

Labor and Politics in Panama: The Torrijos Years

The relationship between labor and politics in Panama has been a complex and dynamic one, marked by both cooperation and conflict. During the Torrijos years (1968-1981), this relationship was particularly fraught, as the government sought to control and co-opt the labor movement while labor unions played a key role in shaping political outcomes.



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by Mark Emery

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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Labor and Politics in Panama Before Torrijos

Prior to the Torrijos years, Panama's labor movement was relatively weak and fragmented. The first labor unions were formed in the early 20th century, but they were often suppressed by the government. In the 1950s and 1960s, the labor movement began to grow stronger, but it was still divided along ideological and political lines.

The Torrijos Years

In 1968, Omar Torrijos came to power in a military coup. Torrijos was a populist who promised to improve the lives of Panama's poor and working class. He also promised to increase Panama's control over the Panama Canal, which was then controlled by the United States.

Torrijos's policies had a significant impact on the labor movement. He legalized strikes and other forms of labor protest, and he increased the minimum wage. He also created the National Workers' Center (CNT), a government-controlled labor confederation that was intended to co-opt the labor movement.

The CNT was successful in bringing many of Panama's labor unions under its control. However, some unions remained independent, and they continued to criticize Torrijos's government.

In 1977, Torrijos negotiated a new treaty with the United States that gave Panama control of the Panama Canal. This treaty was a major victory for Torrijos, and it helped to increase his popularity among Panamanians.

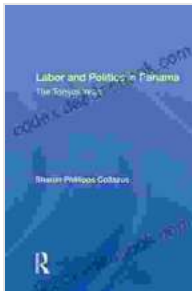
However, Torrijos's popularity began to decline in the late 1970s. The economy was struggling, and there was growing dissatisfaction with Torrijos's authoritarian rule. In 1981, Torrijos died in a plane crash.

The Aftermath of the Torrijos Years

After Torrijos's death, the labor movement in Panama continued to play a key role in politics. However, the CNT was weakened by internal divisions, and it was no longer able to control the labor movement as effectively as it had under Torrijos.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the labor movement in Panama became increasingly independent and critical of the government. Labor unions played a key role in the overthrow of President Manuel Noriega in 1989, and they have continued to be a powerful force in Panamanian politics.

The relationship between labor and politics in Panama during the Torrijos years was a complex and dynamic one. Torrijos's policies had a significant impact on the labor movement, and the labor movement played a key role in shaping political outcomes. After Torrijos's death, the labor movement in Panama continued to be a powerful force in politics, and it remains so today.



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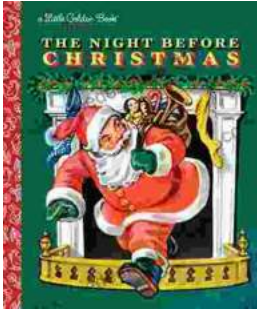
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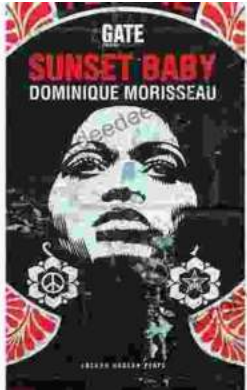
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