

## Arrest Kissinger!

24 November 2014

“Arrest Kissinger!” read the ads that ran in 2012 in the *Tagesspiegel*, *Berliner Zeitung* and *taz*, the three daily newspapers in Berlin. A collaborative art event by the Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar and us, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights. Along with German and English versions, the ads also appeared in Spanish, Vietnamese, Khmer, Portuguese and Timorese dialects, i.e. the languages of the people living in countries where the population endured great suffering under former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s *realpolitik*. And for these policies he is still lauded by many today.

World renowned artist Jaar’s piece focuses primarily on his home country and the Pinochet dictatorship. It begins with a date: 11/9/1973, the day coup fighters began bombing the Moneda Palace in Santiago de Chile. A date that still carries a terrible significance for Chile, for Latin America as a whole and for the Left movement everywhere. It marks the moment when the states of the West made it clear that they were unwilling to accept a democratically elected socialist – Salvador Allende – as president of Chile.

Since then, the 11<sup>th</sup> of September has been etched in the Latin American consciousness as a reminder of the USA’s ultimate act of dominion. After 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, the date has of course come to be associated with the Al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington. And so it is an aching example of imperialist language usage when people in Latin America now hear the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 1973 being referred to merely as *Once de Septiembre chico*: the little 11<sup>th</sup> of September.

In “Searching For Mr. K” Jaar quotes from a recorded dialogue between Kissinger and President Richard Nixon on 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1973 about the putsch which had taken place in Chile five days earlier:

P: Hi Henry.

K: Mr. President.

P: Where are you. In New York?

K: No. I am in Washington. I am working. I may go to a football game this afternoon if I get through.

P: Good. Good. Well it is the opener. It is better than television. Nothing new of any importance ...?

K: Nothing of very great consequence. The Chilean thing is getting consolidated and of course the newspapers are bleeding because a pro-Communist government has been overthrown.

P: Isn’t that something? Isn’t that something?

K: I mean instead of celebrating, in the Eisenhower period we would be heroes.

The results of the military coup, which was supported by the calculated assistance of the USA: thousands dead, many, many thousands more tortured and exiled, the destruction for decades of democracy in Chile. “Nothing of very great consequence”, was the summary of events from Kissinger, a man who continues to be held in high regard, honored at countless gala events and most recently in Germany by *Der Spiegel*.

The University of Bonn and the German Ministry of Defense have gone one step further. In March 2014 they named a university professorship after this war criminal. Yes, those are the words I use to describe this man, even if by law he has not been found guilty. Kissinger continues to go unpunished and largely free from any prosecution. The laws in place at the time his crimes were committed did not allow for universal jurisdiction in criminal cases, as would be possible today. No investigations into his criminal contributions were held anywhere. In the USA, criminal proceedings against powerful political figures remain largely off-limits.

“Arrest Kissinger!” is thus more of a symbolic plea. But things are quite different for the Kissingers of today, as shown by the decision against former Liberian president Charles Taylor, whose active support of the rebel army in Sierra Leone saw him face charges at a UN tribunal for his role in human rights violations.