

Andean Report by Carlos Méndez

Clamor grows for CAP's resignation

The Venezuelan President is confronted with accusations of corruption, by a populace fed up with his economic policies.

A recent series of events has put Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez (known as CAP) on the same path as Brazilian President Fernando Collor de Melo: toward unemployment.

Pérez turned a blind eye to the causes behind the *caracazo* of February 1989, when the citizenry rose up against the austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He chose to ignore what was behind the attempted coup d'état in February of this year. He has not lifted a finger, either to provide some relief to his countrymen from the brutal austerity measures, or to put an end to the rampant political and government corruption. On the contrary, he has aggravated them.

Every day there are increasing demands that he resign as President of Venezuela. On Sept. 17, all the Caracas newspapers published a call from 49 high-ranking officers of the Armed Forces, addressed to "the 49 senators of the republic," urging that CAP's term be cut short, or the country would risk "a civil war." This ultimatum, as the politicians called it, signaled the grave situation within the Armed Forces, which is reflected in the ever more frequent reports of insubordination, arms theft, desertion, and even skirmishes, from garrisons all over the country.

Sept. 17 was also the date that the popular mobilization against Pérez resumed. One student in Maracay died, shot by the National Guard. That same evening, there was a *cacerolazo*, the noisy banging of pots and pans to demonstrate discontent, to which the

government responded with threats, censorship of the communications media, militarization of some zones of the city of Caracas, and by shooting at the buildings where pans were being banged.

Pérez is now also facing the possibility of various criminal proceedings against him. Congressman Enrique Ochoa Antich has just requested that Venezuela's prosecutor general bring Pérez to trial for "criminal conspiracy," "human rights violations," and "illicit enrichment," among other charges. There exists ample proof to support the charges, and, in particular, that money was channeled to his "other woman," Cecilia Matos.

The President is also accused of "influence peddling," pointing to his close links with wealthy banker Pedro Tinoco, who, as president of the Venezuelan central bank, strongly promoted the interests of his own Banco Latino.

According to the dailies *El Nacional* and *El Nuevo País* of Aug. 24, Congressmen José Antonio Martínez and Fernando Alvarez Paz were seeking yet another criminal investigation of Cecilia Matos, in order to determine the source of her wealth. The parliamentarians are requesting that a criminal court open an investigation based on the many reports of criminal activity on the part of Matos that have been presented to the media by a leader of the President's own Democratic Action party, Gustavo Orlando López. He has accused Matos of using her relationship with President Pérez to enrich herself.

Martínez claims that Matos went from being Pérez's private secretary, before his first administration, to being the owner of apartments in New York, mansions in Caracas, and summer homes. Moreover, he says, Matos intervened to have government contracts awarded to arms merchants Orlando García (ex-chief of security for Pérez) and Gardenia Martínez. There are arrest warrants out against the two.

According to the press, the leader of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) in Táchira, Elbano Carrillo, is requesting that the Fifth Criminal Court in the city of San Cristóbal carry out an investigation of Matos, regarding the financing of a museum honoring Pérez. One court has subpoenaed Matos's tax returns.

Yet another proceeding under way is the Cuntrera case, which touches not only Pérez, but other prominent members of the Venezuelan political elite. On Sept. 11, the government announced that it was revoking the Venezuelan citizenship of Pascuale Cuntrera, and that it was deporting the brothers Paolo and Gaspare Cuntrera, Italians who are naturalized Canadian citizens. The Cuntrera brothers had been sought by the Italian government in connection with the investigations of the recent assassination of Judge Giovanni Falcone.

Since 1983, there had been outstanding arrest warrants against them by the Rome police for drug trafficking.

On Sept. 18, Pérez told journalists that the Cuntrera brothers "were not carrying out criminal activities in the country. It was because of the persistence of my government that people who came and went because they had been given residence here, were detained. But they did not carry out any criminal activity here, although they did do so in the rest of the world."