

10-18-2006

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Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Death of Ex-Interior Secretary Leaves Questions Unanswered About Dirty War." (2006).
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Death of Ex-Interior Secretary Leaves Questions Unanswered About Dirty War

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2006-10-18

In early October, former interior secretary Mario Moya Palencia, considered a key player during the government's dirty war against leftists during the 1960s and 1970s, died in Mexico City without having to face trial for his alleged crimes. Moya Palencia, who headed the Secretaria de Gobernacion (SEGOB) during the presidency of Luis Echeverria Alvarez (1970-1976), is said to be responsible for the violent repression of student demonstrators during the infamous Jueves de Corpus incident in June 1971 (see SourceMex, 2002-06-19).

Special prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Flores, director of the Fiscalía Especializada en Movimientos Sociales y Politicos del Pasado (FEMOSPP), filed genocide charges against Echeverria and Moya Palencia in 2004 (see SourceMex, 2004-10-20). The case ended up before the high court (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nacion, SCJN), which initially ruled that the two officials could not be brought to trial on genocide charges (see SourceMex, 2005-03-02). The court later reversed that stance, saying that genocide charges were applicable (see SourceMex, 2005-06-22).

The SCJN decision did not rule on whether genocide charges were applicable in the Jueves de Corpus case, so Carrillo brought the case to a federal court presided by Judge Antonia Herlinda Velasco. The judge refused to issue arrest warrants against Echeverria and Moya Palencia on the grounds that the Jueves de Corpus killings did not meet the legal standards for genocide.

The judge said homicide was applicable in this case, but the statute of limitations for filing such charges expired in 1985 (see SourceMex, 2005-08-03). "Even though [Moya Palencia] was exonerated by the federal justice system of the crime of genocide, his role in the creation of the elite military unit Halcones, which repressed a peaceful student march, was never clarified," said the Mexico City daily newspaper La Jornada. Moya Palencia's defenders insist that the court rulings are important.

"The federal courts declared him innocent of all charges," said Juan Velazquez, an attorney who represented both Echeverria and Moya Palencia. He said there were no charges pending against the ex-interior secretary at the time of his death. "Don Mario was never brought to trial."

Moya Palencia also played censorship role in 1960s

Moya Palencia's connection to the dirty war is tied primarily to the Jueves de Corpus repression, but he also played behind-the-scene roles in the repression of dissent during the administration of former President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz (1964-1970). Moya, who was SEGOB's director of cinematography during the Diaz Ordaz administration, had a key role in censoring information that was not favorable to the administration. "From that office, Moya Palencia not only censored Mexican productions, but also those originating outside the country, especially in the aftermath of the Tlateloloco massacre," said the Agencia de noticias Proceso (apro).

Moya Palencia went on to serve as president of the state-run paper company Productora e Importadora de Papel (PIPSA), where he also played a censorship role. "At PIPSA, Moya Palencia had tight control over the distribution of newsprint, limiting supplies to any newspaper that questioned the regime," said apro.

After Echeverria completed his term in 1976, Moya Palencia threw his hat into the ring to become the presidential candidate for the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). At that time, the PRI was still the dominant party, so anyone who gained the nomination through the traditional "dedazo," or designation by the party leadership, was assured of winning the presidency. Rather than select Moya Palencia, Echeverria and the PRI executive committee (comite ejecutivo nacional, CEN) opted to give the dedazo to Jose Lopez Portillo, who served until 1982.

Human rights advocates said Moya Palencia's death would not derail their efforts to uncover the truth about the role of the Echeverria administration in the repression of dissent. "We are going to continue our intense efforts to bring to light all the atrocities committed during the six-year tenure of Echeverria," said Rosario Ibarra, whose son Jesus Piedra disappeared in 1974 after being detained by authorities. "We are not seeking revenge, but we want justice," added Ibarra, founder of the uman rights organization Comite Eureka. She represents the Partido del Trabajo (PT) in the federal Senate.

The efforts of Ibarra and other advocates could become a little more difficult, as their ally Ignacio Carrillo will no longer be investigating dirty-war crimes. Earlier this year, the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) announced that the FEMOSPP was being phased out and its duties transferred to other units within the attorney general's office (see SourceMex, 2006-04-26). [Sources: Agencia de noticias Proceso, Associated Press, Notimex, 10/09/06; La Jornada, Excelsior, Milenio Diario, Reforma, El Universal, La Cronica de Hoy, 10/10/06]

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