

VENEZUELAN S REFLECT ON THE MEANING OF THE 23 DE ENERO*

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- EL MILITARISMO EN VENEZUELA: LA DICTADURA DE PEREZ JIMENEZ.* By JOSE RAMON AVENDAÑO LUGO. (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1982. Pp. 393.)
- EL 23 DE ENERO: HABLA LA CONSPIRACION.* Interviews by AGUSTIN BLANCO MUÑOZ. (Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1980. Pp. 421.)
- LA CONSPIRACION CIVICO-MILITAR: GUAIRAZO, BARCELONAZO, CARUPANAZO Y PORTEÑAZO.* Interviews by AGUSTIN BLANCO MUÑOZ. (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1981. Pp. 454.)
- THE INDICTMENT OF A DICTATOR: THE EXTRADITION AND TRIAL OF MARCOS PEREZ JIMENEZ.* By JUDITH EWELL. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1981. Pp. 203.)
- EL DIARIO DESCONOCIDO DE UNA DICTADURA.* By GUILLERMO GARCIA PONCE and FRANCISCO CAMACHO BARRIOS. (Caracas: Publicaciones Selevelen, 1980. Pp. 431.)
- EL 23 DE ENERO DE 1958 Y EL PROCESO DE CONSOLIDACION DE LA DEMOCRACIA REPRESENTATIVA EN VENEZUELA.* By HELENA PLAZA. (Caracas: Garbizu & Todtmann, 1978. Pp. 239.)
- EL NUEVO IDEAL NACIONAL Y LOS PLANES ECONOMICO-MILITARES DE PEREZ JIMENEZ, 1952-1957.* By FREDY RINCON N. (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1982. Pp. 179.)
- CRISIS POLITICA: VENEZUELA, 1945-58.* By ANDRES STAMBOULI. (Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1980. Pp. 336.)
- LA REVOLUCION NO HA TERMINADO...* By HUGO TREJO. (Valencia, Venezuela: Vadell Hermanos, 1977. Pp. 265.)

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the overthrow of the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship in Venezuela on 23 January 1958 occasioned the publication of a series of books based on documents and testimonies

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about the political resistance to that regime.¹ These works, as well as several others under review in this essay, demonstrate that the events of the 23 de enero are very much enveloped in controversy. The debate is heavily charged because the national leaders who are being judged have remained an integral part of the political scene in Venezuela in the years since 1958. Two issues in particular loom large: what institutions and organizations were responsible for the overthrow of the dictatorship and what was the role of individual actors? Discussion on these topics eventually leads to the question of the gains that the events of the 23 de enero brought about for the nation. Some participants in the debate invoke the title of a book by Hugo Trejo, *La revolución no ha terminado...*, to make plain the hiatus between what the protagonists of the events of the 23 de enero set out to accomplish and the national reality in the ensuing quarter of a century.²

In *Crisis política: Venezuela 1945–58* and in *El 23 de enero de 1958*, political scientist Andrés Stambouli and historian Helena Plaza attribute what happened on the 23 de enero to the opposition of various institutions and social groups to Pérez Jiménez, and in doing so, they reject those theses that hold one specific factor or sector responsible for the event. These two authors deny that the movement was “purely military,” even though the five members of the junta that assumed power following the flight of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez were all officers (Plaza, p. 89). They also discard the possibility that opposition to Pérez Jiménez was set off by what Plaza terms the purely “circumstantial” slack in national production—especially in the crucial area of construction—concluding that this negative development was more than offset by increased oil sales following the closing of the Suez Canal. In the course of the 1950s, sectors such as certain political parties, the military, the church, and the bourgeoisie, all of which had extended at least tacit support to the military regime when it took over in November 1948, became disenchanted. According to Stambouli, government ineptness caused the loss of church support. Its change of attitude was triggered by the overreaction of Minister of the Interior Laureano Vallenilla Lanz to a pastoral letter by the Archbishop of Caracas that was not so much directed against the government as it was inspired by the Vatican’s increased social awareness and concern for the plight of the poor. This view differs from other accounts that consider the letter itself a direct challenge to the regime.³ At the same time, the nation’s bourgeoisie chafed at the apparently inexplicable refusal of the government to pay its internal debt⁴ and at the economic favoritism that it extended to a small coterie of supporters. A similar reliance on the civilian police unit, the “National Security,” and its use of arbitrary force alienated military officers who had previously welcomed Pérez Jiménez’s pledge to govern on behalf of the armed forces as an institution. Stambouli concludes

that "if one factor stands out in the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez, it is the autocratic behavior of the government that succeeded in irritating all sectors of national life" (p. 165).

