

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND  
POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE  
CARIAS DICTATORSHIP  
IN HONDURAS:  
The Historiography

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- HISTORIA DE LOS SIN HISTORIA, 1900–1948.* By Mario R. Argueta. (Tegucigalpa: Guaymuras, 1992. Pp. 128.)
- PORQUE QUIERO SEGUIR VIVIENDO. . . HABLA GRACIELA GARCIA.* By Rina Villars. (Tegucigalpa: Guaymuras, 1991. Pp. 359.)
- TIBURCIO CARIAS: ANATOMIA DE UNA EPOCA, 1923–1948.* By Mario R. Argueta. (Tegucigalpa: Guaymuras, 1989. Pp. 390.)
- BANANOS Y POLITICA: SAMUEL ZEMURRAY Y LA CUYAMEL FRUIT COMPANY.* By Mario R. Argueta. (Tegucigalpa: Guaymuras, 1989. Pp. 153.)
- EL FUNDADOR DE LA PAZ.* By Rafael Bardales Bueso. (San Pedro Sula: Central Impresora, 1989. Pp. 617.)
- LA HEGEMONIA DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS EN HONDURAS (1907–1932).* By Marvin Barahona. (Tegucigalpa: Centro de Documentación de Honduras, 1989. Pp. 264.)
- CONTINUISMO Y DICTADURA.* By Emma Bonilla. (Comayaguela: Litográfica Comayaguela, 1989. Pp. 87.)
- CARIAS, EL CAUDILLO DE ZAMBRANO, 1933–1948.* By Alejandro S. Sagastume. (San Pedro Sula: Graficentro, 1988. Pp. 127.)

Hugh Hamill wrote recently, "There is little argument . . . that Spanish American caudillos have been more numerous and more intrusive than their counterparts in many other societies."<sup>1</sup> This category certainly includes General Tiburcio Carías Andino, who ruled Honduras from 1933 to 1949. Yet the history of the "life and times" of his regime has yet to be written, which is surprising because knowledge of Carías's life is central to understanding Honduras's history in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

1. *Caudillos, Dictators in Spanish America*, edited by Hugh M. Hamill (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 3.

2. An early official account is that by Lucas Paredes, *Biografía del Dr. y Gral. Tiburcio Carías Andino* (Tegucigalpa: Ariston, 1938).

The period between Carías's birth in 1876 and his monopoly of power from 1933 onward demarcates a period of change unequalled in Honduran history. At no point since Honduras was reorganized after the Spaniards arrived in the 1520s and Independence in 1821 did the country undergo the kinds of transformations that occurred between 1876 and 1933. Moreover, in the forty years between 1892 and 1932, Carías participated decisively in nearly every major political and military engagement that scarred Honduran society. In the 1920s, he assumed the mantle as the Nationalist party's main military and political caudillo, a position he maintained until 1963.

Carías's national prominence and popular following preceded his regime and his eventual monopoly of power, which made him unique among Central American caudillos. No other Central American or Caribbean dictator of the 1930s and 1940s enjoyed the kind of mobilizing political power that Carías accumulated in the decade before he assumed dictatorial power. Indeed, Carías ran as the presidential candidate of the Nationalist party in the elections of 1923, 1928, and 1932.

In 1923 Carías won a plurality of the votes, but a civil war ensued, and although his military efforts helped win a Nationalist victory, the negotiations excluded him from power. In 1928 Carías lost the elections to the Liberal party but emerged as victor in the elections of 1932. Late that year, another civil war erupted and Carías again became involved in defending his campaign success militarily. In February of 1933, Carías finally assumed power even as fighting raged outside Tegucigalpa, and in 1936 he amended the constitution and extended his "presidency" to 1949.

