

Venezuelan voters repudiate Pérez, the left, and Gnosticism

by Peter Rush and David Ramonet

Venezuelans voted overwhelmingly with their feet in the nation's first-ever gubernatorial election held Dec. 3, staying away from the polls in droves in an unambiguous repudiation of both the ruling Democratic Action (AD) party, the discredited Christian Democratic party (COPEI), and the leftist Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party. Faced with very few good choices among the candidates offered by the three major parties in the 20 gubernatorial races, 68% of the electorate stayed home—up from a normal 8% abstention rate.

Those who did vote trounced the AD, sending a strong message to the party's standard-bearer, President Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP), who has become the most unpopular President in decades for his dogmatic imposition of International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionalities that have cut living standards in half in less than a year. The AD won only 11 of 20 states, losing many of the most important ones. But the MAS, which had expected to pick up votes from disgruntled former AD supporters, was also crushed, winning only one of the governors posts lost by the AD.

The residents of the critical border state of Táchira resoundingly turned back the gubernatorial bid of MAS candidate Walter Márquez, the leader of the satanic Gnostic sect called the Universal Christian Gnostic Church, despite his having held a commanding lead in the polls just one month before the election. Key in his defeat was the eleventh-hour campaign mounted by the general secretary of the Venezuelan Labor Party, Alejandro Peña Esclusa. After it became clear that no other political groups in Táchira would take the point, Peña publicized Márquez's attack on the Catholic Church and his backing for the Colombian ELN guerrilla assaults against the Venezuelan army, and portrayed Márquez's Gnostic background and beliefs as anti-Catholic and perverted. Peña's successful intervention prevented the creation of a narco-terrorist enclave on the Venezuelan-Colombian border, which would have been a national security threat to both nations.

CAP suffers overwhelming defeat

Above all, the nationwide de facto boycott of the elections, and defeat of 9 of 20 AD candidates, was a repudiation of President Pérez (or CAP, as he is known) and his IMF

economic policy. With inflation nearing 85% for 1989, food consumption per person cut by more than one-third, agricultural production crippled, and the economy disintegrating, CAP steadfastly defends the course of "liberalization" of the economy, and the depressing of real wage levels according to the IMF program he implemented last February. The election results are being called in the country "an electoral February 27," referring to the week of rioting, plunder, and killing that wracked Caracas and other cities earlier this year.

In the capital of Caracas, the AD candidate won with only 43% of the votes cast, based on a voter turnout of only 28%, one of the lowest rates in the country. Outside of Caracas, the turnout was 35%, making a national average of 32%.

The AD lost in the states encompassing the entire coastal belt from Caracas to the Colombian border on the west, including the states of Miranda, Aragua, Carabobo, Yaracuy, Falcón, and Zulia. The first three are the densely populated states that surround Caracas (Miranda actually includes a portion of the capital), and Zulia is the premier oil-producing state, whose capital, Maracaibo, is the second largest city in the country. Carabobo is the headquarters of much of the country's industry, while Aragua is an important agro-industrial state containing important military bases as well.

The AD was also shocked to lose the extremely important state of Bolívar, location of most of the nation's heavy industries such as aluminium, steel, bauxite, and other minerals, and of the state development company Venezuelan Corporation of the Guayana. The governorship was won by Andrés Velázquez, the candidate of the Radical Cause party and the leader of the state's steel workers' union. Although his is not one of the major three parties, Velázquez won with broad support from the population, which made it impossible to carry out the vote fraud that had been put in place before the voting.

On election night, the AD was so enraged at losing this vital state, that it attempted to stage a police-state coup. As soon as the preliminary returns indicated a Radical Cause victory, the incumbent governor from the AD had all the top Radical Cause labor union leaders thrown in jail, and he

announced that the AD had won the election. In response, the entire work force of the factories of Ciudad Guayana, Bolívar's principal city, went on strike the following morning, and by afternoon, the AD was forced to back down, release the workers and concede the Radical Cause victory.

The MAS, which had done quite well in the national congressional elections last December, was also decisively beaten, winning only one governorship, in Aragua, despite prior expectations of winning big. The COPEI, more by default than anything else, picked up the other seven governorships.