In accepting the importance of a multiplicity of forces in the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez, Plaza rejects those accounts that highlight the role of political parties. Such versions, according to Plaza, leave the false impression that the mobilizations culminating in the general strike of 23 January followed a preconceived plan elaborated by political insurgents. Plaza denies that the parties can be credited with fomenting the discontent of the military officers who intervened in the events of the 23 de enero. The Junta Patriótica, which united Acción Democrática (AD), COPEI (originally the Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente), the Unión Republicana Democrática (URD), and the Partido Comunista de Venezuela (PCV) in the underground movement, failed to develop close ties with the rebel officers and was surprised by the initial military uprising of 1 January. This view regarding the tenuousness of the political-military connection is corroborated by several leftists active in the resistance who were interviewed by historian Agustín Blanco Muñoz. Guillermo García Ponce and Simón Sáez Mérida, former members of the PCV and the left wing of the AD, boast of the key role played by leftists in the military revolts of 1962 against the AD government of Rómulo Betancourt, but they admit that military conspirators acted independently during the first twenty-three days of 1958.⁵

Plaza's and Stambouli's balanced view of the participation by both military officers and political parties in the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez is shared neither by Hugo Trejo, who spearheaded the 1 January conspiracy, nor by other military conspirators interviewed by Blanco Muñoz in *El 23 de enero: habla la conspiración* and *La conspiración cívico militar*. Trejo's commentaries reflect the ambivalence toward political parties of the officers who fought to reestablish democracy and their resentment of certain leading politicians. One of their overriding complaints is that the AD governments prior to November 1948 (when a military triumvirate that included Pérez Jiménez took over) and after 1958 manipulated military staff appointments in order to favor trusted supporters within the institution. According to Trejo, what happened on the 23 de enero was the work of a small group of officers who were convinced that the battle for democracy had to commence with the armed forces. He denounces the self-serving *vivos*, the politicians who lived in exile during the dictatorship (such as Rómulo Betancourt), and he criticizes the political parties for having failed to extend a helping hand in the 1 January conspiracy (p. 165). Part of Trejo's suspiciousness of politicians may have developed as a result of his veritable exile under the regime of Military Junta President Wolfgang Larrazábal, a move that

was accepted and in some cases actually abetted by top party leaders. Trejo's plea following 23 January to open up communications between the military and the public was viewed as a Nasser-like intrusion into the political arena and a natural threat to political parties. Trejo's distrust of politicians nevertheless was shared by other officers of diverse backgrounds and was expressed in the Blanco Muñoz interviews, thus indicating that this sentiment was widespread and transcended the political orientation and experiences of individual officers.

The behavior of the military conspirators interviewed by Blanco Muñoz must be placed in the context of a period of transition from military to political party hegemony at the level of the state. Daniel Levine has noted that after 1936, parties filled a vacuum created by the premature dissolution of traditional structures and went on to become "the central organizing principle" in Venezuelan society.⁶ There is some disagreement as to whether the parties in general, and the AD in particular, overstepped their natural limits in intervening and establishing control over the armed forces. The most fervent champions of the AD governments insist that their assertiveness on the military front was necessary to curb ambitions and safeguard the nation's fledgling democracy. Furthermore, the party had to rely on a group of its most trusted military followers, who possessed outstanding professional attributes,⁷ even if such reliance meant discriminating against other officers who were not identified with the AD.

The officers interviewed by Blanco Muñoz viewed themselves as defending the military's institutional autonomy from the encroachment of the government—that of the AD before 1948 and after 1958 as well as that of Pérez Jiménez during the interim.⁸ One of the officers told Blanco Muñoz that anti-AD, but not anti-PCV, attitudes prevailed in the military during this period. The success of first the AD and later COPEI in attaining considerable influence in the armed forces was such that to this day they command the undeclared sympathy of most high-ranking officers. Their effort to bring the military under control was reinforced by handsome salaries and privileges accorded to officers.⁹ The AD and COPEI were also aided by factionalism and personality clashes in the military that limited its capacity to safeguard its inherent interests. These internal divisions are manifested in the two Blanco Muñoz volumes, in which the interviewees were quick to condemn certain fellow officers while praising others. (Trejo, for example, comes under heavy attack for his management of the 1 January uprising and his role after 23 January.¹⁰) Yet even after twenty-five years of democratic rule, party dominance is far from absolute, certainly weaker than in organized labor and other institutions where party loyalties at the top are much stronger. The study of the armed forces' relative autonomy vis-à-vis political parties along with its autonomy vis-à-vis the dominant classes

are dimensions of the military's autonomy that need to be thoroughly examined in order to determine the stability of the democratic system, as Jorge Nef has pointed out.¹¹

