



VENEZUELA

## TEODORO PETKOFF: THE CRISIS OF THE PROFESSIONAL REVOLUTIONARY

### Part II: A New party

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American Universities Field Staff Report - January 1973

*When the Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, author of One Hundred Years of Solitude, returned to Caracas in the summer of 1972 to receive the Rómulo Gallegos Award for the best Latin American novel of the previous five years, he gave a three-minute acceptance speech and promptly donated the \$23,000 prize money to a new Marxist-Leninist party, the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo). Led by a group of men in their late thirties and early forties who had played key roles both in the uprising that led to the 1958 overthrow of the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez and in the guerrilla insurrection of the 1960s, the MAS was formed in early 1971 in the wake of a bitter division of the PCV (Partido Comunista de Venezuela). It has set out to become a new kind of revolutionary party which through ideological re-examination and innovation would break free of the isolating rituals and dogmas of traditional communist politics. The young men who formed the core of the MAS leadership are the closest Latin America has come to producing a coherent body of professional revolutionaries in the classic Leninist sense of the term. Yet they have succeeded also in giving a new human breadth and warmth to their growing movement. García Márquez described this quality in an interview published in Paris shortly before he received the Gallegos award:*

*The MAS is a young and imaginative party with a great doctrinal clarity, with its own policy based on national reality, with a stupendous spirit of personal sacrifice and a revolutionary determination that cannot fail. At the same time, and this formidable and new, its activists know that revolutionary seriousness is not incompatible with modern dances, cowboy pictures and a sense of humor, and they are not ashamed of loving. I am identified with its purpose; I am a personal friend of many of its leaders, and I am convinced that they are going to make in Venezuela. [1].*

*The interest in the MAS of García Márquez, and of other Latin American intellectuals living in Europe began with the publication in 1969 of a small book, Checoslovaquia: El Socialismo como Problema, an ideological critique of the 1968 Soviet invasion. Intended originally as an internal PCV document the book was written while in hiding by Teodoro Petkoff, a PCV Central Committee member who was one of the guerrilla leader of the 1960s and later a founder of the MAS. Shortly before the PCV divided in December 1970, Petkoff was attacked in Pravda for "anti-Leninist positions" of "revising Marxism, twisting its most important theses, discrediting the PCV's most faithful leaders, rejecting Leninist principles of organization" and "maliciously adulterating the process of construction of communism in the USSR." On the other hand, García Márquez, who briefly had belonged to the Colombian Communist Party, had gained a different perspective from the official Soviet view while traveling in Eastern Europe in the 1950s as a correspondent for the Bogotá newspaper El Espectador and later while working for the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina in Bogotá and New York. The novelist, who once described himself as "a Communist who doesn't know where to sit down" told me during his 1972 visit to Caracas that Petkoff's book on*

Czechoslovakia "expressed what I felt about socialism, that socialism without democracy is a contradiction. The Soviet invasion was not socialism. Either that was not socialism or I am not a socialist." Petkoff himself, in his second book, *¿Socialismo para Venezuela?* (1970), broke with the traditional Cold War PCV line by arguing that "the anti-imperialist struggle in Venezuela does not consist of a declaration of war against the United States, but a very real confrontation with our own dependent capitalism and its political power."

Petkoff and the MAS embody the crisis of the professional revolutionary in Latin America: the search for a new revolutionary role and identity following the failure of the guerrilla movements of the 1960s. In the course of this search, the MAS has tried to revive the revolutionary populism of Venezuela's largest party, *Acción Democrática*, when AD first burst upon the scene in the 1930s and 1940s after the end of the long dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gomez (1908-35). At the same time, the MAS has tried to preserve the classic Leninist role of the professional revolutionary vanguard, in a sense trying to reconcile the old contradiction in the world's revolutionary traditions that harks back to the bitter controversy between the populism of Bakunin and the antipopulism of Marx.

This autobiographical statement by Petkoff that follows here is the second by Petkoff that follows here is the second and concluding part of some 20 hours of interviews taped during 1971 and 1972. These interviews constitute an important documentary disclosure of the inner life of the PCV during the 1950s and 1960s, when the party was deeply involved in the insurrection against the Pérez Jimenez dictatorship (1948-58) and later in urban and rural guerrilla operations against the elected *Acción Democrática* regimes of Presidents Rómulo Betancourt and Raul Leoni (1959-69). The first of these two Fieldstaff Reports<sup>[2]</sup> narrated Petkoff's early years in the PCV, the political and tactical disputes during the insurreccional period the establishment of guerrilla units in the countryside and the cities, and Petkoff's dramatic escape, in 1963 from the Military Hospital in Caracas, descending by a nylon cord from the seventh floor prison ward. This Report deals with the decline of the guerrilla movement, the postinsurreccional crisis within the PCV that led to its division. And formation of the MAS. It concludes with a selected bibliography on the PCV and the Venezuelan guerrilla movement.

In his prologue to the third edition (1972) of *Socialismo para Venezuela?* the Secretary-General of the MAS, Pompeyo Márquez, who was the operational head of the PCV for many years, reflected on the past PCV errors of "insufficient mastery of Marxist method, dogmatic practices, and a limited knowledge of the national reality." Márquez continued:

The need to find the reasons for our defeat in the insurrection, as well as for our other repeated failures put many Marxist thinkers to work. Numerous essays were either published or submitted for internal discussion. There also appeared a theoretical literature by academics and revolutionary leaders. This was a period, if you will, of personal inquiry, of research for which the main "laboratories" were the jails, the hiding places and the daily struggle of dozens of leaders. The prisoners of the concentration camp of Tacarigua, under the direction of Eloy Torres, had formed what became a kind of popular university.

This search continues today on the eve of the December 1973 Venezuelan elections, in which several polls and many political observers have rated MAS as likely to win a major bloc of parliamentary seats. The MAS Presidential candidate is José Vicente Rangel, a lawyer and parliamentarian who won national attention for his denunciations of police torture of captured guerrillas during the 1960s.<sup>[i]</sup> Among these revolutionaries in crisis, however, great doubt remains concerning the potential of the marginal poor for revolution in a Venezuela that has become hyper urbanized through torrential peasant migrations to the cities, and which politically has drifted toward conservatism since the early 1960s.<sup>[ii]</sup> While Petkoff notes in his *¿Socialismo para Venezuela?* that "the violent process of urbanization" is "peculiar to capitalism in general," he also writes of the "conservatism and passivity" of the Venezuelan working class that stands in stark contrast with the "social dynamite" of the marginal sub proletariat:

Leadership organization and orientation are urgently needed, since the powder keg of the marginal masses could explode in a direction completely opposed to the interests of the revolution. The very instability of this mass makes it responsive to the action of any

*demagogue, or of that very special version of Latin American demagogy: military dictators and ex-dictators [i.e. the remarkable political comeback of Pérez Jimenez]. If a revolutionary change does not occur, the future contains an economic collapse and a catastrophic deterioration of the living conditions of the popular masses.* <sup>[iii]</sup>.