Voters reject Gnostic Márquez

It was in Táchira state that the most violent swing of public opinion took place, in the wake of the educational campaign launched by Peña and the PLV starting in mid-November. Going into the final month of the campaign, Márquez was given a 15-point lead in the polls, and was generally considered unbeatable. On Dec. 3, he lost to the candidate of AD by an almost two-to-one margin, 47% to 27%. In the interim, the local press was filled with almost daily stories on the battle between Peña and Márquez, which evidently awakened the Táchira electorate to the dangers of electing the self-professed Gnostic and defender of guerrilla terrorists as their governor. Heard frequently on the streets of San Cristóbal, the state capital, the day after the election, was the statement, "Here the AD didn't win; here Peña defeated Walter [Márquez]."

Márquez's defeat also eliminated what would have been an extremely serious threat to the national security of Venezuela. Located on the border with Colombia in a region in which the Cuban-run ELN guerrillas are quite active, Táchira is very important in the efforts of the Venezuelan Armed Forces and National Guard to keep the ELN out of Venezuela. The group has violated the border numerous times, most recently in September, when they killed five National Guardsmen. A Márquez victory would have virtually opened the border to their incursions and permitted them to establish bases such as they now have in Colombia.

'Márquez defends bishop killers'

Peña launched his attack on Márquez in a Nov. 13 interview that appeared in *Diario Católico*, the principal daily paper of Táchira, under the headline, "Walter Márquez defends the assassins of Catholic bishops." In the interview, Peña laid out Márquez's backing for the ELN, which had just a few weeks earlier murdered a Colombian bishop, Monsignor Jesús Jaramillo, of Arauca, the Colombian department adjacent to Táchira. Márquez had come to the defense of the ELN, and implied in public that not the ELN, but the Venezuelan army itself, had killed the five National Guardsmen. He said that there was no evidence of ELN involvement, despite the fact that the ELN had just issued a public statement claiming responsibility, and never subsequently

retracted the claim.

Márquez first began defending ELN guerrillas last year, when, after the killings of the National Guardsmen, he intervened to claim that the victims were not guerrillas at all, but innocent fishermen. Márquez even forced the bodies to be exhumed, and "protected" two alleged witnesses to the fight, in his effort particularly to discredit the CEJAP, the elite border force that had been attacked by the guerrilla unit.

One week later, Peña upped the ante against Márquez, with an advertisement in the *Diario Católico*, entitled, "The Gnostic sect of Walter Márquez is a satanic sect that promotes perverted sexual rites." The advertisement detailed the evidence, on the public record, that Márquez's Universal Christian Gnostic Church was co-founded in Venezuela by Márquez and an accused terrorist, rapist, and drug trafficker, and that its brother church in Colombia was founded by professed sexual pervert Samael Aùn Weor, Márquez's mentor.

The advertisement quoted from Weor's Gnostic bible, *Perfect Matrimony*, such statements as: "All religion has a sexual origin"; "the dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit and of the voluptuous Venus Aphrodite, is always represented as a phallic instrument used by the Holy Spirit to impregnate the Virgin Mary"; "the energies of the Holy Spirit descend to the sexual organs"; and "the four Gospels can only be understood with the key of sexual magic."

Márquez reacted immediately, seeking and obtaining a court injunction against Peña, forbidding him to speak in public against Márquez, on the spurious grounds that Peña had attacked him because of his religious faith, in violation of the Venezuelan Constitution. But the issue wouldn't die. The following Sunday, Nov. 19, Monsignor Nelson Arellano devoted his homily to an attack on Gnosticism, which was broadcast live by radio, and later in subsequent radio news shows. In response to this, Márquez declared a hunger strike against the Catholic Church for interfering in politics, only to drop it 24 hours later.

On Nov. 27, Peña appeared in court to appeal the injunction against him, where he presented the evidence that his charges against Márquez couldn't be in violation of the Constitution, because they were based on the truth, and introduced into evidence the entirety of Weor's pornographic blasphemy against Christianity. Márquez's lawyers ducked the issue, and instead told the court nothing but that Peña should be stopped because he is a follower of Lyndon LaRouche, someone who has been jailed in the United States. The case was continued until after the elections.

But on Nov. 30, Peña's PLV counterattacked again with a final pre-election ad headlined, "Márquez Offends 16 Million Venezuelan Catholics," which reprinted Peña's court testimony on why Gnosticism was a satanic sect, and which rhetorically asked whether Peña offended Márquez, as charged, or whether Márquez's blasphemy offended all Venezuelan Catholics.

The voters clearly felt offended.