

On January 23, 1978, Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez opened the doors of Miraflores, the nation's presidential palace, to the public. Throughout the day, thousands of housewives, businessmen, workers, and shantytown-dwellers poured through the building's ornate halls. "Today," proclaimed the government's television and press advertisements, "Miraflores belongs to the people." The President's open house marked the twentieth anniversary of a critical date in modern Venezuelan history, the abdication of the nation's dictator, General Marcos Pérez Jiménez, and the birth of contemporary Venezuelan democracy. In the days preceding Pérez Jiménez's fall, thousands of Caracas citizens had taken to the streets in a spontaneous uprising against the dictatorship. They were soon joined by much of the Armed Forces. In December 1958, after a brief interim government, Rómulo Betancourt was elected to a five-year presidential term.

Few would have predicted in 1958 that Venezuela would emerge in the coming years as the foremost symbol of democracy in Latin America.¹ Until the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez, the country had been ruled almost continuously by a series of military dictators and *caudillos* (strong men). Indeed, only during three years of its history (1945-1948) had the nation ever enjoyed a popularly elected, civilian government. Modern political

parties and popular mobilization had not existed prior to the 1930s. When President Betancourt took office in 1958, then, democratic institutions for expressing popular will had scarcely been established.

In December of this year the nation will hold its fifth democratic national election since 1958, for the presidency and both houses of Congress. Shortly thereafter, President Pérez will become the fourth consecutive Venezuelan chief executive to serve out his constitutional five-year term and peacefully hand over power to his successor.² Moreover, unlike many other developing nations where apparently democratic elections are merely a charade or a competition between nonrepresentative elites, political parties in Venezuela are fairly responsive to popular interests and demands. On two occasions (1968 and 1973), presidential authority had passed from one political party to another without trauma. While military governments seized power throughout the hemisphere and crushed long-standing democracies in Chile and Uruguay, Venezuela has thus developed during the past 15 years from an entrenched military regime to South America's most stable democracy.

Undoubtedly the country's task has been eased by its extensive petroleum wealth. Substantial tax revenues from the recently nationalized oil industry have enabled the government to invest in

a range of activities and to meet demands from competing sectors of society in a manner that other Latin American governments cannot afford. While relative affluence is no guarantor of democracy, Venezuela's economic growth has been supplemented by the development of popular democratic institutions.

Yet, it is well to remember that Venezuelan democracy is still young. As the January 23 anniversary approached, movie theaters in Caracas showed brief news documentaries on the 1958 popular uprising. Television and other news media featured advertisements contrasting the nation's long history of dictatorship to its recent democratic stability. These government-sponsored ads ended with a single message, "Democracy, the only path" ("Democracia, el único camino"). News programs on the government television stations (two of Caracas' four channels) are often followed by the statement "only in a democratic society is such a show possible." The government seems to be reassuring both its constituents and itself that current political institutions are viable. One is reminded of a patient taking the first steps after a long illness. Even when the walk is no longer wobbly, a certain sense of insecurity remains.

As an alternative development model to the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes now prevalent throughout Latin America,

Venezuelan democracy has consequences that transcend its national borders, suggesting that liberal democracy has some future in the region. Its Social Democratic (Acción Democrática) and Social Christian (COPEI) Parties are loosely linked, through international organizations, to parallel parties in Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Peru. Even before the Carter administration's efforts, Venezuela had taken the lead in supporting human rights and democratic elections in Latin America. During the past months it has dramatically exerted pressure, independently and through the Organization of American States (OAS), to establish democratic governments in the Dominican Republic and in Nicaragua.

This Report examines the origins of contemporary Venezuelan democracy, the nature of democratic governments since 1958, the major political and socioeconomic problems still facing the nation, and the position of Venezuela's major political parties as the country entered its current electoral campaign. A subsequent Report, *The Making of a Venezuelan President-1978*, will analyze the mood of the electorate, the parties' selection of presidential candidates, and the campaign through August 1978.

The Origins of Venezuela's Modern Political System³

From its original colonization by the Spanish through the early twentieth century, Venezuela was socioeconomically underdeveloped. Its capital city, Caracas, compared to such major commercial and cultural centers as Lima, Bogotá, and Mexico City, was a secondary colonial center. During the post-independence era of the nineteenth century, continued warfare between local military chiefs inhibited political development. A series of *caudillo* dictators—Antonio Guzmán Blanco (1870-1888), Cipriano Castro (1899-1908), and Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935)—did little more than destroy the

power of regional strongmen and centralize power in the national Armed Forces and bureaucracy.

The initiation of extensive petroleum extraction in 1922, however, set social and economic forces in motion that were to change the face of Venezuelan politics. By 1929, the country had become the world's leading oil exporter and petroleum revenues helped finance the first stages of industrialization. As peasants moved to the cities in search of jobs, a country whose population had been over two-thirds rural in the 1930s became more than half urban by 1950. To be sure, regressive government policies often inhibited development. As late as 1945, the country still had only seven public secondary schools. Despite such policies, urbanization and economic expansion combined to augment the power of two groups that began to play an important role in the nation's politics for the first time: the urban middle class and the industrial-petroleum working class. Through the close of the 1930s, neither group had any institutional base—unions, political parties, or interest groups—to express their political demands. Eventually, however, their voices had to be heard.

The first rumbles of discontent came, as they so often do in Latin America, from the nation's universities. In 1928, demands for greater political freedom from Venezuelan Central University students led to mass demonstrations, clashes with the police, and extensive arrests. Student leaders who escaped imprisonment were forced into hiding or exile. Spurred by signs of popular support, others began to organize the middle class, industrial workers, and peasantry. From among these student activists (at home and in exile) came the leaders, known as "the generation of '28," who were to shape Venezuelan political development for the next 40 years. Essentially, they were motivated by two alternative ideological strains: many were

Marxists of either an orthodox or revisionist type; others were more inclined to a nationalist reformism modeled after both the Mexican Revolution and the Peruvian Aprista movement.

The death of Juan Vicente Gómez in December 1935 permitted the return of exiled student activists and a more tolerant, if unpredictable, government policy toward popular political participation. The Venezuelan Communist Party, the National Democratic Party (PDN), and the Venezuelan Labor Congress (CTV) became important vehicles for mass mobilization.

In 1941, the PDN was legalized and reorganized into the Acción Democrática (AD). Led by Rómulo Betancourt, one of the generation of '28, AD was a direct outgrowth of the underground student-mass movement of the 1930s. In 1937, Betancourt's colleagues had renounced Marxism to form a multiclass, populist movement. The hallmark of Acción Democrática then, and ever since, has been vigorous and tireless organization. Throughout the country, AD organizers went to the universities, factories, urban middle-class neighborhoods, and the countryside to establish a popular base matched by few other parties in Latin America. Betancourt's marching order to the party cadre was "not a single district, not a single municipality without its party organization."⁴ Student associations, labor unions, peasant federations, and other vertical and horizontal organizations formed the base of a party machine that has served AD until today.

