10-29-1986

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Deborah Tyroler

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Nicaraguan Attorney Defending Eugene Hasenfus Suspected Of Corruption

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, October 29, 1986

According to an Oct. 23 report by Cuban news agency PRENSA LATINA, the Nicaraguan attorney in charge of defending U.S. citizen Eugene Hasenfus before the Anti-Somocista Peoples Tribunals in Managua is himself a suspect of wrongdoing. A Conservative Democrat party leader told PRENSA LATINA on Oct. 22 that Enrique Sotelo Borgen "should be put on trial just like his client." Hasenfus was arrested on Oct. 6 by Sandinista troops after he parachuted from a C-123 cargo plane shot down in southern Nicaragua. The plane was engaged in an airlift mission to supply military equipment to Nicaraguan contras inside Nicaraguan territory. Three other crew members including two Americans and a Nicaraguan died in the crash. The Conservative politician, who requested anonymity, accused Sotelo Borgen of having appropriated "hundreds of thousands of cordobas" provided by the Sandinista government to the seven political parties running candidates in the 1984 general elections. Sotelo was coordinator for the Conservatives in 1984, and according to PRENSA LATINA's source, "after the elections, he refused to account for campaign expenditures." The politician stated that an ensuing argument over a large deficit in the party's budget caused a split resulting in the emergence of the so-called "Sicilian Group," led by Sotelo. He also accused Sotelo of having received $30,000 from the US Embassy in Managua towards persuading the Conservative party to withdraw from the campaign. This effort apparently failed, since the party did not withdraw. The Conservative leader admitted that while "there are no witnesses" to prove the charges against Sotelo, "those in the US Embassy know [about] it..." Sotelo is not well-liked by relatives of certain counter-revolutionary prisoners. As related by the Conservative leader, the attorney's service charges to seek pardons for such prisoners in the national assembly are quite high. Relatives of prisoners who did not receive pardons have complained because they paid in advance, and Sotelo did not reimburse them when the requests for pardon failed. "In the Hasenfus case," said the PRENSA LATINA source, "[Sotelo] doesn't need to bribe or blackmail anybody because he must be well-paid." The attorney has repeatedly refused to disclose how much he is being paid to defend Hasenfus.

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