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Chile: Leftist Leader Assassinated

by John Neagle

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According to police, late Sept. 4 Jecar Neghme Cristi was ambushed by three gunmen from a car and shot to death. Neghme, 29, a Chilean of Palestinian origin, was walking to an office of the officially banned Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), when he was shot 12 times. MIR sources cited by AFP said they believed Neghme might have been killed while pinned to the ground, saying no bullets had hit the wall behind him. Neghme belonged to the Broad Party of the Socialist Left (PAIS), but was also an MIR spokesperson. At a public rally in late August, Neghme pledged his party's support for Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin, the opposition's only candidate for the Dec. 14 elections.

On Sept. 5, several radio stations were contacted by a person who claimed to be speaking for a previously unknown rightist death squad, the 11th of September Front. The caller was quoted as saying, "We take full responsibility" for the killing. The Front's name is a reference to the date that Gen. Augusto Pinochet took power in a 1973 coup. The caller said the group was avenging attacks by leftist guerrillas on the security forces. This year eight police officers have died in such attacks. The caller asserted, "We will not stop in the execution of other leftist leaders." Also on Tuesday, the police used tear gas to break up a protest march by dozens of MIR supporters. Witnesses said the demonstrators threw stones and at least one fire bomb at police vehicles. There were no reports of arrests. MIR was once Chile's leading leftist rebel group. In recent years, it split into three factions. Neghme was a leader of the moderate faction. His father, a Socialist, was killed by firing squad after the 1973 coup. Interior Minister Carlos Caceres said the murder was an outcome of fighting among MIR factions. On Sept. 7, Denisse Pascal Allende, vice president of PAIS, said that an operation to impede the return to democracy via attacks against political leaders was likely underway. Pascal Allende reported that two unidentified assailants attacked Christian Left Party leader Jaime Cavada, who suffered head injuries. Cavada had previously received several death threats. Pascal also demanded protection of PAIS leaders by police. PAIS is comprised of the Communist, Almeyda Socialist, Christian Left, and Historic Socialist parties, and the MIR. (Basic data from AFP, Reuter, 09/05/89; Notimex, 09/07/89)

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