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Scottish workers' act of solidarity in Chile struggle

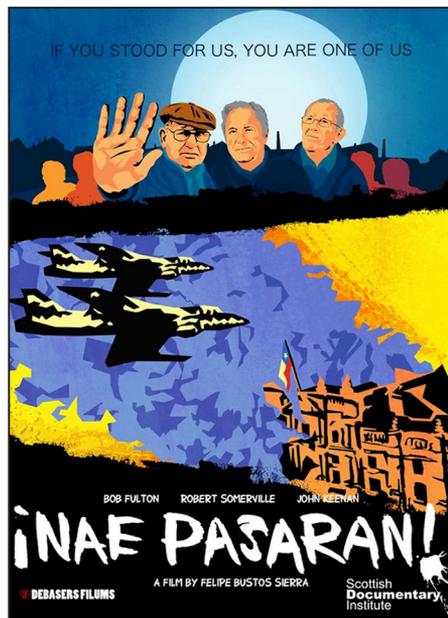
Nae Pasaran. Documentary directed by Felipe Bustos Sierra. BBC Scotland/Conejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes/Creative Scotland. 2018. 96 minutes.

IN 1973, the Chilean military, with the encouragement of US President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the collusion of the CIA, overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende.

In the years that followed, tens of thousands of people were murdered, detained and tortured by the regime, which became increasingly brutal in its repression of opposition. Hundreds of Chileans fled abroad, aided and abetted by foreign governments, trades union and church organisations.

Even the New Zealand Embassy in Santiago briefly—and reluctantly—gave shelter to a Chilean trades union leader before handing him over to Swedish diplomats.

It was an era when any kind of political immorality seemed possible. Two years after the coup, in 1975, Nixon and Kissinger gave Indonesia the go-ahead for the invasion of East Timor. That same year the CIA in Sydney kept in close touch with Governor-



General John Kerr in the lead up to his dismissal of the Whitlam government.

However, this was also a time when workers' unions had the power to take a stand on issues as a sign of international solidarity against oppression. Around the world trades union rallied in solidarity with the workers and ordinary people of Chile.

Nae Pasaran tells the story of one such struggle in Scotland, where workers in the East Kilbride Rolls-Royce plant refused to work on Avon engines from the Hawker Hunter squadrons of the Fuerza Aérea de Chile. East Kilbride was the only place in the world where the Avon engines were maintained.

The Hunters had been used in the attack on the presidential palace in which Allende died and without maintenance they would eventually be grounded.

When the Rolls-Royce workers at East Kilbride realised they were being asked to work on Chilean engines they immediately declared them black. The engines were put into crates and stored outside where they rapidly deteriorated.

Four of the engines were stolen in the middle of the night and subsequently four Hunters were able to fly back to Chile. Claims are raised in the film that the return of the engines was part of a deal to release seven political prisoners, but there is no proof of this and none of the Roll-Royce workers were involved.

This film explores the links between the long running act of solidarity in Scotland and the detainees in Chile. For those detained by the fascist regime in Chile, every act of solidarity was vital as it raised their spirits and put pressure on the junta.

Director Felipe Bustos Sierra has done an astonishing job in bringing the two sides together and showing just how much the Scottish actions meant. It also demonstrates that what was, for the workers, a local action, had major repercussions on the other side of the world.

In 2015 the surviving workers were awarded the Order of Bernardo O'Higgins, Chile's highest award, for their act of solidarity. It's a deeply moving moment and indeed much of this remarkable film will invoke deep emotions as it reveals the suffering of the Chilean people under the fascist Pinochet regime and the determination with which the Rolls-Royce workers maintained their act of solidarity with fellow workers.

Links

The *Standard* website has links to the original 13 minute documentary that was used to raise money for the full length film and to a chapter from *No Truck with the Chilean Junta!: Trade Union Internationalism, Australia and Britain, 1973-1980*.

Nae Pasaran has been screened across the UK and at international film festivals. It was due to be released on DVD in June and can be ordered from the film's official site.

References

The Standard <https://thestandard.org.nz/solidarity/>

Nae Pasaran official film website <https://naepasaran.com>