The Venezuelan Experience: 1958 and the Patriotic Junta.

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THE VENEZUELAN EXPERIENCE: 1958
AND THE PATRIOTIC JUNTA

A Dissertation

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The Department of History

by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an historical analysis of the political culture of the Republic of Venezuela. Emphasis is placed on the relations between the nation's military and civilian sectors. For most of her existence as a nation-state, Venezuela was governed by individuals in military uniform. For the last eleven years (1958 to the present), civilians have ruled Venezuela. Using an historical approach with minimal assistance from social science methodology, the burden assumed by this study is to explain the reasons which have allowed this transformation to take place.

Militarism is a predominant feature of Latin American politics. It signifies the presence of armed forces in government. In the nineteenth century, the most striking form of Latin American militarism was the caudillo—the boss, the leader, the man-on-horseback, the dictator. Venezuela was no exception. Some of the most powerful dictators in the history of Latin America were also presidents of Venezuela. To 1958, political power in Venezuela was controlled by the armed forces. Civilians in positions of power were not to be found.

Yet, since 1958 and at this writing, civilians are governing Venezuela. The country has experienced peaceful political campaigns, honest elections and parties in power, all without military intervention.
The three civilian presidents of Venezuela since 1958, Romulo Betancourt, Raul Leoni and Rafael Caldera, have performed admirably. Intelligence, wisdom and sobriety have characterized their leadership. Venezuela's many economic and social ills are being challenged to the point where vast strides in education, agriculture, housing and public health are being made. But, the most striking feature of contemporary Venezuela is its political stability and absence of military officers in positions of power.

A primary explanation as to why this transformation in the political culture of Venezuela transpired was the role played by the Patriotic Junta during 1957 and 1958. The Patriotic Junta was an ad hoc committee organized in the summer of 1957 for the purpose of overthrowing the military dictator, Marcos Pérez Jiménez. It was composed of members from Venezuela's four most important political parties, Democratic Action, the Democratic Republican Union, the Independent Committee for Political and Electoral Organization and the Communist Party of Venezuela. By printing and distributing clandestine literature, the Patriotic Junta succeeded in winning wide public approval and support for its stand against the unpopular dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez. On January 21, 1958, the Patriotic Junta called for a general strike which paralyzed the nation. Students and other sympathizers, under the direction of the Patriotic Junta,
brought Venezuela to the verge of social disintegration. With no alternative, the country's armed forces were forced to demand the dictator's resignation. The era of Marcos Pérez Jiménez ended on January 23, 1958.

Throughout the remainder of 1958, the Patriotic Junta, due to its popularity and prestige, continued to exercise considerable influence on Venezuelan politics. Its call for a political truce among individual political parties (in the name of civilian unity) was endorsed openly by the nation's entire ideological spectrum. The Government Junta that replaced the dictatorship was committed to the cause of democracy and representative institutions. When it was threatened by rightist elements in the armed forces desiring a return to military rule, the Patriotic Junta used its influence to rally mass support behind the shaky provisional government.

The Patriotic Junta also exercised a profound impact on the thinking of military officers. The latter realized that civilians were willing and able to fight for political liberty, and, once attained, prepared to defend it. The Patriotic Junta played a very important role in establishing civilian preeminence in Venezuela.
CHAPTER I

A FRAMEWORK

The Republic of Venezuela is the northernmost country of South America. It is bounded on the west by Colombia, on the south by Brazil, and on the east by Guyana, while its northern shores are washed by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean for over 2,000 miles. Its 352,150 square miles of territory—about the combined areas of Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas—make it the seventh largest nation in Latin America. At the time of this writing, the population of Venezuela is approximately nine million. This population is expanding at a rate of over three per cent a year, making Venezuela one of the fastest growing countries in the world.\(^1\)

Regarding religion, Venezuela is predominantly Roman Catholic, the vast majority of its citizens professing this faith. The petroleum industry represents the country's most important economic activity. Among the nations of the world, Venezuela is the leading petroleum

\(^1\)The ethnic composition of Venezuela's population is as follows: 68% mestizo, 20% white, 10% black and 2% Indian; 8% of the total population is foreign born with Italians and Colombians comprising the largest foreign groups. David Eugene Blank (ed.), Venezuela Election Factbook: December 1, 1968 (Washington, D. C.: Institute for the Comparative Study of Political Systems, 1968), 3.
exporter and second leading producer, outranked only by the United States. Politically, the Republic of Venezuela operates under a federal system, that is to say the powers of the nation are divided between two jurisdictions, state and national. The federal union consists of twenty states, two federal territories, a federal district and seventy-two islands in the Caribbean Sea, which are called federal dependencies.²

There is an old saying among the inhabitants of this picturesque nation to the effect that when God was creating the universe and the time came for Him to endow the area which is today Venezuela, He spared nothing. This land was given magnificent mountains, fertile plains, great rivers, tropical shores, a paradisiacal climate and, above, all, great, diverse quantities of mineral wealth. When the time came to designate inhabitants for this majestic land, however, the Lord allotted Venezuela the dregs. In this writer's many conversations with Venezuelans, he found this tale to be a favorite of the older, uneducated citizens. It was their way of explaining why their richly endowed country, until recently, had suffered consistently from tyranny and exploitation.

Taken within the Latin American context, Venezuela has no monopoly on tyranny or exploitation. Indeed, to the scholar, and even to the "man-in-the-street," political instability, violence, revolutions of all varieties, dictatorships and corruption appear endemic to Latin America. But even within this framework, Venezuela has outperformed its neighbors south of the border. A glance at her history establishes Venezuela as the Latin American prototype. Comparatively speaking, no other country in this culture area can claim to have experienced such frequent upheavals, with their attendant bloodshed and destruction, as those which have characterized Venezuelan life; and no other country can claim to have experienced dictatorial rule at the hands of more venal, brutal men than those who have typified Venezuelan leadership.

Modernity has brought little change to the Latin American scene. Violence as a vehicle for political, social and economic change has been on the rise throughout the present decade. In the mid-1950's there was growing optimism for the triumph of democratic civilian governments, due to the ouster of dictators in Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Peru and Venezuela, and to the apparent success of constitutional

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regimes in Brazil, Bolivia and Costa Rica. The problems facing these new civilian governments were awesome. "Archaic social systems, land tenure, illiteracy, rising expectations, inflation, loss of foreign trade, rapid urbanization, and a host of other problems were a nightmare to anyone trying to establish cause and effect relationships." In this decade, the armed forces have unseated, altered or prevented civilian regimes from taking power in Argentina (1962, 1963 and 1966), Brazil (1964 and 1968), Bolivia (1964), Dominican Republic (1963), Ecuador (1961, 1963, and 1964), El Salvador (1961), Guatemala (1963), Honduras (1963) and Peru (1962). Students of Latin America are in general agreement as to why the pendulum has swung back again from constitutionalism to dictatorship. Briefly, the motives of the armed forces in assuming power can be lumped under two broad categories: the military's desire to rule (for whatever reasons), and the poor performance of the civilian governments replaced.

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4Williard Foster Barber and Neale Ronning, Internal Security and Military Power: Counterinsurgency and Civic Action in Latin America (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966), 22. This growing optimism was the main theme in Tad Szulc, Twilight of the Tyrants (New York: Henry Holt, 1959).


Venezuela is notably absent from the list of nations that have undergone military intervention in the present decade. Since 1958, when her last military dictator was overthrown, the Republic of Venezuela has experienced democratic, constitutional, stable government. In her entire national history of over 150 years, Venezuela has never enjoyed such political stability with the concomitant, but hitherto absent, blessings of individual liberty and socio-economic justice. Yet Venezuela has had to face all the problems encountered by her sister republics, plus the added handicap of possessing armed forces with the oldest, most aggressive tradition of military intervention in all Latin America.

Why has democracy endured in Venezuela? Perhaps a more provocative question might be why has democracy endured at all? Both within and without Latin America, theorists long have been grappling with this issue. Until recently, scholars placed a great deal of creditability in the argument that democracy could only succeed in

7By the term "democracy," the author has reference to the very basic connotations of that oft cited term: the right of the majority of the population to choose their leaders, presumably through free and honest elections; and the right of the minority to continue to attempt to become the majority, thus necessitating individual freedom. A similar, accepted definition can be found in Charles O. Porter and Robert J. Alexander, The Struggle for Democracy in Latin America (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 2.
a nation which contained a large middle class. Post-World War II instability and military intervention in Argentina and Brazil, the two Latin American countries possessing the largest middle classes, have shattered the universal applicability of this postulate. These developments caused students of the area to take a closer, more critical, look at Latin America's middle class; and the results were startling.

In a penetrating essay, Jose Nun revealed that Latin America's middle sectors lack the social, programmatic and ideological cohesion of their counterparts in the United States, thus placing them at a disadvantage in competing with the oligarchy and the working classes, who have definite objectives and more homogeneity. The only group representative of the middle sector which possesses the necessary solidarity to overcome the power of its competitors is armed forces. Therefore, whenever the middle classes are threatened, the military will come to their rescue. "In other words... there are enough reasons to see the Latin American middle classes as factors of political instability, whose instrument is the army, and whose detonator is precisely the democratic institutions which these sectors appear to support." Nun's findings are strongly

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supported by Columbia University's Charles Wagley, who concluded that, "It is, however, to be noted that its \textit{middle class} presence in significant numbers in a nation does not correlate necessarily with political stability."\textsuperscript{10}

Closely allied to the belief in a relationship between a large middle class and the success of democracy, and a view which is particularly fashionable today, is the notion of a direct relationship between economic prosperity and democracy, or between poverty and totalitarianism. Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela are the three wealthiest countries of Latin America, yet their historical records of constitutional integrity are among the poorest.\textsuperscript{11} Nor is there any correlation between mass misery and communism. As the Cuban example has demonstrated, communism can be victorious without the active participation of the masses.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, in spite of these historical realities, United States policy toward Latin America,

\textsuperscript{10}Charles Wagley, "The Dilemma of the Latin American Middle Classes," \textit{Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science} XXVII (May, 1964), 311. For a different approach to the idea that the usefulness of the middle class concept has been exaggerated see Richard N. Adams, "Political Power and Social Structures," in Claudio Veliz (ed.), \textit{The Politics of Conformity in Latin America} (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 16.


\textsuperscript{12}Boris Goldenburg, \textit{The Cuban Revolution and Latin America} (London: George Allen, 1965), 344-345.
embodied in the Alliance for Progress, is based on such premises. This policy has led one social scientist to make a strong case for the correlation of economic development and social unrest, and to scold as moralistic and contrary to historical experience this country's belief that the solution to political instability lies in broad development programs.\(^{13}\)

Two other requisites often prescribed as being indicative of a successful democracy are a high level of education and universal suffrage. Concerning the former, Argentina immediately comes to mind. With a literacy rating of over ninety-two per cent, her educational level ranks first in Latin America.\(^{14}\) Yet, at this writing, Argentina is governed by a tight military dictatorship. "Germany and France have been among the best educated nations of Europe, but this by itself did not stabilize their democracies."\(^{15}\)


\(^{15}\)Seymour Martin Lipset, \textit{Political Man} (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), 40.
problem exists when dealing with political participation. "As the events of the 1930's in Germany demonstrated," asserts Seymour Martin Lipset, "an increase in the level of participation may reflect the decline of social cohesion and the breakdown of the democratic process....The belief that a very high level of participation is always good for democracy is not valid." 16

Due to the unique position occupied by the armed forces in Latin America, this discussion would be deficient without some mention of the role of the military vis-a-vis democracy. Generally, Latin America has been regarded, and not incorrectly so, as an underdeveloped area of the world. This description has also been attributed to her military. Until only recently, it was an accepted fact that as this area became better educated, modern, prosperous and industrialized, correspondingly the Latin American military would become professionalized and apolitical. 17 This hypothesis has proved to be only partially correct.

Most authorities agree that since the end of the nineteenth century the majority of Latin American officers have been recruited

16Ibid., 37.

from the middle class, educated in modern academies, and trained in the newest techniques of military science. It has been implied that the interest of the officers would turn increasingly toward matters of a military nature—weaponry, strategy, national security, promotions, pensions and retirement—and less toward politics. Developments, however, have proved the contrary. "Indeed, in recent years, two of the most highly professionalized military establishments in Latin America, those of Argentina and Peru, have been very active in politics."

In attempting to account for this reality, two key explanations have received the most acceptance. The first, meshed with the middle class concept previously discussed, acknowledges that the only institution representative of the middle sector with the necessary cohesion to act decisively is the armed forces. This social link, coupled with the military's monopoly on instruments of violence, has caused the armed forces to become the defender of bourgeois


dominated nations against the leftist led masses. A second reason why professionalization had not led to an apolitical military lies totally within the novel Latin American mold. Historically, this area lacks a tradition of active, external warfare. With the cold war, this tradition has been reinforced by the policies of the United States which has assumed responsibility for the safety of the entire western hemisphere against outside aggressors. The Latin American military, faced with a void uncommon to the armed establishments of most countries, has turned inward. Thus professionalization has strengthened contact between the civil and military spheres, causing Latin America's incongruous, albeit modern, armed forces to continue functioning in their historic role of president-maker. 21 "Professionalism... is no specific for militarism." 22

The point to be stressed now is this: all of the above mentioned concepts--economic prosperity, a large middle class, a high level of education, mass participation and a professional military--cannot guarantee the success of democracy. These qualities are significant because they tend to support democratic values and practices; 23 but


23 Lipset, Political Man, 39-40.
none of these, taken jointly or separately, can bring forth the inception or the maintenance of democracy.

Difficult as it may seem, democracy can and has survived in situations where even these pillars were virtually non-existent. Venezuela since 1958 is a case in point, for "Venezuela appeared to be the most unlikely country for a successful experiment of this kind." 24 Although she ranks first among the nations of Latin America in per capita income, Venezuela's problem is not under-development, but misdevelopment. "This misdevelopment is connected with, and is the result of, the fact that most Latin American countries look more modern than they actually are." 25 Venezuela's high cost of living and extreme maldistribution of wealth force over half the population to live at bare subsistence level. 26 Venezuela's middle class is estimated at twelve per cent of the population, small even by some Latin American standards. 27 At this writing, over


26Lieuwen, Venezuela, 14.

27Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay have substantially larger middle classes. Johnson, "Political Role of the Middle Sectors," 21.
thirty-four per cent of her citizens are illiterate, and it has been only in the last decade that the vast majority of her people have been allowed to participate in her national life. The armed forces of this South American republic have undergone much professionalization, but this has had no visible effect in depoliticizing Venezuela's military. It seems credible, therefore, that "to the extent that the political subsystem operates autonomously, a political form may persist under conditions normally adverse to the emergence of that form."

What is the missing ingredient? What is that elusive quality that can create and support a democracy under conditions seemingly detrimental to its survival? What is that abstract entity that, if absent, can cause democracy to fail in a country that appears to possess all the attributes of the more advanced nations, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, in which democracy has

28 United Nations Statistical Yearbook, XVIII, 81, 742; and Herring, Latin America, 960-961.


31 Lipset, Political Man, 28.
endured? Historians Arthur Preston Whitaker and David C. Jordan call it the "ideology" of nationalism. Seymour Martin Lipset, the noted political-sociologist, calls it "cleavage and consensus." 

Although the approach of Whitaker and Jordan is primarily a priori and political, while Lipset's is more sociological and inductive, both are essentially in agreement on the basic issue of what makes democracy work. Since "Nationalism...is a spirit, not a program; a tool or instrument, not a purpose," Whitaker and Jordan argue that it is a concept which eludes acceptable definition. For this reason, the ideology of nationalism can be understood only as a functioning, mobilizing instrument within a given nation. This ideology, closely associated with the national good, is given legitimacy in observance by the various organizations that impose an identity upon a nation. "Foremost among these in twentieth-century Latin America are governments, trade unions, the military and political parties." Using the 1963 Venezuelan elections as a specific example of how the ideology of nationalism operates, Whitaker and Jordan concluded:

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33 Lipset, Political Man, 1-10.

34 Whitaker and Jordan, Nationalism, 3.

35 Ibid., 28.
Thus, the three largest parties, AD, URD, and COPEI, which stood so close together on major issues, polled 71 per cent of the total popular vote. For what it may be worth, this was evidence of widespread agreement on the direction of Venezuela's . . . nationalistic orientation.\textsuperscript{36}

The key to understanding the Lipset approach lies in the use of two words, cleavage and consensus. Paradoxically, both of these qualities must be present within a nation for democracy to survive. Cleavage, in Professor Lipset's analysis, is tantamount to legitimate conflict. "Surprising as it may sound, a stable democracy requires . . . that there will be struggle over ruling positions, challenge to parties in power, and shifts of parties in office."\textsuperscript{37} Cleavage alone, however, cannot maintain free, representative government; consensus also must be attendant. In everyday parlance, consensus might be labeled the political "rules of the game" of a particular nation. A political system which allows for "the peaceful 'play' of power, the adherence by the 'outs' to decisions made by the 'ins,' and the recognition by the 'ins' of the rights of the 'outs.'"\textsuperscript{38} With specific reference to Latin America, Lipset cites the absence of this "peaceful play of power" as the chief cause of Latin American political chaos.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 137.
\textsuperscript{37}Lipset, \textit{Political Man}, 1.
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 27–28.
Cleavage and nationalism long have been present in Venezuela and Latin America; the ideology of nationalism and consensus have not. As Chapter IV of this study will attempt to demonstrate, the ideology of nationalism and cleavage and consensus have been present in Venezuela since 1958—and so has democracy. The fact that the political culture of the Republic of Venezuela has undergone a traumatic transformation in the last eleven years is beyond dispute. A country that had been subjected to praetorian rule for virtually all of its existence has suddenly achieved a viable, representative form of government.

Although Whitaker, Jordan and Lipset are concerned mainly with the maintenance of democracy and not its creation, both essentially agree that the key to understanding the inception of this political form lies in history. For the historians, "a nation's historical animosities, conflicts, aspirations, and many other factors must be understood for the nuances of meaning and implications of a nationalistic ideology to become clear." Surprisingly, Lipset, a behaviorist, stresses the significance of a nation's historical experiences even more than Professors Whitaker and Jordan. A nation's heritage and characteristics may all point to one kind of political form, yet another form may develop "because of a syndrome

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40 Whitaker and Jordan, Nationalism, 26.
of unique historical factors..."\(^{41}\) For Lipset, the very persistence or failure of democracy in any country depends on the will and actions of its citizens in shaping those key historical events which determine its destiny.\(^ {42}\) It will be the primary purpose of this dissertation, therefore, to uncover, narrate and analyze those "unique historical factors" that gave birth to the Venezuelan democratic revolution.

Due to the nature of this central theme, the author has decided to develop this dissertation within a theoretical framework called political culture.\(^ {43}\) Two motives prompted the insertion of this very recent epistemological concept. The first is that political culture, by definition, emphasizes an orientation which parallels the objectives of this work. The Patriotic Junta was a clandestine ad hoc committee organized in the summer of 1957 for the purpose of plotting the overthrow of the President of Venezuela, the military dictator Marcos Pérez Jimenez (This will be the theme of Chapter V.). Once

\(^{41}\) Lipset, Political Man, 28.


this goal was accomplished, however, the Patriotic Junta, enjoying immense popularity and prestige, became a kind of super pressure group, with every conceivable civilian sector of Venezuelan society rallying to its banner; even the military paid it homage, albeit grudgingly. Thus, by a system of osmosis, all these diverse groups, from poor peasant to high-powered business executive, from student to housewife, adopted the same political and philosophical position as the Patriotic Junta. Stated briefly, (for it will be the primary task of Chapter VI to elaborate this phenomenon), this position was to bring freedom to Venezuela through democratic, representative institutions. Because "the focus on political culture rather than political attitudes implies a concentration upon the attitudes held by all the members of a political system rather than upon the attitudes held by individuals or particular categories of individuals," the usefulness of the political culture concept and its relationship to the germane accomplishments of the Patriotic Junta are self-evident.

The second motive for focusing on political culture is to stress the difference between this concept and the traditionally accepted process of "political development." The objection to political development is that it impedes objective analysis on the part of most

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political observers because of the subjective, axiomatic presence of cultural relativism. The use of political development often leads to an expression of normative preference, which in turn is usually derived from the observer's idealized concept of his own society. A simplification of this problem might read: "When I say political development, I mean democracy; and when I say democracy, I mean current practice in the United States." Past and present United States students of Latin American affairs have been guilty of this conceptual trap. In this composition the term "democracy" will be used solely in reference to a political concept which, within the limits allowed by isolation, is uniquely Venezuelan.

Another consistent error which this dissertation will attempt to avoid is the practice of many Northamerican scholars of speaking

45 The dangers inherent in the use of political development are aired in Pye, "Political Culture and Political Development," 11-12.

46 Needler, Political Development in Latin America, 3.

47 Ibid., 24-25. Complete isolation is impossible. The present fundamental political forms now in use in most Latin American countries were established during the early independence period. This was republicanism as expounded in France and the United States.

48 Following common usage throughout Latin America, this essay will use the term Northamerican when referring to a citizen of the United States of America. This is an assumption, based on cultural rather than physical geography, that North America begins at the Rio Grande. Since Canada is included, North Americans are divided into Northamericans and Canadians. Stanislav Andreski, Parasitism and Subversion: The Case of Latin America (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 1.
and writing of Latin America in terms of continental generalities. 49 These general works have made a contribution in identifying and publicizing various important aspects of Latin American life, but many of the conclusions reached in studies of this type are not holding up under intensive, specialized examination. This is especially valid in the area of civilian-military relations which, due to the ubiquitous role of the Venezuelan military, comprises a substantial portion of this essay. "Professional Latin-Americanists, however, are becoming increasingly aware of the diversity of the area and the quite distinct character of societies and institutions of its component national states." 50 This dissertation, The Venezuelan Experience: 1958 and the Patriotic Junta, is an intensive study of civilian-military relations in Venezuela; it is the sincere wish of the author that this work, in some small way, will further the trend of encouraging Latin Americanists to speak "in rigorously comparative rather than loosely generalizing terms." 51

In all fairness, it should be mentioned that in frequent cases Latin Americanists have been forced from specialized inquiries due


51 Ibid.
to the incomplete nature of available data. Behaviorists trained in modern techniques of empirical research in United States and European universities have been unable to apply their methodology to Latin America. "It requires data that are often meager or non-existent; this is true of all of Latin America in the nineteenth century and most of it in the twentieth century." Making the best use of what was available, students of Latin American politics, to explain why a political system survived or failed, looked at constitutions, judicial structures, parliamentary organizations and other formal apparatus of government. It has been only of late that scholars have turned to the increasingly important infrastructure of politics—those institutions not directly within the government but which play a major role in the decision making process—especially political parties and pressure groups. On the status of stasiological (the study of political parties and pressure groups) research in Latin


53 Whitaker, Nationalism in Latin America, 6-7.

54 Verba, "Comparative Political Culture," 514.
America, one leading political scientist has labeled achievements in this area as "relatively new" and methodological accomplishments, "primitive."  

Students of Latin America's armed forces also are faced with this lack of data. Indeed, it is this area, more than any other, that is the outstanding example of this deficiency. The problem of data collection on the military is compounded by several problems. Because of the nature and functions of these institutions, they are highly sensitive to investigation and tend to surround their activities with security restrictions. Also, in many cases the military is unable to distinguish between scholarly research and espionage, especially if the researcher is a foreigner. Finally, the Latin American military, when and if it decides, is powerful enough to shield itself from any kind of serious examination.

It is hoped that the above discussion will help justify the purpose of this study to those who might question the value of a historian's writing on a subject of such contemporaneity, a subject that has not attained proper historical perspective. Actually, it has been

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55 John D. Martz, "Political Parties in Colombia and Venezuela: Contrast in Substance and Style," *The Western Political Quarterly* XVIII (June, 1965), 318.

56 The author can personally verify the existence of this situation.

57 McAlister, "Recent Research and Writing," 29-31.
the Northamerican historian rather than the political scientist or sociologist who has pioneered inquiry into the problems of Latin America in the twentieth century. Especially in the area of civil-military relations, "historians were first in the field and have produced the bulk of published studies." Even Latin Americans have shown little interest in this topic. This is due partly to the traditional distaste of intellectuals for military institutions, partly to prudence; for in some countries investigation of the military can lead to anguish, and partly because Latin Americans prefer to expend their efforts examining problems over which they have some control.

So, since there is "more than one road to knowledge and perception," the historian and historical methodology stepped into the vacuum created when many social scientists discovered that they would be unable to use the tools of their trade, and when Latin Americans chose to avoid an unpleasant issue.

But there are positive reasons why historians are actively engaged in the study of twentieth century Latin American politics and the role of the military. Concerning political parties and pressure groups, historians can derive much from published political propaganda--clandestine or otherwise--resolutions, platforms and speeches, news

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58 Ibid., 39.
59 Ibid., 29.
60 Ibid., 33.
reports and editorial opinion. This work has relied heavily upon such sources. As for the military, Latin American service journals, upon which this study has based many of its conclusions, can be particularly rewarding. On this matter, Professor Lyle McAlister, a leading expert on the Latin American military, has said:

They [military service journals] frequently include articles and editorials expressing the armed forces' concept of their mission and proper role within the general society... Where materials do not express explicitly military attitudes on non-professional matters, intelligent inference or systematic content analysis may define them. Furthermore, the distribution of contents as between purely technical or professional pieces on one hand and items concerned with national problems on the other provide a gross indication of what the armed forces regard as important. Finally, service journals often contain valuable biographical data on individual officers and historical articles which reveal how the military views its own past. 61

Another reason justifying the presence of the historian in this area, in addition to the availability of traditional sources of information, is that the historian is more catholic in his interest and less bound by intellectual styles. 62 And finally, "while quantification can be most useful... particularly in the present statistical century, the conventionally empirical and intuitive methods of the historian are still indispensable..." 63

61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 29.
63 Whitaker, Nationalism in Latin America, 7.
There are probably other, more internationally subjective reasons why historians are concerned with twentieth century Latin America. Scholars of all disciplines are in unanimous agreement that today Iberia's former possessions in the Western Hemisphere are in a state of almost constant revolution. There are several paths these nationalistic convulsions may take. There is the fascist example set by Juan Peron in Argentina; there is the communist example set by Fidel Castro in Cuba; and there is the democratic, peaceful, evolutionary, effective example set by Romulo Betancourt, Raul Leoni and Rafael Caldera in Venezuela. Venezuela has proved that democracy can cope with the task of solving the problems of this area of the world.

Nevertheless, this author intends the Venezuelan example to be just that, an example. It is presumptuous of anyone to attempt to lecture a nation on how it should manage its political affairs. It is only through the growth of indigenous reform movements that any variety of political democracy can be established solidly in Latin America. The pattern of what happened in Venezuela has not been repeated and probably cannot be repeated elsewhere in Latin America. It was a Venezuelan experience.
CHAPTER II

LATIN AMERICA'S SOLDIERS AS POLITICIANS

Students who study the relationship between the civilian and military sectors of Latin American society never cease to be impressed by one singular fact: with no exception, every Latin American nation has experienced militarism. As used by Latin Americanists, the term militarism has acquired special meaning. It refers to a country's armed forces, or a part of them, taking action against an existing government and assuming political power.\(^1\) By this definition, militarism is not new to Latin America; armed institutions of most of these countries have been ruling their respective nations for years.\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Venezuela is a premier example of this phenomenon. Chapter III of this dissertation gives a brief chronological survey of Venezuela in which the preponderance of her armed forces throughout her history will be demonstrated.
What is new, however, is that through general usage scholars have accepted militarism as the tag for this Latin American reality.³

Despite a long tradition of politicalized armed forces, the study of the role of the military in Latin America, by whatever name, has only recently been accepted as a legitimate and important problem susceptible to scholarly analysis.⁴ "It is more than interesting, it is rather remarkable that Latin Americanists concerned with a region where armies have played pre-eminent roles for a hundred and fifty years should be so dilatory in exploiting this trend."⁵ Of course, this does not mean that the extrapoliitical role of the Latin American military was totally ignored before 1960 and the

³Although militarism has received the endorsement of Latin Americanists (due mostly to the lack of a more suitable term), its usage has not been without significant criticism. Ordinarily, one might think of militarism as connoting a system which glorifies the military way of life, or a society organized along military lines; this is not applicable to Latin America where the primary feature of the military has been its nonmilitary goals. Praetorianism or predatory militarism have been suggested as substitute terms, but militarism remains the most popular. Alfred Vagts, A History of Militarism (New York: Free Press, 1967), 11-13; and Lyle N. McAlister, "The Military Government: Arms and Politics in Latin America, Edwin Lieuwen," Hispanic American Historical Review XL (November, 1960), 588.

⁴McAlister, "Recent Research and Writing," 6.

⁵McAlister, "The Military and Government," 584. For purposes of clarity, the military includes the regular armies, navies, air forces and nationally controlled constabularies of the several nations. McAlister, "Changing Concepts of the Role of the Military in Latin America," 86.
appearance of Edwin Lieuwen's *Arms and Politics in Latin America.* 6

General histories of the area usually had something to say on the subject, but most of this material is unsatisfactory for several reasons. In the first place, comments on the armed forces of Latin America are usually incidental or peripheral to the main theme. 7

Second, these accounts are descriptive and narrative rather than analytical or explanatory. Finally, attention is directed toward the more obvious manifestations of military action, such as the "man on horseback" or *golpe de estado* (Spanish for coup d'etat), instead of the more subtle corporate, environmental motivations causing military intervention. "The political role of the military was acknowledged, described, and deplored.... Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that no 'important books' appeared." 8

This flurry of contemporary interest in the role of the Latin American military did not develop arbitrarily. Several influences contributed to its current vogue. The twentieth century's three world wars, two hot and one cold, have shown that armed institutions are

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6 Edwin Lieuwen, *Arms and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960). It was this pioneer work and its revelations concerning the Latin American military that revealed to scholars the research opportunities available in this area. Professor Lyle N. McAlister has labeled this work, "a consequential book." *Ibid.*, 587.


8 McAlister, "Recent Research and Writing," 5-6.
much more than simple combat instruments. "They are social sub-
systems with a life and rhythm of their own which transcend military
operations and which interact in an infinity of complex ways with
civil society."9 The appearance of a Communist regime in the
Caribbean was another factor creating this new awareness of Latin
America and her military. Recent Cuban history has confirmed the
fact that this area of the globe is destined to assume a key role in
the Cold War and that the armed forces of these nations will deter-
mine largely how this role will be played. Ideally, the military can
act as a defense against external hemispheric aggression and internal
insurgency, while its technical and logistical skills can bring much
desired economic development and modernization.10 However, in
reality, Latin America's armed forces continue to devote more time
to politics and less to those specific functions for which ostensibly
they were created.11 Within this realization lies the profundity of
militarism.

Since 1960, literature on the subject of the Latin American
military has not been characterized by general agreement; rather

10 McAlister, "Recent Research and Writing," 6-7.
11 Between 1930 and 1965, there were 105 successful golpes de
estado. There is no accurate manner of determining how many unsuc-
cessful golpes were attempted. Barber and Ronning, Internal Security
and Military Power, 249-263.
diverse interpretations are the rule. Yet, there are some areas
where a consensus exists. One area of general agreement is that
the genesis of Latin American militarism can be traced directly to
her colonial experience. Another is the effect of the independence
struggle in fostering the military heritage of the colonial epoch.

"It would be an error of the first magnitude, in any attempt to
understand the politics of the Latin American republics, to overlook
the powerful influences exerted on them by three centuries of
colonial rule." 12 From the very beginning, the sixteenth century
Spaniards who conquered and settled the new world were men imbued
with a strong military heritage. 13 The Spain that colonized the
western hemisphere was the Spain of the reconquista. For nearly
800 years, between 711 and 1492, Christians and Moors kept Spain
in a continual state of war. Because of this, Spanish military men
assumed an importance, the consequences of which resulted in the
transfer of this martial mystique to the Spanish American Empire. The
various representatives of the Spanish Crown who ruled the empire

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12 Martin C. Needler, Latin American Politics in Perspective

13 This background discussion of militarism is not relevant to
the Portuguese empire in America (Brazil). This does not mean that
Brazil has been free of militarism, it has not. Brazil's military
tradition grew out of the uncertainties arising from the abolition of
slavery in 1888 and the overthrow of the empire in 1889. John J.
Johnson, The Military and Society in Latin America (Stanford:
possessed both political and military responsibilities. This was true of the powerful viceroys and captains-general, as well as of the intendants and other subordinate officials. "In the colonies political authority and military command were joined; today most of the Latin American republics have still to create a military service separated from politics." Spaniards in uniform also enjoyed special privileges which set them apart from other men. They possessed the fuero militar and cedulas de preeminencias. The fuero militar was a body of laws which gave the military the right to exercise legal jurisdiction over their own membership. When soldiers found themselves in legal difficulties, they would invoke the fuero militar in order to appear before a military court and receive preferential treatment. The cedulas de preeminencia were economic in scope. Soldiers were exempt from paying taxes and levies, immune from debtors prison, and their arms, horses and clothing could not be confiscated for payment of debts unless the royal treasury was the creditor. These immunities even followed members of the military into retirement. The effect of these privileges and


15 Needler, Politics in Perspective, 8.

16 For a scholarly examination of the fuero militar see Lyle N. McAlister, The "Fuero Militar" in New Spain (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1959).
exemptions was that of placing members of the armed forces above the law.\textsuperscript{17}

Spain discreetly avoided developments that might create a military complex among its colonial subjects, but by 1760, a weakened Spain, in an attempt to conserve funds and manpower, resorted to the creation of colonial militia units.\textsuperscript{18} This military build-up was accelerated by the reversals of the Seven Years' War and was accompanied by the extension of the \textit{fuero militar} and \textit{cedulas de preeminencias} to the officers and men of the militia. "As was the case with the armed forces in Spain, the members of the military establishment in the American colonies, by virtue of their military affiliation and immunities, regarded themselves as a superior class."

By 1810 and the beginning of the Latin American wars of independence, fifty years had passed since colonial subjects were allowed to enter active military participation. Speaking in historical terms, this is not an insurmountable amount of time, and whatever military tradition existed might have been erased had the struggle for independence been brief. But it was not brief. Led by the officers and men of the colonial militia, the patriot wars have been described thusly:

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\textsuperscript{17}Christopher, "The Political Behavior of the Military," 18-20.  
\textsuperscript{18}John J. Johnson, "The Latin-American Military as a Competing Group in Transitional Society," 94.  
\textsuperscript{19}Christopher, "The Political Behavior of the Military," 41.
\end{flushright}
They dragged on for fifteen years in the Spanish colonies as armies fought with constancy against primitive forces, against nature, and against primitive men. By the time they were terminated, a generation had grown up inured to brutality and to the resolution of issues by resort to arms. ... The destiny of America had become subjective—military loyalties had become distinct from civic loyalties. 20

When the struggle for independence was completed, the newly created Latin American republics were devastated, physically, economically and politically. 21 With the removal of time-honored Iberian institutions, chaos ruled. Until independence, all power emanated from the crown with authoritarianism and personalism the chief characteristics of Spanish colonial administration. 22 This was now to be replaced by slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity and doctrines of constitutionalism, federalism and centralism. But slogans and constitutions could not fill the vacuum created by independence; 350 years of totalitarian rule was not to be eradicated with the stroke of a pen. "The failure to substitute a universally accepted symbol of authority was the great failure of the independence movement." 23


22 A scholarly account of the authoritarianism and personalism which personified Spanish colonial administration and the almost complete lack of popular participation in the political process can be found in R. A. Gomez, Government and Politics in Latin America (New York: Random House, 1965), 15-19.

Civilians in the immediate post war years, led by Latin America's intellectuals, attempted to guide the political life of the young republics. As students of the Enlightenment, their commitment to liberty encouraged them to look to the French Revolution and the successful North American movement for independence for political ideas. Intellectuals created beautifully written constitutional charters, but these documents "failed to harmonize theory and practice." Independence had abolished the monarchy but retained what is natural to a monarchy—centralism, authoritarianism and aristocracy. This occurred partly because these traits were a way of life for over three centuries and could not be abrogated immediately and partly because of the ideology of the struggle for independence. These wars were not social revolutions. The socio-economic caste system inherited from Spain remained after political emancipation; the wars of independence were conservative movements led largely by conservatives.