Four years after Acción Democrática's foundation, party leaders conspired with junior military officers to overthrow the government of General Isaías Medina Angarita. The October 1945 coup was later followed by popular election of a Constitutional Assembly and, in 1947, the first direct popular election of a

Venezuelan president. In the various national elections held between 1945 and 1948, Acción Democrática attained between 70 and 79 percent of the vote, as no other group could come close to matching their popular base. Armed with that mandate for change, the party introduced legislation covering educational reform, land redistribution, an increased governmental share of petroleum profits, and the promotion of labor unions and peasant federations. While most of these proposed innovations were not extremely radical, they were met with resistance and fear by the nation's large landowners, industrialists, the foreign-owned oil industry, much of the Catholic Church, and elements of the military. As AD leader, Leonardo Ruíz Piñeda declared, "we are a multiclass party of the revolutionary left," the party's opponents called AD adherents *adecos*, an abbreviation for the term "Acción Democrática-Comunista" (Communist Democratic Action).⁵

A major center of opposition to the new government was the Catholic Church. Conflict between church and state centered on the AD's proposed educational reform decree which would have restricted the use of foreign-born teachers (who constituted a large portion of the parochial school teaching force) and imposed national examinations

which Church officials felt discriminated against their schools. Militant opposition to the reform decree was led by Catholic high school and university students. As the country approached the 1946 Constitutional Assembly elections, these Catholic activists formed the Committee of Independent Electoral Organizations (COPEI) to oppose AD at the polls. Rafaél Caldera, the new party's leader, was a 30-year-old university intellectual who was to continue as COPEI's unchallenged chief until 1973. COPEI (also called the Social Christians) strength was centered in the traditional Catholic rural areas of Venezuela, particularly the Andes. As the only effective opposition to the *adecos* (a name the party had accepted without its communist implications), COPEI became the repository of virtually all conservative elements in the nation, including the far right.

On November 24, 1948, less than one year after *adeco* President Rómulo Gallegos had taken office, the AD government was removed by yet another military coup, led by Colonel Marcos Pérez Jiménez. During the next decade *adeco* militants were once again subjected to imprisonment, exile, and other forms of repression. Throughout the early and mid-1950s many activist AD youth were involved in clandestine activity against the regime.⁶ Initially, COPEI continued

to operate openly and even participated in the 1952 presidential elections which Pérez Jiménez ultimately rigged.⁷ When the dictator's tactics became more repressive, a number of *copeyanos* (COPEI adherents), as well as Church leaders, joined the opposition. At the same time, many on the far right, who had joined COPEI during the *trienio* (the three-year period of AD rule, 1945-1948) merely because it had been the only viable opposition to Acción Democrática, now left the party to support Pérez Jiménez. By 1957, the new regime had lost the support of most organized groups in society and of significant segments of the officers corps. Pérez Jiménez's obviously fraudulent re-election plebiscite in December 1957 sparked the popular riots and military uprising that drove him from power the following month

The Democratic Era (1958-1978)

With the fall of the dictatorship, AD leaders returned to Caracas in triumph. Ten months later, led by their presidential candidate, Rómulo Betancourt, the *adecos* swept back into power. Their electoral machine, nurtured underground during the Pérez Jiménez years, remained the best vote-mobilizing organization in Venezuela, if not in all of South America. Continuing to draw on their support among the peasantry and the organized working class, the *adecos* have won a plurality in every congressional election since 1958 and all but one of the presidential elections ever held under direct, universal suffrage.

The AD's 1958 victory, however, also showed that, while the party was still the nation's largest, it could no longer totally dominate the electoral process in the manner of the *trienio*. Whereas AD had attained over 70 percent of the vote in all 4 elections (including the 1948 municipal elections) held during the earlier democratic period, in 1958 Betancourt failed to achieve

Former President Rómulo Betancourt (AD) and President Carter, March 29, 1978.

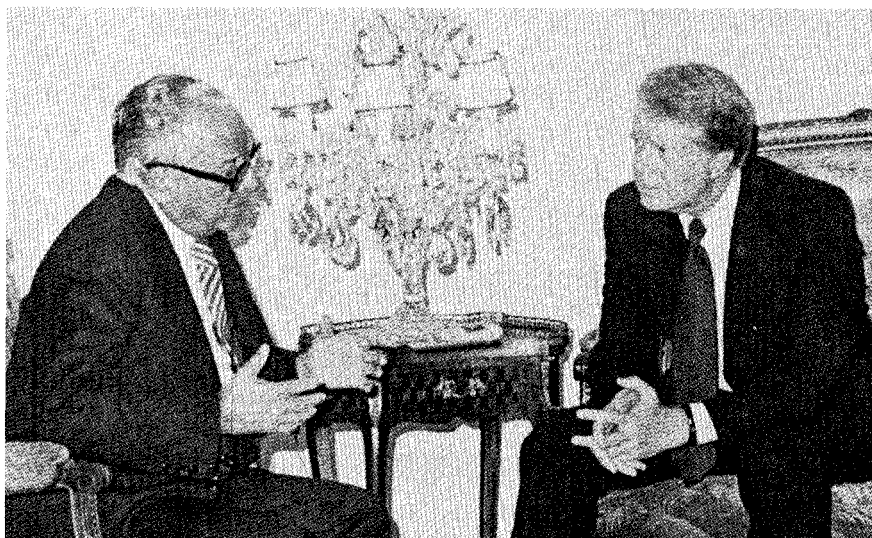


Table I

Venezuelan Presidential Election Results (1958-1973)

Year	Acción Democrática	COPEI	Leading "Third Party"
1947	*Gallegos (74.4%)	Caldera (22.4%)	Machado (PCV) (3.2%)
1958	*Betancourt (49.2%)	Caldera (15.2%)	Larrazábal (URD-PCV) (34.6%)
1963	*Leoni (32.8%)	Caldera (20.2%)	Villalba (URD) (18.9%)
1968	Barrios (28.2%)	*Caldera (29.0%)	Burelli (URD) (22.2%) Prieto (MEP) (19.3%)
1973	*Pérez (48.8%)	Fernández (36.7%)	Paz Galarraga (MEP) (5.1%) Rangel (MAS) (4.2%)

*Presidential winner

an absolute majority. In the four presidential elections held from 1958 to date, *adecos* have "only" attracted between 28 and 49 percent of the vote (see Table I).

Several factors help account for the reduction of AD dominance in the years after the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship. By the 1960s, Venezuela had become a predominantly urban nation. Caracas' population in particular grew at a spectacular rate, from 495,000 in 1941 to 1,136,000 by 1961. AD's strongest support base has always been the peasantry—many of them organized into *adeco*-led federations—in the nation's eastern region and southern plains.⁸ The country's rapid urbanization partially eroded that critical power base. Many *rancho* (shantytown) dwellers and other urban lower class voters (mostly rural in origin) continued to support AD, but they have proved less "reliable," often casting their votes for personalistic third-party candidates. In 1958, for example, the Caracas lower classes overwhelmingly supported the candidate of the reformist Democratic Republican Union (URD) and the Communist Party, Admiral Wolfgang Larrazábal, leader of the provisional government that served after the fall of Pérez Jiménez.⁹ Indeed, Caracas, with the nation's largest voter concentration, has repeatedly been a weak area for Acción Democrática.

An equally important element in reducing AD's electoral dominance has been the organizational efforts of competing parties, particularly COPEI. During the early 1940s, the *adecos* had secured a lead of more than five years over all other parties, except the communists, in building a party structure. Consequently, in the series of elections held from 1946-1948, no other party could even approach their capacity for popular mobilization. By 1958, however, COPEI and, to a lesser extent, the left-of-center URD, had used the years to create their own party structures.

Following the 1958 campaign, in which *copeyano* candidate Rafael Caldera was overshadowed by the charismatic candidacy of Admiral Larrazábal, COPEI re-established itself as the leading opposition party. In the five congressional elections held since 1947, the party has finished second four times and third once.¹⁰ In the five presidential races (Table I), it has finished first once, second three times, and third once. By 1973, with URD's demise as an electoral force, the Social Christians (COPEI) were securely established as Venezuela's second party. Indeed, Lorenzo Fernández, losing *copeyano* candidate that year, actually received a substantially higher percentage of the vote than had Caldera in his narrow 1968 victory. As Table I indicates, the COPEI share of the presidential vote has increased in every election since 1958.

Following the 1973 election, in which the AD and COPEI candidates shared 85 percent of the vote and no other party gained more than 5 percent, many observers insisted that Venezuela had developed a two-party system. While I will argue that it is too early to make such an assertion, there is no doubt that these two parties can now be called "the establishment," while the remaining third parties have a long way to go before they can challenge that dominance.

