

## OSWALDO ALVAREZ PAZ

Governor of Zulia State and Presidential Candidate of COPEI

Oswaldo Alvarez Paz is from an upper-middle class Maracaibo family of professionals, 50 years old and married with six children. Having joined the COPEI party at 14, he studied law in Maracaibo and since then has spent his entire adult life in politics, including 24 years in the Chamber of Deputies, of which for a five-year period in the 80s he was President (ie Speaker)

Sensing the trend in Venezuelan political evolution, in 1989 he moved to state politics and became the first elected Governor of Zulia, the most westerly state, surrounding Lake Maracaibo. (Previously governors were appointed by the President.) His government there earned the reputation of being clean, efficient and business-oriented. He was thus re-elected Governor last December with a huge majority.

On April 25 last, COPEI, which is currently leading in the opinion polls, chose Alvarez Paz as its presidential candidate through the unprecedented device of an "open primary" in which all Venezuelans registered on the voters' lists could vote. More than 2 million turned out, and Oswaldo received an overwhelming majority of 64%, which puts him in a very favourable position for next December's election.

The win is seen as a concrete sign of a real change in the style of political leadership in the country. Oswaldo, although a long-standing COPEI politician, has distanced himself in recent years from the established party hierarchy at a time when public opinion has been swinging against the entrenched character of parties, party machinery and what is pejoratively referred to as the reigning system of "partidocracy". Oswaldo's popular image as a new breed of leader also stems from his articulate, self-confident and charismatic projection to the public.

Alvarez Paz has a strong and well-defined profile with respect to the central policy issues currently dominating public debate in the country. Paramount in his view of government is a pronounced economic liberalism. "I believe in God and in the market", he said in a recent interview. On CAP's much reviled economic reform package he unhesitatingly asserts that it is not the package but CAP's implementation of it that is bad, since the president did not make efforts to secure broad political support for it. Also he categorically places the fiscal imbalance problem, including the need for new taxes, at the top of his list of priorities for governmental action. (Rightly, in our view). He tends to surround himself with, and draw his advice from, technocrats much more than party politicians, and in this regard criticizes CAP for having