Among the conservative elements, the most powerful group was the landed aristocracy. Its primary motive in supporting the independence movement was to end the economic mercantilism of Spain in favor of a more liberal system. When the civilian intellectuals and their well intended documents failed to bring about the stability so necessary for economic profit, and when these theorists and their charters began tampering with social egalitarian ideas, the landed elite turned to the one institution still intact from the colonial period and the wars of emancipation that could provide stability and preserve the social status quo—the military.  

The Catholic Church followed the example of the landed aristocracy. The Church supported the Spanish cause as long as victory seemed possible; but when Spain's defeat became inevitable, she aligned herself on the side of the landed elite, who represented orthodox Catholicism. When most of the constitutions separated church and state and the intellectual leadership began to speak in uncomforting anti-clerical jargon, the Church also turned to the military. In return for preserving her privileges and immunities, the Church gave the military her support as the moral pillar of Latin America. In return for stability and protection for the existing caste
system, the landed aristocracy gave the military its substantial economic backing.

The armed forces did not have to accept the overtures of the aristocracy and the church, but they did. There were several reasons for this. With an end to the fighting, the military began to contemplate their role in the struggle for independence and their place in a peace-time society. The armed institutions of the newly created republics began to picture themselves as suffering hardships, deprivation and exposure, while civilians argued over the spoils. Had not the military given Latin America its freedom? Was it not only right but also necessary that the military have a major voice in determining forms of national organization and in the making of public policy? Civilian politicians had their chance and had failed to create viable political systems. "The national armies, therefore, moved into a power vacuum and proceeded to exercise the political authority which they believed was inherent in their status and mission. . . ."30

The stability of any political system is dependent on its legitimacy, "the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for society."31 The wars of independence destroyed legitimate

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29Ibid., 98.


31Lipset, Political Man, 64.
political power without providing an equally legitimate substitute.\footnote{32Tannenbaum, \textit{Ten Keys}; 146. For an example of the consequences of a legitimacy vacuum outside Latin America see Hans Kohn, \textit{Making of the Modern French Mind} (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1955).} The gap between legal norm and social reality could not be bridged by the new republican constitutions. "Under conditions of this 'legitimacy vacuum,' therefore, all that remained was reliance on naked force..."\footnote{33Needler, \textit{Political Development in Latin America}; 25-26.}

Since power depended upon the political use of force, and the military controlled the instruments of force, the armed forces, by assuming political power, resolved Latin America's crisis of legitimacy.\footnote{34Calvert, "The Typical Revolution;" 88.} This was, and to a great extent remains today, the "supermission" of the military. As defined by a Brazilian militarist, supermission is "the undeniable right of the armed forces to depose the legitimate powers... when the military feels that its honor requires that this be done, or judges it necessary and convenient for the good of the country."\footnote{35Quoted in Charles W. Simmons, "The Rise of the Brazilian Military Class: 1870-1890," \textit{Mid-America XXXIX} (October, 1957), 237.} The fruits of the military's supermission caused the nineteenth century to spawn a generation of armed politicians.

They and their successors were to hold sway in most countries throughout the century carrying on in the normal military-authoritarian tradition inherited from the colonial era and filling the void of experienced civilian leadership.\footnote{36Frank A. Knapp, Jr., "The Meaning of Militarism in Latin America," \textit{Foreign Service Journal} IXL (December, 1964), 20.}
The most striking expression of nineteenth century Latin American militarism was the caudillo. But to refer to nineteenth century caudillism as a form of what twentieth century scholars have labeled militarism is to interpret the latter in its broadest sense. Three factors have apparently caused Latin American literature to refer to caudillism as a phase of militarism. First, the rationale for political intervention is the same, the "supermission" of the armed forces. The military in Latin America, even today, view themselves as the guardian of the nation. Following logically from this self-ordained image is the conviction that they stand outside and above the constitution and the law. Second, in both centuries the soldier has had a poor opinion of civilian leadership. The military's image of elected politicians is characterized by "fecklessness, ineptitude, immorality, and even betrayal." The third feature common to the caudillo and the twentieth century militarist is their control of the means of violence. Both have had sizable armies at their command.

Recent scholarship, however, has tended to differentiate between the nineteenth century caudillo and his twentieth century cousin. Caudillism was born of the profound disorder which followed the

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struggle for independence. It was a political process in which violence was an essential element. It was anarchic, self-generating, instinctively aspirant to the vanished role of the monarchy. Caudillism was highly personal; indeed, it has been labeled "the union of personalism and violence for the conquest of power."\(^{40}\) Personalism as personified by the crown in the colonial era, a strong characteristic of Hispanic culture, was transferred to the caudillo after independence. A caudillo was usually a member of his nation's military establishment, but this was not a necessary prerequisite; many were simply armed chieftains. Caudillism was parochial; the caudillo was a local leader concerned with local matters only. His forces, untrained and undisciplined, were little more than unruly mobs. Through his alliance with the aristocracy, the caudillo was committed to an agricultural-commercial economy and the order necessary for its development.\(^{41}\) Caudillism functioned within an unsophisticated, illiterate, impoverished society, where the great majority knew little and cared less about government and politics.\(^{42}\) The mode of political intervention used by the caudillo was the pronunciamiento. A pronunciamiento transpired when an armed

\(^{40}\) Gilmore, *Caudillism and Militarism in Venezuela*, 7, 47.


leader "pronounced" against the existing government. A clash ensued, with the caudillo usually replacing a helpless civilian regime.  

Twentieth century militarism bears scant resemblance to caudillism. While the caudillo was born of the profound disorder which followed independence, modern militarism has emerged from a society seeking balance and rapid restructuring. The caudillo was provincial, but today's military officer, a member of a modern army equipped with costly armaments and backed by the resources of the state, is national in outlook. In the last century armies resembled mobs; in the present century they are highly professionalized. This professionalization has been achieved through the use of officers and military missions from other countries and greater emphasis on technical training in military academies. "In fact, the technical skills of military personnel have made them the bearers of modernity as represented by industrialization." These developments terminated the agricultural-commercial alliance maintained by the caudillo and the landed elite in the nineteenth century.

Other factors contributed to the fall of the "triple alliance" (aristocracy, church and military) that ruled Latin America in its first

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43Calvert, "The Typical Revolution," 90.

44Gilmore, Caudillism and Militarism in Venezuela, 9.

century of independence. Industrialization brought a source of wealth other than land to Latin America. As the parvenus rose in prestige, the social monopoly of the propertied elite deteriorated. By its very nature, professionalization caused the military officer to identify with industrialism and the growing middle class that accompanied its expansion.\textsuperscript{46} Another reason for this new alignment between the military and the middle sectors was that professionalism led to changes in the composition of the military. With physical and educational qualifications replacing birth as the chief prerequisite for entry into a military academy, members of the middle class soon dominated the officer corps of Latin America's armed forces.\textsuperscript{47}

Just as modernization caused the political impotence of the aristocracy, so did modernity check the political power of the Church. Nationalism came to Latin America in the twentieth century. As in Europe centuries earlier, it caused the international Roman Church to take a back seat to the nationalist ferment which reflected the desires of these countries to attain greater status in the world.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 105.

\textsuperscript{47}Nun, "The Middle-Class Military Coup," 71-72.

"is undoubtedly the major ideology in Latin America today," and the military is closely identified with it.

From the military of Latin America has come both the symbol and advocate of nationalism. For the masses, the armed forces provide a symbol of national pride and power inherent in nationalism. Economically, nationalism in Latin America is committed to terminating economic dependence upon the more prosperous nations of the globe. The military have made the modernization of society their first goal. Their control of organized force, their technocratic training, and their national pride have caused Latin American armed forces to have a strategic interest in the economic advancement of their respective countries. Institutional self-interest and national progress have replaced the personal, parochial caudillo.

As the vehicle for political intervention twentieth century militarism has substituted the more sophisticated golpe de estado for the less subtle pronunciamiento of the nineteenth century. The golpe

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51 Whitaker and Jordan, Nationalism, 24-25.

52 A third method utilized by the military to attain power is the cuartelazo, or barracks revolt. A cuartelazo occurs when a barracks or a military unit of reasonable facsimile declares against the existing government. It is usually successful if enough other units join in the rebellion in order to tip the scales of power. Though cuartelazos have occurred in both centuries, its manifestations are more closely akin to the pronunciamiento than to the golpe de estado. Calvert, "The Typical Revolution," 90-91.
depends on speed. The president and his entourage are seized and hustled out of the country. Simultaneously, the military announces to the nation a previously prepared campaign of vilification and justification. The decision for or against execution of a golpe de estado is usually determined by a joint meeting of the heads of various military branches, army, navy, air force and, depending on the country involved, the national guard. Modernization of the armed institutions of Latin America has brought an end to military-political hegemony of the army.

Just as the method of intervention has been updated, so has the product. The military junta has replaced the heroic leader to whom the armed forces historically surrendered their claims to power.

Above all else, the junta, which ordinarily contains representatives of each branch of the services, suggests that as institutionalization takes place, loyalty of man to man will be slowly transformed into organic solidarity and a collectivist concept, reflecting the growth of a mass consciousness, will be substituted for the traditional individualistic one.

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53 Ibid.


But due to the increasing size and complexity of modern governments, military juntas have had to rely increasingly upon civilian bureaucrats as administrators of public affairs. In the twentieth century, therefore, juntas have tended to be transitional, retaining power until a new government, one acceptable to the military, is chosen.

It seems clear from the above discussion that substantial differences exist between caudillism and militarism. The transitional stage which allowed for this transformation within the armed forces came at the turn of the century. It was juxtaposed by a change in the total environmental make-up of Latin America. The last decade of the nineteenth century is usually accepted as the beginning of the end of feudalistic life in Latin America. It was at this time that the industrialized countries of Western Europe and North America began to look abroad for markets, raw materials and foodstuffs. One of the areas which immediately attracted their attention was Latin America. European and North American investors, along with Latin American entrepreneurs, began mining, ranching and plantation enterprises, railroad and port facility construction and commercial and banking concerns.

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57 Ibid.

58 On many occasions, however, transitional juntas have remained in power indefinitely. Another occasional by-product of rule by a military junta is that an individual member of the junta is able to maneuver into a position of dictatorial power—with the consent of the armed forces, of course. Needler, Political Development in Latin America, 28.
This activity accelerated urbanization and the growth of socio-economic sectors with interests in conflict with those of the rural, agricultural oligarchy.\textsuperscript{59}

The various Latin American republics did not begin this process of modernization simultaneously. Some nations were slower than others in responding to the more mature demands of the twentieth century. World War I, however, provided the needed impetus for the more tardy countries and accelerated progress in those nations where industrialization was already underway.

During that conflict, the countries from which the Latin Americans had become accustomed to buying most of their manufactured goods were unable to continue to provide these products; as a result, the Latin American countries were faced with the alternative of going without or producing these goods themselves.\textsuperscript{60}

The impact on Latin America of the Great Depression and World War II had similar effects and served to increase the pace of modernization.

It was inevitable that these broad social and economic changes, accompanied as they were by the influx of new ideas, would ultimately influence the military establishments of Latin America. The fin de siècle also brought military professionalization. This was part of the general impact on the area from Europe and the United States, but


\textsuperscript{60}Alexander, \textit{Organized Labor in Latin America}, 5.

\textsuperscript{61}\textit{Ibid.}
especially from the former. "At the end of the nineteenth century, French and German missions began introducing modern military methods." The United States concentrated its efforts on training the armed forces of Caribbean and Central American republics, although not always by invitation. World War I, World War II and the Cold War, with their extraordinary military priorities, all have contributed to the continually improved quality of Latin America's armed forces.

The raison d'être of this treatise on the traditional role of Latin America's soldiers as politicians is to demonstrate the decisive part they play in determining the policy directions of their respective countries—as a prelude to a specific discussion on the political influence of the Venezuelan military. Thus far in this chapter, an attempt to remain objective has been made. Militarism has not been praised or condemned, and only areas of wide unanimity among scholars have been evaluated. Professor Lyle McAlister cites these areas of agreement as follows:

It has become less personalistic and more institutional; somewhat less predatory and more oriented toward the solution of national problems; less dependent on the employment of naked force and more prone to rely on manipulation and negotiation; less ready to defend the traditional order and more inclined to support or at least tolerate middle class political leadership.

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62 Lieuwen, Arms and Politics, 31.
63 Ibid., 31-33.
64 McAlister, "Recent Research and Writing," 9.
Yet academic dissension relative to militarism does exist. The most striking area of this factionalism deals with the implications of militarism for the economic, social and political development of Latin America and, for our purposes, Venezuela. Simplified, is militarism good or bad?

Three distinct schools of thought on this matter are discernible. The "traditionalist" interpretation of militarism, the first to appear, can be found in most older Latin American textbooks. The contemporary version of this approach is found in the works of Edwin Lieuwen, the previously cited Arms and Politics in Latin America and Generals vs. Presidents. This view is based on the belief that the dynamic of Latin American history is the struggle for economic development and social reform through democratic, constitutional processes. Militarism has prevented this. Lieuwen acknowledges progressive changes in the Latin American armed forces, but this has not altered the fundamentally predatory nature of militarism.

The "realist" position on the issue of militarism is somewhat less denunciatory of the Latin American armed forces than the traditionalist position. Among historians, John J. Johnson in his already

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65 Ibid., 5-33. This source contains a discussion of these various positions along with other new research developments on the role of the Latin American military.

cited The Military and Society in Latin America has contributed most to the crystallization of this view. This is also the interpretation accepted by most political scientists, among whom Martin C. Needler, Theodore Wycloff and Frank A. Knapp, Jr. are the most noted. According to this concept, militarism is not an obstacle to democracy and social reform in Latin America. Rather, militarism is endemic to the political culture of the area, a culture where political power is based on force and violence. All sectors of society live by this environmental reality; but the military, due to their monopoly of the means of force, enjoy a distinct advantage. The realist position is characterized by an extremely pessimistic attitude toward Latin America's civilian leadership, past, present and future. Given this situation, the realist foresees a positive role for the armed forces of Latin America via civic action type projects. The well trained, efficient military officer is simply better suited for administrative responsibility than the corrupt, vacillating politician.


The third theoretical position on militarism is more analytical than programmatic. José Nun⁷⁰ is associated with this third interpretation, which is highly critical of both the traditional and realist approach. According to Nun, the traditional position is derived from nineteenth century European and United States antimilitarism and, as such, is inapplicable to Latin America. The assumption that civilian rule is indispensable to social reform is not necessarily valid south of the border. Nun contends that the realist view is based on the various experiences of the new emerging nations of Asia and Africa, particularly Nasser's Egypt; and that it does not apply to the Latin American republics. They are not new, each one having an established tradition. While Nun does not advance his own methodology for the study of militarism, the implications of his critique are clear. Latin America is a complex political culture area unlike any other. Objectivity and meaningful solutions will develop only when this postulate becomes the basic analytical premise of Latin Americanists.

With one reservation, it is this last position that most nearly parallels the framework established in the introductory chapter of this study. The basic shortcoming of José Nun's observations is that, for

purposes of analysis, the ideological isolation of Latin American militarism is both impossible and undesirable. Although Latin America is a novel political culture area, she has borrowed many political ideas and practices from Europe and the United States, especially democracy and representative institutions. Over many years, democratic ideology, though treated cavalierly, has become very much a part of the Latin American scene. Political evolution in a democratic direction is becoming more widespread. Ironically, the most conclusive evidence to this effect has come from Latin America's armed forces.

In fifteen out of nineteen coups d'état which took place during the decade 1955-1964, the overthrown government was instead succeeded by a provisional government charged with making preparations for elections within a limited period of time. The striking thing about this pattern of behavior is not that the results of the ensuing elections may sometimes not be respected or that they may be conducted in a partial manner, but that the hold of the norms of democratic ideology is so great...  

The reader should keep this development in mind in relation to the definite conclusions reached in the next chapter.

Chapter III will deal with militarism in Venezuela. It will concern itself with precise examples of militarism that were treated only generally in the present chapter. It will demonstrate both the strong and weak points of the three concepts discussed above. It will present

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cases of military intervention to halt constitutional processes and social betterment, epochs of weak civilian regimes and instances of the soldier as modernizer. From this delineation there will emerge a unique nation with a unique problem of militarism.
CHAPTER III

VENEZUELA'S SOLDIERS AS POLITICIANS

Throughout most of the colonial era, Venezuela was a marginal possession in the Spanish American Empire. The centers of activity in the Empire, Santo Domingo, Mexico and Peru, attracted conquest and settlement because of their mineral wealth and sedentary Indian populations suitable for labor. Venezuela had no precious minerals, and her aboriginal inhabitants, comparatively sparse, were nomadic and belligerent. Economically, therefore, she remained a poor and neglected colony of Spain. Politically, the seven provinces which came to make up Venezuela were administered from external centers of power. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Venezuela was under the jurisdiction of the Audiencia of Santo Domingo; during two periods in the eighteenth century, 1717-1724 and 1740-1777, she was administered by the Viceroyalty of New Granada. In 1777, Venezuela became an autonomous Captaincy-General, a subdivision of the Spanish Empire headed by a military officer. With a fellow officer ruling Venezuela, the colonial militia units formed in the 1760's were able to extend and strengthen their already preferred position. By the nineteenth century, drills, training and especially the extension of
the *fuero militar* to the officers and men of the colonial militia served
to create the basis for a military caste in Venezuela.\(^1\)

When the Latin American wars for independence began in 1810,
Venezuela was the movement's spearhead in South America. Spain's
determination to crush the movement at its origin, and Venezuela's
determination to achieve freedom, caused the latter's movement for
political independence to become the most cruel, bloody and prolonged
of Latin America.\(^2\) The Liberator, Simon Bolivar, a native son of
Venezuela, labeled his country the "barracks" of South America.\(^3\) As
history would record, Venezuela lived up to this epithet.

By 1830, men like Simon Bolivar, Jose de San Martin and Antonio
Jose de Sucre, talented Creoles who might have guided the young
republics into national maturity, were no longer on the scene. Their
places were taken by undisciplined militarists schooled in the violence
of the revolutionary movement. In 1830, with the unifying influence of
Simon Bolivar removed, ambitious *caudillos* brought about Venezuela's

\(^1\)Jose Gil Fortoul, *Historia Constitucional De Venezuela* I
(Caracas, Editorial Las Novedades, 1930), 91-92; Lott, "Venezuela,"
237; Gilmore, *Caudillism and Militarism*, 10; and Lieuwen, *Venezuela*,
23.

\(^2\)Philip B. Taylor, "Democracy for Venezuela?", *Current History*

\(^3\)Lieuwen, *Arms and Politics in Latin America*, 165; and Masur,
*Nationalism in Latin America*, 59.
secession from the Republic of Colombia. (Colombia, created during 1821 and 1822, was made up of New Granada, Venezuela, Panama and Ecuador.) These veterans, who had created the Venezuelan state, wanted to lead and control it.  

In 1960, a Venezuelan author, writing on the subject of civil-military relations within his country, declared:

The history of Venezuela is the uninterrupted struggle of two concepts: civilism versus militarism. These two irreconcilable positions express the drama of the nation.  

At the time it was written, the accuracy of this statement was unquestionable. Nineteenth century Venezuela, however, was another matter. Hostility did exist between Venezuelan military men and her small band of intellectuals, but to say that a constant struggle prevailed between these two groups is a gross overestimation of civilian power. Conflict was present in nineteenth century Venezuela, but it was characterized

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4 Ibid., 19; Gilmore, Caudillism and Militarism, 11; and Gil Fortoul, Historia Constitucional De Venezuela, I, 683-685.

5 Angel Mancera Galletti, Civilismo y Militarismo (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1960), 9.

6 In 1960, the improprieties committed by Venezuela's last military dictator, Marcos Pérez Jiménez, who had been ousted in January, 1958, were still fresh in the minds of Venezuelans. This resulted in much antipathy directed against the military and an increased respect for the civilian elements responsible for the dictator's fall. For more on this subject see Chapter VI.

by caudillos competing for power among themselves—not with civilians. Until well into the twentieth century, "general-presidents" controlled Venezuela through military power; "the unchallenged supremacy of the armed forces has been the chief characteristic of the nation's politics."⁸

Constitutionalism, the idea of limited government, did not flourish in Venezuela. Instead, her political, social and economic institutions have rested upon authoritarian concepts created, enforced and interpreted by the military. The complete lack of respect for democratic, representative government is best demonstrated by a glance at Venezuela's constitutional history. Since 1811, Venezuela has had twenty-six constitutions—the record for our hemisphere.⁹ Dictators manipulated these constitutions to serve their own interest; and this is an important factor in explaining why Venezuelans throughout history have had so little respect for democracy.¹⁰

True, there were civilian directed parties in nineteenth century Venezuela, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. Traditionalist

⁹Lieuwen, Arms and Politics, 165.
¹⁰"When Is a Plebiscite," America XC VIII (January 4, 1958), 386.
¹¹Lott, "Venezuela," 246, 253.
in outlook, the Conservatives were supported by the landed oligarchy and the Church. They favored a strong central government and continued clerical privilege. The Liberals, professing egalitarian, anti-clerical notions, favored decentralized government. Yet the differences between the two parties were academic. Their energies were directed toward mounting the bandwagon of the military officer most likely to defend their position and provide the accompanying spoils.

From 1811, the year of her declaration of independence from Spain, to 1958, when her last military dictator was overthrown, Venezuela had eight civilian presidents. Six of these were puppets, and all eight governed at the will of the military. Of the 147 years between 1811 and 1958, these eight civilian presidents of Venezuela served a grand total of fifteen years. Given this situation, civilian leadership in Venezuela was not vacillating, it was virtually non-existent. "The history of Venezuela can almost be told in the lives of its military dictators."

The first important figure to control the destiny of Venezuela was General José Antonio Páez. From 1830 to 1848, this llanero chieftain and hero of the wars of independence was the master of the

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12 Ibid., 249, 252.

13 Ibid., 245; and Taylor, "Democracy for Venezuela?," 285.

nation. Páez was elected president for two terms, 1831-35 and 1839-44, but he remained the power behind the scenes until 1848. General Páez, a conservative by nature, ruled in the interest of landowners and wealthy merchants. Above all, Venezuela needed internal peace, and this the caudillo provided. Páez began to rebuild the economy, encourage agriculture and enforce greater fiscal responsibility.

By 1840 opposition to the Páez regime had developed in the form of the Liberal Party. The new party's membership was composed of debt-ridden farmers, small businessmen and intellectuals. The farmers and businessmen disliked the economic monopoly of the large landowners and wealthy merchants, while the intellectuals agitated for an end to slavery, wider suffrage and the abolition of capital punishment. In the face of mounting defiance, the Conservative Party found it increasingly necessary to resort to force and electoral fraud in order to resist the Liberal challenge. The elections of 1846 was won by General José Tadeo Monagas, a Conservative. A political crisis was precipitated when it became apparent that Monagas cared more about perpetuating his own power than serving the interest of the conservative

**15**These are not "popular" elections but "indirect" elections. The congress elects the president and the president, in turn, appoints the congress. The disadvantages of this system for the non-incumbent are obvious. Revolution thus becomes the only solution for those desiring political power.

**16**Lott, "Venezuela," 238; and Lieuwen, *Venezuela*, 33-34.
oligarchy. When Conservative ministers balked at his policies, they were fired and replaced by Liberals in March, 1848. As expected, General Páez moved to oust General Monagas, but the latter had been building up his military backing and was ready. Páez was defeated in 1848 and exiled in 1850.  

José Tadeo Monagas was the chief caudillo of Venezuela for a decade. From 1848 to 1858, many of the planks in the Liberal Party platform became law: abolition of slavery, abolition of capital punishment, extension of the suffrage and limitation of interest rates. Though noble in intent, many of these reforms were meaningless due to the President's refusal to respect routine processes and liberties. The Páez administrations, though tyrannical, were devoted to promoting the national welfare; under Monagas, "the economy began to stagnate and decay; continuous deficit financing ruined the nation's credit." 18

In 1850, Monagas placed his brother, José Gregorio Monagas, in the presidential palace, and, in 1854, José Tadeo assumed the presidency for another four years. In 1857 a new constitution was drawn up which placed no restrictions upon re-election and extended the presidential term to six years. This obvious attempt to establish a Monagas dynasty was too much for the already disgruntled Liberals. Conservatives and

17 Lott, "Venezuela," 239; Lieuwen, Venezuela, 35-36; and Gil Fortoul, Historia Constitucional De Venezuela, II, 222-225.

18 Lieuwen, Venezuela, 36-37.
Liberals joined forces and brought the dictatorship to an end in March, 1858. The inability of the two parties to agree on a form of government plunged Venezuela into five years of bloody civil war, the Federalist War.\(^\text{19}\)

The main issue that precipitated the Federalist War, federalism versus centralism, was artificial. The real struggle was between rival caudillos seeking to control the nation. The course of this war is extremely complicated. Suffice it to say, it was excessively cruel, with the central government exchanging hands numerous times.\(^\text{20}\) By 1863, the forces of the Liberal Party were victorious and a federal system was adopted, with a new constitution promulgated in 1864. But a federalist constitution, coupled with control of the capital and national government by the Liberal Party, did not bring peace to Venezuela. The propertied elements, in league with regional caudillos, ruled the provinces independently of the federal government, while the latter was militarily unable to require the rest of the country to cooperate in national affairs. Real tranquility did not come to Venezuela until 1870, when Antonio Guzmán Blanco, the Liberal politician-general, was able to establish personal hegemony over the nation.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 37-38; and Lott, "Venezuela," 239.

\(^{20}\) An excellent account of the Federalist War can be found in William D. and Amy L. Marsland, *Venezuela Through Its History* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1954), 169-188.

For eighteen years Antonio Guzmán Blanco was the undisputed master of Venezuela. He "probably did more to modernize Venezuela than all other leaders combined in the century following independence." A system of public primary education throughout the country was established, and state support was extended to secondary and professional schools and to the Central University in Caracas. Guzmán Blanco put the nation's economy in order. Some methods used to achieve this were as follows: public works were initiated; port facilities were improved and major cities modernized; railroad and road construction was subsidized; customs duties were reduced, causing increased revenue through a higher volume of trade; graft and corruption were severely curtailed; and foreign investments were encouraged.

It was in the area of church-state relations that the caudillo introduced his most far-reaching reforms. A Mason and extreme anticleric, Guzmán Blanco dealt a blow to the power of the Venezuelan Catholic Church, from which it would not recover until the 1960's.

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25 Díaz Sanchez, Guzmán, 543-546; "Five More Years, Time LXX (December 30, 1957), 30. For an examination of the resurgence of the church as a political force in contemporary Venezuela see Chapters VI and VII.
Compared to her role in other Latin American countries, the influence of the Church in Venezuela was never particularly strong. This was due to clerical resentment "springing from the Church's support of the Crown in the struggle for independence and its identification with the oligarchic forces of society."\(^{26}\) Whatever political influence the Church possessed prior to 1870 was completely extinguished by the church-state legislation of Guzmán Blanco. Church property was confiscated, marriage and the registration of vital statistics were secularized, religious ceremonies outside church buildings were prohibited, and Protestant sects were encouraged to send missionaries. "The Church in Venezuela never fully recovered from the ferocious attacks he made upon its wealth, its position in education, and its spiritual and moral influence over the people."\(^{27}\)

On the surface it seemed that Venezuela had entered a new era, but the reforms of Antonio Guzmán Blanco were superficial. The admirable educational programs initiated in his early years of power were not sustained. It soon became apparent that his stern fiscal policies and demands of bureaucratic honesty were not to benefit the country but to improve his own opportunities for graft. Most of the public works

\(^{26}\) Lott, "Venezuela," 252. For a brief discussion of the political role of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America see Needler, *Politics in Perspective*, 42-44.

\(^{27}\) Lieuwen, "Political Forces in Venezuela," 352-353; and Lott, "Venezuela," 239.
projects inaugurated by Guzmán Blanco became statues and monuments to himself. Finally, even his persecution of the Church stemmed more from his desire for self-deification than from any personal religious convictions. "In sum, though Guzmán Blanco's rule had positive aspects, on balance his was a regime that brought few lasting benefits to the nation."28

In 1888, the caudillo was overthrown by old age, bad health and the forces of opposition. He died shortly thereafter. Four years of chaos and confusion followed the ouster of Guzmán Blanco, for "he had suppressed, not destroyed, the spirit of disorder and barbarism, and once his iron hand was removed, it sprang up all over Venezuela until cruder and heavier fists rammed it down again."29 It was not until 1892 that General Joaquín Crespo was able to muster enough military backing to impose his will upon the nation. Corruption and inefficiency characterized the seven year rule of Crespo. In 1899, the Crespo government was overthrown by an army headed by General Cipriano Castro, the "Lion of the Andes."30 This was the beginning of the "Tachira Dynasty."

The Venezuelan state of Tachira is located in the extreme southwestern section of the country. It borders Colombia and lies in the

28 Lieuwen, Venezuela, 41-42.
30 Lott, "Venezuela," 240; and Lieuwen, Venezuela, 43-44.
foothills of the Andes Mountains. When Cipriano Castro seized the presidency in 1899, he inaugurated a fifty-nine year period of almost unbroken rule by military officers from Tachira: Castro, 1899-1908; Juan Vicente Gómez, 1908-1935; Eleazar López Contreras, 1935-1941; Isaiás Medina Angarita, 1941-1945; and Marcos Pérez Jiménez, 1948-1958. The administration of the "Lion of the Andes' was "characterized by administrative tyranny, inefficiency, graft and extravagance, by financial chaos, by almost constant domestic revolt, and by frequent foreign interventions." Personally, Castro's constant dissipation and inebriation resulted in collapsing health and caused the andino to seek specialized medical treatment in Europe in 1908. While he was abroad, his vice-president and chief lieutenant, General Juan Vicente Gómez, assumed the presidency and invited the deposed leader to remain permanently in Europe.

For the next twenty-seven years, Juan Vicente Gómez, the "Tyrant of the Andes" or the "Democratic Caesar," as his detractors and

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32 Lieuwen, Venezuela, 44.

panegyrist respectively dubbed him, was the undisputed boss of Venezuela.\footnote{Unfortunately there is no scholarly study available on Juan Vicente Gómez. A highly critical but journalistic examination of Gómez is Thomas Rourke, \textit{Gómez: Tyrant of the Andes} (New York: William Morrow, 1936). A reply to Rourke and representing a laudatory analysis of Gómez is Pedro Manuel Arcaya, \textit{The Gómez Regime in Venezuela and Its Background} (Washington, D. C.: Sun Printing, 1936).} During the Gómez years, 1908–1935, "Venezuela was in the grip of the most heavy-handed and ruthless dictatorship in its history.\footnote{Lott, "Venezuela," 240.} Venezuela was managed as the private estate of Gómez and his family. The choicest estates were confiscated and became their personal property. Since there was a complete absence of civil and political liberties, even the historic Conservative and Liberal Parties disappeared. The key to the caudillo's power was a well-disciplined army officered with andinos, an elaborate spy network, and brutal, terrifying torture chambers for those who dared criticize Gómez or his administration. Perhaps the chief contributions of Gómez were an extensive highway system and internal stability, which allowed the economy to prosper. Neither aided the people of Venezuela. The new network of roads was built to enable the army to move promptly to any part of the republic where revolt threatened. Gómez-imposed stability allowed a nascent petroleum industry to develop, which soon brought fortunes to the president and his Tachira cabal. Nothing was done to elevate the Venezuelan people: living standards were miserable, agriculture and industry remained primitive,
health and education degenerated, and government housing was non-existent.\textsuperscript{36}

The philosophic rationalization of the Gómez regime was supplied by his Minister of the Interior, Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, in his book called \textit{Césarismo Democratico}, issued by the government in 1929.\textsuperscript{37} It was an effort to justify the monolithic rule of Gómez and Venezuela's caudillistic past. According to this philosophy, dictatorship was the only form of government suitable for Venezuela, due to the unsettled nature of its people. The authority of the Venezuelan caesars derived from "democratic" origins. Since Venezuelans instinctively turned to strong, sagacious leaders, the democratic caesar always represented, albeit unconsciously, the will of the people. He was, therefore, democracy personified. The absurdity of this collation between caudillos and democracy is obvious, for Gómez and most of Venezuela's dictators never had any concern for the underprivileged majority and never attempted to alleviate social inequities.

What the anti-aristocratic dictators did was to stimulate vertical mobility; they expelled their enemies from the ranks of the privileged, and brought in some of their formerly impecunious friends... and became founders of new aristocratic lineages.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Ibid.}, 240-241; Lieuwen, \textit{Venezuela}, 46-50; and Martz, \textit{Acción Democratica}, 300.


It was under Gómez that oil was first discovered and extracted in Venezuela. By 1930, she had become the world's second leading producer. This new economic development brought in so much wealth that it enabled Venezuela to retire her national debt and Gómez to survive the world depression which began in 1929. Foreign oil companies "had what they considered an ideal industry-government relationship. This consisted of almost complete freedom of action, dealing only with the dictator, and making a farce out of the law when the occasion demanded."39 The tremendous petroleum revenues were siphoned off by Gómez, his family and the army; the country and its people derived little benefit from them.40

On December 17, 1935, Juan Vicente Gómez passed away peacefully in his sleep.41 Venezuelans reacted to the news of his death with celebrations, looting, riots, demonstrations and, above all, a demand for restoration of civil liberties. With the iron fist of Gómez removed, Venezuela began a process of political, social and economic modernization that most of her sister republics had experienced a generation earlier. The seeds of this transformation had been planted during the Gómez era.


40 Ibid., 118-119; and Lott, "Venezuela," 241.

41 Lieuwen, Venezuela, 50-51.
Economically, Venezuela under Gomez had evolved from an agrarian to a mineral based economy, primarily because of foreign investment. However, Gomez was not the first president to encourage international investment. Throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, foreign investment had supplied the finances and technology necessary to bring Venezuela's agricultural products to the international market, as well as the necessary transportation and communications. With the discovery of oil during the Gomez regime, a shift in the resources exported occurred as foreign capital and technology turned to petroleum. As years passed, the Venezuelan economy became less diversified, more extractive, totally dependent upon oil and, therefore, highly vulnerable to world economic fluctuations.

Of particular importance to this study are the military reforms of Juan Vicente Gomez, which resulted in the complete transformation of the Venezuelan armed forces. Gomez was shrewd enough to realize that his retention of power rested on his ability to suppress rival caudillos. Using the ever increasing revenue from petroleum, he set about expanding and modernizing the Venezuelan military to an extent that no would-be aspirant dared challenge his supremacy. Gomez established the first Venezuelan military academy. A German trained

Chilean military mission was employed to run the school and undertake the professionalization of the army. After World War I, the most promising young officers were sent to Europe for advanced training, while French and Italian airmen were brought in to establish an air force. With loyal Tachira partisans commanding all key posts, Gómez truly became a national caudillo.  

Ironically it was the military reforms inaugurated by her most powerful caudillo that contributed most of the termination of caudillism in Venezuela. Gradually the cadets produced by the Gómez-built military academies began to develop a concern for status, adequate weapons and advanced training.  

Military men could become caudillos, but only at the sacrifice of their military character. Caudillos could become military men, but only at the price of professionalization. . . If the caudillo-become-military man desired to continue his political activity it would necessarily be through the military institution.  

