

Pro-drug 'Dialogue' seeks to place Peña Gómez in Dominican presidency

by Carlos Wesley

Impeached former Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez set off a firestorm in the Dominican Republic when it was revealed that he surreptitiously entered the country on March 24 to meet with his protégé, José Francisco Peña Gómez. A member of the pro-drug Inter-American Dialogue, Peña Gómez is running on the opposition PRD ticket for the Dominican presidency in the upcoming May elections.

Pérez, who is awaiting trial in Venezuela on charges of corruption, fraud, and the misappropriation of millions of dollars during his administration, arrived on a private jet from New York along with his mistress, Cecilia Matos. Initial reports were that they were staying at the luxury estate of his crony Gustavo Cisneros on "billionaires' row," the resort enclave of Casa de Campo, in La Romana. But the Cisneros Organization—already in hot water because Ricardo Cisneros, Gustavo's brother and partner, is a fugitive from Venezuelan justice for absconding with the funds of Venezuela's Banco Latino—promptly issued a denial.

A spokeswoman for the PRD also tried to deny at first that Peña Gómez had met with Pérez, a fellow member of the Socialist International. She even denied that the Venezuelan was in the Dominican Republic! But, after the daily *Ultima Hora* published a facsimile of the flight report on March 28, there was no choice but to 'fess up: Carlos Andrés Pérez was indeed in the country, staying at the La Romana estate of Italo-Dominican businessman Vincenzo Mastrolilli, Peña Gómez's top fundraiser.

'Pérez called me'

Still, in a March 28 interview with the daily *El Nacional*, Peña Gómez insisted: "It is absolutely not true that I met with Carlos Andrés. It is just not true." *El Nacional* explained that "prior to coming to the country, Pérez called from New York to say they shouldn't meet because it would be used politically against" Peña Gómez. Later, the Dominican leader said that he would meet with Pérez after all.

By this time, a hysterical Peña Gómez was charging there was a death plot against him, and he threatened a blood-bath in reprisal for any attacks. The March 28 *El Nuevo Diario* quoted Peña Gómez, "If they move against me . . . the Dominican Republic will go up in flames." Out of control, he added: "If they move against me, I want friends and foes to know . . . [that] leaders of the Reformist Party will not be

able to sleep peacefully, not here, nor in New York, nor in Washington, nor Boston, because they will pay with their blood for my blood."

Peña Gómez is so close to Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP) that in some circles he is known as "Capito," or "Little CAP." So, why all the hysteria?

Clearly it would not help the Inter-American Dialogue's (IAD) plan to put Peña Gómez in the presidency, if Dominicans were reminded of his ties to the corrupt CAP and the corrupt Cisneros brothers. One of them, Gustavo Cisneros, was granted "privileged citizenship" (alongside his Venezuelan citizenship) in the mid-1980s by then-Dominican President Salvador Jorge Blanco, a PRD party-mate of Peña Gómez. Jorge Blanco was himself later jailed for corruption in office.

The Cisneros empire includes the largest U.S. Spanish-language TV network, Univisión. Also, Gustavo Cisneros sits on the International Advisory Board of David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan Bank, along with Henry Kissinger, who also benefitted from CAP's largesse, having been given a juicy contract advising the Venezuelan government on foreign investments and debt, and who also is a frequent visitor to La Romana, where he winters most years with designer Oscar de la Renta.

Dominicans warned

Exactly one week before Pérez's arrival, Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV) leader Alejandro Peña Esclusa (no relation to Peña Gómez), warned Dominicans during a televised interview not to allow CAP's cronies to do to their country what they did to Venezuela, where 1.2 million depositors of Banco Latino were defrauded of their life savings and pensions by the owners, directors, and principal borrowers of the bank. Chief among those responsible for the bank's collapse this past January was Pérez, whose policies encouraged Latino to engage in such questionable practices as money laundering (Venezuela became Latin America's principal drug-money laundering center during the Pérez administration). Venezuela's current authorities have issued an arrest warrant for Ricardo Cisneros for "robbery, fraud and conspiracy."

The interview with Peña Esclusa, which was televised March 17 on the "Revista 110" program hosted by Julio

Hazim, had to be conducted by telephone from Caracas, Venezuela, since Peña was stopped by a last-minute court order as he was about to board the plane to Santo Domingo. "It seems there are people afraid of what I may say about the directors of Banco Latino, some of whom even had Dominican citizenship, which they abused," said Peña Esclusa.