*In the interview material that follows, Petkoff traces how he and his comrades of the MAS have tried to reach beyond traditional Marxism-Leninism to provide a broader and more viable base for the revolutionary movement in a country that has experienced extraordinary transformations over the past generation. This search for a new political formula, as narrated by Petkoff, was involved in the PCV's bitter polemics with Fidel Castro in 1967, the internal struggle in the PCV over the Czech question and the formation of the MAS in the difficult effort to create new revolutionary populism. In 1965, following his capture in the mountains of western Venezuela and his return to the San Carlos prison in Caracas, Petkoff retranslated into Spanish Sun Tzu's ancient Chinese classic: *The Art of War*, from the English version by V.S. Marine Colonel Samuel R. Griffith. In his introduction to this translation, Petkoff observed: "For Sun Tzu: politics is an art that the sovereign should master in depth. The ruler should conquer, above all, by political means. He will appeal to arms only when circumstances exhaust peaceful means and oblige him to develop his policy at a higher level, that of the armed struggle. One of the central ideas of Sun Tzu, that appears diversely in many of his maxims, is that to conquer an enemy by the sword cannot be the desideratum of the sovereign. How much more skill, talent and wisdom are needed to conquer, without bloodshed!"*

## I

Sometime in 1965 or 1966 the Cubans proposed to some of our comrades then living in Havana that Che Guevara come to Venezuela to fight in our guerrilla movement. As I was in prison at the time, I never did learn many of the details. I do know that our party leadership rejected the proposal and we who were prisoners at the time agreed with this decision, and I still agree today. This decision was to have some bearing on the bitter polemics that erupted in 1966 between Fidel Castro and the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) over the PCV's decision to withdraw in a gradual and orderly way from the armed struggle.<sup>[3]</sup> This debate intensified after Pompeyo Márquez, Guillermo García Ponce, and myself escaped in February 1967 from the "escape-proof" prison of the San Carlos Fortress in Old Caracas through a tunnel dug by members of the Communist Youth from across the street to our cells. Fidel Castro called us cowards and traitors to the cause of the revolution in Latin America, while we were trying merely to save both our party organization and the possibility of future revolution from almost certain and total destruction after it became clear that our armed insurrection had failed. At bottom, both in our decision against the participation of Che Guevara and in the polemics with Fidel Castro, we felt that our autonomy and integrity were at stake. The idea of bringing Che to Venezuela was part of the romantic myth surrounding the armed struggle and some of its key figures. This kind of myth always appears in revolutionary movements that are already known to be defeated. It is a kind of magic belief that a single audacious action or the figure of a single heroic person is capable of reviving a movement that can no longer base itself on the real conditions existing in the country. On the other hand, and even more important, is the fact that national liberation movements, especially in Venezuela, must deal with a big publicity machine that tries to distort the image of the revolutionary movement in the eyes of the masses, presenting the revolutionaries as soviet or Cuban agents. I believe that the world struggles for socialism erases all frontiers, and that any revolutionary can fight in any country. At the time we had Spanish Republican exiles in our urban guerrilla movement and Peruvians, Brazilians, and Colombians in different parts of the country; I remember one Colombian who died a very heroic death with us. These were all just ordinary men who had come to join our struggle. But it is necessary to understand that the people can be deceived and manipulated by enemy propaganda, which is capable of making an act of immense

generosity, such as the presence of a major figure like Che Guevara in Venezuela, appear on television and in the press like just another act of foreign interference. On the other hand, after our rejection of Che Guevara's participation and our decision to withdraw gradually from the armed struggle, our guerrilla apparatus became filled with ultra-leftist vanguard illusions and Fidel was able to promote a division of the PCV in 1966, with much of the party's military organization splitting away under the banner of our guerrilla leader in Falcón, Douglas Bravo.

The failure of our campaign to stop the 1963 elections had produced very important changes, both in the country as a whole and within our movement. Perhaps our greatest error of this period was to try to stop the elections instead of participating in them. The party's leadership during all of this period was mistaken in its failure to understand the modes of revolutionary warfare under Venezuelan conditions. There was no dictatorial regime like the right-wing military dictatorships in other parts of Latin America, nor a colonial regime as in Algeria or Vietnam, but an electoral democracy that in Venezuela was something new. Venezuela has no century-old democratic tradition as in Chile or Uruguay, but was seeing the first democratic regime in its history [under President Rómulo Betancourt (1959-1964)]; the second one if you count the abortive Acción Democrática (AD) government of the 1945-1948 period.<sup>[4]</sup> Under these conditions, democracy in Venezuela was a new toy recently taken out of the box and it still remained unbroken in the eyes of the masses. It contained escape valves for revolutionary tensions such as freedom of the press and assembly, parliamentary debate, and labor unions, while in combating a dictatorship everything is reduced to the armed struggle. Under these conditions, it was obvious that the armed struggle had to be just one element of an overall policy of the revolutionary movement, which could not ignore the other political processes taking place in the country. The 1963 elections took place in the period when the armed struggle reached its climax and, nevertheless, the electoral process became the most important political phenomenon in the country, absorbing the interest and passion of the masses. We did not understand that under the conditions of the time; in a country shaken by the armed struggle, with a democracy still unstable, with the army restless; these elections could have aggravated the contradictions in Venezuelan society and our movement could have emerged much stronger by participating in them.

Our natural ally in the 1963 election was a liberal-progressive party, URD (Unión Republicana Democrática), which was involved with us in the insurrectional process and had parliamentary representation and a strong leftist wing. In the 1958 elections, following the fall of the Pérez Jimenez dictatorship, URD had done extremely well by backing the popular figure of Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal, who had stepped in to head the military revolt against Pérez Jimenez and became Venezuela's Provisional President until the election campaign began. Larrazabal was a charismatic figure who had invited peasants to come to Caracas and build shacks and participate in a huge emergency public works program. So through him URD had obtained an electoral support from the marginal and plebian sectors of the population, both in Caracas and in the cities of the interior. The leader of URD, Jovito Villalba, was a very ordinary politician who, as events later showed, was capable of making a deal with anybody. But URD had entered the 1963 election with a very radical campaign, severely attacking the Betancourt regime and Acción Democrática, drawing on the strong anti-Betancourt sentiment that was deeply involved in the armed struggle and the popular mobilizations, demonstrations, and street combats of those times.

For these reasons we should have issued a call temporarily to suspend our insurrectional actions and have supported Jovito Villalba's presidential candidacy, for the simple reason that he was against the Establishment of that time, and would have maintained the revolutionary movement and its political base intact. In 1963 our military apparatus still had not suffered any important blow, and we were in very good shape to call a temporary ceasefire to participate in the elections to broaden the political base of the armed struggle. As things turned out, URD lost badly in the elections - partly because we called for abstentions instead of helping URD. So, right after the new AD government of Raul Leoni

was installed, URD caved in and joined the government coalition, expelling its principal leftist leaders and removing one of the bases of support for our insurrection. Thus in the 1963 election AD won re-election easily, and its coalition partner over the previous five years, the Social Christian COPEI party, doubled its previous vote, showing a certain movement toward the right in Venezuelan politics-especially in the middle classes-that foreshadowed a decline in the armed struggle. A prolonged insurrection without any clear triumph or decision generates a search for stability and peace, especially in the middle class, and this is what happened in Venezuela in those years.

Although the urban guerrillas were, by the nature of Venezuelan society, our most important form of armed struggle until the 1963 elections, we began after our political defeat and our increasing isolation to theorize about a "long war" and to shift our field of guerrilla action to the countryside. We began to intoxicate ourselves with uncritical reading of Maoist, Vietnamese, and Cuban guerrilla literature on struggle in the mountains and creating a People's Army from peasants in the countryside. The banality with which we interpreted these writings blinded us to the fact that, while the populations of China and Vietnam are heavily rural, three-fourths of Venezuela's population is urban and the country continues to urbanize at a very fast rate. Soon after the elections, in April 1964, we held a plenary meeting of the PCV Central Committee and made an absurd analysis of the situation, deciding to plunge into the rural guerrilla movement. Among those who made this decision at this plenum were Freddy Munoz, then president of the student federation of the Central University; Germán Lairé; Alberto Lovera, who was barbarously tortured and murdered after his arrest by the political police (DIGEPOL) the following year; Tirso Pinto, who later became commander of the guerrilla zone in Lara State; Douglas Bravo, the guerrilla chieftain in Falcón State and the party's leading military figure, and myself. Pompeyo Márquez and Guillermo García Ponce, the two pillars of the older PCV leadership, had been jailed shortly before the elections, and some of the party's younger leaders had become members of the politburo to replace members of the old leadership that had been imprisoned.