Acción Democrática: Factionalism and the Move Right¹¹

Acción Democrática's brief hold on power during the *trienio* and its ouster by the military was a sobering experience for party leaders. Despite the *adecos'* disavowal of Marxist ideology (indeed, their hostility toward the communists) and a clearly expressed social democratic platform, AD's militantly reformist rhetoric in the 1940s had alienated the military, big business, the Church, and other powerful interest groups.

When Rómulo Betancourt led the party back to power a decade later, he was determined not only to win an electoral majority, but also to placate the nation's power elite sufficiently so that AD could stay in office. This meant moderating the party's rhetoric, even its policies. When land reform was implemented, it included generous compensation for the landlords (and, in fact, never threatened their

interests). When educational reform was contemplated, the Church was consulted first. When taxes on the foreign-owned oil companies were raised, the government was careful to stay within acceptable limits. Close linkages were also forged between AD and the European social democratic movement as well as with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in the United States. Finally, the party sought to broaden its organizational base within the middle class and the business community while continuing to court the peasantry and organized labor. Thus, AD developed into a multiclass party willing to accept anybody who would work within the very broad limits of its program.

For his admirers, Betancourt's efforts at moderation and conciliation were intelligent and pragmatic. There is little value to mass mobilization and militant reformist ideology, they argued, if it simply leads to a polarization of society, confrontation with vested power interests (including the Venezuelan military and the United States), and ultimately, removal from power.¹² But, what supporters saw as pragmatism, critics viewed as a betrayal of ideals. More radical *adeco* activists, almost the entire youth wing, felt Betancourt's more centrist position was a sell-out to vested interests. Spokesmen for these left-leaning *adecos* included some of the party's most articulate and dynamic young leaders: Américo Martín, Domingo Alberto Rangel, and Gumersindo Rodríguez. In 1960, these men and their supporters were expelled from Acción Democrática. Shortly thereafter they formed a new party, the Leftist Revolutionary Movement (MIR). The MIR exodus came during a period of economic stagnation and rising unemployment in Venezuela (reaching 15 percent in Caracas by the mid-1960s). In 1962, Martín and other *miristas*, disillusioned by the electoral process and inspired by the Cuban revolution, turned to armed insurrection. They were quickly joined by elements of the

Communist Party and jointly formed the Armed Forces for National Liberation (FALN).

MIR's withdrawal was but the first of three party divisions that wracked Acción Democrática during the 1960s. In 1961, Raul Ramos Gimenez (the party's former political secretary) and Ramón Quejada (also a former political secretary and leader of the AD's peasant federation) led a faction of *adeco* congressmen (called ARs) out of the party, thereby denying President Betancourt a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. Finally, in 1967, followers of AD Secretary General Jesús Angel Paz Galarraga and of former Education Minister Luis Prieto bolted from the party when Betancourt and his allies refused to nominate Prieto for the presidency despite the clear preference of *adeco* rank and file for his candidacy. Angered by the rigidity and conservatism of the party machinery, Paz Galarraga and Prieto (two of AD's most respected founding fathers) formed the left-of-center, People's Electoral Movement (MEP).

The most overtly damaging of these three party schisms was clearly the MEP defection. Prieto finished fourth as the MEP presidential candidate in the 1968 election (Table I), drawing nearly 20 percent of the vote, only 9 percent less than the AD candidate. Since MEP support was drawn primarily from AD, there is no question that Prieto drew enough votes from *adeco* nominee Gonzalo Barrios to tip the race to COPEI. Yet, in the long run, the *mirista* schism may have been more damaging. When Américo Martín and the *miristas* left the party, they took some 80 percent of the AD youth wing with them, leaving the *adecos* virtually no organization on the university campuses. In effect, the party was stripped of a whole generation of leadership. My interviews of *adeco* congressmen and party spokesmen during the 1978 election campaign revealed two sets of leaders: first, men in their late 50s or early 60s who had

been among the party's early founders or activists (Betancourt himself, 1978 AD presidential nominee Luis Piñerúa); and second, a succeeding generation of activists (in their 40s) who had joined the party as high school or university students between 1945 and 1958 (President Pérez, Information Minister Celestino Armas, Congressional leader Humberto Celli). One looks in vain for a third generation of talented AD leaders in their 30s. This contrasts sharply with COPEI, whose congressional delegation is led by such capable young Deputies as Eduardo Fernandez (leader of the COPEI congressional delegation), Abdón Vivas Terán, and José Rodríguez Iturbe.

In addition, the MIR, ARS, and MEP exodus removed virtually all of Acción Democrática's left. While AD officially remains a Social Democratic Party and a member of the Socialist International, it has moved inexorably toward the center of the political spectrum. And although *adeco* administrations have nationalized the critical sectors of the Venezuelan economy, they have never threatened the position of the nation's industrial-commercial elite nor altered Venezuela's highly unequal distribution of income.¹³ Today, big business views AD as an ally, not as an enemy. Such leading business spokesmen as Pedro Tinoco and Carmel Lauriá (the former Secretary General of Venezuela's Chamber of Commerce, now serving as Secretary to the President) have served as close advisers to current AD President, Carlos Andrés Pérez.

COPEI: Expansion and Move Left

If the first decade of Venezuela's contemporary democratic era was marked by AD's movement from the left toward the political center, it also featured COPEI's movement toward the center from the right. Much of the initial impulse in the formation of the Social Christians during the 1940s had been a reactionary response to the perceived leftist threat represented

by AD. In their conversations with me, many of the men who helped found COPEI in the 1940s cited fear of AD's alleged Marxism as their primary motivation for becoming involved in national politics. Generally, these men were practicing Catholics from the Andes (especially the state of Tachirá), an area known for its Catholic conservatism in a country where the Church is generally quite weak. The desire to protect the Church, the parochial educational system, and the family from the perceived onslaught of AD radicalism were all critical factors in their early political activity. Thus, COPEI entered Venezuelan political life as a distinctly conservative party, including in its midst sympathizers of Spanish falangism. Indeed, the 1948 military coup by Pérez Jiménez was greeted with joy by many *copeyanos*.

The party's young leaders, however, were certainly not solidly reactionary. Their national leader, Rafael Caldera, and local activists such as Tachira organizer, Valmore Acavedo, were motivated by a sense of "Christian social justice." Drawing on progressive Papal encyclicals and the ideology of Western European and Latin American Christian Democracy, such men share the *adeco* belief that the state must take an active role in promoting greater equity and social justice.

With the military overthrow of the *adeco* government in 1948, many reactionary political figures who had joined COPEI merely to oppose AD left the party. Subsequently, Pérez Jiménez's excesses drove many *copeyano* activists into the opposition. Some went to jail where they joined erstwhile AD enemies. As one Social Christian leader told me, "in jail we exchanged ideas with them and found that many of the ideals we stood for were the same as theirs." Finally, just as the overthrow of President Gallegos had convinced Rómulo Betancourt of the need for moderating AD's program, so had the Pérez Jiménez regime's repression convinced



¡CORRECTO!

Luis Piñerúa, Acción Democrática presidential candidate.

Rafael Caldera of the need to join AD in a common front against military dictatorship. Thus, when the military regime was overthrown in 1958, the three principal political parties—AD, COPEI, and URD—signed an agreement (known as the *Punto Fijo* pact) committing themselves to a joint program of reform and to a congressional coalition supporting whichever presidential candidate won that year's election.

Since 1958, COPEI has moved, like AD, to broaden its electoral base. Its core strength remains in the Andes and the rural west as well as with the urban middle class. The party also sought to gain support among the peasantry and organized labor so that, by 1968, it was as much a nationally based, multiclass party as was AD.

