

strongly recommend this book for upper-level and graduate political science courses, as well as for all research dealing with various aspects of post-Communist transitions.

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Buchenau, Jürgen. *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007, xxvii + 275 pages. Paper, \$34.95.

From 1924 to 1934, Plutarco Elías Calles (1877-1945) served as a key consolidator of the Mexican state, severely weakened by a violent and destructive revolution (1910-17). Calles served as president of Mexico from 1924 to 1928 and was an early architect of the one-party political system that held power in Mexico until 2000. Despite his importance to Mexico's political history, Calles has received relatively little attention from biographers who otherwise have written volumes on other revolutionary leaders such as Alvaro Obregón, Pancho Villa, and Emilio Zapata. In *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution*, historian Jürgen Buchenau fills this gap with a fine biography of the man known by Mexicans as the *Jefe Máximo* (Head Chief) during the formative years of twentieth-century Mexican politics.

Although the book focuses on Calles's public life between 1911 and 1935, Buchenau succinctly contextualizes his subject's childhood and middle-class upbringing on Mexico's northeastern border region during the late *Porfiriato* era (1867-1911). Buchenau explains how the particular characteristics of the border region, with its proximity to the United States and absence of rail connection to Mexico City along with its economy based on ranching and U.S.-owned mining operations, shaped Calles's attitudes towards reform, politics, and the Revolution. In addition, Calles's experiences as a student and teacher in the late *Porfirian* education system, heavily imbued with positivist philosophy, inspired the ambitious educational reforms and projects he undertook during his presidency.

Calles's political connections grew despite economic setbacks resulting from several failed business ventures while working as a hotel manager, farmer, and mill operator. According to Buchenau, the northern state of Sonora served as a "training ground for [Calles's] eventual political career" (p. 21). In 1911, he became *comisario* (police chief) of the border town of Agua Prieta. His political appointment, combined with his commercial (and smuggling) enterprises, turned Calles into a strategically important "border broker" (p. 31) who supplied the Constitutionalist movement during the Revolution with weapons, ammunition, and supplies purchased in the United States. The winning revolutionary faction rewarded Calles with the post of provisional governor of Sonora in 1915. His goals regarding political order, morality, public education, and strong-arm tactics served as "a dress rehearsal for his later role as national leader" (p. 56).

Calles's campaign for the presidency in 1924 reflected the lessons he learned during the Revolution. In what Buchenau calls the "first populist presidential campaign in Mexican History" (p. 103), Calles's rhetoric now incorporated popular demands for land and justice and promises of education, labor rights, national sovereignty, and democratic governance. In his analysis of Calles's administration, Buchenau attempts to provide a fair accounting. He divides Calles's presidency between a populist (1924-26) and a repressive phase (1926-28) in order to credit Calles for reforms often overshadowed by his later authoritarian policies.

While acknowledging the religious persecution, repressive methods, and labor cooptation that defined the Calles administration, Buchenau argues that the *Jefe Máximo* merits praise for his efforts to reform education and promote both economic development and social welfare. Above all, Calles should receive credit for setting the stage for a civilian political system by successfully persuading military generals to stay out of the 1928 presidential race. By founding the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (National Revolutionary Party, or PNR), he united various factions, including the military, under one national ruling party. Buchenau correctly points out the uniqueness of Calles's system of shared governance during a period of widespread Latin American and Caribbean dictatorships.

Buchenau's use of newly available documents and oral history sources greatly enriches his study and offers new insight into Calles's presidency and forced political retirement. Recently catalogued documents in the Calles archive allowed Buchenau to uncover the basis for the Calles administration's concerns of a possible U.S. invasion and the limited extent of Calles's continued involvement in Mexican politics after his forced exile in the United States. Buchenau also uses these documents to reassess Calles's behind-the-scenes involvement in Mexican politics, known as the *Maximato* (1928-34). According to Buchenau, the Cárdenas presidency (1934-40) did not signal an abrupt end to the *Maximato*. Instead, the process was far more gradual as the lack of violent conflict associated with Cárdenas's ascension to the presidency makes clear. The book's final chapter, which examines Calles's family relationships and turn toward spiritism during his later years, uses archived oral histories and recent interviews of family members. Impressive archival research conducted in Mexico, the United States, England, and Germany enables Buchenau to present a unique multinational perspective on the political negotiations, power struggles, and ambivalent Mexican-U.S. relations during Calles's political career.

Students of Mexican history who have increasingly turned their attention to the decades of the 1920s and 1930s will particularly welcome Buchenau's book. However, they may be disappointed by the author's lack of a broader discussion of the social and cultural context of the period. For example, the two decades following the Revolution brought major changes to gender roles and women's involvement in the public sphere. Some consideration of how the larger cultural context influenced Calles and his political decision-making, as well as an examination of his own personal views on matters like the role of women in the new nation-state, would enrich one's understanding of the era. Such a discussion would also help further contextualize recent scholarly work on education, childhood, family, gender, class, and the formation of a national culture during the first half of the twentieth century in Mexico. To be fair, Buchenau does not set out to address these concerns. Nevertheless, his study does raise the question of how to integrate political history and a "Great Man" theory of history with the recent shift toward cultural history.

Students of modern politics and state formation in Mexico, as well as those interested in Mexican-U.S. relations, will find this book useful and insightful. Buchenau's refreshingly clear writing and lucid arguments offers students and teachers at the undergraduate and graduate level a wonderful introduction to the intricacies of early twentieth-century Mexican political history.

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