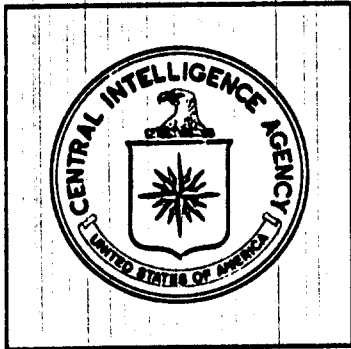


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Chile: Major Prisoner Release

The military government's decision on November 16 to release over 300 persons imprisoned under the state of siege is a major gesture designed to diminish international criticism of Chile's violation of human rights. 150

In making the announcement, a junta spokesman said that the 18 other political prisoners "too dangerous to be freed in Chile" would be expelled if another country would accept them. The spokesman said two other prisoners--Communist party chief Luis Corvalan and former Allende coalition senator Jorge Montes--would be released only if the USSR and Cuba would reciprocate by freeing two prominent prisoners. The Chileans called on world opinion to pressure the USSR and Cuba to take such reciprocal action.

The government's decision does not affect those Chileans who have been charged, convicted by military tribunals and jailed, nor those individuals detained by security forces but not officially acknowledged.

By nearly sweeping the jails clear of those still held in preventive detention, the Pinochet government probably expects to lessen the impact of a critical report recently circulated by the UN human rights investigating group and hopes to improve its image with the new US administration. The government's action also is a tacit admission that internal security is no longer a problem. Any new roundup of "subversives" would be difficult for the government to justify and would immediately elicit another wave of international condemnation.

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