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NOTES ON COSTA RICAN DEMOCRACY

BY

JAMES L. BUSEY

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO PRESS
BOULDER, COLORADO, JANUARY, 1967

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PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
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COLORADO SPRINGS CENTER

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James L. Busey,
Boulder, Colorado

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

TABLES

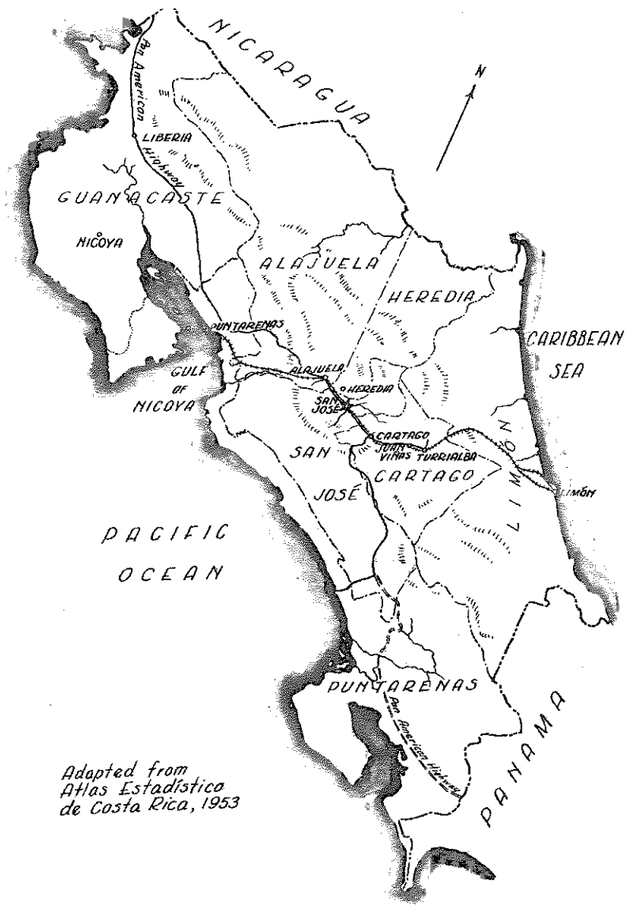

FIGURE 1. Political-Physical Map of Costa Rica

NOTES ON COSTA RICAN DEMOCRACY

PROLOGUE

Many persons shelter images or dreams of the singularly pleasing spots they have known or hope to see. These may be noisy, crushing places like Times Square or Trafalgar Square; or great, sweeping avenues, like the Paseo de la Reforma or the Champs-Élysées, with monuments, and great trees, and fountains, and memories of tragic defeats and proud victories, images of heroism and marching men; or simple, quiet rural lanes with farm buildings and lazy streams and hardly more sounds than a dog's bark or a bell's tinkle; or great green-blue waves with foam and wind that seem to cry adventure and danger into an apparent infinity; or a fishing village of Alaska or the Gaspé, with bays, islets, small boats, and honorable men who are producers from the sea; or a place of beautiful women, and dancing in the streets, and beating music that makes men forget politics; or a bandstand at night, where old men sit and young people promenade about a plaza and hold hands and make all life seem to begin again, while the band plays waltzes and military music and symphonies; or quiet places alone by campfires in forests, or on mountain or Arctic tundra, where the wind blows slightly and the earth has not been destroyed.

People dream of countries they know or have heard about. For generations before and after 1776, America was the dream of men who, being human, yearned for liberty. For some it may be Switzerland, or Denmark, or France, or Canada, or Norway, or New Zealand, or Sweden, or Australia, or some other. Or it may be a very tiny, romantic-sounding place like Andorra, or San Marino, or Liechtenstein. These countries have their own reasons for stirring men with dreams—mountains, or pastoral tranquility, or prosperity, or opportunities for escape, or deep fjords, or a great history, or a romantic and cultured city, or a vibrant, courageous people.

Many of these places share a common tradition of liberty. The Republic of Costa Rica, a small but not diminutive country in Central America, is one of these.

