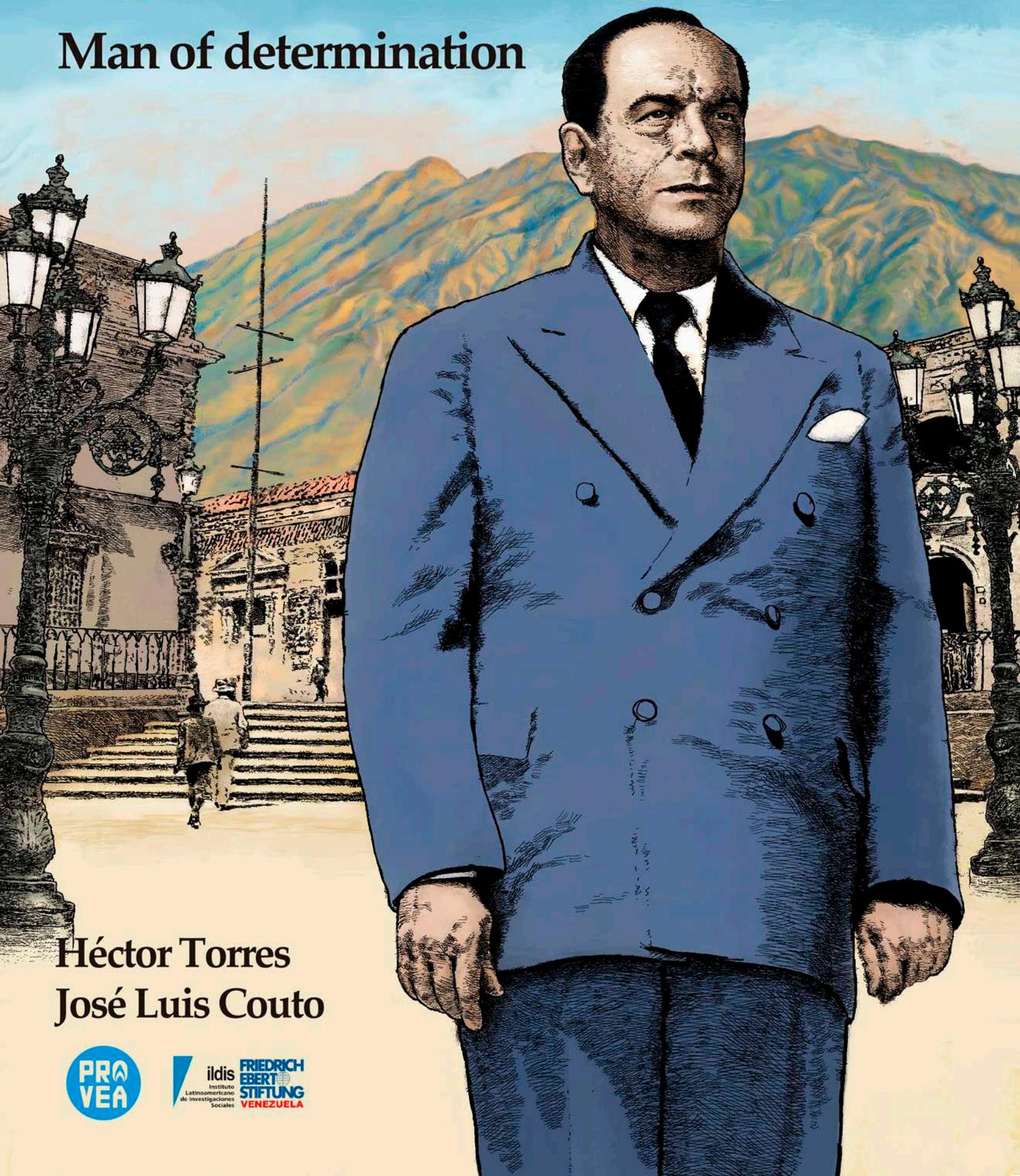


# GALLEGOS

Man of determination



Héctor Torres  
José Luis Couto



Wm. C. C. C.

**Gallegos. A man of determination.**

Hector Torres. Jose Luis Couto

First edition: Diciembre 2022

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© From the script: Hector Torres

© From the illustrations: José Luis Couto

Historical research: Neller Ochoa

Translation: José Rafael Medina

Layout: Rafael Uzcátegui

Made in Impresos Minipres

Printed in Venezuela

ISBN: 978-980-6544-69-7

Depósito Legal: DC2021001843

Made the deposit indicated by law

Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos (Provea)

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Rif: J-00912473-9

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# **GALLEGOS**

**A man of determination**

# FOREWORD

A pirogue sails down the Arauca river along its right bank. Thus begins the classic of Venezuelan literature *Doña Bárbara*, once an essential reading for analog high school students. In times when *Google* was a mere fable of science fiction, for many the shortcut to learn about the plot and the characters of the novel and answer, with some degree of accuracy, the questions of the final exam was the film by Fernando de Fuentes and Miguel Delgado (1943), starred by María Félix and Julián Soler. Since neither *Netflix* nor *YouTube* existed at the time, people would rent the movie, in Betamax or VHS format, from the Mexican cinema section at their nearest video rental shop.

For the generation that attended school in the late 80s, the approach to the work of Rómulo Gallegos was traumatic. His legacy was part of the founding myth of democracy, at a time when it was in crisis. At that moment, a literary movement was beginning to flourish throughout the continent and, like all avant-garde movements, to build its identity by positioning itself in contrast to what preceded it. The pantheon at which it aimed its darts was made up of the authors of the so-called Latin American boom, with Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar and Carlos Fuentes, among others, at the forefront. Although Gallegos was not part of that group, in the absence of a Venezuelan referent, the new voices of the national letters aimed their criticism at him for symbolizing the cultural status quo. Voluntarist, impatient and immature Venezuelans used to believe that history was a linear process toward happiness. And that nothing could jeopardize what we had built up to that point. The lesson, as we now know, has been as hard as bitter. But if the insight into Gallegos was never gentle for teenagers back then, the man is nowadays a blurred character from a bygone Venezuela for younger generations.

In its quest for diluting collective memory and identity, the totalitarian aspiration has launched an offensive at three levels: The self-image of the Venezuelan people; how we interact with each other and, finally, how we interact with our surroundings. In short, the strategy involved the imposition of a historical narrative and the erosion of civic references; the destruction of the grassroots associative and horizontal fabric through the statization of everyday life and, thirdly, the destruction of the institutional checks and balances and stripping democracy of its content. For this reason, the work of rebuilding the country is a political, economic, social and anthropological endeavor to regain a decent and autonomous life project that aspires to satisfy our material, affective and emotional needs.

This titanic challenge can only be met through the participation of all good-hearted Venezuelans. In order to overcome the socialization of distrust and suspicion, a precondition for the detachment that allowed the perpetuation of authoritarian

populism, we must deliberately promote spaces of trust, which give us back the appreciation of our community capacities. Reclaiming the artists, musicians and writers of the past is a tool for this: a memory that paves the way for a consensus on our past and future worth and allows us to walk the path together.

Rómulo Gallegos is not only a role model of idiosyncrasy, talent and sensitivity that illuminates the winding path of the country's democratic reconstruction, but also a referent for social or popular movements and, especially, for human rights activists and defenders. Not only because of the social rights that were promoted between 1945 and 1948, in which he had an outstanding role as the first Venezuelan president elected by universal, direct and secret vote, a government truncated by the sabers. Also for being the first president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), from the moment of its creation until 1963. For this reason, Gallegos can be remembered as a human rights defender. If with this work we manage to arouse curiosity to (re)discover his figure, we will be satisfied.

Finally, thanks to all the people who made this publication possible.

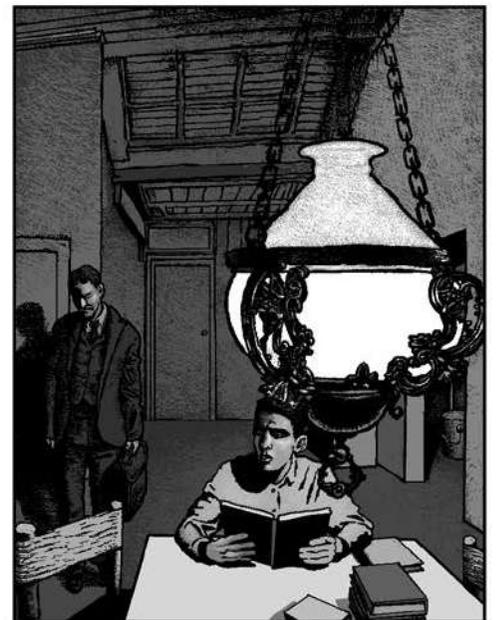
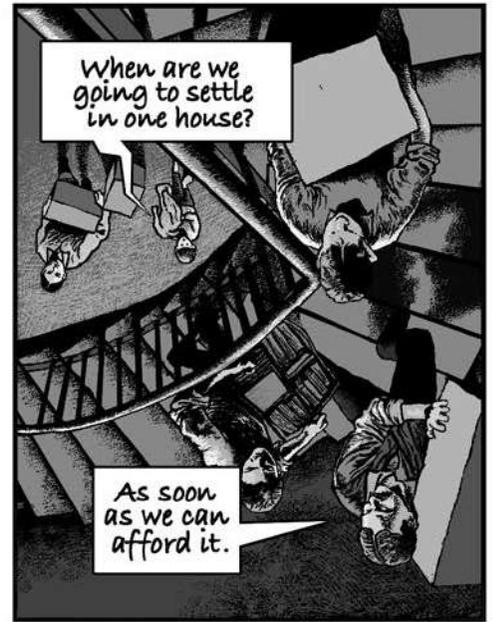
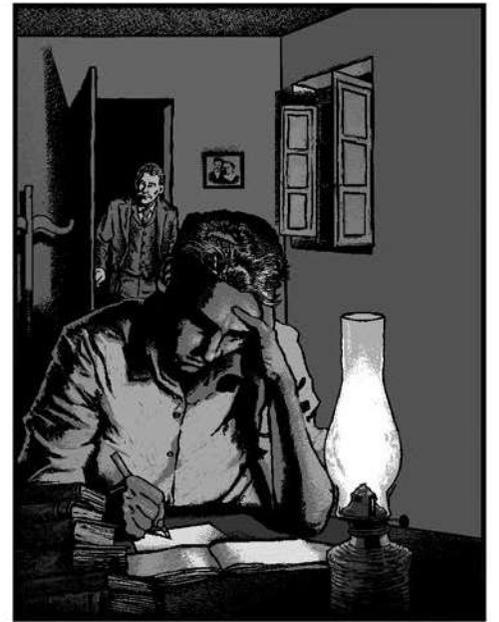
To the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation (Ildis) for sharing our aspiration to talk about human rights in all possible languages. To Hector Torres for accepting the challenge of venturing into the graphic novel. To José Luis Couto for his sleepless nights at the drafting table. To Neller Ochoa for the research work. To Carlos Ayala for historical advice. To Jesús Rosendo, from Minipress, for his patience and understanding. And finally to you, for being interested in this experiment, where we try to promote a conversation on human rights through comics.

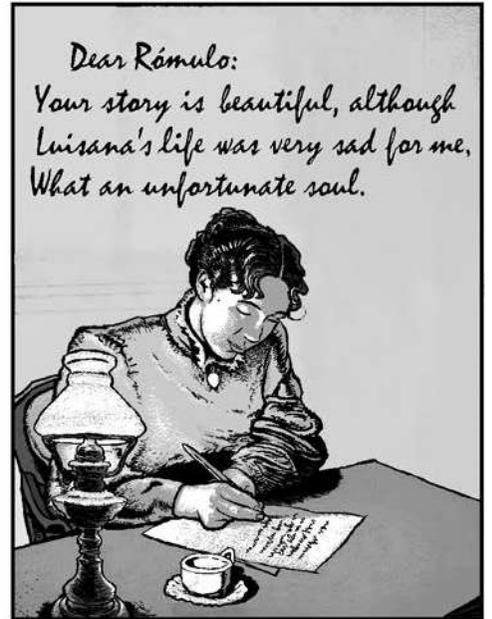
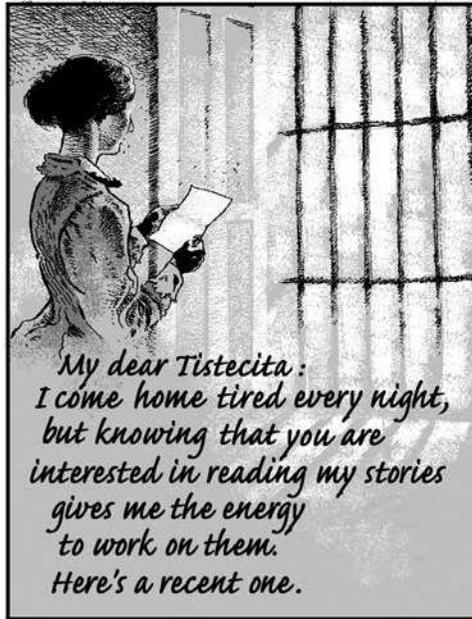
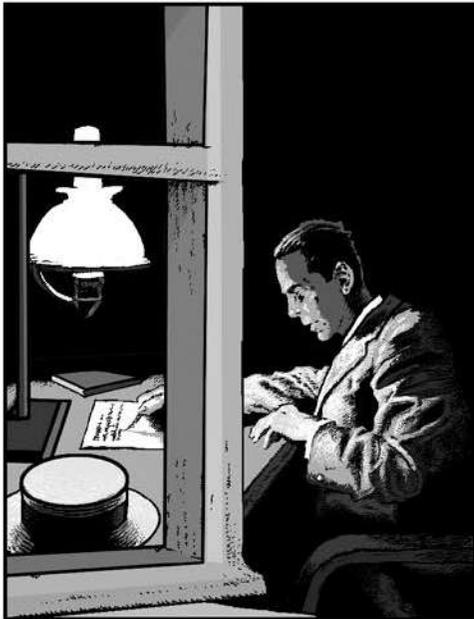
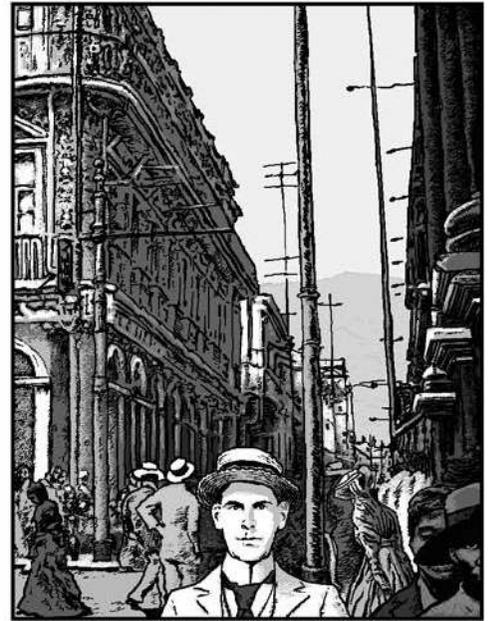
**Rafael Uzcategui**

