

[From the Wall Street Journal, Aug. 29, 2011]

CASTRO VS. THE LADIES IN WHITE

(By Mary Anastasia O'Grady)

Rocks and iron bars were the weapons of choice in a government assault on a handful of unarmed women on the outskirts of Santiago de Cuba on the afternoon of Aug. 7. According to a report issued by the Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the beatings were savage and "caused them injuries, some considerable."

It was not an isolated incident. In the past two months, attacks on peaceful women dissidents, organized by the state security apparatus, have escalated. Most notable is the intensity with which the regime is moving to try to crush the core group known as the Ladies in White.

This is not without risk to the regime, should the international community decide to pay attention and apply pressure on the white-elite regime the way it did in opposition to apartheid in South Africa. But the decision to take that risk suggests that the 52-year-old dictatorship in Havana is feeling increasingly insecure. The legendary bearded macho men of the "revolution," informed by the trial of a caged Hosni Mubarak in an Egyptian courtroom, apparently are terrified by the quiet, prayerful, nonviolent courage of little more than 100 women. No totalitarian regime can shrug off the fearless audacity these ladies display, or the signs that their boldness is spreading.

The Castro brothers' goons are learning that they will not be easily intimidated. Take, for example, what happened that same Aug. 7 morning in Santiago: The women, dressed in white and carrying flowers, had gathered after Sunday Mass at the cathedral for a silent procession to protest the regime's incarceration of political prisoners. Castro supporters and state security officials, "armed with sticks and other blunt objects," according to FIDH, assaulted the group both physically and verbally. The ladies were then dragged aboard a bus, taken outside the city and dropped off on the side of a highway.

Some of them regrouped and ventured out again in the afternoon, this time to hold a public vigil for their cause. That's when they were met by another Castro onslaught. On the same day thugs set upon the homes of former political prisoner José Daniel Ferrer and another activist. Six people, including Mr. Ferrer's wife and daughter, were sent to the hospital with contusions and broken bones, according to FIDH.

The Ladies in White first came on the scene in the aftermath of the infamous March 2003 crackdown in which 75 independent journalists and librarians, writers and democracy advocates were rounded up and handed prison sentences of six to 28 years. The wives, mothers and sisters of some of them began a simple act of protest. On Sundays they would gather at the Havana Cathedral for Mass and afterward they would march carrying gladiolas in a silent call for the prisoners' release.

In 2005, the Ladies in White won Europe's prestigious Sakharov prize for their courage. Cellphones that caught the regime's brutality against them on video helped get their story out. By 2010, they had so embarrassed the dictatorship internationally that a deal was struck to deport their imprisoned loved ones along with their family to Spain.

But some prisoners refused the deal and some of the ladies stayed in Cuba. Others joined them, calling themselves "Ladies in Support." The group continued its processions following Sunday Mass in Havana, and women on the eastern end of the island established the same practice in Santiago.

Laura Pollan, whose husband refused to take the offer of exile in Spain and was later

released from prison, is a key member of the group. She and her cohorts have vowed to continue their activism as long as even one political prisoner remains jailed. Last week I spoke with her by phone in Havana, and she told me that when the regime agreed to release all of the 75, "it thought that the Ladies in White would disappear. Yet the opposite happened. Sympathizers have been joining up. There are now 82 ladies in Havana and 34 in Santiago de Cuba." She said that the paramilitary mobs have the goal of creating fear in order to keep the group from growing. But the movement is spreading to other parts of the country, places where every Sunday there are now marches.

This explains the terror that has rained down on the group in Santiago and surrounding suburbs on successive Sundays since July and on other members in Havana as recently as Aug. 18.

Last Tuesday, when four women dressed in black took to the steps of the capitol building in Havana chanting "freedom," a Castro bully tried to remove them. Amazingly, the large crowd watching shouted for him to leave them alone. Eventually uniformed agents carried them off. But the incident, caught on video, is evidence of a new chapter in Cuban history, and it is being written by women. How it ends may depend heavily on whether the international community supports them or simply shields its eyes from their torment.

[From the Wall Street Journal, Aug. 26, 2011]

ON CUBA'S CAPITOL STEPS

The four Cuban women who took to the steps of the capitol in Havana last week chanting "liberty" for 40 minutes weren't exactly rebel forces. But you wouldn't know that by the way the Castro regime reacted. A video of the event shows uniformed state security forcibly dragging the women to waiting patrol cars. They must have represented a threat to the regime because they were interrogated and detained until the following day.

The regime's bigger problem may be the crowd that gathered to watch. In a rare moment of dissent in that public square, the crowd booed, hissed and insulted the agents who were sent to remove the women.

