



The National Intelligence Daily

Published by the Director of Central Intelligence for Named Principals Only

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Copy No. 116

RIDAY JULY 19, 1974

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1.5c Chilean Christian Democrats Approach Outright Opposition

A dispute over radio censorship is deepening the estrangement between Chile's military government and the Christian Democratic Party. It could drive the party into outright opposition.

Party president Aylwin early last

month sent a strongly worded letter of protest to the then interior minister when the government ordered the end of what it considered offensive programming at the major station of the Christian Democrats' radio network. The interior minister—whose military colleagues had criticized him for being "soft on the Christian Democrats"—in turn reprimanded Aylwin for engaging in conduct inappropriate for the leader of a "recessed" political group.

The government's decision to make both letters public may have been because of right-wing civilian advisers who have been trying to stir up trouble between the armed forces and the Christian Democrats.

the government yesterday issued a stern warning to the Christian Democrats. Secretary General of Government Ewing said that all necessary steps will be taken to enforce the political "recess" in effect in Chile, even if drastic measures are required. The party may take the opportunity to answer with yet another letter, this one to be signed by all former Christian Democratic congressmen.

Relations between the party and the government have approached the brink before, but up to now neither side has wanted to risk an open break. This time, however, the dispute appears to have taken on a momentum of its own and both sides may have gone too far to back down.

Movement of the Christian Democrats into opposition would seriously erode the military government's civilian support and have a negative impact on the junta's already poor international image. Former president Eduardo Frei plans to seek asylum at the Swiss embassy if the government outlaws the party.

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