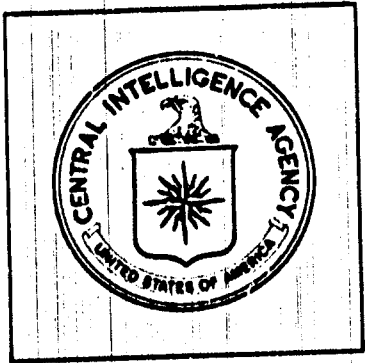


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# Latin American Trends

## STAFF NOTES

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Chile: Church-State Tensions Slacken

President Pinochet's decision to release a number of priests who were being detained for aiding fugitive terrorists has halted--at least for the moment--the steady decline in church-state relations over the past several months. Fundamental tensions remain, however, and the church is likely to remain an irritant to the regime.

15c

In making the amnesty gesture, Pinochet tacitly admitted that members of the clergy charged with harboring "criminals" might have been inspired by altruistic motives and sentiments of mercy. The President warned, nevertheless, that the government would not treat future offenders quite so generously. The Catholic Church had earlier agreed to dismantle the interdenominational Committee for Peace, which the government had strongly criticized for being pro-Marxist.

Cardinal Silva met with Pinochet on December 22 to inform the President about his recent trip to the US and Europe and to reiterate how poor Chile's image was abroad. Silva again stressed the Church's concern over the impact of the government's austerity measures on the Chilean people--a view that is shared by some junta members, particularly the outspoken General Leigh.

In his Christmas message several days later, the Cardinal urged the government to grant a general amnesty on New Years to all persons jailed for their political opinions who have not committed criminal acts. According to press sources, Pinochet intends to release 50 additional prisoners soon.

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[REDACTED] Pinochet's interior minister, General Cesar Benavides, is a major obstacle to improving relations. The minister is said to be a doctrinaire, stubborn individual who refuses to compromise; his obstinacy, which is not out of step with the puritanical Pinochet, probably accounts for a large measure of the regime's rigidity on the human rights issue. The interior ministry's rulings on detentions have frequently contributed to the bad press that Chile has received abroad. 15c

For instance, the two-month imprisonment of British national Dr. Sheila Cassidy for giving medical attention to an important terrorist leader is a glaring example of the government's shortsightedness. Dr. Cassidy, who claims to have been tortured, will no doubt see that her accusations are widely circulated in Western Europe, where public opinion is generally receptive to denunciations of Chilean human rights violations.

[REDACTED] the church-state difficulties as manifested by these problems are deep-rooted and that little change is in sight unless there is a basic shift in government attitudes. As far as we can see, that is unlikely anytime soon.

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