One of the four women, Sara Marta Fonseca, gave a telephone interview to the online newspaper *Diario de Cuba*, based in Spain, as she made her way home after being freed. Ms. Fonseca, who is a member of the Rosa Parks Feminist Movement for Civil Rights, said that the group was demanding "that the government cease the repression against the Ladies in White, against the opposition and against the Cuban people in general." The Ladies in White are dissidents who demand the release of all political prisoners.

Yet as Ms. Fonseca explained, the group wasn't really addressing the government. "Our objective is that one day the people will join us," she said. "Realistically we do not have the strength and the power to defeat the dictatorship. The strength and the power are to be found in the unity of the people. In this we put all our faith, in that this people will cross the barrier of fear and join the opposition to reclaim freedom."

Ms. Fonseca said her group chose the capitol because the area is crowded with locals and tourists and they wanted to "draw attention to the people of Cuba." In the end, she said that they were satisfied with the results because she heard the crowd crying "abuser, leave them alone, they are peaceful and they are telling the truth." This reaction, the seasoned dissident said, "was greater" than in the past. "I am very happy because in spite of being beaten and dragged we

could see that the people were ready to join us."

For 52 years the Cuban dictatorship has held power through fear. The poverty, isolation, broken families and lost dreams of two generations of Cubans have persisted because the regime made dissent far too dangerous. If that fear dissipates, the regime would collapse. Which is why four women on the capitol steps had to be gagged.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

LAUREL SENIOR LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

● Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, today I wish to congratulate the world champion Laurel Senior League Softball team, led by manager Brad Lee, and by coaches Bo Collins and Kevin Green. By winning the Senior League Softball World Series, the young women on the team demonstrated that success comes from hard work, perseverance, and teamwork, with the help of dedicated coaching and the support of community, parents, and fans.

This spring when the softball season opened, more than 2.5 million girls around the world dreamed of winning the Senior League Softball World Series. Among them were 14 girls from the town of Laurel in Sussex County, DE, who—after suffering a heart-breaking loss in the 2010 championship game—vowed that 2011 would be their year. And that is exactly what happened.

The players are Alison Pusey, Alexis Hudson, Logan Green, Sara Jo Whaley, Whitney Toadvine, Emily Pusey, Regan Green, Erin Johnson, Kortney Lee, Kristen Collins, Nicole Ullman, Alyssa Givens, Bethany Wheatley, and Bree Venables. Led by manager Brad Lee and coaches Bo Collins and Kevin Green, these young women worked hard all season to improve their hitting, fielding, pitching, and base running.

In its 38th year, the Senior League Softball Little League division for girls ages 14 to 16 is a worldwide tournament with teams traveling to compete from as far away as Italy and the Philippines. The Senior League Softball World Series has been held for 8 years in Sussex County, DE. As the host, Delaware's top team gets a berth in the tournament, and Laurel has captured that spot 7 of the past 8 years.

While the Laurel girls have served as excellent hosts and ambassadors for Delaware and for the United States of America during those 7 years, they fell just short of the championship year after year.

The championship title almost slipped again from Laurel's grasp—not once, but twice—during the 2011 tournament. In two of the playoff games, the team came from behind in the bottom of the final inning to win. While the championship game proved to be a pitching match, clearly the many hours of practice at the plate paid off.

On August 13, under the threat of rain, 16-year-old Logan Green took the

mound against the Latin America team and pitched a three-inning no-hitter. Laurel scored in the first inning when first-baseman Bree Venables was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded. Logan's sister, 14-year-old Regan Green, took over the mound in the fourth inning and gave up four hits—but no runs—over the last four innings to secure the final win and the championship.

Regan Green recalled her nervousness during that final game but said that her fellow players' teamwork gave her the confidence she needed on the mound. "It's always good knowing they have my back," she said.

Alyssa Givens set the stage for the "safety run" with a well-hit double in the sixth inning and then stole home from third base. Regan Green and the fielders took care of five batters in the seventh inning.

Finally, after years of coming close, the Laurel Senior League Softball team claimed the World Championship title.

Team Manager Brad Lee credited the victory to players' hard work and expressed the pride of his hometown. "There's nothing like playing for your hometown. This is something that these young ladies will remember forever, and to bring the trophy home to Laurel for the first time is an unbelievable feeling."

The State of Delaware—and especially the town of Laurel—share Manager Lee's sentiment.

Today, we congratulate the Laurel Senior League Softball team, manager Lee, and coaches Collins and Green. Through their commitment to excellence, perseverance, hard work and team work, they made their dreams come true and accomplished something that no other Delaware team, male or female, has ever done. In doing so, they have not only made the town of Laurel and its citizens proud; they have made all Delawareans proud.●

TRIBUTE TO SECOND LIEUTENANT VICKI ALTHAGE

● Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, today I wish to acknowledge an important life milestone for a very patriotic young woman. On September 10, Officer Candidate Vicki Althage in the Nebraska Army National Guard will become 2LT Vicki Althage.