Provea Coordinator-General

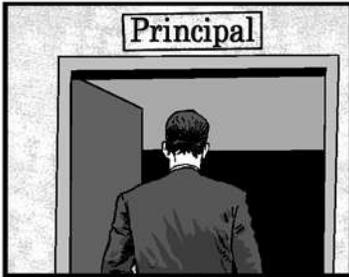
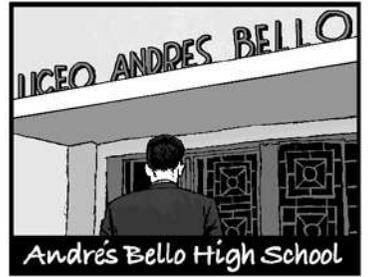


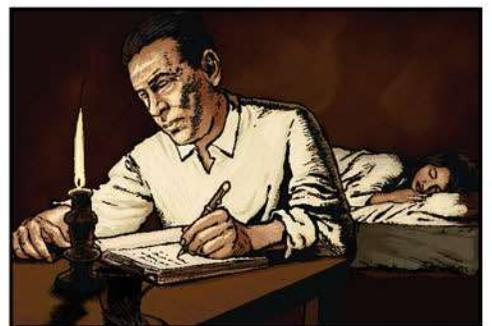
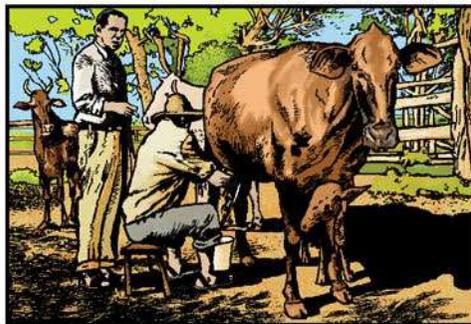
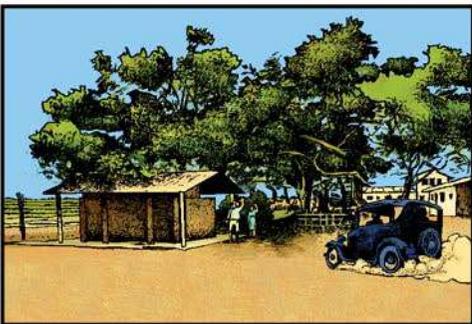
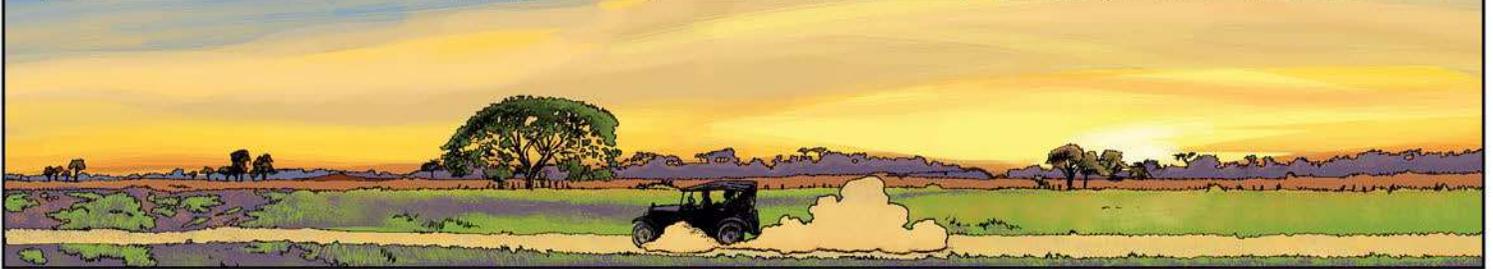
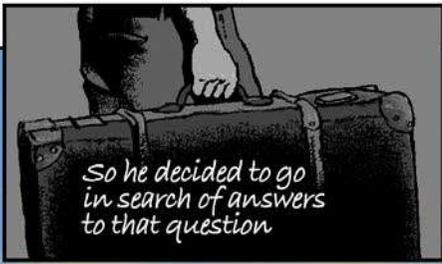
















That book is so good that it cannot be against my government, which is also very good.

Let no one mess with that book or with Don Rómulo Gallegos, and no more talk of the matter.



"...Therefore I appoint you a senator for the state of Apure because you know the man from the llanos very well."

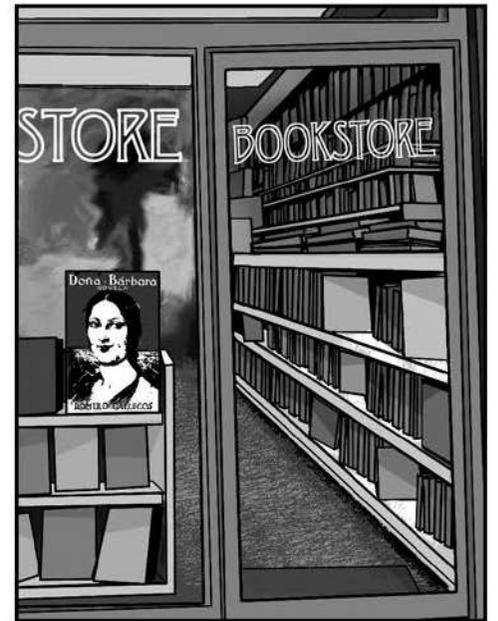




I won't make any promises.



I will write to you as soon as I have news.



"...Many copies sold and we are going to print more."

It seems that we are in front of a bestseller."



Really?

Well, bring it to me



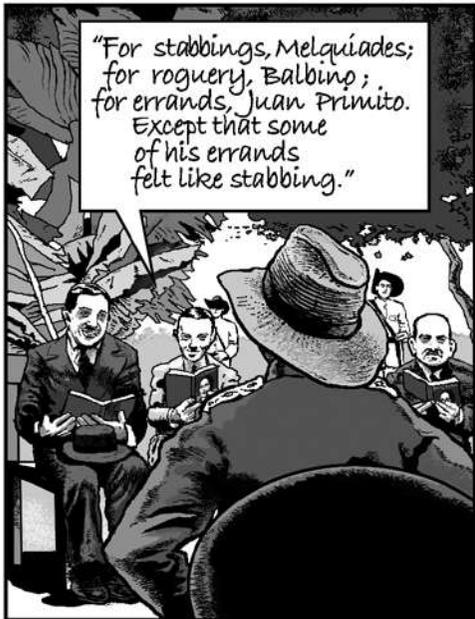
Let's see if it is true that this novel speaks ill of me.



Call Tarazona, we are going to read this novel.



"A pirogue sails down the Arauca river along its right bank"



"For stabbings, Melquiades; for roguery, Balbino; for errands, Juan Primito. Except that some of his errands felt like stabbing."

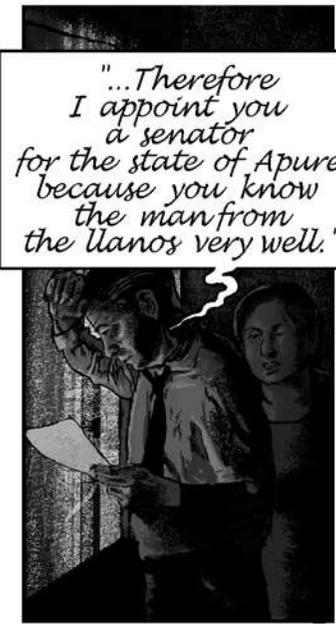


"The Venezuelan Llanos! Propitious for the effort as it was for the feat, land of open horizons where a good race loves, suffers and awaits!..."



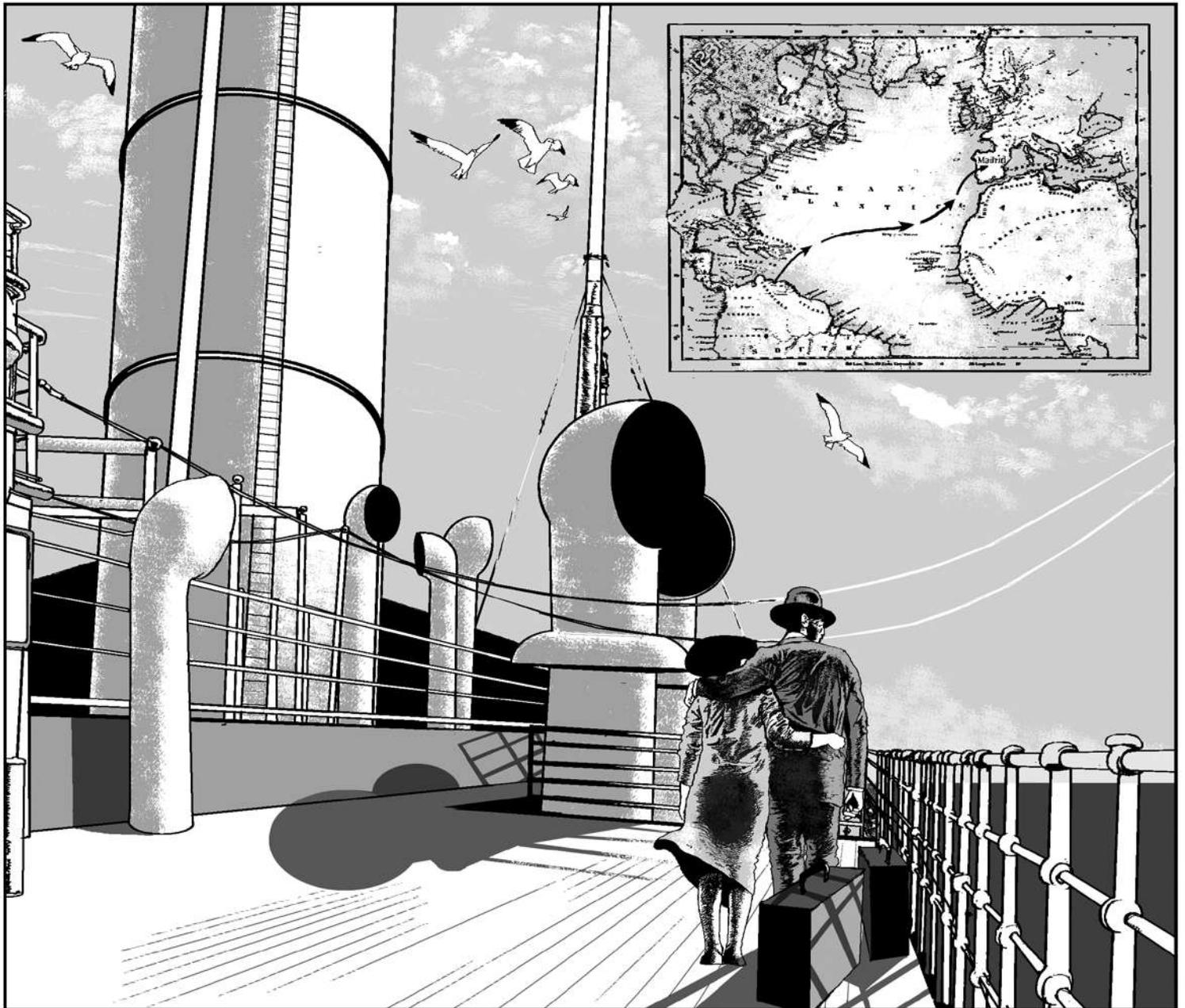
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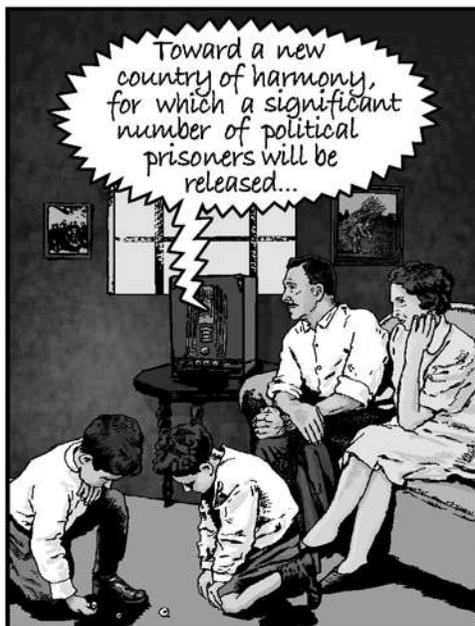
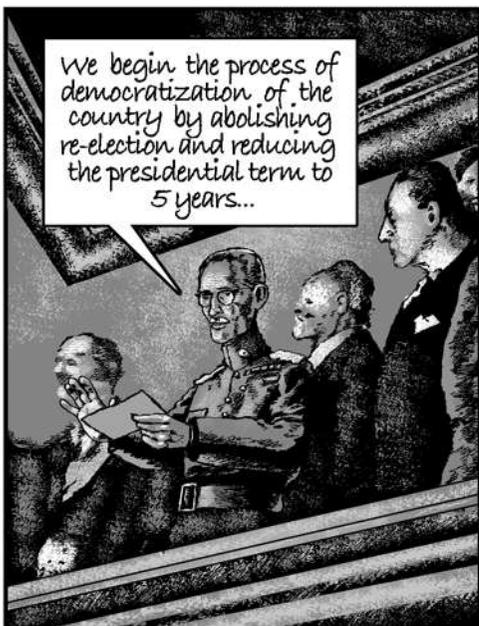
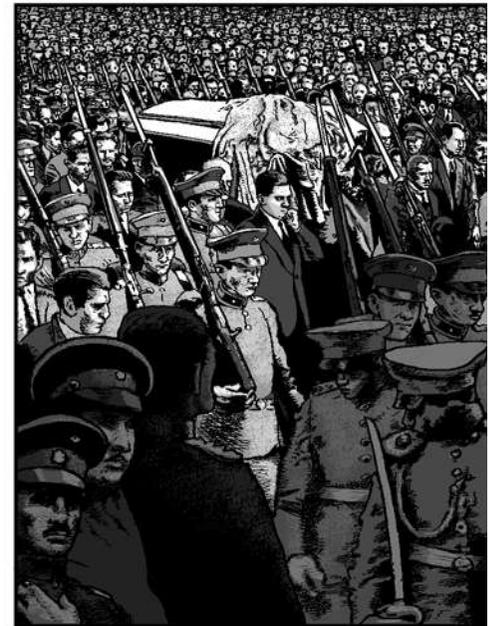
Let no one mess with that book or with Don Rómulo Gallegos. and no more talk of the matte. .



