

Periods:

Dec/73 - Jan/74

Asesinato

IV, 9

DEATHS DURING THE MONTH OF CHRISTMAS

It is not possible to know the number of deaths in Chile in the last month of 1973 and the first month of 1974, owing to obvious difficulties of communication, especially from the provinces. However, it is apparent that the advent of the Christmas season has not impeded a series of executions without trial, under pretexts created ad hoc.

12-2. Ex-socialist deputy Luis Espinoza Villalobos was killed in Valdivia. The newspapers of 12-4 give the well known official version: "attempted to flee." This is given in spite of the fact that Luis Espinoza was obese, that prisoners are moved bound and under guard armed with machine guns. The pretext is obviously implausible.

12-12. Dr. Absalon Werner Villar, the ex-director of the Third Health District, and Roberto Achu Liendo, the ex-chief of the Office of Social Development of San Felipe, were killed. Both were 31; both had small children. The pretext given by El Mercurio is the same: attempt to escape while the vehicle in which they were transported broke. Actually, they were killed a few yards from the prison of San Felipe, during the hours of curfew (when flight would have been impossible.)

12-19. While they were being moved to the Buin Regiment, after they had been tortured during two periods of detention, the seventeen year old student, Denrio Alvarez, and three young men, alleged extremists (Miristas), whose names were not given, were murdered. The official explanation: attempting to flee while their prison vehicle was disabled by a flat tire. The truth, it would appear, is that young Alvarez died during the second period of torture, together with the three other youths. Alvarez' father, in addition, was relieved of his job at the University of Chile.

12-20. The death of Dr. Jorge Avila, under torture or perhaps by firing squad, without trial, was confirmed. Dr. Avila was a specialist at the psychiatric hospital of Santiago. He had surrendered himself in September voluntarily. Recently married; his wife was expecting her first child.

12-23. The government announced the death of five youths the previous night, during an alleged armed confrontation with troops while attempting to scale a high tension tower. According to the official communique, one was discovered to have been carrying, in his pocket, a plan entitled "Plan Leopard", in which the plans for a sabotage attempt against a high tension tower were elaborately spelled out. The youths were: Luis Canales Vivanco, 27; Carlos Alberto Cuevas, 21; Pedro Rojas Castro, 21; Alejandro Patricio Gomez Vega, 22 and Luis Orellana Perez, 25. In reality, as neighbors and relatives have testified,

(continued)

all of them had already been arrested, in their respective homes, between the eighteenth and the twentieth of December. The arrests, it would seem, were made by members of the Air Force of Chile, in plain clothes, driving the white refrigerator trucks of the Bresler ice cream company. Some of their parents turned to the Peace Committee (Committee Number 2) for legal help and began to look for their sons at various police stations and regimental headquarters, without finding them. Only on the 23rd did they learn of their sons' deaths.

In truth, there had been no attempt to sabotage electric transmission towers (always well protected), nor had there been any sort of armed confrontation. On the contrary, their murders were pre-meditated and cold-blooded without charge or trial. They were carried out by a Death Squad of sorts, related to the Chilean Air Force, which acted outside official channels, but with official consent. The youths died under torture, which is indicated by the fact that at least two of the five cadavers, upon identification, showed not bullet wounds, but contusions of the head and body, as well as burn marks upon wrists and genitals. On December 23rd and 24th, just before Christmas, these young men were buried. Perhaps their lives, taken so early and unjustifiably, were just what General Arellano Stark needed to justify his prediction that "extremists" had been preparing "una Pascua negra" - a black Christmas.

This crime was only one of many committed under similar pretexts, against persons who had already been detained. The authorities would invent a "plan" or an assault against military installations, in order not to have to repeat every time "attempting to flee during a motor vehicle breakdown." This was the case with "Plan Butterfly", the pretext for the firing squad murder of Mariano Garcia, ex-director of the El Salvador copper mine, and thirty miners, without trial. The "plan" was described fleetingly by the newspaper La Segunda of November 29, which indicated that it envisaged assassination attempts against the wives and children of military personnel, as well as an attempt to blow up the entire mine.

