

# Left-right pincer is forcing Venezuela into civil war

by Alejandro Peña Esclusa

Not since the bloody civil wars of the last century, has Venezuela been so close to a mass bloodletting. Everything is on the verge of explosion, and it could happen before the year is out.

The scenario: Venezuela's international creditor banks pressure President Rafael Caldera's government to bend to the demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and impose austerity. Leftist groups—some of them armed, like those behind Col. Hugo Chávez (see box) and the Radical Cause party—as well as corrupt sectors linked to former President Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP), organize a “popular uprising” to protest the IMF package. The Armed Forces repress the disorder. A sector of young military officers, seeing no third option between neo-liberalism (“savage capitalism”) and the Marxists, join the latter, thereby splitting the Armed Forces. Sectors of the Catholic Church linked to the Theology of Liberation follow the example of Bishop Samuel Ruiz in Chiapas and join the uprising. The country is plunged into civil war.

## The pincer's left arm

On Feb. 4, 1992, all of Venezuela applauded the military coup headed by Colonel Chávez against the country's most despised President, Carlos Andrés Pérez. Although the coup failed, the pressures continued with the “pots and pans” protest of March 10 and the second failed coup attempt of Nov. 27, ending with CAP eventually being booted from office.

But a short time later, Chávez demonstrated that he was no alternative. In a televised interview from jail with journalist José Vicente Rangel, Chávez declared that his model for political strategic thinking was the Italian communist ideologue Antonio Gramsci. As his model for the kind of state he desires, he offered the theories of the Darwinian sociologist Max Weber, author of the fraudulent tract *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Many Chávez well-wishers explained afterwards that Chávez had in fact never read those authors, didn't know what he was talking about, and had only quoted them in order to sound erudite. That may well be true; but Chávez suddenly began to appear surrounded by some of the most dangerous elements of the radical left and by Castroite ideologues such as Domingo Alberto Rangel.

In a recent two-part interview appearing in the daily *Ultimas Noticias* of Jan. 31 and Feb. 1, Chávez spoke of Fidel Castro in the following terms: “I deeply respect the achievements, especially the social ones, of the Cuban Revolution; we may have differences of focus with its leader Fidel Castro . . . but independent of any difference . . . we recognize that this man made history and represents a reference point in America.”

This is no mere courtesy, since Chávez also says in the interview that “I believe that Marxism as a science—because it is a science that goes beyond questions of political intent, as a means of analyzing reality and prospects for the future—continues to be valid, as do all the political currents that exist and have existed throughout the centuries.”

Chávez doesn't hide his sympathies for the Mexican Zapatistas who staged an insurrection this past January in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas: “What is happening in Mexico is a rediscovery of our roots. To return to Zapata is to return to [Venezuelan peasant revolutionary Ezequiel] Zamora, to the roots of America, to Tupac Amaru, to Guai-caipuro, Tamanaco, to the Indians who fought to rescue the lands that belonged to them more than 10,000 years ago.” Chávez knows, or ought to know, that the “indigenist” movements like the Zapatistas are manipulated by forces linked to British intelligence whose sole purpose is the balkanization of Ibero-America.

In the magazine *Zeta* of Feb. 1994, Chávez returns to the issue of the Zapatistas and Chiapas: “Without trying to offer the ultimate analysis of this development, so important for the future of Latin America, I nonetheless find certain similarities to the Feb. 4, 1992 insurrection in Venezuela.” Chávez explains that “Saying ‘Emiliano Zapata’ in Mexico is like saying ‘Ezequiel Zamora’ in Venezuela, both leaders of agrarian and peasant revolutions. It is thus that an ideology is no longer a simple system of ideas, but becomes instead the motor that drives the people's action against servitude.”

## Chávez and Radical Cause

Chávez's “people's action” is indeed no mere “system of ideas.” According to *El Nacional's* Nov. 13, 1992 issue, Lt. Raúl Alvarez Bracamonte, who stole a cache of weapons from a military installation on March 1, 1992, said that “Col.

## Hugo Chávez's pseudo-Zamora

Former Col. Hugo Chávez Frías tells the story that in 1975, shortly after he graduated from the Military Academy with the rank of first lieutenant, "Hunting in the headquarters library [at Fort Taware], I came upon *El Libro [The Book]*. Surely some curious officer had left it there among various U.S. military pamphlets and publications and a few booklets on Marxist-Leninist theory and guerrilla tactics. That night, I again read the master [Federico] Brito Figueroa (we had previously read him in the Military Academy when we studied 'the insurrections of the Negro slaves in Venezuela's colonial society'), this time in the fascinating pages of his *The Times of Ezequiel Zamora*. From then on, it became my most important book" (reported in *Ultimas Noticias*, May 16, 1993).

