

Venezuelan Gnostics storm Catholic Church and the Army

by Gretchen Small

Four days before the Feb. 2 presidential inauguration of Carlos Andrés Pérez, Venezuela's Gnostics launched into a rampage against the Catholic Church, the military, and the small but vocal Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV)—institutions which have succeeded thus far in blocking the Gnostics' attempt to secure the state of Tachira, which borders on Colombia, as an unchallenged base for narco-terrorist operations.

Fearing they have come under government investigation as instruments of Soviet irregular warfare against Venezuela, the Gnostics took to the media in a desperate attempt to get the incoming government to prosecute the PLV, top military officers, leading Catholic figures, and agro-industrial interests in Tachira, as the real threats to national security.

Initially, the Gnostics had been confident that once Carlos Andrés Pérez was installed in power, they would have a free hand for their project. Since its founding in October 1987, the primary obstacle to narco-terrorist actions along the border has been a special anti-drug and anti-terrorist force called the José Antonio Páez Specific Command, or CEJAP, and local press had reported in December that sources close to the President-elect assured them that Pérez planned to dismantle the CEJAP as one of his first actions in office.

The situation changed in January, however. Agricultural associations from the area took out advertisements defending the CEJAP, and its commander Gen. Humberto Camejo Arias. Then, a previously unknown Committee in Defense of National Sovereignty began taking out advertisements in the national press detailing the Gnostics' ties to drug running, kidnaping, and terrorism. Walter Márquez, a "bishop" in the Universal Christian Gnostic Church and congressional deputy from Tachira, who has taken the lead in organizing the narco-terrorist takeover plot, was a special target of the advertisements.

The Gnostics concluded that powerful institutions in Venezuela were combining forces to prevent Pérez from supporting the Gnostic plot. The Committee's ads filled out details of the Gnostics' criminal background, which before this only the Venezuelan Labor Party had dared reveal. Then, the leading Catholic paper of Tachira, *Diario Católico*, published several interviews with PLV Secretary General Alejandro Peña, in which he reiterated that Márquez's Gnostic "Church" was a Satanic cult, which recruited on the basis of

perverse sexual practices, and which ran the Colombian narco-terrorist group, the M-19.

The emergence of the Sovereignty Committee and the PLV campaign threw the Gnostics into a tizzy. Since the PLV has campaigned on behalf of various initiatives of the American politician Lyndon LaRouche, the Gnostics feared that their national enemies had upped the ante, and had allied with the international movement associated with LaRouche. That combination, they consider very dangerous.

LaRouche, the Gnostics' enemy

The Gnostics counterattacked against the man they assumed was leading the campaign against them: LaRouche. On Jan. 29, *El Nacional*, one of the major Caracas dailies, ran a full-page scandal spread, claiming that unnamed "sources in state security" had begun an investigation into the activities of Lyndon LaRouche, the PLV, and the Sovereignty Committee.

The articles read like a dictation from Walter Márquez himself. Their tactic was to allege that the recent attacks on Márquez and his Gnostic church were a cover for a broader operation aimed at military and government institutions. "It is a question of a conspiracy orchestrated and conducted, from various decision-making centers . . . which, in reality, seeks to discredit the Military Intelligence Directorate (DIM), the Permanent War Council in San Cristóbal [Tachira], and economic sectors close to the President-elect, and Carlos Andrés Pérez himself," *El Nacional's* "informants" charged.

The "economic sectors close to the President-elect," are "the powerful Venezuelan group, the Diego Cisneros Organization," *El Nacional* said.

Included in the package was not only a slander article against LaRouche, containing allegations about various PLV members, but also a separate slander piece against the head of the CEJAP, Gen. Humberto Camejo Arias, painting him as a rich landowner, interested only in increasing his own wealth. What seemed most to worry *El Nacional's* sources, however, was the fact that General Camejo—a tough anti-terrorist fighter—has been rumored as a possible head Venezuela's national police, the DISIP, in the Pérez administration.

Three days later, on Feb. 1, *El Nacional* published another

er full-page spread on the alleged state security investigation into the advertisement campaign against the Gnostic Márquez. This, too, proved to be more hype than content. Although “investigative services” remain tight-lipped, *El Nacional*'s sources discovered that 127,430 bolivars were spent in five days, by three people, to pay for the Defense of Sovereignty ads. One of those people, they added, had signed a petition to register the Venezuelan Labor Party, “which the state security agencies link to the organization which economist and philosopher Lyndon LaRouche runs from the United States.”

