

Did Cisneros pay \$600,000 to frame up Peña?

by Valerie Rush

Little did the Cisneros clan know that when they took Venezuelan Labor Party leader Alejandro Peña to court to try to silence his voice, that they were opening a Pandora's box. Far from intimidating its enemies, the Cisneros empire has brought upon itself an avalanche of denunciations which could mean the end of its corrupt reign in Venezuela.

Back in February, Peña had demanded that the multibillionaire Cisneros family—longtime agents of Rockefeller interests in Venezuela—be investigated by the government for its role in the January bankruptcy of Banco Latino, which wiped out the life savings of 1.2 million Venezuelan families and posed, in Peña's words, "a national security threat." Peña also called on the government to confiscate assets of principal shareholders, including Ricardo Cisneros and others, to guarantee reimbursement of the bank's thousands of defrauded and desperate depositors.

Peña was answered by a Cisneros-financed witchhunt through the courts intended to put him behind bars and, at the same time, to intimidate both anti-Cisneros media and the Rafael Caldera government. The Cisneros organization, which gained its fortune and achieved formidable influence in financial and political circles in the shadow of the corrupt regime of former President Carlos Andrés Pérez, is feeling especially vulnerable since the impeachment of its protector last year.

The maneuver has so far backfired, however, and Peña's right to freedom of expression became a rallying cry for those who have had enough of the Cisneroses' thuggery. An international outcry was also raised, forcing the judge to release Peña on bail.

Dirty tricks exposed

In the days following Peña's release, a flood of details exposing the dirty tricks employed by the Cisneros clan has been published in *El Diario de Caracas*, a part of the IBC media conglomerate which has stood up to the Cisneros empire. Journalist Rodolfo Schmidt penned a series of exposés on the *Cisneros v. Peña* case skewering the Cisneros organization; not the least of Schmidt's revelations is the fact that Cisneros reportedly spent a cool \$600,000 to frame up Peña!

Schmidt also charges that the Cisneros family has consis-

tently forced Venezuelan law to work for its interests, while ignoring that same law when convenient. Thus, Ricardo Cisneros—a Banco Latino director and one of 83 bank officials indicted for fraud after the government intervened and took over the bank—remains a fugitive from justice in Miami, instead of answering to Venezuela's courts for his responsibility in the bank's failure. As brother Gustavo Cisneros explained in a recent interview with the *Miami Herald*, "Venezuelan justice does not function." And yet, writes Schmidt, while Cisneros was lecturing about the shortcomings of Venezuelan justice in Miami, his people were "showing mastery in how to make it function . . . conveniently" against Peña.

In a followup article, Schmidt notes that there are two kinds of lawyers: those you hire for what they know, and those you hire for *whom* they know—that is, "who use the law to violate justice. In this case, Cisneros lawyer Ricardo Koesling knows Judge Oscar Noel Vera Sandoval of the 42nd Criminal Court," in charge of the Peña case. Schmidt details the multiple irregularities committed by Judge Vera Sandoval in ramming through the Peña prosecution.

Are there judges on the Cisneros payroll? According to Schmidt, Judge Guillermo Heredia Rodríguez, who took over the 42nd Criminal Court long enough to issue the indictment and arrest warrant against Peña (during a brief but convenient "sick leave" taken by Judge Vera Sandoval), also served as lawyer for the political police (DISIP) deputy commissar Leovigildo Briceño some years back, when the officer was caught with 15 kilos of cocaine in his possession. Briceño, now serving time in jail, led the Cisneros-instigated raid on Venezuelan Labor Party headquarters and on the homes of *EIR* correspondents in Venezuela in 1985, to confiscate the book *Narcotráfico, S.A. (Dope, Inc.)*. That book exposed the links of the Cisneros family to drug money-laundering interests, and was eventually banned from circulating nationally by Judge Ana Luisa Gandica, also an attorney for Pepsi Cola in Venezuela. Pepsi is owned by the Cisneros clan.

Schmidt writes that both the judges and witnesses against Peña have murder in their past. For example, Judge Vera Sandoval "is known for his behind-the-scenes role in the murder of Attorney Ramón Carmona Vásquez," while at least two Cisneros witnesses, ODC security chief Efrén Díaz Rojas and Braulio Enrique Gudino, director of operations for Cisneros's Venevisión TV network, are former DISIP agents involved in murders.

In 1982, Díaz Rojas participated with other DISIP agents in the "Cantaura Massacre," murdering 25 students, and later in the "Yumare Massacre," in which 9 Colombian guerrillas were double-crossed and killed while picking up a shipment of weapons they had purchased from the DISIP. And in the mid-1970s, Gudino was charged with murdering political figure Jorge Rodríguez with a karate kick that split open his liver, during "interrogation" while in police custody.