Ever since independence caudillism had been the dominant trait of Venezuelan politics, but, by 1935, "Caudillism had been replaced by something approaching true militarism." The accessory characteristics of caudillism (violence, nepotism, oligarchy and a pre-industrial
economy) had been replaced by the complex demands of modernization; industrialization, urbanization and a growing middle class.47

Yet, just as a void of representative civilian leadership existed after independence, a similar void appeared in 1935. Due to the oppressive Gómez dictatorship, organized civilian groups capable of dominating and stabilizing the political process, political parties and pressure groups, professional and student organizations, labor unions and a domestic-commercial lobby, were either absent or inchoate. The only pressure group possessing the effective solidity necessary to dominate and stabilize the nation's politics was the new modernized armed forces of Venezuela. Caudillism had filled the power vacuum created by the passing of the Spanish crown; militarism was now to fill the power vacuum created by the passing of caudillism.48

Venezuela, however, was not sufficiently removed from its caudillistic past to discard entirely its legacy. The decade from 1935 to 1945 served as a transitional period in the development of Venezuelan militarism. The oligarchy which held economic and social hegemony in Venezuela under Gómez, though weakened by the rise of new sectors that accompanied modernization, was still a power to be considered;


it demanded a continuance of the status quo. Of critical importance for the future of Venezuelan politics was the military. During the administrations of Eleazar López Contreras (1935-1941) and Isaías Medina Angarita (1941-1945), there transpired a piecemeal accumulation of resentment between the young, highly trained officers of diverse social background and the many illiterate, politically appointed gomecista veterans. These young turks would have to wait ten years for their opportunity. In 1935 the key to power, the Venezuelan armed forces, remained in the hands of the Tachira lieutenants of Juan Vicente Gómez. The old order was crumbling, but the new order was not yet ready to assume control.

General Eleazar López Contreras, Minister of War under Gómez and a fellow andino, became the new strong man of Venezuela. He assumed control upon the death of his Tachira comrade in 1935. A gomecista Congress elected him for a full five year term commencing in 1936. For a time López Contreras acquiesced to the formation of political parties, organized labor unions and student groups that followed the return of civil liberties caused by the death of President Gómez. It was not until early 1937 that the new president felt secure enough to check the growth of popular political participation

49 Martz, Acción Democrática, 301.

in Venezuela. Labor unions were outlawed, student leaders were exiled or imprisoned, and all political parties were declared illegal with the sole exception of the president's own party.51

Yet López Contreras was no Gómez. "He was more civilized and progressive... and his regime reflected the difference."52 The López Contreras government inaugurated the first "National Plan" for economic development. The vital provision of this plan was to "sow" the petroleum—use Venezuela's petroleum revenue to stimulate underdeveloped areas of the economy. The revelation of Gómez's corruption and oil company collusion and the example of Mexico's nationalization of foreign oil companies caused public opinion to back López Contreras in his successful attempt to raise the share of oil profits from seven to nearly seventeen per cent.53 He also initiated a program of domestic improvement which included construction of schools, docks, highways and needed public works.54 In 1941, López Contreras' choice as his successor was General Isaías Medina Angarita, Minister of War

51 Lieuwen, Venezuela, 53-54.

52 Marsland, Venezuela, 251.

53 Feinstein, "The Role of Foreign Investment," 189.

and fellow andino. The Congress dutifully complied and the Tachira establishment was perpetuated.55

Personally, Medina Angarita was easygoing and far more liberal than his two immediate predecessors. Political parties were allowed to organize and function; and many were allowed to win seats in the Congress. A minimum of labor organization was tolerated, and the first social security and income tax laws were introduced. Many of these programs were financed by a new law of 1943 regulating foreign oil companies in Venezuela. The government's share of petroleum profits was increased from nearly seventeen to thirty-two per cent. Politically, however, Medina Angarita's liberalism had its limits; and, as 1945 rolled around, he began lining up support for his chosen successor.56

The traditionalist elements of Venezuela, the large landowners and some senior army officers, were very unhappy with President Medina Angarita's libertarian tendencies. All of the officers from Tachira, and especially ex-President López Contreras, had a more personal motive for being unhappy with the President. Medina Angarita had violated the code of the purple (Purple is the color of Tachira). Since the days of Castro, men from Tachira controlled

55Lott, "Venezuela," 241; and Marsland, Venezuela, 251.
56Blank, Venezuela Election Factbook, 8-9; Marsland, Venezuela, 252; and Lott, "Venezuela," 242.
Venezuela, "when one Tachirense died or retired, another Tachirense took his place." But Medina Angarita surrounded himself with intellectuals from Caracas, and his fellow andinos seethed. By 1945, the rift between López Contreras and the President was complete. Obviously, Medina Angarita's control of the Congress and the electoral machinery was sufficient to elect constitutionally his chosen successor.

Force of arms seemed to be the only alternative of the Venezuelan "right," which lined up behind the candidacy of López Contreras. 58

"During the summer of 1945 the nation was tense amidst rumors that the pax tachirense, which had enforced political order ever since the turn of the century, was about to be broken by civil war between the lopécistas and medinistas." 59

In October, 1945, President Medina Angarita, concentrating upon the threat from the right, was overthrown by a golpe de estado led by a group of young officers and supported by the Venezuelan "left."

Venezuela's transitional period from caudillism to militarism was over, for this 1945 coup had all the qualities of contemporary militarism. The movement was conspiratorial; the golpe had been carefully planned. The President (and López Contreras for good measure) were quickly

57 Marsland, Venezuela, 252.
58 Ibid.
59 Lieuwen, Venezuela, 62-63.
arrested and exiled. The junior officers occupied the key communication centers of the country and announced to the nation their motives: to institute universal suffrage, install civilian government, promote constitutional reform and create a professional, apolitical military. They denounced any intention to rule themselves. The rebel officers set up a provisional junta to run the country and, to most people's surprise, allowed a civilian, Romulo Betancourt, to become provisional president. 60

In 1944, for a variety of reasons, the rebellious young officers (none ranked above major) had formed the Patriotic Military Union (UPM) which spearheaded the movement to overthrow President Medina Angarita. Its three most important members were Majors Carlos Delgado Chalbaud and Marcos Pérez Jiménez and Captain Mario Vargas. To instigate a purely military coup would have been inconsistent with the aims of the UPM; so the young officers invited Venezuela's best organized political party, Democratic Action (AD), to become a co-conspirator. As expected, the leadership of Democratic Action, long vocal in their denunciation of military rule, procrastinated; but, when it became evident that the UPM would act, regardless of AD's decision, the latter decided to accept the offer. Thus, Romulo Betancourt, the

leader of AD, was allowed to become the provisional president of Venezuela in October, 1945.\footnote{Lieuwen, \textit{Arms and Politics}, 84; and Marsland, \textit{Venezuela}, 253–254.}

It truly seemed as if Venezuela had entered a new era. The armed forces had pronounced for representative, democratic government; the will of the many and not just the few finally would be realized. Yet ample cause for pessimism existed, for the ostensible motives of the UPM in ousting the President were designed simply to attract wide popular approval. Their ulterior reasons, according to one Venezuelan authority, were as follows:

Gomecista holdovers refused to retire; promotions were slow or non-existent; technical improvements were blocked by superior officers; a wide variety of military reforms were rejected by the leadership. Salaries for middle- and junior-level officers were low, and prospects of raises were slight. Comparable military men elsewhere in Latin America were proceeding with alterations and a general modernization that seemed possible in Venezuela. In short, a stagnation existed which these officers were determined to dispel.\footnote{Martz, \textit{Accion Democratica}, 302.}

The pessimism referred to above is derived from the corporate designs of the UPM. Their primary motive for intervention was not patriotism; it was institutional self-interest.

Nevertheless, for the moment, Venezuela would be governed by an administration staffed by civilians and oriented toward democracy. The provisional government lasted from October, 1945, to February, 1948. It was run largely by members of Democratic Action; AD's
program became the government's program. There was complete political freedom, and political parties mushroomed in size and number; vast strides were made in education; Venezuela's prostrate agriculture was revived; domestic industry was encouraged by the state; labor was encouraged to organize; the Ministry of Health's budget was quadrupled; real agrarian reform was introduced; universal suffrage became a reality; and elections were honest and their results respected. On December 14, 1947, for the first time in history, Venezuelans went to the polls en masse and elected a president. Their choice was Romulo Gallegos, the AD candidate, a novelist and elder statesman. He was inaugurated on February 15, 1948.63

President Gallegos' term was halted on November 24, 1948, when his legal, constitutional, democratically-chosen administration was overthrown by a military golpe de estado. Once again the military had corporate reasons for intervention, yet this undertaking was not without considerable civilian support. Democratic Action's program and its implementation alienated several elements of the civilian sector. Its revolutionary plan of agrarian reform caused the large landowners to become the government's most bitter antagonists. Industrialists voiced predictions of social upheaval as the strength of organized labor increased. The military also received urging from a new, unexpected

63Lott, "Venezuela," 242; Lieuwen, Venezuela, 75-87; and Marsland, Venezuela, 255-258.
source, Venezuela's nascent political parties, especially the Democratic Republican Union (URD) and the Independent Committee for Political and Electoral Organization (COPEI). The AD government of 1945-1948 was highly partisan. Patronage was monopolized; URD and COPEI were allowed no part in administration; and with AD's electoral base growing rapidly due to its grass roots reform program, the position of Venezuela's opposition parties would remain hopeless unless a change occurred. The armed forces of Venezuela would probably have acted against President Gallegos with or without civilian encouragement. Nevertheless, civilian discontent undoubtedly served as a catalytic agent for the military.

The stated motives of the military in justifying their action were altruistic:

The armed forces dissolved Acción Democrática because it attempted to incite the people to conduct a general strike of a political nature, because it tried to destroy the institutional essence of the armed forces and convert it into an instrument of their design, and because an extremist faction of the party was attempting to maintain itself in power by diverse means of social disintegration.

This situation caused the armed forces to assume control of the government in order to stop the political chaos.  

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64 Lieuwen, Venezuela, 74-89; and Marsland, Venezuela, 257-259. Civilian groups urging the military to intervene in their nation's politics is a frequent occurrence in Latin America. For an examination of this problem see Johnson, "The Latin American Military as a Competing Group in Transitional Society," 124.

Romulo Betancourt, speaking for AD, countered:

Democratic Action did not have an inflexible hostility toward the armed forces.... But we recognized that the army's only function was that assigned it under legal democratic processes, that is, that of an institution of a professional and technical character, subordinate to the executive power, entirely removed from politics. 66

AD was faithful to the above stated position vis-a-vis the armed forces. It catered to demands of the younger officers by publicizing this view, cashiering most of the officers above the rank of major, granting liberal salary increases, and sponsoring improved living and training facilities for the military. In spite of this program, the military became increasingly apprehensive toward AD, for many officers believed the government, if permitted, would destroy their status by creating some sort of civilian militia as a counterweight to the armed forces. 67

Three years of democratic, civilian government in Venezuela, of whatever quality, was not enough to change the political habits of the military. Backed by over a century of tradition, the armed forces of Venezuela were not prepared to support the government; they wanted to be the government.

A full-fledged military junta was set up to replace the Gallegos government. The junta was composed of three officers, two of whom

66 Betancourt, Politica y Petroleo, 461-470.

had been leaders of the UPM. The president of the junta was Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Delgado Chalbaud; the other members were Major Marcos Pérez Jiménez and Lieutenant Colonel Luis Felipe Llovera Paéz, both from Tachira. Most of AD's reform program was abandoned by the new government. Labor unions were abolished and most of their leadership imprisoned or exiled, agrarian reform was halted completely, advances in education, deemed dangerous to the social order by the military, were severely curtailed and AD was outlawed. 68

Venezuela's peasants, industrial workers and students had gained much under AD. It was these three elements, representing far over fifty per cent of the Venezuelan population, that would suffer most under the decade of military rule that followed 1948. 69 The great masses of Venezuelans came to realize the importance of having a government sympathetic to their plight. Three years of civilian government had accelerated the revolution of rising expectations in Venezuela. Momentarily, this hitherto oppressed mass of Venezuelans had experienced social and economic betterment; they would remain a source of dissatisfaction and unrest to an indifferent military regime. Even Venezuela's small but growing middle sector, politically connected with URD and

68 Holmes, "Army Challenge in Latin America," 184; Lieuwen, Venezuela, 89-91; and Blank, Venezuela Election Factbook, 10.

69 For a closer examination of the 1948 Venezuelan coup as a holding action for the "right" against pressures from the "left," see Lieuwen, "A Revolutionary Force," 32-36.
COPEI, eventually would become alienated from the military government that it had encouraged in 1948. The chance of attaining power under AD had been slim; under the military it became impossible. By 1948, and to increasing degrees thereafter, socio-economic justice and political liberty became identified with civilian rule.

The military junta ruled Venezuela until November 19, 1950, when its head, Lieutenant Colonel Delgado Chalbaut, was assassinated under mysterious circumstances. Marcos Pérez Jiménez became the new strong man of Venezuela. In keeping with constitutional procedure and practice, the military regime called for national elections on November 30, 1952. A pro-government party was formed, the Independent Electoral Front (FEI), whose candidate was the now Colonel Pérez Jiménez. So confident was the government of victory, that it allowed URD and COPEI to campaign and enter their respective presidential candidates, Jovito Villalta and Rafael Caldera. Villalba and Caldera campaigned vigorously. URD's program demanded drastic reform, while COPEI called for a more

70 Delgado Chalbaut's assassin was Rafael Simon Urbina, a soldier of fortune, who was subsequently shot "while trying to escape." These bizarre circumstances cast much suspicion on Venezuela's new strong man, Marcos Pérez Jiménez. Most of the questions raised concerning this episode are still unanswered. For an interesting treatment of Delgado Chalbaut's assassination set against a backdrop of international oil intrigue between Royal Dutch Shell and Standard Oil see Herbert Wendt, The Red, White, and Black Continent: Latin America—Land of Reformers and Rebels (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 169-170.

71 Lieuwen, Venezuela, 90-91.
moderate reform government. The elections were conducted under the AD-authored constitution of 1947, which permitted universal suffrage. The results were a farce. When returns indicated that URD would win by a landslide, the government slapped a tight censorship on all election news. On December 2, the government announced that Marcos Pérez Jiménez had been elected. The following year a new constitution, enhancing the power of the president, was promulgated, URD was outlawed and Jovito Villalba joined Romulo Betancourt in exile. Once again a native son of Tachira ruled Venezuela.

Colonel Marcos Pérez Jiménez was not a caudillo, but a military officer ruling in the name of the armed forces. He was quite cognizant of the fact that his base of power was the armed forces and that he would remain president only as long as he held the loyalty of the military. With this in mind, P. J., as he was referred to by most Venezuelans, set out to keep the armed forces as contented as possible. Most of Venezuela's $2 million-a-day oil royalties were spent on the military. Officers' salaries were raised to seductive levels, and United States arms shipments were supplemented with the finest foreign manufactured equipment, including British-made jets. Officers occupied

72Lieuwen, Arms and Politics, 87.

the most important and lucrative government positions. It was not unusual to find military bases with famous paintings in each room, Persian rugs on floors polished like mirrors, crystal chandeliers, and great windows with silk damask drapes. Since many officers were not allowed in the more aristocratic country clubs of Venezuela, P. J. built the $10 million Circulo Militar in Caracas, the most sumptuous officers' club in the world. It is "Latin America's most expensive monument to the inferiority complex of officers."74

The philosophy of the Pérez Jiménez regime was the "New National Ideal." It was provided by P. J.'s close friend and advisor, Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, son of the Gómez apologist of the same name who created the democratic caesar concept.75 The thesis of the New National Ideal was simple: Venezuela's greatest need was economic progress, and since she was not ready for democracy and representative institutions, a dictatorship committed to economic advancement was the best possible government for her. In the words of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, the New National Ideal was dedicated to the following program:


75Martz, Acción Democrática, 94.
The moral, intellectual and material improvement of the inhabitants of the fatherland and the rational transformation of its physical environment, to permit Venezuelans to occupy the rank which corresponds to her geographical location, her extraordinary wealth and her glorious tradition.\(^\text{76}\)

The Church, and especially landowners and foreign investors, were extremely contented with the New National Ideal. Never a powerful influence in Venezuela, the Church's continued non-involvement was assured when the Pérez Jiménez administration provided for Catholic instruction in public schools.\(^\text{77}\) Land redistribution was ended by P. J., and once again between two and three per cent of the population owned between seventy-five and ninety per cent of the land.\(^\text{78}\) Venezuela under Pérez Jiménez became a paradise for foreign capital. Plans for a nationally owned oil company were dropped; millions of dollars in new concessions were granted; and P. J. ended the tradition established by his predecessors, civilian and military, of increasing Venezuela's share of oil profits: it was reduced from thirty-seven to twenty-five per cent. Yet Venezuela's take from foreign extraction of her resources increased by leaps and bounds. P.J.'s rule

\(^{76}\) *Venezuela Bajo el Nuevo Ideal Nacional: Realizaciones Durante el Gobierno del Coronel Marcos Pérez Jiménez* (Caracas: Publicaciones des Servicio Informativo Venezolano, 1955), 1.

\(^{77}\) Feinstein, "The Role of Foreign Investment," 218.

\(^{78}\) Lieuwen, "Political Forces in Venezuela," 349; and Eisenhower, *The Wine is Bitter*, 121.
coincided with the Korean War and the Suez crisis, both of which caused petroleum production and cost to soar. Besides oil, an additional source of revenue was discovered, iron ore. United States Steel and Bethlehem Steel began investing millions of dollars in Venezuela. Foreign investors have called the Pérez Jiménez years Venezuela's most prosperous. 79

Civil liberties within Venezuela were another matter. A near successful attempt was made to eradicate political parties. AD and URD leaders not already in jail or abroad were hunted down, killed, imprisoned or exiled. By 1953, even COPEI, Venezuela's traditionally conservative Christian Democratic party, felt the heavy hand of the government when the party expelled members who cooperated with Pérez Jiménez. 80 All industrial and peasant unions were destroyed and their leaders persecuted, while the government established a puppet labor confederation with luxurious headquarters in Caracas. 81


81 Alexander, Organized Labor in Latin America, 146, 151; and Martz, Acción Democrática, 261.
Freedom of the press disappeared. The Pérez Jiménez regime was condemned by the Inter-American Press Association for its press censorship, imprisonment of journalists and forcible confiscation of newspapers. Education would take years to recover from the setbacks it met during the New National Ideal. P. J. built a new beautiful $134 million Central University of Venezuela at Caracas but kept it closed most of the time. When it did open, government officials allowed no autonomy. With the exception of the Central University, new school construction did not keep up with the population growth, while the portion of the budget for education dropped to one of the lowest in Latin America. Student demonstrations, both university and high school, were met with military action, always resulting in casualties. The dictator's tight grip on the nation was enforced by a huge spy and secret police network, the National Security. In an interview with Time, P. J. explained why all this was necessary:

I make every effort to give Venezuelans the kind of government adapted to them.... We are still in our infant years and we still need halters.... There must be a leader who shows the way without being perturbed by the necessity of winning demagogic popularity.

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84 Waldo, "Why Latin America Distrusts Us," 85; and Lieuwen, Venezuela, 92.
85 Time (February 28, 1955), 29.
Despite the tremendous tax wealth that entered Venezuela in the 1950's, the great majority of her people remained poor, unhealthy, illiterate and domiciled in the most primitive surroundings. Huge sums were spent on frivolous public works projects and highway construction, where peculation was most conveniently concealed. Colonel Pulido Barreto, P. J.'s ordnance chief, was able to amass over $100 million from parking meter concessions alone. P. J.'s personal fortune in 1958 was estimated by experts at somewhere over $250 million; yet Venezuela's school teachers averaged less than $90 a month and over ninety per cent of her labor force averaged less than $3 a day.\footnote{\textit{Lieuwen, Petroleum in Venezuela,} 119-120; "Five More Years," 30; Andreski, \textit{Parasitism and Subversion}, 98-99; "Friendly Strongmen," \textit{Time} \textbf{LXX} (July 15, 1957), 42; and Lott, "Venezuela," 242.}

Economically, Venezuela became more and more dependent upon a single extractive industry, thus increasingly sensitive to events abroad. Government-foreigner investor primacy rather than private, domestically generated capital dominated Venezuela. United States companies were helping to establish in Venezuela the very system they bitterly oppose at home, an economy directed and controlled by the state. Despite years of affluent foreign investment, Venezuela under the Tachira dynasty failed to achieve what economists call "take-off." The economy was backward and unbalanced—"dominated by and dependent upon one
commodity, while agriculture stagnated, and no significant private
domestic capital market developed.\textsuperscript{87}

In April, 1957, the Venezuelan Congress enacted legislation
which called for national elections on December 15th of the same year.
The experience of the 1952 elections had cast the Venezuelan people
into a "morass of cynicism and disillusionment."\textsuperscript{88} The administra-
tion that would oversee the 1957 elections was the same government
that violated its promise in 1952; no one took the announced elections
seriously. In November, true to popular belief, President Pérez
Jiménez made it clear that instead of an election with opposing candi-
dates, a "plebiscite" would be held on the designated day of balloting.
The only name appearing on the ballot would be Marcos Pérez Jiménez,
and voters had a choice of voting for or against him. No write-ins
were allowed. On December 15, 1957, apathy reigned; only govern-
ment employees went to the polls. So rigged was this election that
two hours after the polls closed, Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, Minister
of the Interior, called reporters to his office and announced, with a
138 calibre revolver prominently displayed on his desk, that the citizens
of Venezuela had voted for Pérez Jiménez in overwhelming numbers.

\textsuperscript{87}Feinstein, "The Role of Foreign Investment," 7, 23, 28, 36.
\textsuperscript{88}Lott, "The 1952 Venezuelan Elections," 541.
As the new year of 1958 dawned, Venezuela braced itself for five more years of military dictatorship. 89

Before concluding and evaluating this look at Venezuela's soldiers as politicians and in order to obtain a more complete picture of the national political spectrum, one must examine, at least cursorily, Venezuela's other advocates of political totalitarianism, the Communists. It may seem strange that a single chapter might contain an examination of militarism, usually identified with the far right, and communism, the far left. Yet these ideologies have two common features which justify this juxtaposition. The first is general and commonly accepted; they are both anti-democratic. The second is unique to the Venezuelan milieu; paradoxically, cooperation had characterized the relationship between Venezuela's communist movement and her military dictators. Ironically, the fortunes of communism in Venezuela have risen under militarism and declined under democracy.

The international communist movement did not reach Latin America until some years after the 1917 Russian Revolution. In 1928, the date of the Sixth Congress, there were parties functioning in seven Latin American nations; and, subsequently, cells were established in all the Latin American countries with March 5, 1931, generally accepted as the

89Ibid., 541-557; "Five More Years," 30; "General Marcos Pérez Jiménez--Still on Top in Venezuela," U.S. News and World Report XLIII (December 27, 1957), 17; and "When is a Plebiscite," 386.
formal founding of the party in Venezuela. Under the fierce dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez, Venezuelan communists, as everyone else, were persecuted. Therefore, their activities and propaganda remained meager. The death of Gómez in 1935 and the temporary relaxation of restrictions allowed the communists to enter the race for popular political support. In order to achieve strength through unity, Venezuela's civilian political leaders formed the monolithic National Democratic Party (PDN) in 1936. By 1937, the PDN fragmented with its non-communist members, led by Romulo Betancourt, demanded that its communist members break with the Communist International, thus permitting the PDN to become a strictly Venezuelan organization rather than a puppet of the Soviet Union. Composing a small minority, the communists left the PDN in 1937 and formed the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV). Neither party was able to thrive since President Eleazar López Contreras soon persecuted them both with fine impartiality.

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90 Latin America's Communist Parties, including Venezuela's, have always held to the official Soviet line. Even with Fidel Castro and the Sino-Soviet struggle, the Soviet Union still holds the allegiance of most of Latin America's Communist Parties. For a thorough analysis of this situation see Roger Phillip Hamburg, "The Soviet Union and Latin America, 1953-1963" (Madison: unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1965).

The PCV opposed and protested the election of Isaías Medina Angarita in 1941. By 1942, it executed a complete about-face and became an ardent friend of the President. Its motives were twofold: the first was international, for Medina Angarita declared himself pro-Ally shortly after Adolph Hitler invaded the Soviet Union; the second was domestic, Medina Angarita, far more tolerant than either López Contreras or Gómez, never persecuted the Communists and even revised the Constitution so as to eliminate an article which outlawed the party. But freedom of political movement for the PCV was not without its price. In return, the Communists were required to swing their support behind the president's congressional candidates. Because of this cozy arrangement, the Communists opposed the 1945 golpe of the Patriotic Military Union, but declared their neutrality when they discovered AD was involved. 92

The PCV remained prostrate during the trienio, the three years of Democratic Action directed government (1945-1948). Provisional President Romulo Betancourt made it clear that, like his predecessor, he would not interfere with their legitimate political activities, but, unlike his predecessor, he would refuse their cooperation. During the trienio, therefore, Venezuela's Communists were alienated from the centers of power. From 1945 to 1948, the PCV also experienced bitter

92 Victor Alba, Historia del Movimiento Obrero, 222; and Alexander, Communism in Latin America, 256-259.
schism. A growing difference of opinion over cooperation with Medina Angarita was carried over into the trienio and aggravated by the issue of whether or not to cooperate with the AD government. This fragmentation was heightened by personal ambitions of individual party members. One faction, the "Red Communists," was led by Juan Bautista Fuenmayor and favored coexistence with AD. The other faction tabbed themselves "Black Communists," and advocated all action that might discredit the Betancourt and Gallegos administrations. Although the split was not mended until 1952, both groups were elated by the 1948 golpe de estado and the new military regime's intense persecution of AD. Communist labor and student organizers began pouring into the vacuum created when Democratic Action and all its leaders were declared personae non gratae. The military junta did not molest the Communists.⁹³

Marcos Pérez Jiménez was quick to realize the potentialities of organized labor as a power base in a fascist dictatorship. His close friend, Juan Domingo Perón of Argentina, had proven that even the military could be forced into submission when brought face-to-face with millions of determined workers. P. J., in order to further secure his hold over Venezuela, wanted to emulate the Perón example; but to break AD's hold over national labor and establish his own organization would

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take time. With this in mind, Colonel Pérez Jiménez outlawed the Red Communists but left the Black Communists relatively free to operate, particularly in the labor movement. The Black Communist Federation of Workers was the only labor organization granted legal recognition by the Pérez Jiménez government. P. J.'s motives were three: with the backing of this communist federation he could claim a semblance of labor support; abetting the communists would help offset Democratic Action influence; and, most important, the Black Communists served as spies for the government in its persecution of AD, URD, COPEI and Red Communist labor leaders. In 1952, Pérez Jiménez was finally able to establish a national, government-controlled labor union, M.O.S.I.T. (Movimiento Obrero Sindical Independiente de Trabajadores).

"Significantly enough, most of its principal leaders were ex-communists." 94

As 1958 dawned in Venezuela, the forces of democracy faced a dim future. The Communist Party in Venezuela was growing at a rapid pace, especially among industrial workers and students, particularly at Venezuela's mammoth Central University in Caracas. This increased strength was not derived from the popularity of Marxist-Leninism, but

94 Alexander, Communism in Latin America, 267-269; Martz, Acción Democratica, 261; Alexander, Organized Labor in Latin America, 146-147; "Embarrassing Exiles," Time LXII (June 2, 1958), 30; and Johnson, The Military and Society in Latin America, 144-145.
from the unpopularity of the military dictatorship. The Communist Party was the only organization still functioning with which civilians opposing the regime could identify. Later, when Pérez Jiménez began persecuting the Black Communists because they had outlived their usefulness, the PCV remained the most powerful civilian group within Venezuela. In the first place, being more or less an underground movement, it possessed the best experience and training in clandestine activities; and, secondly, it possessed an ample source of revenue unavailable to other parties, the Communist International.  

Complementing the advantages of the PCV was its powerful, though unwitting ally, the United States of America. Deep resentment towards the U.S.A. developed among Venezuelans during the Pérez Jiménez administration. This resulted not so much from our maintaining cordial relations and supplying millions of dollars worth of military material to a highly unpopular dictatorship, but because the United States went "out of its way to pay homage to his regime." Hated Pedro Estrada, P.J.'s secret police chief, was received enthusiastically when he visited Washington, D.C.; Colonel Pérez Jiménez was made an "honorary submariner" by the U.S. Navy; and, worst of all, in 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower conferred the Legion of Merit on

95 Feinstein, "The Role of Foreign Investment," 219-220; Martz, Acción Democrática, 292; and Madariaga, Latin America, 23.

96 Alexander, Communism in Latin America, 269.
Marcos Pérez Jiménez for "special meritorious conduct in the fulfillment of his high functions..." 97

Despite increased communist strength, as 1958 made its appearance, the armed forces, as they had for most of Venezuela's history, were in complete control of the situation. Their record was poor. Venezuela was at once the richest and the poorest nation of Latin America. In the minds of millions of Venezuelans, despotism was tantamount to military rule, and military rule meant a retarded economic system, official corruption, educational backwardness and mass misery. Either because of institutional conservatism, corporate self-interest,


In 1963, writing of his 1953 visit to Venezuela, Milton S. Eisenhower stated the following: "I could readily see that Pérez Jiménez was trying to keep his army as happy as possible. I knew that he had buildings full of political prisoners, that there was an undercurrent of political unrest, and that many of his enemies were in exile." Milton S. Eisenhower, The Wine is Bitter: The U.S. and Latin America (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), 193. Subsequent actions by officials of the United States of America in decorating Marcos Pérez Jiménez seem highly inconsistent with the findings made by this special ambassador, who also happened to be a brother of the President of the United States. Milton Eisenhower's 1953 report contains no mention of his 1963 revelation.
personal ambition, indifference or ignorance, the armed forces of Venezuela had inhibited economic progress and social justice. Sooner or later pent up popular aspirations would explode and "dual communism" was prepared to take charge.

As in Venezuela, two factions of the communist party were operating in Fulgencio Batista's Cuba. One cooperated with the dictator to make inroads into the government, labor unions and student groups, while the other faction struggled against Batista to obtain the sympathy and support of the masses. Hindsight can provide the remainder of the story. When the proper moment arrived, and a propitious vehicle presented himself, Cuba's communists were ready to provide that vehicle with all the ingredients necessary to set up a new variety of Latin American despotism, despotism of the left. As 1958 opened, despotism of either variety seemed to be Venezuela's inevitable fate.

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CHAPTER IV

VENEZUELA'S POLITICANS AS POLITICIANS

Since 1958 both Venezuela and Cuba have experienced revolution. These were not typical Latin American revolutions because both nations, in the course of their revolutionary movements, underwent real economic, social and political change. The Cuban experience was characterized by public trials, genocide and mass exodus, resulting in the establishment of an aggressive communist dictatorship. The Venezuelan experience was characterized by genuine reforms implemented by honestly elected officials, conditions which resulted in the establishment of one of the most stable democracies in Latin America. The difference between the Venezuela described in the previous chapter and the Venezuela of today is incredible. The incredibility of this contrast is heightened by the fact that this transformation occurred with a minimal amount of social dislocation.

December 15, 1957, was the date of the plebiscite which "elected" Colonel Marcos Pérez Jiménez to a five-year term as President of Venezuela. Approximately twelve months later, one finds Venezuela involved in another election. In a free and honest contest, preceded by a spirited three-way campaign, Romulo Betancourt, the candidate of the Democratic Action Party, was elected to a five-year
term as President of Venezuela. President Betancourt completed his entire constitutional term. "He was the first elected civilian President in the nation's entire history to do so." ¹

This achievement attains greater significance when viewed against the awesome problems faced by Romulo Betancourt. Politically, the President and his party, AD, were rocked by internal schism. In 1960, AD's left-wing broke with the party and formed the pro-Castro Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR). In 1962, AD suffered further fragmentation when another estranged element withdrew over personal issues and formed the ARS.² Betancourt's coalition government of three parties, AD, URD and COPEI, nearly collapsed


²Peter Snow, "Political Party Spectrum in Venezuela," Caribbean Studies IV (January, 1965), 36-47; and Taylor, "Democracy for Venezuela?," 284-290. The initials ARS do not represent specific words but were taken from a Caracas public relations firm, Publicidad ARS, whose slogan was "Let us think for you." The Venezuelan press implied this was what the ARS faction of AD was saying to President Betancourt. Alexander, The Venezuelan Democratic Revolution, 80-83.
in 1960, when the Democratic Republican Union withdrew in protest over strained relations between Venezuela and Cuba. 3

The Venezuelan economy was uncertain. From 1958 to 1960, foreign capital fled Venezuela. This "capital flight" took place because the comrade of the foreign companies, Pérez Jiménez, was no longer in power; but more specifically, it was due to business' fear and distrust of a civilian government that would have to bid for popular support. 4 Contributing to the malaise of the economy was the legacy of the New National Ideal: Venezuelan agriculture could not feed her people; slums were appearing overnight filled with unemployed, unskilled migrants; the colossal graft and useless public projects of P. J. and his cronies left the country deeply in debt; and forty per cent of Venezuela's school-age children were without the most basic educational facilities. 5

As if these obstacles were not sufficient challenge, Betancourt also was plagued by foreign intervention in the internal affairs of


Venezuela. Democracy in the Caribbean was not in the plans of the Dominican Republic's dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. In January, 1960, a rightest military coup, directly assisted by Trujillo, was unsuccessful. When this attempt to bring down the Betancourt government failed, a bomb plot to assassinate the President, personally planned and supplied by Trujillo, was carried out in June, 1960. The Venezuelan President's military aid was killed; and Romulo Betancourt, badly burned, his vision and hearing severely impaired, remained bedridden for six months. As a result of the charges brought against the Dominican Republic by Venezuela before the Organization of American States, for the first time in its history that organization condemned a member state and imposed sanctions against it. 6

With the assassination of Rafael Trujillo in May, 1961, Venezuela's external threat from the right was silenced. Its place was taken by a combined external–internal threat from the left championed by Fidel Castro's Cuba. Castro's Venezuelan arm was the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FLAN), a terrorist organization staffed by the MIR and the pro-Castro wing of the Venezuelan Communist Party. 7 Aware that they lacked the necessary strength to

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7 The most balanced Venezuelan account of FLAN terrorism is Rodolfo José Cardenas, *La Insurrección Popular en Venezuela* (Caracas: Ediciones Catatumbo, 1961).
topple the government, FLAN's goal was to cause such disorder and confusion through urban and rural insurgency, property destruction and assassinations, that the military would be compelled to intervene. This would enable Fidel Castro and his Venezuelan followers to rally the masses against a reactionary, military dictatorship.

FLAN violence took a heavy toll, but effective military and police countermeasures directed by the government neutralized its activities and undermined Castro's prestige in Venezuela. On November 2, 1963, a four ton cache of arms was discovered on the Northwest coast of Venezuela. An OAS investigation team subsequently proved, beyond any doubt, that the arms had come from Cuba and that they were to be used to produce a blood bath in Caracas. FLAN bent the Betancourt government but did not break it.

Romulo Betancourt weathered the storm; Venezuelan democracy and Venezuela's civilian politicians, traditionally Latin America's weakest and most obscure, had proven their ability to endure. On December 1, 1963, amid FLAN threats of reprisals for anyone who participated in the elections, ninety-one per cent of Venezuela's

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registered voters turned out and elected AD's Raul Leoni President of Venezuela. At midday on March 11, 1964, with great pomp and splendor, occurred "one of the greatest events in contemporary Latin American politics." For the first time in the history of Venezuela, power was transferred, orderly and peacefully, from one democratically elected chief executive to his legitimate successor.

Like Betancourt, Raul Leoni was one of the charter members of Democratic Action and he had long been recognized as the popular choice of Venezuelan labor. Leoni became the second democratically chosen president of his country to serve out his constitutional term. Although the problems faced by the former Minister of Labor were not of the magnitude of those encountered by Betancourt, Leoni's administration had its share of difficulties. As soon as Leoni took office, COPEI abandoned its coalition partnership with AD in favor of the role of loyal opposition. This precipitated a cabinet crisis, and the new

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10 James D. Cochrane, "The Venezuelan Executive: Background Material for a Study of the Leoni Administration," *Caribbean Studies*, VI (January, 1967), 61-64. To many Northamericans, the transfer of political power from one man to another might appear routine, but for Latin America, with her personalistic culture and tradition, this is a rare, incomprehensible event. For more on this problem see Frank Tannenbaum, *Ten Keys to Latin America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 145-146.
president was forced to search desperately for other allies in order to maintain his government.\textsuperscript{11} In 1965 inflation hit Venezuela, followed, in 1966, by a drop in petroleum production, severe contraction in the availability of credit and the flight of capital.\textsuperscript{12} Fidel Castro and the FLAN continued to harass the government. Under Leoni, Venezuela's terrorist left concentrated its efforts on urban insurgency and used its influence in labor to call wildcat strikes in the hope of disrupting the economy.\textsuperscript{13}

Raul Leoni weathered the storm, as had his predecessor; and once again amid threats of violence and repression, Venezuelans turned out in record-breaking numbers on December 1, 1968, to elect a new president. Their choice fell on Rafael Caldera of COPEI, Venezuela's Christian Democratic Party. Caldera's victory was a

\textsuperscript{11}COPEI's motives in breaking with AD are carefully analyzed in Franklin Tugwell, "The Christian Democrats of Venezuela," \textit{Journal of Inter-American Studies} VII (April, 1965), 245-267. For an excellent biographical sketch of Raul Leoni see Cochrane, "Venezuelan Executive," 61-73.

