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Congress Declines to Pick New Prosecutor in Colosio Case

by LADB Staff

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In an unexpected turn of events, three political parties in Congress turned down President Ernesto Zedillo's invitation to participate in the selection of a new prosecutor to investigate the assassination of presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio. Key members of the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), the Labor Party (PT), and Zedillo's own Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) said the differences of opinion were too wide for the Chamber of Deputies and Senate to reach consensus on the best person to fill the post. The National Action Party (PAN) at first did not withdraw from the process, but said its participation in the selection of a new prosecutor would be useless without the involvement of the three other parties. "Only eight days ago, we were praising the new climate of collaboration between the executive and legislative branch," said PAN legislator Garcia. "I think the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies owe the public an explanation."

The decision of Congress seems ironic, since the legislature including members of the PRI and PRD were the most vocal critics of the Attorney General's Office (PGR) for its failure to resolve the assassination of Colosio, who was gunned down at a campaign rally in Tijuana in March of 1994. The former prosecutor in the Colosio case, Pablo Chapa Bezanilla, was forced to resign in early August after a federal judge ruled that the government had insufficient evidence to charge Othon Cortes with participating in Colosio's assassination (see SourceMex, 08/14/96). The legislature including members of the PRI appears divided on the best course of action.

Some PRI legislators have demanded the resignation of Attorney General Antonio Lozano Gracia, who is a member of the PAN. On the other hand, others have suggested that Lozano Gracia take over the investigation. "We think it would be better for the president, through his attorney general, to decide who will be responsible for the investigation," the PRI faction said in a prepared statement on Aug. 26. Some citizen groups have demanded that the PGR make public all the evidence collected thus far in the Colosio case. Some theories suggest that former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari and his close advisers may have planned Colosio's assassination. The PGR has attempted to link the assassination to an organized plot, rather than to lone-gunman Mario Aburto, who remains in federal custody. The inability of former prosecutor Chapa Bezanilla to come up with adequate evidence to support this theory ultimately led to his dismissal. Meantime, new evidence to support the plot theory surfaced less than two weeks after Chapa Bezanilla's resignation.

In late August, the national television network Televisa aired a videotape taken at Colosio's political rally in Tijuana on March 23, 1994. The video tape, obtained from former PGR adviser Eduardo Valle, shows an unidentified woman apparently moving her hands above her head and making gestures toward Colosio while saying, "They're going to kill you." The scene occurred minutes before he was assassinated. Valle, who served under former attorney general Jorge Carpizo, remains in exile in the US. Valle was an adviser for the PGR in 1993-1994. He resigned in August 1994, calling Mexico a "narco-democracy," and fled to the US in fear for his life. In an interview with Mexico's Radio Red, Valle also cast doubts on the theory of Aburto as the lone gunman. "At least three people

yelled, 'He (Mario Aburto Martinez) is not the one,' but no one paid attention," Valle said in the interview. In the video, as several spectators are seen pursuing Aburto, one man is seen fleeing the scene, which sharply contrasts with the behavior of most of the other people present, who are seen frantically pushing to get closer to the spot where Colosio was killed. Valle suggested that the PGR investigation should focus on that particular individual.

According to the daily newspaper The News, the evidence presented by Valle has never been found by the PGR's 60 agents working full-time on the Colosio murder investigation. Meantime, Attorney General Lozano said his office will examine very closely the new evidence brought forth by Valle. "I believe this evidence is very important," said Lozano Gracia to a group of international journalists two days after the new video footage of the Tijuana murder was shown on Televisa. Still, Lozano remained cautious. "This information has to be corroborated with a lot of other information," he said. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 08/25/96; Novedades, 08/22/96, 08/26/96, 08/27/96; Excelsior, 08/26/96; La Jornada, 08/22/96, 08/23/96, 08/27/96; El Financiero, 08/27/96; The News, 08/27/96, 08/28/96)

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