Given his lengthy career, Tiburcio Carías is a central personality through whom many themes and issues in various periods of Honduran history may be studied. Yet the Carías regime between 1933 and 1949 represented an unusual period of Honduran history, one that seems to have institutionalized the worst aspects of the social, economic, and political processes that emerged during Carías's early years. These factors included the detrimental relationship between concessionary contracts and the foreign banana companies' monopoly over the economy; a general subservience to the dictates of U.S. foreign policy; the marginalization of labor from access to power; and political authoritarianism and personalist political parties. Only in the 1980s did a new wave of studies begin to address these and other issues in serious ways, drawing on modern theoretical perspectives and accessing new archives. These recent books thus transcend all earlier commentary on the Carías regime.

### *The Old Historiography: Contributions and Problems*

Most books written about Tiburcio Carías before the 1980s can be categorized as either hagiography or anti-hagiography. Examples of both

genres abound. Praiseful accounts were penned by foreign admirers of the dictatorship<sup>3</sup> and also by local Nationalist party loyalists.<sup>4</sup> Even some members of the Liberal party who once fought Carías published later justifications of his dictatorship.<sup>5</sup>

Critical accounts of the dictatorship were first published by Liberal party militant and intellectual Angel Zúñiga Huete, Carías's opponent in 1932 and bitter enemy since the civil war of 1924.<sup>6</sup> In the 1940s and 1950s, two other important authors wrote about Carías's life and times in some depth, namely William Stokes and William Krehm. But Stokes's account did not focus on the Carías regime, certainly not on its social and economic aspects.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Stokes's coziness with the regime kept him from adopting a more critical view of Carías's seamier side.<sup>8</sup> Only Krehm's *Democracia y tiranías en el Caribe*, published in various editions since 1949, elaborated on many of Zúñiga Huete's earlier charges. Krehm also drew on the research available in Charles Kepner's and Jay Soothill's 1935 account, *The Banana Empire*.<sup>9</sup> Stokes, in contrast, incorporated into his analysis neither the charges made by Zúñiga Huete nor the details presented by Kepner and Soothill.

3. Gilberto González y Contreras, *Un pueblo y un hombre: Honduras y el General Carías* (Tegucigalpa: Imprenta La Democracia, 1934); González y Contreras, *El último caudillo* (Mexico City: Costa-Amic, 1946); Margot Lainfiesta, *El renacimiento de una nación cámara lenta* (Tegucigalpa: Imprenta Calderón, 1936); Lainfiesta, *Honduras comienza hoy* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1937); and Salvador Maldonado R., *Reportaje sobre Honduras* (Mexico City: n.p., 1946).

4. Antonio Ochoa Alcántara, *La nueva Honduras (hacia un verdadero nacionalismo)* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1934); Carlos Izaguirre, *Honduras y sus problemas de educación* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1935); Izaguirre, *Readaptaciones y cambios* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1936); Julián López Pineda, *La reforma constitucional* (Paris: Ediciones Estrella, 1936); López Pineda, *Democracia y redentorismo* (Managua: Tipografía Guardian, 1942); Daniel Hernández, *La justificación histórica de la actual prolongación en el poder* (La Esperanza: n.p., 1940); Romualdo Elpidio Mejía, *La obra patriótica del Congreso Nacional* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1941); and Mejía, *La vida y la obra de un estadista* (Tegucigalpa: La Epoca, 1942).

5. Luis Mejía Moreno, *El calvario de un pueblo* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1937); and Mejía Moreno, *El calvario de los demagogos* (Tegucigalpa: Tipografía Nacional, 1939).

6. See the following works by Angel Zúñiga Huete: *Desastre de una dictadura* (Kingston, Jamaica: Times, 1937); *Un cacicazgo centroamericano* (Mexico City: Imprenta Victoria, 1938); *Idolo desnudo* (Mexico City: Acción Moderna Mercantil, 1939); *Carta abierta a Tiburcio Carías Andino* (Mexico City: n.p., 1943); *Cartas: una actitud y una senda* (Mexico City: n.p., 1949); and *Conflicto cívico entre la dictadura y el pueblo: mi contribución por la liberación de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa: Imprenta "La Razón," 1949).

