

# Institute for Policy Studies

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AFTER THE MURDERS OF FORMER CHILEAN AMBASSADOR ORLANDO LETELIER AND HIS AMERICAN CO-WORKER RONNI KARPEN MOFFITT, PEOPLE WERE STRUCK WITH BOTH SHOCK AND GRIEF. THAT EVENING, MICHAEL MOFFITT PAINFULLY WROTE OUT HIS FEELINGS TO EASE HIS SORROW AFTER THE TRAGIC LOSS OF HIS YOUNG WIFE AND HIS FRIEND, A GREAT CHILEAN PATRIOT. THE FOLLOWING IS THE CONTEXT OF THOSE THOUGHTS:

Generally when people reach a certain level of prominence in society, they tend to pawn off lesser tasks to subordinates. Orlando Letelier was not such a man. On Monday evening, September 21, we spent several hours quite literally going over the placing of commas and semicolons in a draft of an essay we had been writing. A few hours later, Orlando and my wife, Ronni Karpen Moffitt, were murdered by a bomb as we drove around Sheridan Circle in Washington.

I vividly recall the day that Orlando was taken prisoner, the same day his beloved President Salvador Allende Gossens was killed in Moneda Palace in Santiago, Chile. That day, September 11, 1973, one of Washington's typically beautiful autumn scenes, turned dark, sort of like Good Friday always seemed to me when I was a child. Various news reports gave conflicting descriptions of what was going on in Chile at the time and it was not confirmed until later that the Allende government had been overthrown by Chilean generals who had always pledged to uphold the Constitution.

I also recall thinking that the coup in Chile would somehow be extraordinarily important in my life. Yesterday, I finally found out why.

The Chilean experience was a unique experiment, or "model" as the academicians phrase it. One of the few Third World countries with any semblance of constitutional rule, Chile, under President Allende, embarked on a road to establish socialism by peaceful means. Not that their reforms were anything new. On the contrary, President Allende merely put into practice many reform measures-- redistribution of land, "Chileanization" of copper production, and the establishment of real social welfare programs for the masses of people--which had always been proposed as a way of attracting the votes of the poor, the intellectuals, and the workers, but were always infinitely postponed and severely compromised with the domestic and international powers-that-be.

Under President Allende, Chile had perhaps the most tolerant political system in the world. The most savage and libelous attacks in the media and elsewhere--far less drove Mr. Nixon to move on his enemies--were tolerated almost to the point of being politically naive. This openness led to the extraordinary advances in popular support for the Unidad Popular government. The UP was one of

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the first in Chilean history to increase in popularity (gauged by provincial elections which are fought out on national issues) while it was in power.

But the entire Chilean political tradition has been systematically destroyed in the three years since the coup. Trade unions, non-sympathetic newspapers and magazines, academic freedom, and most importantly, literally thousands of lives and hopes have been extinguished by the junta and its henchmen. In fighting their war against the "cancer of Marxism" they have decided to kill the patient: the people of Chile.

All of which brings us to the murder of Orlando Letelier. We may never know who planted the bomb in his car last tuesday, just as we will never know who pulled the trigger on the late President Allende. The lawyers, administrators, and professors will make their clever debating points and insist that the investigation proceed prudently. But in a very real sense these are of secondary importance.

The United States government, especially the Nixon Administration and the intelligence community hated the Allende government. Private banks, foreign assistance agencies, international lending institutions, and the highest officials of the US government and corporations it represents, tried to make it impossible for Allende to govern. Likewise, the junta which now holds an iron clamp on Chilean society, hated Orlando Letelier. Indeed, it was a fluke that he ever left the concentration camp of Dawson Island at all. He used to laugh at how stupid and clumsy they were to harass his family and friends and to try to destroy his reputation within Chile to drum up increased support for their barbarism. He said last Monday evening he thought the "moderates" had prevailed and that he was essentially not in danger. Thus, he went around the world tirelessly trying to inform anyone who would listen about the brutal nature of that regime. He predicted that the junta would last "probably three more years" but that its life span would be considerably shortened if, first of all, the market price of copper remains low; and secondly, if all US government assistance would be withdrawn.

The latter would be a fitting tribute to his life. For the reality is that the junta is responsible not only for the death of Chilean society and one of its great diplomats, but they are also, I suspect, responsible for the death of my wife. Anyone who is interested knows that Washington is full of Dina agents, the Chilean secret police. Whether or not directions came from Santiago or the Embassy on Massachusetts avenue is not known at this time. If a sincere investigation is not quashed by political pressure, it may be possible to find out.

My wife and I loved Orlando Letelier because, like he, we believe that the abominable conditions in which the majority of the human race (especially, but not exclusively in the Third World) are forced to live, is morally outrageous and politically insane. This is the legacy which they and the late President Allende bequeathed to the world and millions of people will never forget it.

Michael Moffitt  
9/22/1976