

4-6-1994

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Recommended Citation

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Investigation Into Colosio Assassination Leads To New Arrests

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 1994-04-06

On April 4, the Attorney General's Office (Procuraduria General de la Republica, PGR) released a preliminary report indicating that at least seven people were involved in a conspiracy that led to the March 23 assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, who was presidential candidate for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

In a nationally- televised address, special prosecutor Miguel Montes, who is heading the PGR investigation, said that five of the seven men thought to have taken part in the plot were in custody as of April 4. The five suspects are Mario Aburto, who has confessed to firing the weapon that killed Colosio; Vicente Mayoral Valenzuela; Rodolfo Mayoral Esquer; Jose Rodolfo Rivapalacio; and Tranquilino Sanchez Venegas.

At least three of the five are former policemen, including Mayoral Valenzuela, who served as chief of criminal investigations in the Baja California state police (Policia Judicial). The report said two other men who allegedly participated in the plot have not been identified and remain at large. Montes's report said the suspects participated in an elaborate plot aimed at infiltrating Colosio's security detail. Colosio's security group consisted of at least six members of President Salinas's team of military bodyguards (Estado Mayor Presidencial).

By infiltrating the security team, the suspects were able to distract Colosio's bodyguards in order to allow Aburto to get close enough to Colosio to fire the fatal shot. Montes said the allegations against the suspects are based largely on a study of photographs and videotapes of the incident, supported by testimony from eyewitnesses. Among other things, Montes says the video footage confirmed that Aburto, Sanchez, and Mayoral Valenzuela had talked together just before the crime, "clearly appearing to know each other."

Montes's report did not mention a possible motive for the assassination. Nonetheless, official confirmation that Aburto did not act alone as was first reported has spurred several conspiracy theories, including the possibility that PRI insiders may have ordered the assassination. In fact, the rumors are especially gaining force given the arrest of Jose Rodolfo Rivapalacio, a PRI party leader in Tijuana. Rivapalacio was responsible for hiring security guards to work in a crowd control unit during Colosio's campaign stop in the city, representing a direct potential link between PRI insiders and the assassination plot.

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