

Venezuela: the last of the liberal democracies?

By DOUG KINCAID
CONTRIBUTOR

If the Carter administration's focus on human rights has won it few friends among military juntas, it has led to a new friendship with Venezuela. Until recently regarded with some

News analysis

hostility in Washington as an OPEC troublemaker, Venezuela is now embraced as one of the few survivors of a nearly extinct species—the liberal democracy in the Third World.

Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez has publicly welcomed the improvement in relations with the United States. He has not, however, lessened Venezuela's support of Third World causes, as was clear during his recent U.S. tour. Speaking to the National Press Club in Washington on

June 29, Perez emphasized his country's advocacy of a new international order free from the present disparities between rich and poor. One area of particular importance, he noted, was the exchange of news and information.

"In Venezuela," Perez said, "in all of Latin America, and further, in the Third World, there is a unanimous conviction that our nations are mistreated and discriminated against by the great means of communications, national and transnational, of the industrialized countries. An active and conscious complicity is attributed to the manipulation of information related to the exploitation of our national resources and of the labor of our peoples. Similarly, the media is chided as indifferent insofar as it does not take us into account except as producers of basic materials to satisfy the needs of the wellbeing or the squandering of industrialized nations."

Perez specifically criticized U.S. news coverage of Latin America as inadequate. He attributed this fault to "ignorance, distance and lack of interest in . . . mutual affairs."

"For all these reasons," he concluded, "we share a desire to create news organizations of the Third World and of Latin America, which may share in the right to inform along with the agencies of the industrialized countries. But, to do it, it is necessary that sufficient space for the information interchange be guaranteed through government treaties."

Ironically, the reports of Perez' speech in U.S. newspapers the following day largely ignored this topic. Instead, they focused on his reassurances concerning oil prices and his support for the Carter policy on human rights.

The Venezuelan president is far from alone in his criticism of the Western news media. Third World leaders have become increasingly resentful of the virtual monopoly over international news flow exercised by the largest agencies. They regard this situation as a vestige of colonialism and seem determined to eliminate it.

Two fundamental concerns have been repeatedly voiced. One is that the Western news media present distorted images of the realities of developing countries. The other is that the

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