José Ramón Avendaño in *El militarismo en Venezuela* and Fredy Rincón in *El nuevo ideal nacional* both stress the importance of the ongoing process of the modernization and professionalization of the armed forces that Pérez Jiménez promoted and was identified with, at least during the early years of his regime. This association accounted for Pérez Jiménez's success in winning over the vast majority of officers for the government that took power on 24 November 1948. In the first place, Pérez Jiménez was regarded by his fellow officers as technically competent and an outstanding professional soldier. In the second, he had raised the banner of opposition to political interference in military appointments during the AD *trienio* government of 1945–48.¹² While in power, Pérez Jiménez took advantage of the steady increase in oil revenues in order to fulfill the pledge he made at the time of the 18 October 1945 coup (which he and the AD led) to modernize the armed forces. Not only was the military equipment that the nation acquired on a par with Venezuela's larger neighbors, but a sizable number of officers from all ranks were sent abroad for training. Pérez Jiménez's program, the New National Ideal, delegated authority to a modernizing class of technocrats with which highly trained military personnel could identify. Its condemnation of political parties also accorded with the apolitical and antipolitical mentalities of Venezuelan officers. Avendaño shows, however, that by promoting professionalization of the armed forces and catering to military attitudes, Pérez Jiménez sowed the seeds of his own overthrow. The advanced training of air force, navy, and national guard officers fed personal ambitions and fostered resentment toward the army, which held a near-monopoly on the highest-ranking positions. In addition, Venezuelan officers were influenced by the democratic attitudes and institutions in nations where they were sent to study. The Perezjimenista quasi doctrine, while consonant with military thinking, highlighted the role of the national "hero," a euphemism for the autocrat personified by Pérez Jiménez, and thus alienated officers with a newly found, albeit tenuous, interest in democracy (Avendaño, p. 271).

While his discussion of the professionalization of the armed forces during the 1950s goes beyond the completely negative portrayal of the dictatorship found in Rómulo Betancourt's *Venezuela: política y petróleo* and elsewhere, Avendaño by no means presents an apology for the Pérez Jiménez government. In contrast, Rincón's *El nuevo ideal nacional*, despite occasional reliance on Marxist categories, offers a favorable account of the regime and thus can be considered revisionist as well as a formidable challenge to standard treatments of the Pérez Ji-

ménez regime. Whereas Avendaño discusses the entrenched interests in the armed forces that blocked the advancement of highly trained officers, Rincón claims that professionalization under Pérez Jiménez curbed the practice of basing promotions on personal criteria. Rincón stresses the ideological and strategic motives behind Pérez Jiménez's schemes. He attributes the government's refusal to allow private interests to run the nation's telephone enterprise to governmental concern for national security. He similarly maintains that the decision to build a steel complex in the Guayana region was due to geopolitical concern regarding the military vulnerability of that sparsely settled region. Pérez Jiménez's nationalist position was clearly demonstrated by the government's attempt to diversify sources of capital, technology, and weapons, the latter of particular importance for Rincón's argument because U.S. policy at the time opposed the diffusion of modern armaments. In short, military imperative is Rincón's point of departure for understanding the government's ambitious economic program.