As it expanded its electoral base, COPEI also enlarged its ideological underpinnings. At the same time that AD was purging its left factions, the *copeyanos* were developing a non-Marxist, Christian left. As with AD, its core lay in its youth wing, particularly in the universities. Abdón Vivas Terán, a brilliant young economist, emerged as the foremost spokesman for the movement called communitarianism. The communitarians argue that property and wealth must be judged, not just in terms of the rights of private ownership, but also in terms of their social value to the community. Thus, the owners of large industrial plants would have to share corporate decision-making with other societal groups directly affected by the firm's operations—the workers within the plant, persons living nearby whose

environment is affected, consumers, etc. The mechanism for such joint decision-making is not always clearly defined, but an important element of communitarian thought involves "autogestion." That is, certain segments of the private sector would be partially or totally controlled by the firms' workers. In general, the role of capitalist enterprises in the economy would be reduced, but rather than turn control over to the state, cooperatives and other grassroots organizations would play a larger role. Companies would be expected to display great social responsibility and to contribute to a more equitable distribution of wealth in society.

Not surprisingly, communitarian thought has become highly controversial. On the one hand, the *copeyano* left has been quite critical of its own party. Vivas Terán indicated to me that he felt COPEI has failed to develop a concrete program and ideology relevant to today's problems. While the party insists it stands for Christian humanism, the dignity of the individual, and the perfectibility of society, said Vivas, its ideology is far too vague and universalistic.

At the same time, the communitarians, and the *copeyano*

left in general, have been subjected to censure both within and outside the party. AD spokesmen periodically accuse them of being closet Marxists, a characterization that Vivas Terán vigorously denied to me. During the early development of the *copeyano* left on the nation's campuses, its spokesmen often clashed with senior party leaders. Thus, in 1966, Vivas Terán was removed by the party leadership from his position as national secretary general of the COPEI youth. Over the years, the party's left has gained a certain respectability within COPEI and even *copeyanos* who do not fully subscribe to its philosophy see it as a dynamic source of new ideas and doctrines. Vivas Terán, now a Deputy in Congress, has been a member of COPEI's National Committee (the party's governing body) for six years. While the communitarians never enjoyed a particularly warm relationship with long-time party leader Rafael Caldera, they are on much closer terms with the party's current presidential candidate, Luis Herrera.

Today, one can distinguish three major ideological tendencies within COPEI. The left exercises a strong influence among party intellectuals and *copeyano* youth, but probably represents less than 20 percent of

COPEI's deputies and party leaders. Christian conservatives, once the party's dominant wing, have been on the decline for the past decade and can themselves be divided into two groups. Traditionalist Catholic intellectuals, such as José Rodríguez Iturbe (chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Chamber of Deputies) and Naudy Suárez (party historian), stress the need for social order, preservation of the family, and other traditional values drawn, in part, from the *Opus Dei* movement. Yet, their day-to-day economic and social policies differ little from that of the AD or COPEI mainstream. Other *copeyano* conservatives, most notably Luis Enrique Oberto (former Finance Minister under President Caldera), are closely linked to the business community and stress the importance of balanced budgets and the limitation of government interference in the private sector. Finally, the party's mainstream—led by Rafael Caldera and Luis Herrera—has advocated and pursued (during Caldera's administration) policies not unlike the AD's. The Social Christians supported the nationalization of the petroleum industry and the normalization of relations with Cuba. Like AD, the COPEI party center is committed to a high degree of state ownership and regulation of the economic sector, and to extensive government activity in housing and public welfare. At the same time, it maintains close linkages to the business community—as does AD—and has never introduced measures that threaten vested economic interests or the current distribution of wealth and income.

On the whole, COPEI today is more ideologically heterogeneous than AD. While the *adecos* were experiencing fissures and purges, the *copeyanos* tolerated a variety of viewpoints. It is perhaps for this reason that COPEI now appears to be the more intellectually dynamic



Acción Democrática rally in Caracas.

and creative of the two major parties. Tensions between the various *copeyano* factions do occasionally surface. In January 1978, for example, Abdón Vivas complained bitterly to newsmen that he, Valmore Acavedo, and other party progressives had been excluded by presidential campaign manager Rafael Andrés Montes de Oca from a critical meeting of party leaders on campaign strategy. For the most part, however, the party has avoided factionalism and internal conflict.

COPEI and AD: What's the Difference?

As both parties have edged toward the political center, many Venezuelan political analysts insist COPEI has become the more progressive of the two. To be sure, during both the past two presidential campaigns, leaders of FEDERCAMERAS, the voice of Venezuelan big business, are known to have privately favored the AD candidate.¹⁴ What differences, then, still exist between the two "establishment" parties?

Both AD and COPEI Party leaders and militants clearly feel there *is* a difference, but they disagree strongly over where it lies. Acción Democrática spokesmen who entered the party in the 1940s or during the Pérez Jiménez regime, continue to see AD as "the party of the people." A favorite AD slogan insists, "Venezuela es un país *adeco*" (Venezuela is an *adeco* country). That slogan reflects a

MAS campaign poster.



firmly and sincerely held *adeco* belief that their party best represents the average peasant, blue-collar worker, and *rancho* dweller. Conversely, many AD militants continue to see COPEI as an elitist, urban-middle-class party. *Adeco* lore has it that AD Party gatherings resemble a traditional peasant *fiesta*, while COPEI meetings are cocktail parties. AD spokesmen cite the party's recent, binding presidential primary (the first of its kind in Latin America) as proof of their greater receptivity to grassroots control.

The *adeco* image of COPEI as an elitist party is occasionally coupled with the assertion that the Social Christians are too leftist. Early in the 1978 presidential campaign, AD spokesmen suggested that the *copeyano* communitarian wing is "soft on communism" and charged that in both Chile and Italy Christian Democratic parties had opened government doors to communist infiltration. Shortly thereafter, an AD Cabinet member told me, in the course of a single interview, that COPEI was beholden to conservative business interests and that, if elected, the Social Christians would open the country to Marxist influences.

When I asked COPEI leaders to define how they differed with AD, they frequently cited the spiritual basis of their own political beliefs. While COPEI is not a confessional party and no longer has any linkages to the Catholic Church, most of its leaders initially decided to join the party on the basis of religious conviction. Thus, they tend to approach politics through a set of prescribed moral values, be it Opus Dei conservatism or communitarian egalitarianism. "*Adecos* see man as a purely economic animal," one former *copeyano* Cabinet member told me. "We see man also as a moral and ethical being." Consequently, the Social Christians feel that the president and his government must not only fulfill a political role but must also serve as educators and shapers of moral

values. At a meeting of COPEI youth that I attended at the beginning of this year's campaign, former President Caldera was introduced as a teacher and moral example. Indeed, during his presidency, Caldera rejected the populist image of his AD predecessors and tended to deliver more erudite "lectures" to the people.

While the *adeco* approach to politics is based on a pluralistic view of society—a nation composed of competing or conflicting interest groups—COPEI views society as an organic whole. AD sees the role of government as conciliator between conflicting interests; *copeyanos* seem to deny that society is inherently conflictive.¹⁵ To achieve a greater degree of grassroots participation, increase social justice, and, at the same time, create greater harmony in society, the Social Christians insist on the need for more local-level organizations. *Copeyanos* charge that AD's political style has been to work with (or through) organized interest groups such as labor unions, peasant federations, and business associations. This, say the Social Christian critics, leaves large numbers of the unorganized in society unrepresented. Consequently, they propose the creation of neighborhood-based associations of women, workers, *rancho*-dwellers, small businessmen, farmers, etc. Ultimately, these groups might even begin to take over some social welfare functions not being adequately handled by government. A creative, if not entirely successful, first attempt at such organizations was the "educational communities" established during the Caldera administration. The role of objective national tests at the secondary level was diminished and an attempt was made to increase individualized evaluation through constant parent-teacher consultations and group meetings. These "communities" highlighted yet another COPEI objective, strengthening the family.

