

Frei Against the Junta

Chile's most respected political leader of recent times, former President Eduardo Frei, has delivered a savage attack on the military dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet and projected a "democratic alternative" for that stricken country. In effect, Mr. Frei calls on the armed forces to throw out the governing junta in order to prevent a regime "with many totalitarian characteristics" from being fastened on Chile.

The former President and leader of the Christian Democratic party scornfully rejects the junta's claim that the only alternative to its policies of repression and economic squeeze is a return to the Marxist revolutionary program pursued by the late Salvador Allende. Mr. Frei envisions a "national union" of democratic parties that would combine necessary authority with respect for basic freedoms.

In a country as politically sophisticated as Chile, Mr. Frei's views will get wide circulation, even though only a few thousand copies of the booklet containing them have been printed in defiance of censorship by a Catholic publishing house in Santiago. The booklet has appeared at a time of increasingly open criticism of the junta by the Catholic Church and persistent reports of disagreements in the highest military echelons. Rumors persist that ten of the highest-rank officers sent an ultimatum to President Pinochet, demanding extensive reforms by a March deadline, including dissolution of the notorious secret police and intelligence agency.

The junta will find it difficult to deal with Mr. Frei's devastating assault and proposed alternative. If officially ignored, the pamphlet will almost certainly be followed by bolder and more frequent attacks. But if the junta moves against so respected a figure as Eduardo Frei, who