It is hardly the custom to open academic monographs with glowing quotations from travel books—such, for example, as this one about Costa Rica:

> Picture a clean, well-built city set 4,000 feet high . . . Surrounding the city . . . are trimly kept coffee plantations and, farther out, sleep rural villages beside foaming streams pouring down from the mountains beyond. Along country roads, gaily painted bullock carts haul produce for shipment while friendly villagers . . . and their

beautiful womenfolk wave gay salutes to every stranger who passes their flower-bedecked cottage doors.[1]

It is not wise to rely too heavily on such glamorized accounts. And yet, it was over a century ago that another traveller, Thomas F. Meagher, commented on the peace, freedom, and independence of Costa Rica, and called it "the Switzerland of the tropics".[2]

After his long travels through the squalid villages and rural slums of Central America, John L. Stephens was inspired to write:

> . . . and for a league before entering Alajuela it [the road] was lined on both sides with houses three or four hundred yards apart, built of sun-dried bricks and white-washed. . . . The fields were cultivated with sugar cane, and every house had its little *trapiche,* or sugar mill.[3]

The famous traveller, diplomat and anthropologist exclaimed:

> On the top of the ravine we came upon a large table of land covered with the rich coffee plantations of San José. It was laid out into squares of two hundred feet and enclosed by living fences of trees bearing flowers; its roads were sixty feet wide and, except the small horsepath, had sod of unbroken green. The deep green of the coffee plantations, the sward of the roads, and the vistas through the trees at all the cross-roads were lovely. . . . The scene . . . addressed itself to other senses than the sight, for it was not, like the rest of Central America, retrograding and going to ruin . . .[4]

As we shall see, other ninteenth-century travellers brought back lyrical accounts of the charms of Costa Rica. Through the years the tourist brochures, and popular writers, and more scholarly observers have reported that Costa Rica is in many respects quite different from her neighbors—more prosperous, literate, and egalitarian. The allegedly objective, impartial scholar is accustomed to entertain such claims with an academic smirk. Someone, such as Stephens, may have got the yarn started. Each subsequent teller elaborated on the story. The descriptions finally lost all contact with reality. "Beautiful womenfolk" wave at you from "flower-bedecked cottage doors", while "gaily painted bullock carts" creak about the place. Indeed!

An antidote for such scholarly cynicism is to fly directly to Costa Rica from almost any other place in Latin America. When we landed in Costa Rica, we came directly from Managua, Nicaragua, and points elsewhere in Central America and Mexico. There had been heat, and the smells of garbage and

[1]Norman Ford and William J. Redgrave, *Bargain Paradises of the World* (Greenlawn, N. Y.: Harlan Publications, 1958), p. 5.
[2]Thomas Francis Meagher, "Vacations in Costa Rica," *The New Monthly Magazine* (December, 1859-February, 1860), in Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Costa Rica en el siglo XIX* (San José: Editorial Gutenberg, 1929), p. 319.
[3]John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán* (1841) (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1949), I, 282.
[4]*Ibid.*, pp. 284-285.

poverty, and half-grown naked children in the streets, and destitute people, and hungry-looking women hauling huge loads of produce on third-class trains without seats, and litter-strewn, ruined-looking streets and buildings where waifs darted in and out of the destruction; there had been drunken caterwauling from saloons, and ragged people and rubbish and animals all piled over each other at railroad stations, and children playing with pigs in mud puddles; and there had been tenderness, and pity, and wan smiles, and touches of maternal love for crying, dirty babies, and romance between sweethearts without hope, and kindness for the stranger, which had shone through the frightening, sprawling sea of deprivation. There had also been the ostentatious mansions of the indigenous rich, with lily ponds, and high protective walls strewn with broken glass and guarded from the rabble by monstrous mastiffs, and terraces with lawns and fountains and beautiful gardens, and the non-producing master followed by his retinue of non-producing servants, and the giant private palace of the governor of the Mexican state, where all the water of a big city had to be shut off so that his caretakers could make the governor's gardens flourish.

Within the Costa Rican terminal, we asked whether we should not register with the police, as is done in some Latin American countries. "Oh", said the immigration agent, "we don't have any police here—except that fellow standing over there;" and the officer grinned.

When we left the terminal by taxi and were on the road from Alajuela to San José, it was bright afternoon. There *were* the clean, brightly colored little houses by the side of the road. There *were* the flowers in the window boxes. And there *were,* in addition to microbuses and other cars, the gaily painted bullock carts, with big, decorated wheels, and lean, white-shirted farmers who walked behind them. We passed through the streets of Heredia: there was no garbage; there were no naked children playing in seas of mud with pigs.

No beautiful womenfolk came out to give us gay salutes. But we thought, with incredulity, that the books had almost come true.

Costa Rica, as we shall see, is not all *that* good. One who knows something of the deep problems of Latin America may be prone to romanticize his observations; impressions of facts may be better than the facts themselves. But the stories about Costa Rica have enough substantial justification to be worthy of note.