\textsuperscript{12}The Venezuelan petroleum industry and, therefore, the entire economy were adversely affected by increased competition from the Middle East. "Venezuela Snaps Back," \textit{International Commerce} LXXIV (February 26, 1968), 15-17; and Taylor, "Democracy for Venezuela?," 287.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Lieuwen, The U.S. and the Challenge to Security}, 64-65; and Taylor, "Democracy for Venezuela?," 286.
a slim one, for AD's Gonzalo Barrios ran a close second.\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless, the verdict of the voters was honored. On March 11, 1969, Raul Leoni removed the red presidential sash and draped it over the shoulders of Rafael Caldera, symbolizing the transfer of executive power.\textsuperscript{15} In the opinion of this author, the election and assumption of power by Caldera was of momentous importance for the future of Venezuelan democracy. For the second time in the nation's history, presidential power was transferred, orderly and peacefully, from one democratically elected chief executive to his legitimate successor. More significant, however, is the fact that for the first time in the history of Venezuela, power was passed from one political party to another. For the first time, Venezuela's "outs," without resort to repression or civil war, succeeded in becoming Venezuela's "ins."

A crucial test of constitutional democracy had been met.

If the sudden surge of democratic processes in contemporary Venezuela seems remarkable, of equal interest is the performance of Venezuela's armed forces, traditionally the most politically-inclined military establishment in Latin America. Relations between

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Wall Street Journal}, December 17, 1968; and \textit{The Times-Picayune}, December 5, 1968.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Discurso del Presidente de la Republica Dr. Rafael Caldera en el Acto de la Toma de Posesión del Cargo} (Caracas: Imprenso en Venezuela por Cromotip, 11 de Marzo de 1969).
the three civilians who have governed Venezuela since 1959 and the military have been marked by complete subservience and obedience of the latter to the former. The commands of the four services (army, navy, air force and national guard) have been firm in their support of democratic government. 16

From the very beginning, President Betancourt, in his frequent messages to the nation, "repeatedly praised the officer corps for its apolitical, professional comportment, for its loyalty and for its patriotism." 17 In April, 1960, and in May and June, 1961, attempted golpes de estado by rightest elements in the Army were crushed in a combined Army-Navy-Air Force assault. In May, 1962, a serious Navy-Marine revolt led by leftist, pro-Castro officers was quelled by troops loyal to the government. 18

The election of labor-oriented Raul Leoni in 1963, coupled with the age-old suspicion of Venezuela's military officers toward civilian politicians, caused some to fear for the future of democracy in Venezuela. 19 This fear proved to be groundless. Relations between

16 Blank, Venezuela Election Factbook, 25.
17 Lieuwen, Generals vs. Presidents, 88.
19 Lieuwen, Generals vs. Presidents, 91.
Leoni and the armed forces were excellent; in fact, as his term progressed, many officers expressed a greater degree of trust and confidence in Leoni than in his predecessor. In the words of President Leoni, the performance of the military during his administration was laudable:

In these difficult times, the National Armed Forces adjusted their conduct to the strict and loyal fulfillment of their constitutional obligations and their professional duty. They have refused the overtures of those who would bring politics into the barracks, forgetting these are principals reserved for civilian, partisan activity. They are always ready to obey, defend and maintain the legitimate government and, in every case, to enforce the verdict of the electorate.

From all appearances, loyalty and cooperation will characterize relations between the military and the present President of Venezuela, Rafael Caldera. In his inaugural address of March 11, 1969, President Caldera, after examining the record of the armed forces in the past decade, described Venezuela's military as "firmly behind democratic institutions and, without a doubt, loyal to the constitutional order."

One of Caldera's first acts as President was to pick a new Defense

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20 Personal interview with members of the United States Military Mission assigned to Venezuela during the Leoni administration.

21 Mensaje Al Congreso Del Presidente De La Republica Dr. Raul Leoni (Caracas: Imprenta Nacional, 1964), 43.

22 Discurso de Presidente de la Republica Dr. Rafael Caldera en el Acto de la Toma de Posesion del Cargo (Caracas: Impreno en Venezuela por Cromotip, 11 de Marzo de 1969), 5.
Minister, boldly passing over several senior pro-AD officers in making his selection. When Venezuela's highest ranking general, Pablo Antonio Flores, openly grumbled, President Caldera abruptly removed him from his military command. He now plans to appoint Flores ambassador to an as yet unnamed Central American country. 23

Since 1958, therefore, the political culture of Venezuela has experienced traumatic transformation. Generally, the country moved from dictatorship to democracy, from a government of men to a government of laws. If there is such a thing as a "turning point" in a nation's history, surely the year 1958 was a "turning point" in the development of Venezuela's political culture. Military rule, the chief trait of the country's political life, vanished in 1958. Civilian rule, virtually absent until 1958, made its appearance and established lasting pre-eminence over the armed forces. It is impossible to understand fully the Venezuelan democratic revolution without first examining its origins, which are firmly rooted in the political events of 1958. Only upon a thorough examination of those events can a realistic assessment be made.

The most reputable and widely acclaimed study of Venezuelan politics since 1958 is Robert Jackson Alexander's *The Venezuelan Democratic Revolution: A Profile of the Regime of Romulo Betancourt* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1964). Ignoring the events of 1958, Alexander attributes the success of democracy in Venezuela to popular approval of Democratic Action's reform program and to the political acumen of Romulo Betancourt, particularly the latter. Both of these explanations are valid, but they are inadequate. Romulo Betancourt long has passed from the political scene, yet democracy persists. Democratic Action's program was recently repudiated by the electorate, yet democracy persists. Democracy has endured in Venezuela for a multiplicity of reasons, none of which can be satisfactorily analyzed without first examining the origin of that nascent tradition. It would be futile to attempt to understand contemporary French politics without some knowledge of 1789. It would be equally futile to attempt to comprehend modern Venezuela without first examining 1958.

As specifically outlined in the previous chapter, the chief characteristic of Venezuelan politics has been rule by the military. Incidents or epochs of civilian rule in the nation's history are few and far between. Examples of civilian power and democratic processes, which might help explain the sudden strength of these forces in 1958, are difficult to recognize. Nevertheless, however weak and inchoate, Venezuela does have a democratic tradition. The remainder of this
Chapter will be devoted—through the use of a novel, but valid, approach—to establishing a democratic heritage for Venezuela prior to 1958. An understanding of these obscure incidents is necessary to comprehend fully the events of 1958 and the triumph of democracy over militarism.

It is the writer's contention that three historical events in Venezuela's past form the basis of her democratic tradition. Accompanying these three historical experiences and emerging from them, were three civilian, heterogeneous sectors, each circumscribed by the armed forces, yet each gaining a new awareness of its political potential. The three events took place in 1928, 1936-1937, and 1945-1948. The three groups dominating these civilian-democratic spurts were university students, political parties and organized labor. Each epoch looked to its predecessor for example and experience, and each epoch built upon the accomplishments of its predecessor. Thus, the civilian machinations of 1928 and 1936-1937 are feeble when compared to the trienio of 1945-1948; and, of course, all three eras are dwarfed by the achievements of Venezuela's civilian democrats since 1958.

The strife that exists on many United States college and university campuses today between students on the one hand and the Establishment on the other is no novelty for observers of Latin America. Since 1918, students in the universities of Latin America have been demanding, with more or less effectiveness, a greater share of
responsibility in the administration of the educational institutions they attend and the societies in which they live. The University Reform Movement, which originated in the University of Cordoba (Argentina), represents the longest continuous expression of the revolution of aspirations in Latin America. In 1918, contrasting sharply with Argentina's rapidly expanding middle class, stood the ancient University of Cordoba, stronghold of conservatism and bastion of the traditional elite. The demands of the students at the University of Cordoba were essentially social and political. They reflected a middle class desire to end the status-preservation function of the university in favor of the university as an instrument of social mobility. Politically, the students demanded "co-government," for only through university autonomy and student representation in its administration could these reforms have a valid and lasting basis.

The students' demands were granted, and henceforth, despite intense opposition, the University Reform Movement has spread throughout Latin America.

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With the passing of time, student grievances multiplied and student political activity increased proportionately. Government instability, political interference in the universities and poor academic standards frustrated professors and students alike and ultimately caused a brain drain to universities in the United States and Europe, or even to private universities. The inability of Latin America's universities to become professionalized has been another source of student unrest.

Part-time lecturers teaching irrelevant syllabuses to part-time students is not university education in any proper sense of the word. State universities often seem little more than vocational night schools geared to producing the minimal qualifications for entry into professions which the needs of the country no longer demand.27

Students in law and the humanities have been especially hard hit; the Latin American republics' underdeveloped economies cannot absorb their skills--their education becomes irrelevant.28 These grievances and concomitant demands for rectification never remained within university walls. Student demands became national political issues, while students attained political influence out of all proportion to their number.

Student grievances are not confined to Latin America. However, three factors, unique to this culture area, help to explain why

27 Hennessy, "University Students," 122-123.

university students are the vanguard of civilian political power in Latin America. First, as citizens of countries where illiteracy is widespread, students feel obliged to take an active part in national affairs, especially in the interest of the less fortunate majority. Second, most Latin American universities offer no extra-curricular activities, thus students turn to politics as the only alternative. A third factor is the numerical superiority, in economically underdeveloped nations, of students in the social sciences and humanities over those in the natural and technical sciences. Since the jurisdiction of the social sciences and humanities involves areas of political relevance, most of Latin America's students are politically inclined.\(^\text{29}\)

Other elements indirectly served to complement the political activism of students. All the major universities of Latin America are located in national capitals. This encourages political activity "because politics and its consequences are more visible, national political organizations and leaders can pay immediate attention to the students, and student protests may be directed toward the actual seats

of authority. "30 One of the main accomplishments of the University Reform Movement was to give extraterritoriality to Latin American universities. Although the rule has been violated by many governments, generally it has been respected, causing universities to become sanctuaries of diverse political ideologies. Traditionally repressed groups such as labor, peasants and political parties, have often strengthened the students' conception of their political function by encouraging them to champion the voiceless. Finally, the introduction of the semi-professional student and the appearance of student groups affiliated with national parties enhanced the political role of the university. Professional students who often span several student generations, are usually on the payroll of a party. They play a vital role in politics by serving as political activists, recruiting agents, election managers, and also as liaisons between university affiliates and the national party. With the Latin American university evolving into an instrument of political and social reform, it was only natural for political parties to try to use student power for the benefit of their specific programs. 31 Therefore, the university in Latin America is not an ivory tower, and student politics is not a training ground for future politicians. "Through the University Reform Movement

30 Lipset, "University Students and Politics," 60.
31 Hennessy, "University Students," 131-134.
and political activism, students in Latin America are an important political group as such."\(^{32}\)

The consequence of student politicalization has been that in the present century almost all political movements posing an alternative to nonrepresentative governments in Latin America "have originated in the universities and have found their first expression through student organization."\(^{33}\) Venezuela in 1928 amply verifies this observation. At that time Venezuela was the personal property of Juan Vincente Gómez, a steadfast opponent of the University Reform Movement. While Latin American universities in other countries took important strides toward autonomy, Gómez intervened frequently in the affairs of Venezuela's Central University at Caracas. Nationalism and Latin solidarity, often manifested in anti-Yankee protest, dominated Latin America's political atmosphere; yet Gómez enjoyed close ties with the United States and her oil companies. For the first time in Latin America, there were emerging political parties and popular figures genuinely sympathetic to the needs of their country's masses. New eras had already dawned for Chile under Arturo Alessandri, for Mexico under Francisco Madero and for Uruguay under José Battle y Ordoñez--but not for Venezuela.\(^{34}\) All these

\(^{32}\)Lyonette, "Student Organizations," 661.

\(^{33}\)Ibid., 657.

\(^{34}\)Lieuwen, "Political Forces in Venezuela," 353; and Aguilar, Marxism in Latin America, 8-9.
factors, meshed with the socio-economic injustices and brutal political intolerance of the Gómez government, caused unrest among Venezuela's university students.\(^3^5\) In 1928, embracing the cause of governmental reform and protesting over the policies of the Gómez regime, university students and their leaders openly opposed the government. The more prominent leaders of the "Generation of 1928" were Jovito Villalba, Gonzalo Barrios, Raul Leoni and Romulo Betancourt.\(^3^6\)

Student Week, the *Semana del Estudiante*, in Venezuela is February 6-12. In 1928 the Venezuelan Student Federation (FEV), already twice dissolved by President Gómez, planned to celebrate Student Week with announced social events, the crowning of a queen and cultural discussions. This was a subterfuge, for the students planned to use the occasion to voice their disapproval of the dictatorship. Raul Leoni, president of the FEV, designated two second-year law students named Betancourt and Villalba to address separate conclaves. The speeches of these young orators were emotional, moving and—in the eyes of the government—treasonous and inflammatory.


Their main theme was a demand for democratic, civilian government and an end to the dictatorship. By the end of Student Week, Villaba, Betancourt and others were arrested on charges of subversion and slapped into dungeons.\(^37\)

These arrests sparked reaction as hundreds of students took to the streets of Caracas, daring Gómez to arrest them. Infuriated, the dictator directly ordered over 200 more students jailed.\(^38\) These mass arrests by the government caused Venezuela's "normally passive citizenry"\(^39\) to join the protesting students, as disturbances spread from the capital to La Guaira and Maracaibo. Unexpectedly, the government relented and freed most of the imprisoned students, who once again took to the streets.\(^40\)

This apparent show of mercy (or weakness) by the government, along with the turmoil racking Venezuela in February and March, 1928, was probably instrumental in fanning the flames of discontent among junior military officers and cadets at the new Military Academy. These


\(^38\) Thomas Rourke, Gómez: Tyrant of the Andes (New York: William Morrow, 1936), 228.

\(^39\) Martz, "Generation of '28," 19.

\(^40\) Betancourt, Política y Petróleo, 68.
young military engineers, technicians and pilots were disenchanted with their assignments—tending cattle and overseeing cane-cutting laborers on the numerous plantations of Juan Vincente Gómez. The young officers made common cause with the students in a major assault against the dictatorship on April 7, 1928. At first the rebellion was successful, but the tide turned in favor of the government when the rebels failed to capture the barracks of San Carlos, the major arsenal of Caracas. An alert officer, Eleazar López Contreras, was responsible for halting the rebel advance. Gómez and his government recouped rapidly; this time no mercy was shown. The offending officers suffered most and were imprisoned indefinitely. Those students who could not escape into exile were weighted down with ball and chain and sent to the interior as road construction laborers. Once again, Pax Tachirense returned to Venezuela.41

The Generation of 1928 failed to achieve its goals. It "provided the rationale for action, but the physical power to overthrow constituted authorities lay elsewhere."42 Therein lies the chief cause for the political defeat of Venezuela's students in 1928. Yet all was not lost, for positive results were discernible. This had been the "first major expression of democratic sentiment"43 in Venezuela. Because


42 Silvert, "The University Student," 222.

of this, in the eyes of the Venezuelan public, students attained a
reformist mystique; this mystique would prove influential in mobilizing
public opinion behind future efforts at governmental reform. For the
students, the defeat and subsequent exile or imprisonment of 1928
heightened the sense of being inheritors or transmitters of the noble
tradition of political liberty.\textsuperscript{44} The Generation of 1928's most salient
accomplishment was to plant the seeds of democracy in Venezuela.
Although repressed harshly, the ideas expounded by these students
survived and ultimately triumphed.

The leaders of the Generation of 1928 remained in prison or in
exile until 1936, the year of Venezuela's next attempt at attaining
democratic, civilian government. It was during these years of
estrangement for their country that some of these young Venezuelans
engaged in a "passing flirtation with Marxism...",\textsuperscript{45} but only a
few retained this admiration. This fleeting romance with Marxism
is easily understood. With few exceptions these men were extremely
young, their adult experiences were few and bitter, they were
scattered throughout the hemisphere and beyond and longed for home,

\textsuperscript{44}Hennessy, "University Students," 134-135.

\textsuperscript{45}Martz, "Generation of '28," 21-22. Romulo Betancourt was
the most important member of this group to join the Communist Party;
he was among the organizers of the Costa Rican Communist Party.
In 1935, Betancourt resigned from the Party, thus closing his affilia-
tion with the movement. He insisted on the primacy of national
problems rather than the international dictates of the Comintern.
and they were in search of a theoretical basis for themselves and their
country. Two other movements also influenced these young politicians.
These were the Mexican Revolution and the Peruvian Aprista move­
ment, democratically oriented but both intensely nationalistic. When
the leaders of the Generation of 1928 returned to Venezuela, they were
to travel a similar path. 46

Meanwhile, for the next seven years, Venezuela remained under
the close surveillance of Juan Vincente Gómez. He died in his sleep
late in December, 1935. Hatreds suppressed for twenty-seven years
were suddenly released. Mobs looted or destroyed much of the property
of Gómez and his relatives. In the larger cities, crowds poured into
the streets, rioting and demonstrating. Xenophobia swept the country:
Gómez's political collaborators were massacred, the Foreign Club was
razed, and the wives and children of alien oil men had to be rushed to
safety. Venezuela in December, 1935, and January, 1936, had all the
makings of a genuine social revolution--but none was forthcoming.
Confusion reigned. The diverse elements that rejoiced over the
dictator's death were incohesive; they offered no positive program to
replace the dictatorship. Their only common bond was their mutual
hatred of Gómez. 47

46 Ibid., 21-22.

47Alexander, Communism in Latin America, 255; Lieuwen, Venezuela, 51; and Marsland, Venezuela, 246-248.
Confusion was not limited to the opposition, for Venezuela's traditional elite was momentarily stunned following the death of the andino. Its bewilderment was brief, however, for its members had had some experience in leadership. Hastily, the gomecista congress named as provisional president Tachira-born General Eleazar López Contreras, Minister of War. The only disciplined body remaining by January, 1936, was the armed forces; and General López Contreras' strategic military command was the only hope of preserving the positions of the gomecista officers, large landowners and politicians. Troops were dispatched to quell the disturbances, and López Contreras attempted to reestablish a functioning government. This became increasingly difficult, for as news of the death of Gómez swept the hemisphere, exiles poured into Venezuela aggravating the already tense atmosphere.

Although leaderless, the Venezuelan masses, in their hatred of anything or anyone connected with the deceased dictator, could not be ignored. The troops could contain sporadic disturbances, but López Contreras soon realized that an excess show of force would only spawn further resistance that even the armed forces might be unable to arrest. Aware that his political life depended upon relaxation of the dictatorship, López Contreras emptied the dungeons of political prisoners,

48Lieuwen, *Venezuela*, 51; and Marsland, *Venezuela*, 246.
permitted freedom of the press and the return of the more notorious exiles. The relaxation of the dictatorship and the restoration of civil liberties mollified public opinion, and order soon was restored. 49

Among the returning exiles, the most popular were the members of the Venezuelan Student Federation (FEV), who had led the resistance against Gómez in 1928. The people trusted these young men implicitly; for, having been out of the country for several years, they were the only politicians completely free of the Gómez taint. The members of the Generation of 1928 sought to provide the civilian leadership necessary to retain the recently granted concessions from the government and to gain new ones; "they harangued crowds from street corners, founded newspapers, and talked politics from morning to night." 50

For fourteen months, the Generation of 1928, supplemented by students who dubbed themselves the Generation of 1936, attempted to fill a twenty-seven year political vacuum and replace a century-old tradition. They nearly succeeded.

The first test of civilian strength came on February 14, 1936. On February 10 acting President López Contreras announced that several constitutional guarantees would be suspended, particularly freedom of the press. FEV President Jovito Villalba responded with an

49Lieuwen, Venezuela, 51-52.

50Marsland, Venezuela, 248.
open letter to the government demanding restoration of constitutional guarantees and prosecution of remaining gomecistas. To back up these demands, the FEV called for a general strike on February 14. Felix Galavis, a notorious henchman of Gómez and governor of the Federal District, already angered by the virulence of the newspapers, was pushed beyond endurance by the open circulation of Villalba's letter. On the morning of the fourteenth, approximately 25,000 people gathered at the Plaza Bolivar and heard FEV members rant against gomecistas still in office. At 10:30 A.M., without warning, soldiers appeared on the balconies of the neighboring Casa Amarilla and fired into the crowd. The troops acted under orders from Galavis; 200 were wounded and eight killed. The senseless slaughter inflamed the crowd. Led by Villalba and FEV members, the crowd swelled to 30,000 as it made its way to Miraflores, the presidential palace, for a face-to-face confrontation with López Contreras. The provisional president knuckled under and submitted to all the demands of the FEV: freedom of the press was restored, most of the remaining gomecistas were removed from office, and Felix Galavis was arrested and charged with murder. Writing of this incident in 1954, Amy and William Marsland observed, "The people had won a great democratic victory, their first and, to this writing, their last."
The political future of López Contreras was shaky. Catering to the leftist leanings of the students did not gain him any popularity with Venezuela's conservative elements. Actually, López Contreras had no intention of moving to the left. He was using public pressure, temporarily behind him, as a threat against a possible recalcitrant gomecista congress, which would select the next president. This strategy yielded results, for in April, 1936, López Contreras was elected President of Venezuela. His political future assured and calm restored, the new president demonstrated to conservatives that their fears were groundless. He continued to talk like a liberal but acted more and more like a conservative.53

During this same period of time, significant political developments were taking place outside official government circles which would greatly affect the future of Venezuela. The winter and spring of 1936 saw the creation of Venezuela's first popularly based political parties. Four of these achieved importance: the National Republican Union (UNR), the Progressive Republican Party (PRP—the legal arm of the Communist Party), the National Democratic Block (BND) and the Venezuelan Organization (ORVE). Of greatest contemporary significance was ORVE, founded on March 1, 1936, and staffed chiefly by the more mature rebels of 1928 and the newly-emerging generation of 1936. Its

53Marsland, Venezuela, 250.
membership was filled with the elite of the FEV, Jovito Villalba, Raul Leoni, Romulo Betancourt and Gonzalo Barrios. Venezuelan Organization was not a political party in the strictest sense, but a coalition front dedicated to uniting all the forces opposing dictatorship. When rumors caused fear that the scheduled April meeting of the Congress might be postponed, three political groups, ORVE, PRP and UNR, announced the formation of the April Block. This Block was formed to strengthen the position of civilian groups demanding governmental reform. Congress met as planned, but the influence of the April Block remains questionable, for López Contreras also wished Congress to convene. After April, 1936, these parties continued to push for broader electoral participation, while the government increasingly resisted such a development.54

The same Congress that convened in April took under consideration and later passed the Ley Lara, a law which allowed the president, in times of crisis, to suspend civil liberties for the defense of public order. To the forces of opposition, this legislation implied legalizing totalitarianism. Unable to stop its passage, the newly formed civilian organizations planned their first show of strength to demonstrate their opposition to the Ley Lara. The three members of the April Block formed

54Alba, Historia del Movimiento Obrero, 178; Blank, Venezuela Election Factbook, 8; Alexander, Communism in Latin America, 255; and Martz, "Generation of '28," 24-27.
a coordinating body called the Democratic Defense Committee, composed of high ranking members from each group. The Committee called for a general protest strike on June 9, 1936. The strike was planned to last for twenty-four hours and was limited to metropolitan Caracas. The strike came off as scheduled, but popular enthusiasm and advance publicity caused impromptu, haphazard strikes to develop in Maracaibo, Valencia, Barquisimeto and several oil fields. Instead of lasting twenty-four hours, the strike lingered for five days and ended ignominiously. Government concessions were not forthcoming; and workers, valuing their pay more than their liberties, straggled back to their jobs. It was obvious from the beginning that the Democratic Defense Committee did not have control of the situation. This lack of discipline and poor tactical implementation resulted in a defeat for democracy and loss of prestige for Venezuela's civilian politicians and students. 55

As adversity continued to plague the forces of democracy, it became increasingly apparent that regimented action, possible only through civilian unity, would be the sole solution to obtaining political concessions from the military based government. To this end, on October 28, 1936, three political parties, ORVE, PRP and BND, terminated their existence and mutually formed the National Democratic

55 Martz, "Generation of '28," 28; and Marsland, Venezuela, 250.
Party (PDN). Associated members of the PDN were the Venezuelan Student Federation and two fledgling labor unions, the Workers Front and the National Industrial Front. Named secretary of the new party was Romulo Betancourt. With the organizational structure established and discipline a reality, PDN members enthusiastically began preparing for the ensuing January, 1937, elections. The President, his military comrades and the traditional oligarchy had other plans, however, for their patience with the forces of democracy was exhausted. The government refused to extend legal recognition to the PDN, thus rendering it ineligible to compete in the elections. A showdown became inevitable. 56

Since the oil industry represented the backbone of the Venezuelan economy, the PDN and its labor affiliates called for a petroleum workers' strike. A few days before Christmas, 1936, 20,000 oil field workers left their jobs, demanding higher wages, better working conditions and union recognition. These exploited laborers had legitimate grievances, and they were determined not to submit until their demands were met. The strike lasted until January 22, 1937, when President López Contreras, citing the constitution, ordered the strikers back to work with a very small pay increase. The workers, forgetting the other

demands and believing they had won the battle, returned to work over PDN protest. The economy was hardly dented.57

López Contreras did not like the implications of the petroleum workers’ strike. Oil was the chief source of national revenue. Politicians’ tampering with this industry was not in the best political interest of the Tachira dynasty. The elections of January 28, 1937, convinced the already doubting President of the worthlessness of political parties. The new constitution adopted in 1936 had extended the indirect system of selecting members of Congress and the president, but the suffrage had been broadened—now only seventy per cent of Venezuela’s males were ineligible (all females were ineligible to vote). Despite government neutralization, a few opposition leaders managed victories, notably Barrios, Leoni and Villalba.58 This show of civilian strength was too much for López Contreras; accordingly he moved to end Venezuela’s brief democratic experience. On February 3, 1937, five of the six groups that had formed the abortive National Democratic Party (ORVE, PRP, the Venezuelan Student Federation, the Workers Front and the National Industrial Front) were ordered to cease all activity. Hardly had the opposition taken to the streets in protest, when they were met by armed forces and thoroughly dispersed. The

57Ibid., 29-30; and Blank, Venezuela Election Handbook, 8.
58When the National Democratic Party was declared ineligible, the legal parties that had merged to form the PDN were revived in order to compete in the January elections.
government's next step was to remove from office the recently elected opposition congressmen. The following week saw the election of those opposing the Establishment nullified in a federal court. To insure continued domestic tranquility, on March 13, 1937, Venezuela's forty-seven most influential civilian political leaders were expelled from the country. Among these were Betancourt, Villalba, Leoni and Barrios. Venezuela's second democratic episode was terminated.

The fourteen months following the death of Juan Vincente Gómez presented to the forces of civilian democracy in Venezuela an opportunity to achieve lasting recognition, yet they did not even achieve survival. In spite of their constant struggle for unity, disunity characterized the infrastructure of their various organizations. The FEV was no longer the power it had been. Originally, its members had been drawn together by their mutual hatred of Gómez, but with his death this cohesive force was gone. The most serious split in the Venezuelan Student Federation occurred when Catholic members bolted the organization and formed the National Student Union (UNE). They were unable to agree with the anti-clerical views of FEV President Jovito Villalba, and an FEV-backed law calling for the secularization of religious schools. The young leader of these more orthodox Catholic students was one of

59 Marsland, Venezuela, 251; Blank, Venezuela Election Factbook, 8; and Martz, "Generation of '28," 30-32.
the most capable members of the fast rising generation of 1936, Rafael Caldera. 60

Attempts at party unification suffered from similar internal dissension. The PRP, composed mostly of crypto-communists, and the UNR, composed of bankers, businessmen and professionals, were never able to work harmoniously together as had the members of the April Block or the Democratic Defense Committee. Common interest and the moderating influence of ORVE managed to hold the coalition together. When the National Democratic Party was formed, the influential and financially well-endowed UNR remained aloof, thus contributing to the weakness of the PDN. 61 As in 1928, it is possible that the forces of civilian political power lacked the physical strength to overthrow the military-established government of Venezuela in 1936-1937. Even complete civilian unity might have been insufficient to implant representative government in Venezuela, but certainly civilian disunity was no asset for the cause of democracy.

Nevertheless, the events of 1936-1937 were of profound importance for the future of democratic government in Venezuela. This epoch saw the creation of Venezuelan vehicles necessary to replace dictatorship with representative government. Torcuato S. DiTella, the noted


61 Marsland, Venezuela, 251.
Argentine political-sociologist, has labeled these vehicles "populist" political parties. According to Professor DiTella, a populist party can be described in the following terms:

A political movement which enjoys the support of the mass of the urban working class and/or peasantry but does not result from the autonomous organizational power of either two sectors. It is also supported by non-working class sectors upholding an anti-status quo ideology.

This description closely resembles that of the political parties founded in the wake of the death of Juan Vincente Gómez. As a result of the economic developments which occurred during the long dictatorship of Gómez, two new groups were brought into existence: a middle class and an industrial working class. Both were outside the equilibrium of forces that made up the Gómez coalition, and both met with severe repression in their attempts to organize. It was these two sectors,

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62 Torcuato S. DiTella, "Populism and Reform in Latin America," in Claudio Veliz (ed.), Obstacles to Change in Latin America (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 47-74. In this interesting article, DiTella sets up various categories of populist parties. Venezuela's political parties are included but only generally discussed. This article offers several new concepts, but its diffuse analysis leaves much to be desired.

63 Ibid., 47.


Until 1945, Venezuela's peasants remained backward and unorganized, but potentially they were a great source of political power; ultimately, that power would align itself with Venezuelan populism.
an urban middle class and labor, together with students and intellectuals, which provided the leadership and membership of the numerous political parties created in 1936-1937.

Liberal or labor reform movements were not viable in Venezuela. In the 1930's, as well as today, liberalism, the dominant ideology of most Western countries, was identified in Latin America with imperialism and foreign exploitation. It was, therefore, unpopular in nationally-minded Venezuela. A strictly labor movement as in England was also impossible. In the first place, numerically, industrial workers were too few to support a national party; and, secondly, the intensive participation and gradual acquisition of organizational experience necessary for the formation of a powerful labor party were absent from Venezuela's nascent industrial unions.

A comparison of Venezuela in 1928 with Venezuela in 1936-1937 reveals more contrasts than similarities. The warmth of public response and involvement indicated greater sympathy for the cause of civilian democracy in 1936-1937 than in 1928. Because of increased civilian power, the departure of Gómez or uncertain political conditions, the government's attitude was more tolerant in 1936-1937 than in 1928.

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65 DiTella, "Populism and Reform," 51-52.

In essence, the López Contreras regime had paved the way for later changes. It had modernized the governing structure by allowing unions and political parties to present their demands—as long as they did not demand structural changes.

Perhaps the most significant difference between Venezuela's two democratic reform efforts came in the area of leadership. While the same individuals, the Generation of 1928, held commanding positions, different organizations led the struggle. Political parties replaced the Venezuelan Student Federation as the vanguard of political reform and civilian power in Venezuela. This is not to say that the political influence of Venezuela's university students disappeared—it did not. To this day, Venezuela's students play an important role in the formation of political opinion, but their zenith was reached in 1928. After 1937 the masses looked to political parties for ideas, programs and leadership. The new sectors emerging in Venezuela desired a more functional vehicle, one more responsive to the complex needs of modern society.

Of these new emerging sectors, the most important was organized labor. In the 1936-1937 period, the political wedding that was forged between Venezuelan labor and her political parties was extremely important. Although weak and inchoate in 1936-1937, Venezuelan labor would grow to become the single most powerful civilian sector in the nation's society. Eventually, labor's subservience and

obedience to Venezuela's political parties gave the forces of civilian democracy a strong countervailing force in their struggle against dictatorial militarism.

During the remaining years of the López Contreras administration, political parties were not permitted. Skeleton facsimiles of outlawed parties continued to function clandestinely, and maintained contact with exiled leaders, but government harassment allowed for little activity. About the only noteworthy event to occur during these years was the official disassociation of International Communism from the National Democratic Party and, therefore, from Venezuelan populism. In late 1937, the Progressive Republican Party withdrew from the PDN and came out openly as the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV). Nationalism caused the break. The PRP withdrew when the noncommunist members of the PDN, comprising a large majority, voted to break all connections with the international communist movement. This development is significant for several reasons: it helped to remove the aura of Marxism from much of the civilian, political leadership of Venezuela, thus permitting participation by hitherto reluctant, yet reformist, bourgeois elements; it gave assurance that Venezuelan populism, exemplified by the PDN, would proceed along

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democratic lines; and it boosted the indigenousness of Venezuelan reform, thus creating a more responsive, effective brand of Latin American populism.