"...Therefore I appoint you a senator for the state of Apure because you know the man from the Llanos very well."



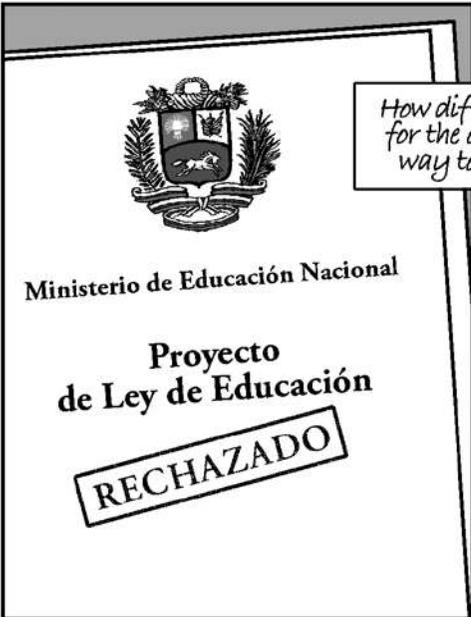
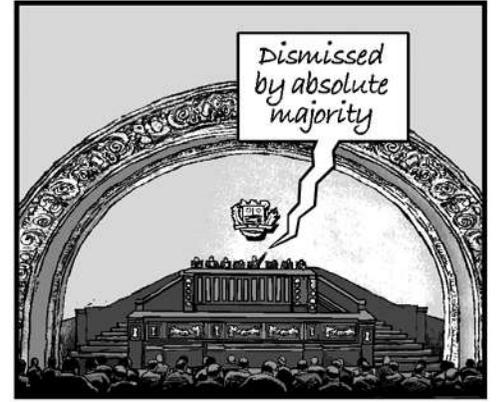




Accused of promoting a general strike, Romulo Betancourt was among the expelled but at the last minute eluded getting on the ship and went into hiding.



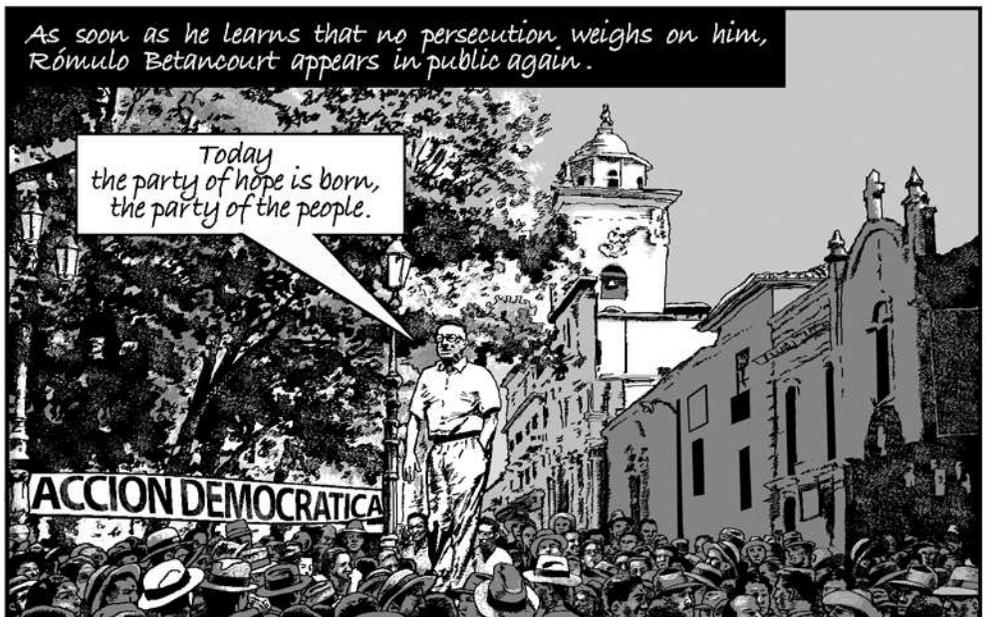
In 1937, López Contreras appointed Gallegos as Minister of Public Education.



How difficult it is for the old to give way to the new.



Given the impossibility of carrying out the reforms that I consider pertinent, I present my resignation to the position I had been holding for the consideration of your Excellency...



As soon as he learns that no persecution weighs on him, Romulo Betancourt appears in public again.

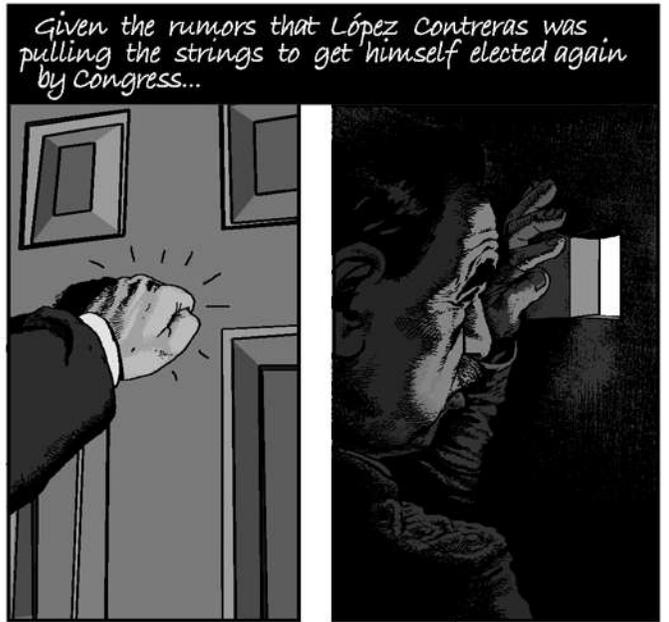


Do we have the votes?



We're working on that, General.

We have loyal men in Congress.



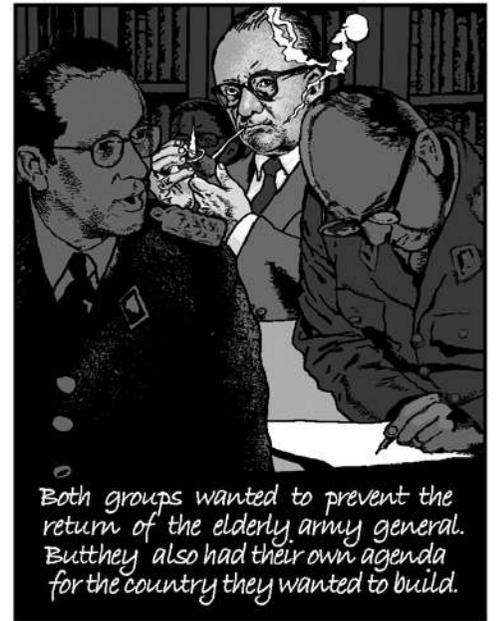
Given the rumors that López Contreras was pulling the strings to get himself elected again by Congress...



Come in, gentlemen. Sit down.



The leaders of Acción Democrática joined the conspiracy planned by members of the so-called Patriotic Military Union.



Both groups wanted to prevent the return of the elderly army general. But they also had their own agenda for the country they wanted to build.



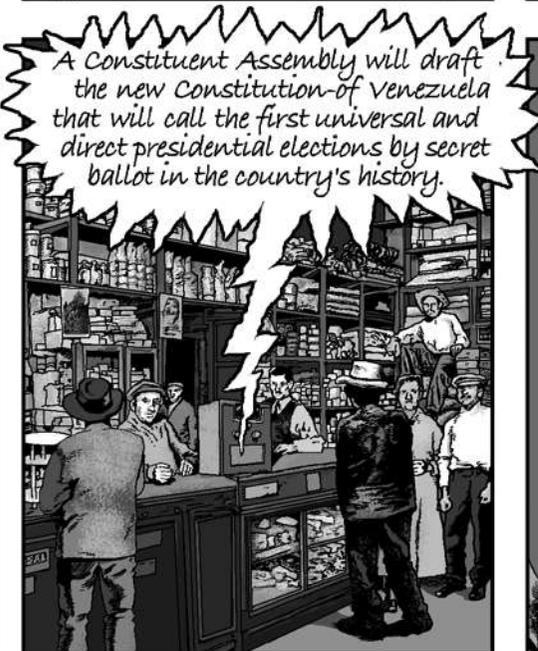
Rómulo Betancourt chairs the Revolutionary Government Junta

EL PAIS

TOTAL TRIUMPH OF THE DEMOCRATIC AND POPULAR REVOLUTION

EL NACIONAL

General Isaías Medina ousted

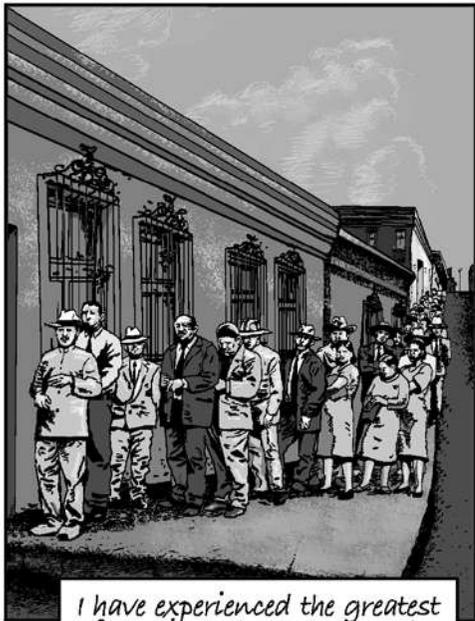
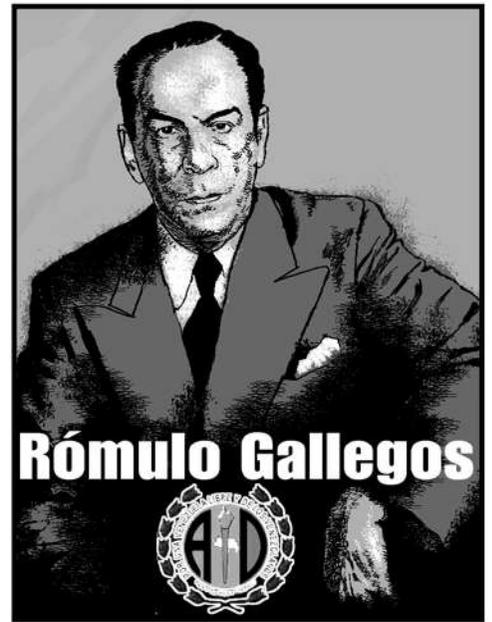
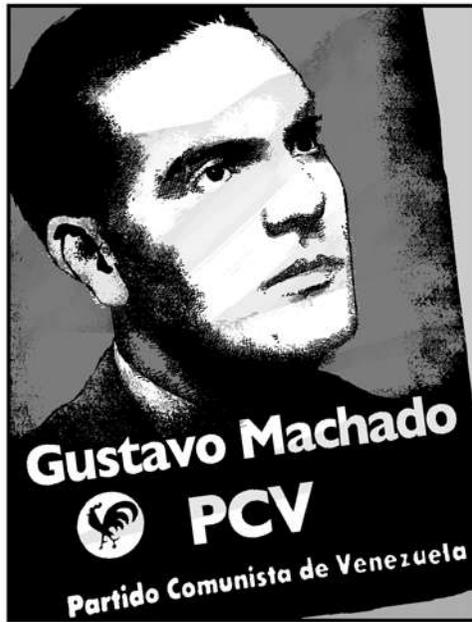


A Constituent Assembly will draft the new Constitution of Venezuela that will call the first universal and direct presidential elections by secret ballot in the country's history.

