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Latin American Trends

STAFF NOTES

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July 19, 1976

~~SECRET~~

150

Chile: More Image Building

The Chilean government is launching a new diplomatic campaign designed to promote better relations with other nations. Part of the reason for this is probably the stinging impact of the recent cutback in US military and economic aid [REDACTED]

Foreign Minister Carvajal is [REDACTED] scheduling a swing through Europe in early September with stops in Spain, France, West Germany, and the UK. The Chilean foreign ministry is eager to take advantage of the successful outcome of last month's Sixth General Assembly of the OAS in Santiago and the important gains in international respectability it has anticipated. There are a few indications that the furor over human rights in Chile is abating somewhat, and some Western European governments are taking a more conciliatory attitude in their dealings with Santiago.

Chile has entertained a succession of visitors recently--including officials from West Germany, Jordan, and Iran--for the purpose of strengthening diplomatic and economic ties. The Chilean press claims that a contract was signed with Iran for the purchase of enough petroleum to meet almost a quarter of Chile's import needs. There is a strong possibility that Santiago is also exploring opportunities for arms purchases, [REDACTED]

Among other actions intended to dramatize Chile's interest in obtaining more favorable treatment abroad, President Pinochet last week installed the 18-member council of state, an advisory body composed of two former presidents and other prominent persons. Formation of the council is widely regarded

July 19, 1976

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

150

as another public relations tactic, but its distinguished members could exert a moderating effect on the policies of the military government.

As another demonstration of its good intentions, the government [redacted] plans to promulgate four constitutional acts laying out the foundation for the "new democracy" envisioned by the junta. They will probably be announced on September 11--the third anniversary of the junta's assumption of power. The drafting of a new constitution has been under way for almost three years but no date has been set for its completion.

The four acts which will be an integral part of the new constitution deal with the following subjects:

1--Institutionality: A description of the nature of the regime, stressing the unitary character of the state and the principles of nationalism, humanism, and Christianity. It will also include the principle of "subordination"--the junta's view that the state exists to serve man, and not the contrary.

2--Nationality: A description of the privileges of Chilean nationality and the means of achieving or losing it.

3--Government Authority During Emergencies: A codification of rules regarding authorization of the state of siege and guidelines for the guarantee of habeas corpus (amparo) to individuals.

4--Human Rights: A compilation of 30 articles on human rights and the duties of citizens. This section, promised by Pinochet during the OAS meeting, has been billed as "one of the most advanced juridical instruments in modern history."

July 19, 1976

-8-
~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

While the issuance of the first portion of the constitution may constitute some modest advance in the regime's efforts to gain broader acceptance, it is unlikely to have much practical effect. Even if the state of siege is lowered another notch--and it seems likely to be on September 11--the personal guarantees spelled out in the new acts will probably not be fully implemented at that time. Nevertheless, the psychological impact may be such that security forces will exercise greater constraint in handling political prisoners and be more attentive to the protection of human rights. 

150

July 19, 1976

~~SECRET~~