Rincón claims that pressure emanating from transnational interests acted as an important constraint on the developmental plans of Pérez Jiménez. For instance, the government's projected network of railroads was completed only along the short stretch between Puerto Cabello and Barquisimeto because of the opposition of automobile interests. Rincón's assigning major credit to Pérez Jiménez for projects that were only on the drawing boards or scarcely initiated by 1958 is a major weakness in his thesis. Similarly, Rincón's effort to explain Pérez Jiménez's actions on the basis of a preconceived master plan whose philosophical underpinning was known as the New National Ideal is unconvincing. Adjacency to disputed territory and military vulnerability may have endowed the Guayana region with priority status, but its abundant natural resources—not the least of which are iron and water power—made the area in any case a logical choice for a major steel plant. In fact, the plans for that project dated back to the AD *trienio* government and were prompted by the recent discovery of vast iron reserves in Guayana's Cerro Bolívar.¹³

In the same manner that Trejo and many other officers who participated in the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez felt subsequently snubbed and discriminated against for political reasons, a large number of the leading political figures in the resistance against the dictatorship soon became dissatisfied with the nation's newly elected democratic government and joined the guerrilla movement. One of the key leaders both in the opposition to Pérez Jiménez and the guerrilla struggle was PCV member Guillermo García Ponce. His *El diario desconocido de una dictadura*, coauthored with journalist Francisco Camacho Barrios, details underground activity during the nine-year dictatorship. The authors, like other leftists of the period, saw the essence of the events of the 23 de

enero as the unification of all democratic progressive parties including the Marxist left, which was subsequently excluded from interparty agreements. García Ponce and Camacho Barrios trace the efforts to achieve unity back to the early years of the dictatorship, when on two occasions AD Secretary General Leonardo Ruiz Pineda met with his counterpart in the PCV. Ruiz Pineda's unity approach clashed with Betancourt's position that the PCV was too small to warrant inclusion in an alliance that would have had inherent political drawbacks.¹⁴ Another impediment to achieving unity during these early years, according to the authors, was the AD's putschist strategy, which the other parties rejected. Thus, they claim, the oil workers' strike in May 1950, which resulted in the outlawing of the PCV, was manipulated by the AD in order to trigger a movement in the armed forces against the government. This concern regarding the AD's insurgent designs was expressed at the time by PCV leader Juan Bautista Fuenmayor in opposition to participation by the Communist party in the conflict. While Fuenmayor's arguments were fairly well received by the then-young García Ponce, the rest of the party's national leadership rejected them and expelled Fuenmayor.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the PCV was wary of the AD's conspiratorial approach until it was finally renounced by Ruiz Pineda's clandestine successor, Alberto Carnevali.¹⁶ Thus the authors attribute lack of unity in the early years first to Betancourt's sectarianism and second to the AD's mistaken strategy of subordinating civilian action to military action.

García Ponce and Camacho Barrios highlight Communist input in the struggle against Pérez Jiménez. The information they present contradicts contemporaneous statements by Betancourt and subsequent assessments by Robert Alexander and others that minimize the PCV's role. Betancourt, in one of a series of articles written for the Cuban magazine *Bohemia* that have been compiled by pro-AD publisher José Agustín Catalá, stressed the fact that throughout its first year and a half, the dictatorship allowed Communists to operate legally while it hunted down members of the proscribed AD. Later, according to this version, harassment of the PCV was directed almost exclusively against the party's top leadership.¹⁷ The relatively close relations between the Communists and the government were said to be part of the "climate of discreet mutual tolerance" between Moscow and Venezuela.¹⁸ This thesis was refuted by the renowned poet and AD leader Andrés Eloy Blanco in another article in *Bohemia*, which was also published by Catalá.¹⁹ Along with the work by García Ponce and Camacho Barrios, one of the most convincing testimonies about the participation of Communists in the struggle against Pérez Jiménez from the outset and their spirit of self-sacrifice is *Revolución de las fantasías* by former AD leftist Domingo Alberto Rangel. In a passage cited by Plaza (p. 47), Rangel

states that the members of the PCV were better prepared to withstand repression because of their tighter discipline and organization and that they were harassed less by the government because they eschewed the putschist approach followed by the AD.²⁰ Several recently published accounts of the resistance suggest that Communist militants were at least as valiant and combative as those of the AD, if not more so. The head of the National Security, the notorious Pedro Estrada, one of his lieutenants, and a rank-and-file member of the Communist underground all state that the captured PCVistas behaved more honorably in jail and under interrogation than did the Adecos. The first two accounts actually claim that AD martyr Ruiz Pineda was betrayed by the one of many "Judases" who figured in his party's ranks. Estrada states several times that "it was the Communist party that carried out the true 'resistance' " to the regime.²¹