There was very little disagreement in those days between the two generations over military strategy. Even old Eduardo Machado, who went to Moscow in 1970 to have the younger leadership denounced as "anti-Soviet" in a Pravda article, was very pro-Chinese in those days. But by the time the PCV was legalized again in the 1968-69 period and the older leaders were able to lay claim to their old authority, the younger generation had been running the party for so long that a confrontation was inevitable. This led to the division of the PCV in December 1970 and the formation of the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) which we are trying to build into a new kind of Marxist-revolutionary party. From the time of that plenum of April 1964 there was a growing awareness on the part of those of us who today are in the MAS, M. as well those who left the PCV with Douglas Bravo in 1966,<sup>[5]</sup> that the party was inadequate to the tasks it had set for itself. In that instance it was the armed struggle that absorbed all our attention, but later this criticism spread to other areas of action. I was a close friend of Douglas Bravo and we wrote to each other when I was in jail. But by the time he split away from the party in 1966 to continue the guerrilla war with the support of Fidel Castro, I had come to believe that the possibilities of the armed struggle were exhausted and that we should retreat. The PCV leaders who were prisoners in the San Carlos fortress in 1966 all agreed that we should withdraw from the armed struggle, but there was strong disagreement over how this should be done. The older leaders - Gustavo Machado, Eduardo Machado, and Guillermo García Ponce - argued for an abrupt and immediate withdrawal, which showed an ignorance of the state of mind of the party cadres. On the other hand, Freddy Munoz, Pompeyo Márquez, and myself argued that the PCV had years of struggle behind it, that its cadres had become conditioned to clandestine activity and insurrection, and that only two years before we had severely attacked the leader of the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) for arguing for the same withdrawal that we had then decided upon. For these reasons our withdrawal from the armed struggle should not be an abrupt about-face, but should be done in a gradual and orderly way. It was our point of view that prevailed, but these two groups remained at odds with each other over several

questions-reflecting deep and - irreconcilable differences in their attitudes toward the 'party and political life - until we took separate roads when the PCV finally divided in December 1970.

## II

I had been returned to the San Carlos prison in 1964 after being captured while serving as a kind of political commissar or representative of the party in the guerrilla zone that embraced the states of Lara, Portuguesa, and Trujillo. The mountains west of the sugar plantations of El Tocuyo in Lara State were known as the Red Zone because the PCV had done a lot of practical work among the peasants there during the 1940s. The chief of the guerrillas in Lara was Argimiro Gabaldón, the son of General José Rafael Gabaldón, an old caudillo of Lara who revolted with thousands of peasants against the tyranny of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935) and surrendered - as a humane act only after Gómez's troops had burned 300 peasant huts in reprisal. When the Acción Democrática government called Argimiro a bandit, the peasants responded by saying to one another: "That's ridiculous". How could the son of General Gabaldon be a bandit?" The guerrillas in the neighboring states of Trujillo and Portuguesa were led by Fabricio Ojeda, a leading figure of the revolt against the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship, my brother Luben, and Gregorio Lunar Márquez. All of 1964 was a year of intensive political work among the peasants. Because of this political and social alliance with the peasants, the guerrillas practically served as the government in some 125 hamlets in the mountains of Lara. The peasants spoke of two governments, the national government in Caracas and the government de arriba [up there] in the mountains. Many times the peasants of Trujillo, when they wanted to travel to the main town of the region, Boconó, first asked the guerrilla commanders for authorization. After a period of organizational work in Lara, I went to the mountains of Boconó for a meeting of three or four days with the leaders of our urban support network in the surrounding towns. I was going to return immediately to Lara, but just as the meeting ended the army began to penetrate the zone from two different directions, with helicopters flying overhead to try to find us in that dense forest. These were the first penetrations of army patrols into the guerrilla zone, and were very different from what happened the following year [1965], when the army encircled the entire guerrilla area, carefully controlled all persons entering and leaving the area, with its battalions of cazadores [guerrilla hunters] criss-crossing the region and summarily executing peasants whom they thought to be aiding the guerrillas.

The Boconó mountain zone where we held our meeting was very heavily populated. The guerrillas moved with great freedom among mountain hamlets such as La Negrita, Los Volcanes, Guaramacal and, although this, is not politically very important, it had very majestic mountain scenery that uplifted one's spirit, especially when I compare it with the desolate mountains of Falcón State where we organized the guerrillas in 1962-63. In the Boconó Mountains the guerrillas were helped greatly by the peasants who fed us, sheltered us in their ranchos, provided us with information, and assisted our movements. Most of the peasants who joined the guerrillas were just boys, around 18 years old. The older peasants limited themselves to giving logistical support. The whole PCV leadership in Portuguesa State - some nine or ten persons - was up in the mountains with us when the army made its first penetration into the zone. We had to avoid any clash with an army patrol because these people weren't guerrilleros and weren't used to the mountains and we were responsible for their lives. We had to stay hidden for 15 days before the army withdrew from the zone and we could come down from the mountains. First the PCV leaders from Portuguesa descended and told our contact man in Boconó that I would be there the next day. On the following day I descended with Abreu, an army lieutenant who had deserted and joined the guerrillas, in a hike that lasted nearly 20 hours, arriving late that night at the house of this contact.

In the morning we began to notice several strange things: first, many people began to go in and out of the house several times, and some teenaged girls came to see the guerrilleros. When we complained about this, our contact man said: "It's all right. They know. They're with us." When Abreu looked out of the house, he saw the same car pass several times. We

were very nervous with all this coming and going of strange people, and with our contact man leaving the house several times to make telephone calls. The car that was going to take us back to El Tocuyo in Lara State came for us at 3 P.M., and while we were circling the Plaza Bolívar in Boconó a black car came up from behind and began following us. Abreu told me: "That's the car that passed by the house several times." We circled the plaza twice and the other car went away. We thought this was a coincidence and we went out of town to the main highway. We looked behind us and the road was empty except for a blue Municipal Water Works panel truck that was coming up from behind. The blue panel truck passed us when we were only a short way outside of town and when it passed us we saw that in the back of the truck there was a group of armed men. The panel truck passed us, stopped, and the armed men jumped out and opened the doors of our car. We got out and they hit us a few times and grabbed us. Then one of those funny things happened: they remembered that they forgot their handcuffs. The head of the group sent someone to a hardware store to buy rape. They shoved us in the back of the panel truck and started off for the state capital of Guanare. The next day my body hurt from the blows I had received, but when I was captured all I could think of was that they would send me back to San Carlos again, that I would be buried behind the same wall, the same canal. In the back of the truck I was in a daze, as if fleeing from reality. After a while the comrades who were taken prisoners with me pointed out that we were being taken into the mountains, and not into the plains area where Guanare was. It looked as if they were going to shoot us. They stopped the truck and put on a show about a firing squad, shouted insults at us and said, "Now we're going to kill you." But you soon see when things are for real and when they're putting on a show, because they've done this two or three times with me. When they're going to shoot someone they shoot him and that's that. So after their show they took us back to Guanare, where we slept in the police station. The next day a special military plane came for us to take us back to Caracas. First I was taken to DIGEPOL headquarters, then to the SIF A (Servicio de Inteligencia de las Fuerzas Armadas). They asked no questions, just took pictures of me, and then sent me right back to San Carlos, which would be my home for the next three years. Upon my return to jail I became absorbed in translating Sun Tzu's ancient Chinese treatise, *The Art of War*.<sup>[6]</sup>