Chávez's bigger-than-life image of Zamora is the concoction of Brito Figueroa, who is currently an official in the offices of the the mayor of Caracas, Radical Cause party member Aristóbulo Isturiz. In reality, Zamora was a rather insignificant figure, molded ideologically by Leocadio Guzmán, the leader of Jacobin liberalism in the mid-19th century. Zamora went on to lead several Jacobin uprisings, before his death during the Federal War of 1859-63.

Brito Figueroa's pseudo-Zamora was one of many such socialist-realist figures created by Marxists who were being financed by the old Latin America Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In his essay *Ezequiel Zamora and Venezuela's History of Militancy*, Brito Figue-

roa constantly repeats that "our interpretation [of 19th-century Venezuelan history], which we once again reaffirm, coincides with that of Soviet historian Anatoli Shulgosky."

For Shulgosky, and therefore also for Brito, Zamora's 1846 uprising in defense of the candidacy of Leocadio Guzmán is the Venezuelan expression of the "struggle of the peasants sent by Pugachov," or the model of Emiliano Zapata in Mexico.

That was a time when in reality, the intellectual leader of the anti-liberal opposition, Fermin Toro, had already written his brilliant work in which he demonstrated that usury is responsible for all of society's ills. With his proposal for a society of solidarity based on the principles of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, Toro was the antithesis of Guzmán.

For Shulgosky and Brito Figueroa, Venezuela's Federal War, the bloodiest of the last century after its war of independence, was simply a war between the wealthy and the exploited—a class struggle. The truth is that the Federal War wasn't in defense of federalism, but rather was a Jacobin uprising against the Toro's constitutional program. Even Guzmán as an old man admitted that had the Toro's program for the 1859 constitution been called a "federalist" program, the liberals would have raised the banner of centralism.

The first victim of that bloody war was Zamora himself. The tragedy was that the federalist victory brought Leocadio's son to power, the autocrat Antonio Guzmán Blanco, who made corruption a form of government. From then on, official liberal historiography simply removed all mention of Fermin Toro's anti-usury program.—David Ramonet

Hugo Chávez Frías gave the weapons stolen from Fort Tiuna to Congressman Pablo Medina, of the Radical Cause party." Alvarez Bracamonte belonged to Chávez's Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement (MBR).

According to a military intelligence report published on June 12, 1994 by *El Nacional*, Chávez began his political activities by putting distance between himself and Radical Cause. That separation was, and is, fictitious. Members of Radical Cause greeted Chávez in Charallave (a town on the outskirts of Caracas), and accompanied him in all of his tour activities there. The report adds that "Hugo Chávez Frías seeks to advance his strategy for power by trying to channel all accumulated discontent, especially among the poorest sectors, into insurrection."

Radical Cause belongs to a narco-terrorist organization controlled by Fidel Castro, known as the São Paulo Forum, to which the Cuban Communist Party and numerous Latin

American guerrilla groups also belong. The main parties in the Forum are all intimately linked to the gigantic arms depot discovered in Nicaragua in late 1993, along with detailed plans for kidnappings and other terrorist actions.

Rear Adm. Hernán Grüber Odremán, leader of the Nov. 27, 1992 uprising against CAP, wrote in a letter to Chávez and published in his book *The Military Insurrection of Nov. 27, 1992*: "By the way, Chávez, we are firmly convinced that it is inappropriate to arm civilians. Weapons are for the military." In clear reference to Chávez's project, Grüber reprimanded him: "We cannot adopt extremist or ultra ideas as our own, because we are certain that they contradict Venezuelan nature."

### The pincer's right arm

On June 1, *El Universal* reported that Defense Minister Gen. Rafael Montero Revette told the Defense Commission

of the House of Deputies that “leftist, rightist, and centrist groups are involved in a plan to destabilize the democratic system.” Days earlier, Interior Minister Ramón Escovar Salóm had said the same thing, in a veiled reference to CAP and his network.

The former ousted President has every reason to want to destabilize the government. President Caldera’s “war cry” has been the fight against corruption in Venezuela, and everyone knows that CAP has been the epicenter of that corruption. Today, CAP is being held in El Junguito prison in Caracas on charges of embezzlement, and he would not look unfavorably on a change that would free him from jail and restore him to political power.

