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Tuesday 25 July 1978



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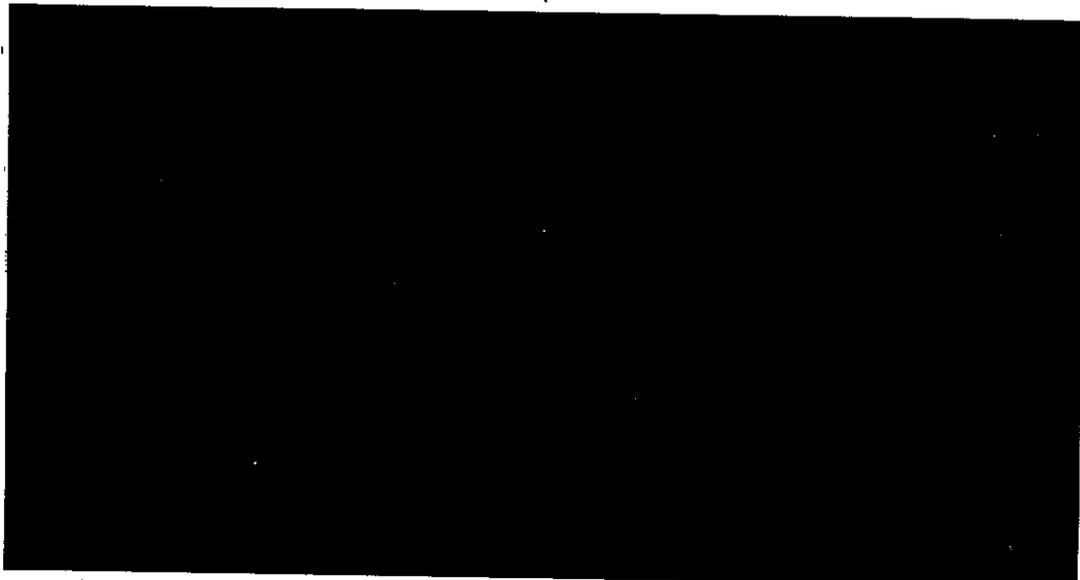
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CHILE: Consolidating Support

[REDACTED] The Chilean press is speculating that Manuel Contreras, the former head of the Chilean National Intelligence Directorate, will be among those indicted next week in the assassination of one-time Ambassador to the US Orlando Letelier. Because it is widely believed that Contreras would not have acted without President Pinochet's consent, the President expects a rough time ahead and has been working to consolidate his political position. Air Force General Leigh's ouster yesterday from the ruling junta was a move in this direction. 15C

[REDACTED] Leigh's ouster was the culmination of his longstanding feud with Pinochet over the political future of the country. In this instance, Leigh's personal criticism of Pinochet during an interview with a foreign correspondent was too much for the President, who was supported by the other junta members and the Council of Ministers. Leigh's removal eliminates Pinochet's most critical colleague and strengthens the President's control over the junta.

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[REDACTED] **Pinochet** apparently believes his **position** is shaky. In **recent weeks**, he has been campaigning **throughout** the country. **for a** continuation of his government. **lie has** been arguing that many of Chile's domestic problems would become unmanageable **if ha were** removed. **Pinochet** also has been successful in playing upon fears that Chile is being encircled by unfriendly governments and that it is often the victim of foreign intervention in its domestic affairs.

[REDACTED] One result of his campaign has been the **formation** of a **personalist** political vehicle **supporting** the President. The **Christian Democrats** and other opposition politicians have **been** critical of this, but they are not in a position to hinder it if **Pinochet** judges that the public is in **favor**. The President has substantial **popular** appeal, but personal movements have had less success in Chile than in other Latin American **countries**.

[REDACTED] Despite **Pinochet's** efforts, **some** military officers [REDACTED] **have** been conducting low-key discussions on the **possibility** of replacing him. **For the few** who have considered the President a liability **for same time**, the prospect that **Contreras** may be indicted argues for a **clean sweep** of the **current leadership**.

[REDACTED] **For the majority who** still support **Pinochet**, however, the **only** way to preserve the accomplishments of the military regime is to keep him in power. Although they have little else in **common**, both groups believe that **Contreras and Pinochet** will be condemned **anew** by the world media and that Chile's international reputation will be **even** more tarnished.

Whatever happens **during the next several weeks**, it is clear **at Pinochet** is prepared to fight any **move** to **oust** him. His inclination is to tough it out, **relying** on his military and popular **support** as well as on his **belief** that he himself **cannot** be indicted in the **Letelier** murder. **Whether he will be able** to ride out the storm is an open question. [REDACTED]

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