

Peña demands probe of Cisneros Group

On April 18, Alejandro Peña Esclusa, secretary general of the Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV), issued the following statement calling on the Venezuelan government to investigate the Diego Cisneros Organization (ODU, commonly known as the Cisneros Group), on the grounds that it poses a grave threat to the country's national security.

The Cisneros Group does not represent the national interests. Quite the contrary, it stands for those of Rockefeller and Kissinger. The international financial system is bankrupt. It is undergoing a collapse the likes of which have not been seen for 600 years. Specifically, the so-called derivatives market, which amounts to \$14 billion, is undergoing a crash which is exploding the world speculative bubble. The international banking system, including Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan Bank, is going bankrupt.

This whole situation has the creditor banks very worried. They are afraid that the government of President Caldera might decide to suspend payment on the external debt and take leadership of an Ibero-American movement in defense of the development and sovereignty of our peoples.

It is unacceptable that the Cisneros Group seeks to manipulate the judicial branch to silence those who tell the truth; they are the ones who ought to be investigated. The relevant authorities should take measures to determine the Cisneros Group's responsibilities in the following alleged criminal activities:

1) *Swindle, theft, racketeering*: Judge Dianora de Simancas issued an arrest warrant against the vice president of the Diego Cisneros Organization (ODC), Ricardo Cisneros Rendiles, for swindle, theft, and racketeering in the Banco Latino case. Gustavo Cisneros Rendiles's partners stated publicly that the major beneficiaries of the multimillion-dollar credits of Banco Latino are the Cisneros Rendiles brothers, to the detriment of 1.2 million Venezuelans.

2) *Use of terrorist, mafia-style tactics*: The Cisneros Group uses its main communications medium, Venevisión, to discredit and terrify all those who dare to denounce their dirty dealings. The employees of Banco Latino, the Federation de Environmental Organizations and Associations (FORJA), and even Gustavo Cisneros's own partners have publicly charged the Cisneroses with using their TV network

as a weapon to lie, slander, and discredit those who have told the truth about the Cisneroses.

3) *Treason to the fatherland*: Gustavo Cisneros's friends abroad are running a campaign to discredit Venezuela. The Cisneroses want to cover up their guilt in the Banco Latino collapse and weaken Dr. Caldera's government, so that it will not take measures against the Banco Latino management.

This is not the first time that the Cisneroses have taken a position contrary to the national interest. When it comes to the external debt and the neo-liberal packet, it is on the public record that the Cisneroses always take the side of Kissinger and Rockefeller—all to the detriment of the Venezuelan people, who as a result have suffered hunger and poverty.

It is no accident that Gustavo Cisneros is founder and director of the Bioma Foundation, infamous for having staged a videotape in which a dolphin gets killed, in order to wage an international anti-Venezuela campaign.

4) *Illicit enrichment "in the shadow of power"*: The Cisneroses are part of the famous "twelve apostles" of ex-President Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP). There are numerous books and articles which document dirty dealings carried out with the support of the CAP government. This includes trading debt bonds for national assets.

5) *Suspected ties with drug trafficking*: In a column published in various newspapers on April 14 and 16, a public relations officer of Banco Latino asserted that Gustavo Gómez López, ex-president of the bank, is an "element tied to the drug trade" who was using the bank to launder millions of dollars originating in narcotics trafficking. If this serious accusation is true, it may be presumed that the Cisneroses were in on it.

In fact, the daily *El Globo* reported two years ago that Celere, Inc., a drug-trafficking firm, was a property of the Cisneros Group.

Perhaps all this explains why the Cisneroses maneuvered with all their might to arrange the banning of the book *Narco-tráfico, SA* [the Spanish-language version of *Dope, Inc.*], where the links of Banco Latino and the Cisneros Group with drug money laundering are detailed. Today, 10 years later, the book remains the only one prohibited in Venezuela.

6) *Presumed ties with hired assassins*: In letters sent to the newspapers *2001* and *El Mundo*, Gustavo Gómez López asserts that the Cisneros Group contracted mercenaries to assassinate him. Gómez López and the Cisneros Group—responsible for the Banco Latino fraud—seem to be adversaries, but before that, they were partners, and it may be presumed that they know each other's shady dealings. All this information, of course, sheds new light on the [assassination] attempt on Mrs. Hope Phelps [the majority shareholder in IBC, the holding company for Radio Caracas Television and *Diario de Caracas*, the leading media opposition to the Cisneros Group].

