
This very good edited volume is the product of a seminar co-sponsored by the North-South Center at the University of Miami and the Institute Venezuelan de Estudios Sociales y Políticos, held in Caracas in November 1991, between the first and second congressional terms and edited against the Venezuelan government. To the seminar focused naturally on the question of identifying the conditions which led to the first coup, and more generally to the forcible undermining of the legitimacy of Venezuelan democracy and the potential for reforming it. Each of the authors in the volume has neither original contribution, but the volume is useful in that it provides an excellent overview of the events and gives the reader plenty of material to make his/her own conclusions. Most of the authors in the volume refer to the origins of the Venezuelan democracy in 1958. The various political forces aligned against the dictatorship of Pino. Javier ceased to exist in that it provided an excellent overview of the events and gives the reader plenty of material to make his/her own conclusions. Most of the authors in the volume refer to the origins of the Venezuelan democracy in 1958. The various political forces aligned against the dictatorship of Pino. Javier ceased to exist in that it provided an excellent overview of the events and gives the reader plenty of material to make his/her own conclusions.
Venezuela, like the other oil rich countries after 1974, went on a binge of foreign borrowing. The debt crisis of the 1980s hit the country hard, especially as prices softened and non-oil exports remained weak. The Florentino and Luzardo governments did not see the writing on the wall, and continued the previous policies of import substitution combined with high levels of public spending. It was not until the election of Carlos Andres Perez for the second time in 1988 that the Venezuelan government decided to make major change in economic strategy. Just as Mexico had done in 1982, Venezuela was forced to restructure its economic strategy in order to avoid a major economic crisis. Perez proposed a major reduction in government spending and a vast liberalization of external trade to include Venezuelan enterprises, public and private, to become more internationally competitive (this is described in detail in the chapter by Luis Zedillo, Jucuqui and Miguel Rodriguez Marín).

The problem appears to have been the nature in which the Perez government announced and defended the policy shift: the Perez government did not, they could not, prepare the general adequately through various forms of research and inclusion. Overcentralization of decision making was the problem here. Also, there were problems of implementation caused by partisan and bureaucratic resistance to the necessary state-led import substitution (see the especially fine chapter by Beatriz Rojas on this problem). Here the main cause was the inertia of ‘paritormity’ in the Venezuelan system.

Most interesting in this volume was the chapter by on General Commandant of the Army Pedro Bracho Rangel Rojas, while extolling the virtues of direct control of government, also urged further efforts on the part of the military to engage itself in securing the defense of democracy (see pp. 164-190). The content and tone of this essay was quite different from all the others in the volume, and suggested the likelihood of further reference on the part of the military to the conduct of business as usual in Venezuela.

To end on a slightly more positive note, this book contains many useful suggestions for current form and policy reform in Venezuela based on careful thought about the recent past. As such, it should be read carefully by anyone interested in the future of the country.

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