The republic of Costa Rica is a little country of about 19,700 square miles. In Central America only El Salvador, with about 8,000 square miles, is smaller than Costa Rica; and Costa Rica is less than half the area of either Guatemala, or Honduras, or Nicaragua. Costa Rica is of about the same area as the Dominican Republic, and among the republics of the Western Hemisphere it is

larger only than El Salvador and Haiti. There are about 1,400,000 Costa Ricans, and in this respect the country is only slightly ahead of Panama, which has the smallest population in Latin America.

Costa Rica has important and sometimes active volcanoes, and the land can be irregular and precipitous enough. There are the craters of Turrialba, Irazú, Poás and Barba, which range between nine thousand and eleven thousand feet. But the country does not have the jagged, perpendicular features of central Guatemala, or even the dramatic, volcanic cones of Nicaragua. Rather, the land of the central plateau tends to be steeply rolling, deeply green, and rich in soil.

Physical zones include the lowlands on the Atlantic and Pacific sides; large, undeveloped areas on the way north to Nicaragua and southeast to Panama; the northwestern, irregular cattle-raising and cowboy country of Guanacaste province, which includes most of the Nicoya peninsula; and the central plateau, where over half the population lives. The *meseta central* contains about one thousand square miles. It is the heart and the life of Costa Rica.

The communities of the *meseta central* are located at altitudes from three thousand to six thousand feet. San José, the capital, stands at 3800 feet and has a population of about 170,000. The city is generally clean, with narrow central streets, well-kept but modest buildings, and probably the best museum and university in Central America.

It is on the *meseta* that one finds the many little towns, the painted houses, the network of paved roads. Outside the *meseta* the towns are less pleasing, and the road communications are poor. There is the Inter-American highway, which extends northwest to the Nicaraguan frontier, and southeast to Panama. An indifferent road system reaches from the Gulf of Nicoya into the scattered towns of the peninsula and touches at some of the ranches and squatters' clearings.

Costa Rican communication with her two coastal ports is effective. Her so-called Northern Railway—narrow-gauge diesel, owned by a subsidiary of the United Fruit Company—communicates with the Caribbean port of Limón. The Ferrocarril Eléctrico al Pacífico—narrow-gauge electric, run by the government— connects San José with Puntarenas on the Pacific. By Central American standards, both railroads are rapid and efficient, and have good accommodations for both passengers and freight. In terms of general development and physical facilities, Limón is among the most satisfactory cities on the Caribbean. Puntarenas, while not the most delightful seaport in the world, certainly compares favorably with such Central American Pacific centers as San José, Guatemala; Acajutla, La Libertad or La Unión, El Salvador; or Corinto and Masachapa, Nicaragua.

Principal crops of the country are coffee, corn, beans, rice and cane, with

bananas in the lowlands. Bananas and coffee are the principal exports.[5] The cattle industry is expanding all over the country, with the central plateau specializing in milk for the interior and Guanacaste in beef for export. Though the export trade is dominated by bananas and coffee, there is a variety of production for domestic consumption which relieves Costa Rica of the more extreme effects of monoculture. There is almost no mining, and thereby, as we shall see, hangs an important tale about the Costa Rican social and political scene.

Costa Rica, as we have suggested, has a reputation for physical beauty and for peaceful charm. She also has a reputation for attainment of a degree of political democracy unusual in Latin America.[6] This is another important side to Costa Rica—a civilian, democratic side which writers have been prone to exaggerate, but which is deserving of attention. It will be a principal function of this paper to examine the political features of Costa Rica. We shall review these characteristics in the context of Latin American norms. We shall then suggest hypotheses designed to throw light on causal elements in the Costa Rican historical, physical, and economic background.

[5]Costa Rica, Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, *Atlas estadístico de Costa Rica* (San José, 1953), p. 81.

[6]For references to Costa Rica's democratic attainments, see the preparatory study by the writer, "Foundations of Political Contrast: Costa Rica and Nicaragua," *Western Political Quarterly*, XI (September, 1958), n. 7, p. 630. The most complete over-all study of Costa Rican society is still John and Mavis Biesanz, *Costa Rican Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944).