Soon after I was returned to San Carlos the ideological debate began over the future of the armed struggle. In the 1962-63 period I was a fervent advocate of guerrilla insurrection, but I gradually realized that when we got involved in all that business we didn't know what Venezuela really was, and by 1965 I became convinced that the guerrillas had reached a dead end. I remember that in April or May of 1965 I expressed these thoughts in a letter to a friend and these doubts gradually spread to other aspects of our political and organizational life. All through this period I exchanged several polemical letters with my brother Luben, who remained with the guerrillas in Trujillo and Portuguesa and remained a passionate defender of the guerrilla strategy, so much that he left the PCV with Douglas Bravo when the party decided to abandon the armed struggle. The polemical battle with Fidel Castro did not really hurt the PCV. What really hurt the party was the fight with Douglas Bravo, for when Douglas split with the party formally in 1966 he took with him the whole Falcón guerrilla front—some 200 men—plus nearly all of the urban guerrilla apparatus in Caracas. This whole process of debate over the future of the armed struggle produced a copious body of theoretical writing on both sides, and the party as a whole lived in a state of hypertension for many months. Douglas and Fidel Castro, above all, used moral arguments, calling us traitors, temporizers, and cowards. On our side we tried to defend ourselves on rational political grounds, and we produced several documents to give a rational and theoretical foundation for a political tactic that seemed obvious to us, and today - six years later - events have shown that we were right. We were trying to place the Left in a position in which it could again be a point of reference in the country. We changed direction to save what was left of the revolutionary movement. My exchanges of letters with my brother Luben was the only personal contact that remained between the two groups. My brother and I clashed politically, but not personally. After a while Luben broke with Douglas, too.

### III

The French Communist Party newspaper *Humanité* called our February 1967 prison break from San Carlos "the escape of the century." This was something of an exaggeration, but when Guillermo García Ponce, Pompeyo Márquez, and myself crawled through the 70-yard tunnel that was dug by four young Communists from a grocery store across the street to a place just under our cells, it caused something of a sensation both in Venezuela and in the international press. It took three years of heroic labor by these youths to dig that tunnel; our only role was to signal with our typewriter keys to guide the digging of the tunnel toward our cell in the final weeks. It took so long to dig the tunnel because of the need to be very careful in disposing of the earth being excavated. The job was executed by an extraordinary man known as Simon the Arab, a Syrian who came to Venezuela in 1956 and later became a member of the PCV. Simon had exceptional qualities of coolness and audacity that were combined with a gift for acting. This talent enabled him to fool the military for 34 months across the street from the Cuartel San Carlos. Simon installed himself as the owner of a small grocery store on the street that runs behind the prison, made friends with the soldiers, got special permission to enter San Carlos at odd hours, and was allowed to circulate in the area of the prison in his panel truck outside the normally permitted hours. To avoid arousing suspicions, however, Simon had to remove the earth from his excavation in small loads of white sugar sacks to be dumped out in different parts of the city. The loads of sugar sacks could not be carried too often nor could they be too big, and this is why the excavation took 34 months. Simon was such a good actor that he stayed friends with the soldiers until the end. I shall never forget the moment when our boys finished the tunnel and broke through the floor of our prison cell, the smile on the sweating face of one of them as he looked up at us through the broken floor, his beret pushed down over one eyebrow. Their names are still a secret, except for those of Simon - who escaped from the country - and Nelson Lopez, who - was shot dead from behind on a Caracas street in revenge by the police after they learned that he was one of the excavators. Actually, Nelson was the head of the four-man excavating squad.<sup>[7]</sup>

Our escape from San Carlos on February 5, 1967 came at a time when the PCV's ideological debate with Fidel Castro was reaching its height. This conflict occupied much of the party's energies during that year, until the dispute quietly died out after Che Guevara's death in Bolivia in October 1967 which came a few months after the DIGEPOL (political police) destroyed Douglas Bravo's last remaining urban guerrilla unit in Caracas.<sup>[8]</sup> The PCV was intensively but quietly working to dismantle its insurrectional apparatus while trying to secure a place on the ballot in the December 1968 elections for its newly invented front party, UPA (Unidad para Avanzar), so we could restore our political strength and our contacts with the people. But this process was interrupted by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, provoking a new kind of open struggle within the PCV that finally led to its division two years later.

It was a coincidence that the PCV Central Committee previously had scheduled a plenum to discuss electoral tactics that took place a few days after the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Toward the end of this meeting the politburo presented what it thought would be a routinely approved resolution of support for the Soviet invasion. However, a lively discussion ensued in which, for the first time in the PCV's history, a policy of the Soviet Union was seriously debated. Only five persons opposed the Soviet invasion, expressing different individual points of view, and their opposition was easily defeated by an overwhelming Central Committee Majority. The five opponents of the resolution included three leaders of the Communist Youth - Antonio José Urbina, Luis Bayardo Sardi, and Alexis Adam - as well as Germán Lairé and myself. All of us were to become deeply involved in the process that led to the division of the PCV and the formation of the MAS. The thrust of our arguments against the politburo resolution was that, far from being a counterrevolutionary plot, the Dubcek experiment in Czechoslovakia represented a renewal of socialism and an attempt to develop a new kind of socialism that would be adaptable for countries far more advanced than the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s. Although our opposition to the politburo resolution was easily defeated, the established PCV leadership - especially Eduardo Machado and Guillermo García Ponce - began after that Central Committee meeting to refer to us privately as a kind of fractional



group within the party, "a Czech group" since we had questioned some traditional values of the PCV.

Shortly after the Social Christian COPEI candidate, Rafael Caldera, had won the December 1968 presidential elections, the PCV Central Committee met secretly once again. At this plenum the party leadership began talking again about starting the old song and dance of forming a United Front with some of the smaller parties who had just lost the 1968 elections. At that meeting, however, I presented a document which severely questioned the politburo's political proposals, and for the first time there was a full-scale confrontation over the fundamental objectives of Communist Party policy. Those of us who had opposed the Czech intervention did not yet act as a group, but there was already some communication among us, especially since my close friend Freddy Muñoz had just returned from abroad and helped me prepare the document that I read before the Central Committee. In the first place, this document challenged the politburo's proposal for a new United Front, which is the old game of the traditional Communist Parties in Latin America and of the Third International. I argued for the need to work for a new kind of political grouping in the country that could not be viewed only in terms of existing parties. Attention should be paid to the social processes underlying Venezuelan politics, to the new working classes and middle classes, to the explosion of the marginal population. On the base formed by these sectors it would be possible to develop an explicitly socialist policy instead of the old formula of "democracy today, socialism tomorrow." We argued for the need for the Communist Party becoming the center of a socialist grouping. At the same time we very timidly pointed out the need to revise the PCV's organizational structure to suit the conditions of the country and the new period we were entering, in which we were to re-establish our legal political activity.