The sheer numbers of party activists who are mentioned in the volumes by García Ponce, Camacho Barrios, and Blanco Muñoz and in other works on the period are part of the legacy of the 23 de enero. As with all national causes, Venezuelans are generally intrigued by accounts of participation in the movement that culminated on 23 January 1958. This fascination has worked to the advantage of some political actors and to the disadvantage of others, and it accounts for the numerous versions regarding individual contributions to the struggle. Thus in the primaries for the 1983 presidential election, Jaime Lusinchi was favored by his record of underground activity, imprisonment, torture, and exile in the 1950s over his rival David Morales Bello, whose role in the death of Ruiz Pineda has occasioned speculation and accusations, albeit without much substance.²² Meanwhile, Ruiz Pineda's daughter and other survivors of AD martyrs questioned the appropriateness of the selection of Rafael Caldera (COPEI's presidential candidate) to deliver an address commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 23 de enero. They argued that Caldera and most other top COPEI leaders of the period failed to make personal sacrifices and were left relatively unharassed up until the last weeks of the regime.²³ Several recently published books point to the key role played by the AD's younger generation, which later broke off from the party to form the Castroite Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) in 1960, and the party's middle generation, which formed the ARS in 1962 and the Movimiento Electoral del Pueblo (MEP) in 1967. Some of these accounts claim that the "old guard" of the AD, who managed to retain control of the party in the 1960s, enjoyed a relatively comfortable exile in the 1950s, a condition that engendered resentment among underground party leaders.²⁴ Another publication, *Nosotras también nos jugamos la vida*, contains accounts of women resistance fighters and, as its title implies, calls for recognition of the role played by women in the struggle.²⁵

Any evaluation of the long-term accomplishments arising out of the events of the 23 de enero must address itself to Pérez Jiménez's defense of his government and his accusations against succeeding regimes, as presented at his trial lasting from 1963 to 1968.²⁶ Judith Ewell in *The Indictment of a Dictator* ably shows that Pérez Jiménez's court statements were directed in part against the United States, which had cooperated with the AD government in his extradition. In this way, Pérez Jiménez made himself out to be a nationalist whose legal rights had been violated in exile by U.S. authorities in reprisal for his allegedly developmentalist and anti-U.S. policies (such as his proposal in 1956 for a massive Latin American aid program). Pérez Jiménez also claimed that his legal problems were related to his regime's refusal to grant business opportunities to Kennedy, Rockefeller, and Nixon family interests. In the end, the AD government's attempt to expose the former dictator for propaganda purposes boomeranged when Pérez Jiménez's extended imprisonment while on trial evoked sympathy, and the sentence he received allowed him to leave the country immediately. The court's relatively favorable decision at least showed, as Ewell points out, that an independent judiciary existed in Venezuela.

The impressive Perezjimenista vote in the national elections shortly after the trial was not a vindication of Pérez Jiménez's record while in power but an expression of sympathy for the man's recent legal ordeal. Ewell notes that Pérez Jiménez was "ever the apolitical technocrat" who, unlike Perón in Argentina, was unwilling to organize political support during his rule and was unable to parlay the spontaneous sympathy vote in 1968 into a coherent organized movement (p. 168). Indeed, given his complete ineffectiveness as a politician, it is unlikely that the Adecos tried to obstruct the Perezjimenista movement because they viewed it as a major political threat, as Ewell claims (p. 156). Rather, the AD's political motive for rekindling the Perezjimenista issue was to score political capital out of the party's role in the opposition to the dictatorship. In a general sense, the case was designed to add legitimacy to the nation's post-1958 democracy. As Ewell states, Pérez Jiménez's trial "expressed the democratic revulsion toward dictatorship and tried to teach the Venezuelan youth of the evils of the system that they but dimly remembered" (pp. 169–70).

Pérez Jiménez argued at his trial that the misuse of public funds and acts of repression that his administration was accused of committing also characterized Venezuelan democracy after 1958. Indeed, charges of flagrant violations of human rights and administrative corruption were frequently leveled against the Venezuelan government in the 1960s and 1970s. Twenty-five years after the events known as the 23 de enero, Venezuelans continue to view it as a national cause, although no consensus exists regarding its long-range accomplishments. Those

who regard it as a democratic revolution that sought to guarantee honest and direct elections are generally satisfied with the results. Leftists and others who define the 23 de enero as a manifestation of national unity encompassing all political tendencies are less enthusiastic about what it offered, especially given the interparty discord that followed.