The Army commissions around 7,500 new officers every year, each and every one is a volunteer. Like most of her fellow lieutenants, Vicki did not have to follow this path. She has a college degree and a burgeoning career in public service. From the time she entered high school, the Nation has been at war in our struggle to defeat terrorism.

Vicki enrolled in the Army National Guard Officer Candidate School knowing that she will likely be called upon to serve overseas, perhaps in Iraq or Afghanistan. She also knows that upon becoming an officer, the welfare and lives of soldiers will become her direct responsibility.

The Nation pays frequent tribute to those who served in World War II—we call them the "greatest generation." On September 10, Officer Candidate Vicki Althage will take the oath of office and become an Army officer in what many today describe as the "next greatest generation."

Proud parents, other family members, and a fiancé will be on hand to witness her commissioning. Another group will also be thinking of her on that day. Vicki happens to be a member of my staff in Nebraska. I can assure you that the entire JOHANNIS office will be cheering loudly and filled with a sense of pride as Vicki accepts this new responsibility.

We hold our heads high when we talk about the strong tradition of military service in our great State. Today I am proud to salute this outstanding member of my staff and dedicated public servant. May God bless 2LT Vicki Althage and her family as she pursues a military career in the Nebraska Army National Guard.●

DELMONT, SOUTH DAKOTA

● Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to the 125th anniversary of the founding of the community of Delmont, SD. I am proud to honor the people of Delmont and extend my congratulations to them on this memorable occasion.

Delmont was a railroad town along the Milwaukee Road even before South Dakota achieved statehood. An investor named Thomas Ball built the town at the top of a hill overlooking the East Choteau Creek Valley. Its railroad depot served the people of Douglas County.

Many of the people who originally settled Delmont were Germans from Russia. Today they still celebrate their heritage with the annual Old-time Harvest Festival. The residents use the celebration to honor their heritage with kuchen, a sweet German pastry with a custard topping, South Dakota's official dessert. This year's festival will be special in honor of the 125th anniversary. The 2-day festivities will include tractor pulls, demonstrations of frontier-era harvesting equipment, fireworks, and plenty of kuchen.

A hundred twenty-five years after its founding, Delmont continues to celebrate its rich heritage through the Old-time Harvest Festival. Though the railroad is gone, the community remains an important historical and cultural asset to South Dakota. I am proud to honor the achievements of Delmont on this memorable occasion.●

REMEMBERING MICHAEL GARAFANO

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I wish to pay tribute to an authentic hero, Michael Garafano, who died tragically in Rutland, VT on August 28, 2011, during Tropical Storm Irene.

Michael Garafano was the water treatment and resource manager in the

Rutland City Department of Public Works, a position he held since 1981. He was known by his coworkers as someone who always went above and beyond the call of duty, and his work ethic was second to none. He took his responsibilities of protecting the Rutland water supply very seriously. He was a model of a dedicated public servant.

So it was not unusual that the night of August 28, as the heavy rains from Tropical Storm Irene started assaulting Rutland, Mr. Garafano, went to check on the city reservoir one more time, looking out for his fellow citizens as he had done so often, and so well, and with such dedication, over three decades. Tragically, his life was taken by the raging storm. Compounding his tragedy is another: Michael Garafano took his son Michael Jr. to check the city reservoir when he went out that night. Michael Garafano Jr. never returned from that journey and is still missing.

Alan Shelvey, Rutland Commissioner of Public Works, said of Michael Garafano, "He was doing what he always did—trying to make sure everything was right and the water supply was protected. We're going to miss him tremendously. He can't be replaced. People say that about people—in this case that's true."

Michael Garafano represented what is best about Vermont and about America: he worked hard and with great dedication, he loved his work, he cared about those who lived in the community where he lived. When there was a job to be done, a responsibility to be met, he responded with generosity and directness. He was the epitome of public service, and lost his life doing the job he cared so deeply about.

Michael Garafano was devoted to his family, and he was a friend to many who knew they could count on him when they were most in need.

It is people like Michael Garafano who make our communities and our entire Nation work and prosper, who make our cities and towns into communities and not just random groups of people. The State of Vermont grieves the loss of one of its unsung heroes.

He will be sorely missed by his family, by the city of Rutland, and by the many people whose lives he touched and enriched.●

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 3:45 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has agreed to the following concurrent resolution, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H. Con. Res. 74. Concurrent resolution providing for a joint session of Congress to receive a message from the President.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following joint resolution was read the second time, and placed on the calendar: