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The fall of Chile's military leader has been turned into an Oscar-nominated movie starring Gael Garcia Bernal. By **Ed Stocker**

The dictator toppled by ad-men

hink most people around the orld know how Pinochet came o power," film director Pablo Larain says. "But I'm not sure many beople know how he was defeated. What happened was a fascinating mix of media, advertising and capitalism." Larrain's latest film, *No*, tells the absorbing advertising story behind the referendum and the strategists that brought down Chile's dictator.

In the late 1980s the leader had looked to soften his image and begun to swap his military attire for demure suits. Under pressure from the US – an ally that had backed his 1973 coup that toppled the democratically elected leftist president Salvador Allende – a vote was called. More importantly, for the first time in almost a generation, the opposition was granted 15 minutes of TV airtime a day in the leadup to the October date. Their task was to - and that they didn't need to be afraid to go out and vote.

The film, nominated in the Best Foreign Oscars, stars Gael Garcia Bernal as Rene fully sinister villain. Saavedra, the silky voiced adman leading the "No" campaign. It's a commanding lead performance from the Mexican actor *Babel*, and a welcome return to the pinsaid about 2011's A Little Bit of Heaven, cutting it with genuine newsreel. alongside Kate Hudson, the better).

Bernal's character has to come up with an ad campaign that strikes the right note. After battling with politicians who want the TV spots to be sombre reflections of society "could hurt itself so much". the horrors of the dictatorship, his vision wins out. The focus is to be entirely posisunny images and blond, smiling protago-"Happiness is Coming". The "Yes" camcentre stage. paign is left stymied.

the amalgamation of real-life characters to tell those sorts of stories often." Jose Manuel Salcedo and Eugenio Garcia, with some family issues thrown in for 'No' opens in UK cinemas on 8 February

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good measure (his estranged wife Veronica is played by Larrain's wife Antonia Zegers). Both Salcedo and Garcia have cameo roles in the film, but are cast against type, appearing as "Yes" campaign colluders.

The most blatant dramatisation is the role of Lucho Guzman, played by Alfredo Castro, Saavedra's advertising boss who also happens to be one of the junta's inner convince Chileans it was time for change circle. In real life, the two characters never worked under the same roof. But it provides a genuinely gripping extra dimension to the film; Guzman, star of Language Film category at this month's Larrain's two previous films, is a wonder-

Larrain is keen to point out that *No* is faithful to the key facts and how they unfolded. Using a 1983 U-matic video camera who rose to international fame in art- to give the film a grainy edge, Larrain clevhouse classics such as Amores Perros and erly splices drama with news footage. He also shot fresh footage of Chile's first postnacle of Latin American cinema after Pinochet president, Patricio Aylwin, at a some questionable recent choices (the less re-staged "No" campaign victory party,

No is the culmination of a trilogy based on the dictatorship – something Larrain says came about quite unwittingly. He says he was looking to answer how Chilean

The first two films in the series, *Tony Manero* and *Post Mortem* – both starring tive – a reflection of the sort of Coca Castro – used the dictatorship as a side-Cola-embracing free-market economy story to explore the complexities of the that Pinochet ironically helped nurture main characters. In the first film, Castro - used against him. The campaign comes plays the character of Raul Paralta, a John up with a multi-coloured, all-inclusive Travolta-obsessed serial killer; in the secrainbow logo while TV adverts use bright, ond he is an emotionally repressed morgue worker watching the bodies piling up. But nists, accompanied by the slogan that in *No*, the dictatorship suddenly takes

"Maybe those first two movies were The film uses a fair amount of artistic about people who were defeated," Larrain licence. Characters have been condensed muses. "But No is about a triumph and has and simplified and Saavedra is actually an epic quality. As a director, you don't get



Yes man: General Augusto Pinochet (above); Gael Garcia Bernal (left) in 'No', the dramatisation of the despot's political end CRIS BOURONCLE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

