

## ‘CIPRIANO CASTRO & JUAN VICENTE GOMEZ: THE EARLY YEARS’

**Brian S McBeth**

**Senior Common Room Member, St Antony’s Collage, Oxford University  
& Investigador Invitado – Universidad Metropolitana, Caracas**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Venezuela was ruled during most of the first half of the twentieth century by presidents from the Andean state of Táchira, which at the time was considered a political and cultural backwater which appeared to have more in common with neighbouring Colombia than with the rest of the country. Nevertheless, Venezuela would be ruled from 1899 through to 1945 by four different Tachirenses dictators who could trace their political birth to the invasion of Venezuela by a small band of rebels led by Cipriano Castro on May 23, 1899.

Despite the regional isolation of Táchira and the close links it had with Colombia, the commercial and political interests of its citizens were firmly rooted to Maracaibo and Caracas. The Tachirenses nationalists far from opposing the central government wanted greater participation in the running of the country's affairs. Such a wish would be achieved starting with Castro in 1899 and ending 45 years later with the October 18, 1945 coup which overthrew the government of Medina Angarita. Of the Andean rulers, Gómez, who would topple his compadre Castro in 1908, ruled the country the longest, remaining in power for 27 years. Gómez was born on July 24 1857 in the hacienda El Recreo in La Mulera, near Rubio in Táchira, while Castro was born 15 months later on October 12, 1858, in La Ovejera de las Lomas Altas, near Capacho. Gómez came from a relatively well-off rural family who owned a coffee-farm and went to a primary school run by Ramón Navarro, while his sisters were taught at home by Braulia Santander. Pedro Cornelio,<sup>1</sup> Gómez's father shortly before he died proposed that his son should study medicine at Bogotá or Caracas. Castro did not have such a rounded education with a contemporary observer suggesting that to speak to him about art was like 'regalar perlas a un asno.' (Domínici, 1901: 21) This paper deals with the early involvement in politics of Castro and Gómez who would dominate political events in the country for just over a third of the 20th century, focusing on the background of the two compadres, the national and regional politics that moulded their political views, what drove them to power and finally focus on what they would ultimately achieve.

### **The Importance of Táchira**

At the turn of the century the mainstay of the Tachirens economy was coffee, which was first introduced in 1798 but only assumed importance in the economic structure of the region and the country as a whole during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The reason for its slow development was the state's chronic lack of a large labour supply. The growing of coffee is labour intensive because the beans have to be hand-picked at harvest time, and other regions of the country such as the Central and Eastern states did not have a surplus population to transfer to the coffee growing region of the Andes. The Wars of Independence and the Federal Wars of the 1860s though had the demographic effect of shifting the population away from the Llanos to the mountainous regions of the Andes. At the same time many Colombians also arrived bringing with them their commercial acumen and expertise as well as their ability for hard work, skills which would be put to good use in developing the coffee industry. The state's population between 1880 and 1890 grew by 21.8 % from 83,521 to 101,709, with the bulk of this increase occurring in the Western coffee zones of San Cristóbal and Rubio. The size of the boom however should be kept in perspective because Táchira's coffee production between 1883 and 1898 accounted for only 18 per cent of the national total, producing 33,090 tonnes during the period in question, while the rest of Venezuela yielded 188,719 tonnes. (Muñoz, 1977: 138)

The German trading houses that had been active in the region since the 1860s also grew in commercial importance with the coffee boom. They acted as commercial banks advancing credit to the coffee producers and using as collateral the following year's crop, while at the same time they supplied the region with imported merchandise. The role played by the foreign traders at this time should not however be overemphasised as the local money-lenders of Táchira were far more important and competed directly with the German trading houses. The Municipal records of San Cristóbal and Rubio examined by Muñoz indicate that in those cities the 'majority of the moneylenders were Venezuelans and that the German firms were responsible for only a small number of the total registered loans.' (Muñoz, 1977: 138) Castro, for example, in 1875 took a clerical job in the German trading firm of Van Diesel & Co. in San Cristóbal, (Sullivan, 1974: 73) while his brother, Celestino, was engaged during the same period in 'small scale commercial and financial activities'(Muñoz, 1977: 138) lending money at a monthly interest rate of 2.5 per cent. However, towards the end of the 1880s the German trading houses began to assume a more dominant position, undertaking a systematic campaign to 'exploit the coffee boom and expand operations throughout the Andes'.(Muñoz, 1977: 132)

### **A Nascent Middle Class**

As a consequence of the coffee boom in the 1880s and 1890s, rural wages in Táchira were the highest in the country. The economic prosperity which the coffee boom brought to the region contributed towards the formation of a nascent middle class among a 'sizeable segment of the urban residents of the coffee zone'. (Muñoz,1977: 143) Táchira's income from coffee allowed it to import many goods from abroad, mainly from Colombia, with the trade in manufactured articles from Santander, described as intense by a contemporary observer. At the same time the region's prosperity also attracted many Colombian teachers, who generally settled in the Western coffee zone, and who began to raise the educational standards of the state, producing a generation of well educated youths at the end of the nineteenth century who experienced keen

dissatisfaction at job prospects and believed that they were the vanguard of a better future, not only for the region but for the country as a whole.

Táchira's geographical isolation made it extremely difficult for the central government in Caracas to destroy the autonomy of the state's dispersed communities. A direct result of this regional isolation was an inefficient government and an inadequate infrastructure which constrained the state's economic development. There was no direct link with Caracas, so that the quickest journey to the capital city would entail first going to Colombia and then travelling to Maracaibo, taking a boat to Curacao and then to Puerto Cabello or La Guaira. The young turks of the state wanted to foster a better transport system in order to facilitate and expand trading and commercial ties with the rest of the country.

### **Castro & Gómez: The early years**

Gómez grew up during the coffee boom of the 1880s which together with the relative geographical isolation, as we have seen, produced a nascent middle class, willing to take risks and develop the region economically, something which appalled the neighbouring Merideños who could not fathom 'the pragmatic and unabashed capitalistic spirit of San Cristóbal'. (Muñoz, 1977: 40) Gómez's capacity for hard work and intelligence made him stand out 'por encima del nivel de la generalidad de los pequeños terratenientes de la región', (Fernández, 1956: 93) and according to Fernández 'no había familia de mayor pujanza que los Gómez, los Castro y los Bellos' (Fernández, 1956: 96) in Cúcuta, San Antonio, or Lobatera.

With Gómez's business activities and farm prospering he began to assume regional importance which led him to join Colonel Evaristo Jaimes in 1886 to protest against the excessive abuse of power which local jefes civiles had perpetrated with the connivance of general Espíritu Santo Morales, the President of the Andes. At the same time Castro also received his first political lesson in June 1886 when he joined up with Pepe Rojas Fernández in the local rebellion against Espíritu Santo Morales. Later the rebel forces of Evaristo Jaimes, which included Castro, gathered at Los Capachos where general Morales meets them, ordering on June 23, 1886 an attack against the city, during which Jaimes is killed but the government troops are forced to retreat with Castro giving chase. He is in turn ambushed but manages to escape and the following day at the funeral of Jaimes, Gómez meets for the first time Pepe Rojas Fernández, Camilo Merchán and Cipriano Castro, striking a lasting friendship with the latter.