7. William S. Stokes, *Honduras: An Area Study in Government* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1950).

8. *Ibid.*, 250–51, 296–97.

9. Charles Kepner's and Jay Soothill's famous book was first published in English as *The Banana Empire: A Case Study of Economic Imperialism* (New York: Vanguard, 1935). The first Spanish edition was *El imperio bananero: las compañías bananeras contra la soberanía de las naciones del Caribe* (Mexico City: Ediciones del Caribe, 1949). Other Spanish editions followed in the 1950s and 1960s.

*The New Historiography of the 1980s: Contributions and Problems*

It may seem unusual to characterize as historiography the wide-ranging publications of the 1980s that addressed the social, economic, and political aspects of the Carías regime. The relevant contributions actually include works or chapters by only a handful of professional historians. The main Honduran historians who have worked and published on this topic include Mario Argueta, Marvin Barahona, and Alejandro Salomón Sagastume. The most important U.S. historians who have made significant contributions to the literature are Thomas Leonard of the University of North Florida and Thomas Dodd of Georgetown University.<sup>10</sup>

Argueta's writings represent the greatest contribution thus far to the literature on Honduran history of the 1930s and 1940s. Particularly noteworthy are his two books published in 1989, *Tiburcio Carías: anatomía de una época, 1923–1948* and *Bananos y política: Samuel Zemurray y la Cuyamel Fruit Company*. In comparison with previous commentaries on this period, Argueta's work is generally well documented and usually advances its claims cautiously, reflecting the author's conviction that supporting evidence is necessary to arguments and hypotheses. In the Honduran context, this approach represents a major scholarly advance. Argueta has also made extensive use of U.S. confidential and nonconfidential consular and ambassadorial reports from Honduras to Washington. Using this ample documentation, Argueta succeeds in confirming at last the connections between Carías and the banana companies during the 1930s and 1940s. Argueta also portrays vividly the earlier origins of the connections between these companies and caudillo politics. In this context, Marvin Barahona's *La hegemonía de los Estados Unidos en Honduras (1907–1932)* complements Argueta's in carefully outlining the regional diplomatic context in which Carías and the banana companies must be situated. Barahona's presentation is also noteworthy for its scholarliness.

Unfortunately, Sagastume's short work, *Carías, el caudillo de Zambrano, 1933–1948* does not measure up to the standards established by Argueta and Barahona. Probably because of lack of funding, Sagastume did not access the collections in the U.S. National Archives, and his study too often relies on outdated or unsubstantiated information first printed in the hagiographic and anti-hagiographic literature of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. This drawback seems to reflect the fact that Honduran archival depositories for the 1930s and 1940s have generally remained off-limits to researchers. Sagastume's introductory remarks admit this disadvantage, declaring that his account "will be neither a classic nor a complete work."

Other authors, however, have demonstrated that serious scholarship can be carried out within the limitations faced by most Honduran

10. Professor Dodd is working on an important manuscript on Carías.

scholars. One example is the work of sociologist Mario Posas, especially his research into strikes occurring before 1933 and between 1949 and 1955.<sup>11</sup> Posas's *Luchas del movimiento obrero hondureño* represented the first synthesis of material published in English and Spanish on events and processes that were almost forgotten during the dictatorship, including the major role played by Honduran left-wing parties in both periods.<sup>12</sup>

While it is true that Carías eliminated labor organizations in the late 1930s and early 1940s, that aspect of the dictatorship cannot be understood without addressing the 1920s and early 1930s. One of Posas's main contributions has been to unearth and situate in historical context the life and political activities of Graciela García, a Salvadoran leftist militant who lived in Honduras from 1915 until she was exiled in 1944. As Sheldon Liss commented recently, "García understood Central America's left wing, knew the history of the labor movement and that of the Communist party of each Central American republic, and was respected as a Communist leader of the entire region."<sup>13</sup>

