

BY JON KRAL—THE MIAMI HERALD

A Miami bus displays a sign paid for by Cuban American Jorge Mas Canosa.

## *The Herald Feels the Heat*

### Miami Publisher Feuding With Cuban American

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By William Booth  
Washington Post Staff Writer

MIAMI—The watchdogs at the Inter American Press Association usually concern themselves with the plight of journalists in places like Bogota.

So it was unprecedented that the group sent a team here to investigate the war of words raging between the Anglo publisher of the Miami Herald and a prominent Cuban American businessman, who has plastered the sides of 60 city buses with yellow signs reading: "Yo No Creo en el Herald." "I don't believe the Miami Herald."

Excrement has been smeared on

newspaper racks. Signs have been left accusing the paper of being an official voice of the Communist Party. There even have been death threats against the Herald's publisher—though they've been defended as merely "prank calls."

In the annals of newspaper wars, the current feud is remarkable for its longevity, intensity and the endurance of its two middle-aged combatants.

In one corner stands newcomer David Lawrence, publisher of the Miami Herald and its Spanish-language sister, El Nuevo Herald.

In the other is Jorge Mas Canosa, the chairman of a powerful organiza-

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# War of Words in Miami

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tion called the Cuban American National Foundation, a multi-million-dollar lobby and advocacy group with offices here and in Washington, a man who many believe would like to be president of Cuba after Castro's fall.

The fight couldn't be more personal if it were between a pair of TV wrestlers. Nor more of a slugfest, as it goes on week after week after week in the pages of the Herald and on the airwaves of Spanish-language radio stations.

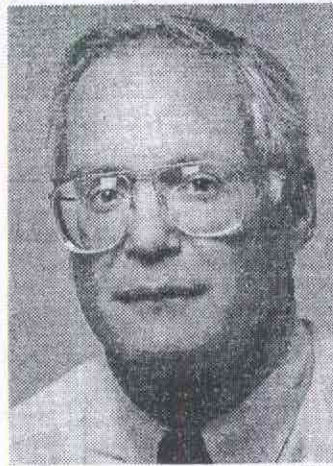
Mas says the Herald's coverage of things Cuban is pinko. "Communist in orientation." While reporters at the Herald may not get written instructions from Castro, Mas says they are more often than not left-leaning dupes of the regime.

Mas compares the Herald to Cuba's party organ, Granma, and says that Lawrence uses his position to "insult, misinform, distort, destroy men and institutions." He is also upset over the lack of coverage—particularly the lack of positive coverage—of his own foundation.

Lawrence characterizes Mas as a word-twisting bully, a power-monger and no less than an enemy of democracy, truth and a free press. He compares Mas to—gulp—Fidel Castro.

"This guy is hellbent on control," Lawrence wrote two weeks ago in his Sunday column. "All the billboards in the Americas, all the national TV that he can buy, all the analysts whom he can strong-arm, all the huffing and bluster that he can muster, still won't give him control of this newspaper. Ever."

To which Mas responded, in a column last week, "It is unfortunate that, after two months, Herald Pub-



MAMI HERALD



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Publisher David Lawrence, left, and lobbyist Jorge Mas Canosa.

lisher Dave Lawrence continues to engage in such incendiary and defamatory rhetoric as that in his Sunday column. The hate, disinformation and reckless disregard that he seems intent on promoting constitute a great disservice to the people of South Florida and our sense of community."

As is his style, Mas regulates his rhetoric to the audience. In the Herald, he is biting but diplomatic. On the Spanish radio stations, he is much less circumspect, accusing the Herald of "intellectual terrorism."

The current fight between Mas and Lawrence has been raging since January, when Mas first went on the radio to denounce the Herald.

"It's gone on longer than the Iran-Iraq war," says Ramon Mestre, of the Herald's editorial board, overstating the case by about eight years. Many Herald staffers say privately that Lawrence is playing into Mas's hands, keeping the fight alive, when it should have ended weeks ago.

Jim Mullin, the editor of a local alternative weekly, New Times, has been having a field day with the spat, musing on whether Lawrence is a genius or a clown, providing running commentary on the blusterings of both sides, which have grown more shrill and more personal with each passing week.

Mas's radio broadside against the Herald began almost within hours of

a Herald editorial against legislation that would strengthen the embargo against Cuba, a bill largely prepared by Mas and introduced by Rep. Robert G. Torricelli (D-N.J.).

After the radio attack, Lawrence rose to the challenge and returned fire with a Sunday viewpoint column headlined, "A defining moment for our community" (Jan. 2), followed by "Come on, Mr. Mas, be fair" (Jan. 23), "Come on, Mr. Mas, be fair: Part II" (Jan. 28) and, finally, "No, Mr. Mas, intimidation won't work" (March 22).

Mas did not take this lying down, issuing first his lengthy critique of the Herald, "Jorge Mas Canosa: a matter of basic rights" (Feb. 2) and then "The community won't be intimidated" (March 27).

Both men write a lot about who's intimidating whom. Lawrence says Mas wants to limit freedom of expression, but Mas throws the same charge back. They also keep referring to "the community," though here in polyglot Miami it is hard to know what community they're talking about.

Mas seized on the Inter American Press Association's conclusion that the Herald "was slow to understand the new cultures within its readership area." It was vindication, Mas said, of his belief that the Herald was insensitive to the dreams and aspirations of Cuban exiles.

However, Bill Williamson, the executive director of IAPA, said, "Our

words were misinterpreted by Mas." The group issued another statement, clarifying the first.

While the report did say that the Herald was slow to understand the new arrivals in Miami, it went on: "We found evidence of a lack of tolerance on the part of some of the Herald's critics, and we are concerned that when passions in the community are already running high, campaigns of denunciation and criticism based on emotions run the risk of inflaming some members of the community to the point of violence."

Both sides too have employed academics to bolster their case. At the center of one controversy is an article written by Fran Matera, a professor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University.

Employing what she calls "textual analysis," Matera says she detects a pattern of bias against Cuban Americans in the pages of the Herald. In her academic work, she focuses on what the paper doesn't tell readers—what she calls "the ellipsis and eclipse."

But in an article written for Mas's foundation, Matera drops the academic stance and goes directly after the Herald for its "left wing rhetoric" and "outdated liberal ideology."

Lawrence blasted Matera in one of his columns, referring to her "so-called independent academic studies." Lawrence writes: "Academic? Hardly." Then quotes another academic who opines that Matera's work itself is biased.

Matera says she's never gotten a dime from the Cuban American foundation or from Mas or any of his projects, such as Radio Marti and TV Marti.

"To me, it's a little shocking. He's [Lawrence] never called me, never checked with me," Matera says.

And on and on. Lawrence says the fight has only cost the Herald about 60 subscriptions and a few hundred fewer sales at newspaper racks in Little Havana. Advertising overall is up.

As for the ads on the sides of the buses, Lawrence says, "I'd be lying if I said it didn't make me angry. Believability is the most precious asset we have."