Morales at the head of 2000 men renews his attack on Capacho but Castro manages to defeat him and on June 29 at Boquerón, the government troops are completely routed. The rebel movement had triumphed in Táchira, with Castro entering San Cristóbal in a victorious procession on July 5, the country's Independence Day. Castro together with Pepe Rojas Fernández were the two most distinguished commanders. The government fearing that this would get out of hand appointed the latter as Governor of the Federal Territory of Amazonas but he was murdered before he could take up his appointment.<sup>2</sup>

In the ensuing years a series of reforms were instituted in Táchira bringing the region more closely into the national political arena, and in 1888, Castro joins Carlos Rangel Garbiras, the

newly appointed President of Los Andes (Táchira, Mérida and Trujillo) as head of the Sección Táchira, but differences between them would soon develop because each man represented varying antagonistic forces in the region. Garbiras was perceived as reflecting the interests of the rich and powerful groups of Táchira, whereas Castro's power base lay in the rural areas amongst the small farmers of the state. (Velásquez, 1960: 207) These differences would eventually make them split. In 1890 Castro, who is now a regional power in his own right, is appointed commander of the government's army in Táchira and a year later becomes a deputy at the National Congress representing the Gran Estado de Táchira, supporting President Andueza Palacio.

### **Castro widens his horizons**

The political problems which besieged Venezuela during the last quarter of the nineteenth century were due to a large extent to the power struggle between Antonio Guzmán Blanco and Joaquín Crespo. The former assumed power after a bloody battle in 1870 when the conservatives, who had ruled since the end of the Federal Wars in 1863, were defeated. The method of government of the Liberal party since 1870 was for each president to be surrounded by 'su grupo personal, aprovechando el impulso de reacciones políticas y concediendo mayor o menor participación en el poder a los círculos locales, según las circunstancias'. (Lecuna, 1954: 17) Guzmán Blanco wanted above all to mould his 'backward and savaged country in the image of prosperous societies he had come to know across the seas. He admired both Yankee industriousness and the culture of the Second Empire in France.' (Nava, 1965: 428)

In 1884 Guzmán Blanco, el Ilustre Americano as he was known, appointed Joaquín Crespo as his successor until 1886. During the latter's presidency, commerce lost business and because of his incompetence Guzmán Blanco was recalled from Europe. Crespo handed over power to Guzmán in 1886 with an 'anillo de hierro' (Lecuna, 1954: 19) because he had appointed for four years the judiciary, the state presidents, and the legislators of the different states, whereas the presidential period would last only two years. In addition, Crespo had selected and appointed the congressmen for the following two presidential periods, naming his friends who would secure his reelection, and thereby causing the major rupture in Guzmán-Crespo relations, with the former departing for Europe and leaving Hermógenes López in charge. At the same time Crespo also retired to Europe.

Guzmán Blanco's intention was to appoint biennial presidents from Europe. In 1888 various candidates were put forward, although the idea was for the Liberal party convention to elect the president. Crespo would be one of the candidates but Guzmán Blanco wanted to dominate the political life of the country and thus proposed that Rojas Paúl be designated president, who turned out to be a popular choice and a good administrator, followed by Andueza Palacio, who tried to extend his period to four years 'juzgando suficiente para mantenerse en el mando para enarbolar la bandera federalista de la autonomía de las secciones.' (Lecuna, 1954: 39) The strongman of the regime was Sebastián Casañas, 'el canciller de hierro' as he was known, who got the municipalities and state congresses to approve the increase in tenure from two years to four. The National Congress in turn needed to sanction such a move in order to re-elect Andueza. Crespo at his Guárico estate declared such a move illegal stating that any reforms would take

effect in 1894 but Andueza Palacio remained in power and suspended Congress. Crespo was then left with the only option of launching his Revolución Legalista in 1892. Sebastián Casañas at the head of a 4000 strong army was sent to subdue the wayward rebel, and in Táchira, the Baptistas, Araujos, José Manuel Gabaldón and Victoriano Márquez Bustillos, the state president, took up Crespo's banner against Andueza Palacio. Castro however defended the government's position and on his suggestion general José María González, head of the Táchira frontier army, appointed Gómez to a post in the army with the rank of colonel.

On March 20, 1892, Castro left for Colón with a small army accompanied by amongst others, Emilio Fernández, Francisco Croce, Pedro María Cárdenas, Pedro Murillo and Modesto Castro, to relieve González's much reduced army which was being attacked by his old enemy Espíritu Santo Morales. After twenty hours of hard battle, Castro defeated Morales with his army scattering in disarray. In El Topón general Eliseo Araujo who had arrived in San Cristóbal to reestablish order as President of the Andes after Márquez Bustillos had joined the rebels, was decidedly beaten on March 22, 1892 by general José María González, commander of the border troops and colonel Juan Vicente Gómez, commander of sectional troops, and later joined by Castro, (Briceño, 1948: 26) with Araujo having to flee from the state. Later at Táriba and Caneyes, Castro together with Gómez, defeated the government troops and then followed the rebels to Palmira and San Juan de Lagunillas, entering triumphantly in Mérida with his troop of 3000 men.

Castro wanted to continue the fight to Caracas. His plan was debated with some arguing that his duty was to protect the Andes but, in the end Castro won and preparations were made to march towards the capital which was only halted when a message from Andueza Palacio delivered by general José María García Gómez brought the sad news that the government had capitulated. Castro remained adamant about marching to Caracas but the pessimism of García Gómez persuaded him to desist in his quest. As a result, Crespo after seven months of hard fighting was able to consolidate his power, with his government more authoritarian than Andueza Palacio, appointing general Espíritu Santo Morales, Castro's old enemy, to take over in Táchira. A conspiracy against Castro had already taken place with General Croce Moreno manoeuvring to take over power from him by joining up with the Rangelistas, the followers of Rangel Garbiras, but as soon as general Morales arrived in San Cristóbal and had assumed power he threw out Croce Moreno. Castro was left with no alternative but to resign his army commission and seek refuge in Colombia, with Gómez following closely.

Castro's campaign to defend the Andueza Palacio government meant that his hacienda in Táchira had been destroyed with a personal loss estimated at Bs 10,000.<sup>3</sup> In the neighbouring republic, Castro purchased the small estate of 'Bella Vista' in a region near the frontier town of Cúcuta with the financial assistance of Gómez, (Núñez, 1953: 17) while the latter acquired the 'Buenos Aires' estate close to his compadre. Most of Gómez's children with Dionisia Bello were born here including José Vicente Gómez and Alí, his favourite, who would die in the great 1917 influenza epidemic.<sup>4</sup> Over the next seven years Gómez builds up a successful business of cattle ranching and coffee production, amassing a small fortune estimated at Bs 30,000,<sup>5</sup> which would enable him to finance Castro's trips to Caracas and later the 1899 invasion. For his part, Castro spent his

time planning his political return, meeting many of the leaders of Colombian liberalism such as Hernández, Herrera Durán and Cáceres.