Between the 1910s and 1944, Graciela García, her husband, and her many Honduran friends played crucial roles in establishing the first labor unions in Honduras, including socialist unions that promoted militancy among workers on the banana plantations. During her lifetime, she also met with numerous important Central American left-wing activists, including Farabundo Martí. Moreover, García's husband, José García Lardizabal, was Carías's brother-in-law. Rina Villars recently published a valuable biography of Doña Graciela entitled *Porque quiero seguir viviendo . . . habla Graciela García*. Villars's account of García's life is, after Posas's work, the most informative text on the early aspects of radical labor organization in Honduras. More important for purposes of this review, Villars's discussion from García's perspective of labor militancy and its repression after 1933 complements the last chapters of Argueta's *Historia de los sin historia, 1900–1948*. Finally, Villars's attention to the anecdotal and testimonial character of García's life dramatizes the many tragedies of that period, including the torture and subsequent death of her brother, Felipe Amaya.

Like Sagastume's book, none of the publications that focus directly on the origins and character of the Carías dictatorship will be known as classics. Yet each one deserves to be read because each contributes something of value to the sparse literature now in print. The least impressive of these works is *El fundador de la paz* by Rafael Bardales Bueso, a Nationalist

11. See Mario Posas, *Luchas del movimiento obrero hondureño* (San José, Costa Rica: EDUCA, 1981).

12. Only two brief final chapters in Argueta's latest work, *Historia de los sin historia, 1900–1948*, add new material to Posas's research.

13. Sheldon Liss, *Radical Thought in Central America* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991), 108.

party intellectual and former education minister from 1965 to 1971 under General Oswaldo López Arellano.

Bardales Bueso's biography of Carías is reminiscent of the views espoused by the older hagiographic literature of the 1930s and 1940s. But within those limitations, *El fundador de la paz* has merit. First, it is one of the few works detailing Carías's early life and his close ties to the Liberal party. Second, nearly half of the book's more than six hundred pages contain the official presidential addresses made by Carías to congress between 1933 and 1948. Finally, the last seventeen pages reproduce rare photographs of the dictator, his wife, and Carías loyalists.

Unfortunately, Bardales Bueso's own loyalties to the Nationalist party lead him to repeat much that has already been asserted in the writings of fellow loyalists Carlos Izaguirre, Lucas Paredes, Gilberto Gonzales y Contreras, and Romualdo Mejía. Bardales Bueso cites their publications frequently as well as journalistic pieces by less-prominent pro-Carías commentators. Bardales Bueso simply juxtaposes the direct accusations made by Krehm, Kepner and Soothill, and others with transcriptions of denials by Carías. Even the milder criticisms found in Stokes's account are missing from *El fundador de la paz*. Bardales Bueso asserts in his prologue that "it could be said that God put . . . Tiburcio Carías Andino on Honduran earth . . . so that he might uproot and destroy in order to cultivate and create."

Liberal party loyalists who suffered during the dictatorship will surely cringe when reading Bardales Bueso's account. But they will smile when perusing the recently published memoirs of Emma Bonilla, entitled *Continuismo y dictadura*. Although some of her narrative is marred by inaccurate dates and conflicting chronologies, Bonilla's familial and political lineage make her personal reflections valuable sources of anecdotal information that archival research should address. She is, after all, the daughter of Policarpo Bonilla, who founded the Liberal party in 1891 and went on to serve as president of Honduras from 1894 to 1899. Equally relevant is the fact that President Bonilla's aristocratic ties extend back to what Samuel Stone has called "noble colonial families."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Emma's sister Juanita was married to Venancio Callejas Lozano, the major Nationalist party leader who was persecuted by Carías in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1932 Callejas Lozano established the short-lived Partido Nacional Autónomo, which challenged Carías's control of the official party. In 1935 Callejas Lozano fled into exile. Carías's persecution of the Callejas family continued into the late 1930s and 1940s. Many family members died in exile, including Venancio.

