



CONRADO RODRIGUEZ

Cuban gets jail for overturning Freedom Torch

By MAUREEN KELLY

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The Cuban exile who knocked down the Torch of Friendship in Bayfront Park last fall has been sentenced to five months in jail and ordered to pay \$5,000 over the next five years for maintenance of the landmark.

"I cannot condone your conduct, no matter what the motivation," Circuit Court Judge Sidney Weaver told exile Conrado Rodriguez yesterday. "Our country is a country of law, and no man is above the law."

Rodriguez, leader of the exile group Independent Labor Union Action, rammed a rented truck into the Torch last Oct. 11 as a "symbolic protest" against those countries favoring relations with the Fidel Castro regime.

"You are not being electrocuted, you are not being shot and I am not trying to make a martyr out of you," Weaver told Rodriguez. "If I wanted to make a martyr out of you, I would put you in jail for five years."

Actually Rodriguez faced a maximum of six years in jail and a \$6,000 fine on charges of malicious destruction of public and private property (the truck.) He had pleaded no contest to those charges Jan. 30.

Before sentencing, Rodriguez told Weaver he assumed all responsibility for damaging the torch, but said it was an "ideological," not personal, crime.

"I did it to bring to the attention of the public that we Cubans did not disavow the fight for our mother country," he said.

Eduardo Cantera, one of Rodriguez' lawyers, said his client would have been shot as punishment if he had done something similar in Cuba.

"On the spot," interjected Weaver.

Alan Oppenheimer, another of Rodriguez' lawyers, called his client a "misguided individual" who had never before been charged with a crime.

"I can only liken it (the wrecking of the torch) to an act that took place 201 years ago when a bunch of rabble rousers threw tea overboard on Boston Harbor," he said.

"No comparison," shot back Weaver.

Weaver ordered Rodriguez taken to county jail immediately, despite objections by Cantera, who wanted his client to surrender today.

Rodriguez' two companions in the torch incident, Israel Pino and Eduardo Macaya, were sentenced in January to one year's probation and must repay the city of Miami the cost of rebuilding the Torch (about \$5,000).

While Rodriguez backed the truck into the torch, Pino and Macaya painted signs saying "Cuba Will Be Free."