

RHC favors bill penalizing illegal government probes

By HAROLD LIDIN
Of The STAR Staff

Legislation imposing severe penalties on government officials who illegally gather information on individuals' political beliefs will be submitted to a special session of the legislature before the end of the year, Gov. Hernández Colón told the Civil Rights Commission Friday.

The governor's testimony before the commission climaxed two months of hearings following publication by the media of portions of a "subversive list" allegedly prepared by the police. In his prepared testimony, Hernández Colón said his administration is pledged "not only to resolve the problem of past violations [keeping dossiers on political dissidents] but to eradicate these anti-democratic practices in the future."

Responding to questions, the governor said he favors the prompt turnover of dossiers to the individuals involved whenever this can be done without jeopardy to informants or revealing surveillance techniques used by police.

But he warned that premature surrender of dossiers "can in effect undermine the efficacy of a system of intelligence directed to legitimate purposes."

"That's where I have difficulty," Hernández Colón continued, with a Superior Court decision ordering that dossiers on non-criminal matters be turned over to the persons affected within six months. Ground rules covering this situation should be prepared by the Supreme Court, he added.

Asked about the possible release of the "40 to 50" folders prepared by police on the late Nationalist Party leader Pedro Albizu Campos, Hernández Colón said that file illustrated the problems involved in protecting the identity of informants.



Demonstrators supporting La Crónica magazine editor Antonio de la Cova picket the Civil Rights Commission in Hato Rey Friday, as the governor testifies inside.

Still, prompt action should be taken regarding dossiers accumulated at police headquarters, the governor said. "I would start with the simplest [cases], those that contain a minimum of information, where there are no problems, and start returning those," Hernández Colón said.

Commission Chairman Enrique González said he fears that the public "will lose faith" if the government delays the return of the dossiers by appeals to the Supreme Court.

Hernández Colón said it would be "more precise to say that in the past some persons have made efforts that have not succeeded" in correcting the situation. As part of his prepared testimony, the governor related how efforts to curb police intelligence excesses date back to the 1965-1968 administration of Gov. Roberto Sánchez Vilella, when



STAR photos by José García

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Hernández Colón served as secretary of justice.

Asked by González how he will deal with surveillance activities of federal agencies, Hernández Colón replied that they are "now are more sensitive" to civil rights. "I can't imagine today's FBI carrying out an investigation of a person like [novelist Ernest] Hemingway," he said.

While the governor testified, rival demonstrators picketed the Civil Rights Com-

mission headquarters in Hato Rey headquarters with signs in support of and against La Crónica magazine editor Antonio de la Cova.

González announced at the hearing that Superior Court Judge Abner Limardo has ordered de la Cova to appear before the commission Oct. 16, under threat of civil contempt. De la Cova has balked at testifying before the committee in open session, contending that as editor of the magazine he should not have to testify about his sources. Similar positions have been taken by representatives of other media.

Meanwhile, González announced that the committee is drafting a Freedom of Information bill. Hernández Colón, recalling that he proposed such a measure unsuccessfully during his first term, promised to support the proposal.