

Andean Report by Carlos Méndez

Socialist no longer a shoo-in

Ex-President of Venezuela Carlos Andrés Pérez might lose his reelection bid—the wild card is the Venezuelan Labor Party.

Sometimes, in the final round, the boxer who “fixed” beforehand to lose the fight, knocks out his rival. The presidential candidate for the Venezuelan Social Christian Party, Eduardo “The Tiger” Fernández, knocked his social democratic opponent Carlos Andrés Pérez, candidate of the Democratic Action Party (AD)

Oct. 18. He also knocked out the gentlemen’s agreement set up 25 years ago in the so-called Punto Fijo Pact.

On Oct. 18, Fernández began filling the television screens with an advertisement asserting that Venezuelan Presidents Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-80) and Luis Herrera Campins (1980-86) had sunk the country with their treatment of the foreign debt and devaluations of the national currency.

It was a shock both because the self-named “tiger” had previously acted like a pussycat toward Dukakis-buddy Pérez, and because Herrera is from Fernández’s own party, COPEI. On Oct. 20, Fernández told a press conference, “I am responsible for the spot going out on television. I ordered it. I have given my word to the Venezuelan people that I will follow different policies.” Fernández emphasized, “My government will be different from that of Pérez, different from Herrera and different from [incumbent Jaime] Lusinchi. . . . The disastrous path begun by the Pérez government could not be corrected by the Social Christian [Herrera administration. . . . During the past 15 years we have had two AD governments and one COPEI. Very grave er-

rors in the administration of immense riches [Venezuela’s oil bonanza] have been made during these 15 years. . . . I am going to govern to correct the errors of the past and to make real the new hopes. . . . For that reason, I place the interests of Venezuela above the interests of my own friends and my own party.”

Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP) immediately responded, but from the safety of the ropes. Tacitly accepting Fernández’s charges, CAP said, “We are not going to deny the past; we are responsible for what we did, for the good and the bad we could do, but we are also firmly determined not to repeat errors, because we have learned from our own experience and we also have the experience of the tragic government of Luis Herrera Campins and the efforts of the government of our comrade President Jaime Lusinchi.”

The problem is that although what Fernández said is true, up to now his program has paralleled that of Carlos Andrés Pérez, whose present proposals are even worse than what he did when he was President.

Venezuelan Labor Party (PL) presidential candidate Alejandro Peña used his campaign to focus on precisely the same policy disasters which Fernández has now suddenly identified. In dozens of interviews in newspapers, radio, and television, Peña has shown with statistics and graphs that during the past 15 years, creditor banks have looted \$67 billion out of Venezuela, with the total complicity of those governing. In addition, during the

same 15 years, \$37 billion in flight capital has left the country.

On Oct. 19, during a two-hour interview on Channel 11 in the oil city of Maracaibo, Peña described CAP and Fernández as “two barflies who go to Rockefeller’s Council of the Americas to peddle their favors and see who will give more to the bankers. . . . The ironic thing is that CAP is a useful fool for Moscow,” and the man whom Fidel Castro just proposed as the leader Latin America needs.

That day, also in Maracaibo, CAP presented his electoral platform. Most of it was vague abstractions, but he clearly stated he would privatize the industries the state has developed, would give “greater flexibility to interest rates,” and would set foreign exchange rates so as to stimulate exports and foreign investments.

However, what his main opponent Fernández did, goes way beyond mere electoral tricks: Fernández broke “the rules of the game.” That opens a plethora of possibilities for change. Although most of the sacred cows of his COPEI party reacted against him for having blasted COPEI ex-President Herrera Campins, the biggest reaction on this score came from CAP’s social democrats. Perhaps by denouncing the politicians of his own party, Fernández cut the shackles which had kept him from letting the whole truth out, something which only the PLV has done up to now.

But if Fernández really wants a different kind of administration, he will have to immediately correct his economic program. Of the many contenders, the only one who has proposed an effective program is Alejandro Peña, who calls for debt moratorium, Ibero-American integration, and a detailed plan of how to develop the agricultural and industrial potential of Venezuela to make it into what he calls “an industrial power by the year 2000.”