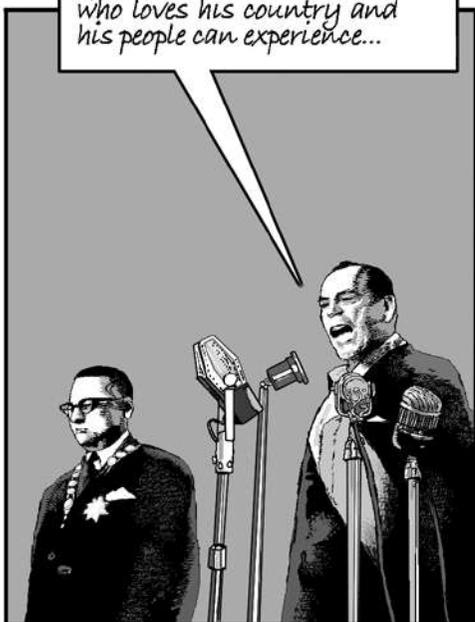
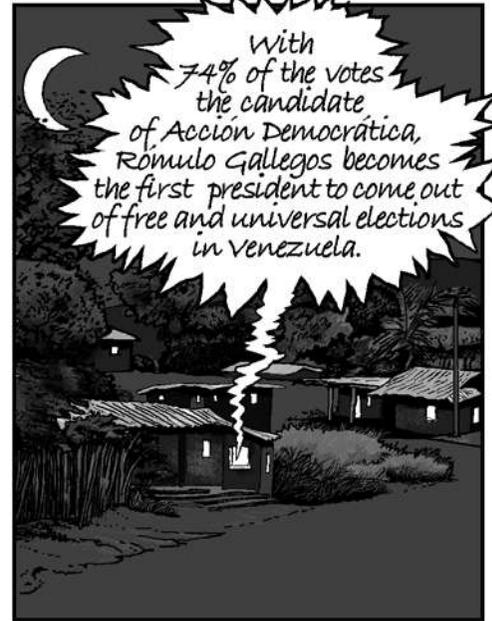


Our candidate has to be our best man.

The one who embodies the highest values of civility.



*I have experienced the greatest of emotions that a Venezuelan who loves his country and his people can experience...*



*...The feeling of knowing that under his name begins the era of the authentic recovery by the people...*



*...of their sovereign right to have the government of their choice.*



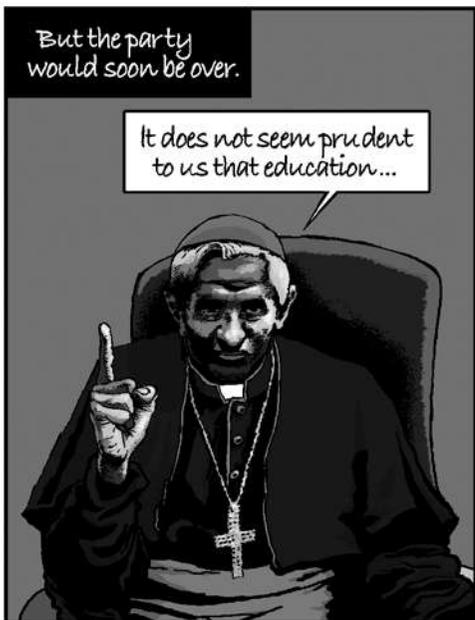
To celebrate the birth of Democracy, the Festival of Venezuelan traditions was held in Caracas's Nuevo Circo, organized by Juan Liscano.



No law prevents me from exercising the duties of the presidency from home, right, Colonel?

Well, as customary...

I hope it's not illegal because I prefer to do it that way.

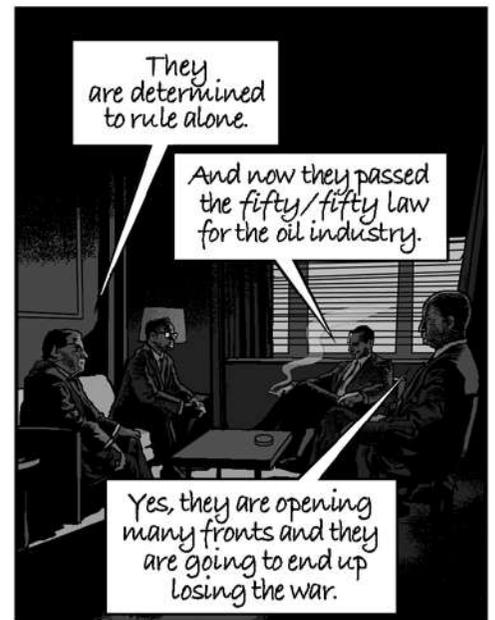


But the party would soon be over.

It does not seem prudent to us that education...



We find it inconvenient for the economic performance of the nation that...



They are determined to rule alone.

And now they passed the fifty/fifty law for the oil industry.

Yes, they are opening many fronts and they are going to end up losing the war.

On April 30, 1948, the OAS saw its birth at the Ninth International Conference of American States in Bogotá, which Gallegos attended as president of Venezuela.



The Americas need to defend their heritage of culture and freedom from the extremist preaching of international communism and other forms of totalitarianism...

The charter of the organization of American States, the inter American system for the peaceful settlement of disputes, the economic agreement, the charter of social guarantees, and the agreements on the defense and preservation of democracy in the Americas and against the perpetuation of colonialism in the hemisphere, are milestones that signal the transcendence of this assembly of peoples.



In a democracy, a president travels abroad and entrusts the power to his defense minister, who hands it over upon his return as a sign of respect for the institutions.



Months later

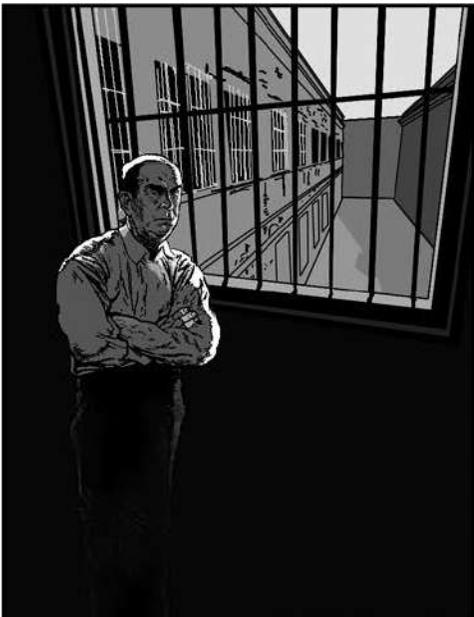
What about the rumors of instability?

You have found me in slippers. And slippers are not worn for running away.



To mitigate the governance crisis, we respectfully ask the President of the Republic to heed the following recommendations: the resignation of the entire ministerial cabinet. The resignation of the President from his position at the governing party. The exile of Rómulo Betancourt.







After a time in Havana, which they abandoned because it was too expensive, they spent a brief period in Miami until finally settling in Mexico City.



Tac Tac Tactactactac



Those who have suffered it know that exile is not a vacation package.



Tactac Tactactac Tac



But I had you, Tistecita. I had you...



Back to the life of moving, as if finding his space on earth would be difficult for a just man.



Tactac Tactac ... Tac...



From that moment on, the joy left Gallegos forever.

From now on he would only wear gray suits and black ties.



Can you change her clothes?

And what's that little crack?

He attended her services every day, from 7 to 12.

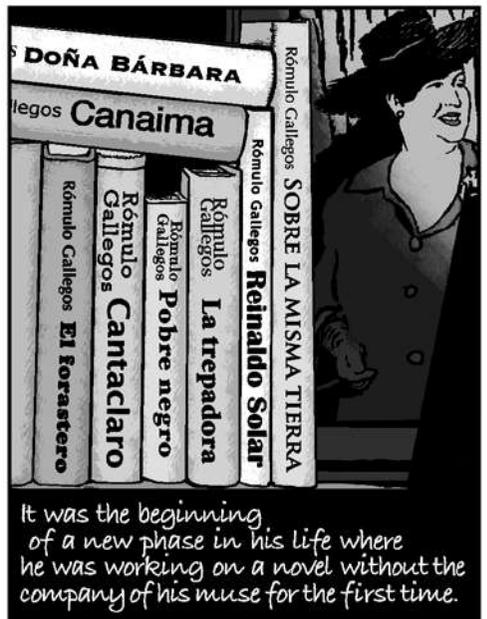
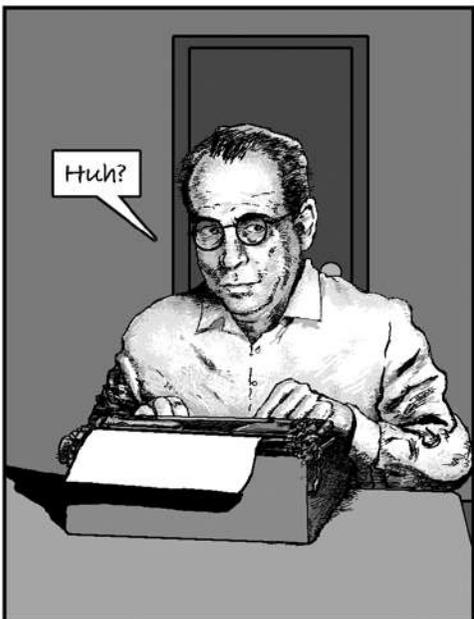
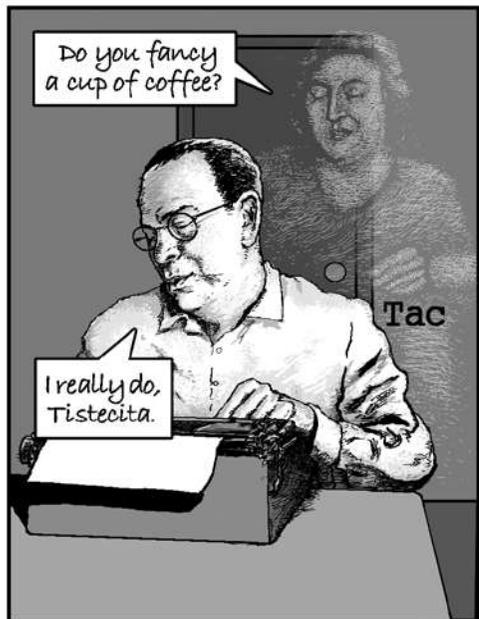
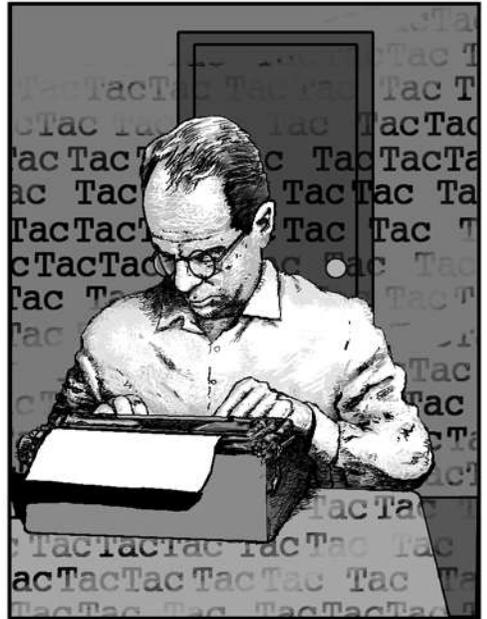
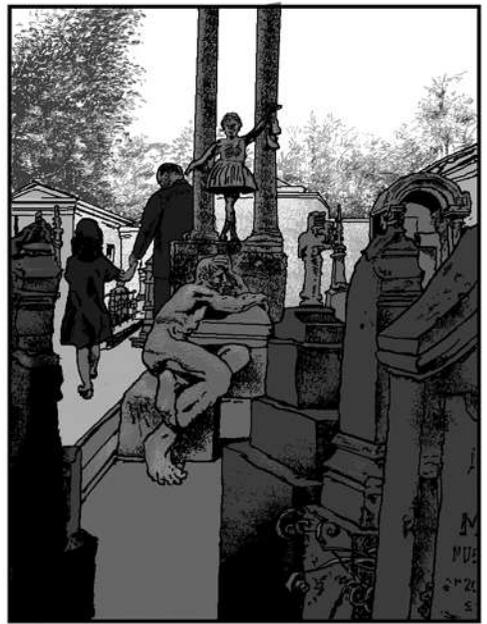


Their daughter spent months without going to school. The couple's friends, including Carlos Andrés Pérez, went to visit him and take Sonia out for a walk.