The government of President Isaiás Medina Angarita (1941-1945) permitted many exiles to return and political parties to function. Representing the left was the now legal Venezuelan Communist Party. Representing the right was the government party, the Venezuelan Democratic Party (PDV) and the disgruntled followers of former President López Contreras, who formed the Bolivarian Civic Group. Somewhere to the left of center and easily the country's largest single political party was Democratic Action (AD), Venezuela's populist party. AD's ranks were made up of former ORVE and PDN members; its leadership came from the Generation of 1928. The party was rechristened Democratic Action on September 15, 1941, after which it immediately began organizing party machinery. AD's recruitment and attention were devoted overwhelmingly to aligning Venezuela's workers and peasants behind the party. The closest thing to a centrist party in the Venezuela of Medina Angarita was National Action, a small, floundering organization formed by the UNE, the orthodox Catholic student movement founded in 1936. Later, National Action was influenced by the international Christian Democratic movement; and, in 1946, its name was changed to the Independent Committee for Political and Electoral Organization (COPEI). But as long as the
military government of Medina Angarita controlled the electoral machinery, party discipline, numerical strength or popularity meant nothing. In every election, the PDV always won safe majorities. 69

In 1945, however, the whole Venezuelan political situation changed, and democracy received a push from an unexpected quarter. A group of young military officers, unhappy with their lot, staged a successful golpe de estado and turned the country over to the forces of democratic reform. These young officers intervened in the name of democracy and civilian government. Because of their stated objectives, the military rebels were able to secure the advance cooperation of Democratic Action, the nation's largest and best-organized political party. This cooperation served the rebels' pragmatic aims as well, for it afforded them the wide public support necessary for success. The coup took place on October 17, 1945. After two days of intermittent fighting, a provisional government dominated by civilian reformers was organized. 70

A seven man "Revolutionary Junta" was established to rule the country until free elections could be held to write a new constitution which would, in turn, create a permanent government. Democratic


70 See Chapter III for more on this episode.
Action dominated the revolutionary government. Romulo Betancourt was the junta's president. Other members were Raul Leoni, Gonzalo Barrios and Luis B. Prieto Figueroa (all of AD), Edmundo Flores, a civilian independent, and two of the rebellious military officers, Colonel Carlos Delgado Chalbaud and Captain Mario Vargas. For over two years, Provisional President Betancourt, who was also the head of AD, ruled by decree. Most of these decrees originated as directives drawn up by AD's National Executive Committee; Democratic Action's program of revolutionary reform became the law of the land. 71

Prior to 1958, the three-year rule of AD marks the apogee of democratic, civilian endeavor in Venezuela. The men who governed Venezuela during the trienio, as this three-year era is sometimes called, were politicians. Like most politicians operating within a democratic framework, they were acutely aware that the retention of power by civilians was dependent upon the successful implementation of representative processes. Because of this, political reform was the first task undertaken by the provisional government. Bans of freedom of speech, press and assembly were all lifted. On March 15, 1946, a revolutionary electoral law was promulgated. It granted the suffrage

to every Venezuelan over eighteen years of age, it lifted previous voting restrictions on women and illiterates, it enabled parties of all shades to nominate candidates, and it allotted representation according to the D'Hondt system.\textsuperscript{72}

The electoral law called for the selection of a constituent assembly on October 27, 1946, for the purpose of writing a new constitution for Venezuela. Taking advantage of the liberal provisions of the electoral law, numerous political parties were founded. They began campaigning and named candidates for election to the constituent assembly. Besides AD, three parties are noteworthy. Ideologically nearest to Democratic Action, but of no prior ancestry, was the Democratic Republican Union (URD). It was founded shortly after the October, 1945, coup by many former ORVE members, the most notable being Jovito Villalba, who had never joined AD because of personal differences with Romulo Betancourt. AD's strongest competition came from the Independent Committee for Political and Electoral Organization, a Christian democratic oriented party formed by the more orthodox Catholic members of the generation of 1936. Although critical of Democratic Action, COPEI's position differed little from the government's. COPEI's religious views coupled with its position as chief

\textsuperscript{72}The D'Hondt system utilizes party lists as the basis for proportional representation. Martz, "Political Parties in Colombia and Venezuela," 325-326.
opposition party, caused many rightest elements to swell its ranks; but its founder, Rafael Caldera, never allowed the military to use his party as a conduit. The weakest party was the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV). Split by internal dissension and clashes over personal ambitions, the PCV fragmented into two groups during the trienio. Weak and unpopular, it was never a threat to democracy.\textsuperscript{73}

On October 27, 1946, 1,400,000 Venezuelans—"an astonishing record for Latin America\textsuperscript{74}—went to the polls to elect delegates to an assembly that would write a new constitution for their country. This was the first free and fair election in the history of Venezuela; and for most citizens, this election also marked the first voting experience. Democratic Action won a stunning victory, a clear mandate to continue its program of political, social and economic reform.\textsuperscript{75} AD's overwhelming majority in the constituent assembly

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
Party & No. of votes & No. of delegates \\
AD & 1,100,000 & 137 \\
COPEI & 180,000 & 19 \\
URD & 54,000 & 2 \\
PCV & 51,000 & 2 \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{73}Holmes, "Army Challenge," 171; Alexander, Communism in Latin America, 261-262; Blank, Venezuela Election Factbook, 9; Martz, Acción Democrática, 316-322; and Edward J. Williams, Latin American Christian Democratic Parties (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967), 21.

\textsuperscript{74}Holmes, "Army Challenge," 171.

\textsuperscript{75}The official results were as follows: Source: \textit{New York Times}, October 30, 1946.
insured the framing of a constitution favorable to the party. According to the new constitution, the President and Congress were to be elected by direct, universal suffrage. The President's term was set at four years, with no re-election permitted for eight years. The state assumed responsibility for education, health, housing and the national economy. AD's political debt to organized labor was satisfied by inserting into the constitution guarantees such as the right to organize, to strike, to receive pensions, sick pay, vacations, severance pay and profit shares. Under the new constitution, national elections were held on December 14, 1947. For the first time in their history, Venezuelans were able to elect a President by direct vote. The victor was AD's Romulo Gallegos, the country's best-known novelist. COPEI's Caldera and the PCV's Gustavo Machado finished second and third, respectively. AD also won substantial majorities in both houses of Congress. The new government assumed office on February 15, 1948.  

Relative to the future of democracy in Venezuela, the most significant development during the trienio was the tremendous growth of

76 Officially, Gallegos received 871,752 votes, Caldera 262,204 and Machado 36,514. Democratic Action won thirty-eight of the forty-two Senate seats and eighty-three of the 111 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. New York Times, December 16, 1947; Lott, "Venezuela," 242; Lieuwen, Venezuela, 75-76; Blank, Venezuela Election Factbook, 9; Waldo, "Why Latin America Distrusts Us," 85; and Alexander, Communism in Latin America, 262-263.
organized labor and its unwritten alliance with Venezuela's two other civilian sectors advocating representative government, students and political parties. The origins of organized labor in Latin America and Venezuela are recent, lying totally within the present century. Two juxtaposed factors contributed most to the birth of organized labor in Latin America: the growth of industrialization caused by the economic dislocations of World War I; and the immigration to the area of thousands of European workers carrying with them the ideologies of trade unionism, anarchism, syndicalism, socialism and Bolshevism.

In Venezuela, small craft societies existed as early as 1919, but any real labor movement was out of the question under Juan Vicente Gómez. Once the andino had passed from the scene, the movement took root. "Populism" was the chief reformist philosophy in vogue in the Latin America of 1936, and labor attached itself to the rising star of populist political parties. From the very beginning,

77 When this dissertation refers to organized labor, labor or labor unions, included are Venezuela's peasants. Beginning in 1936, Venezuela's political parties initiated attempts to organize peasant unions, but little was accomplished until the trienio. This joint treatment is justified because Venezuela's peasant unions were organized along the same lines as her urban and industrial unions. The strike is also the peasant's chief method of action. Anibal Quijano Obregon, "Contemporary Peasant Movements," in Lipset and Solari, Elites in Latin America, 308.

organized labor in Latin America was "part of the movement for basic economic, social and political change." Its goal was to win a greater share of the nation's bounty by bringing the worker, for years the victim of a stratified, poverty-ridden society, into active participation in civic affairs. For feudalistic Latin America, this was a revolutionary role.

To a greater degree than in other parts of the world, Latin America's labor movements have been closely tied to politics. There are several reasons why organized labor turned to political parties and governments for solutions to its problems. In most Latin American countries, the structure of labor unions and the collective bargaining process are regulated in great detail by the government. Governments have removed much from the realm of labor-management determination: minimum wage, overtime, length of vacations and holidays, health and pension plans are all written into law. Finally, major economic policies--taxes, imports and exports, inflationary and counter-inflationary programs, employment and foreign exchange controls--are in government hands. Since labor's standard of living is so greatly affected by government, it seemed natural for labor to try to influence government decisions in these areas.

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But if labor needed politics, politics needed labor more. Particularly in the case of Venezuela, "political circumstances at the time of the labor movement's onset also contributed to the politicalization of the trade unions." Two important motives prompted strong political party interest in organized labor: one was idealistic and noble, the other was opportunistic and vital. Many politicians, impressed with the poverty and oppression experienced by most workers, desired to help labor with favorable legislation abetting organization. But the pragmatic reason of political parties was more important. Worker's unions, potentially possessing a degree of discipline unlike any other civilian sector, might become capable of mass action for or against a party or government. This is crucial where the ballot decides power. In 1945, Democratic Action was both aware of this potential and able to do something about it. During the trienio, labor voted overwhelmingly AD; and, as a result, AD never lost a national election.82

By the constitution of 1946, the rights of Venezuelan labor became the law of the land, but this did not terminate the Betancourt and Gallegos governments' support of the worker. Under AD

leadership over 500 new labor unions were formed, causing labor membership to quadruple. A landmark accomplishment for Venezuelan labor was the creation, in November, 1947, of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV), a national labor organization. The government put pressure on employers to grant wage increases, then spent millions of dollars subsidizing foodstuffs and other basic items to prevent inflation. Hundreds of schools were built in worker neighborhoods, causing the number of children enrolled in Venezuelan schools to double. These government programs, as well as others in the areas of housing, agriculture and industry, were financed by a new oil policy which raised Venezuela's share of petroleum revenue to fifty per cent.

To permit a fuller degree of collaboration between labor and government, a separate Ministry of Labor was created, headed by Raul Leoni. Venezuela's other political parties, namely URD and COPEI, attempted to cut into AD's labor support, but could not gain significant victories.

83 Only a few PCV controlled unions were members of the CTV. Communist influence in Venezuelan labor suffered a blow from which it never recovered in 1944 when the Medina Angarita government withdrew legal recognition from all PCV dominated unions. This action had been preceded by a split between AD and the PCV in the Second Workers Congress of the same year. Both parties wished to control organized labor in Venezuela; when joint domination proved impossible, the Congress was dissolved. The government's move remains a mystery, for President Medina Angarita stood to gain more from aiding the PCV than AD. The net result allowed AD to take over, reorganize and reorient a majority of the country's communist-controlled unions. Alexander, Communism in Latin America, 259-264, and Organized Labor in Latin America, 144; and Martz, "The Growth and Democratization of Labor," 7-8.
due to Democratic Action's control of the government and concomitant ability to deliver the goods. 84

Within this general framework of Venezuelan labor, the great accomplishment of the trienio was the mobilization and politicalization of the Venezuelan peasantry. Well over half of the local unions founded during this era were peasant (or campesina) unions. Traditionally, peasants were politically negligible due to isolation, poverty, backwardness and government indifference. With AD in power, however, party leaders began working with both farmers and peasants in an attempt to restructure Venezuelan agriculture. The political arm of the peasants became the Venezuelan Peasant Federation (FCV), headed by AD's Ramon Quijada.

A near-perfect marriage of functional capabilities and needs was thereby initiated: campesina masses and the local leaders sought political representation and the organizational skills necessary to weld themselves into an effective form of collective action; the leaders of the new political parties sought a base of organized, massive electoral support; in each other, the partners found their needs nicely met. 85

The Gallegos government founded the Agrarian Reform Institute, backed by three per cent of the national budget. Its objective was to

84 Alba, Historia del Movimiento Obrero, 405; Blank, Venezuela Election Factbook, 9; Alexander, Organized Labor in Latin America, 144-145; and Martz, Acción Democrática, 259.

resettle Venezuela's 350,000 landless peasant families on idle or ill-utilized lands, justly compensating owners. Nevertheless, the landed oligarchy bitterly resisted land reform at every turn. "It was probably more than coincidental that the military coup against AD in November, 1948, occurred very soon after the passage of an agrarian reform law and before this law could be implemented."  

The power of labor rests on two pillars: numerical strength at the ballot box when elections matter, and the threat of violence as the ultimate weapon when elections do not matter. In the exercise of these powers, Venezuelan labor managed the former, but not the latter. The reason for this is simple: Democratic Action, like Venezuela's other political parties, assumed—perhaps naively—that representative government would become a permanent feature of Venezuelan political life. During the trienio, labor was organized to function as a pressure group in a democratic society and not as an armed institution. The implication by some authorities to the effect that organized labor failed "as a counterweight to the armed forces. . .", or that trade unions, "as a political counterpoise to

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87 Landsberger, "Labor Elite," 234.

88 Betancourt, Política y Petroleo, 461-470.

89 Martz, Acción Democrática, 260.
the armed forces ... proved ineffective in the revolution of November, 1948, "is unfair criticism.

Criticism of labor for its lack of militancy is more justified after 1948. The military coup which overthrew President Gallegos in the fall of that year nullified the gains made by labor under Democratic Action. A pro-labor government was replaced by a pro-management government. Programs for improved housing, schools and medical facilities were scrapped in favor of plush officers' clubs. Those 350,000 landless peasant families waiting for their small parcel of land were to have a long wait. Along with her students and political parties, Venezuela's workers and peasants were visited by repression. Compared to the ten years of dictatorship that followed 1948, the trienio resembled a political paradise. "It was a period of activity and accomplishment on a scale never before experienced." This memory, with that of the


More critical of Venezuela's civilian government than the military were the country's other political parties. They viewed AD's position as unfair competition and encouraged the armed forces to intervene. There was a complete absence of civilian unity. Various explanations of why the military decided to halt Venezuela's democratic experiment can be found in the following: Edwin Lieuwen, "The Military: A Revolutionary Force," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science CCCXXXIV (March, 1961), 36, and Arms and Politics, 86; and Holmes, "Army Challenge," 172-174.

Martz, Acción Democrática, 62.
oppression of the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship, forged an unwritten triple alliance between students, politicians and labor that proved a far more formidable opponent of militarism than the challengers of 1928, 1936-1937, or 1945-1948.

Like the student rebellion of 1928 and the political panaceas of 1936-1937, the civilian-democratic forces of the trienio failed because those who controlled the nation's physical power were determined to replace politicians with military officers and democracy with militarism. But like its predecessors, the 1945-1948 era made a contribution to the cause of freedom. During the trienio, Venezuelans discovered not only the economic and social advantages of representative government, but also the dignity inherent in being able to express openly an opinion, to have a voice in the affairs of one's country and to vote for a chosen candidate without fear of reprisal or exile.

Of the three historical experiences which comprise Venezuela's sparse civilian political tradition, the 1945-1948 trienio did the most to inculcate democratic values in the minds of the people. But in 1945, unlike 1928 or 1936, the impetus for reform came from without the civilian-democratic sector. It was almost as if the armed forces, having given democracy to Venezuela in 1945, retained the right to repossess it in 1948. The course of representative government in Venezuela in 1948 demonstrated to its advocates a simple lesson: only civilian unity plus a willingness to pay whatever price necessary would transform their dream of democracy into a permanent reality.
CHAPTER V

THE PATRIOTIC JUNTA: PART I

In the summer of 1957, the main topic of conversation in Venezuela was the national elections scheduled for the latter part of the year. Everyone knew that either President Marcos Pérez Jiménez or a close military associate would be Venezuela's next chief executive. Speculative discussion in the streets, homes, side-walk cafes and particularly in the country's censored press centered around political parties and the role they would play in the forthcoming elections. The government had made a near successful attempt at eradicating political parties; but with P. J.'s five-year term drawing to a close, URD and COPEI, Venezuela's only remaining legalized parties of any significance, began preparing candidates and programs for entry into the campaign. Democratic Action, Venezuela's largest party prior to 1948, had been outlawed for nearly a decade. Its leadership was either dead, imprisoned or exiled, and its membership dispersed and persecuted. In 1952, the Venezuelan Communist Party was also outlawed. The Democratic Republican Union, temporarily banned after its strong showing in the 1952 elections had been reinstated by 1957. However, it was impotent without its exiled leader, the ubiquitous Jovito Villalba. The only
political leader of national reputation not exiled was Rafael Caldera, the leader of the Independent Committee for Political and Electoral Organization. Unofficial speculation in the summer of 1957 expected URD and COPEI to unite behind the candidacy of Caldera, the only individual given the remotest chance of winning. Speculation on the role of political parties in Venezuela's next election ceased on August 21, 1957, when Rafael Caldera was arrested and imprisoned. There would be no repeat performance of the 1952 elections.

Although political parties seemed to be the number one target of the Pérez Jiménez regime, other groups were singled out for government repression. The Central University of Venezuela, the traditional repository of the country's democratic values, was under constant surveillance by the authorities. By 1957, the prolific population growth of Venezuela had produced a nation of young people (seventy per cent of all Venezuelans are under thirty years of age), a factor giving special weight to student political activity. Aware that university students were a potential source of unrest, P. J. disregarded, as early as 1952, the academic inviolability established by the

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University Reform Movement. Since the death of Juan Vincente Gómez, the huge Central University had enjoyed autonomy; but when students protested the 1952 election farce, P. J. invaded and closed the University. In February, 1956, when trouble arose over a strictly academic controversy, the police were again sent in to end the dispute and temporarily close the University. It was about this time that a University Front was created. It was composed of students of all political ideologies and dedicated to the overthrow of the dictatorship. However vocal and dedicated, the University Front, as demonstrated by its third confrontation with the government, seemed helpless against the military regime. In the last week of November, 1957, in reaction to the announcement by Pérez Jiménez that the forthcoming national elections would be a "plebiscite" rather than a contest, the students started a demonstration within university grounds and began a march toward Miraflores. About half-way to the presidential palace they were met by police using tear gas, chased back to the University City, sought out with clubs and subjected to mass arrest. The Central University of Venezuela was closed and remained so as long as Marcos Pérez Jiménez ruled Venezuela.²

²In this November, 1957, confrontation between students and police, several distinguished professors having nothing to do with the demonstrations were severely beaten by police. Humberto Cuenca, "Revolución de los Manifiestos," in Asi Se Fraguó La Insurrección: Documentos Clandestinos, 1956-1958 (Caracas: Ediciones de la Revista Cruza del Sur, 1958), vi; S. Walter Washington, "Student (continued)
Organized labor in Venezuela was also on the government's "black list." It was crushed. The effective Venezuelan Labor Confederation (CTV) was dissolved. Oil workers' unions and peasant unions were destroyed, but most urban unions continued to function under reconstituted, pro-P. J. leadership. Pérez Jiménez created a national, government-controlled and government-financed union in 1952, but few genuine labor organizations became affiliates. After an extensive investigation of the state of organizational freedom in Venezuela, the International Labor Organization (ILO), a technical agency of the United Nations, condemned the dictatorship. When, at an international oil conference, the ILO attacked the government's labor policies, P. J. withdrew Venezuela from the organization. A CTV-in-exile functioned as a propaganda organ, and the various political parties, AD, URD, COPEI and PCV (Red Communist), all


3 Marcos Pérez Jiménez was attempting to emulate the labor-military based government of Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina. Since Venezuela's population was becoming increasingly urban, Pérez Jiménez wished to construct a political system based upon the military and the caudillo as the champion of the urban worker. Feinstein, "The Role Foreign Investment," 212-213.
maintained small, clandestine labor organizations; but these remained ineffective during most of the dictatorship.\(^4\)

There was still one more distinguishable sector of Venezuelan life that became disenchanted with Pérez Jiménez. The Venezuelan Catholic Church, never a real political power in the country, declared itself opposed to the New National Ideal. This unusual position taken by the normally acquiescent Venezuelan Church can only be understood when set against certain developments within international Catholicism.

On May 1, 1955, Pope Pius XII declared the institution of the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker for the first day in May. This was a revival of the concept first expounded by Pope Leo XIII (Rerum Novarum--1891), which called on the Church to turn its attention to the temporal, as well as the spiritual, needs of the worker. Pius XII's successors continued to push this movement. Currently, this "New Catholicism" emphasizes liturgical innovations, theological reforms and ecumenicity; but it also caused a crisis in the Church--especially pronounced in the Church south of the border. The Latin American episcopacy is under heavy pressure from the Vatican and various hierarchies within the international Church to use its influence in the cause of social and economic advancement. There are two important reasons for this concern. The first is that Latin America comprises one-third of the Church's total

\(^4\)Alexander, Organized Labor, 146-147; Accion Democratica, 261.
baptized membership. The second is that due to social, economic and political unrest in the area, Latin America appears to be particularly vulnerable to communism. Neither the traditional Latin American Catholic Church, the ally of privilege and conservatism, nor the traditional Venezuelan Catholic Church, complacent and subservient to dictatorship, fits into this new, self-defined role of the universal Church.

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6 One of the most progressive Latin American prelates is the Rev. Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, Brazil. The following offering was given by His Excellency in 1956 at the Second Annual National Conference of the Catholic Inter-American Cooperation Program. In a few words, it demonstrates what is happening to the Church in Latin America.

Lord, make us love the Eucharist more and more in the man who is poor. May we recognize in the image of his misery the presence of your Son. Help us, for the love of this man who is poor, to wage a fight to the death against the causes of his poverty.

These days of study present a panorama: unjust social structures in Latin America; grave social crises shaking the countries of the continent; a social revolution which everywhere imposes itself. Revolution, not in the meaning of armed and bloody revolt, but of rapid and substantial change. (continued)
Since Juan Vincente Gómez, the Church in Venezuela had been making a comeback. Gómez removed the property-holding and educational restrictions instituted by Antonio Guzmán Blanco in the last century, allowing the Church to become gradually wealthier and more independent of the State. By the early 1950's, the Church hierarchy felt secure enough to let it be unofficially known that the Venezuelan Church disapproved of the government's treatment of COPEI, a Christian Democratic party. In 1953, eighty-three copeyano congressmen were arrested when they boycotted the assembly chosen by the 1952 electoral fraud. By 1954, COPEI was still legal but was unable to carry out its activities. In 1955, the dictatorship apparently succeeded in cementing a rapprochment with the Church by permitting Catholic instruction in public schools. The mortar, however, proved to be very weak. On Sunday, May 1, 1957, a pastoral letter from Rafael Arias Blanco,

6 (continued)

Woe be to all Christians if the lowly become convinced that the Church has abandoned them in this dark hour. They cannot but believe that religion is indeed the opium of the people and Christianity an ally of privilege and exploitation. Quoted in John J. Considine (ed.), Social Revolution in the New Latin America: A Catholic Appraisal (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1965), vii.

7 Lieuwin, "Political Forces in Venezuela," 53. For more on the relations between Guzmán Blanco and the Venezuelan Catholic Church see Chapter III.

Archbishop of Caracas, was read from all Church pulpits in Venezuela. It was an unmistakable indictment of the New National Ideal.9

The Archbishop did not "beat around the bush," He opened his letter by ridiculing those who would put the Marxist tag on anything connected with labor, organized and unorganized. Between communism, "which considers the individual a mere instrument of the State," wrote the prelate, and capitalism, "which sees the worker as just an instrument for production," is the dignity of human rights as found in the Gospel. After quoting from the writings of Popes Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII, Arias Blanco lashed out at the New National Ideal.

No one can dare say that the wealth of Venezuela is evenly distributed, for an immense number of our people are living in subhuman conditions. Unemployment is driving many Venezuelans to discouragement and desperation; capitalists are reaping unheard of profits, yet worker's wages are unjustly meager; there are no schools where the sons of workers (who have every right to it) can acquire an education in order to built a better life; credit for the worker is unavailable; the government constantly violates the rights of the workers by removing legal defenses; and women are toiling at jobs under unjust conditions. All of these facts are lamentable, they prevent Venezuelans from enjoying the God given richness of their country.10

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9The full text of Archbishop Arias Blanco's letter can be found in Asi Se Fraguó La Insurrección, 13-17. For a discussion of the effect of the letter on Venezuela see "Venezuela: For Harmony," Newsweek LI (January 20, 1958), 44; "Venezuela's Dictator Is Out," Business Week (February 1, 1958), 80; and Szulc, Twilight of the Tyrrants, 296-297. For the reaction of the Catholic press in the United States to Archbishop Arias Blanco's letter see "When Is a Plebiscite," 386.

10Asi Se Fraguó La Insurrección, 15.
During the rest of 1957, the relations between the government and the Church grew worse. The highly respected Venezuelan Catholic daily, La Religion, criticized P. J. for the arrest, on August 21, of Rafael Caldera on the ludicrous charge of inciting the Catholic Church against the government. In late November, when students demonstrated against the Pérez Jiménez announcement that a plebiscite instead of elections would be held in December, La Religion, in defiance of censorship orders, came out for the students and against the proposed plebiscite. Caldera was released on December 24, 1957, and given two weeks to leave the country. When, after only a few days, agents of the National Security began inquiring as to his whereabouts, Caldera was given diplomatic asylum by the Papal Nuncio. The result was strained relations between Pérez Jiménez and the Vatican. Following the abortive January 1, 1958, coup against the New National Ideal, P. J. ordered all newspapers to print front page editorials denouncing the uprising. The colorful editor of La Religion, Rev. Jesús Hernández Chapellin, refused and landed in jail. On January 4, four more priests who had been openly critical of the government were arrested. Not even the moral force of the Church seemed to weaken the dictatorship. 11

The numerous repressive policies of the Pérez Jiménez regime, the harassment of political parties, the jailing of priests, press censorship, military occupation of the university and the persecution of organized labor, adversely affected specific identifiable civilian sectors of society. These and other practices of the dictatorship, practices not directed toward any particular element in the population, served to draw condemnation of the regime from that great faceless, untitled mass, the Venezuelan general public. Excessive police brutality in quelling university and high school demonstrations, in addition to unnecessary indignities inflicted upon faculty members, caused concern among many, especially intellectuals and parents. The New National Ideal's "iceberg principle" of economics--to spend millions on the one-tenth of the country that was visible, notably Caracas--could not hide growing slums, increasing unemployment and rising food prices. Citizens became increasingly edgy in the precarious atmosphere created by the National Security. For the first time in the nation's history, women saw the inside of prison walls. "Venezuela became a huge political jail where men were enclosed without the benefits of being charged, without legal counsel and without trial." Pedro Estrada, chief of the National Security, was at once the most hated and the most feared man in Venezuela. Venezuelan public opinion

12 Cuenca, "Revolución de los Manifiestos," v.
began to express misgivings about the country's image. In 1955, Argentina ousted its military dictator, Juan Perón, who, in 1956, took up residence in Caracas. In June, 1957, Argentina broke relations with Venezuela when Perón began using Venezuelan facilities to direct, by remote control, a sabotage campaign in his country. Peru and neighboring Colombia had recently overthrown their military dictators, Manuel Odría and Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. To help celebrate Venezuelan Independence Day, July 5, 1957, P. J. could find only one available friend, General Alfredo Stroessner of tiny Paraguay. It was publicly known that citizens of other countries were beginning to make parallel comparisons between Pérez Jiménez's Venezuela and the Dominican Republic of the notorious Rafael Trujillo.  

The government of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez was not blind to this growing tide of resentment. Yet, the effect of this increasing unpopularity seemed to embolden the dictatorship. In November, 1957, the Venezuelan Congress obediently approved modification of the

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country's electoral law. Venezuela's General-President announced to the nation that, on December 15, 1957, a plebiscite would be held in place of an election. Lareano Vallenilla Lanz, Minister of the Interior, and Pedro Estrada, National Security Chief, P. J.'s two closest advisers, had no illusions concerning the President's popularity—Pérez Jiménez could never win an honest election. The plebiscite was the brain child of Vallenilla Lanz. Voters would be asked whether they wanted Pérez Jiménez to remain in office, the sole name on the ballot would be Pérez Jiménez, and there would be no campaign. On December 15, voters were given two cards: a blue one, to vote yes; and a red one, to vote no. There was only one Presidential candidate on the ballot (P. J.) and only one slate of candidates for Congress (P. J.'s). Two hours after the polls closed, Vallenilla Lanz called in foreign correspondents to announce that eighty-five per cent of Venezuela's registered voters had re-elected Pérez Jiménez by a four to one majority. In reality, polling places on December 15 resembled morgues. Only government employees voted. Ink stains on the finger indicated that a person had participated in the election; for a person hoping to keep a government job, to return to work without ink stains was dangerous. 14 Although Venezuela had never been a haven

14 The New York Times, December 18, 1957; "When Is a Plebiscite," 386; Kantor, "AD De Venezuela," 20; and Szulc, Twilight of the Tyrants, 296-299.
of democracy, even her most venal dictators paid lip service to democratic procedure by at least going through the motions of being re-elected. Pérez Jiménez did not.\footnote{15}

Scholars, journalists and observers of Latin America and Venezuela are in unanimous agreement that it was this "plebiscite farce" which turned nearly all of Venezuela against the dictatorship. Even for those Venezuelans who had accepted the government of Pérez Jiménez with immense patience and passivity, the episode of December 15 proved to be more than they could tolerate. Venezuela's cup of endurance had overflowed. The plebiscite instilled in Venezuelans from all walks of life a desire to strike back at the dictatorship. Since these civilians lacked physical modes for accomplishing their desires, they were drawn to the banner of the Patriotic Junta, which offered a symbolic method for denouncing the government. The Patriotic Junta, in hand-circulated leaflets, requested that Venezuelans show their disapproval of the regime by boycotting the plebiscite. Officially, Marcos Pérez Jiménez was re-elected President of Venezuela on December 15, 1957; unofficially, this day marked the first of many victories for the Patriotic Junta.\footnote{16}

\footnotetext{15}{Porter and Alexander, \textit{The Struggle for Democracy,} 4; and Lott, "Venezuela," 243.}

\footnotetext{16}{The following sources are all in agreement regarding the significance of December 15, 1957, plebiscite as the single most important indicator of the unpopularity of the Pérez Jiménez (continued)
The Patriotic Junta was a totally clandestine organization dedicated to the overthrow of the military based regime of Marcos Pérez Jiménez and to the establishment of representative government in Venezuela. Its origins are obscure. Following the 1948 counter-revolution, Democratic Action's exiled political leadership had time to re-examine its achievements and mistakes. There was complete agreement as to what constituted AD's biggest blunder: civilian disunity and weakness caused by mutual enmity among Venezuela's political parties—with Democratic Action the most hostile contributor. URD, PCV, and COPEI, eager to fill the vacuum created by the departure of AD from the Venezuelan political scene in 1948, were not as quick to realize the value of political unity. By 1952, however, P. J.'s persecution of the Communist Party of Venezuela, and the provisional military junta's theft of a clear electoral victory from the Democratic Republican Union demonstrated to these two groups the advantages of concerted action. At a 1956 conference, AD exiles adopted a "New Tactic" which called for full and active cooperation

16 (continued)
with Venezuela's other political parties. Since the expatriated leadership of the PCV and URD also favored inter-party coordination against the dictatorship and all three parties in exile maintained close contact with their underground counterparts in Venezuela, the way was clear for some form of joint action. COPEI was reluctant to cooperate for fear of jeopardizing its legal status; but the arrest of Rafael Calder in August, 1957, convinced Venezuela's Christian Democrats of the necessity of civilian unity. The stage was set for the formation of the Patriotic Junta. 17

Prior to the summer of 1957, the Patriotic Junta was just an idea. Three of Venezuela's four major political parties, URD, PCV and AD, were being persecuted by the government and were forced to operate party machinery clandestinely. By pre-arrangement, the presidents of the underground URD and PCV set a date and place for the first meeting of a joint committee—the future Patriotic Junta—to coordinate the anti-government activities of both parties. 18 For


18A very brief account of the activities of the Patriotic Junta can be found in Philip B. Taylor, Jr., The Venezuelan Golpe De Estado of 1958: The Fall of Marcos Perez Jiménez (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Comparative Study of Political Systems, 1968), 51-55. This monograph (p. 50) states that all inter-party cooperation was directed from New York by the exiled leadership of AD, URD and COPEI, and that, by mutual agreement, the PCV would not be included. In a published newspaper interview of February 14, 1958, Jovito Villalba, Romulo (continued)
the sake of harmony and security, the party chiefs established two important principles to govern the relationship between the parties and the coordinating committee: both parties would abide by decisions of the committee and only the presidents would know the identity of his party's representative. The first meeting of the Patriotic Junta took place on June 14, 1957, at the home of Fabricio Ojeda, a young reporter and member of the URD. 19

Present at this first gathering were Guillermo Garcia Ponce of the PCV and Amilcar Gómez, José Vincente Rangel and Fabricio Ojeda of the URD. With the exception of Gómez, these were young men, who, at the time, could have been classified as political unknowns—a discreet fact influencing their selection. Amilcar Gómez, an influential URD member and close friend of the exiled maestro, Jovito Villalba, apparently dominated this first session of the committee. The first business to be discussed was security, for the arm of the National Security seemed long and omnipresent. Legitimate names were abandoned and supplanted by code names; each of the four politicos selected an alias and introduced himself to the group. (Of course,

18 (continued) Betancourt and Rafael Caldera refuted this allocation and clearly stated that only informal talks had taken place in New York, resulting solely in the encouragement of inter-party harmony. Actual collaboration and the Patriotic Junta's policy of national unity were all developed and implemented in Caracas. El Nacional, February 14, 1958.

URD members knew each other's legitimate names; but in Patriotic Junta meetings, code designations were always used. This measure was introduced to prevent members from divulging vital information in case of capture and torture by the National Security. Each session of the committee was to determine the date and location of its next gathering, with all future meetings taking place in the automobiles of its various members. Finally, a name for the coordinating committee was chosen. It would be called the Junta Patriotica. The name had been suggested by Jovito Villalba in his correspondence with Amilcar Gómez and other URD members. The term was drawn from a revolutionary organization by the same name formed on October 15, 1858, and dedicated to the overthrow of the tyrannical regime of General José Tadeo Monagas.20

A few days following the first meeting of the Patriotic Junta, the party chiefs of the Venezuelan Communist Party and the Democratic Republican Union began negotiations with powerful Democratic Action. AD's positive response to suggestions that it join the coordinating body and thereby limit its penchant for individual action pleasantly surprised its former competitors. By early August the necessary

arrangements had been made, and Democratic Action's Moises Gamero became a member of the Patriotic Junta. 21

August, 1957, was a momentous month for the Junta in still another way. It was in the early part of this month that the people of Venezuela first heard mention of the Patriotic Junta. This was made possible by the appearance of the Junta's maiden publication, "Manifesto No. 1: The Patriotic Junta to the Venezuelan People." 22


22 The early manifestos, bulletins and leaflets distributed by the Patriotic Junta were not as numerous as the Junta's later publications. This was due simply to a lack of demand. As the popularity of the Patriotic Junta increased, so did the demand for its circulars—particularly following the December 15, 1957, plebiscite. Police were ordered to destroy anything signed by the Patriotic Junta. Immediate arrests and imprisonment by the National Security was in store for anyone caught with Junta literature on his person, or for anyone seen reading Junta literature that was nailed to posts or walls.

In mid-1958, the Patriotic Junta-backed provisional government ruling Venezuela was shaken by several attempted military coups. Two enterprising editors, to help rally the civilian population behind the government (and to sell a few volumes), published accounts of the great achievements of Venezuela's civilian citizens under the Patriotic Junta. One of these José Umaña Bernal, Testimonio de la Revolución en Venezuela (Caracas: Tipografía Vargas, 1958) is highly opinionated, subjective and inaccurate. (It is this source which forms the basis of the previously cited Taylor study.) The other Así Se Fraguó La Insurrección: Documentos Clandestinos, 1956-1958 (Caracas: Ediciones de la Revista del Sur, 1958), however, is extremely valuable. Prefaced by a short, introductory essay, it contains a near complete collection of all the publications of the Patriotic Junta. It is the only collection of its kind known to this writer. Even the volume itself is out-of-print and virtually inaccessible.
The members of the Patriotic Junta wanted their clandestine organization to become the conscience of Venezuela. With freedom of speech and press impossible, they wanted the Junta to serve as a vehicle of national expression and opinion. This would necessitate, however, a fairly sophisticated printing facility unavailable in the tightly clutched Venezuela of Marco Pérez Jiménez. It was at this juncture that Venezuela's communists made their most significant contribution to the success of the Junta. "Padilla" (the code name of Guillermo García Ponce of the PCV) informed his comrades that the printing press and staff of the Tribuna Popular would be put at the disposal of the Patriotic Junta. The Tribuna Popular was and is the official organ of the Venezuelan Communist Party. It was established in the early 1940's, but it remained underground even after the PCV was legalized. Since the number of Venezuelan communists was never large, the circulation and influence of the Tribuna Popular remained minimal, but its plant was perfectly suited to the needs of the Patriotic Junta. None of the Junta's members, including García Ponce, knew the location of the press. Directives of the Patriotic Junta were authored jointly by all members; all preliminary drafts were destroyed; and the final copy was taken by "Padilla" who, in turn, entrusted the tract to his party chief for ultimate deposit with the printing press of the Tribuna Popular. Usually, the finished product was prepared in time for the Junta's next meeting, when García Ponce arranged for its delivery to the
Patriotic Junta. To minimize risks, Junta members never distributed their own literature. Instead, members deposited the printed tracts with their respective party chiefs, who made the necessary arrangements for distribution.23

"Manifesto No. 1: The Patriotic Junta to the Venezuelan People" was dated August, 1957, and signed la Junta Patriótica. A four-page essay, this first manifesto was mildly worded and critical of P. J.—but not anti-military. It had as its main theme the coming elections scheduled for December. Except for a vague allusion made to "representative sectors of national life," nothing was said regarding the identity of the Patriotic Junta. Its purpose, however, was more succinctly expressed:

We aspire only for respect of the right of direct, secret and universal suffrage; that candidates be allowed to campaign for office and debate openly—in other words, to allow the will of the public to be expressed through the suffrage.... All candidates should be welcomed, civilian or military.24

After a discreet reference to the recent overthrow of dictators in Argentina, Peru and Colombia, the tract demanded free and honest elections in December, implying that if they were not forthcoming, the government of Pérez Jiménez might meet a similar fate. This first


24"Manifiesto No. 1: La Junta Patriótica al Pueblo Venezolano," in Asi Se Fraguo la Insurrección, 26-29.
of many Patriotic Junta publications was summarized with the following call for unity:

The Patriotic Junta makes a call on all countrymen, both in and out of government, to act as one, without hatred or vengeance, for national peace and prosperity. . . . On the streets, in the factories and offices, on the countryside, in the educational institutions, in the forts, wherever one may be, we must struggle for the respect of our sacred rights and sovereign will. 25

The manifesto ended with a forthright statement of its position: "against presidential succession;" "for representative government;" "for a president who will respect the nation;" and "for peace, tranquility, and calm for the Venezuelan Family." 26

The month of August, 1957, continued to hold significant events for the Patriotic Junta. For Pérez Jiménez, preparing for the December elections meant the elimination of competitors. In mid-August the government began a crack-down on potential political troublemakers. Among those arrested were three members of the Patriotic Junta: Amilcar Gómez, José Vincente Rangel and Moises Gamero. Fortunately for the Junta, these men were apparently arrested for overt political activities and were not subjected to intense interrogation—the government simply wanted them safely "put away" in order to avoid possible embarrassment.

