

have to maintain sufficient national consensus to avoid another outbreak of widespread violence. Few observers question his assertion that agrarian institutions should be reformed. Many of us would strongly disagree with his analysis of why and how.

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José Napoleón Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960–1972. By STEPHEN WEBRE. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiii, 233. Cloth. \$17.50.

Published in 1979, this book could hardly have been more timely. In July, the victory of the Sandinist rebels in Nicaragua had sent a shock-wave through official Washington. Within days, high government officials were already discussing the need to avoid a “second Nicaragua” in El Salvador. That country’s right-wing military dictatorship, it was argued, should be replaced by a moderate civilian-military junta that would include Christian Democrats. Those of us who chanced to hear such talk were not particularly surprised, therefore, to learn two months later that Washington’s wish had become a reality as young military officers staged a coup that brought to (apparent) power precisely that type of government. Though the façade of reformism soon became tarnished and civilian junta members came and went, José Napoleón Duarte (the great, reformist hope of the 1960s) was eventually appointed interim president (in name at least), and he and his party were openly backed by the United States in the 1982 “democratic” election.

Though it only covers events up to 1977, Webre’s book is very useful in understanding the party and candidate that the United States helped resurrect during this later ill-fated attempt to engineer a “moderate” alternative to revolution. After carefully summarizing the evolution of Salvadoran politics to 1960, the author devotes the body of the book to chapters on the birth of the party in the early 1960s; its ideological, tactical, and organizational character; its heyday during the optimistic 1960s; and, finally, its suppression in the 1970s. Throughout, one is struck by the impression that while the Christian Democrats in general and Duarte in particular were sincere and humanitarian reformers, they never really stood a chance. The real rulers of El Salvador—the military and the monied elite—allowed them to participate in politics largely for rea-

sons of façade and, even then, only as long as they represented no real threat to the system. When Duarte apparently won the presidential election of 1972, the results were immediately overturned and traditional repressive measures were adopted.

Webre's approach is uniquely balanced and objective. Like many of us who studied individual Christian Democratic movements in their heyday in the 1960s, Webre was originally captivated by the honesty, sincerity, and dedication of the Christian Democrats. A decade later, however, writing the final version for publication, he clearly reflects an awareness shared by many social scientists today that there are basic structural problems in El Salvador (and Latin America, in general) that make the Christian Democratic alternative quite utopian and naïve. Therefore, Webre manages to treat Duarte and the Christian Democrats with genuine sensitivity. Yet at the same time he is also capable of astutely observing that:

While the goal of a revolution accomplished solely through Christian suasion and moral education is an attractive one to those who abhor bloodshed, one must be skeptical about its chances for success in any society, much less one such as El Salvador's, where the privileged have routinely demonstrated their willingness to employ any means whatsoever to preserve intact their advantages . . . (p. 68).

In sum, this is a timely, balanced, and well-researched book. It should be of interest not only to historians and social scientists but also to anyone who would like to have more background information about the recent United States-sponsored Christian Democratic revival in El Salvador and a better understanding of why it inevitably failed.

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Rómulo Betancourt and the Transformation of Venezuela. By ROBERT J. ALEXANDER. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1981. Afterword. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 737. Cloth. \$39.95.

While reading the page proofs for this book, the subject of this biography was stricken and subsequently died in September 1981. The author, "a personal and political friend" (p. 1) of Rómulo Betancourt, will be charged by some readers of writing a traditional "marble statue" biography, of presenting an unabashed panegyric designed to encase his hero's immaculate reputation in the march of history—"the most impor-