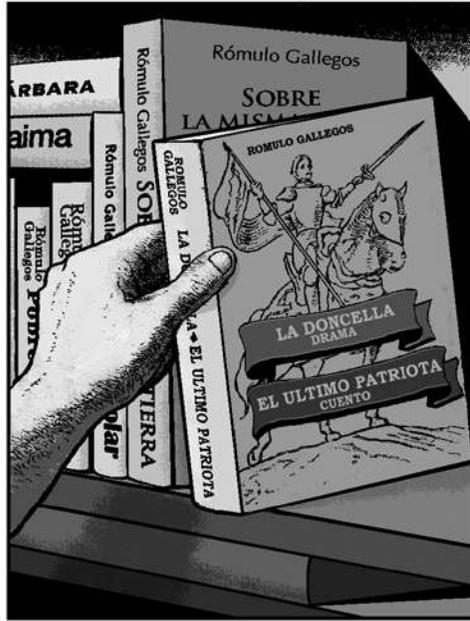


Doesn't he do anything else?

Do you want to go for ice cream?



Those were long years of loneliness and pain in which literature became his refuge.



We must return to Caracas, Tistecita. Dawn returns to our land.



Let's go to the Marisela, daddy.



No, dear. I couldn't bear to live in a place that brings back so many fond memories.



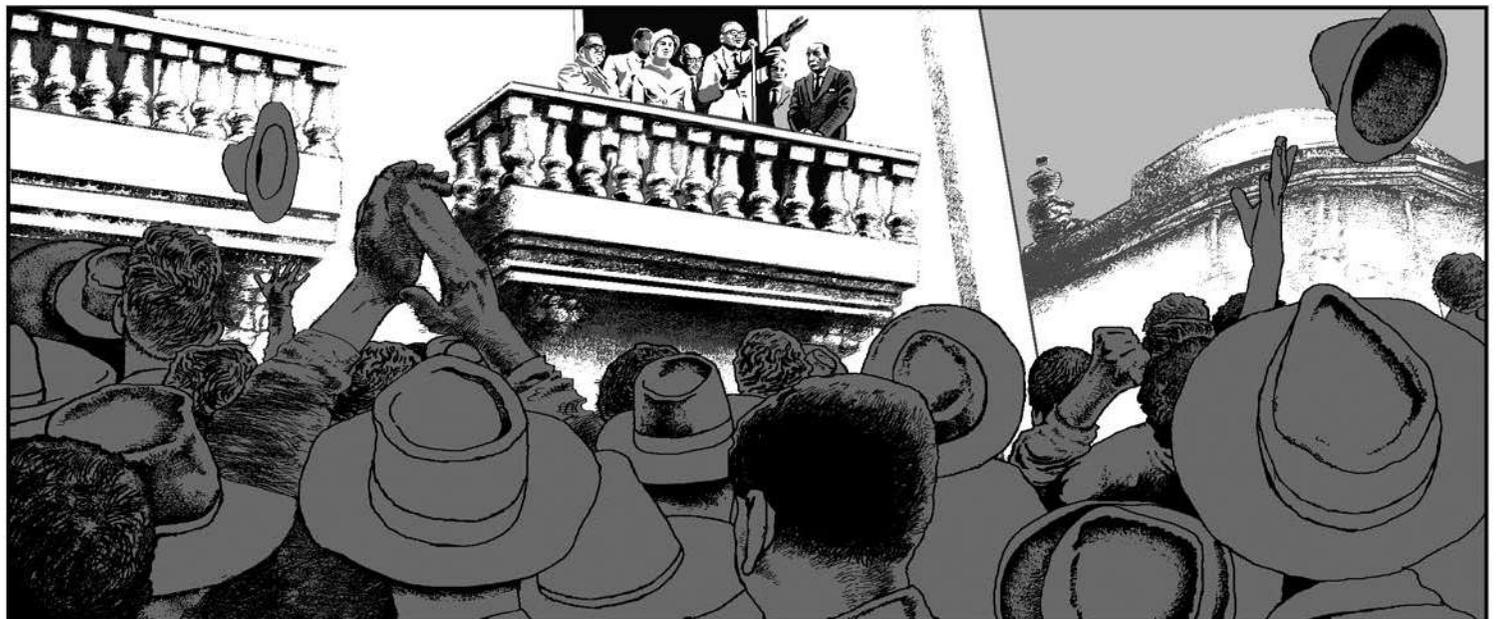
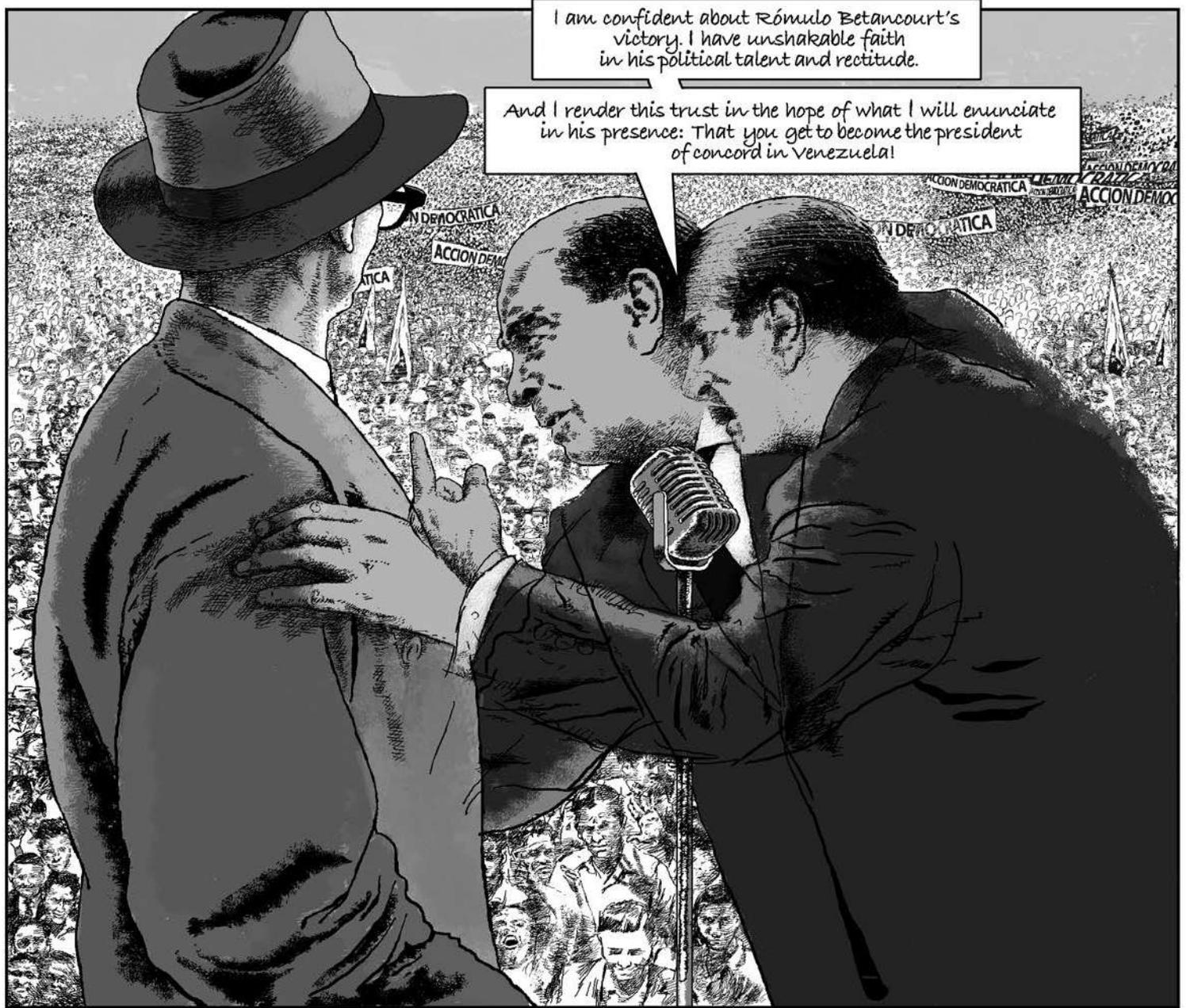
After selling the Marisela, Gallegos had another house built on Luis Roche Avenue and named it Sonia.



Betancourt is going to run and I am going to support him.

You know I'm not a man of power.





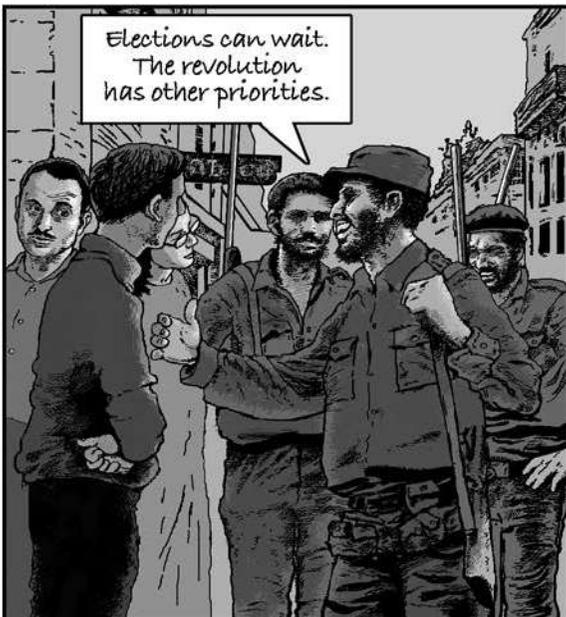
Havana, early on January 1, 1959.



The promise of free elections and a transitional government aroused many expectations.



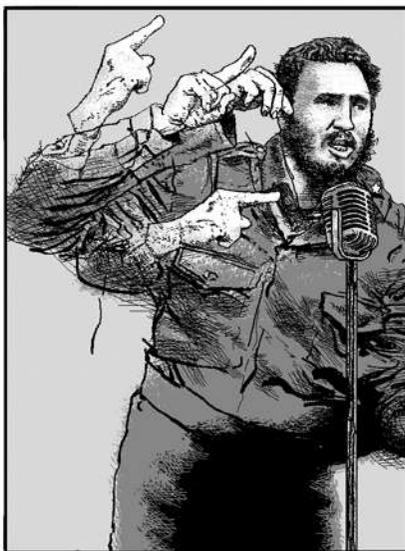
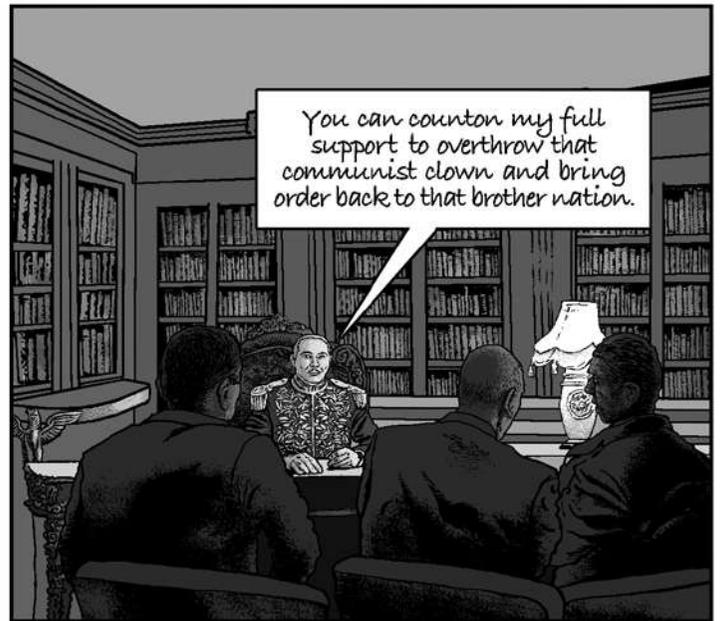
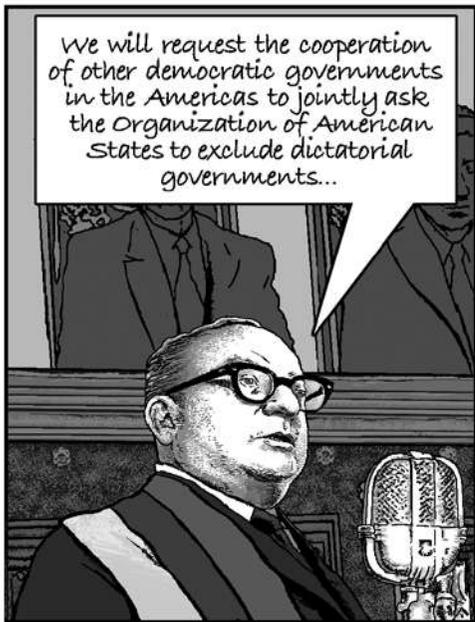
Instead of bourgeois elections, we must start a revolution