Another view holds that the events of the 23 de enero represented a watershed in Venezuelan history that signaled profound changes on all fronts, but the view is debatable and controversial. For instance, both historians and economists differ among themselves as to whether the breakthrough in industrialization occurred during World War II, during the postwar AD trienio government, during the dictatorship of the 1950s, or after 1958. While some writers assert that the Pérez Jiménez government impeded the original industrialization impulse, others credit Pérez Jiménez with having made it possible.²⁷ Examples could also be cited in the areas of foreign policy, infrastructural development, and national defense that would suggest the confusion regarding the question of whether 1958 marks a thorough break with the past.

The real winners following the 23 de enero have been Venezuela's two main establishment parties, the AD and COPEI, which have alternated in power four times since 1958. The big losers in the aftermath of the 23 de enero were the leftists, who had been inspired by the mass mobilization and popular euphoria of the moment to make the fateful decision to resort to arms. Blanco Muñoz's interviews with leftists of different ideological tendencies reveal an unusual consensus among them. They agree that the Communist party was correct in submerging the far-reaching call for national liberation in order to unite with other parties to its right for the purpose of ousting Pérez Jiménez; but in 1958 (not later, when the mass movement was already at a low ebb), the PCV should have taken advantage of the presence of the masses in the streets to push for radical change rather than calling for immediate elections.²⁸ The leftists envision the 23 de enero as a popular upsurge, in apparent contradiction with the accounts several officers gave to Blanco Muñoz insisting that Pérez Jiménez's overthrow was a veritable palace coup staged by officers. But the two versions are not entirely at odds. Whereas the officers emphasize the absence of civilian input in the conspiracy against the dictatorship, the leftists are most impressed by the mass protests that erupted just days prior to Pérez Jiménez's flight and continued throughout the early years of the newly installed democracy. These different views as to what the 23 de enero represents only underscore the varied and sometimes conflicting associations that the phrase conjures up for Venezuelans to this day.

NOTES

1. Three books not included in this essay are these recently published works: *Fuentes para el estudio del 23 de enero de 1958* (Caracas: Congreso de la República, 1984); *Poesía en la resistencia* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1982); and *1958 en la caricatura política*, compiled by Paciano Padrón (Caracas: Comisión Bicameral Especial para la Conmemoración del XXV Aniversario del 23 de enero de 1958, 1983). José Agustín Catalá has compiled and published numerous documents and articles of the period. Catalá, who was jailed by the Pérez Jiménez government because of his role in the publication of the AD document *Libro negro*, heads the publishing firm of Ediciones Centauro.
2. Blanco Muñoz, *La conspiración cívico-militar*, p. 64; Victor Hugo Morales, *Del Porteñazo al Perú* (Caracas: Editorial Domingo Fuentes, 1971), p. 36.
3. John D. Martz, *Acción Democrática: Evolution of a Modern Political Party in Venezuela* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 93; Winfield J. Burggraaff, *The Venezuelan Armed Forces in Politics, 1935–1959* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972), p. 146.
4. In Blanco Muñoz's *El 23 de enero: habla la conspiración*, questions are posed regarding the internal debt on pp. 133, 199, 224, 286, and 336. According to one interviewee, the decision of Military Junta President Wolfgang Larrazábal to pay off these debts, which amounted to two billion bolívares, was opposed by a large number of military officers.
5. Both García Ponce and Sáez Mérida favored a strategy in the 1960s of building up leftist contacts in the military in order to trigger a response in the armed forces in opposition to the AD government. It is thus understandable that they would emphasize leftist influence in the planning of the military uprisings of 1962, although other accounts downplay the role of the leftist parties. See Luigi Valsalice, *Guerrilla y política: curso de acción en Venezuela 1962/69* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Pleamar, 1975), pp. 23–30; Steve Ellner, "Political Party Dynamics and the Outbreak of Guerrilla Warfare in Venezuela," *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 34, no. 2 (Autumn 1980): 10–12; Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada: hablan cinco jefes* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1980), p. 362; Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada: la izquierda revolucionaria surge* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1981), pp. 118–19, 146–47; Guillermo García Ponce and Francisco Camacho Barrios, *El diario desconocido de una dictadura* (Caracas: Publicaciones Seleven, 1980), p. 299 (this book was republished by Ediciones Centauro in 1982 under the title *Diario de la resistencia y la dictadura, 1948–1958*).
6. Daniel H. Levine, "Venezuela since 1958: The Consolidation of Democratic Politics," in *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Latin America*, edited by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 86.
7. José Agustín Catalá, interview, Caracas, 4 August 1983.
8. The 24 November 1948 coup was simplistically viewed during the 1950s as the work of power-hungry officers, epitomized by Pérez Jiménez, while democratic military personnel were credited with a key role in the 23 January movement. Anyone who holds to this framework will be perplexed by the abrupt reversals and inconsistencies in the behavior of officers who were prominent in the conspiracies of the period. A brief biographical sketch of these officers shows that institutional concerns overshadowed commitment to democracy or any particular ideology. One example is Air Force Captain Wilfrido Omaña, who is considered to be one of the outstanding martyrs in the struggle for democracy. Both before and after the abortive uprising at Boca del Río in September 1952, Omaña worked closely with top AD clandestine leaders in an attempt to foment opposition to Pérez Jiménez in the armed forces. Previously, however, Omaña had participated in a military conspiracy against the AD government in 1947 in Barcelona that served as a prelude to the November 1948 coup, and thus he cannot be fitted into the mold of the steadfast fighter for democracy. Among dozens of other examples is that of Colonel Juan Moncada Vidal (interviewed by Blanco Muñoz), who was more perejimenista than Pérez Jiménez. In the early years of the military dictatorship, Moncada attempted to remove the more

