

Witness At Rivero Hearing Claims His Life Threatened

MIAMI (UPI) — A government attorney charged Wednesday that the life of a mystery witness at the deportation hearing for Cuban exile leader Felipe Rivero had been threatened in order to keep him off the witness stand.

Immigration Service Attorney Joseph Monsanto made the charge shortly before Rivero took the stand in his own behalf and denied ever issuing any orders for "violent acts" in Canada or elsewhere.

Rivero's testimony ended the three-day hearing for Rivero, who is seeking to avoid being "excluded" from the country. The defense rested its case after his testimony and Special Inquiry Officer Daniel J. Schrull said he would make a ruling probably next Tuesday.

Monsanto interrupted the hearing to ask for a short continuance on grounds one of his witnesses had told him of a threat against his life. Monsanto said he had informed the FBI of the alleged threat and told the witness, whom he would not name, not to appear.

"He told me his life had been threatened if he testified in these proceedings. I felt that in the circumstances I should excuse him," said Monsanto.

Schrull denied the demand of the defense that the witness be named, but the hearing officer

gave his assurance that the charge made by Monsanto "will not prejudice me."

As the 43-year-old Rivero was being led back to his Dade County jail cell, he said, "They haven't judged me, they are judging the people of Cuba."

Asked if he thought the hearing was fair, he said, "I'll tell you after I hear the ruling."

Rivero is head of a militant exile group, but he denied in his testimony the group was Nazi or Fascist oriented. The Immigration Service seeks to kick Rivero out of the country because of alleged terrorist activities of Rivero and his followers.

One of the government's final witnesses denounced Rivero's organization, the Cuban Nationalist Association, as "Nazi, Fascist and totalitarian."

Arthuro Gonzalez-Gonzalez, secretary general of another Cuban group, said he knew little about the CNA, but nevertheless called its political aims "Nazi, Fascist and totalitarian."

When Gonzalez stepped off the stand he and Rivero sympathizers exchanged insults in Spanish. Outside the hearing room a Cuban identified as Julio Perez called Gonzalez a "CIA mercenary" and charged the hearing was "like a communist trial. I don't know who paid them (the witnesses), Castro or Kossygin."

Perez then angrily shouted, "I am ready to leave this country anytime."

"Let them deport me!"

"You can go downstairs and turn in your green card anytime you want," an immigration officer said.

A green card is the identification carried by a resident alien.

Perez was involved in the Cuban exile attack on the United Nations building in December of 1964. Cuba's former industry minister, Ernesto (Che) Guevara, was addressing the General Assembly at the time.

A bazooka shell was fired at the building from the Queens side of the East River, but fell short into the river.

Another government witness, Julio Pestonit, invoked the U.S. fifth amendment three times in refusing to answer questions. He said "I am under the accusation of planting a bomb in Florida."

During the inquiry Monday an FBI agent testified Pestonit was a former treasurer of the CNA who quit because he considered its program "unrealistic."

Also called by the Immigration Service Wednesday morning were two newspaper reporters, Carlos Martinez and Mary Louise Wilkerson.

Both testified to the authorship of stories they wrote. Mrs. Wilkerson's story was published last September. It concerned an attack by CNA members on the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa, Canada.

Martinez testified concerning an article published in September of 1965 concerning Rivero's plans "for physical elimination of world communists."

The government revoked Ri-

vero's parole as an alien two months ago when it was alleged his organization was plotting in connection with an attempt to blow up the Cuban Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal. He has been in the Dade County jail since.

Immigration officials said at the start of the inquiry if Rivero is ordered excluded he would not be sent back to Communist Cuba, but instead may go to whatever country will accept him.