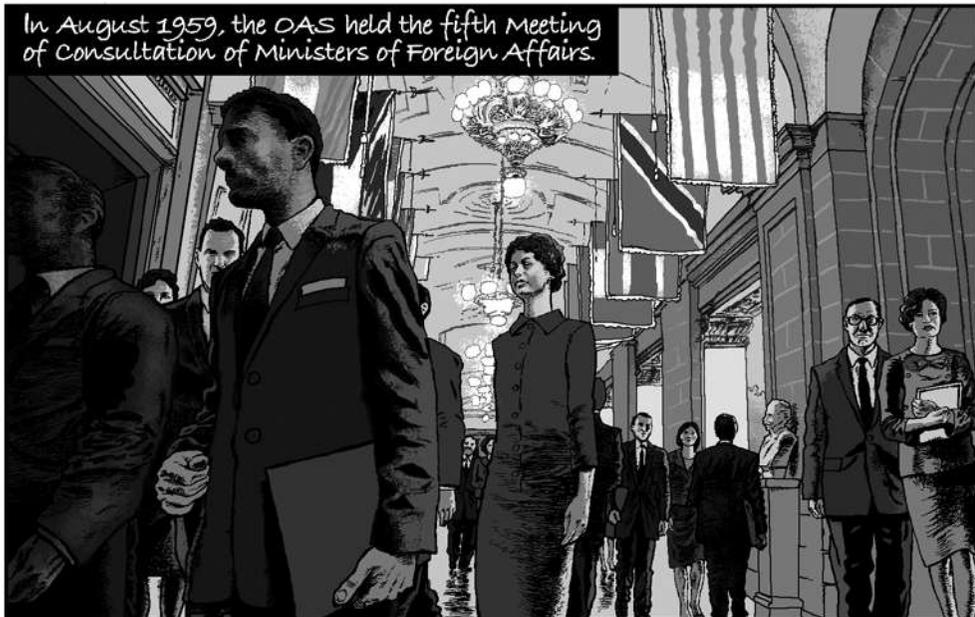
Elections can wait. The revolution has other priorities.



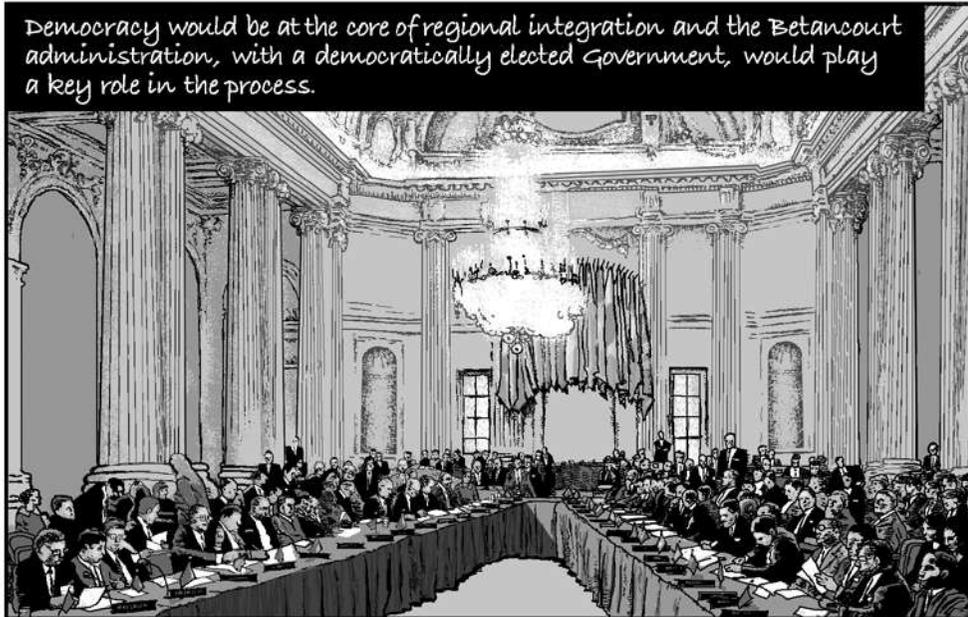
Fire.



In August 1959, the OAS held the fifth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.



Democracy would be at the core of regional integration and the Betancourt administration, with a democratically elected Government, would play a key role in the process.

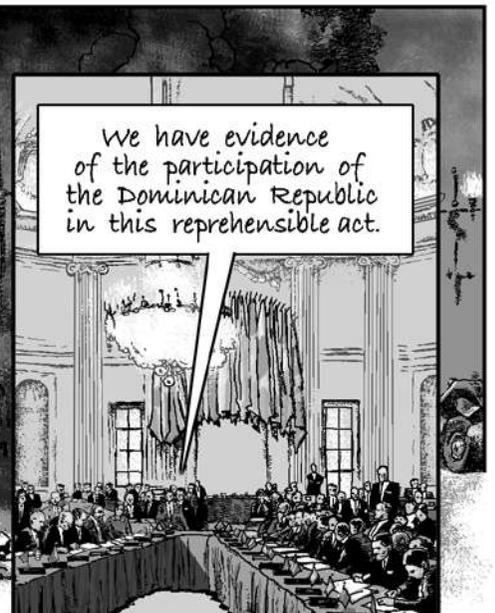
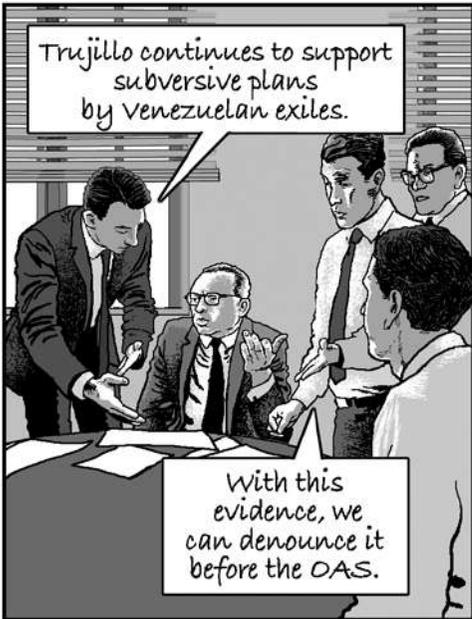
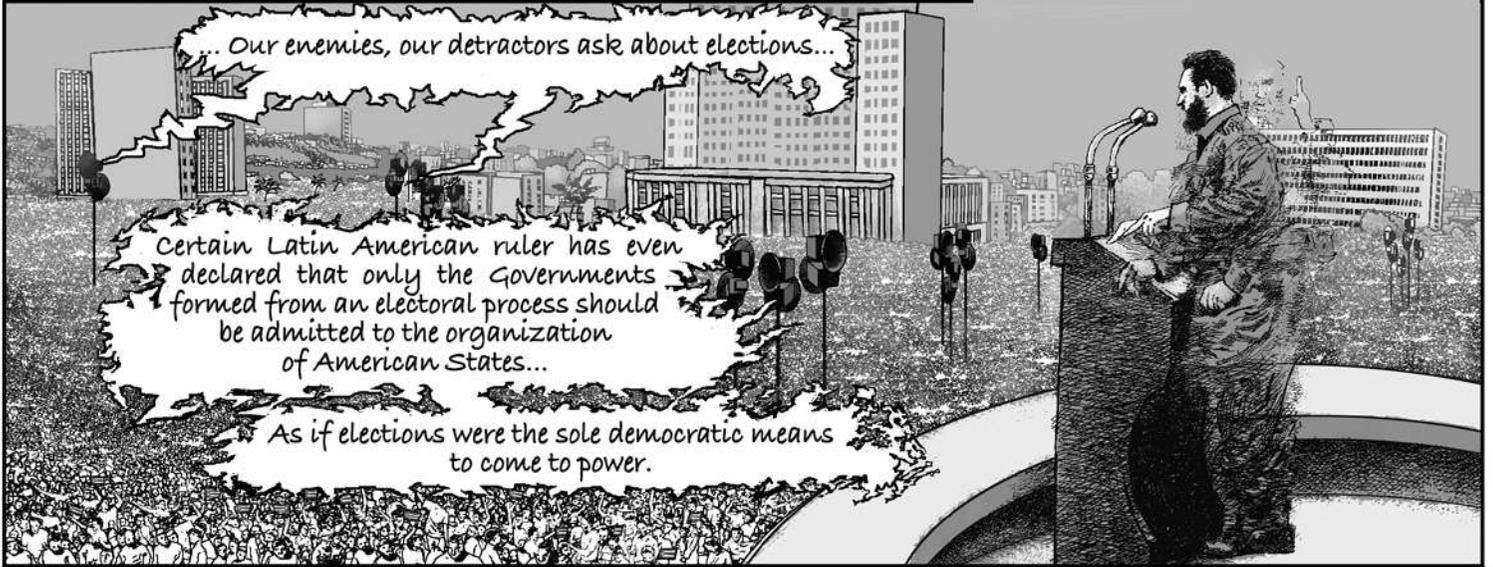


**Resolution:**  
Establishing an Inter American Commission on Human Rights made up of 7 members, elected in a personal capacity from a list proposed by the member States, and the Council of the Organization.  
The Commission will be organized by the Council and shall promote respect for human rights under the specific powers granted by the latter.

Given the significance of the nascent instrument, Venezuela nominated its best man for the position: someone with high moral character and prestige who also professes an unwavering commitment to democracy.



As the IACHR comes into force, the continent keeps shaking. One year later...





# IACHR

That same year, the IACHR came into force. Rómulo, who had known the dictatorship of Gómez and the exile during the ruling of Pérez Jiménez and had chaired the Human Rights Commission in Congress, found in the organ a place to build his ideals of justice.

The IACHR was born with the sensitive mission of investigating reports of human rights violations, both in the Dominican Republic and Cuba.



He was the most prominent figure in the Betancourt government.



Which tells of the importance that he gave to the presence of Venezuela in the organ.

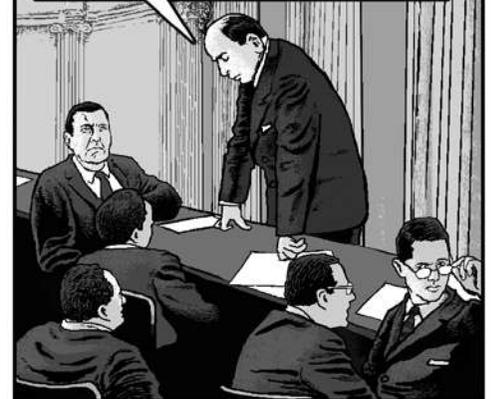


Well, Let's get to work!



This Commission should not be limited to the sole promotion of respect for human rights,

it is obliged to ensure that they are not violated.



We seek to emulate the format of the Red Cross through visits where victims can be interviewed without the presence of State representatives, and with the freedom to make all the pertinent questions.



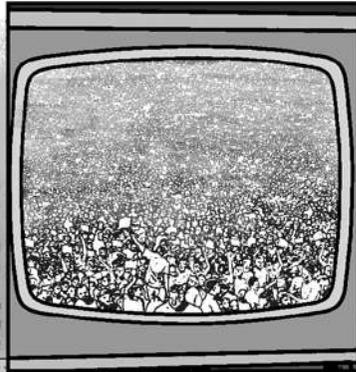
This is the first time that an international human rights organ officially and directly listens to the victims.



Cuba, May 1, 1961.



A few days after the episode at the Bay of Pigs...



Cuba is a socialist state and there will be no more elections here.



Many intellectuals affirmed that Cuba was witnessing the restoration of the dignity of the Cuban people.

Although none of them deemed it important to ask the people.



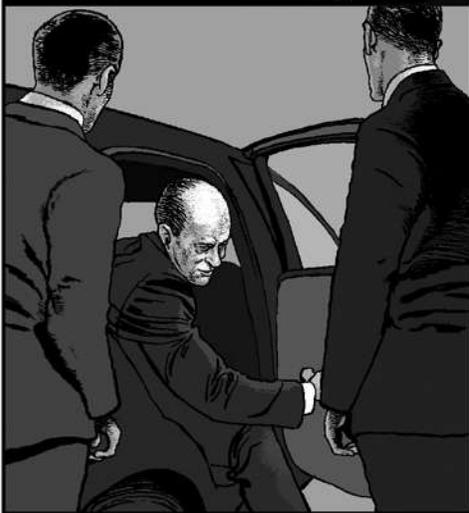
Given the incompatibility of the Cuban authoritarian system with the member countries of the organization, we decide...

January 1962.

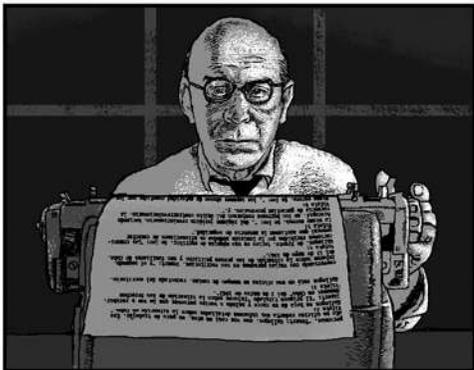
Gallegos, almost 80 years old, does not stop working. That year his office prepared two reports detailing the situation in Cuba.



