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LADB Staff

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Pinochet-Supported Nazi Schaefer Given 20 Years

by LADB Staff

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Former Nazi and ally to the regime of Gen. Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) Paul Schaefer received a 20-year jail sentence in a Chilean court on May 24. The former leader of the compound known as Colonia Dignidad was convicted on charges that he committed abuses against 25 minors in the enclave between 1993 and 1997, and he faces further charges for participating in crimes committed by the secret police.

The judge in Schaefer's case, Talca Appeals Court Judge Hernan Gonzalez, ordered the maximum penalty for 20 charges of "dishonest abuse" of minors and five counts of "sodomy rape" of children, resulting in the 20-year sentence and an order for an indemnification of 770 million pesos (US \$1.4 million) to be paid to the victims. Gonzalez considered the crimes attributed to Schaefer to be proven, and he ruled favorably on the applications for indemnification from lawyers for 11 of the victims, who were ages 7 to 17 at the time of Schaefer's abuses. Gonzalez had closed the indictment phase of the case in August, believing that the investigations into the case had been "exhausted," which allowed him to begin the trial phase of Schaefer's prosecution. The decision concluded 10 years of investigations into abuses committed by Schaefer.

The elderly German emigre was a corporal and medic in the Nazi army during World War II and fled to Chile in 1961 after allegations of abusing minors surfaced in his home country. He fled Chile in the 1990s after accusations came out against him, and he remained on the lam for eight years. Argentine authorities captured and extradited the 84-year-old fugitive to Chile early in 2005 after finding him in a private, gated community in a suburb north of Buenos Aires (see NotiSur, 2005-04-08). Since then he has been detained at the Carcel de Alta Seguridad (CAS) in Santiago. He is also wanted in Germany on child-molestation charges.

Chilean police had raided Colonia Dignidad now called Villa Baviera an enclave founded by Schaefer in the early 1960s. Set up on the outskirts of the city of Parral, about 340 km south of Santiago, it was a heavily fortified estate protected by barbed wire, barricades, and hidden cameras. The compound was inhabited by an estimated 300 people, most of them German citizens, who for years had pledged their complete loyalty to Schaefer.

A self-proclaimed "permanent uncle" to his followers, Schaefer was an evangelical cult leader whose sermons were said to often contain a heavy dose of anti-Semitic and anti-communist rhetoric. When he fled Germany in the 1960s, dozens joined him in Chile. The enclave's residents were separated by sex and were governed by a strict disciplinary regime.

More charges for torture and murder pending

Human rights organizations say that Colonia Dignidad served as a torture center during the Pinochet dictatorship as well as a vacation spot for secret service agents during the 17-year military

regime. Prosecuting Judge Jorge Zepeda says Schaefer will now have to face legal proceedings for his role in secret police crimes of the era. Investigations have shown that Schaefer and former secret police chief Manuel Contreras led a paramilitary group that participated in the persecution, torture, assassination, and forced disappearance of opponents to the Pinochet regime. Contreras is serving a 12-year sentence (see NotiSur, 2005-06-03). There have been several police searches of the 16,000-hectare enclave that have turned up large weapons stashes and evidence of abuses, including a clandestine mass grave.

Socialists accuse right wing of protecting Schaefer

In January, Chilean Socialists denounced leaders of the country's right wing for protecting Colonia Dignidad for years and held them responsible for abuses committed there. "We Socialists denounce that the right, by its past actions in defense of and collaboration with Colonia Dignidad, is responsible for the human rights abuses that we have been discovering recently," said Sen. Ricardo Nunez, president of the Partido Socialista (PS) on Jan. 4. That week investigators had found the mass grave, where the bodies of 30 opponents to the Pinochet regime may have been buried, according to investigations by Judge Zepeda. The bodies, said investigators, might have previously been exhumed, incinerated, and thrown into the sea or rivers in the region.

PS Sen. Jaime Naranjo said the right "hides its face and maintains complicit silence" and "is not capable of assuming its responsibility, of repenting, or of asking forgiveness" in the face of atrocities. He said that, years before, the current president of Renovacion Nacional (RN), Sergio Diez, presented an injunction to the Tribunal Constitucional (TC), one of the country's top courts, to impede prosecution efforts against Schaefer. Naranjo also mentioned the country's other right-wing party, the Union Demócrata Independiente (UDI), saying some federal UDI deputies and UDI Sen. Hernan Larraín had defended Colonia Dignidad as a "social welfare society."

Several more people are under arrest for crimes committed at the enclave and Judge Zepeda says as many as 100 people may have been killed and buried at the compound during the military regime. "We are confident that all those responsible for these crimes, not only Paul Schaefer and his closest collaborators but all those who were complicit, will be tried and sentenced," said the PS leaders.

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