Castro was a frequent visitor to Gómez's hacienda with the conversation always concentrating on how to depose Crespo. The latter however wanted to get the fiery Táchira rebel on his side by persuading him to join the government in exchange for Castro handing over the arms he had hidden in Colombia to the country's Liberals. Alirio Diaz Guerra, Crespo's Colombian private secretary, invited Castro to Caracas but the president's overtures went unheeded and instead he put forward his own ideas about re-organizing the country. The result was stalemate with Castro returning to his exile in his hacienda in Colombia. In the second of his two trips to Caracas, financed by Gómez, Castro returned to the capital in 1893 to speak to Crespo about the deteriorating political situation in the Andes but this time he was ignored and dismissed with the scathing remark that 'ese indiecito no cabe en el pellejito'. (Siso, 1985: 145)

### **National Politics**

Crespo's victory however had managed to unify the old Liberalismo Amarillo of Guzmán Blanco against the rising tide of conservatism propounded by José Manuel Hernández (Mocho) by allowing his former enemies, who were not revolutionaries, to form a Representative Cabinet of Opposition led by Manuel Antonio Matos. This neutralized part of the opposition but did entail giving Matos the Treasury portfolio, which backfired as his enemies also wanted to be part of the government. At the same time Crespo also initiated a period of open elections, vigorously taken up by the conservative Mocho Hernández. Mocho, who had led a colourful career, at one time working as a gold miner in Yuruary, had established together with Alejandro Urbaneja, the Partido Democrático, during Rojas Paúl's time. Later in 1897, Urbaneja proposed the formation of a Partido Liberal Nacionalista, with Mocho at its head, adopting traditional liberal principles and 'prometiendo hacer efectivas, las practicas democráticas que no se habían cumplido y suprimir el peculado y los negocios lucrativos considerados durante largos anos como finalidad del ejercicio del poder' (Lecuna, 1954: 46), and in May 1897 his presidential candidacy was launched.

The official government candidate was Ignacio Andrade who after the Legalista revolution had been Minister of Public Works and Education and who became the second most powerful man in the country when he was elected President of Miranda, which up to 1898 comprised Miranda, Aragua and Guárico.<sup>6</sup> From Curacao where he was exiled, Rojas Paúl also launched his candidature, while other contenders with no hope such as Pedro Arismendi Brito, Francisco Tosta García, and Juan Francisco Castillo, also entered the race. Mocho Hernández would use the latest electioneering techniques he had seen in action in the US during the presidential campaigns of William J. Bryan and William McKinley. During his own campaign in Venezuela in 1897 he 'organised an intensive program of tours, speeches, mass meetings, explaining his program, which consisted in a restatement of all the liberties that had been consistently trampled in Venezuela for over half a century'. (Harwich, 1971-2: 48) Mocho was an incessant campaigner, who at the start of the campaign only had Bs 2,000 but who never lacked money because of the enthusiasm he was able to convey to the public, canvassing for support across the country, visiting the Aragua valleys, La Guaira, Maiquetía, and Macuto. He arrived in Caracas

on June 16, and then left for Puerto Cabello on June 26, arriving in Coro on June 28, then travelling to the interior of Falcón, reaching Maracaibo on July 15, and continuing to Trujillo, Barinas and Apure. On August 1 he was in Ciudad Bolívar, and from there visits the western part of Guárico, Calabozo, Ortiz, Villa de Cura, arriving in Valencia on August 28, just before election day. This was the first time that an election campaign using modern electoral techniques had been conducted in the country.

When the polls opened on September 1, the government flooded the cities with peasants armed with machetes and took over the electoral tables in order to prevent people from depositing their ballot papers, with the result that Andrade won with 406,610 votes compared with 2203 votes for Mocho Hernández, 203 votes for Rojas Paúl, 152 votes for Guzmán Blanco and 31 to Nicolás Rolando. Congress duly confirmed the result electing Andrade who according to Lecuna was 'un hombre de paja'. (Lecuna, 1954: 60) Crespo who had divided the country up into five circunscripciones militares and headed the Central zone, the most important one, ensured that the country accepted the result.

Mocho Hernández, who felt that he had been robbed of the elections, wanted to rebel immediately against the fraud committed but was unable to leave his house in Caracas as he was almost under house arrest as his home was being watched constantly. He nevertheless managed to escape reaching general Evaristo Lima's hacienda of La Queipa, near Valencia. After lengthy discussions it was decided that March 2 would be the most suitable date on which to launch the rebellion but the uprising got under way a day earlier on March 1, when Mocho with 300 peasants took up arms with his 'Grito de Queipa'. Crespo at the head of the government forces immediately started pursuing Mocho but the government commander was killed by a stray bullet at Mata Carmelera on April 16, 1898, precipitating a national crisis which shakes the foundations of the liberales amarillos and places the new government of Andrade on the defensive as it is now a foregone conclusion that Mocho will head for Caracas unopposed because of his popularity and form the next government. At the insistence of M.A. Matos, Ramón Guerra is named head of the government's armed forces, who managed to capture Mocho at La Hacha and is then taken to Caracas where he is imprisoned.

At the beginning of 1899, the Liberales Amarillos were divided into the Crespistas 'resentidos and conspiradores' as Velásquez has called them and the Andradistas formed by the brothers of Ignacio Andrade together with Febres Cordero, Troconis, Arvelo, Carrillo Guerra and Leopoldo Baptista. The Crespistas would later support Guerra who had saved the country from the rule of Mocho Hernández and the conservatives. Guerra wanted as his just reward for defeating Mocho Hernández and thereby preventing the dreaded conservatives from getting power, to replace the deceased Crespo as President of Miranda state. Andrade fearful of the real intentions of Guerra did not want to give him so much power, deciding instead to split the state into its three constituent parts, viz, Miranda, Aragua and Guárico, with Fernández, Morales and Guerra their respective presidents. The Crespistas seeing their influence wane with Andrade, would now support Ramón Guerra. Andrade would further erode Guerra's power base by making him replace some of his officers, thereby pushing him to rebel on February 19, 1899 at Calabozo, by proclaiming Guárico an autonomous state and accusing Andrade of violating the constitution. General Augusto Lutowsky was ordered with 3000 men to Calabozo and general Manuel

Guzmán Álvarez and Lorenzo Guerra also converge with various battalions from Guárico, forcing Guerra to seek refuge in Colombia.

### **Táchira's involvement in national politics**

Táchira at the close of the nineteenth century had the highest per capita income of Venezuela. However, at the end of the century there was a drastic decline in coffee prices which produced a great deal of discontent among the urban middle class population of the state, who at the same time perceived that the policies pursued by the Federal Government, such as an increase in taxation and higher import duties in order to pay off the country's foreign debt, had the effect of diminishing their economic opportunities, creating a great deal of resentment, especially among the educated middle class and small farmers. Civil disorders were frowned upon because it was only under peace and order that business could prosper but many of the bachilleres could not go to university due to the economic depression, and they were no 'industrias para emplear con perspectivas lisonjeras a esa gente.' (Rangel, 1964: 65) Táchira was therefore faced with two alternatives either to industrialize or to incorporate themselves more fully into national politics in what Rangel calls 'participar en las aventuras venezolanas de las guerras civiles'. (Rangel, 1964: 67) The nascent middle class of Táchira however were dissatisfied in general with the state of affairs in the country. It was predominantly from this group and the young urban sector of Táchira that Castro drew his strength from in 1899 becoming a movement of 'bachilleres trocados en guerreros' (Rangel, 1964: 67) as Rangel has so eloquently described the rebels that invaded Venezuela in May 1899.