The same newspaper on the same date and page, denounced "Plan Lautaro", identical in every respect with plan Butterfly, except that its alleged objective was an assault against a nitrate rather than a copper mine. "Plan Lauraro" was used by the authorities to justify firing squad executions which occurred without benefit of judicial proceedings, in the Saltpeter mines of Pedro de Valdivia and Maria Elena.

In Valparaiso, at the beginning of October, military communiques spoke of "Plan Zulu", a plan no less terrifying and no less a military fabrication - than the famous "Plan Zeta". It is to be noted that the forgery in the case of Plan Zeta is very clumsy, given that its alleged official, as reproduced in

(continued)-

the White Book (Libro Blanco) , mentions not September 17, the date usually mentioned, but the 19th, and that "tentatively."

"Plan Leopard" was offered as an excuse for the cold blooded murder of five youths. (The very idea that it would have been necessary to elaborate -- and carry about in one's pocket - a detailed plan to sabotage a power line seems quite absurd as the Hollywood style name coined by its military inventors.) There had been no attempt to sabotage a transmission tower, just as there had never been an attempt against the powder magazine of the Tucapel Regiment of Temuco on the night of November 10th when seven persons were killed allegedly while involved in such an attempt, but had long been prisoners as of that date. Their wives had made desperate attempts to save these seven, and had gone three times to the regimental headquarters on the very day on which they were executed. The official military version of the incident, announced by General Pinochet on the morning of November 11th attempts to link Alberto Molina, regional secretary of the Communist Party of Cautin, to the incident as leader of the attack and carrier of a machine gun and explosives. Alberto Molina had long before had his right arm cut off at the shoulder in an accident in the mines of the Lota district.

The year 1973 ended with the shooting death at the entrance to the Argentine Embassy, of the 27 year old youth Luis Leiva.

In every instance an "attempt to flee" or a frustrated extremist assault is invented in order to explain new deaths. The prophecies of "El Mercurio" on the 6th of January, 1974 that "there will surely be contrived (new) attempts against military posts", made in order to prepare a favorable climate for new crimes, were confirmed with new murders in January.

The editorial page of "El Mercurio" of the 22nd of January, 1974, reports an attack against a military patrol in Quillota , alleged to have occurred "while the patrol was transferring a group of prisoners from one part of the city to another." The result: "six extremists dead". To get away from the usual formula, "attempting to flee", Mercurio mentions "two fugitive prisoners", without giving their names and later it indicates that there had been other non-publicized episodes of the same type. It continues "the need to avoid the general public impels authorities to keep secret the job being done by our military as well as the attempts made by extremists to upset the public order." And, predictably, it ends with the announcement of fresh deaths, concluding that "so long as the danger of events of this type (terrorist attacks) should continue to exist, it would be well that the citizenry be warned."

The fallen martyrs of January 18th in Quillota, local leaders of the Popular Unity government and of workers' organizations, had been detained since September. There were Victor Fuenzalida F., Diego H. Aranda B., Julio Arturo Joo Pardo,

(continued)

The rejection, in the middle of January, a writ of habeas corpus presented by the lawyer Andres Alwyn on behalf of seven peasants who had been detained and had disappeared, dramatically shows the state of human rights in Chile. They were detained in October, like thousands of other workers. And they do not appear listed as prisoners in any military or civil prison. For the moment, in January, no one has any indication of their fates. They are the brothers Ramiro, Redro and Silvestre Lunoz, Basilio Valencia, Rosalindo Herrera, Patricio Duque and Carlos Gaete. In the farming region of Buin (in the province of Santiago) alone, 19 farm workers have disappeared in this way. Also, in January a deposit of dozens of cadavers was discovered in Tumbes (Talcahuano).