PART I

POLITICAL FEATURES

CHAPTER I

Costa Rican Government and Constitution

Most studies of Latin American government and politics stress the overwhelming power and dominance of the executive. According to these studies, the Latin American president possesses huge constitutional authority, even including the power to sweep aside constitutional guarantees by unilateral decree. The president, these studies contend, directs an official party which holds the keys to real power, while the government apparatus barely tolerates one or more opposition parties which function precariously on the fringes of legality. Elections automatically put the stamp of popular approval on the official slate, and leading officials are virtually immune to public criticism. The legislative branch is a subservient creature of the president and dutifully accedes to his demands. Legislative debate is perfunctory, and opposition expression is desultory and ineffective, because everyone knows that the executive policy will prevail.[1]

There is evidence that several of the Latin American republics depart rather widely from this presumed norm. Legislative and judicial independence are highly developed in Uruguay and Chile. Unquestioned executive dominance is not at all assured in all important aspects of political life in modern-day Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Panama, or even Guatemala, Honduras, or Ecuador. Exceptions relative to vigorous opposition, or multiparty contests, or public expression, or legislative autonomy, may be found in other republics. The generalizations about omnipotent executive power are applicable to several of the countries, and perhaps in varying degrees to almost all; but the exceptions are sufficiently worthy of note to raise serious questions about the over-all validity of these generalizations.

Latin Americanists tend to cite Costa Rica as one departure from the more usual patterns of executive dominance.[2] Yet few detailed studies of Costa

[1] Textbook writers try to indicate variations in political practice among the various Latin American countries. However, the topical analysis presently in vogue among Latin American political studies encourages a degree of generalization which blurs meaningful distinctions. See William S. Stokes, *Latin American Politics* (New York: Crowell, 1959), Chapter XVI, "Omnipotent Executive Power," and Chapter 17, "The Subservient Legislature"; William W. Pierson and Federico G. Gil, *Governments of Latin America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957), pp. 208–94 *et passim*; Harold Eugene Davis (ed.), *Government and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Ronald, 1958), pp. 186–367. One derives an over-all sense of executive dominance from Austin F. Macdonald, *Latin American Politics and Government* (2nd ed.; New York: Crowell, 1954), pp. 1–21. A small, perceptive volume is R. A. Gomez, *Government and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Random, 1960), especially Chapter V, wherein the major themes and characteristics of Latin American political processes are deftly woven into a small number of pages. Asher N. Christensen, *The Evolution of Latin American Government* (New York: Holt, 1951), pp. 224–84, 401–76 *et passim*, brought together the leading relevant articles on Latin American political features which had been published at that time.

[2] *Supra*, Prologue, n. 6.

Rican government and politics have appeared,[3] and none has closely examined functional relationships in Costa Rican government. Before entering upon such an examination, we might usefully sketch the general features of Costa Rican governmental structure and constitutional background.

The formalities of Costa Rican government are based on the Constitution of 1949. Since independence, there have been five other constitutional documents — 1824, 1844, 1847, 1859, and 1871.

As is the case throughout most of Latin America, Costa Rica follows the presidential rather than the parliamentary system of government, but with important concessions to the parliamentary type. The legislative, executive, and judicial functions are separated in theory. The president is chosen by popular election for a four-year term and may not be reëlected to the office until two intervening terms have passed. The legislative branch is represented by the *asamblea legislativa*, a unicameral body of forty-five members. Insofar as constitutional ingenuity can accomplish the feat, the judiciary is separated from the other branches of government. The executive branch must exercise its functions through a number of autonomous agencies as well as through ministries which are under presidential direction.

In her territorial distribution of powers, Costa Rica is a unitary republic. Her seven provinces are administrative subdivisions of the central government.[4] There are no legislative or other organs of provincial self-government. However, a considerable degree of self-government is exercised in the several *cantones* into which the provinces are divided. Each canton elects a *junta* whose members are known as *regidores*. A presidentially appointed *jefe político* is also a member of the cantonal *junta*. The smallest unit of government is the *distrito*, which may elect a *síndico*, or local delegate, to serve as its representative with voice but without vote on the cantonal *junta*. The Costa Rican cantons are equivalent to the *municipios* of other Latin American countries, and as is customary south of the Río Grande they do contain territory which may lie outside the integrated communities or towns. The Constitution refers to the collective cantonal authorities as

[3] The subject is treated in Biesanz, *op. cit.*, especially Chapter IX, "Democracy," pp. 224–53; Harry Kantor, *The Costa Rican Election of 1953: A Case Study* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1958); John D. Martz, *Central America — The Crisis and the Challenge* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), pp. 210–63; José Francisco Trejos, *Origen y desarrollo de la democracia en Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Trejos Hnos., 1939); Lic. Eugenio Rodríguez Vega, *Apuntes para una sociología costarricense* (San José: Universidad de Costa Rica, Editorial Universitaria, 1953); and several other miscellaneous sources and histories that will be cited, *infra*. Except for the Biesanz chapter and the Kantor treatment, none of these could be called political-science studies of the country. The Rodríguez Vega study, *supra*, is a scholarly sociological analysis, and one of the most perceptive recent books to appear in Costa Rica.