Undoubtedly, there is much truth in the *adeco* and *copeyano* images of themselves and of each other. AD is indeed a less ideological, more pragmatic party. While Social Christians see this as a fault (leading to opportunism and lack of moral standards), *adecos* view their pragmatism as a virtue, yielding more flexible, less dogmatic policies. Similarly, *adeco* leaders are certainly "more folksy" and "like the people." COPEI spokesmen tend to be professionally trained men with an almost paternalistic orientation toward solving social problems. Founding father Rafael Caldera and the current COPEI candidate Luis Herrera, are both erudite, university-educated men. By contrast, none of the five Acción Democrática presidential candidates since 1958 (including the current nominee) has a university degree. Luis Piñerúa, the current *adeco* candidate, never completed high school. Thus, *copeyanos* feel strongly that their leaders are more competent, while their opponents see the Social Christians as elitists.

Over time, however, educational, class, and geographic differences between the two major parties have begun to fade. AD continues to be stronger in rural regions (outside the Andes), while the Social Christians still predominate among the urban middle class. COPEI's steady rise in electoral support in each of the elections since 1958 has been achieved, in large part, through greater mobilization of the urban lower classes. As we have seen, both parties have sought and gained support among all social classes and strata. In my observations of both parties' 1978 campaigns, I could not discern any obvious class differences between the people at the two party headquarters or at party rallies. Nor is there truth any longer to the old axiom that COPEI rallies are more "white" while AD has more blacks and mulattos. The old distinction between AD country-style barbecues and Social Christian cocktail parties is clearly no longer valid. With the rise of educated AD leaders such as

Information Minister Celestino Armas (a U.S.-trained mining engineer) and unsuccessful presidential aspirant Jaime Lusinchi (a pediatrician who leads the *adeco* congressional delegation), differences in leadership style are also beginning to fade.

Despite the differing ideological underpinnings of the two dominant parties (Social Democrat versus Social Christian/Christian Democratic), there is little to choose between them on basic policy issues. When Rafael Caldera became the first COPEI president in 1968, his administration's policies did not differ significantly from those of his AD predecessors. His innovations—broadening of Venezuela's diplomatic relations to include both Latin American military regimes and initial feelers toward Cuba; amnesty for leftist guerrillas; early moves toward nationalization of petroleum and steel—were all accepted or even further developed by his *adeco* successor, Carlos Andrés Pérez.¹⁶ Venezuelan foreign policy generally has bipartisan flavor, and the COPEI chairman of the Chamber of Deputies' Foreign Relations Committee expressed the feeling to me that there is no substantive difference between the foreign policies of Caldera and Pérez. Similarly, a former Caldera Education Minister told me the same was true of educational policy and, indeed, insisted the current administration had adopted many of his innovations. Both parties are mildly socialist or statist, favoring government ownership of the major sectors of the economy and substantial social welfare activity (at least by Latin American standards). Yet, both are equally insistent on defending the role of private enterprise, and neither (with the exception of the small COPEI communitarian wing) seeks seriously to alter the status quo.

Venezuela's Current Political Agenda

Differences between the nation's two leading parties are thus more a matter of style and image than of

substance. Their respective movement toward the center of political spectrum is but part of a more generalized narrowing of the terms of Venezuelan political conflict since 1958. Both the far right and the revolutionary left have faded. The danger of a right-wing military coup, quite real during the early years of the democratic era, appear remote.¹⁷ In 1968, the rightist National Civic Crusade (CNC), led by ex-dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, secured a surprising number of congressional votes, drawing particularly on the discontent of Caracas' urban poor. In 1973, however, most of the CNC congressional delegation was defeated, and in the current national elections the parties of the far right have virtually no following.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the Marxist left evokes considerable support from younger voters, especially within the universities and high schools, certain sectors of the labor movement, and elements of the Caracas middle class. But the nature of their challenge to the political system has changed considerably since the early 1960s when urban and rural guerrillas—drawn from MIR and the communists—had seen armed struggle as the only means of bringing about change and had mounted a serious threat to the established order. By 1968, the guerrillas were conclusively beaten and most gladly accepted President Caldera's offer of amnesty. *Mirista* leader Américo Martín, a former guerrilla, now sits in Congress and is the current MIR presidential candidate. His congressional colleagues include Teodoro Petkoff (formerly member of the Communist Party) and other former guerrillas in the MAS delegation. Leaders of MIR and MAS, the leading contemporary Marxist parties, now admit their guerrilla efforts were misguided and have committed themselves to working for revolutionary change within the electoral system.

In narrowing the terms of political conflict, Venezuela has avoided the

class polarization, left-right confrontation, and political repression that have plagued most Latin American industrializing nations since the early 1960s. Acción Democrática and COPEI leaders have helped develop an emerging consensus on political ground rules, thereby reinforcing Venezuela's political stability and its relatively high level of democracy and civil liberties.¹⁸

While consensus has been valuable in building political stability and in strengthening democratic institutions, it has also left unanswered some basic social and economic questions. Venezuela, with its great oil wealth, has one of the highest standards of living in Latin America. There is far less abject poverty than in neighboring Colombia and Brazil. Yet, serious problems of malnutrition, inadequate health care, and poor housing continue; and the distribution of wealth is as bad as in most of Latin America. Following the last Venezuelan national elections, two leading American political scientists, John Martz and Enrique Baloyra, noted:

*The fact remained, however, that too little was being delivered to the Venezuelan masses. A crisis of distribution . . . was an unresolved problem of epic proportions. Despite fifteen years of generally, progressive, reformist governments, Venezuelans of 1973 were still subject to the onslaughts of poverty, disease and malnutrition amid a society and environment of superficial affluence.*¹⁹

The authors also observed that some 25 percent of Venezuela's urban population were living in *ranchos*; 60 percent of all children were illegitimate; 100,000 illegal abortions were performed annually; and there were some 280,000 abandoned children in Caracas alone.²⁰

While the post-1973 oil boom has probably improved conditions for the Venezuelan lower class, some 40 percent of the population remains

ill-fed and ill-housed. According to current data from the National Institute of Nutrition (a government agency), 46 percent of all Venezuelan children under 14 have inadequate diets. One-fourth of Venezuela's adult population is illiterate, and in rural provinces such as Lara and Trujillo the figure reaches 80 percent. Recent World Bank figures reveal that the richest 20 percent of the Venezuelan population earn two-thirds of the national income while the poorest 20 percent receive only 8 percent.

Beyond the problems of economic maldistribution and lingering poverty, Venezuelans of all classes are experiencing the difficulties of extremely rapid economic expansion and urban growth. The population of Caracas, now approaching 3 million, doubles every 12 to 15 years. The nation's extremely high rate of population growth (double the rate of other countries with comparable per capita incomes) and massive migration to the cities have put tremendous strains on public services. A survey conducted in mid-1978 revealed that two-thirds of all Venezuelans had suffered breakdowns in water or electric service during the preceding year. In the capital, horrendous traffic jams, air pollution, dirty streets, and a high crime rate further diminish the

quality of urban life. In short, while the average Venezuelan enjoys more civil liberties, a more responsive government, greater educational opportunities, and a higher standard of living than most Latin Americans, serious problems remain, particularly in meeting the needs of the bottom half of the population.

Critics of Venezuela's two "establishment parties" insist that neither is offering meaningful solutions to these lingering problems. They contend both parties are too closely linked to the nation's economic power structure to introduce far-reaching change and that, indeed, each has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Such criticism even emanates from within the parties themselves. Luis Esteban Ray, one of Venezuela's leading newspaper columnists and an *adeco* Deputy, suggested to me that both parties are beholden to big business, thereby explaining the failure of any administration adequately to tax the enormous profits of Venezuelan firms.²¹ *Copeyano* Deputy Abdón Vivas has expressed the same feelings.

The Venezuelan "New Left"

In the current presidential and congressional elections, the principal challenge to Acción Democrática

and COPEI comes from the Marxist left, particularly from the Movement to Socialism. Because MAS appears on the verge of establishing itself as a serious third-party alternative, its origins and program merit further examination.