### **Andrade is named President**

On February 28, 1898, Ignacio Andrade was appointed president and tries to release the hold that the deceased Crespo still had on the country and consolidate his own power by splitting the country back into its 20 states and granting them their autonomy. The secciones of the Andes State, for example, would have their status upgraded to that of a full state. In taking this course of action Andrade would have to appoint new legislative and judicial bodies both at the national and state level, and by so doing would get rid of the Crespistas and appoint his own men, further consolidating his power. Such a move was a solid legal blow against the Crespo political machinery because it would attract to the Andrade camp those people who wanted to recover their old political power and also lessen the influence of the state presidents. Anyone who opposed Andrade's move, such as the members of the Supreme Court, would be gaoled under the pretext that they were conspiring against the government. The measure had the added attraction that it could be applied immediately as there was no need to change the constitution because according to Bello Rodríguez, the Interior Minister, all that was necessary under the 1884 constitution was for Congress to approve the change.

Nevertheless, such action by Andrade brought about violent opposition within the Liberal party, with the Crespistas and Anduecistas uniting with Francisco Tosta García, José Landislao Andara and Ramón Ayala joining together with the old Guzmancista, Francisco González Guinán. They all argued that the country's political division would not be immediate and could only be applicable during the presidential period following its approval, which in this case would start from January 1, 1902. In Táchira, political unrest was further aggravated by the vexed question

of representation of the state at the national level. In January the Asambleas Legislativas of the States met to proclaim the independent wishes of the secciones Trujillo, Mérida, and Táchira that formed the Andes state. The Trujillanos decided to breakaway forming their own independent state while Mérida and Táchira would form a smaller one whose president would be Espíritu Santo Morales, with La Grita as the new capital of the state to the well-wishes of Táchira but to the consternation of Mérida. The Merideños appealed to Andrade but he gave Morales all the support he needed. (Arellano Moreno, 1967: 191) It was time for Castro to place his political marker.

### **Castro prepares to invade Venezuela**

During his period of exile Castro was constantly visited by people who kept him in touch with events in Caracas. In early 1898 he held talks with Carlos Rangel Garbiras, his old adversary and head of the Nacionalismo in the Andes, at La Donjuana in Colombia, but an agreement could not be reached because his old foe wanted a dual leadership structure with him as civil chief and Castro as military chief. This was unacceptable to Castro because he reasoned that two leaders would weaken their position and both men felt that they should be the sole leader of the revolution.

The Liberales Continuistas of Andueza Palacio and José Ignacio Pulido after their defeat in 1892 by the Liberales Legalistas had gone into exile, but had later returned to the country with the death of Crespo and were not willing to give up without a fight. They viewed Andrade as a conservative because of his social background and considered themselves as the 'verdaderos depositarios de la pureza liberal amarilla,' (Bello Rodríguez, 1979: viii) with the result that the Anduecistas began to conspire to end Andrade's rule. Cipriano Castro was one such Anduecista, who had been exiled since 1892 but had refused to return, who was now invited by Pulido, Ayala and Andueza Palacio to participate in the rebellion, designating him chief of the Andes state.

In February 28, 1899 Castro sells a life policy to Gómez for US \$1289 with a surrender value of US \$ 5000 in order to travel to Caracas to confer with Andrade about what political role he could play in the future. Castro in exchange for supporting Andrade demanded the presidency of the Andes, but he was unable to put his views to the president as Mendoza Solar, Secretary to Andrade, prevented a meeting taking place between the two men. At this snub Castro immediately started to put into effect his plan to topple Andrade and seize power which he had spent so much time mulling over at his hacienda in Colombia

On his return journey back to his status of a political exile in Colombia he stopped at Curacao where he was able to enlist the support of an important group of Anduecistas on the island, including Pulido, Pietri and Ayala. (Domínici, 1901) In Maracaibo too at the home of Don Felipe Arocha, his wife's foster uncle who ran a large trading house, a number of important business leaders met and promised to support Castro in his revolutionary quest. During the rest of the year Castro was kept busy seeking support for his plans with a Centro Directivo del Partido Ciprianista formed with Lucio Baldó as President of the Committee, with other members including Santiago Briceño Ayestarán, Rafael María Velasco Bustamante, Román Moreno, Pedro Pablo Rodríguez, Trino Niño, and Ramón Buenahora, and which later expanded with the

incorporation of other Liberals such as colonel Régulo Olivares and general Froilan Prato, as well as general Obdulio Cacique. Although the initial expenses were funded by Castro most of the financial backing came from Gómez, the successful entrepreneur.

The first objective of the rebels would be to acquire power in Andes and then proceed to take over the country. Castro also informed his small band of supporters in the centre and western areas of the country the purpose of his actions so that he could count on their backing, offering in the end that the first to reach 'triumfante a la capital sería reconocido como Jefe Supremo del País, debiendo los demas sostenerlo y reconocerlo como tal.' (Briceño A., 1948: 37) Many took up his suggestion but all their attempts were squashed by the Government and in Caracas general Esteban Chalbaud Cardona, Castro's second in command who had travelled to Caracas to communicate the news to the rebels, was imprisoned amongst others.

### **A Constitutional Crisis**

The new national administrative structure posed a tricky constitutional question because the seven states mentioned by the first article of the 1881 constitution as forming Venezuela no longer existed, begging the question that the constitution needed to be reformed completely. Consequently, Congress met on February 20, 1899 to discuss these matters and in effect became a constitutional assembly, with all legislative and governmental powers from the president downwards becoming provisional until these constitutional matters had been resolved. To compound matters for the government the year would be an economic disaster with coffee prices plummeting, and hence government revenues shrinking because of the economic recession which led to a decline in imports. The country would also suffer that year from a small pox epidemic, a locust plague which ate many of the crops, and a long draught which decimated cattle stocks.

The principle of returning the country to twenty states was not in dispute but the way of obtaining this result divided Congress into two distinct camps, *viz*, the Inmediatistas, supported by Andrade who wanted to make effective the immediate creation of 20 states and the Constitucionalistas who preferred to amend the constitution first to create the 20 new states. The Inmediatistas, proposed the return to the political division of the 1864 constitution by changing clause 2 of the constitution which allowed the setting up of provisional states and the appointment of interim officials within the new states. When it came to a congressional vote on this proposal, Andrade's supporters won by 66 votes to 25, and on April 22, 1899 the formation of 20 states in Venezuela, with the large states of Bermúdez, Miranda and Andes splitting into smaller entities, was enacted by Congress. Such an outcome amounted, according to Velásquez, to a coup d'etat 'en el cual los soldados estan reemplazados por los diputados y senadores y los fusiles por las papeletas de la votación'. (Velásquez, 1960: 204-5) At the beginning of May, Andrade and Bello felt sufficiently strong to release Mocho Hernández from prison, reasoning that all Liberals would unite with them against the conservatives.

Castro did not agree with the result arguing that the changes which Congress had approved were unconstitutional. As we have seen however the constitution did allow the creation of such

entities on a provisional basis while it was debated in Congress and the appropriate amendments to the constitution had been enacted. Castro had nevertheless found the pretext he needed to launch his revolution and so began to activate his supporters by setting up local committees in Táchira for the restoration of the constitution. Many of Castro's strongest allies such as Régulo Olivares, Santiago Briceño Ayesterán, and Pedro María Cárdenas travelled to Colombia to meet Castro in order to cross the border with him. There is however one last attempt to get Andrade to change his mind, with a memorandum proposing that Castro should be appointed president of Táchira. Andrade rejects the suggestion something he would live to regret because by October he would be in exile in Curacao and Castro would start his nine year rule of the country.