This article was blunt: the ad campaign against Márquez was intended to create a climate in which incoming President Pérez could not proceed with his plan to “restructure” the CEJAP, *El Nacional* states.

Here again, there were other targets. The “investigative services” have now ordered investigations opened into 10 anti-terrorist actions previously undertaken by the CEJAP, and are examining the “powerful economic and political interests which run ‘a state within a state’ in Tachira,” *El Nacional* says. These agro-industrial interests—not the narco-terrorists—have been carrying out killings, and ordered the attacks on Márquez, because he defends “poor peasants,” they conclude.

This time, however, *El Nacional* carried another side of the LaRouche story. Under the title, “LaRouche Has Those Who Defend Him,” *El Nacional* reviewed for its readers many of LaRouche's ideas, quoting extensively from a pamphlet published by the Schiller Institute, entitled “The Plan Is to Kill Me: LaRouche; Bankers and Bolsheviks Want to Silence the Leader of the Fight Against the IMF.”

“U.S. economist and philosopher, Mr. Lyndon LaRouche, contrary to what many people might think, does have those who defend him in Venezuela, and that is demonstrated by the publication of the magazine of the Schiller Institute, whose international board is presided over by Mrs. Helga Zepp-LaRouche,” *El Nacional* stated.

Yet another article was published the next day in *El Nacional*, this one under the blaring headline, “Representatives of Lyndon LaRouche are Making Contacts in the State of Tachira!” The only scandal here, was that “reliable sources” report that PLV Secretary General Peña (called a representative of the “famous economist and philosopher Lyndon LaRouche”) was visiting San Cristóbal, the capital of Tachira, to meet with people “of high-level political, economic, and ecclesiastical power,” to coordinate further campaigns against Márquez. Rich cattlemen and leaders of the military and Catholic Church—the so-called “state within the state”—are paying Peña's bills, the “sources” claimed.

Cross-border base sought

The Gnostics' drive to seize control of the border region between Colombia and Venezuela exploded in October 1988, after a clash on the border involving forces of the CEJAP in

the area of El Amparo ended with 14 people dead. Gnostic “bishop” Márquez immediately charged that the confrontation was a deliberate massacre of innocent fishermen, and led up a national witchhunt to prosecute the CEJAP as killers.

Amnesty International took up the cause of the “fishermen” also, and on Dec. 29, Márquez announced that he had formed “an international committee of solidarity with the surviving fishermen of the El Amparo massacre,” presided over by Mexican liberation theology leader Sergio Méndez Arceo.

When other congressional deputies began joining Márquez's campaign, military officers warned that the strategic goals of the narco-terrorists are being seriously underestimated. “Many have asked what the Colombian guerrilla would gain by blowing up a Venezuelan oil pipeline, when their objective is to destabilize the Colombian government and institutions. They seem to have forgotten that there has been a regroupment of guerrilla activity at the continental level . . . [as seen with] the so-called International Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinator,” CEJAP Commander General Camejo told the Chamber of Deputies' special subcommission investigating the El Amparo case on Dec. 22.

Nonetheless, on Dec. 26, aides to Carlos Andrés Pérez told *El Diario de Caracas* that Pérez had decided to “annul the Oct. 28, 1987 decree which gave life to the CEJAP.” Faced with that possibility, other forces began rallying to defend the CEJAP. Rafael Poleo, a congressman and director of the Caracas daily *El Nuevo País*, wrote on Jan. 3 that people should remember that the CEJAP “was created to consolidate Venezuelan sovereignty in the plains border region. Before this Command began its operations, the narco-guerrillas were the true government,” he stated. “This abdication of sovereignty to the Colombian narco-guerrillas . . . ended when the Specific Command was created. . . . It is obvious that this subversive network has a support network which includes journalists and politicians.”

It is exactly that support narco-terrorist apparatus which the Sovereignty Committee's advertisements targeted. One ad reviewed how for years cattlemen living near the border with Colombia have been routinely kidnaped for ransom by Colombian guerrillas. When the CEJAP was finally set up, the committee notes, several kidnappings which had gone “unsolved” for years were cracked, leading to the arrest of the kidnapers. Yet in three cases, Walter Márquez intervened personally to secure the release of the kidnapers—including in a case in which it was proven that the kidnapers belonged to the Colombian-based National Liberation Army (ELN). That ad concluded with the warning: The ransoms gained from kidnaping “added to the large-scale support from the drug traffickers of the zone, could serve legal, military, or civil entities, finance leftist congressmen interested in destabilizing the democratic system, and purchase journalists to direct a campaign to discredit the institutions, integrity, and the sovereignty of the country.”