The roots of Venezuelan Marxist political activity stretch back to May 1931, when the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) was clandestinely founded. The communists, then, can lay claim to being the nation's oldest functioning party. Despite some early strength among students and oil workers, the PCV failed to develop into a potent political force, largely because of AD's tremendous success in organizing the urban poor, the peasantry, and industrial labor. In the 1947 presidential election, when AD won nearly three-fourths of the vote, the PCV finished a distant third with a mere 3 percent of the electorate.

During the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship the communists regained some strength and prestige in the slums and factories through their underground opposition to the regime. But the party was unable to translate that support into votes in the election that followed Pérez Jiménez's overthrow. Even those workers who voted for communist union leaders tended to support *adecos* in national elections. In 1962-63, under pressure from younger activists such as Douglas Bravo and Teodoro Petkoff, the PCV's leadership reluctantly committed the party to join MIR in the developing guerrilla movement. Some five years later, after the guerrillas had been defeated in both the cities and the countryside, the party renounced armed struggle.²² Throughout the 1960s, the communists suffered from the strategic and ideological confusion that has long plagued most of Latin America's communist parties (with the notable exception of Chile). Consequently, when the PCV was



Luis Herrera (COPEI) campaigning in low-income housing project.

relegalized in 1969, it commanded the support of less than 3 percent of the electorate.²³

The failures of the 1960s, exacerbated by deep internal divisions within the PCV, culminated in 1970 with the exodus of the party's most talented leaders, including most of its youth. On the surface the schism stemmed from the Communist Central Committee's decision to support the August 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. A group of "Young Turks" on the Central Committee (led by Teodoro Petkoff, Germán Lairet, and the party's youth wing) condemned the invasion and defended the revisionist Dubcek regime in Czechoslovakia as "a renewal of socialism and an attempt to develop a new kind of socialism that would be adaptable for countries" different from the Soviet Union.²⁴

Actually, the dispute over Czechoslovakia was merely a vehicle for entering into a far more fundamental debate over the Communist Party's internal practices as well as its goals and strategy within the Venezuelan electoral system. The young insurgents' position can be summarized in three statements: first, democratic centralism within the party should be abandoned in favor of open

democracy, which allows divergent viewpoints to co-exist; second, the party must abandon the normal practice of communist parties throughout Latin America (again, with the notable exception of Chile) of waiting for the "objective conditions" that would permit revolutionary change and instead press aggressively for socialism through the Venezuelan electoral process; finally, the party must abandon "packaged ideologies" imported from the Soviet Union (or Cuba) and adopt a program appropriate to Venezuela's particular needs.²⁵ In effect, Venezuela's "Young Turks" were arguing for a Latin American brand of what has since become known as "Eurocommunism." Indeed, their leading spokesman, Teodoro Petkoff, has suggested to me that the party closest to their own ideology and philosophy is the Italian Communist Party.

Not surprisingly, the insurgents were attacked bitterly, not only within the Venezuelan Communist Party hierarchy, but also by Soviet Communist chief Leonid Brezhnev and by *Pravda*. A split was inevitable and, in December 1970, the young dissidents left the party. They were joined by a number of "middle-of-the-roaders" (who had tried unsuccessfully to avoid a full

break) including Pompeyo Márquez, the PCV's most skilled organizer. The following month they founded MAS, an acronym which stands for "Movement to Socialism" and is also the Spanish word for "more."²⁶ The *masistas* took with them almost all the Communist Party's youth movement, much of its union support, and most of the PCV's most capable intellectuals.

By 1973, less than three years after its formation, MAS was able to mount a creditable electoral campaign. Its congressional slate attained nine seats in the Chamber of Deputies and two in the Senate, thereby giving the party the third largest congressional delegation after AD and COPEI (though its 5 percent of the vote placed it far behind the two giants). In the years since the last election MAS had enhanced its position in a number of ways. Its high level of support among university students and faculty—including the lion's share of the nation's social scientists—enables it to present well-documented, statistically supported programs and to mount imaginative electoral campaigns on a limited budget. Until it was dealt some setbacks by MIR this year, MAS had dominated university student elections. In addition, Teodoro Petkoff, Freddy Muñoz, and other *masista* delegates are among the most eloquent and personally popular members of Congress. Both Petkoff and Muñoz are extremely well-liked by reporters and congressional observers rate them among the most well-prepared and informed Deputies.

Masistas argue that nationalization of basic industries (oil, some petrochemicals, steel, iron, aluminum) brought about by AD and the Social Christians has merely served to further enrich Venezuelan capitalists with close linkages (and lucrative contracts) to those nationalized industries. Thus while nationalization programs were a positive step, the state sector will only serve the interests of the entire

Luis Herrera Campins—COPEI presidential candidate (Venezuela) and me.



population, in their view, if the major Venezuelan industrial firms are also expropriated. Rather than speaking vaguely of "capitalist exploiters," MAS has named some 20 multimillionaires — Mendoza, Vollmer, Delfín, Boulton, Neuman, Tamayo — whose holdings would be expropriated immediately under a MAS administration.

Although MAS condemns the economic role of the United States in Venezuela, it does not focus its main fire on American imperialism (as do most Latin American leftists). Rather, it concentrates on the Venezuelan capitalist elite whom they view as the more immediate reactionary force. Party spokesmen favor renegotiation of oil contracts with United States refineries and marketers, but accept the need for continued oil sales to the United States and for cordial relations with the "colossus of the north." Teodoro Petkoff indicated to me that one of Salvadore Allende's tactical errors was his head-on challenge of U.S. interests.

Similarly, in its domestic program, MAS avoids packaged leftist rhetoric and stresses the need for pragmatism. In a recent magazine interview José Vicente Rangel acknowledged the importance of maintaining cordial relations with

Venezuelan military. Party spokesmen insist they favor socializing only the major sectors of the economy and would leave the capitalist sector's middle and smaller-sized firms in private hands. A planned economy, they argue, would in fact benefit small and medium-sized businessmen by affording them greater predictability and would also grant them security from being swallowed up by the giant monopolies. Like the *copeyano* communarians, *masistas* favor some kind of worker control of the socialized economic sector, rather than a monolithic government bureaucracy (undoubtedly the *masistas* would be inclined to a higher level of centralized control). Unlike most Latin American Marxist parties, MAS actively seeks support among the middle class and the urban poor and does not see itself as primarily a "working-class party."

While party spokesmen feel that socialism is ultimately the only means of achieving socioeconomic equality in Venezuela, they are aware their party is unlikely to enact its program in the near future. Consequently, they consider it important to push for pragmatic changes within the existing system. When asked what types of programs MAS favors in the short run, Deputy Freddy Muñoz (MAS campaign

manager) told me they supported the kind of "audacious reforms" AD President Pérez proposed in his 1973 campaign but later failed to deliver. In fact, when Pérez took office, the MAS congressional delegation voted with AD to grant the new president emergency powers so that he could raise the minimum wage and implement other economic reforms. Both Muñoz and Petkoff noted that MAS supports many of the tax and economic reforms set forth in the President's "Fifth Economic Plan." But they feel the current administration has failed to deliver on most of its reformist promises due to the entrenched influence of big business within AD and COPEI as well as the current weakness of the left as a political force.

The *masistas* hope to increase the size of their congressional delegation in the December 1978 elections to a point where it can more effectively demand socioeconomic changes from the plurality party. Party leader Freddy Muñoz mentioned several areas where he felt action was needed: increases in the minimum wage as well as in the general industrial wage level; introduction of meaningful corporate and personal income taxes which would be used to redistribute wealth through improved social services; labor legislation which would facilitate the right to strike (a right Muñoz claimed is very restricted under current Venezuelan law); educational loans for workers and their families as well as legislation requiring large employers to provide educational facilities for their workers; and rural land redistribution coupled with effective government technical assistance and loans to the peasantry. While Muñoz did not specifically mention feminist issues, MAS is the only party actively stressing feminism in its campaign propaganda. One early party poster showed several working-class

MAS candidate José Vicente Rangel (arm raised) with Teodoro Petkoff (white shirt, glasses), Pompeyo Marquez (golf cap and glasses) and other MAS leaders at a march in Caracas.



women marching. The caption beneath stated "neither exploited by a boss nor cornered behind a stove."