The Cisneros Group, closely linked to CAP, also has reasons for wanting to destabilize the government. Stemming from the government takeover of the Banco Latino, an arrest warrant was issued against Ricardo Cisneros for robbery, fraud, and conspiracy. Former bank directors, such as Siro Fébres Cordero and Gustavo Gómez López, have publicly stated that the real controllers of the bank, as well as the primary beneficiaries of its soft credits, were the brothers Ricardo and Gustavo Cisneros. There is already a popular petition for the assets of the Cisneros Group to be seized, to cover the bank’s losses. The Cisneroses fear that Dr. Caldera could order this measure. In early June, *Zeta* implied that Gustavo Cisneros was using his television channel to feed the destabilization process.

The Cisneroses are self-declared neoliberals, but they also have their connections to the left. *EIR*’s book *Narcotráfico, S.A.* (the Spanish-language edition of *Dope, Inc.*), which was banned in Venezuela as the result of Gustavo Cisneros’s efforts, details the links of the Cisneros Group to Fidel Castro. In February, when the Venezuela Labor Party (PLV), which supports the arguments presented in *Narcotráfico S.A.*, denounced Radical Cause for its links to the São Paulo Forum, the leaders of the latter party found refuge with Cisneros’s television channel, which they used to attack the PLV.

Despite his formal ousting from the Democratic Action (AD) party, CAP still controls important sections of the AD, particularly in the powerful labor sector which is capable of organizing strikes and demonstrations like those which only recently rocked Venezuela, and which, leftist provocateurs will surely seek to infiltrate and sow chaos and violence. CAP’s links to Fidel Castro, who campaigned for CAP in the 1988 elections and was the first to express his support for CAP after the 1992 coup attempts, is a matter of public record.

Unfortunately, Venezuela’s current government has committed serious errors which are being used against it. For example, instead of embargoing the assets of the owners of such collapsed banks as Banco Latino, in order to guarantee reimbursement to bank depositors, the government allocated 700 billion bolívares—more than half the national budget—to bail out those banks. This, in turn, has caused a dramatic

hike in the inflation rate, which can only increase the chances of mass rebellion. In every strike and demonstration, the same complaint can be heard: “There is money for the corrupt ones of Latino, but no money for our petitions.”

### Venezuela’s ‘emerging bankers’

Various commentaries in both the national and international press have suggested that the group of bankers who enriched themselves under CAP’s protection (the so-called “emerging bankers”) and who allied with the centers of international financial power, are threatening President Caldera with a coup d’état to force him to embrace CAP’s deal with the IMF and to avoid or prevent implementation of nationalist measures that would protect the economy from disintegration and chaos.

Banker José Alvarez Stelling, partner of “emerging banker” Orlando Castro (who has been identified as Radical Cause’s principal financier), spoke on June 2 at the conference series “How to Have Confidence in Venezuela,” organized by the Alvarez-owned Consolidated Cultural Center. Alvarez complained that the emerging bankers are being blamed for the crisis afflicting Venezuela’s financial system. “If we respond to the financial crisis by turning the banks and the bankers into the targets of public enmity, confidence in the currency will be undermined, causing runs against our reserves which will make the macroeconomic adjustments the country has ahead of it that much more difficult to carry out,” said Alvarez. That same day, the bolívar, which had already been dropping in its value against the dollar, fell to 170 to the dollar.

But what has truly thrown fuel on the fire is the attitude of the international forces linked to the creditor banks and the IMF. An article written by Richard Freeman and published by *EIR* (June 3, 1994, p. 24), documents the efforts of the international banks to “slam the Venezuelan economy” and try to “put Caldera up against the wall.”

On June 1, Prof. Rüdiger Dornbush, adviser to the IMF, World Bank, and United Nations, traveled to Venezuela and threatened that if President Caldera does not apply the IMF’s draconian austerity prescriptions, “the crisis will worsen until the moment is reached in which a [Argentine President Carlos] Menem, a [Peruvian President Alberto] Fujimori, or perhaps someone very improbable, will impose stabilization in the most radical way possible.” In other words, if President Caldera doesn’t do it, “someone else” will surface to displace the President and impose IMF dictates by force. This is the most direct threat that has been issued so far against President Caldera. Dornbush was invited to address a series of forums organized by the Venezuelan-American Chamber of Commerce (Venancham). Two days later, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott completed Dornbush’s threat, saying that if the government did not deepen the measures of “economic opening” begun by CAP, the country would fall outside the sphere of U.S. “economic cooperation.”

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