Bonilla offers exquisite and touching details about many of those

14. Samuel Z. Stone, *The Heritage of the Conquistadors* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 3–4.

events, including the persecution and eventual exile of Venancio Callejas's nephew, Rafael Leonardo Callejas Valentine, father of the current president of Honduras and longtime Nationalist party militant Rafael Leonardo Callejas Romero. Many of the prominent Bonilla family members eventually joined the exiled Liberal community, as did Emma in 1944. These valuable anecdotes from Doña Bonilla's account should be woven into a systematic and documented account of the life and times of the Carías dictatorship.

Also worthy of mention is a 1982 sociological essay by Filánder Díaz Chávez, who in 1944 was jailed at twenty-two by the Carías dictatorship and then exiled to El Salvador. Díaz Chávez's *Carías, el último caudillo frutero* presents no major new research and at times falls into pure polemics against the older hagiographic writing of Carías's loyalists like Carlos Izaguirre and Julián López Pineda and also against Bardales Bueso's officialist history of the Nationalist party.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Díaz Chávez's more substantive ideas deserve attention as a systematic conceptual outlook rivaling the vision offered by Stokes in 1950. Díaz Chávez's historical-sociological perspective draws on the writings of Marx, Engels, Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser. Unfortunately, however, Díaz Chávez too often emphasizes the more reductionist theoretical currents in the writings of these and other socialist thinkers.

According to Díaz Chávez, Carías's dictatorship embodied the peculiarities of a society that never made the transition to capitalism because colonialism and neocolonialism destroyed the country's nascent productive forces. Carías's ascension to power in 1933, given his connections to the United Fruit Company, resulted in the institutionalization of a "neocolonial state" whose primary responsibility involved serving foreign capital and the U.S. government. Meanwhile Carías's henchmen were suppressing the internecine struggles among the caudillo factions.

Sadly, *Carías, el último caudillo frutero* almost completely marginalizes Hondurans as historical actors with any capacity for reshaping the character and contours of U.S. imperialism. Interventions and occupations took place, but resistance also occurred, and at times it might be helpful to view intervention not so much as an imperial response but as a reaction to local behavior that U.S. consulates and ambassadors did not foresee and could not control. Argueta and Barahona make this point, but like most of the other accounts discussed here, that of Díaz Chávez presumes little subtlety in the formulation or implementation of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>16</sup>

15. See Filánder Díaz Chávez, *Carías, el último caudillo frutero* (Tegucigalpa: Guaymuras, 1982); and Rafael Bardales Bueso, *Historia del Partido Nacional de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa: ServiCopiex, 1980).

16. For a contribution along these lines, see the chapter on Honduras in Thomas M. Leonard, *The United States and Central America, 1944–1949: Perceptions of Political Dynamics* (Mobile: University of Alabama Press, 1984).

In any case, Carías emerges in *Carías, el último caudillo frutero* as a representative of Honduras's dominant elite class, the rural petty bourgeoisie. In this regard, the Carías regime differs from its Central American counterparts of the period in that between the 1870s and the 1930s Honduran society was not dominated by a coffee oligarchy. Viewed from this conceptual perspective, Carías's *continuismo* appears to have resulted from forces that he in some ways merely succumbed to, as depicted in Stokes's work. The difference between the views of Stokes and Díaz Chávez is found in their opposing theoretical discourses and in the primacy that Stokes gives to "cultural forces" in contrast to Díaz Chávez's emphasis on "social forces."

### *Possible Avenues of Research*

Certain avenues of research offer the double promise of advancing scholarly knowledge of the relationship between Honduran history in the 1930s and 1940s and more contemporary issues while placing the Carías regime in a broader regional context that would extend beyond Central America. Up to now, the Carías regime has too often been presented in a provincial and parochial fashion.

The first issue requiring intensive research is the role of the military under Carías, especially in view of his strong support for establishing a Honduran air force. Argueta dedicates one chapter of *Tiburcio Carías: anatomía de una época* to the military, but much more remains to be ascertained. This issue is crucial because, unlike the dictatorships of Jorge Ubico, Anastasio Somoza, and Martínez Hernández, the Carías dictatorship counted less on institutionalized military force than on clientelistic relations with regional military caudillos who had accompanied Carías during military engagements in the 1920s.