Given the scope of this evidence, it is indispensable that,

while the relevant responsibilities are being ascertained, the following security and defense measures be taken at once:

- 1) Preventively seize all of the assets of Gustavo Cisneros Rendiles, as well as the assets of the ODC.
- 2) Serve Gustavo Cisneros with an order prohibiting him from leaving the country.
- 3) Revoke the state concession that the Cisneros Group has to operate Venevisión.
- 4) Rescind all the contracts which the government and the autonomous institutes have with companies of the Cisneros Group.

Documentation

The following are excerpts from a Feb. 16, 1994 interview with Venezuelan Labor Party Secretary General Alejandro Peña Esclusa, by the "Lo de Hoy" talk show of Radio Caracas Television (RCTV).

Peña: I think the Banco Latino case is much more serious than people think and could even lead to civil war. . . . There are many families affected, 1 million of them; we have here a middle class which could be destroyed if measures aren't taken. First of all, it is necessary to determine who is responsible. . . . It is an open secret that the ODC, the Cisneros Group in particular, controls the Banco Latino. This is well known.

So, one of the things I proposed in our newspaper ad . . . was the preemptive seizure of all the personal goods and assets of the Diego Cisneros Organization, of Gustavo Cisneros, of Ricardo Cisneros, of Gustavo Gómez López, simply as a means of protecting the depositors. . . .

I think there is a kind of reverential fear of the Cisneros Group and of the "twelve apostles" around [deposed President] Carlos Andrés Pérez, such that until now there has been no real will to confront those who have become so powerful "in the shadow of power." . . . There has been a fear to speak the truth and confront them, and the time has come to do so. . . .

At this time, there is an international campaign against Venezuela. If one looks at the articles appearing in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, on Venezuela's financial situation, one gets the idea . . . that one cannot invest in the country because things are so bad. Well, I ask myself—and I think this should be investigated—could it be that the friends of Gustavo Cisneros abroad, like Luigi Einaudi, like Henry Kissinger, like George Landau, a member of the Americas Society like Gustavo Cisneros, could these friends be running a campaign against Venezuela to force the government to cleanse the name of Banco Latino's directors and to

pay the depositors with the nation's patrimony, instead of with the directors' patrimony? . . .

The situation must be taken advantage of to . . . revise the whole economic package of Carlos Andrés Pérez and his financier circles, and to return to healthy economic practices.

The United States itself at the time of its independence, had a military officer who became the first U.S. Treasury secretary, Alexander Hamilton. He took several magnificent measures . . . after the War of Independence from England. Interest rates were lowered, a debt moratorium was decreed . . . there were exchange controls, and a lot of long-term, low-interest credit was issued to finance productive activities.

If we don't return to such a policy, which I would call "Hamiltonian," to the healthy policies we had 30-40 years ago which encouraged production, the Venezuelan financial system will definitely collapse.

Q: You speak of the danger of civil war. . . . What would be a way of channelling civic protest to get the results which in the medium term are going to solve the problem? . . .

Peña: I think that President Caldera must carry out a nationalist revolution in this country, a peaceful one. It is necessary for the President himself to carry this out before the situation deteriorates even further, and takes us to a new Feb. 27 [1989 riots in Caracas, in which thousands lost their lives]. Very simple, but revolutionary, measures must be taken. . . . The assets of the bank directors must be seized . . . but I propose an additional measure, which is to stop paying the foreign debt.

While we have 1 million families facing hunger in a situation as dramatic, as difficult as we are seeing today, it is impossible to continue honoring interest payments on the foreign debt. We all know that that debt is usurious, is false, is exaggerated, and that the Venezuelan population comes first, and the international banks after. . . . This must be seen as a new independence. . . .

Q: What independence, if we depend even for our food from abroad?

Peña: I think a Latin American revolution must be carried out. If two or three countries agree to suspend their foreign debt payments, this would create a better situation. Further, I would say the following: that if we *don't* do this as a political decision, then we will have to do it in any case for lack of resources. . . . It were better to do it now, and to change the whole economic system. The neo-liberal system, the economic package of Carlos Andrés Pérez and his coterie of financiers, of the International Monetary Fund, doesn't work. Not here, not in Russia, not in Poland. . . . And one more thing: To accomplish this, there must be unity of the Armed Forces. We cannot have powerful groups running international campaigns against the country, with the Armed Forces divided against itself. President Caldera must govern with a firm hand, backed by a united Armed Forces.