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Editor
The Miami Herald
One Herald Plaza
Miami, Florida

Dear Sir:

No one with the faintest interest in current events has ever had any doubts as to the power of the press to mold, for better or for worse, public opinion. Rarely has there been a more flagrant abuse of this power than the campaign of distortion and out and out falsehood which the Knight-Ridder newspapers have unleashed in opposition to the Petition for Commutation of Sentence filed on behalf of Valentin Hernandez.

This distortion is best personified by the Miami Herald editorial of December 2, entitled, "No Pardon!", a mean-spirited piece of yellow journalism reminiscent in tactics, if not ideology, of the worst of the McCarthy Era.

As The Herald knew all too well, or should, with the barest minimum of investigation, have known, Mr. Hernandez at no time requested a pardon. To the contrary, he requested a commutation of sentence. This would have removed the 25 year mandatory minimum provision of his sentence, and placed any possible release date squarely up to the discretion of the Parole and Probation Commission. It would in no way have guaranteed his release, but would have allowed the Commission to consider this at some future date, evaluating all aspects of the case at that time, including the crime itself as well as any possible offsetting factors, such as rehabilitation.

As The Herald also knew, a pardon would have had the effect of excusing Mr. Hernandez from any and all future consequences of his conviction. This was never Mr. Hernandez's intent. ^{again} Although serious questions as to the character of some witnesses/ him remain, he has accepted his conviction under the American system of justice, and applied for appropriate relief as provided for under that same system.

Pardon would, indeed, be inappropriate in this case. The Herald's distortion of the true nature of the petition can only have been designed to outrage public opinion and thus unduly influence the decision.

There are so many untruths and inaccuracies in the Knight-Ridder articles that it is impossible to address them all in this format. For example: Jesus Lazo, the man named by The Herald as Mr. Hernandez's coperpetrator, is said by The Herald to have been, "convicted in ausencia." The fact is that Lazo has neither been convicted nor tried; he has been convicted to date by no one other than the Knight-Ridder newspapers.

Some of the other inaccuracies are far more damaging, none more so than the depiction of Luciano Nieves as a pacifist who was executed in cold blood for "holding views that were not violent enough", and because he "favored American-Cuban detente." In reality, Nieves, a former Captain in Castro's army who enjoyed close ties with Fidel himself, was a bellicose, aggressive individual with a penchant for starting loud political arguments in public places. Rather than being "stalked" by "a cold-blooded political assassin", he was shot by a third party after a brief struggle near his car. The third party also wounded Hernandez. Inside Nieves's car afterwards, police found a fully loaded .45, suggesting that had the "pacifist" reached his car, he might be the one currently seeking clemency.

As to the characterization of Valentin Hernandez as a "terrorist" "political assassin", etc., Mr. Hernandez has steadfastly denied any such allegations throughout the years, nor has he been charged with any such crimes. Indeed, those who have thus accused him are an unsavory lot, including two Nieves associates (and witnesses against Hernandez) later arrested by the FBI as Communist agents, as well as an acknowledged anarchist and arsonist whose arm was blown off while placing an incendiary device. Furthermore, the officer in charge of the investigation, Fabio Alonso, was later twice convicted of narcotics trafficking and corruption, including activities ongoing at the time of the investigation.

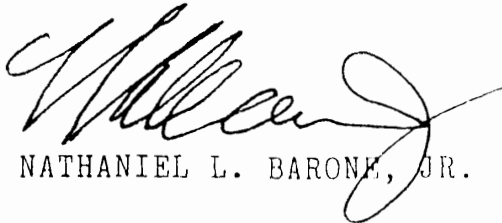
Mr. Hernandez freely admits being an anti-Castro activist, while denying ever being involved in any terrorist activities. Obviously, many responsible members of the Cuban community believe him. To impugn the character of all these people by labeling them as supporters of terrorism, as the Knight-Ridder editorials have done, is to cast an unfortunate slur upon the entire Cuban community.

In closing, let us freely admit that the foregoing represents this matter as viewed from the side of Valentin Hernandez. That is precisely the point -- there are two sides, which the Knight-Ridder papers totally failed to bring out. With their failure to do so, they did a grave disservice not only to Valentin Hernandez but to their readers and the cause of justice as well.

(3.)

We honor, and rightfully so, the concept of a free press in our society. In order for the press to be truly free, it must not present the news tailored in such a manner as to reflect only the views espoused by those writing, or assigning, the story.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'N. Barone, Jr.', written in dark ink. The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with a large loop at the end.

NATHANIEL L. BARONE, JR.