

Letelier witness takes 5th Amendment

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WASHINGTON—The trial of three Cuban exiles charged in connection with the 1976 car-bombing assassination of former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier evolved yesterday into a series of legal arguments focusing on a Fifth Amendment plea by the government's key witness.

Sitting in the courtroom for only a half-hour, the jury heard the government's witness, former Chilean

secret police agent Michael Townley, refuse to answer when asked by defense lawyers where in Chile he obtained detonating equipment which Townley says was used in the killing.

Townley, who has received Chilean government permission to testify about his role in the Letelier slaying but not about any of his activities as an agent of the Chilean secret police, said he would be liable to criminal prosecution in Chile if he answered that question.

Lawrence Dubin, one of the three defense lawyers,

promptly asked U.S. District Court Judge Barrington Parker to expunge all of Townley's testimony, arguing that Townley couldn't invoke the Fifth Amendment "selectively."

Prosecution attorneys said Townley has the right to refuse to answer on the grounds of self-incrimination, but Parker ordered both the defense and prosecution to submit legal arguments before he issues a ruling on whether Townley has to answer all questions put to him under cross-examination.