[4] In order of population: San José, Puntarenas, Alajuela, Cartago, Heredia, Guanacaste, and Limón. *Atlas estadístico, op. cit.*, p. 38.

the *gobierno municipal*.[5] In Costa Rica the cantonal *juntas* exercise real authority over an important range of local matters.

While Costa Rica has experienced her share of violence, electoral fraud, and dictatorship, her record in these respects is rather at variance with those of her neighbors. During the period 1824–1958, nine Costa Rican administrations secured power by force; nine by (usually) legal designation, for brief terms; nineteen by essentially non-competitive election; and nine by competitive election (indirect, four; direct, five). Several of the non-competitive elections could be said to have reflected broad community consensus.

It was not until this century that the country seemed to be well on the road to rather stable constitutional and civilian government, with a marked degree of popular participation, individual rights, and rule of law. Since 1890, most presidents have secured office by more or less regular electoral means, and in several cases genuine party competition has prevailed. Of twenty-one administrations since 1890, three have secured power by more or less legal designation, for brief periods; eight by essentially non-competitive election; and eight by competitive election (indirect, three; direct, five).

Only three presidents of Costa Rica (of a total of about forty-six) have been military men; and only six presidents, whose regimes total no more than forty of her one hundred and forty years of independent political existence, could be said to be of the severe dictatorial type.[6]

Violence has affected not more than one third of Costa Rican regimes, and since 1889 it has played a prevailing role during only two periods — 1917–1919 and 1948–1949. It was during the second of these turbulent episodes that the present Constitution of 1949 came into being.

During 1940–1944, Dr. Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia served as president of the country. His regime displayed left-wing and extremist tendencies which were not conducive to stable democracy. His followers continued in power during 1944–1948, under the presidency of Lic. Teodoro Picado. In elections of February 8, 1948, Calderón Guardia attempted to regain the pres-

[5] Costa Rica, Ministerio de Gobernación, *Constitución política de la república de Costa Rica, 1949* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1958), Article 169. To avoid inaccuracy, English translations from the Constitution will be taken from Pan American Union, *Constitution of the Republic of Costa Rica, 1949* (Washington, D. C.: Pan American Union, 1951).

[6] For details on Costa Rican presidential succession, see James L. Busey, "The Presidents of Costa Rica," *The Americas*, XVIII (July, 1961), 55–70. The article contains a table of Costa Rican administrations, with notations on modes whereby they acquired and left office, and outstanding political features of each. Two standard texts on Costa Rican political history are Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla histórica de Costa Rica* (28th ed.; San José: Librería e Imprenta Lehmann, 1957); and Carlos Monge Alfaro, *Historia de Costa Rica* (9th ed.; San José: Imprenta Trejos, S. A., 1959).

idency, but lost to the opposition candidate, Otilio Ulate, publisher of *Diario de Costa Rica*. The Calderón-Picado forces held a majority of seats in the Congress of the time, and in March, 1948, that body nullified the presidential election returns on the grounds that the autonomous electoral tribunal had permitted fraud and corruption to influence the outcome. José Figueres, another opposition figure, led a revolt which succeeded in overthrowing the Picado regime. Figueres took power as leader of a revolutionary *junta fundadora de la segunda república*.[7] By arrangements in a pact between Figueres and Ulate, the *junta* would retain power for eighteen months, after which Ulate would secure the presidency on the basis of the elections of February, 1948. A first act of the *junta* was to officially bring the Constitution of 1871 to an end, and to call elections for December 8, 1948, for an *asamblea constituyente* (constitutional assembly). The elected constitutional assembly promulgated the new Constitution on November 7, 1949, and the next day the *junta* turned the presidency over to Otilio Ulate.

During the period of *junta* rule, May 8, 1948–November 8, 1949, the Figueres-led regime put a series of rather severe revolutionary decrees into effect. Under the circumstances, one might expect the 1949 Constitution to be almost exclusively a product of *junta* formulation.[8] In Latin America, in fact, it is not uncommon for constitution-making to fall under the heavy hand of executive control. One may cite the Castillo Armas constitution of Guatemala, 1956; that of Osorio in El Salvador, 1950; the Somoza document in Nicaragua, 1950; that of Pérez Jiménez of Venezuela, 1953; and others which in substance if not in theory have been enunciated by Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, Perón of Argentina, Vargas of Brazil, and so on through varying degrees of executive participation in the process of constitutional formulation. Conversely, it is less common though not unknown for a Latin American constitution to emerge from free debate in an uncontrolled constitutional assembly, as appears to have been the case with the present Costa Rican Constitution of 1949.

