

Letelier Suspect Deported to U.S.

By JUAN de ONIS

Special to The New York Times

SANTIAGO, Chile, April 8—Chile's military Government today deported to the United States Michael Vernon Townley, a suspect in the assassination in Washington of Orlando Letelier, a leader of Chilean exiles.

President Augusto Pinochet's decision to expel Mr. Townley, an American who has lived in Chile for most of the last 20 years, came after the United States applied strong pressure for cooperation in the investigation of the assassination.

While Mr. Townley's lawyer tried in vain to obtain a Supreme Court injunction to block the deportation, armed guards put the 35-year-old electronics technician on a plane accompanied by an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

An informed source here said: "If Townley was not flown to U.S. custody, the Ambassador would have been recalled to Washington and public disclosures would have been made on what investigators have learned already."

A confrontation with the United States over the case would be a setback for Chile's campaign to improve its image and could jeopardize relations with American banks providing important credit.

President Pinochet told other junta members on Wednesday about his decision to turn over Mr. Townley. He had received a report on evidence accumulated by Eugene M. Propper, the assistant United States attorney handling the investigation. Mr. Propper indicated that

Continued on Page 6, Column 1

AMERICAN DEPORTED IN LETELIER INQUIRY

Continued From Page 1

Mr. Townley was a key suspect who could provide the link between the people who ordered the assassination and those who placed the bomb that killed Mr. Letelier and an American woman, Ronni Moffitt.

Mr. Letelier had been a confidant of Chile's Marxist President, Salvador Allende Gossens, and had served him first as Chile's ambassador to the United States, then as Foreign Minister and finally as Defense Minister.

After President Allende's overthrow by

the right-wing military junta in September of 1973, Mr. Letelier was imprisoned by the junta for nearly a year. He was released after intervention by Venezuelan authorities and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger. He went to the United States in 1974 and became a leader of exiles in the United States.

Mrs. Moffitt was Mr. Letelier's assistant at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington. She and her husband, Michael, who also worked at the Institute, had borrowed Mr. Letelier's car when their own broke down. The next day, Sept. 21, 1976, they picked up Mr. Letelier and were on their way to work when a bomb attached to the bottom of the car exploded at Sheridan Circle, six blocks from the Chilean Embassy. Mr. Moffitt was thrown from the car and injured, his wife died of her injuries and Mr. Letelier was dead when he arrived at the hospital.

Mr. Townley has been working for the

Chilean secret police, formerly known as the National Intelligence Directorate, whose chief at the time of Mr. Letelier's death was Col. Manuel Contreras Sepúlveda. The colonel was promoted to general last October and was one of President Pinochet's closest advisers until the army announced on March 22 that he had "resigned voluntarily."

Two Men Are Questioned

At that time, Mr. Propper had submitted 55 questions to the Chilean Supreme Court to be put to the bearers of two official Chilean passports issued under false names to men who entered the United States on Aug. 21, 1976.

The Chilean Government put forward the names of two bearers identified only as military officers, but Mr. Propper said that he wanted the questions put to Mr. Townley and Capt. Armando Fernández Larios, also attached to the secret police,

on the basis of evidence that they had both been in the United States before Mr. Letelier was killed.

Captain Fernández answered all the questions put to him, and his involvement in the case has been cleared up. But Mr. Townley invoked the American Constitution's Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination and refused to answer questions on his actions in the United States.

It is expected that Mr. Townley will be questioned by a Federal grand jury investigating the Letelier case in Washington and will be asked to testify under oath and before witnesses brought by the prosecutor.

The disclosures by Mr. Propper, who has visited Chile twice in the last month, and the resignation of General Contreras have been widely reported in Chile and have created great interest in the case.

President Pinochet referred to the investigation in a nationally televised

speech Wednesday in which he said his "conscience is clear" on Mr. Letelier's death. He pledged Chile's cooperation in identifying those responsible, "whatever their position or nationality."

Earlier statements by President Pinochet that his Government had "no responsibility" for the assassination were somewhat modified by his latest position.

Townley to Be Arrested

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 8—Justice Department officials said today that Michael Vernon Townley, upon his arrival in the United States, would be arrested on a Federal warrant as a material witness in the investigation of the Letelier murder.

The officials said that Mr. Townley was expected in Miami this evening and would probably be arraigned there Monday. His interrogation is to be in Washington.