The 8th of January, 1974, another Chilean river, the Pilmaiquen (Osorno province) yielded up the bodies of five persons who had been detained. Knowledge of their whereabouts had been disclaimed in all of the regional police stations and regimental headquarters. One of the bodies was that of Raul Santana Alarcon, a leader of slum dwellers, who had surrendered voluntarily in Osorno on September 17, 1973. Another was that of Gustavo Isor Spormann, detained September 29 and taken to the third police headquarters of Osorno. Another body was that of Juan Mansilla Delgado, who had been detained on October 6th by police of the Salto de Pilmaiquen barracks. He and his half brothers Eduardo and Alfredo Pacheco (detained with him on October 6th) were officially listed as dead in a communication made by the Social Assistant of the Army in Valdivia to their sister after close to two months of exhaustive searching. She was given their death certificates for "legal purposes." The certificates list the date October 9, 1973--three days after their detention--as the date of their deaths; the cause of death, in each case, is listed as "unknown." The other body belonged to Mario Sandoval V., communist alderman of Rio Negro, who had been detained September 18th and whose presence had been denied at army and police headquarters.

On December 30, just before the new year, Marcelino Cardenas Villegas who had been detained and later placed in unconditional liberty by the military tribunal of Valdivia on December 28, was killed by police of the Salto del Pilmaiquen barracks. While entering his home to detain him, they killed a neighbor, Carmen, the mother of seven children, whom they found there. Of 25 other persons of this province who have been detained and later disappeared, nothing is known. With much reason, they are presumed to be dead.

The first month of the new year ended with another murder, this time of four youths, killed in Puerto Montt during the midnight hours of January 31. As common in the official version, their deaths occurred while they were being transported. This time, however, the official version was a bit different, for the sake of variety: "One of the detained took advantage of a moment of carelessness on the part of one of the members of the patrol to seize his rifle and succeeded in firing a shot.

(continued)

The other three took advantage of the opportunity to hurl themselves upon the other members of the patrol, with evident intent to seize their rifles and attack them." This attempt was repelled with the resultant death of four prisoners: Jose H. Lanao Ampuero, Pedro Bahamoendes Rogel, Jose S. Soto Munoz and Hector Maldonado Ulloa. The reporter for El Mercurio was forced to mention that many people attended their funeral, for the youths were well known and loved, and one of them was an outstanding sportsman.

The communique which announced these deaths was signed by the Air Force General Sergio Leigh, the brother of Gustavo Leigh, Commander in Chief of the Air Force and member of the Junta and of Hernan Leigh, the Chilean delegate to the "Anti-communist Congress" which met in Brazil in January. The similarities between these murders and those committed daily in Brazil by the renowned Death Squad cannot be ignored.

These crimes must be condemned. They must be stopped. They offend the most minimal human conscience; they are a stain upon the humanist and Christian tradition of Chile, and they can create wounds and hatred whose consequences can hardly be predicted.

To remain silent, to do nothing, is to be an accomplice to these crimes. There are Christians of good faith within the present government who are unfamiliar with these facts and who continue to believe the lies by which these crimes are officially explained. They know nothing of the deaths and disappearances of humble farmers and workers, in distant places, without writ or warrant. It is inconceivable that these death squad type actions should have the consent of authorities who say they are searching for a workable modus vivendi and of persons who declare their adhesion to doctrines of elementary human rights.

It is inconceivable that the authorities should continue to justify the absence of even a minimum of true justice, and a total lack of personal guarantees by reference to a counterfeit "state of war," having nothing to do with reality nor is it conceivable that they should continue to invent attempts to flee or attacks against military personnel to justify their crimes. They cannot continue to force soldiers to kill their brothers on the pretense that they are morally justified by the existence of "Plan Z." They have lost all respect for human life, which only God can give and only God should take away, taking lives on the pretext of imaginary crimes, gratuitously blamed upon victims who have not the slightest possibility of defending themselves effectively.

Christians and non Christians, in and out of government, cannot be indifferent in the face of systematic torture and murder in our Chile.