



Tiburcio Carías: Portrait of a Honduran Political Leader (Eisenhower Center Studies on War and Peace)

Thomas J. Dodd

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Honduras's longest-serving head of government, Tiburcio Carías (1876--1969) was a larger-than-life figure who had the air of an ordinary, approachable person. During his rule from 1933 to 1949, he variously employed the tactics of a liberal, a conservative, a constitutionalist, and a dictator. Modern Honduras cannot be understood without comprehending his influence. In the -- amazingly -- first biography of this powerful Latin American caudillo, Thomas J. Dodd, a former ambassador to Uruguay and to Costa Rica, offers a vital, riveting account of Carías's life and career.

Dodd shows Carías to have been a pragmatist and political survivor. His regime, unique in Central American and Caribbean history, was neither a brutal military government nor draconian and despotic. Unlike Somoza, Batista, Trujillo, and other contemporary dictators, Carías was not assassinated, driven from office, or exiled. He completed his term, stepped down, and remained active in Honduran politics until his death. The National Party he created remains a major political force to this day.

Through extensive research into his subject, including correspondence with harsh critics as well as admirers, Dodd achieves a balanced assessment of Carías. The leader created domestic order and political and social stability when he unified his country. At the same time, he allowed local political chieftains and militias to remain in place. His reign was part of a larger sweep of Honduran history from the 1870s to 1949 that witnessed the rise of agrarian capitalism and U.S. domination of the nation's primary economic resource, banana exports.

After Carías's death, thousands of Hondurans from across the ideological spectrum turned out to praise the former dictator as a "restorer of peace" and "benefactor of the nation." Dodd's superb combination of biography and political history explains Carías's rise to power and shows how the trajectory of his public career reflected the life of his country.

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