The National Security's most unpopular move came on August 21, with the arrest of Rafael Caldera, the highly respected head of COPEI. The

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
jailing of Caldera caused his successor, Pedro del Corral, together with most of Venezuela's Christian Democrats, to lose whatever qualms they possessed regarding entry into the struggle to overthrow the dictatorship. Pedro Raul Aguilar of COPEI joined the Patriotic Junta. He was arrested, however, after attending only one Junta meeting; Pedro del Corral named himself as Aguilar's replacement. 27

By the beginning of September, the Patriotic Junta took final form. For equalization of representation and for reasons of security, URD did not name replacements for Amilcar Gómez and José Vincente Rangel; Fabricio Ojeda became its sole representative. Silvestre Ortíz Bucaran was selected by AD to replace the imprisoned Moises Gamero, while Pedro del Corral represented COPEI. Guillermo García Ponce represented the PCV. The membership of the Junta remained unchanged until January 1, 1958, when Pedro del Corral was arrested. His copeyano replacement was Enrique Aristigueta Gramko, whose appointment marked the final change in Junta personnel. These four young political unknowns, Ojeda (age 29), García Ponce (age 33), Ortíz Bucaran (age 33) and Aristigueta Gramko (age 24), speaking for Venezuela's four great political parties, URD, PCV, AD and COPEI, were to undermine and eventually

topple one of the most entrenched military dictatorships in Latin America. 28

"Manifesto No. 2: The Patriotic Junta to the Venezuelan People," the second publication of the Junta, made its appearance in September, 1957. The basic themes stressed in this tract were the same as those of its predecessor: a demand for free, honest elections in December and a plea for civilian unity to strengthen this demand. This manifesto differed from the first, however, in its subtlety. In discussing P. J.'s relations with the Venezuelan military, emphasis was placed on the condescending manner in which specifically named officers, disagreeing with the policies of the New National Ideal, were hustled out of the country on meaningless diplomatic assignments. General Pérez Jiménez was portrayed as being completely dominated by the corrupt "gangsters" holding high government portfolios. The innuendo was clear. The armed forces of Venezuela were being used. A cabal--headed by Laureano Vallenilla Lanz and Pedro Estrada--was enriching itself at the expense of Venezuela and with the assistance of Venezuela's armed forces. "Manifesto No. 2" also vehemently criticized the government's arrest of Rafael Caldera. The eulogizing of

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Caldera, which revealed COPEI influence within the Patriotic Junta, gained the latter growing recognition and support from the Catholic, more conservative elements in the population.²⁹

During the months of October and November, 1957, no "manifestos" were issued by the Patriotic Junta. Although the second manifesto expressed the Junta's "deep appreciation for the way in which our first manifesto was received..."³⁰ its members felt a new approach was needed to attract greater interest in the Patriotic Junta and its work. In lieu of lengthy treatises, the Junta would publish news bulletins. Several reasons prompted this decision: bulletins, by nature shorter and more precise, would require less time to compose; news releases, based along journalistic lines, would demand less time at the printing press and permit quicker distribution; and, most important, since all events, both local and international, were subject to total press censorship by the government, any sources of reliable information would become a prime object of acquisition in a Venezuela hungry for news.³¹


³⁰ Ibid., 29.

³¹ Interview with Enrique Aristigueta Gramko, July, 1967. In the summer of 1967, when this paper was being researched, Señor Aristigueta Gramko was the only member of the underground Patriotic Junta available for comment. Pedro del Corral was out of the country. Guillermo García Ponce was either in exile or hiding somewhere in Venezuela. His party, the PCV, had been declared illegal for its terrorist activities, and, by (continued)
A total of six Patriotic Junta bulletins appeared during October and November. These dispatches were approximately the same length as the manifestos (three to four pages) but differed in format. In journalistic fashion, the pages of the bulletins were interspersed with headlines, followed by a brief three or four sentence paragraph elaborating on the heading. Though accurate, their content was slanted. Every item challenged the dictatorship. Typical examples of news releases on local issues are as follows: "the University Front, representing the students, is backing the Patriotic Junta in its slogan of unity...;" "Dr. Villalba, leader of URD, made the following declaration: 'Dr. Caldera... is the symbol of everything..."

31 (continued) 1967, García Ponce had become one of Venezuela's leading communists. Reliable communist sources at the Central University of Venezuela informed the writer that an interview with García Ponce would not be possible. Silvestre Ortiz Bucaran, on the losing end of several splits within Democratic Action, refused to discuss any aspect of his former affiliation with that party. Very embittered, Ortiz Bucaran feels that he did not receive a "fair shake" from AD. Fabricio Ojeda committed suicide in 1963. A militant urredista and fervent admirer of Fidel Castro, Ojeda joined the FLAN and became a guerrilla captain. In 1963 he was captured by government troops and imprisoned; several days later he was found dead. Using his belt, he hanged himself from the ceiling of his cell. Much of the intimate background machinations of the underground Patriotic Junta were supplied by Señor Enrique Aristigueta Gramko. The writer is deeply indebted to Señor Aristigueta Gramko for this valuable information.

32 These bulletins were undated, but from the nature of their news content and from conversations with Venezuelan historians, political scientists, journalists, politicians and citizens, their appearance in time can be fixed from early October to late November of 1957.
opposing the violence and terror imposed by Pérez Jiménez;" "new threats against the editor of *La Religion*, it is said that Father Hernández Chapellín has taken the pulse of Venezuela and through his writings the heart of the martyred nation speaks;" and

Director Pedro Silveira, Jr. of the Ministry of Finance siphoned off three million dollars from the issuance of fraudulent liquor import tax stickers. . . . Mr. Silveira declared that Pérez Jiménez did not mind for his 'true friends' to profit by helping themselves to public funds. 33

On the international scene, it was via the news bulletins of the Patriotic Junta that Venezuela discovered its government had been censured by the International Press Association for its interference with freedom of the press. The nation also learned that a Christian Democratic Conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, named Rafael Caldera, then held in a National Security prison, Honorary President of the Conference. Comments from various Latin American papers on the conditions within Venezuela, contained in the bulletins, were of particular interest to readers. *El Labaro* (Panama City, Panama) stated "the imprisonment of Dr. Caldera indicates the Venezuelan government's intention of transforming the country's election into a bloody farce."

*La Nación* (Montevideo, Uruguay) observed "the election of Pérez Jiménez without opposition will come as no surprise to America's

33"Boletín Informativo de La Junta Patriótica: No. 1," "Boletín Informativo de La Junta Patriótica: No. 2," "Boletín Informativo de La Junta Patriótica: No. 3," and "Boletín Informativo de La Junta Patriótica: No. 4," in *Así Se Fragua La Insurrección*, 33-46.
democrats." El Tiempo (Bogotá, Colombia), probably Latin America's finest newspaper, noted "the government of Pérez Jiménez is reactionary to the point of abolishing politics." 34

As much for their accuracy as for the tantalizing nature of their content, the bulletins were a success. It was obvious to those who read the releases of the Patriotic Junta that these publications represented responsible journalism. The Junta had two efficient sources of information. At its disposal were the elaborate, clandestine machines of AD, URD, COPEI and the PCV. Party members and sympathizers held positions in all areas of Venezuelan life, and many served as informants. The Patriotic Junta's second important source of news came from within its very membership. Fabricio Ojeda (URD) and Guillermo Garcia Ponce (PCV) were reporters; Garcia Ponce was a freelancer, while Ojeda worked for one of the country's largest and finest newspapers, El Nacional. These two men (especially Ojeda) had access to the international wire services and local news releases prior to their trip to the censor. 35

34 Ibid.

35 During his entire tenure as a member of the Patriotic Junta, Fabricio Ojeda was a regular attendant at the numerous press conferences of Pérez Jiménez's influential Minister of the Interior, Lareano Vallenilla Lanz. El Nacional, January 31, 1958.
The government's attempted emulation of the modus operandi of the Patriotic Junta is testimony to growing public interest in the Junta created by the bulletins. Leaflets signed by the various political parties urging the people to rebel, loot and destroy property were distributed by the National Security. A Patriotic Junta news bulletin quickly appeared to divulge the source of the leaflets and the motives of the National Security—to justify future arrests before the upcoming elections and to capture any militant respondents. El Heraldo, owned and published by Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, tried to undermine the unity theme of the Junta by fabricating accounts of inter-party hostility, particularly between Romulo Betancourt (AD) and Rafael Caldera (COPEI). "Information Bulletin of the Patriotic Junta: No. 3," citing the editorials of the audacious Father Hernández Chapellin, labeled these efforts "blasphemous." 36

During the last week in November, President Marcos Pérez Jiménez announced the government's intention of holding the plebiscite rather than an election on December 15, 1957. The visible disgust felt by most Venezuelans following P. J.'s proclamation was not missed by the Patriotic Junta. From the last week in November to December 15, the date of the plebiscite, the Junta embarked on a stepped-up campaign against the government and the plebiscite. Patriotic Junta bulletins

36 "Boletín Informativo de La Junta Patriotica: No. 3," in Asi Se Fuguro La Insurrección, 42-43.
No. 5 and No. 6 appeared in rapid succession, but they were no longer dedicated to printing news. They were, in reality, a call to arms. All sectors were called upon (1) to form "little" Patriotic Junta subservient to the parent organization and (2) to "incite the people to fight for their rights." Since P. J. had violated the constitution (which he had drawn up himself) and, by doing so, had insulted all Venezuela, the new slogan of the Patriotic Junta became the following:

Defend the constitution!
Repudiate the plebiscite!
Unite against unsurpation and tyranny!
United under the Patriotic Junta!
For the liberty and dignity of Venezuela! 37

As part of its campaign, the Patriotic Junta released directives addressed to specific sectors of society. In a tract addressed to the Venezuelan military, the Junta, after citing the section of the constitution (Article 103) which gave any qualified Venezuelan the right to campaign and run for the office of president, desired to know why the

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37 "Boletín Informativo de la Junta Patriotica: No. 5," in Asi Se Fraguo La Insurrección, 52-55. Bulletins numbered 5 and 6 were the last two such publications of the Patriotic Junta. No. 6 dealt exclusively with the student strike and demonstrations which followed the announcement of the plebiscite. The students were lauded for their courage in the face of tyranny, while the government was condemned for excessive brutality in quelling the student protests. "The Patriotic Junta salutes the students of Venezuela. They are not alone. Soldiers, clergy, workers, peasants, intellectuals and professional men and women unite... for the defense of the Constitution and to impede the plebiscite..." "Boletín Informativo de la Junta Patriotica: No. 6," in Asi Se Fraguo La Insurrección, 56.
armed forces had shifted in their role as guardians of the constitution to one of constitutional desecrators. "The nation asks," asserted the Patriotic Junta, "are the Armed Forces going to violate the constitution or defend it? Will the Armed Forces act in the same servile manner as the Congress?"

Three other such appeals appeared: one addressed to the women of Venezuela, one to the workers of Venezuela, and the last to the large Italian community of Caracas. The women were asked to give "moral" support to their men, while the workers and Italians were urged to boycott the plebiscite. The leaflet addressed to the Italians also served to dispel any xenophobic accusations directed against the Junta.

Although the name of Marcos Pérez Jiménez was the only one appearing on the election ballots of December 15, 1957, there was an opposition candidate. Campaigning from an automobile cruising the

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39 "La Junta Patriotica A Las Mujeres Venezolanas," "La Junta Patriotica A Los Trabajadores Venezolanos," and "La Junta Patriotica A Los Immigranti Italiani," in Asi Se Fraguó La Insurrección, 62-79. Shortly following the announcement of the plebiscite and without precedent anywhere in the world, the government decided that foreigners would be allowed to vote. This step was aimed at throwing the ballots of thousands of new immigrants (mostly Italians), presumably grateful to the regime for employment, to Pérez Jiménez. The result was enmity between the aliens and more sensitive Venezuelans, particularly native laborers who viewed this foreign competition as unfair. Szulc, Twilight of the Tyrants, 298; and Daily Journal, January 25, 1958.
The streets of Caracas was the Patriotic Junta. Political party and labor union members, clergymen and students were joined by thousands of other Venezuelans in casting their vote for the Patriotic Junta. These dissatisfied Venezuelans voiced their opinion by observing the Junta's call for mass abstention from the polls. At several news conferences prior to election day, Vallenilla Lanz jokingly ridiculed the Junta by reiterating that governments were not overthrown by pieces of paper. Nevertheless, those "pieces of paper" won a stunning victory on December 15, 1957. 40

In the remaining two weeks of 1957, the Patriotic Junta issued two declarations and two leaflets. The declarations were very similar to the manifestos, but they were not entitled "Manifestos." Both long essays, they were entitled "National Unity Against the Usurpation" and "Declaration of the Patriotic Junta." The first, after congratulating the Venezuelan people on their performance of December 15, articulated the numerous grievances suffered by each sector of Venezuelan society and reiterated that only organized civilian resistance could halt these humiliations. This publication strongly emphasized that the Patriotic Junta's fight against the government was just beginning. The second declaration is very significant. The "Declaration of the Patriotic Junta"

40 Daily Journal, February 2, 1957, February 5, 1957; Asi Se Fraguó La Insurrección, ix; and Szulc, Twilight of the Tyrants, 299.
revealed, for the first time, that the Junta represented no particular political party, candidate or ideology, but stood simply for "progress, liberty and human dignity." Another salient feature of this document was that it indicated just how the Junta intended to overthrow Pérez Jiménez—Venezuelans were asked to begin preparations for a general strike. The Patriotic Junta was to announce its decision regarding the date of the strike in the near future. The two leaflets were short (one page) and succinct. One, "A New Coup d'Etat," declared the plebiscite synonymous with a golpe de estado minus force; the other, "To the Armed Forces," insinuated that the military's tacit approval of the plebiscite compromised their integrity.41

The Patriotic Junta's bout with the government over the plebiscite issue gained for the Junta increased respect, prestige and renown. The Patriotic Junta was on the lips of nearly all Venezuelans. Hundreds of people made typewritten and even handwritten copies of Junta literature to send to friends and relatives in the provinces. Political party leaders tactfully informed members that the Junta was non-partisan in nature and that it had the complete confidence of Venezuela's political parties. Also complementing the fame of the Junta was the creation of numerous "little" Patriotic Juntas. The members of the Junta, operating anonymously.

by telephone, contacted thousands of Venezuelans, urging them to form coordinating committees to expedite mobilization against the government. A Feminine Committee, a Student Committee, a Labor Committee, a Pharmacist Committee, an Engineering Committee and a Physicians' Committee were formed, to mention but a few. These "little" Juntas were in direct communication with the parent Junta, with members of the latter using their code names and making contact via telephone. This anonymity added to the excitement and interest surrounding the Junta. Who, what, where was the Patriotic Junta? Perhaps the Junta was a group of exiled political leaders, some prominent businessmen, a few valiant intellectuals, several outstanding professional men, or, better yet, a team of former ministers. Speculations were legion relative to the identity of the organization that had spread a spider web across Caracas and Venezuela. 42

The first day of the new year, 1958, was of profound importance for the future of the Patriotic Junta and Venezuela. On this day, a military uprising against the government of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez occurred. For several months, the Patriotic Junta had been vaguely aware that certain military officers, disenchanted with P. J., were plotting against the government. These officers had contacted

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42 Martz, Acción Democratica, 95; Asi Se Fraguó La Insurrección, xii; Kantor, "AD De Venezuela," 245; Daily Journal, January 24, 1958, March 27, 1958; and El Nacional, February 8, 1958.
known Democratic Action leaders in hopes of concocting a reenactment of 1945. AD representatives listened to the conspiring officers, prudently encouraged them and informed the Patriotic Junta of these developments. Those numerous Junta leaflets addressed to the armed forces had been primarily directed at this disgruntled military element. For most Venezuelans, the January 1, 1958, uprising was the result of the work of the Patriotic Junta. This was not totally true.

As in 1945, a number of officers, but principally younger officers of middle grade rank, were unhappy with their superiors and their commander-in-chief, General Marcos Pérez Jiménez. Their reasons were numerous. P. J. showered senior officers with privileges, political appointments and opportunities to grow rich (mostly by corruption), but junior officers were neglected. Many officers felt insecure, for Pérez Jiménez broke all records in sending abroad as attachés or advisors officers regarded as untrustworthy. Venezuela's Navy and young Air Force were restless under a regime run largely by and for the Army. Finally, many younger officers were eager for

43 In October, 1945, a group of young military officers called the Patriotic Military Union (UPM) collaborated with Democratic Action in the overthrow of the government of General Isaías Medina Angarita. Chapter III contains a full treatment of this subject.

advancement and politically ambitious, just as P. J. had been in 1945. 45

As early as November, 1957, a small group of young Army officers, led by Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Trejo, an instructor at the military academy, were conspiring to overthrow the government. The conspiratorial

45 Johnson, The Military and Society in Latin America, 124-135; "P. J. in Command," 48; and "An Air of Hail and Farewell in Venezuela," Life XLIV (January 20, 1958), 31. Another reason given by some authorities is that most of these disgruntled, younger officers had received training in the United States and, as a result, became imbued with democratic values and the belief in a rigid separation of professional and political interest. Their argument is based on the fact that most of the young officers who led an unsuccessful golpe de estado on January 1, 1958, against the government of Pérez Jiménez had attended military schools in the United States. This motive is advanced by John D. Martz, a political scientist from the University of North Carolina (Accion Democratica, 310-311), Edwin Lieuwen, a historian from the University of New Mexico (Generals vs. Presidents, 87), and John J. Johnson, a historian from Stanford University (The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries, 129). It is undeniable that the military rebels of January 1, 1958, were partially educated in the United States; it is questionable, however, that this training alone instilled in these men an understanding of political democracy and the tradition of an apolitical military. A sociological study by Philip B. Springer, Social Sources of Political Behavior of Venezuelan Military Officers: An Exploratory Analysis, "Politico XXX (June, 1965), 348-355, has revealed just the opposite. Springer's findings (pp. 351-353) suggest that the most politically inclined officers of the Venezuelan armed forces were those specifically trained in the United States. Civil-military relations in Venezuela since 1958 tend to support the sociological study. The officers who grumbled under Pérez Jiménez, notably Hugo Trejo, Wolfgang Larrazabal and Jesús Maria Castro León, were the same officers who endeavored, constitutionally and unconstitutionally, to influence Venezuelan politics after the dictator's ouster.
group, which had no specific name, met secretly and informally. It had established contact with sympathetic Navy and Air Force officers and a few civilians. However, as demonstrated by the results of the uprising, the conspirators represented only a minority of Venezuela's military officers. The insurrection was precipitated by the arrests, on December 31, 1957, of Army General Hugo Fuentes and Air Force Colonel Jesús María Castro León. Though neither were parties to the plot, their unofficial opposition to Pérez Jiménez, the cause of their arrests, moved the youthful cabal to panic. At six o'clock in the morning on the first of January, 1958, the large air base near the city of Maracay (forty miles west of Caracas) was captured by rebellious Air Force personnel under Major Luis Evencio Carrillo. Lieutenant Colonel Trejo, taking command of a tank battalion ostensibly to put down the rebellion, took control of the small Army base at Los Teques (about 10 miles from Caracas) and pronounced against the government. The superiority in arms and number of the military forces loyal to Pérez Jiménez ended the rebellion before the day's end. The thirteen Air Force officers, including Major Carrillo who led the revolt at Maracay, escaped by plane to Colombia. On January 2, in a solemn ceremony, Lieutenant Colonel Trejo and twenty other Army officers were degraded and imprisoned. 46

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46 Cayuela, "Hugo Trejo," 52-59; "Jets Over Caracas," 24; Hispanic American Report (January, 1958), 29; Szulc, Twilight of (continued)
"Although the military action of January 1 failed, its consequences were soon to be seen. . . . The myth of the unity of the army was crumbling. The thesis of 'government by the Armed Forces' was cracking." The above lines, written in mid-1958 by a Venezuelan editor, vividly describe the effects of the January 1, 1958, uprising. Most Venezuelans believed that certain courageous, patriotic military officers had responded to the pleas of the Patriotic Junta. It now seemed possible to cement a civilian-military coalition; it appeared, at least partially, that the instruments of force, represented by the military, might be on the side of the Patriotic Junta. The Junta took full advantage of its apparent implications.

In the days immediately following the unsuccessful coup, the members of the Patriotic Junta worked feverishly, not at composing

46 (continued) the Tyrants, 300; and Garcia Ponce, Apuntes Sobre La Libertad, 107. Philip B. Taylor, Jr. The Venezuelan Golpe De Estado of 1958: The Fall of Marcos Pérez Jiménez (Washington, D. C.: Institute for the Comparative Study of Political Systems, 1968)./ maintains that a conspiratorial group composed of senior officers was also plotting the overthrow of the government (pp. 47-52). The group was called the National Liberation Movement (MLN), and, according to Taylor, it was the MLN whose hand was tipped on December 31, 1957. Taylor cites no source for this contention.

47Asi Se Fraguó La Insurrección, xiii.
propaganda, but at mobilization. With civilian militancy activated by the military action of January 1 and with the armed forces relatively confused, the Patriotic Junta decided the time was ripe for backing their printed pages with action. The University Front became the military arm of the Patriotic Junta. The Junta's newest member, the young Enrique Aristiguieta Gramko, a law student himself, took over responsibility for coordinating action between students and the Patriotic Junta. The chief weapons for the rioting and demonstrating students were stones, bottles and, particularly, Molotov cocktails. Male students furnished the gasoline and their female counterparts supplied the glass jars and cloth. According to Aristiguieta Gramko, "the girls made beautiful bombs." The chief

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48 Only one Junta publication, a New Year's Day message to Venezuela, appeared in early January, 1958. Its very title, "People and Armed Forces United Against Usurpation," confirmed what most Venezuelans thought they already knew. "But on January 1," stressed the essay, "the Armed Forces...answered the popular call in defense of the Constitution,...the situation created by Pérez Jiménez, Vallenilla Lanz and Pedro Estrada is intolerable for the army as it is for the people." "Pueblo y Ejercito Unidas Contra La Usurpación," in José Rivas Rivas (ed.), El Mundo y Época de Pérez Jiménez II (Caracas: Pensamiento Vivo, 1958), 17. Except for this manifesto of the Patriotic Junta, this source, as well as Los Manifiestos de la Liberación; Recopilación de los Manifiestos que Circularon Clandestinamente desde el Primero Hasta el 23 de Enero de 1958, Día de la Liberación Venezolana (Caracas: Pensamiento Vivo, 1958), contains copies of manifestos written by various organizations (doctors, lawyers, engineers and other homogeneous groups) under the guidance of the Junta. These documents, not meant to be clandestine, were circulated openly. As a result, they were more accessible than those tracts appearing prior to January, 1958.

targets of the students were police and National Security vehicles, but any object identified with the government was subject to destruction. Public resentment toward the regime grew as P. J. resorted to tear gas, clubs and, finally, bullets to maintain himself in power. Mass student demonstrations soon became mass popular demonstrations. 50

With the authorities occupied by riots and demonstrations, the Patriotic Junta finalized plans for the coming strike and entered into intensive talks with numerous influential groups, urging them to pronounce openly against Pérez Jiménez. Meanwhile, Venezuela's high military command became concerned. The threat of complete social disintegration and the association of the armed forces with a highly unpopular regime precipitated a cabinet crisis. On January 9, 1958, Chief of Staff, General Romulo Fernández, speaking for most of the military, and echoing the words of the Patriotic Junta, demanded the formation of a new cabinet and immediate dismissal of Lareano Vallenilla Lanz and Pedro Estrada. Before midnight, Vallenilla Lanz and Estrada were en route to the Dominican Republic, and a new

cabinet was sworn in the following day. General Fernández was named Minister of Defense. Most Venezuelans assumed that he was their country's new strong man. Six other military officers were given cabinet positions. Significantly, one of the first acts of the new chief of the secret police was to free the five priests and General Hugo Fuentes and Colonel Castro León. For Pérez Jiménez, submitting to these demands meant preserving military unity, the base of his power; for General Fernández and his followers, the concessions represented national tranquility—the demands of the Patriotic Junta were satisfied.

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Tranquility was not forthcoming. The cabinet shake-up was not representative, nor was it a step toward democracy. It was simply another internal struggle among militarists dedicated to perpetuating government by the armed forces. The Patriotic Junta was not satisfied. Contacting all subsidiary units, Junta members ordered more demonstrations, and the response was gratifying. Manifestos multiplied. Through the works of the Junta's Feminine Committee, a "Mothers' Manifesto" appeared, vehemently protesting the regime's treatment of both students and Venezuela's educational institutions.

It contained the signatures of hundreds of mothers. The " Mothers' Manifesto" was followed by the so-called "Intellectual Manifesto. " Dated January 10, 1958, this document contained a list of nine demands ranging from freedom of speech to representative government. It was signed by over eighty of Venezuela's most famous men of letters. At the top of the list was the signature of Mariano Picon Salas, Venezuela's foremost living historian. Finally, the official position of the Junta was revealed in a tract called "The Labor Front of the Patriotic Junta on the Cabinet Change. " It read as follows:

The labor front of the Patriotic Junta says that Venezuela is not contented with the sudden changes in the cabinet made to harmonize Venezuelans. A change of government is necessary. . . . We all know that the end of the dictatorship is nearer than ever because Venezuela is united to conquer its freedom.

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52 "Manifiesto de las Madres Venezolanas Ante Los Ultimos Acontecimientos Estudiantiles," in Rivas Rivas, El Mundo y la Epoca, 15; and Asi Se Fraguio La Insurreccion, xiii.

53 "Declaración Sobre la Situación Política Nacional," in Rivas Rivas, El Mundo y la Epoca, 6; El Nacional, January 25, 1958; and Daily Journal, January 26, 1958. A similar list of demands in the form of a petition was signed by the professors of the Catholic Andres Bello University and the faculty members of Caracas' four large Catholic high schools. "Ante La Clausura Del Liceo Andres Bello," in Rivas Rivas, El Mundo y la Epoca, 5. Dated January 12, 1958, there was also published and widely circulated a petition drawn up by university students. It contained no signatures. "Manifiesto No. 1 Del Estudiantado Universitario," in Rivas Rivas, El Mundo y la Epoca, 3.

Whatever General Fernández hoped to accomplish by demanding cabinet changes did not materialize. Indeed, the situation grew more critical. Within the military, Fernández' failure hurt his prestige. This fact, coupled with the new Defense Minister's decision not to press his advantage over Pérez Jiménez, spelled his demise. On the morning of January 13, 1958, when General Fernández drove to Miraflores, ostensibly to demand the resignation of the President, he was arrested and exiled. The presidential palace surrounded by tanks and armored cars, Pérez Jiménez, in a radio broadcast, announced that he had taken over the Defense Ministry. P. J.'s victory meant that he had won a power struggle within the armed forces, but military command was no longer tantamount to political command.55

In Caracas, demonstrations, street fighting, sporadic bombings, police cars, sirens and curfews abounded. It was clear that peace would not visit Venezuela until President Pérez Jiménez and the New National Ideal were extirpated. On Tuesday, January 15, 1958, a small leaflet signed by the Patriotic Junta revealed the date of the great strike. The opening paragraph read as follows:

55 Hispanic American Report (January, 1958), 30-31; Szulc, Twilight of the Tyrants, 302-303; Asi Se Fracu La Insurrección, xiii; "P. J. in Command," 48; and "Venezuela for Harmony," 44.
General Strike: From twelve noon until further notice.
Next Tuesday: at 12 noon the church bells, factory
whistles, and auto horns will sound for five minutes. 56

During the same week, various organizations, at the urging of
the Patriotic Junta, openly criticized the dictatorship and demanded
reforms. Generally, these manifestos demanded that the government
permit citizens to exercise basic civil liberties and that it follow the
principles of constitutional democracy by allowing the formation of a
popularly chosen government. Every day a new petition appeared: on
January 15, that of the Engineering Society of Venezuela; on January 17,
the Venezuelan Bar Association; on January 18, the Venezuelan Medical
Association; and on January 19, the Venezuelan Pharmaceutical Asso-
ciation. 57 When the National Security began distributing pamphlets
announcing different dates for the strike, the Patriotic Junta released
its last clandestine publication. It was a small leaflet directing the
people to disregard these false instructions and to look "without fear
to the General Strike set for Tuesday, January 21, 1958, at noon." 58

56 "Un Mandamiento de La Junta Patriotica Para Martes el 21
de Enero," in Asi Se Fraguo La Insurreccion, 99.

57 La Esfera, January 26, 1958; and "Colegio de Ingenieros
Declara Que el Pais Necesita Derechos Humanos," "Miembros del
Colegio de Abogados ante la Situacion Politica," "El Gremio
Medico al Pueblo de Venezuela," and "Miembros del Colegio de
Farmaceuticos," in Asi Se Fraguo La Insurreccion, 7-12.

58 "Huelga General de La Junta Patriotica," in Asi Se Fraguo
La Insurreccion, 99.
The stage was set for the Patriotic Junta's greatest production. Preparatory to the general strike scheduled to begin at noon, Tuesday, January 21, 1958, the University Front of the Patriotic Junta called a student strike for Monday, January 20. On Friday, January 17, as much from this command as from the possibility of violence, Caracas school officials informed parents and students that schools would not reopen on Monday. The first phases of the general strike began on the afternoon of January 20, when editors, reporters, linotypists and even copy boys walked off their jobs. Throughout that night, agents of the National Security sought out newspaper personnel in order to force them back to work and turn out their dailies. The agents were unsuccessful. Radio and television personnel were also supposed to leave their posts on the evening of January 20, but the National Security moved fast enough to force skeleton staffs to remain on the job. The next day, radio and television stations were on the air, but only with recordings and films. Commercial establishments remained open into the night on Monday, January 20, 1958, for they were filled with foresighted housewives laying in supplies. 59

On the morning of Tuesday, January 21, 1958, the Patriotic Junta and its many followers were reassured when Caracas' usually crowded newsstands were empty. There were no papers to buy or sell. Promptly at noon the iron grills on the front of businesses came hurtling down. Then, from steeple after steeple, bells clanged out the Church's defiance of the dictatorship and signaled the start of the strike. Automobile horns, usually mute under threat of a fine, blared out in almost deafening tones. (Factory whistles were not blown because the government posted police in all factories to prevent such an occurrence.) Police rushed to block off streets leading to the city's downtown squares to prevent crowds from gathering. Nonetheless, crowds massed in the streets, breaking windows, throwing rocks, stones and Molotov cocktails and overturning police cars and buses. Police tried to enforce an emergency 6 P.M. curfew, but fighting raged into the night. Eventually, quiet returned to Venezuela's capital. Its normally bustling night life disappeared; only police patrols moved through the deserted streets. Caracas resembled a ghost city.61

60 The bus driver's union was not sympathetic to the Patriotic Junta nor to the general strike. The Junta instructed its student wing to search for all buses not cooperating with the strike and put them out of commission. Daily Journal, January 26, 1958.

Wednesday dawned bright and clear. The morning was tranquil, but in the afternoon rioting broke out again all across Caracas. Those citizens not actively demonstrating cheered, as mobs continued to overturn police cars and buses. Reports of revolts in provincial cities were beginning to circulate. On national radio and television hookup, the government constantly issued bulletins to the effect that the members of the Patriotic Junta had been arrested and found to be communists or known criminals. The people were asked to keep the peace and return to work. But there were still no newspapers to read; schools, businesses, factories and banks were all shut tight; and street fighting continued with greater intensity. Through it all, automobile horns continued to honk; it was as if the people, many isolated in their homes, were reassuring and encouraging one another and vowing not to surrender.

Within the armed forces, the Patriotic Junta's strike created a crisis. Venezuela was in a state of chaos and anarchy. Clearly, the government of Pérez Jiménez had no control over the nation. Venezuelans were killing Venezuelans and there was no end in sight. Enlisted men openly sympathized with the Patriotic Junta, and many were supplying arms to civilians. The future of Venezuela's armed

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62 La Esfera, January 23, 1958; Daily Journal, January 24, 1958; "A Place in the Sun," 49; and Szulc, Twilight of the Tyrants, 303.
institution, as well as the future of the nation itself, was in jeopardy. At 6 P.M. on Wednesday, January 22, 1958, nine of Venezuela's highest ranking military commanders, representing all branches of the country's armed forces, met secretly at a Caracas military academy. They drew up an ultimatum giving General Pérez Jiménez until 10 P.M. to resign. To enforce their demand, Navy destroyers off Caracas' port of La Guaira trained their guns on the capital, and Army commanders mobilized their units for action. P. J. requested negotiations, but the military stood firm. In the early morning hours of January 23, 1958, an eleven-car Army caravan raced from Miraflores Palace toward Caracas' small municipal airfield, Carlota Airport. By 2 A.M., Marcos Pérez Jiménez, his wife and two daughters were on a plane bound for the Dominican Republic.63

A decade of Venezuelan history, the era of Pérez Jiménez, was over. With few exceptions, most foreign journalistic accounts of P. J.'s ouster, along with more serious studies that follow, credit the dictator's overthrow to the military. This was not the case. The New

National Ideal was terminated by civilian opposition and action, led and directed by the Patriotic Junta. Except for a few politically ambitious officers, the Venezuelan military was not unalterably opposed to P. J.'s regime. But Pérez Jiménez imposed an archaic political system upon a nation undergoing rapid social and economic modernization. Venezuela desired to demonstrate its political maturity; she wanted to renovate her political system in order to bring it in line with the rest of the country and the world. The military forced their comrade, General Marcos Pérez Jiménez, to abandon the presidential office; but it was the Patriotic Junta which forced the military to act. Technically, one might say that the end of the New National Ideal resulted from joint civilian-military action, but that is a gross over estimation of the role of the latter.

