

breaks with the traditional view that the Inquisition was completely rigid with regard to the application of censorship standards, a view that did not allow for the possibility that readers might, given the conditions of the region, not apply the standards. Finally, because of the importance of its topic, this book is a must-read for researchers interested in the history of books and reading in Latin America.

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National Period

Cuba's Aborted Reform: Socioeconomic Effects, International Comparisons, and Transition Policies. By CARMELO MESA-LAGO and JORGE PÉREZ-LÓPEZ. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xx, 223 pp. Cloth, \$59.95.

Cuba's "authoritarian socialist government" that "controls practically all economic activities" (p. 137) has put that nation's economy on a roller-coaster ride since 1959. The authors attribute this to six "vicious" cycles, averaging seven years each, of fluctuation toward and away from the market according to what the authors call *idealist* or *pragmatist* political policies. After losing Soviet subsidies, estimated at \$65 billion until 1990, the island has been unable to regain its previous economic levels. In a remedial attempt, Cuba allowed the dollarization of the economy for a decade, during which annual gross tourism revenue reached \$2 billion and annual remittances from Cubans abroad nearly \$1 billion. In spite of these measures, the country has a \$35.8 billion external debt, and its "dreary record" of debt payment has "severely affected its access to international financial markets" (p. 67), making the Cuban currency worthless.

The severe deterioration of government-sponsored social services since the early 1990s and the widening disparities in income and wealth have prompted "increasing inequality and poverty in Cuba" (p. 108). The Communist leadership, the armed forces, and internal security agents constitute a tiny privileged class who enjoy better retirement plans and escape the endemic shortages of food, housing, and consumer goods. There is a national three-tiered health system, with high-quality services for the government hierarchy and foreigners with hard currency, in contrast to the inequality of the "irritant" public health programs (pp. 86, 110). The children of the elite "attend exclusive schools," while higher-education enrollments among the general population have dropped significantly due to the allure of higher wages in the tourism sector. A physician or an engineer earns the maximum equivalent of \$25 monthly, but a taxi driver can make up to \$770. This has prompted "thousands of physicians" to work as cabdrivers or waiters in "tourist apartheid" facilities reserved for foreigners, such as hotels, restaurants, and beaches, where Cubans are denied entry (pp. 87, 99).

This book constitutes an about-face for both authors, whose previous scholarship relied largely on the same Cuban and United Nations statistics and methodology that

they now denounce as “contradictory” data, “flawed estimates,” “statistical manipulation,” and “fragmentary information” that is “virtually worthless” (pp. 31, 35, 89, 105, 130). Cuba has never published statistics on income distribution, incidence of poverty, external remittances, or tourism revenues, nor does it reveal how estimates are computed for inflation or many other leading social and economic indicators. However, other sources cited in this work are also questionable. Mesa-Lago draws his calculation of income inequality from an informal survey he made in 2002 of only a dozen Cubans abroad. Likewise, only one source, published by his former student, is used to describe Cuba’s complex racial situation.

Mesa-Lago’s other publications were timidly critical of Cuba’s economic and political situation while praising what he perceived as the “improved equality” in social performance, particularly in education and public health. This book continues to avoid direct criticism of Fidel Castro. Mesa-Lago has praised Castro as “a political genius, perhaps the only true genius among the world’s leaders today” (*New York Times*, Dec. 31, 1978). While *Cuba’s Aborted Reform* acknowledges that “Castro continues to be the determining factor in the key decisions that affect the nation” (p. 5), economic and social failures are instead repeatedly blamed on “the leadership,” “the government,” and the “policy makers.” There is also no mention of Castro’s personal fortune, estimated by *Forbes* in 2004 at \$195 million.

The authors now propose “more comprehensive, deeper, and faster-paced reforms” to “move Cuba faster toward a market economy” (pp. 156, 183). They favorably cite and promote many of the views of five economists on the island who applaud the slight “economic progress” achieved after the 1990s crisis, reject neoliberalism, and want to “work for change within a socialist framework” to mitigate current problems (pp. 61, 164). In contrast, Mesa-Lago and Pérez-López ignore the scholarship of other renowned Cuban economists, including Felipe Pazos, José Illán, Alberto Martínez Piedra, Antonio Jorge, Ofelia Tabares, Jorge Salazar Carrillo, and dissident Marta Beatriz Roque, who challenge the achievements of the revolution and advocate post-Castro strategies of stabilization under economic and social liberalization. These economists outline the future reconstruction and growth of Cuba based on an agreement by the Cuban people concerning how to effect the transition, build institutions, establish a legal framework, implement political democracy, and legitimize the government. They call for the proliferation of small- and medium-sized domestic firms with the support of exiles to accelerate national reconciliation, loosen controls on prices and foreign exchange rates, and open up the market economy. On the other hand, Mesa-Lago and Pérez-López could once again change their perspective after the demise of the current government presents unexpected opportunities.

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