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'A Campaign to Smear Letelier'

Five months after Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt were assassinated on Washington's Embassy Row, a campaign has been launched with the apparent purpose of smearing Letelier's reputation. The effect—more important, in the long run—is to distract attention from the suspected killers and to shield the repressive Chilean government.

Using evidence collected in good faith as part of the investigation of the assassination, somebody in the FBI or the metropolitan police or the Justice Department has passed parts of the

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contents of Letelier's briefcase, first to columnist Jack Anderson and now to columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak. An Evans and Novak column, which appeared on this page on Feb. 16, focused on alleged connections between Letelier and Cuba and failed to examine the crucial question: Who killed Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt?

Information has come to the Institute for Policy Studies that shows that orders for the "hit" on Letelier and Moffitt came directly from the DINA, the Chilean secret police. According to published sources, high U.S. government officials concur that the murders were carried out by Cuban exiles whom the CIA had trained to murder Fidel Castro. Instead, they murdered Letelier and Moffitt.

While a diligent team of FBI agents pursues the killers' trail and attempts

to nail down an air-tight case against them, other investigators, apparently working with organized right-wing elements, are trying their best to divert the public and the police from the real issues of the case. The issue was not and is not Letelier's political life, and much less the contents of his briefcase, which contained no secrets.

The calculated leaks, based on Letelier's briefcase material, have yielded only unsupported charges that Orlando Letelier was receiving and dispensing "Cuban" money. A Washington Post reporter, Lee Lescage, who examined everything in the briefcase, has concluded that the "columns followed the darkest possible interpretation of the scanty material."

The facts of Letelier's political life were open and known to his friends and associates. He worked full time as director of the Transnational Institute, the international program of the Institute for Policy Studies. He performed his duties with great skill and efficiency. Letelier also worked to restore democracy in his homeland after a military coup had destroyed it—with the help of the CIA, as a recent Senate investigation showed.

In exile, the Unidad Popular, the coalition that governed Chile until the coup, organized themselves for political and humanitarian activities. Letelier, a member of the Chilean Socialist Party, and a former cabinet minister and ambassador, played an important role in his private capacity in these efforts. Among his obligations were to aid newly paroled Chilean refugees, some of whom arrived in the United States

with little orientation or money, after they had been released from Chilean concentration camps. Letelier also testified before the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and talked with legislators and State Department officials about the conditions that prevailed in Chile after democracy had been destroyed.

The Unidad Popular sent Letelier money to pay expenses incurred for this kind of work. The treasurer of the Unidad Popular is Beatriz "Tati" Allende, the slain President's daughter; she lives in Cuba, with her Cuban husband and

Taking Exception

children. But the party's treasury is not in Cuba. Its funds were raised in Western Europe and in the United States from labor unions and social democratic parties, and from religious groupings. None of the money sent to Letelier came from the Cuban government.

Furthermore, the Evans and Novak column confuses two different conferences in order to implicate Rep. Michael Harrington. Harrington, an outspoken defender of human rights, attended a conference sponsored by the Third Session of the Committee to Inquire into Crimes of the Chilean Military Junta. The committee paid for Harrington's ticket. The amount, however, that the committee gave to Harrington was less than the full cost of the ticket. Letelier then reimbursed Harrington for the difference and was, in turn, himself reimbursed. Contrary

to what Evans and Novak suggest, this conference, which took place in February 1975 in Mexico City, is quite different from the November 1975 conference on the "Future of United States-Latin American Economic and Political Relations," to which Harrington was also invited. The November 1975 conference was co-sponsored by the Institute for Policy Studies and a Mexican institution, the Centro de Investigacion y Docencia Economicas (CIDE). IPS paid for the tickets for the participants, and CIDE provided the facilities. The February conference had nothing to do with IPS, and no IPS money was involved. And mention of Helsinki in a briefcase note, to which Evans and Novak attribute sinister mystery, refers to the original site of the February committee meeting in Finland, where the investigation of junta torture began. Luis Malra, whom Evans and Novak claim lives in Cuba, actually resides in Mexico.

Those in the FBI or the Justice Department who leaked the materials in Letelier's briefcase to the columnists have sought to obscure the real issues in this murder case. Will the conscientious FBI agents and the federal prosecutor be allowed to prevail? Will they arrest the Cuban exiles and expose the Chileans who planned the murder—even if it means revealing the role played by U.S. government agencies in earlier training of the killers? Or will foreign diplomats and U.S. citizens walk with fear on Embassy Row, knowing that foreign secret police forces and hired thugs can commit murder and get away with it?