The first of them was the Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba, dated March 2, 1962,



and the second was the Report on the Situation of Political Prisoners and their Families in Cuba, released on May 17, 1963.



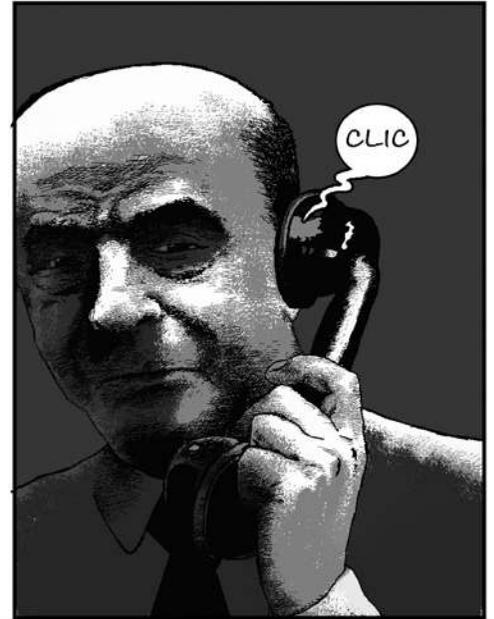
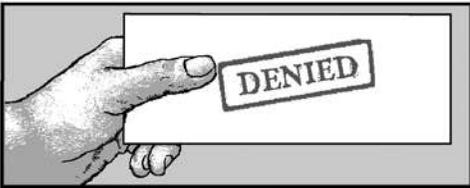
The communications received by the Commission abound in accounts of a general nature that assert the absence of guarantees...

in the revolutionary legal regime, emphasizing the blurred contours of the counterrevolutionary crime, the lack of procedural guarantees, and...

...the unpunished abuse of authority by the militiamen, all of which contribute to endangering the lives and property of the inhabitants of Cuba.



In January 1963, the IACHR made several efforts to visit Cuba, to no avail.



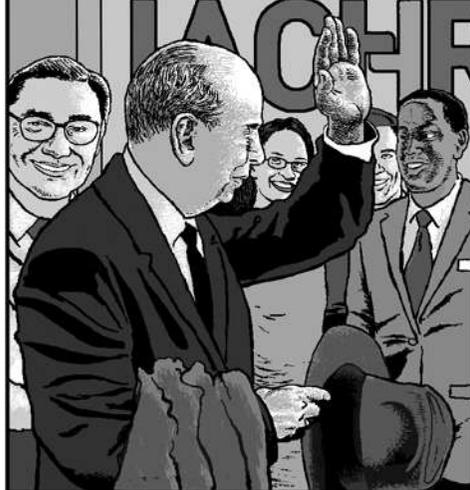
A delegation of the IACHR led by Gallegos visited a refugee center in Miami.



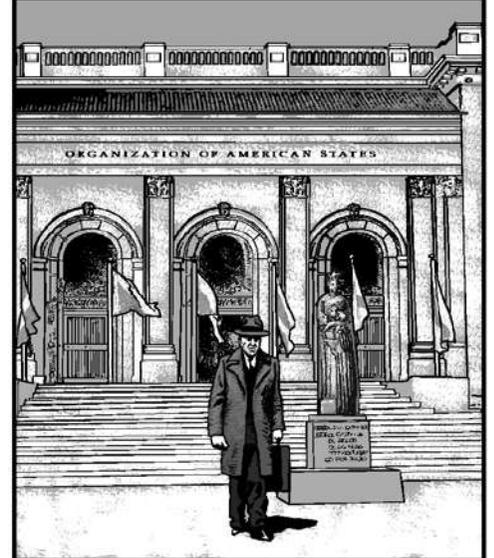
To that date, the IACHR had received 1,350 communications on humanrights violations.

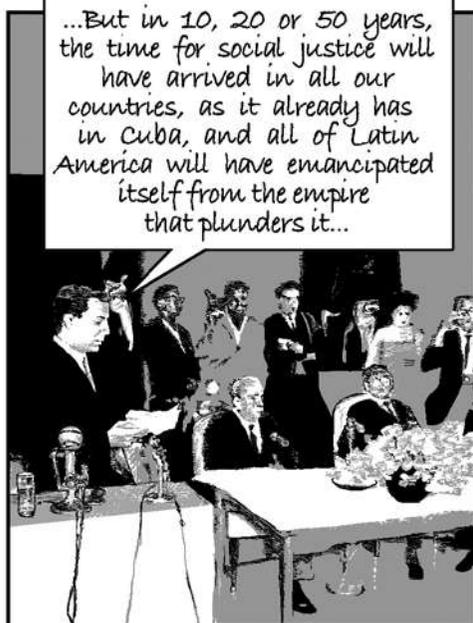
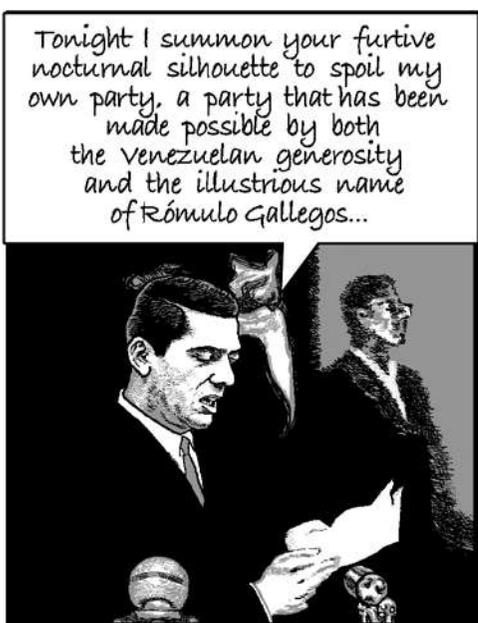


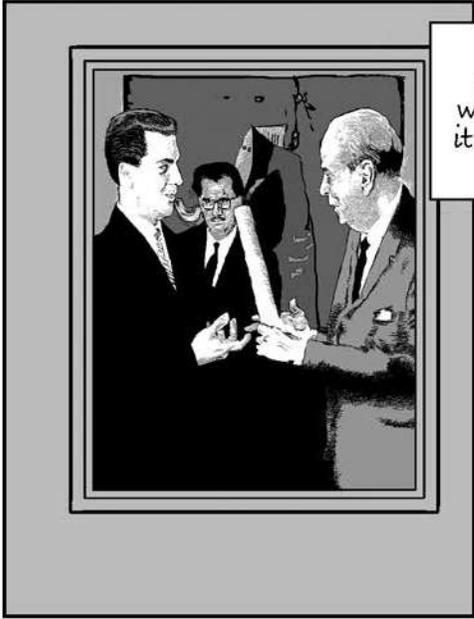
This report marked the end of Gallegos' term as president of the IACHR.



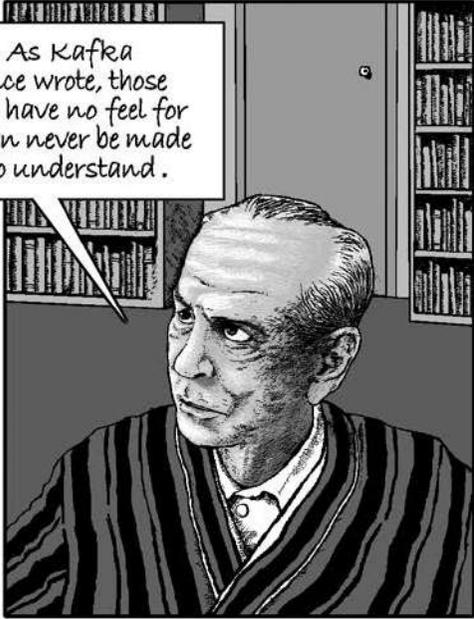
Exhausted, he retires from public life.

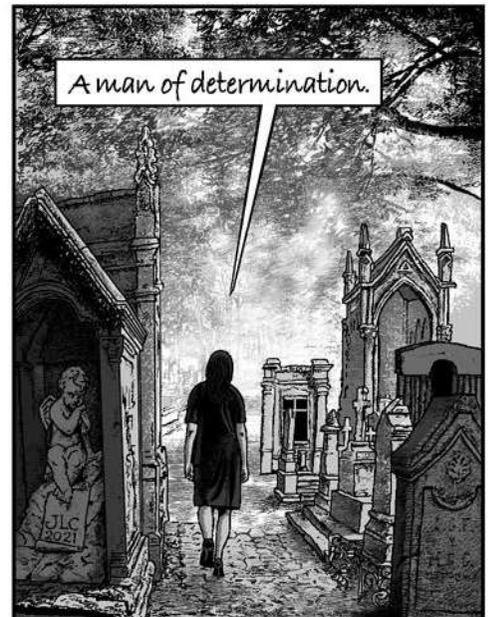
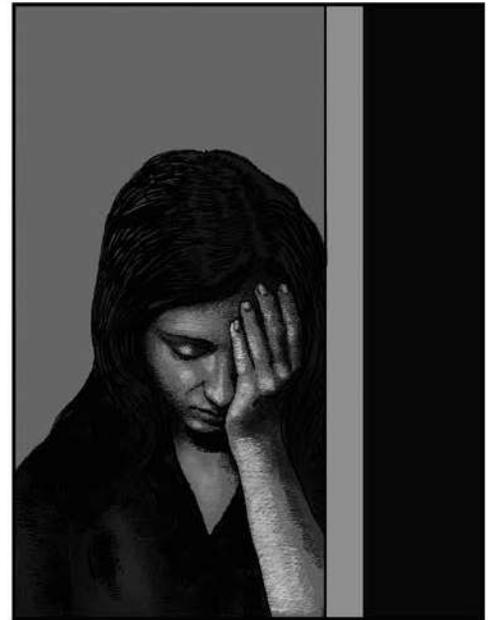
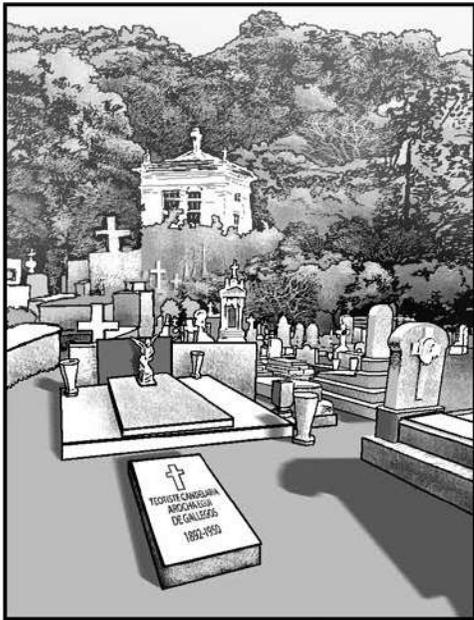






As Kafka once wrote, those who have no feel for it can never be made to understand.