According to Captain Marco Tulio Mendieta, who once served in Carías's presidential guard, the dictator opposed creating a professional army out of fear that its officers might overthrow him.<sup>17</sup> This interpretation should be placed within the context of Alain Rouquié's claim that the "movement from temporary ad hoc armies to the standing army, from the private armies of the caudillos to the army that is the monopoly of the state, did not take place everywhere in Latin America."<sup>18</sup> Rouquié errs, however, in bracketing Honduras and Nicaragua in the same evolutionary category.

Here Rouquié fails to emphasize a key point that distinguished the

17. See Carlos A. Contreras, "The Origins of the Honduran Professional Army," paper presented to the Social Science Association, 19 Mar. 1992, Austin, Texas. I wish to thank Professor Contreras for sharing his paper with me.

18. Alain Rouquié, *The Military and the State in Latin America*, translated by Paul E. Sigmond (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1987), 61.



Honduran situation from that in Nicaragua: Carías's dependence on an air force linked him early on to a military apparatus over which he lacked technical oversight and which connected the Honduran air force to foreign expertise via the training of pilots and support crews in the United States. The Honduran air force received the more technical and cultural modernization offered by the U.S. armed forces. It is little wonder, then, that the leaders of Honduras's modern coups (in 1956, 1963, and 1972) had trained in the United States in the 1940s. In fact, Carías's final displacement as head of the Nationalist party in 1963 resulted from the influence garnered by Oswaldo López Arellano, who was at that time a colonel in the air force.

Explaining the unique potential and nature of military reformism in Honduras in the 1970s would also require a detailed analysis of the relative marginalization of the Honduran army between the 1930s and the 1950s, mainly in order to improve the air force.<sup>19</sup> In my view, the fact that the leadership of the Honduran armed forces in the 1960s and 1970s was found in the modernizing officer corps of the air force meant the exclusion of traditional landowning interests from personal influence within the policy-making circles of the armed forces high command. Colonel López Arellano's attentiveness to local and Latin American progressive forces in Honduras after 1968 must be understood in this broader context. The existing literature has addressed these issues only superficially.<sup>20</sup>

Other issues calling for research involve the opposition to Carías, his peaceful departure from power in 1949 (unique at that time in Central America), and the impressive power he continued to wield in Honduran politics well into the late 1950s. None of Carías's dictatorial counterparts of the era matched his ability to remain influential in national politics. How can this situation be explained? It cannot be attributed simply to Carías's unique qualities as a caudillo.

Fruitful research on these and related questions should start by investigating the Honduran exile community (mostly Liberal militants), which resided in Mexico, Costa Rica, and throughout Central America in the 1930s and 1940s. Such research should take into account the broader patterns of Caribbean left-liberal anti-dictatorial movements that flourished after 1944 against Somoza in Nicaragua, Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and others. Researchers interested in this topic should start by reading the work of Charles Ameringer.<sup>21</sup>

Examining this regional context should then lead scholars to exam-

19. These issues are not discussed in Leticia Salomon's *Militarismo y reformismo en Honduras* (Tegucigalpa: Guaymuras, 1982).

20. See James W. McMillan, "Central America: Effects of Militarism on Regional Development (1930-1986)," M.A. thesis, Lamar University, 1986, 59-65.

21. Charles D. Ameringer, *The Military Left in Exile: The Anti-Dictatorial Struggle in the Caribbean, 1945-1959* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1974).

ine the demise of the Carías dictatorship in relation to interesting regional hypotheses advanced by Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough on Latin America between the Second World War and the cold war (between 1945 and 1948). In their view, “these years constituted a critical conjuncture in the political and social history of Latin America just as they did for much of the rest of the world.”<sup>22</sup> Bethell and Roxborough divide this conjuncture into two phases. The first involved democratic openings and successful expression of popular demands by movements and parties associated with the reformist left or the orthodox Marxist left. This first phase also “witnessed unprecedented militancy within organized labour. . . .” During the second phase, “the popular forces, in particular the organized urban working class but also in some cases the urban middle class, and the Left, most decisively the Communist Left, suffered a historic defeat in Latin America during the immediate postwar period” (pp. 168–69). Does this description fit what happened in Honduras?