- civilian-minded President Carlos Delgado Chalbaud in order to allow Pérez Jiménez to assume absolute power. Following the events of 1958, Moncada participated in several military revolts that were branded as right-wing, only to join shortly thereafter the Castroite guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN). For a discussion of the institutional concerns of the military, see Burggraaff, *The Venezuelan Armed Forces*, pp. 90, 150, 196–97; Gene E. Bigler, “The Armed Forces and Patterns of Civil-Military Relations,” in *Venezuela: The Democratic Experience*, edited by John D. Martz and David J. Myers (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977), p. 125; and Edwin Lieuwen, *Venezuela* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 88.
9. Domingo Alberto Rangel, *Los mercaderes del voto: estudio de un sistema* (Valencia: Vardell Hermanos, 1973), p. 110.
 10. See also Edito José Ramírez R., *El 18 de octubre y la problemática venezolana actual, 1945–1979* (Caracas: Avila Arte, 1981), pp. 245–49.
 11. J. Nef, “The Revolution That Never Was: Perspectives on Democracy, Socialism, and Reaction in Chile,” in *LARR* 18, no. 1 (1983):240–41.
 12. *Habló el general*, interview by Agustín Blanco Muñoz (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1983), p. 136.
 13. Rómulo Betancourt, *Rómulo Betancourt: memoria del último destierro* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1982), pp. 133–34; Steve Ellner, *Los partidos políticos y su disputa por el control del movimiento sindical en Venezuela, 1936–1948* (Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 1980), p. 116.
 14. Ellner, “Leonardo Ruiz Pineda: Acción Democrática’s guerrillero for Liberty,” in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 22, no. 3 (August 1980):389–91.
 15. Fuenmayor recognized that the AD’s clandestine leaders represented a “leftist” tendency in the party and that they tried to encourage common AD-PCV activities in the students’ and workers’ movements. Nevertheless, he opposed PCV-AD unity on the grounds that the AD underground leaders failed to speak out against Betancourt’s anti-Communist pronouncements. Fuenmayor, “Carta abierta a todos los militantes del Partido,” (Caracas, mimeo, July 1950); Fuenmayor, interview, Caracas, 7 June 1983.
 16. *Boletín Seminal* (PCV), no. 20, 2 July 1951, p. 1; Pompeyo Márquez, “El 23 de enero de 1958: la culminación de un proceso,” in *Enero 23 de 1958: reconquista de la libertad* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1982), p. 361; “Venezuela democrática,” May 1955, p. 12, in *Prensa de los venezolanos en el exilio, México, 1955–1957: Venezuela democrática* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1983).
 17. Alexander states that Communist publications, unlike those of the AD, “circulated comparatively freely” during the period. Robert Alexander, *The Venezuelan Democratic Revolution: A Profile of the Regime of Rómulo Betancourt* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1964), p. 77; Robert Alexander, *Rómulo Betancourt and the Transformation of Venezuela* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1982), pp. 345–46, 419.
 18. Betancourt, *Rómulo Betancourt*, pp. 219–20.
 19. Andrés Eloy Blanco, “Carta sin censura,” in *Cuba: patria del exilio venezolano* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1982), pp. 155–56.
 20. Rangel also makes this point in *Los mercaderes del voto*, p. 43.
 21. *Pedro Estrada habló*, interview by Agustín Blanco Muñoz (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1983), pp. 122, 151, 167, and 251; Braulio Barreto, *Confesiones de un esbirro* (Caracas: Editorial Caracas 2.000, 1982), pp. 174–77; David Estellar, *Weekend en las guerrillas: memorias de un combatiente en dos épocas críticas de nuestra historia—el 23 de enero y las guerrillas* (Caracas: Editorial Domingo Fuentes, 1983), pp. 31–32. Catalá attempts to refute Estrada’s remarks in *Pedro Estrada y sus crímenes* (Caracas: Editorial Centauro, 1983). The PCV’s most valuable contribution during the latter part of the resistance period was to promote unity among the opposition parties, which resulted in the formation of the Junta Patriótica. Alexander differs from García Camacho (p. 225) in giving the AD major credit for initiating the unity approach that prevailed after 1954 (*Rómulo Betancourt*, p. 393).
 22. For different versions of the circumstances surrounding Ruiz Pineda’s assassination, see Charles D. Ameringer, “Leonardo Ruiz Pineda: Leader of the Venezuelan Resis-

