

Andean Report by Alfonso Rodríguez

CAP tied to Letelier murder

The President of Venezuela is in hot water both at home and abroad, and many think he won't last out his term.

The trials and tribulations of Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez are fast spreading beyond Venezuela's borders. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of his failure to force neighboring Colombia to deport two Venezuelan military officers who had participated in last November's coup attempt against him, Pérez's name has once again come into the limelight, this time linked to international terrorist activities.

The details surfaced during the Santiago trial of the former director of the Chilean Directorate of National Intelligence (DINA), Gen. Manuel Contreras. He is charged with participating in the 1976 assassination of former Chilean Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier in Washington, D.C.

According to the Chilean daily *Ultimas Noticias* of March 2, Contreras insisted that "the authors [of the assassination] were agents of the DISIP [Venezuela's political police], linked to the CIA." The Chilean newspaper *Mercurio* reported on the same day that "the former chief of the defunct DINA, Gen. Manuel Contreras, told magistrate Adolfo Bañados that . . . he had reached the conclusion that the CIA had ordered the attack" against Letelier.

This same conclusion is held by Venezuelan lawyer Pío González, who testified before Judge Bañados as a defense witness for Contreras on March 1. González's familiarity with the Letelier case stems from his work as an attorney for anti-Castro Cubans Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, both accused of having bombed

a Cuban airliner in 1976, in which 73 people died.

Chilean newspaper *La Segunda* reported that during his testimony, González confirmed unequivocally that "Venezuelan-nationalized Cubans, who are members of the [Venezuelan] political police and at the same time are agents of the CIA, organized the assassination of former minister Orlando Letelier." Both the attack against Letelier, and the attack on the Cubana airplane were planned, according to González, at a meeting of anti-Castro Cuban exiles, held in Bonao, Dominican Republic in May 1976, just a few months before the attacks were carried out. At that time, Carlos Andrés Pérez was President of Venezuela and George Bush was director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

González explained at a press conference in Santiago that for some time, "Carlos Andrés Pérez has been the U.S. State Department's spearhead in Latin America. The Letelier case and the Cuban airplane disaster cannot be seen as isolated incidents. They form part of a constant, systematic trajectory of Mr. Pérez in favor of State Department interests." In response to questioning by journalists, González explained that "other examples of Carlos Andrés Pérez's interventionism in Latin America are his support for the U.S. invasion of Panama, the sending of troops to Central America, and the rupture of relations with Peru. All of these cases prove that Pérez, at the bidding of the State Department, wants to prevent the so-

cial and economic unity of Latin America which, because of similarity of principles and customs, is given to trade and territorial integration."

González added, "With Letelier's assassination, the United States sought to destabilize the Chilean government, a government which was not subservient to it, just as it destabilizes all of Latin America today by means of the foreign debt." Offering extensive documentation, González told the journalists of numerous cases of corruption involving what is known as President Pérez's "inner circle," which is identified in Venezuela with the associates of his mistress Cecilia Matos. The cases range from fraudulent sales of weapons to the Venezuelan Armed Forces, to terrorism and drug trafficking. González insisted that Pérez is fully aware of these illicit dealings.

The same week of the Contreras trial, Pérez also found himself harried by the repeated accusations of opposition journalists that he maintains a personal army of Central American and Caribbean mercenaries. Thus far, Pérez has managed to deal with the denunciation the same way he has dealt with accusations that he made a fortune by speculating with secret government funds—by simply declaring imperiously that, "out of respect for myself and for the dignity of my office as head of state," there was no need to respond to the charges.

With the same trademark arrogance, Pérez responded to the evidence in a recent U.N. Narcotics Council report identifying Venezuela as "the major money-laundering center in Latin America," by saying that money laundering is not a crime in his country! "The problem of dollar laundering is that we do not have legislation which establishes such a crime," he breezily informed reporters.