

Chile accuses CIA in murder plot

By Lionel Martin

Guardian Staff Correspondent

Havana

Two suspects in the assassination of Christian Democratic party leader Edmundo Perez Zúkovic were killed during a shoot-out with police in Santiago June 13. Six others were arrested at the scene and a quantity of arms along with literature claiming credit for the assassination were seized, according to a televised speech by the Chilean minister of the interior, José Tohá.

The two dead men—Roland Rivera Calderon and Arturo Rivera Calderon—were associated with an ultra-“left” splinter group, the Organized Vanguard of the People (VOP), officially dissolved over a year ago. Roland Rivera Calderon had also been a member of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) but was expelled in 1968 as an agent provocateur. The MIR has supported the Allende government and some of its leading militants are serving in his personal bodyguard.

The two main parties in Allende's ruling coalition—the Communists and the Socialists—denounced the June 8 Zúkovic slaying as a right wing plot organized by Chilean reactionaries and the U.S. CIA under the code name, “Plan Calvo Sotelo.” (José Calvo Sotelo was a conservative Spanish politician whose dawn murder on July 13, 1936 was imputed to progressive forces and was used as the rationale for the army mutiny led by Francisco Franco which initiated the Spanish Civil War.)

Chain of reaction

The Zúkovic killing has also been attributed by those who oppose Chile's new popular unity government to “left wing elements.” But the Zúkovic affair is a key link in the chain of seditious activities that have been building up for more than six months. The first link was forged on October 22, 1970, days before Allende was to be sworn into office as president of the new socialist-oriented government.

On that day the army chief of staff, General René Schneider, was shot down in a manner conspicuously

similar to the most recent murder. In both cases the car in which the victims were riding was blocked by other automobiles from which the assailants fired the fatal submachine gun shots.

The first phase of “Plan Calvo Sotelo,” the murder of Schneider, backfired on the schemers. Instead of causing the desired chaos and creating conditions for a coup or civil war, the assassination welded even greater popular unity. President Allende took office as planned and investigations proved what had been suspected from the first—that right wing subversive elements were behind the killing.

By design or chance, the murder of Zúkovic occurred on the precise day which the military prosecutor closed his case against those accused of the Schneider assassination. The highest ranking conspirator, ex-general Roberto Viaux, faced 20 years and the material authors of the crime faced life imprisonment. Three of the accused conspirators Diego Izquierdo, Allen Cooper and Andres Widow, are believed to have fled to the U.S.

The Zúkovic murder occurred as the voting date for the ratification of an important constitutional reform by the entire Congress draws close. This reform would make a part of Chile's organic law the nationalization of the great copper mining resources, a major plank in the program of the Popular Unity Coalition and a decisive step in Chile's struggle out of the imperialist orbit.

In order to defeat the reform bill it was necessary to provoke an open confrontation between the powerful Christian Democratic party and the new coalition government. By blaming the left for the murder of Zúkovic, a top man in the Christian Democratic party, it was hoped to open an unbridgeable schism between the two most powerful political forces in the country. Because Christian Democratic power largely depends on reformist doctrine and demagoguery it has been politically impossible for its most conservative members to lead the party to militant and open opposition to the social reforms of the Allende government.

Following the murder, the Christian Democratic



Chilean President Salvador Allende.

leadership made a statement holding the Popular Unity government culpable because of what it called "the spirit of hate and defamation" fanned by the pro-government news media. But the Christian Democratic party statement nowhere mentions the open provocative campaign of the conservative news media in Chile, the precedent of right wing violence in the Schneider affair or what is common knowledge to Chileans, the anti-government conspiratorial activities of right wingers backed by the CIA. Significantly, the reactionary Partido Nacional released a declaration that coincided on major points with that of the Christian Democratic party.

Anti-government commentators have directed all their accusations at the VOP for the murder of Zukovic. Shortly after the assassination, radio station Balmececa in Santiago taped and broadcasted a telephone call which said, "This is a commando group of VOP. We have liquidated Perez Zukovic."

Journalist Mario Gomez of the newspaper Puro Chile wrote that on the basis of information given by "a high personage linked to government circles" a group which had broken off from the VOP after its dissolution had actually carried out the assassination and that it was led by five ex-policemen and directed by two foreigners who are functionaries of the CIA.

MIR denounces assassination

The opposition press immediately took advantage of the murder to demand the elimination of certain militant left organizations. One of these is the MIR which was quick to repudiate the assassination of Zukovic and called for joint action to defend the government of Allende. The secretary-general of the MIR, Miguel Enriquez, went to the Presidential Palace shortly after the murder to express solidarity with the government. Another militant left organization, MR-2, also made a statement backing the government and calling on the workers to be vigilant.

A few days after the murder the Chilean Navy announced that as part of a link in a prolonged investigation they had boarded a Panamanian-flag merchant ship named "Puelche." However before they were able to board it they took pictures of crewmen throwing cargo overboard. On the ship they found, according to extra-official reports, arms and other contraband material. According to one Prensa Latina

dispatch they found 5000 submachineguns aboard. Speculation has it that the Puelche cargo was destined for the insurreccional phase of the "Plan Calvo Sotelo."

President Salvador Allende has acted with vigor since the murder and has stressed the unity between the different segments of the civilian and military security forces. In his original statement hours after the murder of Zukovic, Allende announced the imposition of martial law in and around Santiago and said that the murder "seeks to prevent the people from carrying forward by democratic means the social changes aimed at ridding the government of its backwardness." He said that it was intended "to provoke the sensation of chaos in a desperate effort to alter the state of normality."

Not the first time

The Chilean ambassador in Havana, Enrique Vega, commented, "There is nothing new about an opponent of the left being murdered with the object of attributing the crime to the progressive forces."

In Santiago the Civic-Military Front—an organization of ex-military and police forces which supports the government of Allende—put the blame for the murder directly on the ultra-right. Their declaration also said, "We point out that behind these murders exists a sinister organization of commandos in which are present known elements, now retired, of the armed forces."

Over the weekend workers' assemblies were held over the country in support of the government at the call of the largest trade union confederation, the United Central of Workers (CUT). The union called on workers to create vigilance committees in every factory and shop.