

# Security Is Tight As Trial In Letelier's Murder Begins

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WASHINGTON — In an atmosphere charged with political emotion, two anti-Castro militants went on trial Tuesday on charges of conspiring to assassinate former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier.

A third Miamian is being tried at the same time on charges of aiding the alleged conspirators and lying to a federal grand jury about the case.

Letelier and a young assistant, Ronnie K. Moffitt, died Sept. 21, 1976, when a remote-controlled bomb attached to the chassis of Letelier's car detonated as they traveled along Washington's Embassy Row.

The opening day of the trial — which is expected to last about six weeks — was highlighted by preliminary arguments and extraordinarily rigid security precautions taken in response to terrorist threats.

The politically explosive nature of the trial was further underscored by a sizable group of Cuban exiles who demonstrated quietly outside the U.S. District courthouse early in the day. They carried placards demanding the release of the three exiles on trial.

**ONE SIGN** demanded that the three — Ignacio Novo Sampol, his brother Guillermo Novo Sampol and Alvin Ross Diaz — be freed because they were merely "anti-Communist Cubans" caught up in a "KGB and CIA plot."

The three men are members of the right-wing Cuban Nationalist Movement, a violently anti-Communist exile group.

The trial, however, has international implications extending beyond the Cuban exile community and touching the current Chilean military government, headed by Gen. Augusto Pinochet.

That junta seized power in 1973 by overthrowing Marxist President Salvadore Allende. Letelier was in Allende's cabinet.

According to the indictment, the three defendants and two other exiles — who have so far eluded a worldwide FBI manhunt — joined with Chilean secret agent Michael V. Townley, an American expatriate, to carry out the assassination.

The indictment alleges that Letelier's death was ordered by Col. Juan Manuel Contreras Sepulveda, chief of Pinochet's secret police, because he had become a leading critic of the Chilean junta after taking up exile in Washington.

**ALTHOUGH THE** indictment names Contreras and two of his top agents as participants in the alleged conspiracies, the Chilean government has so far refused to honor U.S. extradition requests.

The Chilean trio is supposedly being detained in Chile pending the outcome of a separate hearing there on the extradition bid.

Townley, who has been cooperating with federal prosecutors in exchange for a lesser sentence, allegedly supervised the assassination by enlisting the Cuban exiles' help.

Emotions surrounding the trial have run high, especially in Miami and in northern New Jersey, where the three defendants live.



LETELIER



TOWNLEY

Federal Judge Barrington Parker, who is presiding, has been the target of two death threats, one allegedly telephoned by a man described as having a Spanish accent.

**SIMILAR THREATS** have been made against federal prosecutor Eugene Propper and against some of Letelier's former co-workers at the International Policy Studies Institute, a leftist think-tank here.

Spectators and reporters were required to pass through rigid security checks, first upon entering the courthouse and later before entering Judge Parker's sixth-floor courtroom.

Dozens of uniformed federal security police were also visible, along with several plain-clothed U.S. marshals.

Most of the trial's opening day was devoted to arguments on preliminary motions and the selection of a jury. However, defense attorney Paul Goldberger added to the bizarre aspects of the case by suggesting CIA involvement.

He told the judge that he had received a telephone call recently from an unidentified caller with "a regular American voice."

According to Goldberger, the caller said: "Don't press the CIA thing" and then hung up.

The caller apparently referred to theories espoused by pro-Chilean sources that Townley was actually a CIA agent.

**IN OTHER** action, Judge Parker denied a defense motion to move the trial out of Washington. Goldberger said news reports of the threat to Parker would prejudice the rights of the three Cuban exiles to a fair trial.

Parker responded that he could not control what the news media printed about the case. He added that the jury would be sequestered throughout the trial and thus would not be able to read about the case.

The judge agreed to a motion for a hearing to determine the admissibility of evidence linking the Cuban exiles to the purchase of a remote-control device capable of exploding a bomb.

A receipt for the purchase of electronics equipment was found by the FBI in a store rented to one of the defendants. The defense contends that it was not told of the receipts until this week.

That hearing will be held today, Parker said. Parker also said he would withhold ruling on a defense request to view the contents of the briefcase that Letelier was carrying at the time of his death.

**DEFENSE ATTORNEY** Lawrence Dubin said papers then in Letelier's possession might assist the defense in understanding the role he played in Washington. Several pro-Chilean sources have contended that the papers show Letelier had ties to Communist officials outside the United States.

Prosecutor Propper, however, said the briefcase was irrelevant to the case.

"We look on the briefcase just as we would look on the contents of his [Letelier's] desk or his file cabinets," Propper said. "The briefcase just happened to be with him."