

***In memoriam* of the President of Chile, physician and public health practitioner, Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens on the fiftieth anniversary of the coup d'état and his passing**

On a day like today, September 11, but 50 years ago, the democratically elected government led by Dr. Salvador Allende and the people of Chile suffered a military coup that violently overthrew it, resulting in thousands of deaths, including that of President Allende, thousands of “disappearances”, and the imprisonment of thousands more. In 1990 the military dictatorship ended and since then Chile has transitioned back to democracy.

Dr. Salvador Allende was not only a political leader, but also a physician and public health practitioner whose thinking was anchored in the social determinants of health and disease, to whom we owe one of the first texts on the social determinants of disease in our Continent, "The Socio-Medical Reality of Chile [La Realidad Médico-Social de Chile]" [1], which he wrote as Minister of Health in the government of President Pedro Aguirre Cerda in 1939.

In the text of "The Socio-Medical Reality of Chile", Dr. Allende wrote that two of the most important determinants of health are: salaries or income of salaried workers and how they spend their salary, determining the standards of living, conclusions very similar to that of other epidemiologists of the continent such as Dr. George Comstock of the Department of Epidemiology at Johns Hopkins [2]. One can reason that the differences in epidemiological thinking over time and between different latitudes are more apparent than real.

Likewise, Allende pointed out that the provision of health services directed at individuals without considering the more general determinants are rather ineffective.

As Senator of the Republic of Chile in 1953, he promoted legislation creating the Chilean National Health Service, which was greatly boosted between 1970 and 1973 during his administration, promoting investments in basic sanitation and immunization programs whereby one million doses of Sabin vaccine against poliomyelitis were administered in a single day, more than ten years ahead of the National

Immunization Days adopted by the Pan American Health Organization. Likewise, Dr. Allende's government applied specific programs for the integrated management of diarrhea and pneumonia in children, and nutritional supplementation programs, the "half liter of milk" program for all children under 18 years of age, again 15 years ahead of the child survival programs promoted in the 1980s by UNICEF.

Time has proven Dr. Allende right, for according to the Ottawa Declaration for the Promotion of Health "The basic conditions and resources for health are peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice and equity. Improvement of health requires an assured foundation in these basic prerequisites" [3]. The existence of a democratic and representative state is fundamental to creating these basic conditions. Moreover, a functional state, as Dr. Stephen Thacker of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) wrote [4], is a prerequisite for the existence of public health surveillance and one can add the existence of effective public health programs.

In the memory of public health professionals and epidemiologists who lived through the democratic triumph of the progressive and sovereign government of Dr. Allende, the legacy of his work and life that we celebrate today lives on.

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## **Referencias**

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