The reading of my document provoked a storm. Guillermo García Ponce stood up and announced that the party was being eaten from within by a petty bourgeois faction that was ultra leftist in national politics (because we proposed an open campaign for socialism, for which we were denounced as Trotskyites, which was of course the greatest heresy); García Ponce called us liberal and rightist in organizational matters because we proposed a revision of the PCV's organizational principles, and anti-Soviet in international affairs because of our previous stand on the Czech question. The crowning accusation was that we were conspiring to liquidate the old party leadership, the party's most glorious figures, Secretary-General Jesús Faria, Gustavo Machado, and Eduardo Machado. After García Ponce made his denunciation such a furious discussion ensued that the meeting was interrupted without ever reaching a conclusion. Tempers boiled over so quickly that it became obvious that a deep crisis had been brewing inside the party for a long time. In this bitter discussion problems and personal conflicts emerged that we younger members of the Central Committee never knew about, because they dated back many years. Of all these personal animosities the most obvious was García Ponce's hatred for Pompeyo Márquez, who was the PCV's Organizational Secretary and who really ran the party in the years before it went underground in the armed insurrection. We saw that the intervention of García Ponce - who had come to play an extremely important role in the PCV's clandestine activity - was only apparently directed against us. It was really directed against Pompeyo, ostensibly perhaps because he had allowed our "petty bourgeois faction" to develop inside the party organization, but really because of an animosity that may have become very intense when they were prisoners together in San Carlos. In this way we saw ourselves as the sacrificial lambs in an attack that went much further, as perhaps the beginning of a move by García Ponce to gain control of the party organization for himself. On the other hand, the leaders of the Communist Youth, who had played a major role in the armed insurrection and who had stood with us on the Czech question, had been going through a period of reflection and self-examination on the failure of Castroism and the armed vanguard theories in Venezuela and Latin America generally, and the disaster for the revolutionary movement in Venezuela caused by the way in which the armed struggle was led and carried out. Although we were members of the PCV leadership and not of the Communist Youth, Germán Lairet, Alfredo Maneiro, Freddy Muñoz, and myself were going through the same kind of reflection in another compartment of the party structure, and it was the Czechoslovakia policy debate that brought us together and made us realize that we held very similar views.

The conflict between Pompeyo Márquez and Guillermo García Ponce became very important to the power struggle within the PCV, and can be better understood in psychological terms than political terms. Since the late 1940s, Pompeyo was the first distinguished younger leader of the PCV. He had enormous energy and dynamism, and a capacity for work that was astounding by any standard. Before becoming a professional revolutionary, Pompeyo had been the manager of a large business enterprise, so he had learned to run things in an efficient, methodical, and very well-organized way. Inside the PCV he had an absorbent work drive that tended to centralize many functions in himself.

Although Jesús Faría was the party's Secretary-General, it was Pompeyo as Organizational Secretary who really ran the PCV. Pompeyo had a free hand in running the party because most of its leaders were rather lazy, and found in him a workhorse who would do all of their work for them.

Guillermo is a few years younger and was Youth Secretary of the PCV when Pompeyo was becoming the de facto Secretary-General. They have many of the same characteristics, and worked together harmoniously for years. Guillermo also is a tractor of great energy who pushes ahead of him, or destroys, anything in his way. But he also has a sense of teamwork like a playmaker in basketball or a middle-center in soccer.

I think the conflict between the two of them began around that time. Little by little Guillermo was gaining stature within the PCV, among that group of shiftless leaders, so he quickly became transformed from Youth Secretary into one of the key de facto party leaders. When we all were in jail together in San Carlos, Guillermo began behaving ostentatiously to show that he no longer accepted Pompeyo's authority, as we others did. Although we all were members of the politburo and, by rights, should have been informed of his views, we only learned of them through the documents that Guillermo sent by couriers outside San Carlos and later transmitted back to us through the party network. This was very strange because the three of us, and old Gustavo Machado, occupied two adjoining cells and spent several hours a day together: I later realized that he didn't show us his political writings because showing them to any one of us would mean he would have to show them to Pompeyo. He said, by his conduct, that we were all equals and evidently began while in jail to develop a plan to get out from under Pompeyo. I don't know whether it was premeditated or not, but he began getting close to the old men, Gustavo and Eduardo Machado and Jesús Faría, to place himself under their wing. I don't want to think that all this was Machiavellian maneuver, but Guillermo became secretary to Gustavo. He told us that, in jail, Gustavo dictated his memoirs and Guillermo took them down. "The party is the old men," Guillermo told me later. "Where the old men are, there the party is also."

He became buddies with Eduardo Machado, Gustavo's younger brother, and this alignment became crystallized in 1966 and 1967, when we prepared those celebrated documents of San Carlos Prison in which we proposed to the politburo the PCV's withdrawal from the armed struggle. Pompeyo, Freddy Muñoz, and I wanted to present the plan as a gradual, orderly withdrawal. But Guillermo inexplicably objected. He didn't attend any more meetings, and put out a second document that was almost identical to ours. For this reason, people always spoke of two documents, that of Pompeyo, Freddy, and I, and that of Guillermo, Eduardo, and Gustavo. There was almost no difference between them, but in this way Guillermo could exploit the political capital of the old party chieftains to cut Pompeyo down to size. After Pompeyo was named Acting Secretary-General, Guillermo argued that the PCV didn't need a Secretary-General. Curiously, Guillermo had one of the most audacious, original, and heterodox minds in the party. Many of the things we, who later formed the MAS, were urging he had advocated also. But he turned all this around to get rid of Pompeyo. He tied his fortunes to the old men of the party such as Gustavo Machado,<sup>[9]</sup> who was known publicly as the leader of the PCV but really did nothing inside the party. Nor did Jesús Faría: the Secretary-General, who was a kind of totem, the repository of confidence in the PCV's pro-Soviet orthodoxy.

In his attacks against the younger leaders of the "pro-Czech" group, whom he denounced as liberal, ultra-leftist, anti-Soviet etc, Guillermo was really attacking Pompeyo by insinuating that Pompeyo was our protector and that we could not survive within the party without his tolerance and trickery. Guillermo's plan was to drive the "pro-Czech" group from the party. He thought that, at the last minute, Pompeyo would react like an old communist and remain within the PCV, but as the janitor instead of the Secretary-General. A new Central Committee would be elected, giving Guillermo enormous power. Pompeyo would be completely defeated because, though he disagreed with us, he always defended our right to maintain our position in party councils. But at the last minute Pompeyo surprised Guillermo and many others by leaving the PCV with us to join the MAS. They didn't perceive the change of perspective that had taken place in Pompeyo in the bitter debates with the Cubans in the late 1960s, and how his concept of a revolutionary party was changed in the internal PCV debate over the right to discuss.<sup>[10]</sup>

In March 1969, shortly after the inauguration of President Rafael Caldera (1969-1974), the PCV was formally legalized and a plenum of the Central Committee was held soon thereafter to convoke the first party congress in ten years for December 1970. The Central Committee declared that all policy discussion in preparation for the party congress would be conducted as a free and public debate. As I have said before, the PCV was never an old-fashioned Stalinist party and always tolerated a great deal of discussion within its ranks, but this time the older party leadership was not aware of the immense dissatisfaction within the PCV rank and file after ten years of failure. When the preparations for the Fourth PCV Congress opened the way for public discussion of all major issues before the party, I used this opportunity to ask the politburo's permission to publish the document I had prepared after the August 1968 plenum in which I criticized the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; this document was expanded into my little book, *Czechoslovakia*, which was to cause such a stir in 1969 and 1970. García Ponce began the preparations for the PCV Congress with an enormous amount of confidence in himself, and when I asked the politburo for permission to publish the *Czechoslovakia* book, he said: "It doesn't matter if it's printed; we'll print it ourselves on the party's presses." As it turned out, the book was produced by an independent Marxist publisher and sold 5,000 copies in Caracas within a few months, which is most unusual for this kind of book.

