

Publisher de la Cova testifies at heated subversive list hearing

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Antonio de la Cova, publisher of the magazine La Crónica Gráfica, heeded a Superior Court order to appear before the Civil Rights Commission Friday, in a volatile public hearing in which his wife took a swipe at a newspaper photographer with an umbrella.

Minutes after de la Cova entered the hearing room to testify in the commission's ongoing investigation of the alleged subversives lists, his wife, Gloria Gil, took a swing at El Reportero photographer Noel Vázquez with her umbrella.

"You don't have to be taking my picture, I'm not a witness," Gil said, hitting Vázquez's camera with her umbrella.

The incident set the tone for the volatile hearing packed with members of the news media and supporters of de la Cova, who faced arrest if he had failed to appear.

Commission President Enrique González, branded as a left-wing radical by de la Cova's magazine, was aggressive and intimidating during more than two hours of questioning of de la Cova.

He chided the witness on numerous occasions for not answering his questions directly, and cut him off when he tried to give an explanation instead of a direct answer. González was just as blunt with the three lawyers who accompanied de la Cova on the witness stand.

"I don't want this to be like the Cerro Maravilla hearings, having lawyers whispering answers in the witness' ears," González said.

González's questions centered on several lists de la Cova turned over to a police intelligence agent, naming Cubans living in Puerto Rico who allegedly are Castro sympathizers.

Although de la Cova testified that he turned over the documents to the police agent, identified as Eugenio Serrano, he would not accept González's classification of him as a "police informer."

"Were you paid for that information,?" asked González. De la Cova raised his voice and answered "never."



STAR photos by José García

Civil Right Commission Chairman Enrique González, left in left photo, questions publisher Antonio de la Cova at public hearings Friday, while de la Cova's wife, Gloria Gil, above, reacts angrily.

"You gave the information for free then," González continued. The witness replied brusquely: "I didn't give information, it was chatter."

A name which appeared on one of the lists with which González confronted de la Cova was that of Cuban economist José Antonio Herrera, a consultant to House Speaker José "Rony" Jarabo.

According to the police report on Herrera, he is described as a pro-Cuban, Marxist socialist. De la Cova refused to acknowledge under questioning that what appeared on the police report on Herrera and others on the list was based on information he had given.

Several times de la Cova was advised by his lawyers not to answer some questions posed by González which they felt violated his rights as a member of the press.

At one point during an exchange between González and de la Cova's lawyers, his wife stood up and accused the commission of "violating our civil rights." González reprimanded Gil and instructed police to remove her from the room if she interrupted the proceedings again.

During an interview after the hearings, de la Cova accused the commission of persecuting him.

"They're trying to get me into trouble with the Federal Parole Board," said de la Cova, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison after being convicted in Florida in 1976 of possessing and transporting explosives. He was paroled in 1982 and moved to Puerto Rico. One of the conditions of his parole was that he not become involved in politics.

The commission recessed until next week when, de la Cova is to take the stand again.