On May 23, 1899, in the small hours of the night Castro, a small man with a thick black beard and with big black eyes and still not 42 years old, slips across the border into Táchira with Gómez, the main financier of the venture, and 57 other followers, and launches his Revolución Restauradora with the objective of restoring the old constitution which, as far as he was concerned, would give the country a strong central government which would stimulate and ensure the general progress of Venezuela. Castro's appeal as we have seen was initially heeded by a small group of people, mainly Tachirenses, while in Mérida only José María Méndez joined him. In Trujillo, where the Araujos and Baptistas had been Castro's supporters, the state remained at the sidelines of the rebellion, and in Barquisimeto only 500 Larenses would join his rebellion. Castro's revolt was then composed almost entirely of Tachirenses.

In a coordinated effort at the same time that Castro was invading the country, the various castristas revolutionary committees also took up arms. In Palmira, 180 men led by Santiago Briceño Ayesterán, started to march towards Capacho where all the other revolutionaries were to meet.<sup>7</sup> The following day on May 24 Castro reaches Independencia where he issues his proclamation stating that Congress as well as Andrade had 'pisoteado la constitución al sancionar y refrendar respectivamente el Acuerdo de 22 de abril sobre la organización de la República'. (Perera, 1943: 222)<sup>8</sup> Castro wanted the establishment of the state's autonomy but this had to be done 'de una manera legal sin arrebatos ni intemperancias y sobre todo sin pisotear la Constitución y las leyes vigentes. (Perera, 1943: 222-3) He was not against the state's autonomy per se but objected to the use of such a concept as a way of establishing a dictatorship. It would be a mistake, however, to view Castro's revolution as some have, as a regional one but rather as Muñoz observes, as a nationalistic one with a strong desire to strengthen the Federal Government rather than repudiate it.

When Castro arrived in Capacho he started to organise his army which would swell to 1,500 men. Their immediate problem at this stage was not manpower but insufficient arms and ammunitions. On the government side, its forces stationed in the various Andean states were also minute, almost non-existent, with small quantities of poorly maintained mausers. Juan Pablo Peñaloza, for instance, in San Cristóbal had 50 soldiers at his disposal, while Espíritu Santo Morales in Mérida had 100 soldiers and Rafael González Pacheco in Trujillo had 50 soldiers. Castro was therefore not unduly worried about the local ill-equipped soldiers but needed to strengthen his forces to face the expeditionary force which the central government would send once it became clear that his rebellion had not petered out after a week.

### **Government reacts**

Antonio Fernández, a former Commander of the Army and a former Defence Minister on more than one occasion as well as a regional caudillo in Barlovento, was dispatched by Andrade with a 600-man strong army to deal with Castro. This also suited Andrade as he wanted to get rid of Fernández for his own political reasons as he was an important member of the Liberal party in Barlovento. Castro would spend two months campaigning in Táchira against Fernández with his tactics of 'madrugarle al enemigo y evitar que concentre sus fuerzas.' (Picón Salas: 1953: 45) Antonio Fernández did not see the point of defeating an obscure regional nuisance such as Castro, preferring to conserve his army for later events where he could achieve greater glory. This allowed Castro to lift the siege of San Cristóbal and head towards Mérida where further differences between Liberals and conservatives would allow Castro an easy passage to Barquisimeto. Castro was not only a good fighter but also lucky in that his opponents were disorganised, distrustful of each other 'por un cúmulo de intrigas y misteriosos errores que señalan ya en el escenario de la Cordillera la descomposición y contradicción en que se debatía el andradismo.' (Picón Salas, 1953: 48) Much of the ammunition used by government forces was useless as it was the wrong calibre for their muskets.

In Tovar, Castro faces Dr Rafael González Pacheco, the Agente del Ejecutivo Nacional, a courageous and astute Trujillano politician, who left Trujillo with 300 men to cut off Castro to try to prevent him from reaching Mérida. But González Pacheco is given the wrong ammunition and rifles by Dr Juan Bautista Carrillo Guerra, a leading conservative figure and the state president since April 1899 who is an intimate friend of Andrade, and so has to abandon the fight against Castro. The Liberals such as the Baptistas and Araujos were more interested in the local political fight with the conservatives such as Carrillo Guerra and González Pacheco than pursuing the small Castro army.

The rebel forces were better organized due in large measure to the efforts of Gómez who occupied the key post of Quartermaster General, ensuring that vital supplies and ammunition reached the fighting men. His efforts meant that the insurrectionists during the campaign would not lack anything because 'ahi estaba el ojo avizor de Gómez viéndolo todo.' (Fernández, 1956: 98) Gómez also took part in three battles, one siege and five skirmishes at Tononó on May 24, at Las Pilas on May 27, at San Cristóbal on May 28 and at Páramo Zumbador on June 27. He was also at the siege of San Cristóbal, defended by General Juan Pablo Peñaloza between July 1-11, and was involved in the battle of Cordero against the troops of Fernández. On August 6 Gómez defeated general Rafael González Pacheco at Tovar, Mérida state, and on August 26 was involved in the Parapara combat in Yaracuy, reaching Carabobo in September where he participated in the combat of Nirgua on September 8, and participates on September 14 in the large battle of Tocuyito.

Castro's progress to Caracas after he breaks out of Táchira in early August is swift, with his advancement almost unimpeded because the government preferred to do battle nearer Caracas. Over the next 42 days Castro's army covers 540 kilometres as the crow flies to reach Tocuyito, in Carabobo state, on September 12, averaging an impressive 13 kilometres per day. The same

morning that Castro arrives at Tocuyito, Diego Bautista Ferrer, the War Minister and Antonio Fernández, president of Aragua, at the head of a 4,600-man strong army leave Valencia to do battle against Castro but the rebel leader from Táchira is able to rout them because Andrade had given equal command to both Ferrer and Fernandez, old enemies who did not consult each other, with the government troops dispersing in a disorderly and panic-stricken manner, at one stage even managing to attack each other. Ferrer returns to Valencia and the city is evacuated, with the population, in near panic, wanting to escape the wrath of Castro to La Victoria, Los Teques or Caracas, thus allowing the almost deserted city to be taken unopposed by the rebels.

Although the government had received a set-back it still controlled most of the country, with the rebels holding only Motatán in Trujillo and now Valencia, where Castro was surrounded by new influential friends such as Tello Mendoza, Corao, Torres Cárdenas, Eduardo Celis and later joined by José Rafael Revenga. It was at this point that Andrade decides to take command of the government troops himself leaving Caracas on September 14, and meeting up with the routed troops in La Victoria where they had retreated. In Caracas, Bello Rodríguez is appointed Secretary General and Fernando Arvelo replaces him at the Interior Ministry. There are now two factions within the government, the Liberal Amarillos, headed by Bello Rodríguez and Arvelo who is a Nacionalista, and who later takes a secret plan to form a new government headed by the conservative leader and composed mostly of Nacionalistas for Mocho's approval who is still in gaol.

