

Venezuelans oppose plan to bust OPEC

by Carlos Méndez

Opposition is growing in Venezuela to President Carlos Andrés Pérez's (CAP) oil policy, and his support of the United States in its war against Iraq. Both points are in fact part of the same policy. Pérez is planning a break with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Venezuela is a founding member, and is simultaneously denationalizing Venezuela's oil industry, preparing to hand it over to foreign creditors and to the U.S. strategic reserve.

Former President Rafael Caldera, a leader of the Social Christian COPEI party who maintains close ties to the Vatican, has spoken out against CAP's policies. In an interview in the Caracas daily *El Universal* on Feb. 10, Caldera remarked that "I think that the [U.N.] Security Council, decisively influenced by the United States, has gone beyond where it should have. . . . The authorization for the use of force, without first exhausting all other options, was undoubtedly a decision which did not sufficiently consider the interests of humanity. . . . I think that we in Venezuela should have shown some differences, doubts, or reservations" about the decision.

Caldera added that "there are aspects of President Pérez's foreign policy about which many Venezuelans have legitimate concerns." Specifically, he said, it is over Venezuela's "position vis-à-vis the United States and the spokesmen of international capitalism." Caldera explained that "I am not anti-U.S., but the decisive influence of international financial agencies, backed by those sectors whose political power is predominant, is sweeping us toward situations which are truly alarming. . . . In this sense, I don't feel fully represented by the current government's foreign policy."

On Feb. 15, *El Universal* published an open letter to Pérez from the National Academy of Economic Sciences which suggests that Venezuela "make a proposal to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization aimed at achieving a cease-fire and a diplomatic solution to the current conflict in the Persian Gulf, which [carries] the imminent danger of generalizing and leading to a Third World War," including the use of nuclear weapons.

A day earlier, *El Nacional* published a paid ad by the Venezuelan Federation of Arab Associations and Entities, which explained that prior to the Mideast war, "Zionist tentacles in Venezuela, and in other countries, had attempted to

launch a campaign to pit security agencies against Arabs and Venezuelans of Arab descent, as well as against anyone more or less sympathetic to the Arab cause." Under the headline "The Phariseism of Zionism," the ad asked the Venezuelan Zionist Federation, which had taken out an earlier ad signed by a group of unknown "intellectuals," "are not the Jew, the Christian, and the Muslim of the same flesh and blood? Why, if you are intellectuals, do you lend yourselves to Zionist manipulation to divide men by their religion?"

Kissinger, the violent adversary of OPEC

There is also growing opposition to CAP's oil policies, particularly since Henry Kissinger's Jan. 23 meeting with CAP in Caracas. Immediately following that meeting, Kissinger stated that "the [Western] hemisphere could be self-sufficient in energy if all of its nations were to agree on a common policy" regarding oil.

On Jan. 26, *Diario de Caracas* reported in its editorial that "Richard Nixon's secretary of state is now an adviser to the Venezuelan government, despite his having been the most violent adversary of OPEC, and therefore, of Venezuela, during the 1973 oil embargo." Recalling that Kissinger created the International Energy Agency to counteract OPEC, the editorial quoted former President Caldera who said that Kissinger's visit to Caracas "is worrisome, because throughout OPEC's existence, he has been its most powerful adversary." OPEC, Caldera said, "must continue to exist and cannot follow the advice of people like Kissinger."

In remarks in the Feb. 1 *El Nacional*, COPEI leader Pedro Pablo Aguilar warned that "if at the end of the war . . . the United States ends up dominating the Persian Gulf nations, then OPEC is finished." He added that "this is a government full of contradictions. Carlos Andrés Pérez has decided to hire Henry Kissinger as his oil adviser, the same [person] who designed and conceived of the anti-OPEC. . . . We don't understand how it is possible for Kissinger, a person so intimately linked to the strategic interests of the great powers, primarily of the United States, to be an adviser to our country, not only in the area of oil, but also in economic matters."

But CAP continues to follow Kissinger's advice. In early February, the newly nominated Venezuelan ambassador to the U.N., Diego Arria, affirmed that "Venezuela cannot assume as a dogma of faith its participation in agencies such as OPEC. The only dogma of faith which Venezuela can adhere to is the quality and improvement of its interests and, to the degree that these change, the organizations to which we belong must also change."

According to Arria, who has been one of CAP's protégés since his first administration in the mid-1970s, "we can't assume that the OPEC that will emerge from this [Persian Gulf] conflict will be the one of [Venezuelan OPEC founders] Pérez Alfonso and Tariqui." OPEC, Arria said, "will undergo a total reorganization, if it exists at all, because it is evident that it is not currently fulfilling its role."