

Exile who plotted store bombing to be free on parole after 6 years

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A Cuban exile sentenced to 65 years for attempting to bomb a Little Havana adult bookstore in 1976 will be released from prison in August for "outstanding" behavior, state parole officials decided Wednesday.



De la Cova

Antonio de la Cova was sentenced to 65 years by Dade Circuit Judge Ellen Morphonios Gable, but the Florida Parole and Probation Commission in Tallahassee had already set a Nov. 1, 1983, release date before Wednesday's hearing. The decision Wednesday, freeing de la Cova Aug. 1, shaved another 15 months off his sentence.

De la Cova was arrested with two other persons by a 30-member posse of FBI agents and police outside *Libros Para Adultos*, an adult bookstore, in May 1976, after an FBI informant warned of a plot to bomb the store.

In a presentence statement, de la Cova said the bookstore was selected as a target by the informant, who had convinced him that the

owner was an agent of Fidel Castro trying to help prove that the Communists had driven immorality out of Cuba.

Charles Scriven, one of the two parole commission members who decided Wednesday to release de la Cova early, said the commission was influenced by a recommendation from the state Department of Corrections.

"They recommended to the commission that the [sentence] be reduced by 12 months," Scriven said. "We added three months."

Scriven said the recommendation was made because of de la Cova's "outstanding" behavior while imprisoned at the Dade Correctional Institution in Homestead.

The parole board's action was criticized by Dade Assistant State Attorney George Yoss, one of the original prosecutors in de la Cova's case. Yoss said he was "very disappointed" that de la Cova is being released early.

"I don't think it speaks very highly of the integrity of a sentence that a judge gives in court when [de la Cova] is sentenced to 65 years and is released by the parole board in less than seven," he said.

However, de la Cova, in a document presented to the parole board before Wednesday's hearing, claimed his original sentence had been excessive.

"We were the first to be arrested and charged with an attempted bombing," he wrote in the statement, "and [Judge Gable] made an example out of our case."

His debt to society, de la Cova added, has been paid by the time he has already served.

"I made a regrettable mistake and have mended my ways so that I will be an asset to the community I live in," he wrote.

According to a letter attached to the document, de la Cova plans to live in Puerto Rico during his parole period and has been offered a job writing for a publication in San Juan.

He declined to comment to The Herald after the parole commission decision Wednesday.

De la Cova has received support from prominent Cuban-Americans including state Rep. Roberto Casas, Miami Commissioner Demetrio Perez Jr. and Hialeah Mayor Raul Martinez. All three wrote to the state parole board asking that the sentence be reduced.

Miami Auxiliary Bishop Agustin Roman, who has repeatedly visited de la Cova in prison, said he is glad de la Cova is being released.

"He wouldn't be coming out of prison if he was not going to lead an honest and law-abiding life," Roman said.