Peña was able to have the travel ban temporarily lifted and flew into Santo Domingo the next day, where he held a news conference. He warned "those Dominicans who have business dealings with the Cisneroses to investigate, so that you don't suffer the same fate as their partners in Banco Latino." He denounced "Cisneros partner Carlos Andrés Pérez, who, along with the Americas Society and the Inter-American Dialogue, is seeking to destabilize the government of Venezuelan President Rafael Caldera."

A large portion of the news conference was re-broadcast on March 30 on "La Hora de Consuelo," a program hosted by Consuelo Despradel on the Radio Televisión Dominicana network, fueling anew the controversy about CAP's continued presence in the country.

IAD's man in the Dominican Republic

The relationship between Pérez and Peña Gómez ("Capito") is of more than academic interest to Dominican voters. Both of them belong to the "second generation" of the Caribbean Legion, the forerunner of what was to become Oliver North's Project Democracy. Although hand-picked by the late Willy Brandt to run the Socialist International in Ibero-America, and thus CAP's nominal superior in that organization, Peña Gómez has always followed the lead of the Venezuelan. The Pérez administration is seen by many Dominicans as providing a useful guide of what to expect if Peña Gómez replaces President Joaquín Balaguer.

One such area is drugs. Under Pérez, according to a United Nations study, Venezuela became the largest drug-money laundering center in all of Ibero-America, as the Banco Latino case shows. In fact, Pérez was even given an expensive mare by Fabio Ochoa, the patriarch of the Medellín Cartel's Ochoa clan, for services rendered.

For his part, Peña Gómez was among the signers of the call issued in 1986 by the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD) for the "selective legalization" of drugs. The Washington-based IAD is run by international finance, and has set much of the free trade and anti-Ibero-American military policy that emanates from Washington these days. Its members occupy many key government posts, from the presidency of Bolivia, to the Finance Ministry of Brazil, to several positions in the cabinet of the Clinton administration. And, in each such case, the member is merely "on loan" to the government he or she serves; the person's primary loyalty is owed to the IAD.

The IAD has consistently maintained its pro-drug stance, and so has Peña Gómez.

At the beginning of March, one of Peña Gómez's campaign workers, Rafael Fermín Almonte, was caught in Santo

Domingo with 6.5 kilos of cocaine. A few days earlier, two suitcases containing drug dollars were supposedly found at New York's Kennedy Airport on a plane in which Peña Gómez was travelling. Cardinal López Rodríguez, archbishop of Santo Domingo and president of the Latin American Bishops Conference, called for a full investigation of all political parties "to determine to what extent narco-politics have penetrated," and he specifically cited the cases of Venezuela and Bolivia. Journalists have alleged that the PRD gets funding from "the Little Dominican Cartel" that runs the drug trade in New York City's Washington Heights.

Backing given to genocidal blockade

Unlike the measured approach toward Haiti of both President Balaguer and rival candidate Jacobo Majluta, who have both denounced the blockade as inhumane and impractical, Peña Gómez fully backs the Dialogue's policy of restoring necklacer Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power, whatever the cost. When his fellow IAD member Michael Barnes, an adviser to Aristide who is tied to organized crime's Anti-Defamation League, got some U.S. congressmen in mid-March to threaten to extend the blockade to the Dominican Republic itself, Peña Gómez remained silent. And when Pérez, as self-appointed hatchetman for George Bush's new world order, pushed for dismantling Haiti's military, and for a multinational force to intervene in Haiti, Peña Gómez never repudiated this, although it is a total violation of national sovereignty and will inevitably result in millions of Haitian refugees fleeing to the United States and across the border into the Dominican Republic.

Hypocritically, while he demands harsh measures "to restore democracy" to Haiti, Peña Gómez wants the United States to lift its embargo and "normalize" relations with Cuba in keeping with the IAD's policy, which urges collaboration with the Cuban-spawned narco-terrorist São Paulo Forum, and bringing "former" communist terrorists to power in Ibero-America—that is, so long as they agree to implement the economic liberalism and shock therapy policies prescribed by the International Monetary Fund and like institutions.

His own electoral alliance now includes such "former" communists as "Fafa" Taveras, while among the honored guests hosted by Peña Gómez at a meeting of the Latin American Socialist International in Santo Domingo in September of last year, there was Nicaragua's Sandinista Tomás Borge and delegates from Colombia's M-19, which in 1980 seized the Dominican embassy in Bogotá and held 20 diplomats hostage for two months.

At that conclave, delegates approved resolutions demanding Aristide's immediate restoration to power, praising Cuba for liberalizing its economy, and calling on Clinton to normalize relations with Castro's regime. Peña Gómez also condemned Venezuela's institutions for daring to exercise their constitutional duty to impeach CAP. Clearly, Dominicans should reject the IAD's offer to "lend" them Peña Gómez as President; the interest costs are just too high.