After the August 1968 Central Committee plenum in which the Czech invasion was debated, we sensed that there was a movement against us within the party, and we decided to form a separate command inside the party that would be for our self-defense. At first this group consisted of Germán Lairé, Antonio José Urbina, and myself, but later it was expanded when Freddy Muñoz returned from exile and Alfredo Maneiro got out of jail. Urbina was Secretary-General of the Communist Youth and was our contact with the leadership of the Youth movement. While there were some differences between the Lairé-Petkoff-Muñoz group and the Communist Youth leadership, we formed a single political unit during the heat of the crisis as it developed. This "self-defense" command grew in strength and cohesiveness during the nearly two years of passionate public debate within the PCV, breaking through the isolation that traditionally existed between the different base units of a communist party, with each cell being detached from the rest of the party and receiving orders from the Regional Committee directly above it. The public discussion broke through the mechanisms which gave the apparatus so much authority and could be manipulated by a few key people on the politburo.

This may seem incredible, but a very important part of the PCV's internal debate ceased to be a discussion of problems of substance, problems of the country, and became instead a discussion of the right to discuss. This would seem at first to be a digression away from the important problems, yet at bottom this was the big question before the party: whether or not PCV members, though in the minority, had the right to discuss and dissent internally from party policy, whether the PCV's established traditions of free internal discussion would be replaced by repressive Stalinist mechanisms. The García Ponce group tried and tried, always fruitlessly, to do away with the role of free public discussion explicitly decreed by the

Central Committee in early 1969, to do away with the polemical exchanges in the PCV newspaper *Tribuna Popular*, to prohibit the publication of books and pamphlets dealing with the party's internal problems, to stop the public assemblies held by PCV local committees throughout the country to discuss these problems. While the García Ponce group was trying to stop these discussions, it also tried to focus the internal PCV debate on the issue of Czechoslovakia for an obvious tactical reason: the majority opinion inside the party was very favorable to the Soviet Union. This is true of most Communist Parties in the world. For example, when the Italian Communist Party condemned the Soviet invasion," it had very serious problems in dealing with the dissent in its base organizations whose members refused to hear of an anti-Soviet position; the same thing happened with the Spanish Communist Party, and almost any other party formed intellectually by 40 years in the spirit of the Third International. So when García Ponce tried to nail down the internal debate to a discussion of Czechoslovakia, he was trying to divide the party into a large pro-Soviet majority and an isolated group of anti-Soviet dissidents.

If we had bitten at this bait for purist ideological principles, accepting this challenge to discuss the general problems of socialism by focusing on the Czech question, we would have been liquidated immediately within the party. We would have become a little marginal group in Venezuelan politics, theoretically very solid and with all the correctness in the world from the point of view of history, but we would have been politically ineffective. So we refused to be trapped into this kind of discussion; in fact, the discussion over Czechoslovakia never formally took place inside the party, only at that first Central Committee meeting immediately and the Soviet invasion in which the five of us were easily defeated. My book on Czechoslovakia circulated freely however, and I was invited to appear at local party assemblies throughout the country to express my views and to answer questions, but we never allowed ourselves to be trapped into a discussion of Czechoslovakia at another Central Committee meeting. We always tried, especially in our discussions with the party rank and file, to focus on the themes that were fundamental from our point of view: the right of free discussion, the definition of the character of our revolutionary process and of Venezuelan society and the need to strengthen the socialist and anti-capitalist character of our struggle by going beyond empty anti-Yankee slogans. We would do this by attacking the economically powerful Venezuelan clans and combines who exercise great influence over the government and the major political parties, *Acción Democrática* and *CAPEI*. All this refocusing of our political objectives implied an organizational renewal of the party. This discussion touched upon many problems in which the rank and file PCV militants agreed with us wholeheartedly, especially on the definition of national problems and the ineffectiveness of the traditional party structure. At many party meetings in Caracas and in the interior, people would come up to us and say: "I'm against you on the question of Czechoslovakia but I agree with you on everything else."

During the long debate over the right of free discussion inside the party, a third group emerged that stood midway between the followers of Guillermo García Ponce and the "leftist" group which had opposed the politburo resolution on Czechoslovakia. This third group, headed by Pompeyo Márquez, was known as the center sector and fought until the end to maintain both freedom of discussion and the unity of the party. In the beginning this center group was absolutely contrary to our point of view. Yet by reason of their personal honesty and their formation in the tradition of intellectual tolerance inside the party, they defended our right of dissent. They began themselves to be attacked by García Ponce's right-wing group and to be identified with us ideologically. At certain stages of the discussion the greatest hostility was directed not at us but at those of the center, which is what often happens to those caught in the middle of a very heated debate. While the right wing never pardoned them, very strong bonds of friendship developed between the center group and ourselves. Through its own experience this group - which had voted against our position on Czechoslovakia - became involved in the substantive discussion over the structure and function of a revolutionary party, and the differences that separated us began to dissolve. At the end of the debate, when the PCV divided in December 1970, Pompeyo Márquez and the other older party leaders of the center left the PCV with us to found the MAS as a new kind of revolutionary party. Although they originally disagreed with us on Czechoslovakia, a strikingly different reaction appeared in these old communists when in October 1970,

shortly before the PCV finally divided, an article appeared in Pravda condemning me and the rest of the "anti-Soviet group" in the PCV. When that Pravda article appeared, one of the older members of the center group told me: "Those are the tanks entering, *chico*. If we were closer to the Soviet Union we all would be in jail."

During those two years of public debate I traveled from one end of the country to the other and came into personal contact with practically the entire membership of the PCV and the Communist Youth at the public assemblies held in every major city of Venezuela. Each PCV cell was supposed to invite a member of the party leadership to present his views, but things never really worked out that way and the discussions took place at much larger public meetings. At the same time, preparations for the Fourth PCV Congress' went ahead with meetings held in each cell and in each town and state committee to elect delegates to the Congress. These local and state meetings little by little produced a more or less marked advantage for the center-left alliance that had developed during the prolonged internal discussions. Late in 1970 we reached the final stage in which there remained only five state meetings to be held, among them two very important ones, in Miranda State and the Federal District (Caracas). Antonio García Ponce, Guillermo's brother, was in charge of the Federal District. While our forces and those of García Ponce were stalemated at five each in the state committee, our strength was very great among the rank and file militants. Our center-left alliance had gained majority strength in most of the PCV's base organizations, although García Ponce's people maintained control of the Central Committee, which had been elected by the Third PCV Congress in 1961 and had never been changed. At the end each side knew how many' delegates it had, but García Ponce was able to push through a motion in the Central Committee to nullify the delegate selection processes in the Federal District and Miranda, where our victory at the Congress would have been wrapped up. After one Central Committee plenum had gone through 15 days of furious discussion of the right to discuss, two more plenums were held in November and December to discuss the nullification of the elections in Miranda and the Federal District, and García Ponce's move to postpone the PCV Congress for several months beyond the scheduled date of December 1970. The division of the PCV came in December after one Central Committee meeting could not come to a decision over postponement of the convention and was adjourned for a week. During that week we counted heads on the Central Committee and realized that, if we went back to the meeting, the Congress would be postponed and our position would be liquidated within the party. By that time he had reached a decision to leave the party. Pompeyo and the others of the Center fought hard to maintain party unity and when they accepted the inevitability of a rupture it was because they saw there was no alternative.

