

The Washington merry-go-round

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Jack Anderson

WASHINGTON — Chile's controversial military dictatorship appears to have an inside track in Washington.

At least two top-level representatives of the junta have paid recent visits to the nation's capital, where the red carpet was rolled out for them. A third delegate is expected to hit town this Friday.

The most notorious of the Chilean visitors was Col. Manuel Contreras-Sepulveda, head of the infamous National Intelligence Directorate, known as DINA. It is this military organization — a Latin American version of the CIA, FBI and Defense Intelligence Agency all lumped together — which has been directly responsible for the arrests and torture of hundreds of political prisoners over the past two years.

Before coming to Washington Contreras stopped off in New York. He paid a quiet visit to the United Nations, where officials are preparing a report on human rights violations in Chile.

Three months ago, a U.N. working group on human rights attempted to visit Santiago for an on-the-scene investigation, but the junta abruptly canceled their invitation. In his talks with U.N. officials, say our sources, Contreras attempted to convince them the U.N. group was barred only because it consisted of Marxists, assorted leftists and troublemakers.

Contreras then hopped down to Washington, where his goings-and-comings were considered so secret that even the Chilean embassy was kept in the dark.

We have learned, however, that the colonel stopped off at the CIA where, say our sources, a private chat was arranged with the deputy director, Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters.

The State Department, meanwhile, was unofficially asked to suggest a few people Contreras might see. The department cooperated but scrupulously recommended the colonel visit some Senators and Congressmen who are critical of the junta. On Capitol Hill, Contreras faced his only unfriendly audience. He wandered into the offices of Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, but could find no one to talk with. Staffers recall him as a "short, round" man who

appeared "blase and somewhat disoriented."

Contreras also visited the House International Organization subcommittee, headed by Rep. Donald Fraser, D-Minn. There he was sternly interrogated by a subcommittee staff member about human rights violations in Chile. The colonel responded with the familiar claim that reports of the killing and torture of political prisoners were a Marxist plot to embarrass the junta.

Another prominent Chilean who passed through Washington, shortly before Contreras came to town, was the junta's press attache, Federico Willoughby. He suffers from a chronic kidney problem and came to the United States primarily for medical tests at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.

During his 10-day stay, however, Willoughby visited the CIA, the State Department and several congressmen. He managed to see Sen. Church, who told our associate Joe Spear that he gave the Chilean a long, stiff lecture on human rights.

This Friday, the junta's minister of justice, Miguel Schweitzer, is scheduled to arrive in Washington. His main mission, say our sources, will be to lobby in favor of a resumption of U.S. military aid to Chile, which was cut off by Congress last December.

Meanwhile, Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., has informed the Senate CIA committee of the Contreras trip and has requested it to be investigated. We have learned independently that committee staff members are preparing written requests for information concerning the visit.

Our own inquiries at the CIA about the Walters-Contreras meeting, meanwhile, produced only a curt "no comment."

Footnote: The Chilean visitors are not the only controversial people who have been able to gain access to top U.S. officials. Giorgio Almirante, the Italian neo-Fascist leader, came to Washington in September, and met with two officials of the National Security Council.

EXPOSED NERVES: Last month, we reported that members of Congress have been getting free dental care from the navy. The story caused more anguish at the Washington Navy Yard dental clinic than an exposed nerve.

It is illegal, our story charged, for Navy dentists to fix congressional teeth at no cost. Navy regulations, of course, authorize free emergency treatment. But the distinguished patients from Capitol Hill received deluxe dental care.

Capt. Stewart Elder, the clinic commander, justified the illegal treatment by telling his colleagues it would help the clinic at budget time. Here's what happened after our story was written:

—Sen. William Hathaway, D-Me., was sitting in the dental chair on the morning our story appeared about his illegal root canal work. His nervous Navy dentist, Capt. Roger Flagg, sent Hathaway to the front office, which referred him to a private dentist since the work was "not of an emergency nature."

—Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., whom we had named as one of the clinic's regular patients, hastily canceled his future appointments.

Sen. Mike Mansfield, D-Mont., rushed a payment to the clinic to cover his past dental work. This created an awkward problem for the Navy, which has no provision for accepting individual payments.

—An angry Capt. Elder transferred an enlisted woman, Vicky Kaiser, out of the clinic although she had been there less than a month. He wrongly suspected she was one of our sources.

—Another suspect, Seaman Michael Aird, was also shipped out although he previously had been promised he would not be transferred. Capt. Elder was wrong about him, too.

—However, other enlisted personnel

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and civilian technicians, carrying Xerox copies of our column in their pockets, continued to furnish us with information. They told us, for example, that the captain had been dissatisfied with the quarterly figures on the number of cavities filled and molars extracted, and, therefore, had penciled in fraudulent figures.

—Clinic officials also told the Navy press office no records were available other than for this year detailing treatment given to members of Congress. In fact, log books kept by various Navy dentists contain this information.

Footnote: The prominent patients, who accepted free dental work, said they were unaware it was illegal. A Navy spokesman acknowledged most of the facts in this report. He said there "was no evidence," however, that Capt. Elder's quarterly reports contain fraudulent figures. He also claimed the Kaiser and Aird transfers were part of the normal rotation.