

Andean Report by Cynthia Rush

Agenda for chaos

Under conditions of worsening economic crisis, Project Democracy's plans are moving forward in Venezuela.

Venezuela is in the worst economic crisis in 30 years: Falling oil prices have forced the government to drain reserves to dangerously low levels to pay its foreign debt; inflation is expected to surpass 30% this year; and price hikes and scarcity of basic food items have provoked widespread unrest. Government, business, and labor leaders are doing battle over how to approach the debt crisis, and what kind of policies are needed to revive the national economy.

On July 12, missions from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank arrived in Caracas to order the government to finally accept an orthodox "adjustment" program, which would increase interest rates, end all subsidies, reduce consumption, and force the country to export everything in sight—Hong Kong style—to guarantee the debt payments which Venezuela has faithfully paid to its creditors.

Complementing the bankers' attack, Venezuelan assets of the "Project Democracy" that has run U.S. foreign policy through the illicit "Iran-gate" apparatus, have launched a coordinated offensive, shrieking that the cause of the crisis lies not in current policy orientation, but in the dirigism and concepts of republicanism still found in Venezuela's political system and its Constitution.

If the nation is to know real democratic bliss, these agents say, government and elected leaders must smash such "obsolete" structures as political parties, modify the Consti-

tution to create a parliamentary system (removing the institution of the "strong executive"), and eliminate the state's role in determining or implementing economic policy.

United in this offensive by their hatred for industrial capitalism and the cultural optimism still characterizing portions of Venezuela's population, are allegedly opposing groups from Venezuela's "left" and "right."

We find radical anti-capitalists posing as "conservative" businessmen—the friends of the "informal economy"—drug-running et al.—at the Caracas-based Institute for Liberty and Democracy, whose president, Hugo Fonseca Viso, just took over the industrial association, Fedecamaras. Then there are the old Soviet agents like José Vicente Rangel and leftist guru Arturo Usler Pietri.

Eduardo Fernández, presidential pre-candidate of the opposition Copei party, has stepped forward as the most vociferous spokesman for Project Democracy's agenda.

In a speech to the nation on Independence Day July 5, which he gave at the invitation of President Jaime Lusinchi, Fernández violently attacked national political institutions, and praised recent violent demonstrations as an example of how an "enraged people" express their democratic will.

In Jacobin overtones, Fernández raved that the people will rise up, unless the "old model" of economic and social development is abandoned. "Each new epoch is born at the price

of traumatic conflict," the candidate asserted. "Violence is always the mid-wife of history. . . . We are going to unleash productive forces to stimulate free initiative of Venezuelans. . . . The people are enraged."

Observers were astonished that Lusinchi provided the opposition Copei candidate with a national forum to expound on a program which threatens the very stability of the government and the country.

Lusinchi reportedly saw his invitation to Fernández as a smart maneuver against former President Carlos Andrés Pérez, his factional opponent within Acción Democrática who is fighting to become the party's presidential candidate. Pérez has criticized the government's slavish obedience to the banks, and has called for greater cooperation with other Ibero-American debtors.

Lusinchi's ploy has backfired. Taking his cue from Fernández, the leftist rector of the Universidad Central, Edmundo Chirinos, has whipped up the student population to serve as cannon fodder in a number of violent confrontations with the police and military. The demonstrations protest "government repression," and treatment of arrested students. Chirinos has even likened the Lusinchi government to that of Chilean dictator Pinochet.

Sensing that the demonstrations are orchestrated, the population hasn't backed them—at least not yet. But under conditions of worsening economic crisis, the Project Democracy crowd intends to mobilize whole sectors of the population into mobs that can assault national institutions.

Hence the emphasis on building up a national movement of "neighborhood associations" which can replace "corrupt" political parties and carry out pots-and-pans style "civil disobedience to defend democracy."