



Orlando Letelier, by Richard Avedon

## A Testament

On Tuesday, Orlando Letelier, who was Chilean Foreign Minister in the Government of President Salvador Allende Gossens, was killed in Washington when a bomb exploded in his car. He had been a leader of Chilean political exiles in the United States who opposed the military junta that overthrew President Allende in 1973. He wrote the following article for the Op-Ed page of *The New York Times*, at his own initiative, a few days before his death.

By Orlando Letelier

WASHINGTON — On Sept. 10 the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet issued Decree No. 588, which strips me of my nationality, for "gravely threatening the essential interests of the state." This measure is just one more addition to the shameful history of the violation of human rights committed by the military junta.

In the chronicle of Latin American dictatorships, political rights have frequently been denied to critics and opponents. The Chilean junta, not to be outdone as leader in the field of such violations, has made the entire Chilean population a victim through a decree that ordered the burning of the country's electoral register. In fact, all the citizenship rights of the population have been destroyed.

Today, having exhausted this repressive mechanism they can only resort to the absurdity of pretending that those who oppose their designs are no longer part of the Chilean nation.

Needless to say, this decree violates the intent of the Constitution that applied in Chile before the rule of law was destroyed there on Sept. 11, 1973, together with the norms of international law, especially Article 15 of the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. This action has no precedent in our history. Never have governments vested themselves with the authority to confer or take away Chilean nationality at will.

Because of my position as Minister of State and Ambassador [to the United States] of the constitutional Government of Chile, I was incarcerated in the concentration camp on Dawson Island until I was expelled from the country without any formal charges ever being made against me. I was not granted any of the basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution or by the laws of my country.

Among other violations, I was deprived of my passport and thus of my status as a Chilean abroad. Many of my fellow countrymen were subjected to the same arbitrary measures.

It would seem, then, that this decree constitutes a complete absurdity. But behind it one sees the logic of a totalitarian mentality, that it projects itself from within a system based on terror and vengeance. Its purpose is to intimidate those who fight from abroad for the restoration of human rights, freedom and democracy in Chile. It tries to erase a whole sector of Chileans from the history of our country, to eliminate the protagonists of a social and political ideal with deep roots in our history, which has survived persecution and is today the emblem of the struggle against tyranny.

What the junta is fighting is not so much the men who three years ago led a democratic Government but rather the ideas we represent. What they are denying is the nationality of values, such as Chilean democracy, that for 150 years constituted an example for Latin America and for the world.

What they are attempting to destroy are the political parties that channeled the aspirations of the Chilean people, its trade-union organizations, and its convivial way of life, based on the free play of ideas and respect for the human being.

Accordingly, to Pinochet none of this has any place within the Chilean nationality, and the fascist ideology that Pinochet professes can be seen in this most delirious expression of his fanaticism.

The patriotic obligation of all Chileans is to contribute to the end of the

dictatorship. We do it as members of a nation and as inheritors of a tradition of freedom to which the Pinochets do not belong.

The things that destroy our nationality are the concentration camps, torture, repression and hunger. That which makes us vulnerable as a nation is the utilization of the armed forces against the Chilean people. It is all this brutal conduct and not the actions of those who want to put an end to it, that isolates us today from the community of civilized nations.

The image of Chile will return to what it once was when democracy is re-established along with the human rights that have been usurped by the dictators. At that moment no one will be in any doubt about the nationality of the Chileans who are in power today. On the contrary, as such they will be made to answer to Chilean tribunals in accordance with the Chilean judicial system for crimes committed against their country.