

Pérez government crumbles in Venezuela

by Gretchen Small

Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez fired his old pal, Pedro Tinoco, as head of the Central Bank on Feb. 21, shuffled cabinet members around four days later, after insisting, Bush-like, to the press on Feb. 22 that “I will not resign nor let myself be resigned.” But such public demonstrations of desperation on the part of the hated Venezuelan President have only fueled national debate over who should replace Pérez—and how.

Given the growing revolutionary ferment in the country, Pérez’s resignation may no longer satisfy the demands for radical change now coming from every sector of national life. Discussion is rapidly moving beyond which personalities could replace Pérez at the helm of state, to center on what form of government should replace the system of corrupt party rule which has dominated Venezuela for the past three decades.

Tinoco: corruption incarnate

Widespread, flagrant corruption was one of the main motives for the Feb. 4 military rebellion which revolutionized the country, second only to the government’s policies of economic misery. Since Pérez is adamant that he will not break with the hated International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies, he attempted to deflect anger by dumping Tinoco, a banker who had come to personify corruption at the public till.

Tinoco has long been a business partner of Gustavo Cisneros, the overnight billionaire who financed the President’s election campaign. Cisneros fled the country as soon as the shooting started on Feb. 4. He had found himself repeatedly at the center of charges of corruption and ties to drug-money laundering.

Tinoco may regret his decision to stay around. His resignation did not quiet demands for investigation into his corruption. In a Feb. 21 editorial, *Diario de Caracas* called upon the Attorney General to immediately launch a probe into the ties between private financial institutions that speculated with exchange rates, debt-for-equity conversions, and zero coupon bond sales, and the directors of the Central Bank—i.e., Tinoco. Tinoco’s conflict of interests were notorious. While

presiding over the Central Bank, he still served as president of the private Banco Latino. He remained a director of Chase Manhattan Bank in Venezuela—the country’s chief creditor—while heading Venezuelan debt negotiations!

CAP now means ‘Chávez to Power’

Sentiment in Venezuela is decidedly revolutionary. Eyewitness reports say that, during live TV coverage of the Feb. 4 coup attempt, crowds of Venezuelans gathered in front of television sets in store windows to cheer each time one of the rebels appeared. T-shirts emblazoned with the face of rebel military leader Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez are being worn surreptitiously by Venezuelans across the country, fake paper currency with Chávez’s face on it is appearing on university campuses, and even the walls of primary and secondary schools have been painted with “Viva Chávez!”

President Pérez, known in Venezuela by his initials “CAP,” can no longer venture outside the presidential palace without seeing his initials, altered to read “(C)hávez (A)l (P)oder” (Chávez To Power), scrawled on city walls. Radio newscasters are having a field-day making puns at CAP’s expense. Chávez’s nationally televised “surrender” speech—in which he acknowledged tactical defeat, but emphasized that it was only “for now”—became an instant favorite. People across the country tack the phrase, “for now,” onto the end of the most innocuous comments, chuckling away.

Nor have the rebels been totally silenced. Chávez explained to a group of congressmen who visited him in jail Feb. 21 that the rebels acted on Feb. 4 with the same idea as those that led Venezuela’s independence fight in 1810. They, also, had no elaborated plan of action, he explained, but “it was a question of breaking the rules of the game, producing a new correlation of forces and calling the people to democracy, because this is not democracy.”

Another rebel leader, Lt. Col. Francisco Arías, sent an open letter to his family, stating that the rebels are not isolated, because they acted in “perfect harmony with . . . the tendency toward true participatory democracy that is sweeping the world, with the goal of ending dictatorships and rule by tiny groups, whether they be the powerbrokers that rule political parties in Venezuela or the Romanian Communist Party. . . . Our combat of the armed populace fits in perfectly with a situation of misery and oppression which surrounds us. . . . We are neither a party, nor an anti-party, we are a true democracy.”

It’s Ibero-America’s turn now

On Feb. 27, the Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV) published a call for civic resistance *à la* Eastern Europe to begin. In a full-page advertisement published in the national daily *El Nuevo País*, widely read by the opposition to Pérez, under the title, “Down with the IMF dictatorship,” the PLV called upon Venezuelans to begin wearing every day a “national

symbol (flag, coat of arms, tricolor armband, etc.),” as a sign of support for the PLV’s six-point program for national change. The first point of the program: that the President, the Congress, and the Supreme Court immediately resign, and a new Constitution to replace party rule be drawn up.

