

AMERICAN IS CHARGED IN LETELIER SLAYING

Expatriate Accused of Conspiracy in Murder of Chilean Exile

By **NICHOLAS M. HORROCK**

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WASHINGTON, April 26—The United States Government today charged a 35-year-old American recently expelled from Chile, with conspiracy in the murder of the former Chilean Ambassador, Orlando Letelier, who was killed when a bomb destroyed his car here in 1976.

At a bail hearing in Federal court, a Government lawyer identified Michael Vernon Townley, an American who had lived in Chile since 1958, as an agent of the Chilean intelligence service. This is the first time that United States authorities have linked the murder of the exiled Mr. Letelier with a Chilean Government agency and the first formal charge in the case.

Bail of \$5 Million Asked

Mr. Townley was charged with having conspired to violate a Federal law that makes it a crime to murder present or former officials of a foreign government. Dressed in a blue suit, dark striped shirt and colorful tie, Mr. Townley listened impassively as the charge was read. He was not required to plead at this hearing, only to indicate whether he understood the charges and his rights.

Eugene M. Propper, the assistant United States attorney in charge of the investigation, urged that Mr. Townley be held on \$5 million bail on the ground that a foreign intelligence service could easily pay a lesser sum and spirit Mr. Townley out of the country.

He said the the Federal Bureau of Investigation had evidence that Mr. Townley had traveled to the United States under at least five aliases in the last four years and carried passports from three different countries. He said that this, together with Mr. Townley's family ties in Chile, sharply increased the chances he would flee. Mr. Townley is

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married to a Chilean citizen.

Seymour Glanzer, one of three original prosecutors in the Watergate case, who is representing Mr. Townley, opposed the bail on the ground that it was tantamount to holding the American expatriate without bail. After nearly an hour of closed-door conferences between the lawyers and Magistrate Henry H. Kennedy, the magistrate ordered Mr. Townley held without bail.

Mr. Glanzer declined to say whether he would appeal the decision. During the hearing it appeared from Mr. Propper's statements that Mr. Townley had not agreed to cooperate with the Government as a witness, but veteran legal observers said that this could be Government strategy designed to protect him against violence.

In an article last week, The New York Times quoted sources familiar with the case as indicating that the F.B.I. had documentary evidence that Mr. Townley, who was brought here by Federal agents from Chile three weeks ago, placed tele-

phone calls to two anti-Castro Cubans living in New Jersey who are suspected of being involved in the murder.

The F.B.I., according to these sources, has also traced Mr. Townley's travels under American, Chilean and Paraguayan passports and reconstructed his movements through family members, friends, and business companies in the United States.

Chile's military Government ordered the expulsion of Mr. Townley, an electronics technician, on April 7 in response to diplomatic representations by the United States. Earlier he had testified before a judge in Santiago that he had been in the United States before the killing of Mr. Letelier but that he had no connection with it.

Mr. Letelier was murdered on Sept. 21, 1976, as he drove to work with Ronni K. Moffitt, a young research assistant, and her husband, Michael. Mrs. Moffitt was also killed by the blast and Mr. Moffitt was injured.

From the beginning, Mr. Letelier's widow and his associates at the Institute for Policy Studies, a private research group, have said that the former diplomat was murdered by agents of the Chilean Government of President Augusto Pinochet. Today's action was the first time the United States Government has said it has evidence to prove that.