

Andean Report by Carlos Méndez

Pérez says, 'It's me or the guerrillas'

Venezuela's terrorist left shoots a top labor leader; Carlos Andrés Pérez blames the Bolivarian rebels.

On Sept. 23, Democratic Action party congressman and former president of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV) Antonio Ríos was shot as he left union headquarters by a man and a woman who were immediately arrested. Shortly after, newspapers in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, received a suspicious press release signed by "the Bolivarian Liberation Forces" (FBL), which claimed credit for the shooting and justified it on the basis that Ríos was "corrupt." Ríos had been released from jail a few days earlier on the charge of "influence peddling." Among other things, the release said: "We share with the people and with organizations such as the [Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement] MBR-2000 [the movement of rebel officers which tried to remove President Carlos Andrés Pérez last Feb. 4] the aspiration for a peaceful outcome to the present crisis."

Javier Elicheguerra, a lawyer and member of the defense team for the jailed MBR-2000 officers, declared that MBR-2000 had no connection to the assassination attempt nor to the FBL. But the Pérez government continues to insist that there is a link. Why?

On Sept. 24, the former presidential candidate and leader of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSI) in Venezuela, Alejandro Peña Esclusa, blamed "the pro-Fidel Castro left, the close friend of Carlos Andrés Pérez," for the attempt on Ríos's life.

Peña explained that "the financial institutions are crumbling, the International Monetary Fund has collapsed

. . . that is, the puppet masters are bankrupt. . . . Thus, the presidencies of Carlos Andrés Pérez [Venezuela], Collor de Mello [Brazil], Gaviria [Colombia], Menem [Argentina], and all those who bow down before the IMF, are finished, their time is up.

"Faced with this reality," Peña added, "Pérez is turning in desperation to his friends, be they the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the M-19 in Colombia, the FMLN in El Salvador, and above all, to his old friend who has always backed him, Fidel Castro, in order to maintain himself in power. Any sort of terrorist act, such as the attempted assassination of Ríos, is a provocation, and an incitement to civil war and violence. Fidel Castro and the other friends of Pérez are experts in creating just such a false dilemma, of dividing a nation into camps: the corrupt democracies of the IMF versus atheist narco-terrorist guerrillas. It doesn't matter who pulled the trigger on Ríos. In the final analysis, whoever they were, they are nothing but marionettes manipulated by the pro-Cuban left, in order to make the Venezuelan population believe that their only choices are the Pérez government, or a takeover by guerrillas. This is the false dilemma."

Pérez is confronting an avalanche of problems, from the growing demands for his resignation to the demand that he be tried for corruption. His response is the same as during the 1960s, when he was interior minister in the Betancourt government: to divide the opposition, frightening business groups and the general public

with the bogeyman that the left is preparing a revolution of "sergeants" connected to international terrorists. Reliable sources in Caracas report that the government has been organizing a virtual parallel army to deal with any "contingencies," to be composed of Cuban mercenaries, former "Contras," and others.

On Sept. 24, Pérez referenced the attack on Ríos: "This is like the last time, in the 1960s, when as interior minister under President Rómulo Betancourt, I organized the measures that saved Venezuela from this terrorist infamy. And I am ready to do the same again."

On Sept. 25, the former head of the Information Section of the presidency, Pastor Heydra, insisted in his column in *El Universal* newspaper that the MBR-2000 was responsible for the attack on Ríos, and that this was one more proof of "the links between some residues of the old left of the 1960s, some self-styled 'notables,' and the lodge of the self-styled revolutionary Bolivarian officers."

On Sept. 24, the Trade Union Committee of the ruling Democratic Action (AD) party, to which Ríos belongs, said that the attempt on Ríos's life "forces us to prepare to defend democracy and the CTV union movement and the democratic political parties, which are the fundamental support for the political system. . . . The Trade Union Bureau will adopt whatever measures may be necessary."

Rep. Gastón Vera, present CTV president, stated that "while staying within democratic and legal bounds," the CTV "will not sit by with folded arms in the face of this criminal activity."

According to *Diario de Caracas*, it is assumed that what is meant by "whatever is necessary" includes "training its militants in armed self-defense."