

Letelier car-bomber is handed jail term

By LARRY MARGASAK

WASHINGTON (AP)—Michael Townley, a former Chilean agent, was sentenced yesterday to serve between 40 months and 10 years in prison for planting the car bomb that killed former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier and an aide in 1976.

U.S. District Judge Barrington Parker stuck to a sentencing agreement that Townley made with prosecutors last Aug. 11, when he pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to murder a foreign official.

Parker said that if Townley had not fulfilled his part of the plea bargaining arrangement by testifying for the government in the trial of Letelier's assassins, he "would be a prime candidate for the maximum penalty which could be imposed."

Townley could have received a life term, as did two anti-Castro Cubans, both Union City residents, who were convicted of having played roles in an international conspiracy to murder Letelier. A third anti-Castro Cuban received an eight-year prison term. All three defendants in the trial are appealing.

"Your involvement was far more culpable than theirs," Parker said to Townley.

Townley had admitted that he recruited the Cubans to help in the assassination plot, which was devised by Townley's former employer, the Chilean secret police agency once called DINA.

Parker noted that Townley testified during the trial that he had no regrets about killing Letelier—a former Chilean ambassador to the United States—because both of them were soldiers fighting for their beliefs. "Today, do you have any regrets or remorse?" Parker asked Townley.

Replying in a voice that was barely audible, Townley said "I feel a great sense of remorse" about the killing of Letelier's aide, Ronnie Moffitt, who was a passenger in Letelier's car when the remote-control bomb ripped through the floor board as it rounded Sheridan Circle here on Sept. 21, 1976.

As for Letelier, Townley said: "If I could turn back the clock I would voice my objections" to DINA superiors and "find a reason not to participate."

Townley said he now feels that "violence is not the solution to a dispute." Under Townley's plea-bargaining agreement, prosecutors said they would recommend parole after the minimum sentence is served. If Townley gets credit for the 13 months he has already spent in custody, he would be eligible for release in August 1981.

Townley's sentencing had been postponed earlier while the FBI investigated a mysterious phone call that Townley admitted making during the trial from a prosecutor's phone.

A tape of that call to a friend in Chile had Townley calling Parker "badly educated" and saying "I offer right now to ask friends all over the world to call him (Parker) and threaten him and get him to withdraw from the case."

Townley told Parker yesterday that he did make derogatory remarks about the judge, and he apologized to Parker. But Townley added that the recording was not accurate in regard to the alleged threat, because certain parts of the conversation were not in the tape.

Parker said the phone call could lead to further action against Townley. But the call had no impact on yesterday's sentencing.



AP Photo

Michael Moffitt, husband of Ronnie Moffitt—slain in a 1976 car bombing along with former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier—stands outside U.S. District Court in Washington yesterday after sentencing of defendant Michael Townley.