### **Support for Castro in the country.**

The intermittent civil wars which affected the country also brought unrest among the commercial elite of the country as it was bad for business. In addition, the foreign debt which Guzmán Blanco and subsequent governments had incurred, had practically mortgaged Venezuela to foreign countries placing an undue burden on customs taxes and making imported goods expensive while constraining economic growth. There was a general feeling that it was necessary to bring law and order to the country as this would possibly lift the country out of its economic nightmare. González Chacón, for example, writing at the time, felt that because the country was in total disorder, it needed a strong hand to put it back on an even keel. The Liberals, which under Andrade's government had suffered politically, saw the ever increasing successful Castro as a saviour of their own cause. (González Chacón, 1899: 11) If Castro was able to bring both the conservatives and the liberals together and use some of the young generation who were not tainted by corruption then 'solo asi lograra contener al país a la orilla de la pendiente por donde amenaza despeñarse; alcanzara a remolar bajo el cielo de la Patria la bandera de la restauración y se abriran nuevos rumbos y risueños horizontes que señalen a los pueblos su viaje al porvenir'. (González Chacón, 1899: 16)

### **Andrade on the defensive**

In Caracas the political situation deteriorated for Andrade when he hears that general Víctor Rodríguez, the Vice President, is organizing a coup against him forcing the President to return to Caracas. At the same time in La Victoria, Luciano Mendoza, refuses to command the government troops unless Fernández is sacked as president of Aragua state and Ferrer is removed from his post of War Minister. Andrade is reluctantly forced to accept this, appointing Agustín

Carullo, the Governor of Caracas as head of Aragua state, and Isidoro Widerman, the former Military Chief of Caracas, as War Minister. The majority of the country's military leaders however remained loyal to Andrade, with Nicolás Rolando in western Venezuela and Gregorio Segundo Riera in Coro offering to concentrate their troops near Caracas to fight Castro. Luciano Mendoza would now command an army of 4000 men to fight the upstart from Táchira.

In spite of Andrade's military support his political power was inexorably waning. On September 16, a few days after the decisive battle of El Tocuyito, the liberals of Caracas headed by Matos met outside Valencia and declared their support and adherence to Castro's Liberal Restoration revolution. Andrade's position was becoming more untenable as the crisis deepened and the country's economic situation deteriorated further, with the government facing bankruptcy as the national coffers were empty. Although the rebels only controlled a small part of the country, Andrade knew that the people could not support further civil unrest. His own political decline was due to corruption amongst his supporters, stemming from his desire to unify the Liberal party by giving most of them 'cargos de preferencia y de confianza en las labores' (Andrade, 1955: 27) of the government, and the bad administration of the public works programme.

Castro issued on September 25 his Valencia Proclamation in which he accused Andrade, once again, of becoming a dictator, stating that:

El país estaba ávido de prácticas legales y necesitado de una administración regular, honesta y pura, pero el General Andrade, lejos de atender a tan urgente reclamo, dióse a la ingrata tarea de hacer una política personal, arrebatando a algunos Estados sus Magistrados Constitucionales, imponiendo por sobre las leyes su capricho autoritario y falseando por último, la base de nuestro sistema, rompiendo la Constitución para llegar al acuerdo monstruo del 22 de abril que violentamente creó las veinte autonomías y constituyó en Dictador al Presidente de la República. (Perera, 1943: 223)

A delegation headed by Manuel Revenga is dispatched to see whether Andrade will accept a negotiated peace settlement with Castro, but the President would only contemplate such a move if the Partido Liberal was recognised as the dominant force in national politics, reasoning that if Castro accepted such a situation the war could come to an end and a new political organization for the country could be achieved. On September 28, general Zoilo Bello Rodríguez, Secretary General, leaves Caracas for La Victoria to establish contact with Castro, and together with General Celestino Peraza, representing the military, enters into talks with the rebel leader in the president's name but with Andrade remaining ignorant of the basis on which negotiations would take place.

Castro's terms were well defined and remained essentially the same as those contained in his Independencia proclamation. In addition, he wanted an eight day truce and promised that there would be no victors or vanquished, that there would be no special favours for any regional groups and that all personal and property rights would be respected. In return, he wanted to share power equally with Andrade's supporters but the president would have to resign until constitutional elections had been held. After a number of false starts a workable peace agreement

was tacitly arranged on October 1 at the small Carabobo town of San Mateo. This was still-born however as Andrade rejected the negotiations because he considered Celestino Peraza a traitor, and had sent specific instructions on September 23 to Luciano Mendoza not to appoint him to the talks with Castro. Although Andrade wanted to preserve Venezuela's peace and institutions, he was not going to surrender to the man from the mountains and his Liberal Restoration revolution, a view endorsed by the cabinet on October 2 when it denounced the San Mateo accord as unacceptable. On their return to La Victoria, Bello Rodríguez and Peraza were intercepted by Fernando Arevelo, the Interior Minister, who revoked their commission for assuming greater plenipotentiary powers than had been assigned to them.

Castro was no longer a regional problem that could simply be ignored because he was now firmly on the national political map after his victory at Tocuyito. It became increasingly clear to Andrade that his own political situation would deteriorate further if he did not extend an olive branch to Castro. He sought the advice of Manuel Antonio Matos, the most important Liberal in the country,<sup>9</sup> who in turn feared that the president, who was no longer sure of the political support he commanded from the Liberals, would free Mocho Hernández in order to curry support from the Nacionalistas. Such a move could conceivably hand the presidency to the Mochistas because of the split within the Liberal party. It was thus clear that in order to prevent the Mochistas from assuming power a deal would have to be worked out with the cabito, as Castro was to be called later.

Matos therefore accepted his appointment as Delegado de la Paz, leaving Caracas together with José Manuel Revenga on October 3 to negotiate a new settlement with Castro. They were unavoidably delayed at La Guaira because the Spanish stokers refused to work on the Venezuelan gunboat Miranda until their wages had been paid in full. Once the dispute had been settled the Peace Delegation left on October 4, followed closely by Francis Loomis, the American Minister, on the USS Detroit. Matos was convinced that Andrade was about to release Mocho Hernández to the consternation of all Liberals, and informed Castro at their first meeting that if this occurred Vice President Rodríguez, former Defence Minister Ferrer, Caracas Commander-in-Chief Francisco González Espinosa, Army Inspector Domingo Monagas, general Francisco Batalla and Matos would intervene. It was clear to Castro after this meeting that Andrade's days were numbered and that the presidency was for the taking before Mocho Hernández was released from gaol. What needed to be done now was to secure the presidency for himself as the move to release Mocho in Caracas was imminent.

### **The Nationalists**

The position of the rebels however was not strong as their army had not grown significantly since it had taken up positions in Valencia. Only Martín Marcano in Barcelona and de Colina in Coro had pledged their support to Castro. The government on the other hand had 4000 well armed and provisioned men in La Victoria, with a further 1500 in Caracas, with practically the whole country in government hands, so it is difficult to understand the fear that the government had of a Castro victory.

A further peace settlement was attempted by Andrade through Luciano Mendoza. On October 9

he asked the US State Department to arrange a private meeting with Castro on board the USS Detroit. Castro travelled to Maracay to wait for the arrival of Andrade to reach a national accord but the president did not show up, thus leaving the rebel leader furious at this snub and breaking off negotiations. The role played by Matos further distanced Andrade from his Commander-in-Chief, with both men no longer trusting each other. Matos on October 14 saw Castro once again in his camp and proposed a peace agreement and the establishment of a Congreso de Plenipotenciarios from the 20 states, of which half would be appointed by the president and the other half by Castro, which would meet in Caracas on October 28 to oversee the resignation of Andrade. President Andrade would place at Castro's disposal the National Armoury until October 28 and half the government's revenue would accrue to the rebel leader. Castro also wanted to include a clause which reappointed the 25 congressmen who had voted against the government in April.

