

MISSING

Thomas **Hauser**
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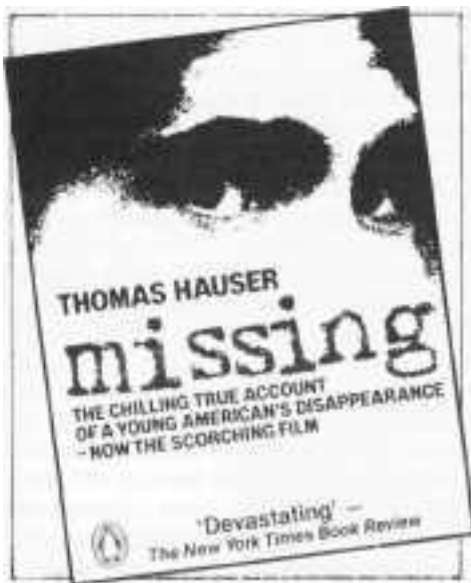
**ASSASSINATION
ON EMBASSY ROW**

John Dinges and Saul Landau
 Writers and Readers, 1981, hbk £6.95
ISBN 0906495 431

An unnerving symmetry emerges from these two books. One tells of Charles Horman, born in New York City, and murdered in the national stadium in Santiago, Chile within days of the coup of September 1973; the other of Orlando Letelier, a Chilean who was blown to bits in Washington DC in September 1976. These deaths, of a US citizen in Chile and of a Chilean in the USA, were linked by the thread of counter-revolution. In each case the Chilean government was directly responsible. And in each case, as the authors demonstrate, the State Department and the CIA were deeply implicated, in all probability having foreknowledge of each murder. Indeed, in Horman's case the only convincing explanation is that US representatives in Santiago planned and ordered his execution — a direct link having been established between the Chilean military and the US embassy. In the more complicated and protracted organisation of Letelier's death, the thread coiled around Chile, Paraguay and Miami before leading to the CIA in Langley, Virginia and Washington.

It's a neat irony, then, that it was due to the work of Hollywood (so frequently written off as the most infamous agent of US cultural imperialism) that Costa-Gavras was able to produce the film *of Missing* so that — to the discomfort of the State Department — the circumstances of Charles Horman's death could be relayed to a mass public.

It's not often, in its tenth year of fascism, that Chile hits the metropolitan media. The brutal shock of September 1973, Chile's cruellest spring, is unlikely to disappear from collective political memory for at least another generation. But aside from the catastrophic trauma of the defeat itself, the experience and political realities of dictatorship — as the Franco regime illustrated — don't make news. The labour movement is still torn to pieces; the terror, more selective and



highly-tuned than in the early years, is no less effective; and accelerating unemployment moves in line with the Chicago programme of cheap credit and an influx of consumer goods for the wealthy, marking a deepening social polarisation and immiseration. According to some estimates a tenth of Chile's population is now scattered throughout every city in Europe and North America, a diaspora in which thousand upon thousand endure the emotional and political pains of exile. Those Madison Avenue agencies employed by the Chilean state have done well, endeavouring to keep their client unobserved — an international football match, a minor earthquake, but little more. Even during the Falklands crisis the cynical deal between Mrs Thatcher and General Pinochet was wrapped so tight it barely touched the front pages or TV screens.

Missing, written by a Manhattan lawyer, derives from a radical, liberal Perry Mason tradition within the United States, one which concentrates above all on the constitutional rights of the individual citizen. This is both its strength and weakness. The book gives a potted, journalistic account of Popular Unity and its destruction (quoting the extraordinary document conjured up in the first days of Allende's government by Nixon, Kissinger and Helms, promising to 'make the Chilean economy scream'). It recounts Charles Horman's tourist trip on the eve of the coup to Vina, on the Pacific Ocean, during which he stumbled across a number of US counter-insurgency personnel who happened to brag to him about their work. This arbitrary chain of events appears to have been the major reason for his downfall. On his return to Santiago he was taken

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