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'Miami Model' of FTAA security is lightning rod

Richard Trumka is not someone you want as an enemy.

A third-generation coal miner, Trumka was born in a small Pennsylvania coal town. While working the mines he went to law school at night and later led an upstart campaign to take over the mineworkers union. While president, he waged two bitter strikes against the state's largest coal operators.

Today, as secretary-treasurer of the national AFL-CIO, the 54-year-old Trumka is one of the most powerful men in organized labor and has made it his personal mission to settle the score with Miami city leaders and its police force for what happened during the Free Trade Area of the Americas summit last month.

"The American labor movement is committed, and I am personally committed, to see that the brutality we saw never happens again anywhere in this country," he said Tuesday during an AFL-CIO meeting to gather testimony from people who say they were abused by the police.

The often emotional meeting lasted four hours. "The stories were worse than I imagined," Trumka said afterward.

He said the AFL-CIO would call on its friends in Congress and throughout the country to 'help us stop `the Miami Model' in its tracks so it can never raise its ugly head again."

The Miami Model.

Those words stem from a statement made by Miami Mayor Manny Diaz, who lauded the police conduct during the FTAA as ``a model for homeland security."

It was a stupid comment, stemming from Diaz's incessant need to brag about the job he's doing. By now, I'm sure Diaz wishes he had never uttered those words. Now when people refer to the Miami Model, it conjures up images of police abuse and intimidation.

The Miami Model, and its architect, Police Chief John Timoney, have galvanized an array of national groups, including the AFL-CIO, the United Steelworkers, the Sierra Club, the National Lawyers Guild and the Alliance for Retired Americans. All now have their sights set on Miami.

And, for the record, what happened in Miami isn't being hailed. It's being derided.

New York Daily News columnist Juan Gonzalez warned the mayor and police in his city, as they prepare to host the Republican National Convention in September, to take note of what occurred in Miami.

"City leaders should start examining what happened in Miami to make sure it's not repeated here -- because something definitely went wrong down there," Gonzalez wrote.

The New York Times ran a lengthy story recently on the complaints of excessive violence along with a picture of Miami cops in riot gear toting billy clubs and shotguns.

The St. Petersburg Times wrote an editorial this month saying police overreacted, noting "dissent was shut down, protesters were injured and harassed, and baseless arrests were made." It concluded by saying, "Timoney's paramilitary response should not be a model going forward."

Though invited, neither Diaz nor Miami-Dade Mayor Alex Penelas showed up for Tuesday's AFL-CIO meeting.

"I would have loved to have seen them here today so that Timoney's whitewash of the facts isn't the only version they hear," Trumka said after the meeting. "They had an obligation to be here. They had a chance to stand up for freedom of speech and freedom of assembly and they took a pass."

A spokeswoman for Diaz said he went to his daughter's school play.

And Penelas?

Tony Fransetta, from the Alliance for Retired Americans, said he spoke to Penelas a few days ago.

"He's been trying to lay all of the blame on Manny Diaz for what happened," Fransetta said. "And he told me he would be here."

A spokeswoman for Penelas admitted the mayor did tell Fransetta he would attend, but later decided not to go on advice of county attorneys.

"I think they are both cowards," Fransetta said of the two mayors.

Added Trumka: "They made a big mistake. We're not going away."