In contrast, Chile serves as an example of a country with which Czechoslovakia suspended all commercial exchanges when the mil-

Table 1.
Commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Latin America in 1975–1981 (in millions of USD)³⁸

<i>State (region)</i>	<i>Cz. export</i>	<i>Cz. import</i>	<i>Turnover</i>	<i>Cz. balance</i>
Argentina	233.1	237.0	470.1	-3.9
Bolivia	49.1	77.3	126.4	-28.2
Brazil	246.7	950.6	1,197.3	-703.9
Ecuador	40.0	70.3	110.3	-30.3
Chile	5.2	1.8	7.0	3.4
Colombia	42.5	90.0	132.5	-47.5
Mexico	113.3	60.5	173.8	52.8
Paraguay	6.7	2.4	9.1	4.3
Peru	66.5	141.7	208.2	-75.2
Uruguay	35.7	70.0	105.7	-34.3
Venezuela	121.2	27.3	148.5	93.9
Central America	39.4	84.8	124.2	-45.4
Caribbean	22.7	2.4	25.1	20.3
Latin America	1,022.1	1,816.1	2,838.2	-794.0

itary regime came to power (17 May 1974).³⁹ However, it may be remembered that Chile was never an important Latin American business partner of the Eastern bloc, therefore this gesture did not have serious consequences. In 1974, Czechoslovak exports decreased by more than 80%, yet it exceeded \$3,5 million (USD).⁴⁰ The majority of deals were concluded during the first half-year, that is before the government regulation banning trade with Chile. In later years, the reduction of Czechoslovak exports was even more dramatic. Czechoslovak-Chilean commercial exchanges were, until the late 1980's, minimal.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Eastern bloc countries sought to keep minimum commercial contacts as a pretext to maintain their representatives in the country.⁴² As the Chilean military government was interested in establishing business contacts with communist countries, except for the USSR and Cuba, the Czechoslovak affiliate TRACO did not encounter any serious problems with Chilean authorities and could continue its work in the country.

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A different example is Uruguay, where commercial exchanges substantially increased. The civil-military government could not afford to lose its markets in the socialist countries and strove to maintain correct relations. This situation is described in the 1975 report of the Czechoslovak embassy in Montevideo:

The countries of the socialist camp are important potential markets for Uruguay, as confirmed by the relatively large number of purchases in some of them in 1974, the USSR and Czechoslovakia in particular. Nevertheless, the Bordaberry government understands the trade with these countries completely unilaterally. It strives to sell a maximum amount of goods without creating conditions for the export of the countries of the socialist camp in return. Although it does not place obstacles of utterly discriminatory nature in the way, the technical-administrative barriers remain (difficulties with currency exchange, delays with obtaining visa etc).⁴³

Uruguay continued to be an interesting business partner for Czechoslovakia, which aimed to maintain the relations due to favourable purchases of wool and leather. On the basis of a 1970 agreement, a Czechoslovak-Uruguayan affiliate Kara-Sur specialising in sheepskin processing started to operate in September 1973. Another Czechoslovak project in Uruguay was the assembly of Babetta and Jawa 350 mo-

<i>Year</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Turnover</i>	<i>Balance</i>
1973	0.9	8.3	9.2	-7.4
1974	1.7	11.7	13.4	-10.0
1975	1.7	6.6	8.3	-4.9
1976	1.7	6.7	8.4	-5.0
1977	2.7	10.5	13.2	-7.8
1978	1.4	9.6	11.0	-8.2
1979	4.4	8.6	13.0	-4.2
1980	15.1	12.3	27.4	2.8
1981	9.3	15.5	24.7	-6.2
1982	1.0	9.1	10.1	-8.1
1983	0.4	12.1	12.5	-11.7
1984	0.5	15.6	16.1	-15.1
1985	0.5	18.0	18.5	-17.5

Table 2.
Commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Uruguay in 1973–1985 (in millions of USD)⁴⁶

torcycles launched in 1974, 1975 respectively. The advertising notice about their Czechoslovak origin was due to political reasons only used for the first time in 1978.

The majority of Uruguayan imports to the Eastern bloc comprised of raw wool. The USSR, Czechoslovakia and the GDR were, besides the UK, the greatest importers of this material. In 1977, Czechoslovakia was the third greatest importer.⁴⁴ In the first half of 1979, Czechoslovakia began exporting tractors to Uruguay, which had been prohibited until then. Between 1979–1981 they became the main export article and contributed to the increase in Czechoslovak exports. In 1980, Czechoslovakia even achieved a positive trade balance. Nevertheless, the following year the imports of tractors were suspended by the Uruguayan government. In June 1982, a trade agreement was signed between the two countries which replaced the 1955 agreement.⁴⁵ In the 1980s, Uruguayan exports to Czechoslovakia reached relatively high figures; In 1981, the Uruguayan Banco de la República granted a credit of \$4.5 million (USD) to Czechoslovakia to encourage exports. In 1984, Czechoslovakia surpassed the USSR and became the greatest importer of Uruguayan wool purchasing approximately 27% of Uruguayan wool exports.

Under the Peronist government in Argentina (1973–1976), a number

of significant documents were signed which held promise for future cooperation. Minister José Ber Gelbard, in particular, advocated the orientation at the socialist markets. In spring 1975, the President issued decrees on the import of Czechoslovak energy facilities.⁴⁷ Czechoslovakia won contracts for the thermal power stations La Plata 2x22MW amounting to \$3.2 million (USD), Rio Turbio 2x50MW amounting to \$8.7 million (USD) and the hydroelectric power station Los Reyunos 2x112MW amounting to \$13.1 million (USD). Other new contracts included the thermal power station Güemes-Salta 1x25 MW amounting to \$8.3 million (USD) and the hydroelectric power station Agua del Toro 2x65MW, received by the foreign trade organisation Škodaexport in an international competition in 1975. The contract for the hydroelectric power station Alicurá amounting to \$27 million (USD), initially granted to Czechoslovakia, became the subject of protracted negotiations. In case of realisation it would have been the greatest Czechoslovak power plant exported to Latin America.⁴⁸

The military government sought to limit economic relations with socialist countries to the bare minimum. Therefore, the Minister of the Economy, José Martínez de Hoz, attempted to challenge the validity of the documents concluded with the Eastern bloc stating that they were not ratified by Congress. As a result, the Czechoslovak contract for the Alicurá power plant was cancelled⁴⁹ and Argentina's plan of energy development was postponed. Nonetheless, the loss of support by the West and the negative economic situation of the country did not allow Argentina to sever its ties with the Eastern European market. In 1977, several contracts concluded during the Peronist government were executed and the Czechoslovak trade with Argentina reached a favourable trade balance after many years. Thanks to the imports of machinery the affiliate Škoda Platense achieved an exceptional position.

In 1978, machinery accounted for approximately 95% of Czechoslovak exports and almost 100% of purchases comprised raw materials. Argentinian exports consisted mainly of feed, raw wool, half-tanned leather and vegetable oils. Argentina tried to diversify its exports to socialist countries with other traditional export articles, which had lost access to West European markets (tobacco, fruit, wine). Czechoslovakia thus became the leading purchaser of lemons.⁵⁰ The improvement of mutual relations was confirmed on 13 December 1978 when the

Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Trade, Andrej Barčák, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlos Washington Pastor, signed an agreement on economic and scientific-technical cooperation. In November 1980, an interbank credit agreement was signed between the Czechoslovak Commercial Bank and the National Bank for Development in Argentina, under which Argentina was granted a credit of \$5 million (USD) for the purchase of Czechoslovak machinery and Banco Central provided Czechoslovakia with a \$20 million (USD) credit for the purchase of Argentinian consumer goods. In February 1982, the validity of the credit agreement was extended for other two years.⁵¹

The 1981 turnover ranked Argentina first in the commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Latin America due to the purchases of industrial facilities (with more than an 88% share of the Škodaexport organisation of foreign trade). Czechoslovakia continued to participate in the Argentine power industry, nevertheless, the impact of the economic crisis, high debt which required reducing investments and the war with the UK resulted in a drop in the commercial exchange after 1982. A number of contracts for Czechoslovak articles were cancelled. A soaring inflation (500% devaluation of peso against dollar) was greatly increasing the cost of Czechoslovak exports. The repercussions of the critical economic situation are described in the report of the Czechoslovak trade department:

The structure, form and organisation of the current representation through Škoda Platense and the extent of the costs associated with running the trade activities of the affiliate under the current economic situation in Argentina lead only to an increase in expenses and losses without guaranteeing any solution of the situation by means of the affiliate's own resources.⁵²

Trade with Argentina had mainly strategic importance for the countries of the Eastern bloc and its benefit was to be seen in the long term.

In October 1983, a Czechoslovak government delegation headed by the Minister of Foreign Trade, Bohumil Urban, visited Argentina. Its main objective was to push through the construction of the power station Luján de Cuyo IV before the civil government came to power. The negotiations were successful and in accordance with the agreement Czechoslovakia was supposed to have a \$60 million (USD) share in the construction of the industrial facility valued at some \$120 million

<i>Year</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Turnover</i>	<i>Balance</i>
1974	10.1	21.0	31.1	-10.9
1975	9.1	14.9	24.0	-5.8
1976	7.4	18.7	26.1	-11.3
1977	25.3	24.4	49.7	0.9
1978	36.0	37.9	73.9	-1.9
1979	26.3	49.5	75.8	-23.2
1980	30.5	44.1	74.6	-13.6
1981	98.6	47.7	146.3	50.9
1982	36.3	34.1	70.4	2.2
1983	14.9	28.5	43.4	-13.6
1984	7.5	92.8	100.3	-85.3
1985	4.2	57.9	62.1	-53.7

(USD).⁵³ During the delegation's visit, the power station Luján de Cuyo III 125 MW was put into operation. At the official commissioning of the plant the Argentinian Energy Minister highlighted the role of Czechoslovakia as a significant economic partner and praised the Czechoslovak political stance during the Falklands conflict. Urban then mentioned that in order to increase exports to Argentina it is necessary to increase imports.⁵⁴

The participation of socialist countries in Argentina's commercial exchange was approximately one third in 1983. Argentina was mainly interested in purchasing technologies, machinery for the food industry, petrochemical industry, gas pipelines and hydraulic structures.⁵⁵ Due to its high debt, the country maintained compensatory relations after 1983. Between 1981-1984 three thermal power stations and two hydroelectric power stations constructed with the participation of Czechoslovakia were commissioned. Czechoslovakia also earned a reputation for competence in textile and metalworking machinery.

Conclusion

The foreign policy of the USSR and other Eastern bloc countries, was distinct towards the various military regimes and was guided by entirely pragmatic interests. As Chile was not of much significant economic

Table 3. Commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Argentina in 1974-1985 (in millions of USD)⁵⁶

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or strategic importance, Moscow could resort to a political gesture and suspend relations with the Pinochet's regime. Other countries, with the exception of Romania, followed this decision. Events in Chile were then used as a powerful propaganda tool by the communist regimes. As regards to Uruguay, despite the campaign pointing out human rights violations, Eastern bloc countries maintained active economic relations with the military regime. The importance of Uruguay lay primarily in the favourable purchases of leather and wool. Closest relations were maintained with the military government of Argentina; the East European public remained largely unaware of the massive human rights violations that occurred there. Due to the economic crisis and the loss of the US and West European support, the anti-communist government in Argentina was forced not only to maintain relations with the Eastern Bloc, but paradoxically extend them as well. Therefore, Czechoslovak-Argentine economic relations developed immensely, particularly thanks to the imports of Czechoslovak energy facilities.

The way, in which the authoritarian regimes were for many years presented to the Czechoslovak public, contributed to the difficulties of an objective analysis after 1989. The crimes of the Argentine military junta, as well as of other Latin American governments characterised by brutal repressions, are still partly overshadowed by the controversial figure of Augusto Pinochet who is seen as their symbol. On the other hand, several right-wing groups in the Czech Republic and other post-communist countries started to acknowledge him as a president who had saved his country from communism and view the repressions of the military government as a necessary evil or regrettable mistakes representing an indispensable part of the fight against communism.

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Notes

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