Venezuelans, however, knew the significance of January 23, 1958. According to Alberto Ravelle, "all moral force, the entire opinion of every political tendency, worked together toward the same goal in order to reach a definite victory. . . . These events have a value in demonstrating the categoric determination of the Venezuelan people never again to tolerate the creation of tyranny."64 For Ramon Escobar Solom, the events of January, 1958, signified "the political and spiritual maturity of Venezuelans, who, with marvelous and rapid

organization, laid the basis for democracy. "65 "It is a custom to christen our revolutionary movements with chronological names that correspond to the date on which they occurred," observed Humberto Cuenca, "but our future historians might well label the popular and military acts of January 23, 1958, not the Revolution of 1958, but the 'Revolution of Manifestos.' "66

For the first time in the history of Venezuela, civilians had succeeded in removing from office an unacceptable administration. Much credit goes to the Patriotic Junta for its skillful management of propaganda and organization. At great risks to its members, the Junta's ability to conceal its identity and maintain the secrecy of its strategy was no mean accomplishment. Though salient, the Patriotic Junta's overthrow of Marcos Pérez Jiménez is of secondary significance. The Patriotic Junta's principal contribution was its influence on the political culture of Venezuela. Students, politicians and organized labor were no longer Venezuela's sole politicalized elements. Many groups and individuals, such as doctors, pharmacists, clergymen, engineers and mothers, who were never particularly interested in


politics, suddenly felt the need and the ability to participate in and influence government. By providing a political vehicle acceptable to most Venezuelans, the Junta was able to help transform a normally apathetic, quiescent population into one willing to pay whatever price necessary for political emancipation: The banner to which these multitudes were drawn, the banner of the Patriotic Junta, symbolized political party coordination and cooperation, political tolerance and respect for the constitution. The staunch adherence of so many Venezuelans to this philosophy, and their proven ability to enforce it, is fundamental to understanding the recent success of democracy in Venezuela.
CHAPTER VI

THE PATRIOTIC JUNTA: PART II

Venezuela in the days immediately following the overthrow of Marcos Pérez Jiménez developed into a remarkable replica of Venezuela in the days immediately following the death of Juan Vincente Gómez. Venezuela was jubilant. Automobile horns honked, church bells rang, factory whistles blew; and Venezuelans, smiling and laughing, extended abrazos (embraces) to everyone they encountered. Venezuela first heard of the departure of Perez Jimenez and the formation of a new government at two o'clock in the morning. The bulletin was issued over Caracas radio and television by a military officer, Major Gregorio López Garcia. Minutes later the streets of the capital were filled with shouting citizens. For the next three days Caracas was engulfed by impromptu festivities.¹

Nation-wide celebrations and joyous demonstrations developed as news of the termination of the New National Ideal made its way throughout Venezuela. One area in which this spirit did not prevail, however, was the Caracas home of the hated National Security.

Several mobs, many led by families and friends of prison inmates, were besieging National Security headquarters. They had already beaten four agents to death, when the trapped agents broke out guns and began firing. The battle raged for several hours until the civilians were joined by the military in army tanks. The police fortress was razed, and the surviving agents were trucked off to prison under military escort. By the weekend, Venezuela was almost back to normal. At the cost of 300 dead and over 1,000 wounded, Venezuela's civilians had won their freedom.  

The new government was a provisional five-man Junta Gobierno (Government Junta), composed entirely of military officers. Its president was Rear Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal. For three reasons, the young (forty-six), handsome Navy Chief of Staff was immediately popular with the Venezuelan masses: first, the Navy had always been unpopular with Pérez Jiménez; second, it had played a key role in the dictator's demise; and third, Admiral Larrazabal, in his every utterance, never ceased to identify himself with the Patriotic Junta

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3The composition of the Government Junta will undergo several modifications during 1958. Civilians will be added and there will be resignations and new appointments, but the number of members will remain at five. These various changes in the Government Junta will be outlined below.
and its goals—political freedom, honest elections and respect for
the wishes of the electorate. The Government Junta (particularly
Wolfgang Larrazabal) and the Patriotic Junta became the two most
publicized groups in Venezuela. But for approximately one month
following January 23, 1958, both were overshadowed by the publicity
given to revelations of the New National Ideal's brutality, graft and
corruption.  

Out of the numerous government prisons came evidence of
atrocities reminiscent of Nazi Germany. From the basement dungeon
of the National Security—its walls striped black from whip lashes—
eighty corpses were removed. Girls with their heads shaved, students
who had been tortured by electric shock and beaten, and political
prisoners whose genitalia had been burned with cigarettes or tattooed
with needles were the more extreme examples of what took place
during the Pérez Jiménez regime. Added to these examples were the
names of several hundred individuals who had just vanished, never to
be heard from again. The papers were filled with reports of murky
financial dealings like those of a trucking firm owned by Mrs. Pérez

4 El Nacional, January 29, 1958; Daily Journal, January 25,
1958; "Venezuela," 31; "The Bum's Rush," 19; and "First Week of
Jiménez that netted $3,500,000 on a $30,000 investment. After P. J. purchased a Miami, Florida, mansion for $400,000 cash, investigations of the ex-dictator's private and public financial affairs were begun. These inquiries, which eventually led to Pérez Jiménez's extradition from the United States on charges of fraud and embezzlement, revealed that he had amassed a personal fortune of something over $200,000,000 and had obligated the nation for a similar amount in questionable debts. The Patriotic Junta was already receiving wide acclaim for its superb manipulation of the general strike, but the disclosed improprieties of the New National Ideal caused many Venezuelans to appreciate more fully the labors of the Patriotic Junta and the principles for which it stood.

In the early morning hours of January 23, 1958, most Venezuelans were listening attentively to their radios. News flashes of dynamic political developments were being released in rapid succession. As


dawn approached, an announcer's voice made an introduction, "Citizens, the President of the Patriotic Junta, Fabricio Ojeda."

Although most Venezuelans had never heard of Ojeda, an entire nation settled back to learn the identity of an organization that already commanded their allegiance. "A coalition, in effect, has been made," declared Ojeda, "until the proposition of a democratic form of government for Venezuela has had a chance to solidify."

Ojeda revealed the political parties included in this "truce" to be Democratic Action, the Democratic Republican Union, the Independent Committee for Political and Electoral Organization and the Communist Party of Venezuela. He called upon all Venezuelans to wear their new garments of freedom with dignity and honor and to forego acts of vengeance. "We have found," Ojeda concluded, "that all political parties eat from the same table."

Fabricio Ojeda was not the President of the Patriotic Junta. The Junta had no President. According to Enrique Aristiguieeta Gramko, a member of the Patriotic Junta, Fabricio Ojeda simply walked into a Caracas radio station where he was known as a member of the staff of El Nacional, provided proof of his membership in the Junta and secured a nation-wide introduction as President of the Patriotic

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8Ibid.
By midday, Ojeda's many friends in all areas of communications had made his name a household word. His picture and numerous pronouncements to reporters dominated the many newspaper "extras" already being issued by Venezuela's recently emancipated press.

Presented with a fait accompli, the remaining members of the Junta, wishing to maintain a united front, accepted Ojeda's self-appointment. Although the young newspaperman received the most publicity, the entire membership of the Patriotic Junta became "symbols of liberation." They were besieged everywhere by autograph seekers, they were constantly called to Miraflores for consultation with the Government Junta, they were sought out by radio and television newsmen for comments on various issues of the day, and they were continually requested to serve as guest speakers at various civic and educational functions. In addition, Julio Barreota Lara of El Nacional ran a series of biographical articles on Professor Soria (Fabricio

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9 Interview with Enrique Aristigueta Gramko, July, 1967. Several knowledgeable politicos interviewed by the writer confirmed Aristigueta Gramko's account. From Fabricio Ojeda's activities following 1958, it is clear that he was motivated by political ambition, both for himself and his party (URD).

Ojeda), Padilla (Guillermo Garcia Ponce), Chito (Silvestre Ortiz Bucaran) and José (Enrique Aristiguieta Gramko). 11

While hardly noticed in the Northamerican press, the fame of the Patriotic Junta spread throughout Latin America. On a vacation trip to Lima and Santiago (Chile), Fabricio Ojeda was given V.I.P. treatment and eagerly quizzed by local reporters for details concerning the Patriotic Junta. Fidel Castro sent his sister, Emma Castro, as an envoy to the Junta. Of course, the Patriotic Junta (as everyone else) sympathized with the "26 of July" movement and assisted the Cuban revolutionary struggle by supporting Miss Castro's efforts at raising funds. From Catamarca, Argentina, came reports of civilians and students forming a Patriotic Junta to deal with a local tyrannical official. Exiles from Rafael Trujillo's Dominican Republic journeyed to Caracas in March, 1958, for a convocation, which labeled itself the Dominican Patriotic Junta and established as its goal the overthrow of Trujillo. 12


As the New National Ideal became synonymous with brutality and corruption, its antithesis, the Patriotic Junta, became increasingly identified with service and benevolence. Venezuelans from all parts of the country, at a rate of over 150 persons a day, flocked to Caracas for audiences with Junta members. Many came to express their gratitude, but most came requesting assistance. There had always been unemployment in Venezuela, but the economic dislocations following the ouster of P. J. aggravated an already unhealthy situation. Many jobless approached the Patriotic Junta for employment, dwellings or a simple handout. In the same predicament, and of particular concern to the Junta, were the families of those individuals killed or wounded in the struggle against the dictatorship. In an effort to cope with this problem, the Patriotic Junta became involved in para-charitable activities. The Junta temporarily rented two floors of a Caracas office building (Edificio Metropolitan), employed a modest secretariat and solicited funds. Public response was generous. Thousands of small donations were received, as well as substantial contributions from some of the nation's wealthiest families. A list of major donors resembled a Venezuelan Who's Who. 13

But politics, not public assistance, was the forte of the Patriotic Junta. The power afforded the Junta by overwhelming public support permitted it to set the nation's political tone. "Unity" became the slogan of the Patriotic Junta—not in the sense of foregoing partisan activity, but in the sense of a political consensus for the cause of democracy. This was the theme emphasized in all Patriotic Junta manifestos and communiques. Venezuelan democracy must remain vigilant. The members of the Patriotic Junta, as well as Venezuela's political parties, strongly believed that only civilian unity in the form of bipartisan harmony could prevent their country from returning to a rightest dictatorship. On January 24, the Junta's first message to its liberated countrymen stated "that only a prosperous climate of political harmony would assure the public peace and allow the completion of our objectives. Political forces should accord a prudential truce in their political fight to find their unity." Deliberately, but perhaps unknowingly, the Patriotic Junta was attempting to establish "cleavage and consensus" in Venezuela.

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14 After January 23, 1958, Patriotic Junta literature was no longer published clandestinely by the Tribuna Popular. A few copies were made and distributed to newsmen. The following day, Junta declarations were usually found on the front pages of Venezuela's newspapers.


16 Chapter I contains a discussion of "cleavage and consensus" as it pertains to a nation's political culture.
In order to enhance its already substantial influence on the politics of Venezuela, the Patriotic Junta expanded its membership. Thirteen new directors were named who, when added to the original four, brought the Junta's total membership to seventeen. These additions are significant. Three of the new directors, Raul Leoni (AD), Ignacio Luis Arcaya (URD) and Lorenzo Fernández (COPEI), were recently repatriated exiles representing the top echelons of their respective parties. The editor of La Religion, Reverend Jesús Hernández Chapellin, was initiated. Officially, Father Hernández Chapellin represented the Venezuelan Press Association, but the presence of a priest on the Junta signified endorsement by the Venezuelan Catholic Church.\(^{17}\) Organized labor was represented

\(^{17}\)In an extensive interview with the writer, Rev. Hernández Chapellin emphasized that as a priest he cannot be a member of any political party or publicly advocate specific political ideologies. Before accepting membership in the Junta, Father Hernández Chapellin consulted his Archbishop, Rafael Arias Blanco, who granted permission and encouragement. The Church's official position on the Patriotic Junta was that it was above political parties. When the writer queried the cleric concerning the fact that, as a member of the Junta, he cooperated with a member of the Communist Party, Father Hernández Chapellin replied, "At that time we did not look at one's political beliefs, whether a man was a communist, a copeyano or an urredista—we were just Venezuelans trying to maintain democracy." The loquacious priest emphatically reminded the writer that there was only one PCV member on the Patriotic Junta. Interview with Reverend Jesús Hernández Chapellin, August, 1967.

Although the Venezuelan hierarchy remained silent on the political developments of 1958, activities by quasi-official groups indicated approval of the Patriotic Junta. Whenever the Junta called for demonstrations, either in protest or approval of some incident, (continued)
by a committee of five from the Labor Front of the Patriotic Junta, while a delegation of four students spoke for the University Front. In order to recognize the role of Venezuelan women in the demise of the dictatorship as well as their increasing political importance, Doña Irma Felizola of the Junta's Feminine Committee was appointed to the Patriotic Junta. Professionals named to the Junta were Dr. Antonio Requena of the Venezuelan Medical Association and Rene de Sola of the Venezuelan Bar Association. The latter was also Minister

17 (continued) Students from Venezuela's Catholic colleges and high schools were in the forefront. La Religion gave front page coverage of all Patriotic Junta pronouncements and activities and published articles by laymen advocating the cause of unity. Distinct indications of the Church's position came on January 30, 1958, when the Archbishop of Caracas, Rafael Arias Blanco, celebrated a Requiem Pontifical Mass for the departed souls of those individuals who were killed in the movement to end the dictatorship. In attendance were the Government Junta, the Cabinet and the Patriotic Junta. La Religion, January 23, 1958, January 25, 1958, January 29, 1958, January 30, 1958, January 31, 1958; La Esfera, January 30, 1958; El Nacional, January 30, 1958; and El Universal, January 30, 1958.

18 Doña Irma Felizola is the widow of former President Isaías Medina Angarita. A significant by-product of the Patriotic Junta was the extreme interest taken by Venezuela's women in its work, and, therefore, politics. Under the direction of the Feminine Committees of the Patriotic Junta, women took part in demonstrations, issued manifestos urging unity and, as elections approached during the last month of 1958, formed "car pools" to transport unregistered acquaintances to inscription centers. Socially, Intercambio, a very aristocratic charitable organization operated by the elite female members of Venezuelan society, consented to "cooperating (in social and charity work) with the Comite Femenino de La Junta Patriotica." Daily Journal, February 14, 1958; El Nacional, March 8, 1958, March 9, 1958, March 19, 1958, July 16, 1958; La Religion, March 6, 1958; and Tribuna Popular, March 8, 1958.
of Justice in the nation's new cabinet. Representing the country's industrial and commercial sector were Angel Corvini, Vicente Lecuna, Jr. and Andrés Boulton. Lecuna and Boulton rank as two of the richest men in Venezuela. This new amplified Junta issued a press release stating that it would direct all of its efforts toward the following four fundamental objectives:

1. Support the Government Junta in its democratic aims and aid in making them realities.
2. Maintain a united front.
3. Maintain the democratic process through legal representation by means of general elections for all public offices as soon as possible.
4. Encourage individual political parties that form the Patriotic Junta to maintain their separate doctrines and organizations, but at the same time establish a truce in their interparty activities and continue working for the consolidation of a stable democratic regime in Venezuela.19

All areas of news media kept the Patriotic Junta and its call for political unity in the limelight. For the promulgation of its numerous manifestos, prime radio and television time was provided. Also, the Junta's many brief communiques were always given top priority as news features in broadcasts and telecasts. All of these declarations, plus the many individual comments of Junta members, were reproduced in full in the nation's press. They focused around a single thought: civilian unity, unflaggingly vigilant for the enemies of democracy,

was Venezuela's only hope of avoiding tyranny. Lifted from random Patriotic Junta pronouncements, the following are examples of this theme:

With this authority the Patriotic Junta proclaims that just as unity among the people overthrew tyranny, that same unity is necessary to lead the nation to greater opportunities under civilianism. We first made this declaration when Venezuela was divided by fights, hatreds and enmities. In Venezuela, there is no possibility for action while division exists, for such division kills popular force.

In order to avoid confusion it is necessary to say again that the Patriotic Junta is a civic institution of popular character. Our role is to maintain the unity of public opinion; to contribute to the orientation of the press; coordinate the political efforts of parties, students and labor unions; and to devote all our energy toward enabling Venezuelans to live in peace without fear and supported by an understanding government.

The Patriotic Junta encourages the citizens to participate publicly in political debate, but always conserving serenity and respect for one's political enemies. For a better understanding of Venezuela, we hope that all the citizens will go along with our beliefs so that Venezuelan unity will always remain strong.

The Patriotic Junta manifests that any attempt to destroy national unity, to disturb the government's plans or action, to upset the serene environment of mutual comprehension and respect between the people and the armed forces will encounter a realistic repulsion on behalf of all the citizens.

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21Ibid., January 29, 1958.
The influence of the Patriotic Junta was complemented by the formation of subsidiary Juntas throughout the country. Patriotic Juntas sprang up everywhere. Juntas were formed in all the larger provincial cities, such as Maracaibo, Valencia and San Cristobal; but they could also be found in Tucacas, Urena and Bonaco, hamlets that most Venezuelans never knew existed. When several Juntas formed in one community appealed to the Patriotic Junta in the capital for recognition, the latter was forced to establish organizational guidelines. In order for recognition to be extended, provincial Juntas had to employ two procedures: 1) follow the declaration of principles promulgated on January 27, 1958 (cited on page 208); and 2) follow the same pattern of equal social, economic and political representation in the formation of their local Juntas as was followed by the original Patriotic Junta. By the end of February, lines of communication had been established among all the Patriotic Juntas of Venezuela. By virtue of its prestige, the Caracas Junta commanded the complete respect, obedience and emulation of its provincial counterparts. When the Patriotic Junta delved into charitable activity, local Juntas began to assist the underprivileged of their communities; when the parent organization decided to make the office of President of the
Patriotic Junta rotary, the parochial Juntas followed suit; and when the original Junta alerted the country to the threat of conspiring perezjimenistas, local Patriotic Juntas formed "civil patrols" to alarm fellow citizens in the event of a possible golpe de estado.

Organized labor, which, along with Venezuela's students, had furnished most of the Junta's support during the general strike, was also mesmerized by the influence of the Patriotic Junta. With tyranny a thing of the past, Venezuela's ultra-politicalized laborers began unionizing procedures immediately following the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez. Emulating the Patriotic Junta, a National Unified Union Committee was formed in mid-February, 1958. It was headed by a directorate, in which all political parties were represented. Extremely powerful due to its size and militancy, the National Unified Union Committee exemplified xenophobic tendencies disturbing to the

24 At a May 26, 1958, meeting of the Patriotic Junta, it was decided that beginning on June 1, the office of President of the Junta would be rotated among members at unstated intervals. Chosen as the new president was Dr. Antonio Requena. The four original members all became vice-presidents. Although Ortiz Bucaran, Aristigueta Gramko and Garcia Ponce were pleased to see Fabricio Ojeda relinquish a position he never really possessed, it was Ojeda who first suggested the move. The young El Nacional reporter had been recently selected as Secretary-General of his party (URD), and he was eager to devote more time to party affairs. Daily Journal, May 27, 1958; and El Nacional, May 21, 1958, June 11, 1958.

Patriotic Junta. The possibility of a labor war between natives and recent immigrants (particularly Caracas' large Italian community) would greatly reduce the strength of Venezuela's civilian forces. The Patriotic Junta felt compelled to issue a major pronouncement on this situation. In a long declaration dated February 22, 1958, the Junta accused the New National Ideal of germinating this antipathy among Venezuela's workers by paying foreigners higher wages on public works projects. The Patriotic Junta announced that it had demanded and received assurances from the young Government Junta that wage discrimination on public works projects would cease and that, as suggested by the Patriotic Junta, the government would follow the traditional Venezuelan employment practice of hiring one foreigner for every four nationals. All parties seemed contented with the Patriotic Junta's settlement and internal unity returned to Venezuela's national labor movement.26

Although less pressing, two features endemic to Venezuelan labor, partisan unionizing and labor-management disputes, were

possible sources of unrest that could have resulted in a divided
civilian populace. Due to the influence of the Patriotic Junta, these
disruptive features were abated. In a lengthy tract issued on March 6,
1958, the Junta "called on Venezuela's political parties to curb any
selfish interest in the organization of labor unions and work together
harmoniously." 27 Political party labor leaders interviewed agreed
to abide by the Junta's request, and "expressed agreement with the
Junta's proposal that individual political interests in labor unions
must take second place to national interests of maintaining the spirit
of unity within the labor movement." 28 The key achievement of the
Patriotic Junta, however, was in the field of labor-management rela-
tions. Chaired by Raul Leoni and Andrés Boulton, a committee of the
Patriotic Junta drew up a unanimously approved report, which called
for a truce between employees and employers. 29 The Junta demanded
concessions from both sides. Management was requested to decrease
production costs (in order to lower the cost of living) and to create
new employment opportunities. Labor was warned that indiscriminate


29 Raul Leoni, former AD Minister of Labor during the *trienio*,
was considered organized labor's voice on the Patriotic Junta. Andrés
Boulton, one of the richest men in the world, represented management.
The presence of these two men on the Junta is evidence of its motley
composition; their ability to work harmoniously together is evidence
of the Junta's uniqueness.
wage increases might imperil an economy already suffering from inflation. The report continued:

The Patriotic Junta, . . . manifests its sympathies for a good and sincere understanding between the forces that are joined in developing the economic activities of the nation because the Junta believes that the application of a truce agreement in possible differences between employers and workers will contribute tremendously to strengthening industrial peace and to the successful inter-party truce.  

The culmination of the Patriotic Junta's efforts in this field came on April 24, 1958, when a two-year "Truce Declaration" was signed by representatives of the National Unified Union Committee and the Venezuelan Association of Chambers of Commerce. Management agreed to maintain wage levels, increase employment and cut production costs, while labor agreed not to strike. Economic issues were set aside in order to achieve a settlement of the more urgent political situation. The country's entire economic spectrum had endorsed the Patriotic Junta and civilian democracy. For the first time in ten years, Venezuela's massive May Day (Labor Day) demonstrations passed without a single incident of violence.  

Venezuela's university population had been the military arm of the underground Patriotic Junta, but many expected sustained


militancy from the nation's traditionally divisive students. Strangely enough, interstudent relationships were characterized by harmony and cooperation. Student-community relationships were manipulated by the Patriotic Junta. Because of their accomplishments, but also due to their extreme youthfulness, the four original members of the Patriotic Junta exercised a strong influence among Venezuela's students. Numerous convocations at the Central University were held to commemorate the work of the Patriotic Junta. During student week, February 6-12, over 40,000 young people paraded the streets of Caracas, making their way to four plazas where the four original members of the Patriotic Junta delivered orations. The official University newspaper, the very professional Universidad Central, always contained Patriotic Junta declarations and communiques, plus numerous articles by both students and faculty dealing with the necessity for political unity due to the omnipresent possibility of militaristic resurgence.32 As requested in a widely publicized Junta declaration, the Government Junta granted complete autonomy to the university, in full accordance with tenets of the University Reform

Movement. The student government of the Central University of Venezuela was organized along the same lines as the Patriotic Junta. The eleven colleges of the University held elections of officers; and, in the spirit of unity, voters had to choose among various slates composed of members from various parties. The eleven elected presidents formed a Federation of Colleges in charge of student government for the entire University. The Central University, the birth place of Venezuelan democracy, now stood ready to defend its creation.\(^{33}\)

Publicly and privately, the communists of Venezuela also supported the Patriotic Junta.\(^{34}\) On March 1, 1958, the Tribuna Popular (official organ of the PCV) issued its first edition following the ouster

\(^{33}\) Universidad Central, January 24, 1958, January 29, 1958, February 14, 1958, March 3, 1958; La Esfera, January 25, 1958; El Nacional, February 13, 1958; Daily Journal, February 13, 1958, March 8, 1958; and Washington, "Student Politics in Latin America," 469. Washington (p. 469) states that the Central University elections of 1958 "show how the Communists profited from the truce to get into positions of influence in student government." This is the exact contrary of what actually occurred. Although student political affiliation was greatly factionalized, numerically, the PCV was probably the largest single party within the University and thus lost representation by participating in the truce.

\(^{34}\) For two reasons, the relations between the Patriotic Junta and the Communist Party of Venezuela will be discussed apart from the Junta's relations with Venezuela's other political parties. The first is that the communists' reasons for endorsing the cause of democracy and representative government are highly suspect. The second and more important is that Venezuela's three major parties, AD, URD and COPEI gradually eased out the PCV from inter-party conferences and programs. This does not mean, however, that the PCV was criticized or discriminated against within or without the Patriotic Junta.
of P. J. Prior to this date, Venezuela's independent journals gave the
nation's communists considerable notice; but, as the country's major
political parties began to rebuild, PCV publicity approached oblivion.
Eager to sustain communist ideology before the public, the Tribuna
Popular appeared; it was dominated by favorable news of the
Patriotic Junta. The communists' position vis-a-vis the Junta was
motivated by three factors. First, the popularity of the Patriotic Junta
was such that certain anonymity awaited any group that opposed it.
After all, a member of the PCV, Guillermo Garcia Ponce, was a charter
member of the Patriotic Junta who had played a vital role in the over­
throw of the dictatorship. It was only natural that Venezuela's
communists should continue to extend support to a popular organiza­
tion that they had helped create. Even Pravda praised the 1958
Venezuelan revolution. Second, "coexistence," a doctrine similar
to the Patriotic Junta's, was receiving official sanction from the Soviet
Union and its Premier, Nikita Krusechev. Finally, participation and

35 Needler, Politics in Perspective, 40-41. In 1959, the total
membership of the Communist Party of Venezuela was 40,000.
Goldenburg, The Cuban Revolution, 308.

36 Tribuna Popular, March 1, 1958, March 12, 1958, March 29,

37 Beatty, "Venezuela," 148. During 1958, the PCV tried very
hard to convince their fellow citizens that it placed the needs of
Venezuela above those of the Soviet Union. Yet, issues of the
Tribuna Popular contained more news of Russia than of Venezuela.
concurrence with the Junta and its tenets provided communists with an entrée into many hitherto inaccessible places. Even the historical schisms endemic to the Venezuelan communist movement disappeared during 1958. This internal unity guaranteed, at least for the moment, that Venezuela's normally militant left would refrain from terrorist activities. Since World War II, the military, in the overwhelming majority of successful golpes de estado against democratic regimes, cited communist terrorism and the necessity of its termination as its primary purpose for intervention. During this crucial era of political recuperation, Venezuela's armed forces were denied this excuse.

The most important factor in explaining the profound political influence of the Patriotic Junta was the strong support it received from Venezuela's three democratic political parties, Democratic Action, the Democratic Republican Union and the Committee for Independent Political and Electoral Organization. These three groups were quick to comprehend the fact that the Patriotic Junta had become much more than a simple conspiratorial clique to oust the dictatorship. The Junta had become a symbol of political tolerance, civic pride and, most of all, Venezuela's determination to maintain democracy. By

continuing to support the Patriotic Junta and its goals, Venezuela's political parties were helping to create an atmosphere conducive to pacific political maturation. Actually, the political mood in the Venezuela of 1958 was beneficial to party growth, for Patriotic Junta declarations never precluded partisan activity. On the contrary, political party activity was encouraged. What the Junta stood categorically against was the "cut-throat" type of party rivalry characteristic of Venezuela's civilian-political past. 39

January 23, 1958, found Romulo Betancourt (AD), Rafael Caldera (COPEI) and Jovito Villalba (URD), Venezuela's three most famous politicians, exiled in New York City. When informed of developments at home, all three praised the work of the Patriotic Junta and began holding a series of conferences to discuss their country's political future. 40 Influenced by the Patriotic Junta, these conferences gave

39 The only era of real political party activity in Venezuelan history was the 1945-1948 trienio. Party relations were characterized by intense partisan rivalry, with opposition parties encouraging the military to intervene in the Democratic Action dominated government, and AD attempting to weaken Venezuela's other parties by allowing them no opportunity for growth and advancement. This inter-party rivalry was an important factor in determining the armed forces' decision to intervene. Chapter III contains more on this problem.

40 For individual comments of Betancourt, Villalba and Caldera see La Esfera, January 24, 1958; and "Venezuela," 32. Rafael Caldera left Venezuela the first week in January, 1958, for a short exile in New York. Jovito Villalba had resided in New York for several years. Romulo Betancourt was living in Puerto Rico when Pérez Jiménez was overthrown and he flew to New York on January 24, 1958, to confer with his old adversaries, Villalba and Caldera.
birth to the Venezuelan Civic Front. The Front was a personal commitment by these three men to avoid open political struggle. In the words of Villalba, the Front would include "all parties and independent forces in order to promote a national government able to avoid the return of military rule and to advance economic and social progress."\(^1\)

The separate return to Venezuela of these three politicos occasioned festivities and public partisan demonstrations. The Patriotic Junta was designated by each party to extend official greetings to these returning leaders. At the three press conferences which followed the homecoming of Betancourt, Villalba and Caldera, Fabricio Ojeda introduced the party chiefs and served as narrator. Each praised the work of the Patriotic Junta and pledged continued support. Margot Bottome, a *Daily Journal* columnist, felt that their speeches, particularly Betancourt's, were "unusually conciliatory."\(^2\)

As the year 1958 progressed, AD, URD and COPEI diligently rebuilt party machinery. Party leaders backed the call for civilian unity and also urged the necessity for more functional representation, a need best attainable through individual political parties. Pressure

\(^1\) *Hispanic American Report* (January, 1958), 32.

for immediate national elections was continually applied to the provisional government by the Patriotic Junta, the single voice which spoke for all parties. To the gratification of the nation's politicos, the military-dominated government responded accordingly. On a nationwide radio and television address of February 19, Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal, President of the Government Junta, declared the primary task of the latter was to prepare for elections. Toward this end, a thirteen-man Election Law Committee was appointed to draft a decree establishing procedures for national elections. Twelve members of the Committee were civilians, three each from AD, URD, COPEI and the PCV; the thirteenth member was a military officer. On May 23, the Government Junta promulgated the electoral law drawn up by the Committee; elections were to be held on December 7, 1958, with all Venezuelans over eighteen years of age eligible to vote. On the same night the government announced the formation of a fifteen-man Supreme Electoral Council to oversee the December elections and take charge of all election machinery. Ten of the members would be named by Venezuela's political parties, with the Government Junta naming the remaining five. The provisional government was to relinquish power to the choice of the electorate on April 19, 1959. The significance of these acts are obvious, the military-based Government Junta was being influenced by the Patriotic Junta. ⁴³

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Certainly the Government Junta had ample reasons to respect the power of the Patriotic Junta. On more than one occasion the Patriotic Junta, in only a few hours, had been able to amass multitudes in the streets of Venezuela. With the military still in shock from the immoralities of General Pérez Jiménez, the government was virtually dependent on the civilian Junta for its survival. An equally self-interested motive of the government in catering to the demands of the Patriotic Junta was the personal ambition of its president, Wolfgang Larrazabal. As chief of state the debonair sailor used the advantages of public office to promote shamelessly his personal ambitions. In the summer of 1958, much discussion centered

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44 Most of the mass demonstrations called for by the Patriotic Junta were in support of the government. One, however, was not. A popular municipal engineer, Celso Portoul, was fired without apparent cause by the governor of the federal district, Lieutenant Colonel Vicente Antonio Marchelli. The engineer had endeared himself to the poor of Caracas by spending much extra time constructing needed sewage, drainage and other items necessary for proper sanitation. A crowd of nearly 10,000 gathered before the presidential palace, while the Patriotic Junta demanded the reinstatement of Portoul and the dismissal of Lt. Col. Marchelli. The engineer was immediately given back his job, and the governor was removed and replaced by a civilian. *El Nacional*, June 18, 1958; *El Universal*, June 19, 1958; and *Daily Journal*, June 18, 1958.

45 On May 19, 1958, a crisis was precipitated when the two civilian members of the five-man Government Junta, industrialist Eugenio Mendoza and economics professor Blas Lamberti, resigned. Among Government Junta members, it had been agreed privately that no member would run for office in December. Larrazabal's obvious hunger for publicity belied his intentions, and Mendoza and Lamberti resigned in protest. Two other civilians were quickly named to replace them. For the sake of unity, the Patriotic Junta agreed to acquiesce in these changes, but warned the government that it must move more rapidly (continued)
around the possibility of a unity candidate. A single candidate, jointly agreed upon by all political parties, seemed to many to be the logical conclusion to a year dominated by the Patriotic Junta. The name most often mentioned as the possible unity candidate was the popular Admiral, who never ceased to cater to public opinion. Larrazabal was contemplating a political career where ballots, not bullets, made the difference. He used every opportunity to cooperate with the Patriotic Junta, thus acquiring the Junta's, and the public's, constant praise and endorsement.  

On June 2, 1958, under the auspices of the Patriotic Junta, a series of conferences composed of representatives from Venezuela's five major political parties began. The purpose of these meetings was an attempt to reach agreement on a single, "unity" candidate for

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In addition to AD, URD, COPEI and the PCV, the Integrated Republican Party (IR) was included. IR was formed in the spring of 1958. Although numerically small, IR's membership was made up mostly of professionals—doctors, lawyers, engineers and other relatively affluent groups. The quality of its membership required its presence in these negotiations. Due to their limited following, IR and the PCV played minor roles in these negotiations.
the coming elections. Negotiations persisted into autumn, but no accord was forthcoming. Democratic Action balked at nearly all suggestions. Being the nation's largest single political party, AD felt its candidate would stand an excellent chance in December and thus argued for partisan candidates with a subdued campaign. Wolfgang Larrazabal's vacillating statements relative to his candidacy were fooling no one, while his lavish praise of Venezuela's communists was particularly disturbing to COPEI. The fact that Admiral Larrazabal seemed to be the odds-on favorite—should a unity candidate be agreed upon—caused COPEI to imitate Democratic Action's recalcitrance.\textsuperscript{48}

By mid-September, inter-party talks were getting nowhere, and December 7, the date of elections, was approaching. The Patriotic Junta moved to break the deadlock. It authorized its President, Antonio Requena, to contact the heads of Venezuela's three major parties and urge them, for the sake of civilian unity, to reach a viable solution to this problem. The outcome of these conversations was the Pact of Punto Fijo, signed on October 31, 1958. This document, named for the Caracas home of Rafael Caldera, was signed by Romulo Betancourt, Raul Leoni and Gonzalo Barrios for AD; Jovito Villalba, Ignacio Luis Arcaya and Manuel López Rivas for URD; and

Rafael Caldera, Pedro del Corral and Ignacio Fernández for COPEI. By the Pact of Punto Fijo, the three parties agreed to conduct vigorous, conciliatory and dignified campaigns; to honor the results of the elections; and, subsequently, to form a government of national unity, the winning candidate staffing his cabinet with members of all three political parties. The stage was set. AD nominated Romulo Betancourt, COPEI nominated Rafael Caldera, and URD, with hopes of a certain victory and with the approval of Jovito Villalba, nominated Wolfgang Larrazabal. The Admiral also received the endorsement of the PCV. During the campaign the spirit of conciliation prevailed, and on December 7, 1958, Venezuelans elected Romulo Betancourt. Larrazabal finished second and Caldera ran third. The Admiral had the moral support of the population but not its electoral support. Prior to election day, The Economist summed up the thoughts of most Venezuelans in this fashion: "Dr. Romulo Betancourt has in his favour the fact that he is a civilian in a nation sick of uniformed 'caudillos'." Betancourt, inaugurated on April 19, 1959,

49 It is significant that three of these signees, Leoni, Arcaya and Fernández, were members of the Patriotic Junta; Pedro del Corral had been a member of the Junta during its clandestine period.

immediately proceeded to comply with the principles of Punto Fijo. 51

Thus far, commencing with January 23, 1958, and ending with April 19, 1959, this chapter has unfolded a relatively smooth process of democratization for Venezuela. The Patriotic Junta, however, did much more than simply influence the various pluralistic elements of the nation's society that shape its politics. The Patriotic Junta became the most powerful pressure group in Venezuela. It articulated the political demands of the society, it sought support for these demands among other groups, and it attempted to transform these demands by influencing the choice of political personnel and the various processes of public policy making and enforcement. 52 Prior to 1958, Venezuela's most powerful pressure group was its armed forces; this crucial year would not pass without confrontation between the latter and its civilian rival, the Patriotic Junta. Three consequent clashes between Venezuela's military (or certain elements

51 El Nacional, September 19, 1958; Blank, Venezuela Election Factbook, 10; and Picon Salas, Venezuela Independiente, 298. When Wolfgang Larrazabal became a candidate, he resigned as President of the Government Junta. His place was taken by a civilian member of the Junta, Edgard Sanabria. An excellent examination of the December 7, 1958 elections and their results can be found in Martz, Acción Democrática, 103-106.

52 The basis for this definition of a pressure group was taken from George I. Blanksten, "Political Groups in Latin America," American Political Science Review LIII (March, 1959), 108-109.
in the military) and her civilian sectors materialized during 1958. These clashes took place in January, June and September, with the summer affair constituting the most serious threat to civilian pre-eminence. In each case civilian elements were led by the Patriotic Junta; and, in each case, civilian elements triumphed.