Such proposals demonstrate MAS' orientation toward pragmatic programs in lieu of utopian promises. But Teodoro Petkoff strongly insisted to me that MAS support for short-term reforms within the framework of the existing capitalist order must not obscure the party's long-term commitment to revolutionary socialism. Petkoff warned that the party must resist "social democratic tendencies" which would convert it into a reformist movement differing little from AD or COPEI progressive wings. The very question of how radical or moderate a Marxist position the party should take presents serious problems for MAS. As it has moved to discard its violent image of the past (many of its founders were, after all, former guerrillas), the party has been outflanked on the left by MIR. On university campuses, a critical area of support for MAS and the entire left, students often tend to be more pro-Cuban than MAS, more violent in their rhetoric, and less committed to working within the existing democratic system. Consequently, during last year's student election in the Venezuelan Central University (Caracas), the University of

Carabobo, and several other campuses, MAS was defeated for the first time since 1973, falling to a more militant *mirista* slate. At the same time, other party leaders—most notably, Germán Lairer, one of the original party founders—insist the party must continue to moderate its Marxist stance and adjust to the realities of Venezuela's state-directed, capitalist system. From Petkoff's and Muñoz's perspective, the *fidelista* (pro-Cuban) students are too strident and unrealistic while the Lairer group are Social Democrats—closet *adeco* liberals who threaten to rob the party of its *raison d'être*. Lairer, on the other hand, has publicly accused Petkoff and Muñoz of being unreformed Stalinists.

True to its original commitment to internal democracy, MAS has publicly aired its party debates. Despite their acrimonious confrontation at last year's Party Congress, both Lairer and Petkoff continue to sit on the MAS Central Committee. When I asked Congressman Muñoz about this he replied, "Of course we all still remain with the party. Our split with the Communist Party was precisely to allow such internal debate." Yet, these differences over party program and ideology represent a basic dilemma for *masista* leadership. If

the party is to become a serious contender for power in Venezuela's electoral system, it may be forced to further moderate its position. If it does, as Petkoff and Muñoz warn, it risks losing its young militants to MIR—and thus a critical source of support and volunteer labor—and becoming a carbon copy of AD and COPEI. MAS' greatest accomplishment to date may be that it has established itself as the dominant party of the left and, more important, as a viable third-party alternative. In choosing Congressman José Vicente Rangel, an independent leftist, as their 1973 and 1978 presidential candidate, the party has further enhanced its respectability.²⁷ Rangel, a distinguished journalist and attorney, established a reputation during the 1960s (while serving as a Congressman for the URD) as an articulate defender of civil liberties. During his past two campaigns, he has emerged as one of Venezuela's most widely recognized and popular political leaders. Various independent public opinion polls (conducted by Gallup, Gather, and Datos) between April and August 1978 indicated Rangel and the MAS congressional slate are likely to more than double their 1973 vote and attract some 10 to 15 percent of the electorate in this December's election and thus firm third-party status.



The 1978 National Election

Whatever its deficiencies—and there are many—Venezuela's current political system is most assuredly the most responsive and stable in South America. As the Venezuelan people approach the December 1978 national election, they may choose between several well-organized, popularly oriented, flexible political parties. Whatever its faults, Acción Democrática has contributed to the nation's political tranquility by delivering sufficient benefits to business, labor, the peasantry, and even the urban poor so that all those sectors of society share a general

Candidate José Vicente Rangel, center, with Teodoro Petkoff (left) at MAS rally.

commitment to the existing political order. COPEI, during its single term in office, helped heal the wounds of left-right conflict in the 1960s. Out of office, the *copeyanos* have offered responsible, often creative, opposition. MAS now appears ready to offer an alternative program that widens the options available to the electorate within the norms of the democratic system. In short, Venezuela's political parties have apparently successfully addressed the primary task of the current political era, legitimizing the democratic order.

Critical tasks remain, however, in the socioeconomic sphere. The "crisis of distribution" described by Martz and Baloyra must still be resolved. Indeed, the oil boom of the 1970s has widened the gap between rich and poor.²⁸ The country's greatly expanded oil wealth has brought other unanticipated problems. The cost of new housing in Caracas has spiraled beyond the means of most

of the population. Increased oil revenues have enabled the current administration of Carlos Andrés Pérez to spend more money in five years than the combined total of all the nation's preceding governments since 1830! Despite a tripling in government income from 1973 to 1974, the national debt in 1977 stood at double its 1973 level, and imports have grown so rapidly that in 1977 the country experienced its first trade deficit of the century. The government comptroller's 1977 annual report noted that gross financial mismanagement had contributed to serious losses in the state-owned steel and petrochemical industries. The report also warned of a "lack of morals in public administration and a tendency for illicit enrichment at the public's expense."²⁹ Government corruption is now so extensive that Rómulo Betancourt and other leading members of the President's own party feel impelled to condemn the low level of public morality, while the Secretary to the President,

Carmelo Lauría, lamely insists that corruption is endemic to Venezuela and not the fault of the current administration.

Unresolved issues such as these dominate the political agenda for the 1980s and constitute the major challenges for Venezuela's political parties. AD has demonstrated a tremendous talent for political organization and for winning elections. For more than a decade, however, it has failed to present imaginative solutions to these problems. The *copeyano* communitarian wing and MAS' academic think-tanks are offering daring new solutions, but neither group is likely to assume power in the near future. Moreover, both parties are divided to some degree in ideological differences that make their future programs uncertain. Thus, whatever the result of this year's national election, no bold new innovations appear to be in sight.

(September 1978)

NOTES

1. "Democracy" is used here to mean liberal parliamentary democracy—a relatively free press, freedom of organization, an electoral process which affords the voters a real choice between two or more alternative parties, etc. Currently only Costa Rica and Venezuela have maintained such democratic norms for a sustained period. Colombia is also frequently categorized as a stable democracy, but its two dominant parties are both oligarchically controlled and, hence, are less responsive to popular demands.

2. Under the 1958 Venezuelan Constitution, upon completion of his five-year term in office, the President must sit out the next two terms before he may run for the presidency again. No president has sought a second term since the regulation has been in force.

3. More extensive analysis of Venezuelan party development may be

found in: John Martz, *Acción Democrática* (Princeton University Press, 1966); Daniel Levine, *Conflict and Political Change in Venezuela* (Princeton University Press, 1973); John Martz and Enrique Baloyra, *Electoral Mobilization and Public Opinion: The Venezuelan Election of 1973* (University of North Carolina Press, 1976); and, the best English language work on contemporary Venezuelan politics, John Martz and David Myers (eds.), *Venezuela: The Democratic Experience* (Praeger, 1977).

4. Rómulo Betancourt, *Política y Petroleo*, quoted in Levine, *op. cit.*

5. Betancourt skillfully defused the term by accepting it (i.e., AD members used *adeco* to describe themselves) while rejecting its communist implications. To be sure, Betancourt himself became a staunch anticommunist.

6. Several of the AD spokesmen whom I interviewed had entered politics in that period and expressed great nostalgia over their resistance activities. These party leaders are now aged 40 to 50.

7. In 1952, two years after he had asserted control over the ruling military junta, Colonel Pérez Jiménez staged a presidential election. While COPEI participated in the election, AD was banned from political activity. Informally, the *adecos* gave their support to Jóvito Villalba, one of the leaders of the "generation of '28" and the all-powerful chief of the reformist Democratic Republican Union (URD). On election night, vote counting was abruptly halted with Villalba clearly ahead. When counting was resumed, Pérez Jiménez quickly took the lead. In 1957, Pérez Jiménez rigged a plebiscite supporting his own re-election. Shortly thereafter,

public indignation sparked the riots that toppled the dictator.