There can be no doubt that despite the rigorous rule of the *junta fundadora*, elections of December 8, 1948, for delegates to the *asamblea constituyente* did not yield a majority which was subservient to *junta* domination and that in its deliberations from January 15 to November 7, 1949, the *asamblea*

[7] Marco Tulio Zeledón, *Historia constitucional de Costa Rica en el bienio 1948-49* (San José: By the author, 1950), pp. 6 and 11.

[8] On the Figueres-Ulate pact, installation of the constitutional assembly, and the decrees of the *junta*, see *ibid.*, pp. 6, 7, 11, and 23–73. For other data on this period I am indebted to an interview with Lic. Fernando Lara Bustamente, deputy and party leader of the Partido Unión Nacional, May 6, 1959. Lic. José Albertazzi Avendaño, *La tragedia de Costa Rica* (México, D. F.: By the author, 1951), especially pp. 89 ff., provides a vigorous criticism of alleged corruption, robbery of the treasury, and persecution of political enemies, during the *junta* period. Hugo Navarro Bolandi, *La generación del 48* (México, D.F.: Editorial Olimpo, 1957), provides a highly favorable view of the *junta* period.

adopted important constitutional provisions which did not entirely represent the will of the *junta*. Despite proposals by an editorial committee of the *junta*, which would have tended to introduce quite unusual political and economic features into Costa Rican government, the convention decided not to depart in a radical manner from the general outlines of the Constitution of 1871. Social and educational clauses were of a more advanced order than were those of the former document; economic provisions did not meet the expectations of the *junta fundadora*; and while numerous new political clauses reflected some of the *junta* thinking, they did not go to extremes which the *junta* proposed. Debates were unfettered and freely exploratory of all aspects of proposed provisions. The Constitution of 1949 was in no sense a creation of executive imposition, even under the rather extraordinary conditions of that year.

There can be no doubt that the new constitutional document did introduce important innovations: *amparo* and judicial review; proscription of the army; "legalization" of "illegitimate" children; full political rights for women; replacement of vice presidents for presidential designates; introduction of rudiments of parliamentary government, with interpolation and votes of censure (though without consequent resignations); full, untrammeled autonomy for the Supreme Electoral Tribunal; new rules to preserve stability of the judiciary; strengthening of the merit system within the civil service; prohibition of immediate reëlection of deputies, or of the President except after an eight-year interval; ending of staggered legislative terms; restrictions on formation of foreign-oriented political parties; and fuller autonomy for many administrative organs.[9]

As we shall see, the Constitution of 1949 is designed to provide important guarantees against disproportionate exercise of executive authority. The document came into being after a violent political overturn, and during rigorous rule by a revolutionary *junta*. Nevertheless, the 1949 constitutional assembly performed its work rather independently of executive pressure.

It would appear that in the sphere of constitutional formulation, executive domination is not inevitable in Costa Rica.

[9] Zeledón, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–15. On differences between the *asamblea constituyente* and the *junta*, see *ibid.*, pp. 5–22 A useful, balanced report on the debates of the constitutional assembly is Rubén Hernández Poveda, *Desde la barra* (San José: Editorial Borrase, 1953), which furnishes a day-by-day journal and commentary on the proceedings of the convention.

CHAPTER II

Constitutional Limitations on the Executive

It is not necessary to remind political scientists that a formal constitutional document may prove a very poor guide to political realities. Statements about individual guarantees, roles of the executive and legislative branches, and judicial functions, may be vitiated in practice by one-party systems, military preëminence in the power structure, legislative subservience to personalist executive power, or outright violations of constitutional provisions. As is well known, such discrepancies frequently appear in the political processes of several Latin American republics.