- tance, 1949–1952,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 21, no. 2 (1979):227–28; *Cuando mataron a Ruiz Pineda*, interviews by Guido Acuña (Caracas: Ediciones Rafael Arévalo González, 1977); José Vicente Abreu, “Leonardo, símbolo real del martirologio,” in *Hombres y verdugos* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1982), pp. 33–46.
23. Younger COPEI leaders such as future President Luis Herrera Campíns, who participated in the university struggle of 1951–52, were exiled, and the party’s National Youth Secretary Hilarión Cardozo was later jailed for four years. See José Rodríguez Iturbe, “Crónica de la década militar (II),” in *Nueva política* 37–40 (June 1981): 150; and Moisés Moleiro, *El partido del pueblo: crónica de un fraude* (Valencia, Ven.: Vadell Hermanos, 1979), p. 164.
 24. Barreto, *Confesiones de un esbirro*, pp. 162–63; Jorge Dáger, *Testigo de excepción: en las trincheras de la resistencia, 1948–1955* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1979), p. 206; and Diego Salazar, *Los últimos días de Pérez Jiménez* (Caracas: Editorial Ruptura, 1979), pp. 195–96.
 25. Fania Petzoldt and Jacinta Bevilacqua, *Nosotras también nos jugamos la vida: testimonios de la mujer venezolana en la lucha clandestina, 1948–1958* (Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1979).
 26. Pérez Jiménez also attempted to justify the policies of his government in two recently published interviews: *Pérez Jiménez se confiesa*, interview by Joaquín Soler Serrano (Zaragoza: Editorial Dronte, 1983), pp. 81–91; *Habló el general*, interview by Blanco Muñoz. Giving these interviews marked a reversal of Pérez Jiménez’s previous refusal to face the press. Blanco Muñoz (himself a leftist professor at the Central University) came under heavy attack for his failure to formulate provocative questions and for allowing Pérez Jiménez to present his viewpoint unchallenged (a similar criticism was leveled at his interview of Pedro Estrada). Catalá attempts to refute these accounts in his compilation *Pérez Jiménez, el delincuente y sus delitos* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1983). See also Catalá’s compilation entitled *Pedro Estrada y sus crímenes*.
 27. Martz, *Acción Democrática*, pp. 91–92; Alexander, *The Venezuelan Democratic Revolution*, pp. 45, 212; Hector Malavé Mata, *Formación histórica del antidesarrollo de Venezuela*, 2nd ed. (Bogotá: Editorial La Oveja Negra, 1980), p. 239; Domingo Alberto Rangel, *Revolución de las fantasías* (Caracas: Editorial OFIDI, 1966), pp. 33–36; and Salvador de la Plaza, *Estructuras de integración nacional* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1973).
 28. Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada: hablan cinco jefes*, pp. 41, 83, 176, 334–35; Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada: la izquierda revolucionaria*, pp. 183–84, 274–75; Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada: hablan seis comandantes* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1981), p. 181.