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2 Cubans Get Life In Letelier Slaying; Court Is Disrupted

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Two anti-Castro Cuban exiles were sentenced today to consecutive life terms for their roles in the bombing murders of Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and Ronni K. Moffitt.

The sentences pronounced against Guillermo Novo Sampol and Alvin Ross Diaz were the maximum penalties provided by both federal law and the District Code.

A third defendant, Ignacio Novo Sampol, brother of Guillermo, was sentenced to concurrent five-year terms on two perjury convictions and to three years in prison on the charge of failing to report a felony.

U.S. District Judge Barrington D. Parker's sentences, which came after two hours of arguments by attorneys and statements by the defendants, touched off a noisy demonstration in the heavily guarded courtroom.

THE OUTBURST was triggered when Guillermo Novo, a leader of the anti-Castro movement, was being led away and got into a scuffle with U.S. marshals.

"Keep your hands off me!" Guillermo shouted, shoving away the marshals, who were trying to take the prisoners by the elbows as they went through the door to the cellblock.

When the door shut, several loud shouts were heard from the prisoners, prompting several rows of Cuban women in the courtroom to begin crying and shouting in both Spanish and English.

As marshals herded the spectators out of the courtroom, they were shouting, "Viva Cuba libre!" (Long live free Cuba).

One woman relative of the defendants shouted repeatedly, "No lloras!" (Don't cry). Another woman screamed, "Down communism!" and a third shouted, "Today we suffer, tomorrow you may suffer, too!"

Parker's sentence means that Guillermo Novo and Ross will have to serve at least 30 years, which Parker stipulated would be done in the confinement of a maximum security facility.

THE EIGHT-YEAR sentence given Ignacio Novo makes him eligible for parole after two years and eight months in prison.

"In the 10 years I have served on the bench," Parker told the defendants, "I've never presided over a trial of a murder as monstrous as this. Orlando Letelier was killed because of his beliefs. The irony is that those found guilty did in fact seek and accept asylum here.

Letelier and Moffitt, an assistant of Letelier, died in an explosion triggered by remote control as they rode in Letelier's automobile along Massachusetts Avenue — "embassy row" — on Sept. 21, 1976.

Letelier, a former Chilean ambassador to the United States, lived in exile in Washington after the right-wing military junta of President Augusto

Pinochet deposed the late leftist President Salvador Allende in 1973.

The grand jury also indicted Juan Manuel Contreras, former Chilean secret police director, and two other secret police officials, Pedro Espinoza and Armando Fernandez, on all murder counts. The U.S. government has been unable to extradite them from Chile for trial.

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Also indicted on the murder counts were two other Cuban Nationalist Movement members, Virgilio Paz and Jose Dionisio Suarez. They are being sought by the FBI as fugitives.

Sentencing has been postponed for Michael Townley, a U.S. citizen who confessed he helped make the murder bomb and remote control device. Townley was the chief government witness in exchange for a promise of leniency.

PARKER TOLD the defendants, "You have abused the hospitality of this country and brought with you a brand of terrorism and hatred that has no place here. The trial showed that Michael V. Townley was far more culpable than the others, but there is no justification for executing anything but the maximum penalty."

Defense attorneys Paul Goldberger, Lawrence Dubin and Oscar Suarez said they would appeal the sentences.

In their final words to Judge Parker before he passed sentence, the three Cubans continued to protest their innocence. Ross told the judge, "I wonder if the Justice Department is going to bring Michael Townley to order for threatening this court on a telephone call made from the office of Assistant U.S. Attorney Eugene M. Propper."

Guillermo Novo launched into a 20-minute speech denouncing the Castro government and charges against his Cuban Nationalist Movement by CIA and FBI agents.

"The CNM is an honorable movement and we have been used as scapegoats," Guillermo Novo said.

PARKER interrupted to say, "You don't have the right to get on a soap box to give a political speech."

But Novo continued. "Townley has lied about our relationship and the FBI intimidated our witnesses by visiting them as soon as we furnished the names to the government, just like Nazi Germany. I am not an assassin, I cannot accept the guilty verdict of the jury or the sentence of this court. But I will appeal as far as necessary because I have faith in the judicial system of the United States."

Ignacio Novo said, "I want to state I am still bewildered to find myself in this situation because of the persecution of the CNM by the U.S. government."

Goldberger in his plea for leniency told the judge, "He (Ross) should not be sentenced to more time than Michael Townley. The man who placed the bomb would be out in 30 months while these defendants never set foot in the District of Columbia."

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