“Humanity has entered a revolutionary period in its history. Barely two years ago the entire population of Eastern Europe took to the streets in search of liberty and sovereignty: Moscow’s puppets fell. Less than a year ago, people took to the streets en masse in the former Soviet Union in rejection of the dictatorship: The communist clique fell. Now it is Latin America’s turn,” the PLV wrote.

Detailing the looting of all Ibero-America which has occurred under the IMF, and citing the fact that while the Venezuelan state received more than \$200 billion in oil income in the last 15 years, the majority of Venezuelans still live in misery, the PLV called for the urgent formation of a “nationalist movement” to implement an emergency economic program. Venezuela must declare a debt moratorium for at least five years, impose strict exchange controls, and take measures to secure jobs and the vital necessities of the population, all as part of a program of Ibero-American integration, based on “great agricultural and industrial projects, transport, and infrastructure works,” the PLV explained.

The PLV ad concluded that instead of party rule, a participatory democracy based on a “harmony of interests” and the precepts of the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, is needed.

New actions coming

The PLV is not a lone voice. On Feb. 20, former President Rafael Caldera told the press that “if the people want,” he would support the dissolution of the current Congress, and the calling of a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution. Prominent intellectual Arturo Uslar Pietri, head of a political grouping dubbed “the Notables,” led a delegation of congressmen, ex-ministers, and members of several influential Venezuelan families which presented the Supreme Court on Feb. 24 with petitions containing 5,000 signatures demanding that the entire Supreme Court resign.

Maj. General Yacobo Yépez Daza, president of the association of retired military officers, told Reuters news agency Feb. 26 that there could be another coup attempt, if the Supreme Court does not resign, or if Pérez associate David Morales Bello is named head of the Congress. Morales Bello, the ruling Democratic Action party nominee for the post, called for the military rebels to be executed after the coup attempt. The post has taken on unusual importance now, because the president of the Senate is next in line for the presidency, if the President resigns.

“Those [who] were discontented will continue to be, because nothing has been changed,” Yépez Daza stated. “If there is radical rectification, we will not see another coup.” Otherwise, there are no guarantees.

Cuban communists bring ‘democracy’ to

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When Joaquín Villalobos, the leader of El Salvador’s Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN), announced in January that he welcomed the United States as the “guarantor” of the “peace” agreement between the Salvadoran government and his guerrillas, he signaled the formal opening of a new phase of strategic collaboration between Washington and communist narco-terrorist forces in Ibero-America. That collaboration extends far beyond the precedent-setting Washington-FMLN agreement, under which FMLN rule over El Salvador will be imposed through foreign occupation.

Across the continent, the FMLN’s closest ally, the Cuban Communist Party, is on an organizing drive to pull the diverse Marxist, socialist, leftist, and environmentalist movements and parties, back into centralized control, deployed behind a program accommodated to the post-Soviet Union world. Fidel Castro’s regime adamantly rejects any democratic changes for Cuba, but in the rest of the Americas, it is deploying forces into an alliance with Washington, under the twin banners of support for “democracy,” and acceptance of continued dominance of the region by the Anglo-American financial system.

Nationalism declared the enemy

Nationalism, not the “democratic system” nor the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is the enemy to be defeated, according to the partners in this alliance.

This is certainly not the first time Marxists and international usurers have put aside their differences to join forces against a nationalism which they both abhor. Yet there are still many who fail to understand that, and claim stubbornly that Washington’s policies today are based on the same brand of anti-communism it employed in the 1950s.

Recent developments in El Salvador, Colombia, and Haiti provide adequate proof that Washington, too, now hangs its policy upon this alliance. No longer able to rely solely on the “free market” democrats to contain the political ferment exploding in the region, Washington has turned to these retooled communists-turned-democrats to ensure that Ibero-America does not break free from the crumbling new world order. The Bush administration, for example, insists that “democracy” requires co-rule in Haiti between Communist