

Vesco Extradition Effort Questioned

By Morton Mintz
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Costa Rican President Daniel Oduber has charged that the U.S. government's attempt to bring back fugitive financier Robert L. Vesco for trial with two former Nixon Cabinet members was arranged "in such a way that it seemed aimed at the extradition failing, just as it did."

The charge is in a letter Oduber, while President-elect, sent to Vesco on May 6. Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) disclosed it yesterday at a hearing of his Senate Permanent Investigations subcommittee on efforts by Vesco to acquire some 2,000 Ingram M-10 machine guns and on the financier's reported interest in funding a factory in Costa Rica to produce up to 500 of these or other weapons a month.

After subcommittee investigators learned of the existence of the letter, the Costa Rican embassy here authenticated it and provided a copy which the Library of Congress translated from Spanish into English.

Oduber wrote the letter a week after a jury in New York City acquitted former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans on all

nine counts of criminal conspiracy, obstruction of justice, and lying to a grand jury in connection with a secret \$200,000 cash contribution which Vesco had made to Mr. Nixon's re-election campaign in 1972.

Chief prosecutor John R. Wing, telling reporters after the acquittal on April 28 that the verdict had stunned him, said, "If we could have gotten Vesco back it would have been different."

The prosecution had asked Costa Rica to extradite Vesco for trial for obstruction of justice. But the Legislative Assembly, controlled by then-President Jose Figueres, whose business interests have received more than \$3.5 million from Vesco-associated sources, enacted on March 21 a new extradition law that seemed tailored to Vesco's legal needs.

For several months, however, the Jackson subcommittee has been troubled about whether Vesco might have committed an offense—involving narcotics—for which he could have been extradited despite the new law, under a century-old American-Costa Rican treaty.

This possibility arose almost a year ago when an under-

cover government narcotics worker, Frank Peroff, provided the subcommittee and the office of the U.S. attorney in New York with tape recordings of his conversations with a since-imprisoned mastermind of a heroin smuggling scheme, Conrad Bouchard of Montreal.

In taped conversations on July 3 and July 8, 1973, Bouchard told Peroff that Vesco or an associate in Costa Rica, Norman P. LeBlanc, would provide \$250,000 to buy 100 kilograms of heroin in Europe—for eventual smuggling into the United States, where the drug would have a multimillion-dollar street value.

That Bouchard said such things is unquestioned, but Vesco and LeBlanc deny that what he said was true. Their involvement has been neither proved nor disproved by the subcommittee, despite a lengthy investigation in which it took sworn testimony from Peroff and numerous federal officials, including prosecutor Wing.

Yesterday, Jackson said the testimony included a disclosure that an attempt in December, 1973, to extradite Vesco from the Bahamas—on a \$50,000 fraud charge involv-

ing his International Controls Corp.—also had failed.

The Bahamian lawyer retained by the government to try to extradite Vesco was Cecil Wallace-Whitfield, who "had previous ties to Vesco entitites and associates," Jackson said. He directed his staff to look into both extradition efforts.

President Oduber, in the letter to Vesco, told the financier that with the Figueres era ended, he would remove any official who might become a partner of the financier and would "ask you to leave the country."

Oduber also said he was giving Vesco 30 days to liquidate his investments in "mysterious activities" and re-direct the funds into farming or tourism.

Oduber also said there would be no more special customs and immigration treatment—an apparent reference to the transporting of 14 automatic rifles into Costa Rica aboard a jet owned by Los Angeles stockbroker Thomas P. Richardson, an intimate of Vesco.

In testimony yesterday, Jay Powell Cook said one reason he quit as skipper of a Vesco yacht was his fear that the vessel would fire on pursuers—including American ships.