The final stages were extremely fine and subtle in tactical maneuver. In the course of the long debate over the right to discuss, we leftists saw that this long struggle would end in the division of the party. In a certain sense the real problem was not whether the PCV would divide, but how and under what political banner because in the end the banner of party unity is very dear to any communist party. 80th García Ponce and ourselves, who formed the two extremes understood that the division would be beneficial to each side, but that it had to be done while waving the banner of party unity. Each sought to attribute provocation of the split to the other. Since the real balance of power lay with the center group, which was fighting for party unity, the side that won the center would be the real winner. At one point old Gustavo Machado, who was allied with García Ponce, called me aside and asked me "for the sake of the party and the Venezuelan Revolution" not to be a candidate for the new Central Committee to be chosen by the Fourth Congress. At the very end the PCV Secretary General Jesús Faría, who was the most passionately pro-Soviet member of the old leadership, became resigned to the prospect of losing control of the Congress. You know the right never was really united. Faría accepted the alliance with García Ponce because he understood that Guillermo was the mainstay of support, but Faría was always afraid of García Ponce's ambitions and still is. Yet at one point Faría said to García Ponce: "You know, Guillermo, we are going to have to learn how to be in the minority. However, any tendency toward concessions or broadening the base of party unity was upset by fresh agitation from both extremes. My second book "¿Socialismo para Venezuela?, appeared late in 1970 and stirred the troubled waters once again. Then old Eduardo Machado made a hasty

trip to Moscow to plead for an article in Pravda denouncing our "ultra leftist, anti-Soviet faction." When the Pravda article condemning us appeared in October 1970, the same Eduardo Machado announced with great cynicism at a politburo meeting: "This is an order that must be obeyed. We must throw Teodoro out of the party." From that moment on Faría did not vacillate anymore. He realized that he had full Soviet backing and conducted affairs in such a way that the selection of delegates in Miranda and the Federal District was nullified and the Congress was postponed.

One interesting thing was that, as often happens in these big discussions, both García Ponce and ourselves knew very well where we were going and what we wanted. For this reason we could have cordial personal relations devoid of animosity. Unlike other comrades - especially those in the middle - who took these things very personally, both García Ponce and ourselves understood that a political process was being culminated in which personal feelings could be aside. For example, at the last Central Committee meeting that we attended García Ponce, Urbina, and I were talking very cordially about the future. García Ponce said, smiling: "it's obvious that we are moving toward a separation. I suppose that we will not make ourselves look ridiculous by expelling each other mutually, by you expelling us and we expelling you. We will have a civilized separation and not put on a spectacle for the country of insulting each other." When we finally said good-by Guillermo said to us: "And later on we will come to an agreement to launch the presidential candidacy of José Vicente Rangel." That was two years ago, and José Vicente Rangel, of course, later became the presidential candidate of the MAS in the 1973 elections. He is a young and renovating figure of the Venezuelan Left, the kind of man the PCV should be supporting if it ever showed an interest in renewal. Guillermo may or may not have said this jokingly, for he is a very complex man. His intolerance and brutality inside the party was always combined with great political sagacity and comprehension of the need for renovation. Very personal as well as ideological considerations were involved in the division of the PCV. The old Communist Party took the road backward into the past, while we started on a different road to form a new kind of revolutionary party. Nevertheless, even if it was a joke, it was a good thing to part company speaking of the candidacy of José Vicente Rangel though after the PCV split Guillermo forgot his cordiality once more.

#### IV

Toward the end of the process that led to the division of the PCV, we came to the conclusion that it would be intolerable for us to remain even as majority in an old-fashioned Communist Party, having to deal with 40 years of inertia and an opposition that always would be trying to drag us backward into the past. If we had won the Fourth Party Congress scheduled for early 1971, it would have been by a relatively narrow majority, which would have made it very difficult to undertake major political initiatives like those carried out by the MAS. We would not have achieved the impact that we have realized today as a new kind of revolutionary party, composed of a revolutionary elite formed over the past 20 years within the PCV, bearing the seal of the Communist Party and yet representing a renewal, a new force in Venezuelan politics.

In a sense, we are seeking something like the mystique and the mass mobilization represented by Rómulo Betancourt and Acción Democrática when they were struggling for power in the mid-1940s. When some people suggest that we of the MAS are the AD of the 1970s, I rather like this parallel and think it important. This is because I believe that AD in the 1940s, as Betancourt himself said, was a telluric phenomenon, an elemental force. Acción Democrática was able to mobilize the desires and hopes of emerging sectors of our society, and also was able to formulate a policy that met the needs of the time. Before AD seized power in the 1945 "October Revolution," when Betancourt was still fighting for power as leader of the opposition, he showed a Marxist lucidity greater than that of any other contemporary political leader. Betancourt achieved in 1945 what Fidel Castro achieved years later: the seizure of power at the head of an immense mass movement. If Betancourt had been a revolutionary, there would have been a revolutionary change in Venezuela. While

personally he was not a coward, he was pusillanimous in the managing of power. So Betancourt didn't dare do what Fidel Castro did later on with his July 26th Movement: reorient toward revolution a heterogeneous ant dictatorial movement that is not itself revolutionary. Betancourt had this historic opportunity, since AD in 1945 was supported by 80 per cent of the Venezuelan people. In a revolutionary thrust Betancourt also would have been backed by part of the army, since part of the army later showed itself favorable to AD in numerous conspiracies against Pérez Jimenez, who overthrew AD in a military coup in 1948. Betancourt and AD opted for what seemed to be merely a political change in favor of mass participation through elections, since the substitution of democracy for autocracy was the panacea of the day.

Just as Acción Democrática built a mass movement upon the idea of democracy and the rejection of a traditional, autocratic political structure, so we of the MAS are beginning to channel an ever-deepening popular feeling that Venezuela must move toward socialism. This feeling today is just as diffuse and intuitive as was the feeling for democracy in the 1940s, which only AD's vanguard had enough lucidity to understand and express. For this reason, our political conduct today is founded on a certain feeling for the future, especially on developments in the second half of the 1970s, that leads us to stress the need to reconstruct the revolutionary force that once existed in Venezuela. Thus we would wish to elude all kinds of large-scale battles that could abort our purpose of building such a movement, perhaps slowly but also in a firm and sustained way, that could act decisively in the revolutionary crisis that is coming.

I think we should distinguish between political revolution - that is, the conquest of power - and revolution in its more exact sense: changing the infernal structure of the country. In the 1940s, it would have been enough for AD to have done what it did with the petroleum industry - that is, establish the 50-50 rule of equal sharing of profits between the government and the foreign oil companies-if AD had destroyed Venezuela's traditional social structure. Historically, of course, this would have been very difficult in a country where there was, at the time, practically no working class. But now I think it is possible to begin a series or major transformations without the first step being the nationalization of the petroleum industry, which has been the banner of the left for so long. I think it much more important to break the internal power structure on which the local business oligarchy rests, including the many nonpetroleum interests of United States companies that abound here. If the United States were disposed to accept these developments, we could establish an arrangement with the oil companies that would allow Venezuela for a time to maintain the flow of foreign exchange into its Central Bank. If a United States government were disposed to accept a modus vivendi with a revolutionary regime here, it would have much to gain. Especially in terms of a secure supply of oil. It seems to me that one of the new concepts for revolutionaries in Latin America to comprehend is that we are in the sphere of influence of the United States. For this reason the process of structural change within our country requires maintenance of economic relations with the United States. A sudden rupture of these economic relations causes so many different problems - like the interruption of flows of supplies credits, and technology - that we have great incentives to maintain a flexible policy. Our main task is to create a new social structure. This is why we of the MAS have been saying that the principal enemy is not the United States, but the dependent capitalist elite of our own country.

Most of the concessions to the foreign oil companies in Venezuela will expire around 1983, when the concessions are scheduled to revert to the State. Such enormous stakes are involved, both for the Venezuelan political system and for the oil companies and the United States, that it would not be strange to see a major political convulsion accompanying the expiration of the concessions. Beyond this, there is the even more serious problem of the decline of Venezuela's oil production capacity as 1983 approaches. This means that present per capita levels of public spending may not be maintained by a spendthrift state that employs a colossal, unproductive bureaucracy just to alleviate the possibility of social disorder. Surely two-thirds of Venezuela's public employees are unnecessary, a form of disguised unemployment absorbed by the government to quiet social unrest. Two-thirds of

the Venezuelan public budget comes from oil revenues, and much depends on the State's capacity to employ people and redistribute this wealth. A blockage of this single channel would plunge the entire society into crisis.