8. The region to the south of Caracas and the Venezuelan coast is called the *llanos* (plains). It is a major agricultural and cattle region. The extreme south of the country (beneath the *llanos*) is sparsely populated.

9. The URD was founded in 1945 shortly after Venezuela's "democratic coup." Subsequently it became the personal political vehicle of Jovito Villalba, one of the major student leaders in the generation of '28. As noted in footnote 7, Villalba, with the tacit backing of AD, undoubtedly would have won the 1952 presidential election had Pérez Jiménez not altered the vote count. URD has generally followed a non-Marxist, left-of-center, political position. When the Betancourt administration called for the expulsion of Castro's Cuba from the OAS, for example, the URD withdrew from the government coalition. The party reached its electoral peak in 1958 behind the candidacy of the highly charismatic, populist, Admiral Larrazábal. It remained Venezuela's third largest party, with a significant following, through the 1968 election, but since then has collapsed totally as an electoral force (in the 1978 election it is backing the COPEI presidential candidate). The party has suffered from the apparent opportunism of Villalba who has formed alliances of convenience with both the left and the right.

10. The Social Christians also finished second in the 1946 Constitutional Assembly elections and in the 1948 municipal elections.

11. The remaining portions of this Report, dealing with the ideologies of AD, COPEI, and MAS, are primarily based on interviews with the following party leaders: ACCION DEMOCRATICA - Humberto Celli, Second Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies and member of the AD Central Committee; Luis Esteban Ray, Deputy; Marcotulio Bruni Celli, Sub-Minister of the Interior; Celestino Armas, Minister of Information and former member of AD electoral command; Avila Vivas, Director of AD's youth campaign wing.

COPEI - Luis Herrera Campins, Senator and current COPEI presidential candidate; Enrique Pérez Olivares, Member of COPEI electoral command and former Minister of Education; Luis Enrique Oberto, Member of COPEI

electoral command and former Minister of Finance; José Rodríguez Iturbe, President of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Chamber of Deputies; Abdón Vivas Terán, Deputy and member of COPEI Central Committee; Valmore Acavedo, Member of COPEI campaign command and former Deputy and Governor of Tachira; Naudy Suárez Figueroa, former member of Directorate of COPEI youth; Ramón Adolfo Illarramendi.

MAS - José Vicente Rangel, Deputy and current MAS presidential candidate; Teodoro Petkoff, Deputy and Sub-Secretary of MAS; Freddy Muñoz, Deputy and presidential campaign manager.

12. In addition to the military ouster of AD in 1948, coups against Jan Goulart in Brazil (1964), Juan Bosch in the Dominican Republic (1965), and Salvador Allende in Chile (1973) are but a few of the examples suggesting that the Latin American military will usually oust a government whose policies or rhetoric threaten elite interests.

13. It is important to note that the nationalization of oil, iron, steel, aluminum, and petrochemicals has been directed almost exclusively at foreign-owned firms. Thus, AD policies may be seen as more nationalistic than socialist. This also helps explain the lack of opposition by Venezuelan big business to such policies.

14. On the 1973 campaign and FEDERCAMERAS, see Martz and Baloyra, *op. cit.*, more recently a leading Venezuelan journalist informed me that he had been told by a high-ranking FEDERCAMERAS official that that organization, and Venezuelan big business in general, favored AD in the 1978 campaign.

15. The three political parties discussed in this paper take contrasting positions on social conflict; COPEI stresses the organic harmony of society and tends to downplay interest group conflict; AD sees such conflict as something to be both resolved (to achieve political harmony) and exploited (to gain votes through labor and peasant organizations); MAS insists that class conflict cannot be resolved under existing economic arrangements and that Venezuela's principal capitalist firms must be socialized to eliminate such conflict.

16. Under the terms of the "Betancourt Doctrine," followed by AD governments

from 1958-1968, Venezuela refused to recognize either Castro's Cuba or rightist military regimes in Latin America. President Caldera abandoned that doctrine and initiated preliminary contacts with Cuba. President Pérez continued the lines of foreign policy initiated by the *copeyanos* and established diplomatic relations with Cuba.

17. During Rómulo Betancourt's first year in office, there were several abortive coup plots by right-wing military officers. The 1973 coups in Chile and Uruguay, previously the Latin American nations with the longest tradition of civilian government, suggest that long-term predictions in this area are hazardous. For an extensive discussion of the Venezuelan military's role in the political system, see the chapter by Gene Bigler in Martz and Myers (eds.), *op. cit.*

18. The recent experiences of Uruguay and Chile show that, even in the most entrenched democracies, civil liberties can collapse in the face of far left or far right challenges to the system and class polarization. Venezuela faced, and eventually surmounted, such a challenge in the 1960s.

19. Martz and Baloyra, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

20. While I have seen this estimate of abandoned children elsewhere, I feel (on the basis of personal observation) that it is overstated. I have been told that many abandoned children in Caracas are taken in by other families so that, unlike in Bogota, Rio, or Mexico City, one does not see children sleeping alone in the streets at night. For more information on poverty and malnutrition in Venezuela, see: Norman Gall, "Oil and Democracy in Venezuela, Part II: The Marginal Man" [NG-2-'73], *AUFS Reports*, East Coast South America Series, Vol XVII, No. 2, 1973; Michel Chossudovsky, *La Miseria en Venezuela* (Vadell Hermanos, 1977); Howard Handelman, "Venezuela, Scarcity Amid Plenty," *Common Ground* (Spring 1978).

21. The rate of profit of Venezuelan firms is astronomical, typically ranging from 25 to 60 percent on capital annually! Attempts by AD Presidents Leoni (1963-1968) and Pérez to impose moderate corporate or individual income taxes were gutted in Congress by members of both major parties. Pérez's recent proposal to place an income tax on annual incomes over \$40,000 was denounced by business leaders as

dangerously socialistic and a threat to the middle class (*sic.*).

22. The exact point at which this renunciation took place is not clear, but by 1967 the PCV had backed away from guerrilla struggle. Douglas Bravo was expelled from the party for refusing to abandon armed insurrection. For a discussion of the PCV's internal debate, see Norman Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff: Crisis of the Professional Revolutionary, Part I:" [NG-1-'72] and Part II [NG-3-'73], *AUFS Reports*, East Coast South America Series, Vol. XVI, No. 1, 1972, and Volume XVII, No. 9, 1973.

23. The PCV was declared illegal during the guerrilla period. In the 1968 election the communist-front UPA gained only 2.8 percent of the vote.

24. Quoted from Teodoro Petkoff in Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff, Part II," p. 16.

25. These themes are developed further in Petkoff's books: *Czechoslovakia: Socialism as a Problem* (1969) and *Socialism for Venezuela?* (1970). The books feature a harsh critique of Soviet Communism and Stalinism, and offer an ideology and program appropriate for Venezuelan socialism.

26. Thus, the party name is very useful for slogans such as "We can do it, we are MAS (more)." "The rich are few; the poor are MAS."

27. Rangel is currently a member of the MAS Congressional delegation, but is not a registered member of the party. All major Venezuelan parties include sympathetic "independents" (nonparty members) on their congressional slates (which are elected through proportional representation). But MAS is unique in

nominating an independent for the presidency. In the party nominating convention for the 1978 elections, Rangel, with the backing of party Secretary General, Pompeyo Márquez, defeated Teodoro Petkoff for the *masista* nomination.

28. That is not to say that the conditions of the poor have deteriorated. In fact, the standard of living of the urban and rural poor has probably risen, but at a slower rate than the middle and upper classes who manifest the ostentatious wealth born of the oil boom.

29. Quoted in the Caracas *Daily Journal* (June 1, 1978).