Perhaps because of the poverty of the existing literature that they accessed, Bethell and Roxborough generally misinterpret the Honduran case in the their broader analysis, especially regarding the second phase of the “critical conjuncture.” They suggest that by 1946, except in a few countries (including Honduras), “all the Latin American states could claim to be in some sense democratic. At least they were not dictatorships” (pp. 170–71). In this regard, Bethell and Roxborough are correct. But they also imply that after 1946, Honduran society remained fundamentally unchanged. Bethell addresses the issue forcefully: “During 1947 and 1948, the postwar advance of democracy and reform throughout Latin America ground to a halt and suffered its first major setbacks.” He continues, “in those countries where dictatorships had survived—Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay—the (largely token) promises of liberalization that had been made were withdrawn or overturned.”<sup>23</sup> According to Bethell, by the end of 1954, the dictatorship in Honduras was one of thirteen authoritarian regimes that had destroyed earlier experiments in democracy.<sup>24</sup>

Yet in examining Honduran history, one finds only a grain of truth in this analysis. It is true that in December of 1954 Julio Lozano Díaz assumed dictatorial powers and that he remained in power until October of 1956. But it is incorrect to suggest that his regime represented a continuation of the Carías dictatorship. Thus the focus on Lozano Díaz’s short-

22. Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, “Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War: Some Reflections on the 1945–8 Conjuncture,” *Journal of Latin America Studies* 20, pt. 1 (1988):167–87, citation on 167.

23. Leslie Bethell, “From the Second World War to the Cold War, 1944–1954,” in *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America*, edited by Abraham F. Lowenthal (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 54.

24. *Ibid.*, 57.

lived and inept administration rather than on the conservative but reformist presidency of Juan Manuel Gálvez (1949–1954) indicates misunderstanding of the demise of the Carías dictatorship, his opposition, and the nature of the Honduran military.

Unlike most of the dictators ruling in Latin America in 1954, Lozano Díaz was a civilian. Moreover, he was ousted in 1956 by air force officers who preferred the reformist measures adopted under the Gálvez presidency and were seeking to marginalize Lozano Díaz's chief of staff, Colonel Armando Velásquez Cerrato. Finally, the reforms adopted during the Gálvez government, particularly key labor legislation, originated in the militancy of a workers' movement that flourished after 1949. Building on a successful and massive strike on the banana plantations in 1954, Honduran workers became the best-organized working class in the area. By the early 1970s, Honduras was home to the largest number of unionized workers in Central America.<sup>25</sup> These unions played key roles in promoting the military reformism led by López Arellano after 1972.

Twentieth-century Honduran history, like its counterparts elsewhere in Latin America, has been marked by various long-term dictatorships. The Carías regime of the 1930s and 1940s, which poet Pablo Neruda called a "dictatorship of flies," represents the major instance of this form of twentieth-century authoritarianism in Honduras. General Carías's life and times therefore merit serious scholarship. Only the handful of monographs discussed here have gone beyond the earlier hagiographic and anti-hagiographic writings of the 1930s and 1940s. Although the newer literature is uneven in quality, most of the books are based on unexplored archival materials, especially those by Argueta and Barahona, and most also incorporate complementary secondary literature. Much remains to be done, however, because most of the works on the Carías regime exhibit a provincial explanatory perspective and often fall short of engaging the broader regional patterns of caudillismo, authoritarianism, and militarism that have pervaded twentieth-century Latin American history.

25. See *Economic Integration in Central America*, edited by William R. Cline and Enrique Delgado (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1978), 188.