

PLV warns: Venezuela's future is at stake

The Venezuelan Labor Party issued the following statement on April 26, under the headline, "The Case Against Peña Esclusa Involves a Serious National Security Problem":

There are two levels to the legal suit which the Cisneros Group has filed against our secretary general, Alejandro Peña Esclusa.

On the first, and simplest level, this suit intends to destroy anyone who, like Peña Esclusa, attempts to question the Cisneros Group; particularly those who try to place some of the blame for the collapse of the Banco Latino on the Cisneros Group.

The second, and more important level, is clear for those who have read the open letter which Peña Esclusa addressed to President Rafael Caldera on Feb. 21 of this year.

In that letter, Peña warned that a pincers-type operation was under way against the Venezuelan government. Bankers, he indicated, "will do everything possible to collect the foreign debt by trying to prevent the government from altering payment conditions or from leaving the International Monetary Fund's framework. Hence the 'veiled threats' from the Americas Society; and the pressures from Standard and Poors rating agency on downgrading Venezuela's debt paper; and from this stem the fears expressed in the London *Independent's* editorial on Dec. 6, 1993, that your electoral victory could produce an 'ebb in the high tide of free trade.' The real fear is that you will decide to break with the false dilemma between

'neo-liberalism' and 'populism,' both dangerous options, and decide to implement a third 'Hamiltonian' or 'nationalist' alternative, coherent with the Social Doctrine of the Church."

"International bankers know very well," Peña added, "that you have the international prestige and the ability to launch a 'nationalist wave' on the model of Hamilton throughout Ibero-America. They know that you have the ability to rally all Ibero-American peoples in order to jointly change the onerous conditions for debt payment.

"Sooner or later, your government will be forced to take emergency measures and, in some way, leave the IMF's framework, not out of rebellion against the banks or for ideological reasons, but rather as an act of defense and security."

In the letter, Peña referenced the nationalist economic program which the Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV) has been proposing for several years as an alternative to populism and neo-liberalism.

It is the case that the financial and banking crisis created by Carlos Andrés Pérez and Pedro Tinoco with their evil "zero coupon" policy, and IMF ministers such as Miguelito Rodríguez, has exploded. It is also true that foreign bankers, friends of Gustavo Cisneros Rendiles, want the government only to have access to their neo-liberal recipes.

Thus the second objective of this case against Peña Esclusa—the second level—is to keep him out of politics and to discredit the PLV so that the government won't even have access to the PLV's proposals.

In our view, this legal suit has to be nullified immediately. Even more important, in fact indispensable, Peña Esclusa must be given access to a platform where he can explain in detail the PLV's economic program. Venezuela's future is at stake.

against Peña Esclusa for the presumed crime of inciting criminality and instigating looting and devastation. Citizen Durán Galvis is within his rights to make these charges; but it is the judge who knows the case who has to ensure that the body of evidence included in the charges and indications of guilt by the person committing the crime are based on fact.

Now, both the body of evidence and indications of guilt on which Judge Heredia based his decision stem from testimony of seven employees of companies owned by the Cisneros Organization, which is directly interested in establishing [Peña's] guilt. They say that a crime was committed and that Peña Esclusa is guilty without having provided a single piece of evidence worthy of the name. (Everything we say here will be proven as the details of the case are made public.)

Nonetheless, the judge found such biased testimony to

be perfectly acceptable. It's as if a judge had said to a citizen: "Some gentlemen stated here that statements that you made were the cause of the looting of their business. I won't deny that this is sufficient proof. You're under arrest."

If all judges followed Judge Heredia's example, the truth is that we could just do without them all and simply permit the same interested party to name the guilty one. The judge could stay around to transcribe what that party dictates to him.

It is worrisome that permanent judges can be so easily substituted by temporary ones who then make decisions of this kind. There must be some flaw in the norms which regulate the naming of temporary judges, if someone with the legal criteria used by Dr. Guillermo Heredia could be named to this position.