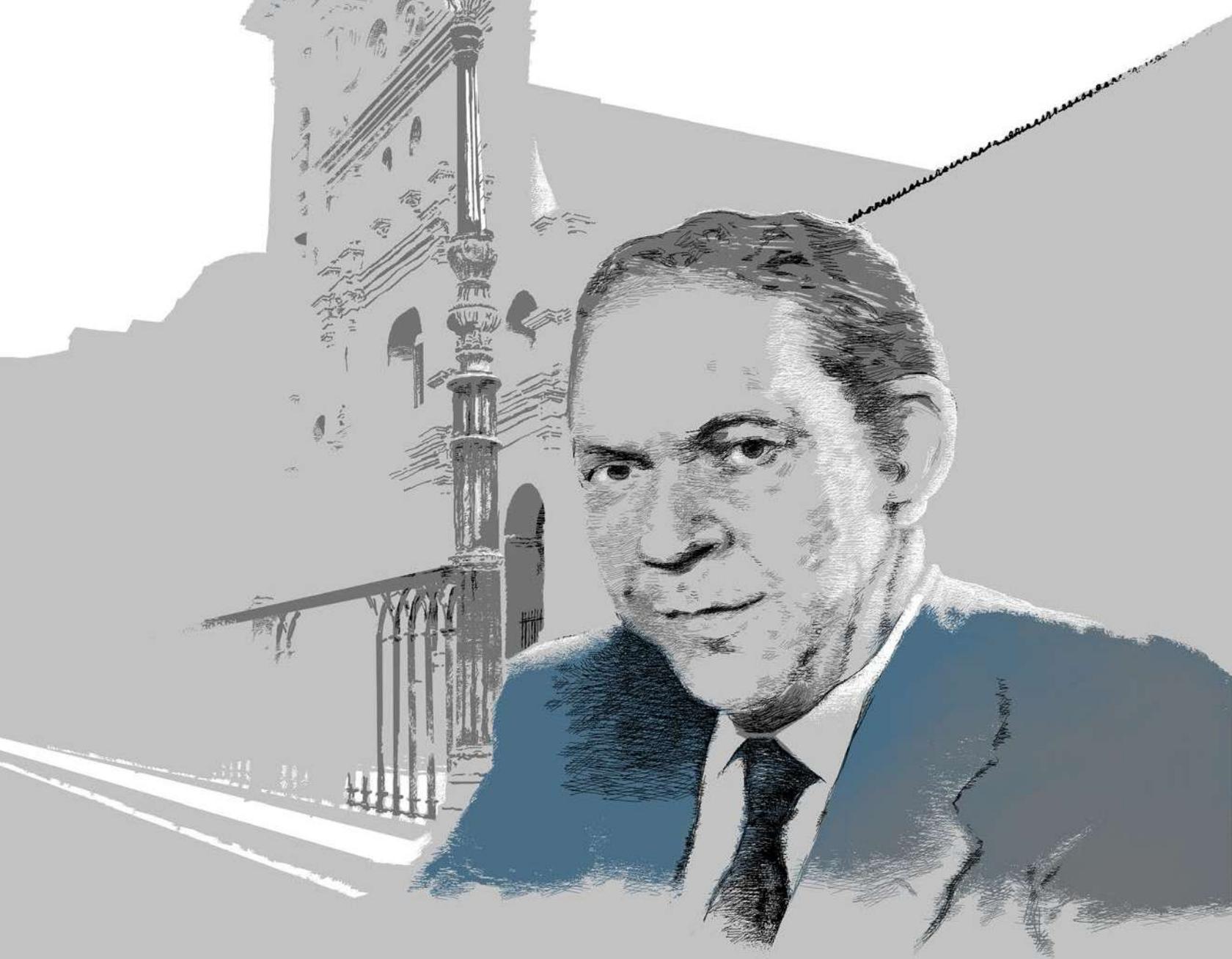


## CARLOS AYALA CORAO

Caracas, 1957. Law graduate from Andrés Bello Catholic University (1979), Master in Government from Georgetown University (1981), Honorary President of the Venezuelan Association of Constitutional Law (1995-1997) and UN consultant for the appointment of the Supreme Court of Justice in Guatemala (2009). Professor in the graduate courses of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights in San José (Costa Rica), Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (1996-1999), and President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Humans (1997-1998).

As a diplomat, he has conducted on-site observation visits to Mexico (1996) and Colombia (1997) and, as president of the IACHR, he headed visits to Guatemala, Peru (1998) and Paraguay (1999). Facilitator before the UN Secretary General under the Geneva Agreement for the dispute with Guyana (1996-2000)

Author of several publications on Constitutional Law and Human Rights. Currently Vice President of the International Commission of Jurists

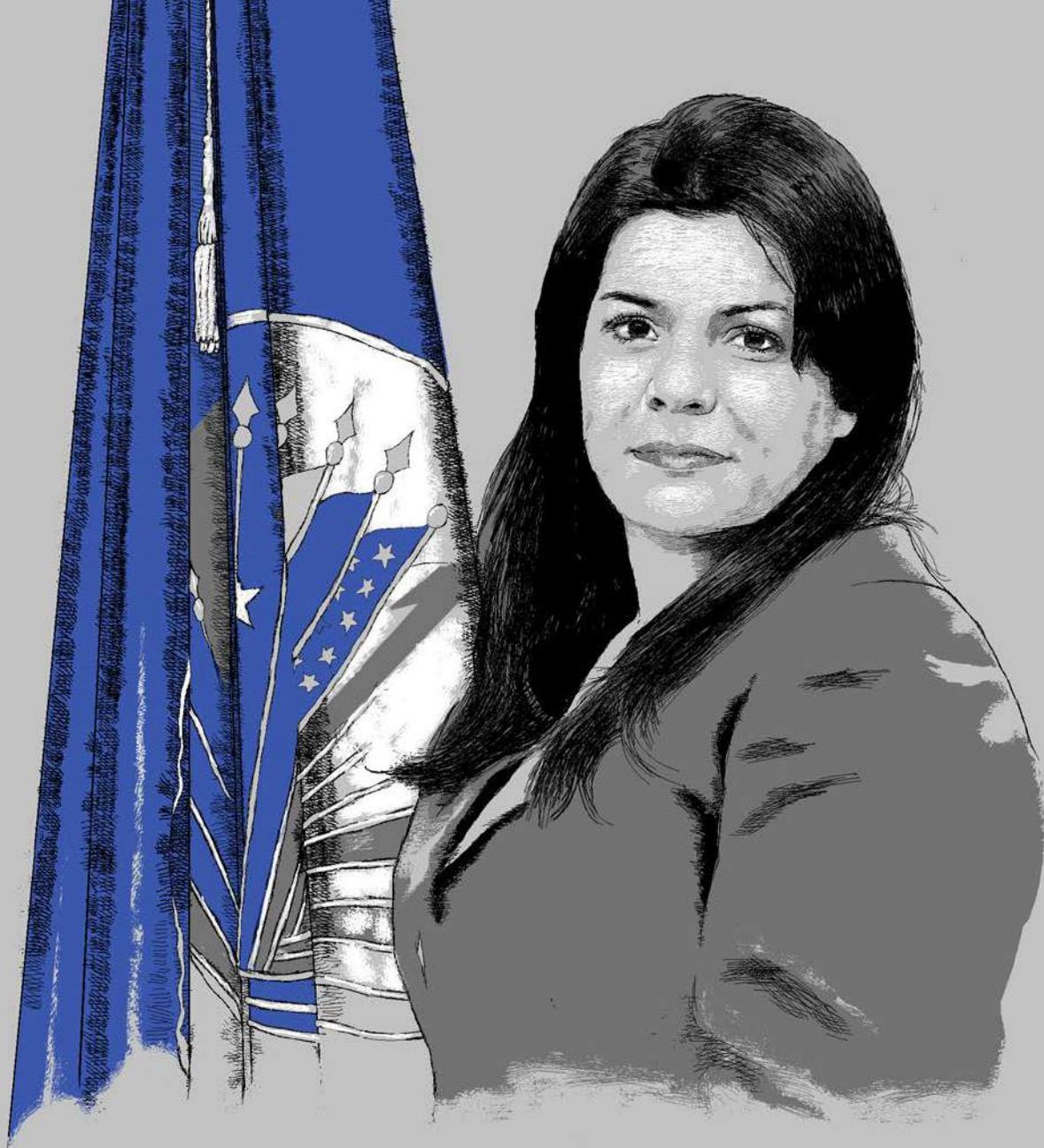


## ANDRÉS AGUILAR MAWDSLEY

Caracas, 1924–The Hague, 1995. Doctor in Political and Social Sciences from the Central University of Venezuela (1946), Minister of Justice in Venezuela (1958-1962), Permanent Delegate of Venezuela before the United Nations Organizations in Geneva (1963-1965) and Ambassador to the United States (1969-1972).

Commissioner before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights from 1972 to 1985, serving as president on several occasions. He headed several on-site visits to Panama, Haiti and Nicaragua (1978); Argentina (1979) and Colombia (1980).

He was also Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the United Nations Organization (1986-1991) and held two consecutive terms as Judge of the International Court of Justice, a position he held from 1991 until he died in 1995.



## LUZ PATRICIA MEJÍA GUERRERO

Caracas, 1972. Law graduate from the Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences of the Central University of Venezuela (1996), Master in Public Law from Carlos III University of Madrid. She has held important positions in the Ombudsman's Office (2002) and the Public Ministry of Venezuela (2005) and headed The Venezuelan Education-Action Program on Human Rights (PROVEA).

She was First Vice President of the IACHR in 2008 and President in 2009. She participated in on-site visits to Jamaica (2008) and Honduras (2009 and 2010) and visited Argentina as Rapporteur in 2011. Since 2013, She has been the Technical Secretary of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), part of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), and special rapporteur of the CIM-OAS.



## MARCO TULLIO BRUNI CELLI

Anzoátegui, 1932. A sociology graduate from the Central University of Venezuela (1956) and lawyer; diplomat, writer and essayist. He was a member of Congress (1979-1984) and Member and Vice President of Venezuela's Advisory Commission on Foreign Relations (1984-1994).

As Commissioner of the IACHR between 1986 and 1993, he made important on-site visits to Panama (1989), Peru (1991), Haiti (1991 and 1993), Nicaragua (1992) and Guatemala (1992). He was appointed Special Rapporteur in Haiti by the IACHR (1991-1995).

He has also served as Representative of Venezuela before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva (1990-1993); Representative of Venezuela before the World Conference on Human Rights (1991-1993) in Geneva; Member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee (1992); President of the Venezuelan Human Rights Foundation (1992) and Member of the Human Rights Committee of the Latin American Parliament (1990-1994).



## FREDDY ENRIQUE GUTIÉRREZ TREJO

Mérida, 1947. Constitutional Lawyer, Professor at the Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences of the Central University of Venezuela and Visiting Professor at the University of Bonn (Germany).

Commissioner of the IACHR from 2004 to 2007. He acted as a delegate of the Commission in cases in Peru and Mexico.

Advisor to Venezuela's Supreme Court of Justice during an initiative carried out in the Social-Political Chamber to introduce a recourse to annul the Decree establishing the Orinoco Mining Arc by the Office of the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on June 14, 2016.





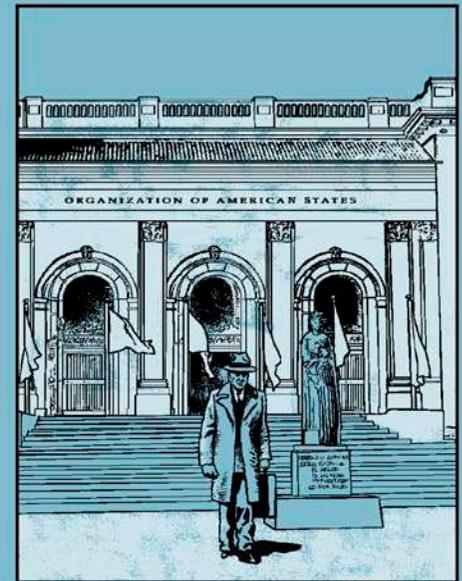
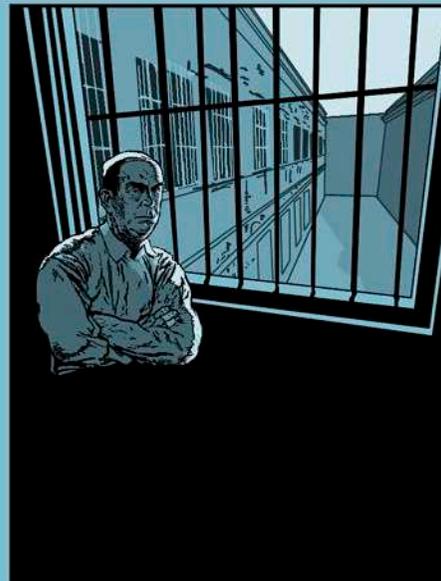
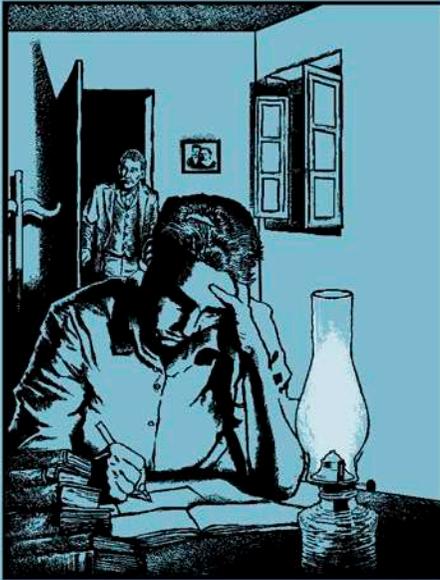
THE END



If you want to know more about the life of Rómulo Gallegos, scan this QR Code.



*Someday it will be true.  
progress will penetrate  
in the plain and barbarism  
will go back defeated.*  
Santos Luzardo  
in Doña Barbara.



**RÓMULO GALLEGOS** is an example of civilism through principles that became evident in his literary work and political career. He was sent into exile twice and his life was not exempt from tragedies. He was as much a prominent figure in Venezuelan history and culture during the 20th century as in the birth of democracy in the country.

This work walks through his biography by emphasizing the sparsely explored fact of his condition as the first president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), at a time when political extremes threatened the stability of the region and the wellbeing of its citizens. To highlight this aspect, Provea rediscovers the figure of Gallegos under a friendly format for the new generations, who have in him the distant reference of the author of a much better known than read novel, *Doña Bárbara*.

**Héctor Torres** (Caracas, 1968) is a narrator, editor and publicist. Author of *El amor en tres platos* (2007), *La huella del bisonte* (2008), *El regalo de Pandora* (2011), *Caracas muere* (2012, 2019), *Objetos no declarados* (2014) and *La vida feroz* (2016). Editor-in-chief at *La Vida de Nos* ([lavidadenos.com](http://lavidadenos.com)) and co-founder of *Ficción Breve* ([ficcionebreve.org](http://ficcionebreve.org)). [www.hectorres.xyz](http://www.hectorres.xyz) @hectorres

**José Luis Couto** (Montevideo, 1960) is a cartoonist and graphic designer. He has worked for publishers, agencies, and record labels in the design of album covers, posters, comics, and illustrations for books, newspapers, and magazines. He has lived in Caracas since 1978 and held several exhibitions.