The following day, on October 15 in San Mateo, on board a wagon of the Ferrocarril de Venezuela, a meeting took place between Luciano Mendoza and Castro which would decide the destiny of the country. No agreement was reached however with the truce further extended by Mendoza in order for him to consult the president, but Andrade was furious at this, demanding an explanation from Mendoza who argued that a further truce had not been granted but rather that 'en reconocimiento de la intervención de Matos, autorizada por orden presidencial, ha preferido esperar antes de que sobre el caiga la responsabilidad de una ruptura.' (Velásquez, 1960: 237) Andrade also found the clause in the peace treaty which included the congressmen who voted against the government unacceptable because 'hace miembros del Congreso de Plenipotenciarios a los veinticinco parlamentarios que en las sesiones de la Cámaras, en abril, se opusieron a su reforma constitucional y salvaron su voto.' (Velásquez, 1960: 237) Castro on the advice of Matos together with Víctor Rodríguez, the Vice President and Drs Raimundo Andueza Palacio and Guillermo Tell Villegas Pulido, would later agree to drop this particular clause. Andrade now threatened the Liberals and Castro with freeing Mocho Hernández from La Rotunda prison. It is from this point onwards that Mendoza ceased to support the president.

Andrade, who is becoming more isolated politically, is left only with the Mochista option to play with, something the Liberals know only too well. The political situation in Caracas becomes more confused, with the directors of the Partido Liberal Nacionalista, viz, Drs. Alejandro Urbaneja, David Lobo, Ricardo Castillo Chapellín, Régulo Franquiz, Pedro Tomás Vegas and Eloy Escobar together with the Interior Minister Dr Fernando Arvelo, reaching a secret agreement in which Mocho Hernández would be immediately released from prison and appointed head of the army, Andrade would resign from the presidency and later a cabinet would be appointed composed of five ministers from Andrade's government and the rest, including the War Ministry, named by Mocho Hernández, with the latter acting as president.

The Nacionalista coup was expected at any time and the Liberals on their part led by the Ministers Diego Bautista Ferrer and Francisco González Espinoza, the Comandante de Armas of Caracas, were also preparing to take emergency measures to check the conservatives, especially as Andrade seemed incapable of doing anything. During the evening of the 19th Andrade had a long conversation with Matos who informed the President that his days were numbered. At

around midnight 'un petardo estallo en el zaguán de la casa de Matos', (Velásquez, 1960: 238) and the immediate thought was that the Mochistas were responsible for this. By dawn Andrade was receiving news of a possible military uprising in Caracas, and when he tried to get hold of general Orihuela, the Jefe de la Guardia Civil Montada, in order to inspect the capital's barracks he received no reply nor for that matter from Ferrer, Governor Leal or Commander Gonzalo Espinoza because, like himself, they were planning their next move. At this stage Andrade ordered all political prisoners to be freed and that he would take with him Mocho Hernández to Macuto, a seaside resort next to La Guaira, but nobody listened. It was at this moment that the president finally realised that all was lost, leaving for La Guaira where in the evening of the 20 October he departs for the British West Indies on board the Bolívar. Ironically, at the time of his departure, Matos was frantically trying to get hold of him to inform him of Castro's acceptance to the changes in the Peace Treaty.

### **A New President**

In Caracas there is general confusion when Vice President general Víctor Rodríguez takes over as president on October 20 as he is unable to decide on his next move. One group of Liberals, the continuistas of 1892 and headed by ex-presidents Andueza Palacio and Villegas Pulido advise that Castro should be given the presidential chair, but the writer Jacinto López, Víctor Rodríguez's new Secretary General, had another idea, which was to surround the new president with capable people who could give him sound advice, and counselling that as a first move he should appoint his own cabinet. Matos is opposed to this move as he wants a candidate whom he thinks he can control at Miraflores palace and insists that power should be handed over to Castro. But López maintains that Rodríguez can continue and informs him that he already has a number of people who would be willing to form part of the new government. In addition, as we have seen, government forces controlled most of the country so that to relinquish power as suggested by Matos would be 'un acto sin gloria, de traición colectiva y de irresponsabilidad total.' (Velásquez, 1960: 239) A compromise solution would be to name a junta composed of José Ignacio Pulido, Cipriano Castro and Luciano Mendoza. In the end, Rodríguez finds López's advice to go it alone the most compelling and appoints his new cabinet headed by Dr Juan Francisco Castillo, the opposition presidential candidate defeated by Andrade., and composed of Eduardo Calcaño, Manuel Clemente Urbaneja, the ex-President Juan Pablo Rojas Paúl, Diego Bautista Ferrer, Heriberto Gordon and José Rafael Ricart.

Twenty four hours later however the views of Matos had prevailed and the new government on 21 October declared its intention of handing over power to Castro. A commission headed by the ex-president Guillermo Tell Villegas Pulido and composed of Manuel Modesto Gallego, Torcuato Ortega Martínez, Bernabé Planas, Carlos Urrutía and Elias Rodríguez, leaves Caracas for Valencia to offer the presidency to Castro and to sign a peace treaty with him, and then to accompany him in his triumphant entry to Caracas. Under article 151 of the constitution the government could enter into such treaties in order to bring to an end acts of civil war. It was argued that the rebel forces had superior power compared with the government which was clearly untrue. Castro accepted the presidency and the entourage left for Caracas, stopping at Maracay where the peace treaty is signed between Castro and the government's representatives.

### Castro arrives in Caracas

Castro who had just celebrated his 42 birthday was accompanied by Matos and Luciano Mendoza on his train trip to Caracas arriving on October 22 at 5 o'clock in the afternoon to be met by a host of public officials, and 'then conducted in an open carriage through streets lined with government troops and curious spectators to the presidential palace.'(Sullivan, 1974: 132) That evening at a sumptuous banquet given by Vice President Rodríguez, with most of the high government personalities going to the Casa Amarilla to congratulate Castro, who declared that his administration would bring 'nuevos hombres, nuevos ideales y nuevos procedimientos'. The following day in the Salón Elíptico of the Capitolio, Víctor Rodríguez formally hands over power to Castro, whose first political act is to free all political prisoners, including Mocho Hernández.

Castro arrived in Caracas a virtual prisoner of the troops of Luciano Mendoza and Loreto Lima, which were superior in numbers and in quality to Castro's 2,000 men billeted in Valencia. Consequently, Castro instead of appointing new faces to his administration is forced out of political expediency to include in his new cabinet the old 'caudillos' such as the ex-Presidents Raimundo Andueza Palacio (Foreign Minister) and the leader of the Liberales Continuistas, Guillermo Tell Villegas Pulido, Juan Pablo Rojas Paúl, and Juan Francisco Castillo (Interior Minister), Andrade's rival in the Liberal Crespistas and the defeated presidential candidate of 1897, together with generals Víctor Rodríguez (Public Works Minister), the ex-Vice President, Luciano Mendoza, Ramón Guerra, Celestino Peraza and Jose Ignacio Pulido (War Minister). In addition, Mocho Hernández, the lifelong enemy of the Liberales Amarillos is also appointed to Castro's new cabinet as Development Minister but a few days later he slipped out of Caracas and declared himself opposed to the new government. Castro's cabinet which was predominantly made up of Liberals with Mocho Hernández the only representative of the Nacionalistas, had the merit of uniting all Liberal factions, something which Crespo and Andrade had failed to do.