As I said, the MAS is preparing slowly for these years of crisis. The revolutionary organization that we are building faces great difficulties. To reduce our economic problems, we simply have eliminated all party salaries, which we received as professional revolutionaries within the PCV. The MAS eliminated these small salaries because it couldn't pay them. This has created serious difficulties for many of our comrades. Eloy Torres, for example, our veteran labor leader, combines his political and union work with the selling of watches. Others are supported by their wives. This enables the MAS to use all the money it receives for investments in propaganda and political activity. The party apparatus in different parts of Venezuela also has been forced to survive on its own, something very different from PCV days, when they received monthly payments from party headquarters.

On the other hand, no political movement can live without money and we have been relatively successful in raising it. When we left the PCV we kept some party property: houses that were used as hiding places and other artifacts of clandestine life. We sold this property for some \$20,000 to begin our first MAS publicity campaign. The splashy posters that had such an impact, depicting the Venezuelan plutocrats fattening on the work of the poor, cost nearly \$7,000. We have been aided by many important Venezuelans who are MAS sympathizers or members and have donated valuable paintings that we have sold at high prices. We have many friends who are young professionals that have contributed generously, yet our income is still very short of our needs. Our newspaper had to suspend publication for three months in 1972 for lack of money to pay the printer, just at the time when the other parties were starting their campaigns for the 1973 elections. At that time we didn't have the money even to print our political posters for the campaign. In those months the MAS survived by little daily miracles. A great number of MAS cadres are living in extreme poverty. When the PCV divided, some people employed in the PCV apparatus told us, "We are with you but the PCV pays our salary." We are creating a revolutionary movement that requires great sacrifice.

We are making such sacrifices to create a revolutionary organization that would be sufficiently open so as not to attempt to impose a rigid model on the society in which it lives. It would have to be the opposite of a closed and rigid political sect such as a traditional communist party. We have to invent a new kind of organization, and this invention is painful and difficult. We have rejected the traditional organizational form of the party cell, because the cell becomes an isolated and self-centered little world of its own. Instead of being an organism capable of influencing the larger community, the traditional communist party cell is a walled, clandestine compartment, even in periods of legal activity that separates its members from the community and deprives them of their influence over their neighborhood or factory. In the MAS we are establishing a very open organization, with a diffuse line between the sympathizer and the committed activist, erasing the mandarin mentality of the traditional party apparatus. We try not to make distinctions between us and the rest of humanity, just the opposite of what Stalin said in his famous oath at Lenin's tomb, that we are men of a special temper, that we communists are made of a special kind of steel. These pretensions tended to make communists into a separate breed within the human species. We want exactly the opposite. We accept all those who wish to join the MAS at this time. However, since we are very aware that political changes could occur that would force us to return to clandestine activity, we maintain a nucleus within the MAS of tried and true activists that could be prepared to move into clandestine activity on short notice. While we must invent new organizational forms, we realize that policy, not organization, is the fundamental characteristic of any political party, enabling it to become a point of reference to a part of the population. To guarantee that the leadership of the MAS will always be in dialogue with the party's rank and file and with the people as a whole, we are building a very horizontal organization in which the distance between the leadership and its base is very small. We thus eliminate the intermediary authorities of a traditional communist party through which orders and opinions are filtered and power is delegated. From this effort to



move directly toward socialism, a new party is emerging that will strengthen the forces of revolution and populism in Venezuela.

[1] The interview with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza was published in the magazine *Libre No. 3* (1972) and reprinted in the literary supplement of *El Nacional*, Caracas, August 30, 1972.

[2] See my Teodoro Petkoff: *The Crisis of the Professional Revolutionary, Part I: Years of Insurrection* [NG-1-'72], Fieldstaff Reports, East Coast South America Series, Vol. XVI. No. 1. 1972.

[3] The Cuban attacks on the PCV began with some Radio Havana broadcasts and a November 7, 1966 editorial in the Cuban party newspaper *Gramma* which said: "In Venezuela the true Communists decisively support the guerrilla struggle as the only effective way of combating the regime of exploitation which this brother-country suffers." In a speech on March 13, 1967, Castro himself accused the PCV of "cowardice and repugnant opportunism." The PCV's replies are contained in a collection of documents: Pompeyo Márquez, *Una polemica necesaria: Fidel Castro/PCV*. Caracas: Ediciones Documentos Politicos, 1967.

[4] This first episode of AD government began with the October 18, 1945 military coup led by Major Marcos Pérez Jimenez that brought AD to power under the provisional presidency of Betancourt. This three-year "trienio" period ended when Pérez Jimenez executed another coup on November 24, 1948 to oust the seven-month-old regime headed by the novelist Rómulo Gallegos, who was the AD candidate in the 1947 elections.

[5] On May 18, 1966, the PCV politburo denounced Bravo and suspended him from the politburo for issuing unauthorized statements contradicting the party line and endorsing Castro's assertion of the primacy of guerrilla insurrection in revolutionary strategy. Shortly thereafter Bravo and his urban and rural guerrilla apparatus left the PCV and continued insurreccional activity with money, arms, and manpower supplied by the Cubans. Within two years, however, Bravo's movement disbanded in a public quarrel with Fidel Castro after the Venezuelan army inflicted severe defeats on the guerrillas, forcing evacuation of the Cuban contingent that had secretly landed in Venezuela.

[6] Sun Tzu, *El arte de la Guerra*. Translated with an introduction by Teodoro Petkoff from the English version by Colonel Samuel B. Griffith USMC. Caracas: Ediciones La Muralla, 1965.

[7] For a fuller account of the escape from San Carlos, see Guillermo García Ponce, *El Tunel de San Carlos*. Caracas: Ediciones La Muralla, 1968. Also see Petkoff's article, "Como nos fugamos de San Carlos," published in the magazine *Elite* shortly after the escape.

[8] For an account of the police raid that destroyed the last FALN "Strategic Sabotage Command," see my "Last Flickerings of the Armed Struggle?" in *The Economist*. September 30, 1967.

[9] Gustavo Machado was born in 1898 and first Tose to Came in an abortive invasion of Venezuela in 1929 from the neighboring island of Curaçao to overthrow the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935). Machado escaped after the invasion failed, spending years in exile in Panama, Paris, and Bogotá and returning to Venezuela after the dictator's death to help found the PCV and its newspaper, *Tribuna Popular*. He was elected to Congress in 1958 and served until his arrest, with other PCV and MIR parliamentarians, in 1963, for openly supporting insurreccional activity.

[10] For an explanation of his decision to join the MAS, see Pompeyo Márquez, "Del dogmatismo al marxismo critico," in *Libre No. 3*. Paris, 1972.

[i] See José Vicente Rangel, *Expediente negro*. Caracas: Editorial Fuentes, 1969. This is a collection of documents and Rangel's parliamentary speeches on the murder of the PCV leader Alberto Lovera after Lovera's arrest by the DIGEPOL (political police) in 1966.

[ii] See my *Oil and Democracy in Venezuela, Part I: Sowing the Petroleum* and *Part II: The Marginal Man* [NG-1.2-'73], Fieldstaff Reports, East Coast South America Series, V 01. XVII, Nos. 1 and 2, 1973.

[iii] Quoted in my forthcoming article in a November issue of the *New York Review of Books*, tentatively titled "Venezuela: The Prodigal Democracy."