11-30-1994

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Zedillo to Inherit Investigation into Murder of PRI Official Ruiz Massieu

by Carlos Navarro
Category/Department: Mexico
Published: 1994-11-30

On Dec. 1, Ernesto Zedillo will be inaugurated as Mexico's 62nd president, thus inheriting a number of volatile and unresolved issues left over from the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. These unresolved issues include the 11-month conflict in Chiapas, as well as lingering questions over the role of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the assassinations of presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in March and secretary-general Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu in September.

While the Colosio assassination and the Chiapas conflict have received only sporadic publicity in recent weeks, the allegations of PRI involvement in the assassination of Ruiz Massieu have been very much in the public eye in the days leading up to Zedillo's inauguration ceremony on Dec. 1. The charges of PRI involvement in the Ruiz Massieu assassination are of special concern to the PRI leadership, because the chief accuser is deputy attorney general and PRI member Mario Ruiz Massieu, the brother of the murder victim. Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu was gunned down outside a Mexico City hotel on Sept. 28 by Daniel Trevino Aguilar, who told authorities the killing was ordered by PRI federal deputy Manuel Munoz Rocha of Tamaulipas state. As of Nov. 30, Munoz Rocha remained a fugitive.

The accusations of PRI involvement in the assassination have not only placed the party in a bad light, but have also widened the divisions between two factions of the PRI. One faction known to some political analysts as the "dinosaurs," since it is comprised of leaders from the party's "old guard"--is said to want to keep power at all costs, while another faction of technocratic reformers is willing to share power with opposition political parties. In public interviews and press conferences during November, Mario Ruiz Massieu who had been appointed as chief investigator of his brother's death said Munoz Rocha was only one of a faction of at least 15 members of the PRI, which he said was responsible for planning the attack on his brother.

In most cases, Mario Ruiz Massieu declined to identify any of the members of the faction. However, in an interview with Reforma newspaper on Nov. 25, he implicated former governors Xicotencatl Leyva of Baja California state and Antonio Toledo of Sonora state, as well as current Senator Enrique Cardenas of Tamaulipas state. However, he said none of the officials he mentioned had ever been investigated. "There is no proof on record because there has never been an investigation," he told the newspaper. The greatest damage to the PRI from Ruiz Massieu's charges, however, has been the allegation that PRI president Ignacio Pichardo, secretary general Maria de los Angeles Moreno, and Attorney General Humberto Benitez Trevino have directly blocked the investigation of the assassination. The three PRI leaders have denied involvement, and after the initial allegations, they challenged Mario Ruiz Massieu to present proof. The three leaders later accused the deputy attorney general of conducting an "incompetent" investigation and announced plans to file lawsuits against Mario Ruiz Massieu for defamation and misuse of his office.

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"We are charging him with failing to carry out his mandate, abuse of authority, and slander of members of the party," said Pichardo. To emphasize his point about PRI obstruction of the investigation, Mario Ruiz Massieu resigned his post as deputy attorney general at a press conference on Nov. 23. Ruiz Massieu's immediate family, all long-time members of the PRI, also resigned from the party that day. In fact, Marisela Ruiz Massieu, who had been elected as a member of the Chamber of Deputies during the Aug. 21 elections, announced that she would serve as an independent in the legislative body, rather than represent the PRI.

On Nov. 24, in an interview on Television Azteca, Ruiz Massieu declared that "he knows much more" about the assassination of his brother than he has revealed. He told the interviewer that the evidence he gathered during the investigation is sealed in boxes at the headquarters of the Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la Republica, PGR). Ruiz Massieu requested that the boxes be opened on Dec. 1 in the presence of a public notary to prevent tampering, when president-elect Zedillo takes office. On the other hand, he expressed concern that the evidence could be altered before then, since five PGR functionaries have access to the boxes.

"It's possible that the evidence could be 'lost'," he said in a radio interview. Before his resignation, Ruiz Massieu asked for an investigation of Pichardo, Moreno, and Benitez. However, in a communique issued on Nov. 27, the PGR announced that there was insufficient evidence to warrant a full investigation of the three PRI officials. In response to the PGR announcement, on Nov. 28 Ruiz Massieu accused the PGR of attempting to "sow confusion and minimize the proof" so far collected regarding the assassination of his brother. He also said the PGR has purposely downplayed the evidence he presented regarding the role of Benitez, Pichardo, and Moreno in the cover-up.

Political analyst Sergio Sarmiento of Reforma newspaper called the day of charges and countercharges on Nov. 23 "bloody Wednesday," noting that Zedillo is now under pressure "to prove he can operate an effective administration" despite the accusations of criminal activity on the part of high-ranking people in his party. Zedillo has made very few comments on the case, in part because he has been out of the country during the latter part of November. However, during a statement made while on a trip to Washington on Nov. 23, Zedillo promised to continue the investigations begun by Ruiz Massieu.

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