

Cisneros tries terror to keep Venezuela in line

by Valerie Rush

Venezuela's top financial speculators and their international patrons, panicked over the meltdown of the nation's banking system and the potential for a bigger reckoning since their protector, ex-President Carlos Andrés Pérez, was deposed last year, are on a rampage to save their political power and their ill-gotten gains. On April 18, Alejandro Peña Esclusa, the country's bluntest critic of the drug- and usury-linked "businesses" which sprouted under the Pérez government, especially the Cisneros group of companies, was indicted for allegedly "inciting to commit a crime" and "illegal association." A warrant has been issued for his arrest.

Alejandro Peña is the secretary general of the Venezuelan Labor Party, which put out a booklet exposing Pérez in 1993, before the corrupt stooge of the international bankers was kicked out. Not surprisingly, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the organized crime front which runs vendettas for its masters around the world, has been caught red-handed running the gutter level of this piece of judicial terrorism against Peña. But the real target is the new Venezuelan government of President Rafael Caldera. If the Cisneros clan can flaunt their influence in Venezuelan courts to silence Peña as crudely as the Beijing communist regime gags dissidents, the message is that Dr. Caldera must do nothing to irk them—or their moneyed friends abroad.

The indictment was secured on behalf of the Cisneros family empire, based on a complaint to the court by one of their lawyers, charging essentially that Peña's public denunciations of their suspect business practices and political associations indicted a mob to loot and burn down one of the Cisneros-owned CADA supermarkets.

Corrupting the courts

Flagrant abuse of Venezuela's courts is not new to Gustavo Cisneros and kin. In 1985, they secured a ban on the

circulation inside Venezuela of the book *Narcotráfico, SA*, the Spanish-language version of the U.S. bestseller *Dope, Inc.*, which was commissioned by Lyndon LaRouche. A whole chapter of the book details the Cisneros Group's ties to suspected drug money-laundering networks. Alejandro Peña is a long-time associate and friend of Mr. LaRouche. This point is underlined in the background material accompanying the latest charges against him.

The indictment also reportedly alleges that Peña forms part of a secret group with officers of the IBC media group, which includes *Diario de Caracas*, Radio Caracas Television (RCTV), and others, to destroy the competitor Cisneros conglomerate. The alleged rumor mongering of this "secret group," according to the complaint, led to a run on the Banco Latino which caused it to be taken over by the government!

The facts of the Peña case are otherwise:

1) In mid-January, 1994, the Venezuelan government placed the Banco Latino in receivership. Judge Dianora de Simancas shortly thereafter determined that 1.2 million depositors had been defrauded of more than \$3 billion, and issued arrest warrants against a total of 83 individuals—including bank director Ricardo Cisneros—for fraud, theft, and illegal association. Cisneros is currently a fugitive from Venezuelan justice, along with the majority of the bank's directors.

2) On Feb. 16, Alejandro Peña told a national television audience that "responsibility has to be determined" in the Banco Latino case, adding, "it is an open secret that the Cisneros Group controls the Banco Latino." Peña did not call for people to burn down supermarkets or anything of the sort; he called on the government "to directly determine and investigate the responsibility of the bank's board of directors. In the meantime, they should preemptively seize all of the assets of the Banco Latino's directors." Peña added: "There has been a kind of fear to say the truth and confront them,

and the time has come to do it" (see p. 37).

3) In March, Gustavo Cisneros issued a nine-page English-language document, which was circulated in the international financial community, complaining: "The vitriolic news campaign that followed the issuance of the 83 arrest warrants was orchestrated by the owners of an influential media group in Venezuela with a proven close relationship to Lyndon LaRouche and his extremist organization."

4) In early March, an "employee" of the Cisneros Group presented a request for a "criminal investigation" before Judge Noel Vera Sandoval of the 42nd Criminal Court, charging Peña with "inciting to commit a crime" and "illegal association."

5) On April 14, Judge Vera took a medical leave of absence, and was replaced by Alternate Judge Guillermo Heredí Rodríguez, who the next day subpoenaed Peña to appear in court on April 18, whereupon he was indicted.

Destabilization of Venezuela

In a statement to the media on April 18, Peña wrote, "This case is a maneuver to try to frighten those who dare to denounce the crimes of former President Pérez and his cronies like the Cisneros family. They are trying to manipulate Venezuela's judicial system in order to maintain their power. It is aimed not only at silencing any and all opposition, but at destabilizing and ultimately overthrowing the government of President Rafael Caldera. Their empire is collapsing and they want to remain untouched.

Peña's statements, which were prominently covered in most Venezuelan news media, were echoed by other leading Venezuelans. The executive vice-president of the *Diario de Caracas*, Josué Fernández, himself subpoenaed under the Cisneros complaint, warned that the investigation and subpoenas were designed "to create a legal precedent for turning prior restraint, or censorship, into an obligation for journalists and the media." This, he warned, "is rejected in every democratic country." The *Diario de Caracas* editorialized on April 21 that the legal maneuvers were designed by those who wanted to stop ongoing revelations that "the business and financial group headed by Gustavo Cisneros illegally benefited in the shadow of power of Carlos Andrés Pérez."

RCTV's information director Eduardo Sapene scored the indictment and subpoenas as "judicial quasi-terrorism . . . against the media and against freedom of expression."

Anti-Defamation League provocateur

In light of the specific charge of "incitement to commit a crime," the Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV) issued a statement calling for the indictment against Peña to be dismissed at once as "a fraudulent proceeding and unacceptable manipulation of the judicial process. There is incontrovertible proof," says the PLV, "that it was not Peña, as has been charged, but former Congressman Gastón Guisandes, an ally of Gustavo Cisneros and of the Anti-Defamation League of



Alejandro Peña Esclusa

B'nai B'rith, who incited mobs to attack the CADA supermarket chain owned by Cisneros."

According to the Feb. 2 issue of the daily *Ultimas Noticias*, Guisandes, who leads the "Broom Party," urged a meeting of defrauded Banco Latino depositors to seize the installations of the Cisneros-owned Pepsi-Cola franchise in Venezuela, "and not to allow a single truck to leave." He also called for a "takeover of Banco Union, Banco de Caracas, and of CADA." Also, according to the Feb. 23 issue of *El Universal*, guisandes incited a mob of depositors to engage in violence during a protest at the Venezuelan Congress.

Guisandes has a well-known history as a provocateur. The Feb. 11, 1988 issue of *Diario 2001* reported that criminal charges were brought against him "for inciting an attack against oil industry vessels and against the peace officers who tried to protect those assets." Guisandes was also "caught throwing rocks at members of the National Guard," and in 1993, was accused of damaging an office belonging to the Venezuelan telephone company.

Who is Guisandes, really? During October and November 1991, Gastón Guisandes took out full-page paid advertisements in a number of Venezuelan periodicals, in which he attacked the PLV, Radio Caracas Television, and publisher Marcel Granier. On Oct. 27, 1991, a pamphlet attacking Peña, Granier, and then-U.S. presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche appeared as a paid insert in Venezuela's Sunday newspapers, sponsored—as were the other ads—by Guisandes's so-called Anti-Drug League, and by the New York-based Jarkow Institute for Latin America of the Anti-Defamation League.

According to the PLV statement: "Gastón Guisandes is considered by many to be an employee of Gustavo Cisneros Rendiles." The PLV called upon the authorities "to investigate whether the attack on the CADA [supermarket] in San Cristóbal was in fact an operation by the Cisneros Group, to make them appear as the victims and to later blame a third party."