

Andean Report by Lucía Méndez

Anybody but Carlos Andrés Pérez

Venezuela's opposition parties have united to make sure the social democrat does not win the presidency again.

A national alliance is being formed to guarantee that social democrat Carlos Andrés Pérez does not win reelection to the Venezuelan presidency. Pérez, who was president from 1974 to 1979, is the candidate of the ruling Democratic Action party in December's elections.

Although CAP, as he is called in Venezuela, is touted in the press as a shoo-in because the public remembers his oil-rich presidency as "the good old days," the austerity and looting by Democratic Action in recent years could provoke the kind of strong reaction evidenced in comparable situations in Mexico and Argentina.

The anti-CAP front's positive platform has yet to be seen. But, there is hope for "Little Venice" in the mere fact that such a movement is taking shape against a candidate with shady connections to families tied to institutions associated with narcotics trafficking.

In June, publisher and businessman Miguel Angel Capriles began to sound the alarm about CAP. In an interview in his own *Elite* weekly, Capriles warned that Pérez wanted to guarantee that his party would rule the country for several successive five-year terms. Capriles called that the "Mexicanization" of Venezuela. Capriles also said Pérez wants to obtain millions of dollars to fund his campaign from his buddies in the European social democracy.

At the beginning of July, Enrique Pérez Olivares, the general secretary of the leading opposition party, the Christian Democratic (COPEI) party, announced that he had spoken with

several other people and organizations in the opposition in order to form "an anti-CAP front." He said that the discussions included a group of supporters of ex-President Marcos Pérez Jiménez, who has haunted Venezuela's liberals since they overthrew him in 1958. According to the Caracas daily *El Nuevo País* July 5, COPEI leader Pedro Pablo was commissioned to go to Madrid to negotiate an alliance with the exiled General Pérez Jiménez, who is still quite popular in Venezuela. It is also said Pérez Jiménez flew to Aruba to meet with his Venezuelan supporters.

Journalist Rafael Poleo, a member of CAP's Democratic Action, compared the new anti-CAP front with the alliances that provoked the 1948 military coup. He wrote that COPEI presidential candidate Eduardo Fernández, ex-President Rafael Caldera, intellectual Uslar Pietri, and leftist José Vicente Rangel had been plotting such a front since 1986.

Most leaders of the ruling Democratic Action accused COPEI of being desperate to stop Carlos Andrés Pérez. COPEI candidate Fernández retorted, "I have not named that gentleman. What I propose is a great national accord to face the deterioration of the system and the danger of hegemony. We Venezuelans have long fought to have a pluralist democracy."

The real danger posed by Carlos Andrés Pérez comes from his connection to the Cisneros family, whose links with institutions tied to narcotics traffic were exposed in *EIR*'s 1985 bestseller, *Dope, Inc.* The Spanish-language edition, *Narcotráfico, S.A.*,

was banned in Venezuela.

The anti-CAP front is an unruly assortment of people from right to left. On June 27, the Venezuelan Communist Party presidential candidate, Edmundo Chirinos, reacted to Pérez's proposal for an international anti-drug conference. "It seems strange to me that a person who lives from drugs and is financed by narcotics traffic talks of convoking a world event against drugs. . . . During the coming period, narcotics traffic will be in power in Venezuela," the press quoted the former university president.

Venezuelans—80% of whom live in poverty conditions—think of CAP in terms of the rapid economic growth and social well-being experienced during his presidency. But, he is now repudiating the development policies he followed then. One of his top advisers, banker Pedro Tinoco, assured the Venezuelan Bankers' Association, in CAP's presence, that they would eliminate exchange controls, let the black market determine the value of Venezuela's currency, and let the "free market" determine domestic interest rates.

Pérez appears confident of victory, but things could change. For example, the armed forces are upset at the ruling party's political maneuvers around which officers should be promoted.

Another factor is that the Supreme Electoral Council revoked its earlier decision to deny national registration to the Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV), which has been persecuted by the cronies of CAP and Cisneros ever since its members began an anti-drug campaign. The PLV's daring to challenge the \$4 billion Cisneros empire and its call for debt moratorium have won it widespread favorable recognition in Venezuela. Its legalization shows that Pérez will find major obstacles on his road to the presidency.