The first conflict of interest between civilians and the military occurred on January 23 and 24, 1958, and, in reality, was an extension of the general strike and sporadic street fighting that overthrew Pérez Jiménez. The all military Government Junta, formed shortly after midnight on January 23, was composed of Rear Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal (Navy), Colonel Roberto Casanova (Army), Colonel Abel Romero (Air Force), Colonel Carlos Luis Araque (National Guard), and Colonel Pedro José Quevedo (Police). The intent of the armed forces was to replace the government of General Pérez Jiménez, which had become a liability due to civilian resentment, with a new military regime. The Patriotic Junta, in a mid-morning visit to Miraflores, informed the government that unless civilians were brought into the government the general strike and violence engulfing the country would continue. To back this ultimatum, several thousand demonstrators paraded in front of the presidential palace carrying hundreds of placards demanding civilian representation. Before noon, it was announced that two of Venezuela's most distinguished citizens, industrialist Eugenio Mendoza and university professor Blas Lamberti, had
been added to the Government Junta. Shortly thereafter, the nascent government announced the appointment of a thirteen-man cabinet. In an obvious attempt to allay political unrest, all members of the cabinet were civilians except Colonel Jesús Mario Castro León, Minister of Defense.53

These concessions were not insignificant, but they were not sufficient to placate Venezuela's angry civilian populace. The forces behind the Patriotic Junta were very dissatisfied with two military members of the Government Junta, Colonels Roberto Casanova and Abel Romero. These men, former close associates of Pérez Jiménez, had been instrumental in quelling the abortive golpe of January 1, 1958. On the afternoon of Thursday, January 23, the four members of the Patriotic Junta returned to Miraflores for a second conference with Provisional President Larrazabal. They made it clear that unless Casanova and Romero were removed from the Government Junta, strikes, violence and public protest would continue. In an interview with reporters upon leaving Miraflores, Fabricio Ojeda opined, "We

(Patriotic Junta) are not satisfied with it (Government Junta). We hope it will be changed very quickly. But if it is not, we will not hesitate to organize opposition." The next morning, workers failed to return to work and the streets were filled with thousands of sign-carrying citizens demanding the removal of Casanova and Romero. Late that afternoon, the government issued a communique stating that the two controversial officers had offered their resignations and these had been accepted immediately. The armed forces buckled under pressure from Venezuela's organized masses. Instrumental in the military's decision to pressure Casanova and Romero into resigning was the fact that the armed forces would still hold control in the government (three of the five members of the Government Junta were military officers). The armed forces, however, could not foresee the growing power of a unified, militant civilian populace and the political ambitions of their comrade, Rear Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal.

Through the remaining winter and spring of 1958, Venezuela remained tense amid constant rumors of reactionary military plots and

counter-plots. These rumors were always being reported by the press, radio and television. By the "enemies of democracy," as these invisible antagonists were labelled, the Venezuelan press had obvious reference to elements in the military who wished to return to government by the armed forces. The key confrontation

56 Aside from those already discussed, the most noteworthy event to take place during the spring of 1958 was the visit to Venezuela, on May 13, of the Vice President of the United States of America, Richard M. Nixon. As a representative of the Eisenhower administration, Nixon was identified with the government that had aided and honored Marcos Pérez Jiménez. Vice President and Mrs. Nixon were stoned, spit upon and extended other indignities. These outbursts were not organized. Pent-up hatreds, however, are difficult to suppress completely. At the most, only 200 people were involved. The Patriotic Junta asked for no demonstrations, either for or against the Vice President's visit. Following Nixon's departure, the Patriotic Junta and Venezuela's newspapers, speaking for the great majority of Venezuelans, expressed their apologies. Universidad Central, May 19, 1958; El Nacional, May 15, 1958; La Esfera, May 15, 1958; and La Religion, May 15, 1958.

between the forces of civilianism and militarism would not come until mid-summer, but the seeds of this collision originated much earlier.

Next to the President, the highest ranking military officer in Venezuela is the Minister of Defense. Named to that post by the Government Junta was Air Force Colonel Jesús María Castro León. The choice was an expedient one. He was acceptable to the armed forces, for, as a dedicated officer, he held the respect of his colleagues. His known disapproval of the New National Ideal, and the fact that he belonged to a traditionally apolitical branch of the armed services, the Air Force, made Castro León acceptable to Venezuela's civilians. (It was the arrest of Castro León on December 31, 1957, that precipitated the unsuccessful coup of New Year's Day, 1958.)

In the field of public relations, however, the new Minister of Defense was no professional. As the representative and spokesman of the military, his every utterance was scrutinized by the many civilian sectors who feared the reappearance of militarism. Frank and impatient, the short, swarthy Castro León gave the impression of being a tough disciplinarian. His first public pronouncement, an address to the Government Junta, was brief and drew little public reaction.  

As weeks passed, the patience of the Minister of Defense grew thin.

\[^{57}\textit{La Esfera}, January 28, 1958; and \textit{El Nacional}, January 28, 1959.\]
The newspapers were filled with diatribes of military corruption under P. J.; during student week, the second week of February, a student manifesto endorsed by the Patriotic Junta requested the "purification" of the military; and many reporters, attempting to squeeze a commitment from Castro León on the many rumors of golpes, succeeded in causing the Colonel to question the value of a free press.\footnote{Universidad Central, February 24, 1958; and El Nacional, February 21, 1958, March 22, 1958.}

Although Castro Leon, in several interviews, admitted that the New National Ideal had made some "mistakes," he constantly maintained that it had not diminished the "people's respect for the armed institution."\footnote{El Nacional, February 21, 1058; and Universidad Central, February 24, 1958.} Many officers knew otherwise. The continued virulence of news items regarding the military eventually convinced the Minister of Defense that something was necessary to clarify the position of the armed forces. Toward this end, the military inaugurated a bi-monthly television show entitled "Venezuela, Know Your Armed Forces." This first production, which took place on the evening of April 2, 1958, consisted of a lengthy address by Colonel Castro León. The numerous minor irritations between the Minister of Defense and his civilian antagonists, which would culminate in the most serious
threat to Venezuelan democracy during 1958, can be traced from this
pronouncement of April 2. 60

From watching and listening to their new Minister of Defense,
Venezuelans learned two facts. The first was that Castro León was
the antithesis of Pérez Jiménez. He was a dedicated officer who
seemed almost naively indifferent toward non-military activity. To
Castro León's misfortune, however, Venezuelans also learned of his
strong adherence to traditionalist political beliefs: a modified approach
to what Chapter II of this study calls the "supermission" of the armed
forces—the concept which holds the military to be the guardian of the
nation and, therefore, above the constitution and the law. Two
passages were particularly controversial:

This Institution that yesterday was based on the noble movement
for independence, from now on will be the guardian of liberty,
of that generous liberty granted to men of good will. . . .
Guardians of a liberty that does not authorize the aspirations
of an ignoble leader threatening to throw the people into the
streets. . . ., in other words, guardians of the National
Sovereignty.

and

If great have been the mistakes committed in the name of the
Armed Forces, and we cannot deny it, ignoble and unjust are
those who would damage the Institution. . . . If guilty was
the armed organization, so were politicians without scruples.
The Armed Forces of Venezuela have their own code, and it is

60 Coronel Jesús María Castro León, "Venezuela Conoce a tus
Fuerzas Armadas," Revista de las Fuerzas Armadas: Organo del
Ministerio de la Defensa no. 141 y 142 (Marzo-Abril, 1958), 2-3.
This address was published in all the country's newspapers as well
as in the nation's top military journal.
about time that the campaigns calling for a demand for purification cease. The Institution can solve its own program; it also demands to be respected as it respects others. 61

The former indicates Castro León's lack of comprehension regarding political modernization and the basic function of politics, while the latter is proof of his growing irritability toward those who would question the integrity of the military.

Public reaction to the Minister of Defense's speech was cautiously critical. Although the Tribuna Popular declared that it "left many points unclarified," 62 and the nation's leftist press expressed vague dissatisfaction, the most severe criticism of the address came from two sectors of Venezuelan life: traditionally known for their political quiescence: professionals and the Church. In an open letter addressed to the Government Junta, dated April 9, 1958, and signed by over 5,000 individuals, a large number of prominent Venezuelans voiced their "public nonconformity with some of the affirmations made by the Minister of Defense, because we are afraid that these affirmations may revive undesirable forces." 63 The letter viewed the political role of the military in the following manner:

61 Ibid.
62 Tribuna Popular, April 19, 1958.
63 Appended to the letter were over 5,000 signatures, including Venezuela's most prominent doctors, lawyers, businessmen and intellectuals. El Nacional, April 13, 1958.
According to the effective constitutional arrangement, we understand that the armed forces—land, sea and air—are noble institutions to whom the people trust the weapons to defend the national sovereignty, to respect its (the nation's) will, and to keep internal stability. The armed forces are technical, professional and apolitical; mainly obedient and not deliberative.  

La Religion, went straight to the problem. The remarks of Castro León indicated that "the armed forces still portend to be the referee of the decisions made by the people expressing their free will." For the Church, its role and the role of the military are similar.

Just as a priest cannot wish for material power, the soldier cannot wish for political power; the military cannot be the referee of his country. His attitude must be of care-taking, of vigilance and of alertness, but never of frightening.

In the months following April 2, the Defense Minister's dissatisfaction mounted as attacks on the military establishment increased. Time after time, the recently promoted General reiterated to reporters his chief objection, the armed forces were not being accorded proper respect. He disclosed to reporters that the enemies of democracy were

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64 Ibid.

65 La Religion, April 11, 1958.

66 Ibid. At about the same period of time, the Ministry of Defense announced a large salary increase for military officers. The timing of this increase was inopportune, to say the least. Shortly thereafter, Colonel Castro León was promoted to General. Both maneuvers occasioned much criticism from numerous civilian sectors.
also the enemies of the armed forces and that their identities were well known. By July, the patience of Castro León, as well as a large faction within the military, had reached its saturation point. When the Venezuelan "man-in-the-street" was being applauded, the Minister of Defense, in reference to the contribution made by the armed forces to the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez, credited his countrymen with possessing "a rare faculty for easy and rapid forgetfulness." When freedom of speech, press and assembly were enjoying great vogue, General Castro León stated that "there should exist tribunals to condemn and punish anyone who starts a rumor."

On the afternoon of Tuesday, July 22, 1958, an angry General Castro León presented the Government Junta a memorandum in the name of the Armed Forces of Venezuela. The memorandum elaborated upon several issues that constituted the military's most pressing grievances: the shameful treatment accorded the Vice President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon; the manner in which the Government Junta relied upon "collective" bodies in its deliberations; the disgraceful injustice accorded Colonel Vicente Marchelli (recently dismissed

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as governor of the federal district); the clear advantage given Democratic Action and the Communist Party of Venezuela in the government; the dishonorable reputation that Venezuela was acquiring abroad; the unjust insults directed against the armed forces by newspapers, radio and television; and the inexplicable behavior of the Government Junta in assisting these indignities. At the end of this memorandum was a list of three demands: 1) the abolition of AD and the PCV; 2) complete censorship of the press, radio and television; and 3) immediate punishment for anyone provoking or directing opposition to the above decrees.\textsuperscript{70} Venezuela was on the verge of returning to totalitarianism.

An analysis of this document reveals no surprises. It is representative of the Latin American militarist mentality. The inclusion of the Nixon visit and constant allusion to communists were designed to gain for the military, as it had so many times in the past, the support of the United States. Democratic Action had no advantage within the government; if anything AD was at a disadvantage. Since it was the largest party in Venezuela, it could easily have demanded a greater number of cabinet posts. Castro León was simply bringing to the surface the simmering feud between the military and AD which dated from the trienio. Finally, references to the Marchalli case, to

\textsuperscript{70} El Nacional, July 26, 1958.
the government's collaboration with outsiders and to the need for communications censorship are symbolic of the military's self-imposed image—the armed forces are an elite establishment and must be treated accordingly.

While Castro León was presenting the memorandum, significant apprehensions were being made by the military. Dr. Antonio Requena, the President of the Patriotic Junta, and three members of the original Junta, Fabricio Ojeda, Guillermo García Ponce and Enrique Aristigueta Gramko, were arrested by military police. The arrests were made as these men departed a television studio where they had just participated in a live telecast entitled, ironically, "Opinion and Unity."

Before the military could act, the television station immediately related to its viewers what had transpired. Thousands marched through the streets of Caracas, but there was no violence. Meanwhile, at Miraflores, Wolfgang Larrazabal was on the spot. Apparently the armed forces were preparing a coup against the government, and the government's only counterweight, the Patriotic Junta, had been immobilized by the military police. Democracy in Venezuela was probably salvaged by the Admiral's next move. He named a committee composed of Rafael Caldera, Jovito Villalba, Eugenio Mendoza and Air Force Chief of Staff, General Josue López Henríquez to negotiate with Castro León. Then, the Government Junta and the entire cabinet (minus the Minister of Defense, of course) moved to Mount Avila to
confer under the protective shadow of navy ships commanded by the Provisional President's brother, Admiral Carlos Larrazabal.  

The negotiating committee made a profound impression on General Castro León. An admirer of Rafael Caldera and COPEI sympathizer, the Defense Minister was disturbed to learn that the copeyano leader was deeply committed to the Government Junta and its democratic progression. More disturbing, however, was the revelation of General López Henriquez that Castro León's own branch of the armed forces, the Air Force, would back the government. Confused by talks, the Minister of Defense, at the request of the negotiators, released the apprehended leaders of the Patriotic Junta. Once free, the Patriotic Junta immediately issued the call for demonstrations in support of the government and for a general strike between 11 A.M. and 6 P.M. on the following day.  

Concerning this episode, a Venezuelan editor made the following remark: "The events of July 22 and 23 may have more significance than those of January 23, for they have shown that the people are determined to live with democracy against all comers." On the morning of

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Wednesday, July 23, 1958, over 20,000 citizens demonstrated throughout the capital city. At 11 A.M., workers walked off their jobs. Accompanying this general strike was a mass "lockout" staged by the Venezuela Federation of Chambers of Commerce. Venezuela came to a standstill. By late afternoon, the ranks of the demonstrators, swelled by striking workers, numbered over 100,000 machete-carrying, pipe-swinging, placard-waving Venezuelans. The most frequently heard shouts were "down with Castro León" and "out with the dirty militarist."

On the balcony of the presidential palace, overlooking the crowd, was a group of men symbolic of civilian unity: Wolfgang Larrazabal, Jovito Villalba, Romulo Betancourt, Rafael Caldera, Dr. Antonio Requena, Fabricio Ojeda and Gustavo Machado (chairman of the PCV). Each addressed the cheering crowd. From Patriotic Junta President Requena, the people learned that similar pro-government demonstrations were simultaneously occurring in Maracaibo, Valencia, Lara, Carabobo, Puerto Cabello, and other cities. Near dusk, the crowd heard an obviously pleased provisional president announce the resignation and departure from Venezuela of General Jesús María Castro León.74

Granting that the July confrontation between the Minister of Defense and the Government Junta had weighty intimations for Venezuelan civilian power, its most meaningful implication involved the armed forces. Unity seemed to characterize the traditionally disunited civilian sectors of society, while disunity seemed to typify the country's traditionally unified military. Castro León was speaking for himself and the nation's most politicalized branch, the Army. Prior to January, 1958, every minister of defense and nearly every president, came from the Army, a fact never popular with the Navy. Since the Provisional President was a navy man, institutional self-interest demanded that the Navy back the Government Junta. Historically, of the three Venezuelan military branches, Army, Navy and Air Force, the latter had been the most apolitical. As Castro León was to discover, his political philosophy was not the political philosophy of the typical Venezuelan airman. General Josue López Henríques, the Air Force Chief of Staff who threw the weight of his service behind the government, became the new defense minister. Like Castro León, he was disliked by Pérez Jiménez—but much so that he had not been in Venezuela since 1954. Unlike Castro León, however, López Henríquez was personable and easy-going; but, above all, he adhered to a position on the role of the Venezuelan military not unlike the country's political
leaders.75 Reinstating the television program "Venezuela Know Your Armed Forces," cancelled by the former Minister of Defense, López Henriquez expressed his view as follows:

These norms (of professionalization) do not impose indifference or disinterest. Impose, yes, an attitude of political neutrality and abstention from debate and partisan politics. For those of us who have taken charge of retaining and maintaining the necessary instruments for the defense of the fatherland and its institutions, we cannot, without excluding our authority, resolve feuds between different political ideologies or dictate solutions to problems that should only be settled by the will of the people freely expressed. . . . Therefore, the humble glory of service is the reward of the soldier.76

Regarding strength, the chief legacy of July 23, 1958, was political cognizance. In July, far more than in January, Venezuelans were aware of the power struggles taking place. Unlike January, where so many facts were unknown and attention was focused on the hated New National Ideal, July presented a clear case of militarism versus civilianism. The motives of the Navy and the Air Force mattered little to the nation’s multitudes. Once again they demonstrated their willingness to pay whatever price necessary in order to prevent a return to militarism.


and its consequent tyranny. Also important was the fact that next to manifesting students, workers and politicians, were doctors, lawyers, engineers, businessmen, pharmacists, teachers and housewives—participants from the most prominent occupational groups. In January these sectors contributed written denunciations and a moral commitment to civilian government; in July they offered themselves. 77

There was to be one more attempt to return Venezuela to militarism during 1958. From the standpoint of time, it was a brief episode; from the standpoint of support, it was a very feeble effort. For the Patriotic Junta and the country's political parties, September, 1958, was a month of political indecisiveness. Interparty talks had not resolved the viability issue of a unity candidate, and many observers were predicting a breakdown in negotiations and subsequent deviation from the atmosphere of political conciliation. On August 21, two exiled Army officers, Lieutenant Colonel Juan de Dios Moncada and Lieutenant Colonel José Ely Mendoza, entered Venezuela illegally for

77 A partial list of organizations offering their verbal and personal commitment to support the Government Junta was printed in El Nacional, July 23, 1958:
Venezuelan Association of University Professors
Association of Venezuelan Writers
Venezuelan Medical Association
Venezuelan Engineering Association
Venezuelan Bar Association
Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce
Venezuelan Pharmaceutical Association
Venezuelan Federation of Teachers
the purpose of overthrowing the government and reestablishing military rule. The Lieutenant Colonels recruited a few comrades to their cause, but remained hidden until the first week in September. Endeavoring to take advantage of apparent momentary civilian disunity, at 3 A.M. on the morning of Sunday, September 7, 1958, a small group of officers under Dios Moncada entered Military Police headquarters in Caracas and assumed control. The officer of the day, Major Pedro Diaz Paredes, who refused to join the rebellion, was arrested. Simultaneously, Mendoza secured entrance into the ministry of defense. Major Alberto Nuñez Salas, commander of the Caracas garrison at the ministry, was also arrested because he refused to collaborate. By 6 A.M. Lieutenant Colonel Dios Moncada had fled to the Mexican embassy for refuge, Lieutenant Colonel Mendoza was in the military police prison, Majors Diaz Paredes and Nuñez Salas were freed; and, by 6:30 A.M., the latter two were addressing gathering crowds from the balcony of Miraflores. Within three hours, the entire military aspect of this revolt had been crushed by loyal detachments.78

In the strictest sense, this confrontation was not between militarists and civilians. It was more of a clash between loyal and subversive officers. Nevertheless, civilians were determined to voice

concern. Crowds demanded that the military police release Mendoza for lynching. When the MP's refused, the mob, laboring under the illusion that the Military Police was an invention of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, besieged its headquarters in an effort to abolish the institution, as they had the National Security. Military police, after a brief battle caused mostly by confusion, gave up the building. By mid-morning calm had been restored by a press-radio-television committee appointed to inform the public of events and to assure them that civilian democracy ruled Venezuela. Heading the committee were Fabricio Ojeda and Guillermo Garcia Ponce. These crowds were not organized demonstrations. The Patriotic Junta did not control this situation, simply because developments occurred too swiftly. However, to satiate civilian militancy and reaffirm civilian support of the government, the Patriotic Junta, on Sunday afternoon, called for a general strike on the following day. On Monday, September 8, Venezuela was paralyzed. The military was once again made aware of civilian power and unity.

79 Military Police headquarters is located next door to Miraflores Palace in Caracas. When military policemen fired over the heads of rioters, palace guards, uninformed of exactly what was taking place and believing Miraflores was under attack, returned the fire. Twelve civilians, two palace guards (Marines) and four MPs were killed. Over 100 were wounded. Daily Journal, September 8, 1958.

80 Daily Journal, September 7, 1958. It is significant that Venezuela's university population was not involved in this September affair. All universities were closed for vacations. The demonstrating crowds were composed mostly of workers and middle class elements. Washington, "Student Politics in Latin America," 471.
The events of September also evidenced further splits within the armed forces. When given an opportunity to rebel, the majority of Venezuelan Army officers stood steadfastly on the side of the Government Junta. The military service branch that provided Venezuela with the Tachira dynasty sided, at least partially, with a government committed to civilian control. For the future of militarism in Venezuela, this development, already manifested by the Navy and Air Force, is of key importance. A change took place in the thinking of many military officers. By the end of 1958, the armed forces of Venezuela were undergoing a process of depoliticalization that had its roots in the events of that same year.

One factor which helps explain this transformation is the legacy of the New National Ideal and its detrimental impact upon the pride of individual officers. Pérez Jiménez was an officer and his every act reflected upon the integrity of the military. The armed forces were as much to blame for the immoralities, injustices and corruption of the Pérez Jiménez regime, as was Lareano Valenilla Lanz or Pedro Estrada. Once the dictatorship was overthrown and its malefic deeds began receiving wide publicity, individual officers were embarrassed to wear uniforms in public. It was traditional in Venezuela for officers to wear fully decorated dress uniforms to church on Sunday, but during 1958 most officers wore civilian clothes at Mass. National military cemeteries and public edifices dedicated to past military heroes were desecrated by civilians.
demonstrating their disgust for anything connected with the country's armed institutions. Many distinguished civilians, such as professor Humberto Cuenca, engineer Alejandro García Maldonado and political leader Rafael Caldera, men held in high esteem by military officers, authored articles frankly informing the armed forces that they had no business in politics. Defense Minister Castro León continually declared to reporters that the activities of Pérez Jiménez in no way diminished the public's respect for military officers; but everyone, particularly the officers themselves, knew that the opposite was really the case. 81

However, even Castro León's pride was forced to compromise. For the first time in the history of the Venezuelan armed forces, the military felt it necessary to practice public relations in the hope of improving its image. The television program, "Venezuela Know Your Armed Forces," as designed by the Minister of Defense, Jesús María Castro León, was to perform this function. There were five of these bi-monthly telecasts. Instead of accomplishing their purpose, however, they only served to augment civilian distrust of the military.

As previously discussed, the first address, delivered by Castro León, drew immediate civilian disapproval. The succeeding four programs, respectively delivered by the Joint Chief of Staff, the Army Chief of Staff, the Navy Chief of Staff, and the Air Force Chief of Staff, might have served to mitigate the Defense Minister's rather tough position, but they did not. Instead, they became lectures in military history. Each speaker gave a historical description of the founding of his respective branch and its many great services to the nation. At a time when Venezuelans were reading about the numerous improprieties of General Pérez Jiménez, many citizens felt these laudatory orations added insult to injury. Under the leadership of General Castro León, the armed forces failed to improve their image.

It was not until the resignation of Castro León as Minister of Defense and the appointment of his replacement, General Josue López Henriquez, that civilian-military relations in Venezuela improved. As previously shown, López Henriquez's notions concerning the role of the military in national life were markedly different from those of his predecessor.

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predecessor. The new Minister of Defense allowed for more branch independence by decentralizing many areas of authority previously handled by the defense ministry. He encouraged creativity and inventiveness within the military, always emphasizing service to the nation. Also, he sought to "broaden the culture of the professional soldier, for the broader and more varied his intellectual preoccupation, the better he will be able to serve his profession."83

The previously mentioned depoliticalization of the Venezuelan military which took place during the last six months of 1958 can be partially explained by the reforms instituted by the new Minister of Defense. These reforms allowed for greater self-expression within the armed forces. An excellent source by which to measure the extent of this transformation within the military is the service journals published by the Ministry of Defense and the various branches of the Venezuelan armed forces. These journals, Fuerzas Armadas de Venezuela (Ministry of Defense), Revista de las Fuerzas Aéreas (Air Force), Revista del Ejercito (Army), Revista de la Escuela Naval de Venezuela (Navy), Guardia Nacional (National Guard) and Siempre Firmes (Military Academy), are issued at highly irregular intervals, and, prior to 1958, contained news of military events, technical articles on military science and historical essays on numerous battles or prominent military commanders.

Within the Venezuelan armed forces, these journals perform a vital function. The concepts of history, duty and purpose of most officers, and particularly these young officers, are formed from reading these journals. The oldest and best established of these publications, Fuerzas Armadas de Venezuela, is assembled by the staff of the Minister of Defense. With the exception of the latter, during the first half of 1958, few of these magazines appeared; and those that did persisted in their traditionalist outlook.

Following the appointment of Josue López Henríquez as Minister of Defense, there ensued a shuffling of military commands. Officers holding to democratic concepts and advocating apolitical comportment for the armed forces were appointed to influential positions. These more progressive commanders, eager to transmit ideas of the political modernization process taking place in their country, demanded changes in the publications under their authority. The pace was set from the top. The influential, supra-service Fuerzas Armadas de Venezuela began publishing articles dealing with the role of the military in national life. Officers known for their intellectual opposition to militarism, as well as for their devotion to duty and country, were requested to contribute articles defining the role of the armed forces vis-a-vis politics. Reflecting their author's views, these articles, in the succinct words of Colonel Martin García Villasmil, repeatedly emphasized that "individually, partially or collectively the armed forces must not act
in internal or external politics, but only as provided by the constitution and national laws." In the latter half of 1958, Fuerzas Armadas also began publishing articles by prominent civilians, a practice without precedent. The speeches of Alberto Lleras Camargo, the highly respected former civilian president of the Republic of Colombia, were given considerable attention. A typical Lleras Camargo statement read:

"Politics is an art of controversy by excellence. The Military of discipline. . . . Maintaining them away from public deliberation is not an obstacle to the constitution, but a necessity for its function." Finally, after the presidential elections of December 7, 1958, many speeches and pronouncements of President-elect Romulo Betancourt were published in Fuerzas Armadas. Utterances of the Democratic Action leader that had drawn military intervention in 1948 were now being printed in the nation's foremost military journal.


The service journals distributed by the individual branches of the Venezuelan armed forces followed the example set by Fuerzas Armadas. Surprisingly, it was the Army publication, Revista del Ejercito, that demonstrated the most change. Both in its editorials and in its articles, this magazine called for the individual military officer to exercise apolitical comportment. Also important for the future of militarism was the position taken by Siempre Firmes, the journal of the Military Academy of Venezuela. Every future Venezuelan military officer would be trained at this Academy; the ideas that he would be exposed to as a cadet would have some bearing on his thinking as an officer. The magazine published by the Military Academy of Venezuela emulated the trend set by the other military journals. Cadets could not help but be influenced by articles which contained such typical passages as the following:

The entrance of military officers in partisan politics is highly dangerous and bad for both the institution and the individual. It results in a loss of prestige and respect for the military in


the eyes of the public. The acts and thoughts of misled officers always reflect on the institution.89

This kind of indoctrination, which stresses the belief that the Venezuelan armed forces are under the constitution and the law rather than above it, continued into 1959 and remains present today.

Thus far, two explanations have been offered in an attempt to justify the changes in the Venezuelan military mentality which took place in the latter half of 1958. The first dealt with the profound impact on the country's armed forces made by the irregularities of the New National Ideal. The second dealt with the apolitical example set by the Minister of Defense, General Josue López Henriquez, and his ranking subordinates. A concluding explanation, external to the armed forces and probably the most important, was the deep impression created in the minds of military officers by the conduct of the Patriotic Junta, in particular, and the country's civilians, in general.

In practically every volume written on the political nature of the Latin American military, officers are described as viewing their country's civilian leaders as inept and vacillating. The military's concern for the national interest, always being unnecessarily compromised by civilian politicians, is always listed by officers as a primary motive

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for political intervention.\textsuperscript{90} The events of January 23, reinforced by the events of July 23, clearly demonstrated to the Venezuelan armed forces that the nation's citizens were anything but inept and vacillating. Led by the Patriotic Junta, Venezuela's civilians demonstrated discipline, courage and organization--three attributes usually associated with the military. The civilian populace proved willing to follow the commands of recognized leaders. By fighting with sticks and stones against police equipped with pistols, rifles and machine guns, they proved willing to pay whatever price necessary for democracy. Finally, via the Patriotic Junta and its numerous subsidiaries, Venezuela's civilians demonstrated to the military the existence of a hierarchical organization similar to their own. Thus, Venezuela's citizens won the respect of the nation's armed forces. In the words of one officer (Colonel José Leon Rangel), stunned by what he had witnessed on January 23, "I shall never forget the numerous men and women, the old people as well as the young people who lost their lives for their country. They were indifferent to sacrifice."\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{90} Three of many works that explain this problem are Finer, The Man on Horseback, 6; Needler, Anatomy of a Coup d'etat, 40; and Lieuwen, The U.S. and the Challenge to Security, 69.

\textsuperscript{91} El Universal, January 24, 1958.
CHAPTER VII

A SUMMARY

The last meeting of the Patriotic Junta took place in November, 1958. In the words of Father Jesús Hernández Chapellin, "The work of the Junta was complete, there was no longer any need for it." It may seem strange that the Patriotic Junta, an organization boasting numerous accomplishments, should suddenly cease operations. Yet, from its inception, the Patriotic Junta was destined to an ephemeral existence. Even its name connotes transience, for junta, in the Latin America context of the word, translates as a committee or group of a temporary nature. The Patriotic Junta was sired by Venezuela's political parties. It was created to perform a specifically negative function—to overthrow the military dictatorship. The Junta advocated positive practices, such as political freedom, honest elections and respect for the wishes of the electorate, but only because the implementation of these practices meant an end to the dictatorship. When the Junta accomplished its task, however, prudence dictated that its life be granted a temporary extension. Two reasons justified this development: first, the immense popularity and prestige of the

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1 Interview with Father Jesús Hernández Chapellin, August, 1967.
Patriotic Junta made it the only civilian entity powerful enough to sufficiently pressure the provisional government into initiating democratic reform; and, second, once the provisional government committed itself to democratic reform, the power of the Junta was needed to maintain the government against certain elements in the armed forces desiring a return to militarism.

The Venezuelan armed forces, for the sake of public order, and individual security, were forced to act against the regime of Marcos Pérez Jiménez. A new military government was established, one more honest and enlightened than its predecessor; but even honest and enlightened totalitarianism has little room for political parties. In order to win the political reforms necessary for party functionalization, it became necessary to exert pressure upon the new military government. To exert this pressure, Venezuela's political parties turned to the most effective instrument for political action at their disposal, the Patriotic Junta. The Patriotic Junta was the only organization capable of engendering mass civilian demonstrations--peaceful if desirable, violent if necessary--to back its demands. Under the leadership of the Patriotic Junta, the militant civilians of Venezuela won the necessary political reforms. With the passing of time, both the provisional government and its commitment to political reform came under attack from far right elements within the military. Under these circumstances, the Patriotic Junta and its
ability to mobilize the masses were utilized by the country's political parties to defend and sustain the provisional government. Physical power in the form of a military coup was met by physical power in the form of tens of thousands of parading civilians willing and able to confront those elements within the armed forces intent upon ruling Venezuela. A successful golpe de estado could have taken place in Venezuela in 1958, but it would have cost thousands of lives. The armed forces were not willing to take the risk, the nation's civilians were.

By November, 1958, the Patriotic Junta had outlived its usefulness. Following the attempted coup of September 7, which demonstrated the preponderances of military officers loyal to the government over those advocating government by the armed forces, the threat of a return to militarism appeared negligible. The provisional government delivered on its promises of open political campaigns and free elections, and partisan activity reached its 1958 peak as December 7, the date of national elections, approached. The country's political parties did not relinquish their traditions, organizations and programs by becoming members of the Patriotic Junta; rather, by accepting membership in this temporary body, they insured the continued survival, growth and development of these partisan characteristics.

The Patriotic Junta was the symbol of a reform movement which had its roots in Venezuelan history. The struggle of 1958 represents
the most important phase of a series of phases in the development of Venezuela's political culture. From their bout with Juan Vincente Gómez, the students of 1928 (who emerged as the country's key political leaders thirty years later) witnessed the possibilities offered by a university community as an effective fighting force; but they also discovered that students alone were woefully inadequate in toppling an entrenched military dictatorship. The repatriated politicians of 1936-1937 discovered that once concessions were granted by a military government, only constant vigilance could insure the permanence of these concessions. Indeed, of Venezuela's three brief struggles for representative government prior to the creation of the Patriotic junta, it was the machinations of 1936-1937 which most nearly parallels the developments of 1957-1958. The atmosphere in Venezuela following the ouster of Pérez Jiménez had a striking resemblance to Venezuela after the death of Gómez. More remarkable was the similarity in organization between the Patriotic Junta of 1957-1958, and its three 1936-1937 counterparts: the Venezuelan Organization (ORVE), the National Democratic Party (PDN) and the April Block. All four groups were composed of individuals espousing various political ideologies and approaches, and all four groups attempted to unite the country's various civilian sectors behind a democratic reform movement in opposition to a military based government. The key lesson acquired from the 1945-1948 trienio was simple but vital.
The process of transforming Venezuela's political culture from one dominated by the military to one dominated by the electorate would not be easy. When confronting the military, the triumph of any future reform movement would depend heavily on civilian unity plus a willingness to make whatever sacrifice necessary for its success. Knowledge of Venezuelan history, and particularly knowledge of her past efforts at political reform, is indispensable to understanding the success of the Patriotic Junta in 1957 and 1958. The Junta learned much from its predecessors. History also reveals the indigenousness of Venezuelan political reform. These reform epochs were dominated by Venezuelans adapting their political philosophies to a Venezuelan political environment. Venezuelans are proud of the fact that their version of democracy was established by a grassroots movement with contributors from nearly every sector of the nation's society. This pride is important in understanding the success of representative government in Venezuela since 1958.

The impact of the Patriotic Junta on the political culture of Venezuela was profound. Its work (with significant assistance from the resentment directed toward the New National Ideal) provided all Venezuelans with an avenue of political participation and association. Directed by the Patriotic Junta, this mass political activism created political attitudes that transcended partisan, economic and social barriers. Since 1958, Venezuelan politics has not been the concern
of the military sprinkled with occasional inroads by students, politicians or organized labor. Today, politics is the concern of most Venezuelans. Closely allied to the Patriotic Junta's role in stimulating Venezuelan political conscience and participation was its efforts at establishing political comity. Political tolerance, coupled with a fundamental trust for those holding opposing political ideas were keystones in the philosophy of the Patriotic Junta. The influence of the Junta was such that these tenets permeated virtually every politicalized element in the country. Dialogue took place, thus better understanding was promoted among the advocates of various ideologies. The origins of this comity and its uninterrupted existence since 1958 is crucial to understanding the important Venezuelan event of March 11, 1969—for the first time in the nation's history, without recourse to violence or civil war, the government of Venezuela was transferred from one incumbent political part to the loyal opposition.

The primary impact of the Patriotic Junta in the realm of civilian-military relations was its disproving the traditional outlook of military officers toward civilians. This attitude held that civilians were opportunistic and vacillating. The Patriotic Junta demonstrated to military men that the values and self-esteem of civilians differed little from their own. This new attitude, together with memories of the New National Ideal, the apolitical comportment advocated by most officers and the excellent performance of the country's civilian presidents
since 1958, are reasons why one can be optimistic with regard to the future of democracy in Venezuela. Tradition, however, is difficult to overcome, and government by armed forces is the dominant political tradition of Venezuela. Yet, for the last eleven years the Republic of Venezuela has been governed by civilians and has made unprecedented strides in all areas of national life. Since it is not the chore of the historian to make predictions, but to understand and, thereby, to enlighten, the writer will simply state that a golpe de estado is indeed a future possibility in Venezuela, but a very remote one.
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