To the dismay of the Tachirenses, Castro's original backers, not one single Andino was appointed to his first cabinet, only managing to secure initially 'secondary and tertiary positions in the bureaucracy, a monopoly of high offices in Táchira, a few important posts in the Federal District, and some staff positions in the armed forces.'(Sullivan, 1974: 151-2) This is not unreasonable however given that in the latter stage of the campaign they had played a relatively minor role in Castro's quest for power. Castro, as we have seen, reached power by default and as Sullivan writes as long as he 'had to rely on traditionalists for military and financial support, old men, old ideas and old methods would prevail. The Caracas...elite would not have accepted a superimposed hierarchy of Andinos. (Sullivan, 1974: 151-2) Castro did not want to challenge the Guzmán Blanco traditionalist system that had ruled the country for over forty years, but also he would not be a puppet as the old caudillos soon realized.

Castro's administration from 1899 to 1908 was characterised by a whole series of crises both internal and external which at any moment seemed capable of toppling him. In December 1901 his erstwhile friends, the Liberal caudillos combined under the leadership of Manuel Antonio Matos to start the Libertadora revolution which at one stage controlled almost the whole of the country with the exception of Caracas and the Andean states. To compound the government's

troubles in the middle of this revolution the Allied powers, the UK, Germany and later Italy, in December 1902 instituted a 'peaceful blockade' of Venezuela to get the government to honour the claims which various nationals had pursued over a number of years. At the outset of the Libertadora revolution, Gómez was named Head of the Expeditionary Force assembled to crush the rebels. It was during this revolution that Gómez showed his true military capacity. After several skirmishes and combats he was seriously wounded in the thigh in Carúpano Rolando, on May 6, 1902 while fighting against Nicolás Rolando. After his recovery he was appointed acting President from July 5 1902 to March 20 1903 during which he had to deal with the Allied 'peaceful blockade' and was instrumental in bringing much needed arms and ammunition against all odds to the besieged government troops of Castro at La Victoria, who eventually defeated the Matos army in Central Venezuela.

Gómez finally pacified the country on July 21 1903 when he defeated the last bastion of rebels in Ciudad Bolívar under Nicolás Rolando, returning in triumph to La Guaira on August 3 1903 as a national hero, and receiving from Castro the title of el salvador del salvador, while Congress named him El Pacificador de Venezuela, and declared July 21 a national holiday which would be celebrated as the Día de la Paz. From now on Gómez's military skill would go unquestioned, acknowledged by friend and foe alike as the regime's ablest military man after Castro, with some contemporary writers acknowledging that he was the epitome of 'el valor, lealtad y el honor en su mayor plenitud'. (González D., 1904: 13) For the first time since his arrival in Caracas with Castro, Gómez's popularity soared, something which would stand him in good stead in the coming years.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen that Castro and to a lesser extent Gómez during the 1880s and 1890s became a regional political figure in Táchira, playing a minor role in the affairs of the country. It is unlikely that Gómez would have entered politics had it not been for Castro, as he was much happier developing his business ventures. Although he had acted in a very small way in a rebellion in the 1880s, had Castro not invited him to join him in 1899 it is likely that Gómez would have remained a local businessman of some stature. As it was his innate commercial and political talents were put to good use by Castro. His sense of survival would also ensure that he would remain in government and in the end topple his compadre in December 1908.

The arrival of Castro and his compadre Gómez at the presidency in 1899 was a considerable success for a group of men with little or no experience of government. There had been countless such local rebellions in the past which would end as soon as they started. What is clearly outstanding about Castro and his rebels is that they were able to achieve power and to maintain themselves in government and prosper in an alien environment, without a strong political base. The appearance of the men from the Andes would change the political landscape of the country for ever because they had upset the political equilibrium which Guzmán Blanco and his Liberal supporters had developed between the commercial bourgeoisie and the local regional caudillos. The result was that the local caudillos would increasingly see their position in jeopardy and would later rebel against Castro, with Mocho Hernández the first to go against him. Some such as Matos felt that Castro was totally manageable, and such a conclusion did not seem

inappropriate as the rebels from Táchira had arrived in power by default, into a power vacuum created by the internal bickering of the Liberal party. It is to their credit that they were able to adjust quickly to national politics and in the end dominate the country to such an extent that this small band of men would rule the country for the next forty five years.

### Endnotes

1. Gómez's ancestors came from Colombia and had been involved in the independence movement. His great grandfather, was José del Rosario García Bustamante, who the was son of Eluterio García Rovira, a neogranadine hero and brother of Custodio García Rovira, martyr of Colombia. José del Rosario García Bustamante, Gómez grandfather who was born in Cúcuta, owned 'La Mulera' in Táchira. He had three sons with Ana Dolores Gómez Nieto, his common law wife, Pedro Cornelio, Fernando and Silverio. Pedro Cornelio, father of Gómez inherited La Mulera. The same José del Rosario García Bustamante married María Concepción Bustamante, who was related to him and had two sons, Eleuterio and José Rosario García, paternal half brothers to Pedro Cornelio. Through the Bustamante surname came the family relation between Gómez, José María García, José Rosario García and Rafael Velasco Bustamante.
2. The crime was never solved.
3. Equivalent to US\$41,512 in 2002.
4. Others include Josefa, who married Carlos Delfino; Flor who married José María Cárdenas; Graciela who married Julio F Méndez; Servilia who married Ignacio Andrade Sosa; Gonzalo who married Josefina Leyva and José Vicente who married Josefina Revenga.
5. Equivalent to US\$124,536 in 2002.
6. Ignacio Andrade's father was general Escolástico Andrade, a hero of the Wars of Independence. Andrade finished his schooling in the US and was a man 'de amplios conocimientos y de excelente formación en el campo de la administración comercial.' Bello Rodríguez, 1979: vii)
7. With Castro were J.V. Gómez, Joaquín Garrido, Manuel Antonio Pulido, Froilan Prato, José Maréa Méndez, Emilio Fernández, Elias Sayago, Régulo Olivares, Pedro María Cárdenas, Miguel Contreras, Guillermo Aranguren, Luis Varela, Jose antonio Dávila, Jorge Bello, Maximiano Casanova, Secundino Torres, Román Moreno, Santiago Briceño Ayesterán, Eulogio Moros, Andrés Amaya. Also Gómez's brother Aníbal, Castro's brothers Carmelo and Trino. There were also youngsters such as: Eliseo Sarmiento, Roberto Pulido, Graciano Castro, Clodomiro Sánchez, Elias Sayago(hijo), Felipe Peralta, Calixto Escalante, T. Morales Rocha, Benjamín Olivieri, Ovidio Salas, Teófilo Velasco, Manuel Rugeles, José R. Dávila, Salvano Briceño, José María García, Rafael María Velasco, and Eleázar López Contreras.
8. For a further discussion on the campaign itself see Guerrero, 1903, Paredes, 1954, Briceño Ayesterán, 1948, Picón Salas, 1953 and Velásquez, 1960.
9. Matos was born on January 8, 1847 at his father's hacienda of Campanero, near Puerto Cabello, and at

the age of 12 was sent to New York to school and later at 15 went to Europe. In 1868 at the age of 21 he started a small trading house in La Guaira and in 1875 married Maria Ibarra, sister of Guzmán Blanco's wife.

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