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Biographical Brief On Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez

by John Neagle

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Venezuela's new president, Carlos Andres Perez, will assume power on Feb. 2. Born on October 27, 1922, in Rubio, located close to the Colombian border, Perez spent his childhood on his family's ranch. At age 15, he became an activist for the prescribed National Democratic Party (PDN). The PDN was the precursor of today's ruling social democrat party, Accion Democratica (AD). In 1939, after Perez's family moved to Caracas, he became president of the "Liceo Andres Bello" Student Union (Centro Estudiantil). In 1942, Perez attended an AD convention for the first time as a party youth leader. In 1945, young Perez participated in the movement to overthrow Gen. Isaias Medina Angarita. A year later, President Romulo Betancur appointed Perez to serve as secretary for his Council of Ministries. In 1948, Perez married his cousin, Blanca Rodriguez. The couple has six children. In November, 1948, after a coup deposed President Romulo Gallegos, Perez was imprisoned for 12 months along with other government officials. Upon his release from prison, Perez was forced to leave the country. Perez returned to Venezuela in 1958, after Maj. Marcos Perez Jimenez was deposed and exiled to the US. In that year, civilian rule was reestablished, and has continued to the present. In 1960, Perez was appointed Interior Minister, a post that he resigned in 1962 in order to become chief of the AD bloc in the national congress. In 1972 he became the AD's presidential candidate, and was elected in late 1973. In 1976, Perez nationalized Venezuela's petroleum and steel industries. Perez's term in office was marked by an oil bonanza for Venezuela, when oil sold for \$30 per barrel. The country earned \$30 billion a year in oil exports. Large-scale steelworks, aluminum processing and hydroelectric projects were implemented in the 1970s. Venezuela's diplomatic corps in the 1970s also gained prominence. Together with other governments, such as the the administration Mexican President Luis Echeverria, Venezuela pushed for the creation of regional cooperation organizations. An example is the Latin American Economic System (SELA), founded in October 1975. In recent years, Venezuela's economic fortunes have taken a nosedive. Low oil prices on the world market reduced oil export revenues to \$8 billion per year. Inflation is now considered chronic, averaging at about 40% per year. During the past five years, the bolivar was devalued by over 300%. The national government's deficit is running close to \$4 billion. Venezuela's foreign debt totals about \$30 billion. During the administration of outgoing Jaime Lusinchi, Caracas paid some \$26 billion in debt service. Perez has also changed. He no longer speaks of nationalizations, and supports the privatization of unprofitable state-run enterprises. (Basic data from Notimex, 01/31/89)

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