On the other hand, there can be little doubt that in many instances a very close reading of constitutional provisions may provide some sort of crude guide to political institutions and processes, or at least the spirit of them, in a given national state. Vague or exceedingly sweeping grants of presidential power may lead one to the suspicion that strong, authoritarian executive dominance prevails; and rather specific, relatively limited formulations of such power may suggest an intention of sharply proscribing the range of executive authority. Where the constitutional provisions grant the president relatively unlimited powers to suspend constitutional guarantees, one may suspect that the document creates no serious obstacles to the exercise of very great presidential authority; and where the constitutional articles do not facilitate, but instead circumscribe and control, the presidential suspension of constitutional guarantees, one may speculate that the political practices of the country do not entirely endorse excessive presidential power. One may apply the same reasoning to provisions relating to executive-legislative and executive-judicial relationships, range of presidential authority over conduct of elections, financial powers of the president, and the like.

In the case of Costa Rica, it is clear that the Constitution of 1949 envisages an executive of rather limited functions and powers. True, he may freely appoint and remove ministers.[1] Subject to a civil service law, he may appoint and remove other officials and employees within the government.[2] It should be noted that such a civil service law, or code, does sharply circumscribe the president's freedom of appointment and removal; and as we shall see, the devolution of many governmental functions upon autonomous agencies tends to limit in reality what may appear in constitutional proviso to be a rather conventional grant of such power.

[1] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Article 139.
[2] *Loc. cit.*

The Costa Rican president is expected to "sanction and promulgate the laws", "maintain order and tranquility", "provide for collection and expenditure of the national revenues according to law", "supervise the proper functioning of administrative services and agencies", "direct international relations of the republic", "dispose of the public forces to preserve the order, defense, and security of the country", and so forth.[3]

There is nothing in the Costa Rican constitution which would be analogous to the Mexican provisions that the president may "open all classes of ports, establish maritime and customs houses and designate their location", grant patents and copyrights, substantially appoint certain important judicial magistrates, and appoint without restriction the governor of the capital city and its environs;[4] nor to the sweeping Guatemalan articles on decree powers, removal of employees, encouragement of new industries and stimulation of investments "in accordance with the law", authorization to the executive to establish or liquidate "banks and institutions of credit in accordance with the law", or to "exercise supervision and control over banks of issue and other credit institutions", or to undertake conservation measures "in accordance with the law", or to "direct, inspect and develop public education", or to manage Indian affairs, or to promote health and housing programs, or to exercise a number of other rather startling functions which seem rather alien to the concept of functional separation of powers.[5]

Similar comparisons with other Latin American constitutions reveal that though the Costa Rican document is not unique in its relatively modest statement of presidential functions, it certainly stands among those few which would limit the scope of presidential powers.[6]

It is in constitutional provisions respecting executive authority over individual guarantees that one notes a sharp departure of Costa Rican practice from that of several other Latin American republics. The more usual practice is for the constitution to grant the president the authority to suspend constitutional guarantees in times of emergency, with the requirement that he secure authorization from Congress at some subsequent date. Thus it is that in Mexico the President, "with the consent of the Council of Ministers [the cabinet, which the President freely appoints], and with the approval of the Federal Congress, and during adjournments of the latter, of the Permanent Committee [of the Congress]", may suspend the guarantees for an undefined "limited time", with the qualification that if the President so acts while the

[3] *Ibid.*, Article 140.
[4] Mexico, *Constitution* (1917), Article 89.
[5] Guatemala, *Constitution* (1956), Article 168.
[6] See, for example, the remarkable legislative-decree powers of the President of Nicaragua, as described in the Constitution of that republic, Article 191, Secs. 9 and 10; or the broad realm of authority of the President of Honduras, *Constitution*, Article 205; or that of the executive of the Dominican Republic, *Constitution*, Article 54.

Congress is adjourned, that body must be convoked "without delay" to grant the President the necessary authorization.[7]

The Guatemalan President may constitutionally "dictate such measures as are necessary in the event of a serious emergency or public calamity", and has only to "advise Congress thereof at its next session".[8] In Honduras, the Congress may suspend certain guarantees during sixty days; but when the Congress is not in session, the President may suspend them for thirty days, and he is obligated to make a subsequent report to the Congress.[9] Nicaraguan provisions are more sweeping, and leave the President with substantially unlimited authority to suspend guarantees and arrest suspects.[10] In most other Latin American republics, presidential authority in this realm assumes important proportions and is often subject to few constitutional restraints.[11]

In the Latin American context, the Costa Rican Constitution is remarkable for the sharp limitations which it imposes on the presidential role in suspension of guarantees. Such suspension is limited to thirty days only, and to certain specifically described guarantees; detention of persons may take the form of house arrest only.[12] But more significantly, when the one-house *asamblea legislativa* is in session, the ordering of suspension of individual guarantees is entirely a function of that body and may occur only by a two-thirds vote of its entire membership. Even more notably, when the Legislative Assembly is not in session, a presidential decree of suspension of guarantees serves automatically, *ipso facto*, as a notice of convocation of the Assembly within the next forty-eight hours, when it must approve the suspension by the usual two-thirds vote. If unable to meet because of lack of a quorum, any number of deputies who are able to meet the next day will constitute a quorum, and they must approve the executive suspension by vote of two thirds of their number. Where these requirements are not met, the guarantees shall be "considered as reëstablished".[13] In reality, as we shall see later, the *asamblea legislativa* is in almost continuous session. Therefore, it would be a rare occasion when the President could actually exercise even this narrowly restricted power.

It would be excessively burdensome to the objects of this paper, and repetitious of other studies, to enter into a detailed discussion of Latin American constitutional practice bearing on executive-legislative and executive-judi-

[7] Mexico, *Constitution*, Article 29.
[8] Guatemala, *Constitution*, Article 168, Sec. 5.
[9] Honduras, *Constitution*, Articles 163–172.
[10] Nicaragua, *Constitution*, Article 197.
[11] For more extended discussions of this point, see Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 280–282; Stokes, *op. cit.*, pp. 391–394; and César A. Quintero, *Los decretos con valor de ley* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1958), pp. 144–155 *et passim*, on states of siege and suspensions of guarantees.
[12] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Article 111, Sec. 7.
[13] *Ibid.*, Article 140, Sec. 4.

cial relationships, the range of constitutionally prescribed presidential authority over conduct of elections, and the financial powers of the president. Suffice it to say that several Latin American constitutions typically provide for very broad presidential authority in each realm. In many instances, presidents may issue what amount to legislative decrees during adjournments of regular legislative sessions and may substantially control the legislative function. They possess wide powers of appointment and dismissal over judicial organs; they are in position to influence strongly or even dominate electoral organs; they are often at liberty to arrange budgets as they please and to allocate expenditures and even arrange for collection of revenues as they see fit.[14]

In all these realms, the Costa Rican Constitution displays a singular concern that executive power be limited. We have already noted that the Costa Rican President enjoys no sweeping decree authority.[15] As in most Latin American constitutions, he is permitted to initiate legislation in the *asamblea legislativa*. His ministers may attend sessions of the Legislative Assembly "at any time", and they "must do so when the Assembly so orders".[16] The Legislative Assembly may "conduct interpolations of Ministers of Government" and censure them by a two-thirds vote of deputies present.[17] The Constitution is careful to point out that the Legislative Assembly meets each year on May 1, "even if it has not been convoked", and that reapportionment is a function of the autonomous Supreme Electoral Tribunal.[18] The document provides that the Legislative Assembly may determine whether the President is physically or mentally capable of conducting the affairs of his office, and whether to call in the appropriate legal replacement, as well as decide by a two-thirds vote of its membership to indict the President and other high officials for trial by the Supreme Court.[19] The Constitution prohibits the Legislative Assembly from adopting "votes of applause for official acts".[20]

One remarkable article holds the President and associated ministers responsible if they "compromise the freedom, political independence, or territorial integrity of the Republic"; or "directly or indirectly impede or obstruct popular elections . . . "; or impede the Legislative Assembly; or "refuse to publish or execute the laws . . . "; or impede the judicary or municipal electoral organs; or violate a specific law "by action or omission".[21] Execu-

[14] *Supra.*, Chapter I, n. 1.
[15] *Supra.*, n. 3.
[16] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Article 145.
[17] *Ibid.*, Article 121, Sec. 24.
[18] *Ibid.*, Articles 116 and 106, respectively. See discussion of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, *infra*, Chapter IV.
[19] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Article 121, Secs. 8 and 9.
[20] *Ibid.*, Article 122.
[21] *Ibid.*, Article 149.

tive domination over other branches of Costa Rican government is of course presumed to be circumscribed by the provision that "The Army as a permanent institution is proscribed."[22]

The provisions of the Costa Rican Constitution make it clear that the document envisages an independent judicial branch. The lower courts of the country are appointed and supervised by the Supreme Court of Justice. Constitutional provisions are designed to protect that tribunal from either executive or excessive legislative interference. The appointment of the seventeen Supreme Court magistrates is exclusively a legislative function, but the terms are for eight years, thus bridging two four-year legislative periods. *Magistrates are regarded as re-elected for subsequent eight-year terms unless specifically determined otherwise by a two-thirds vote of the Legislative Assembly.* To protect against erosion of judicial autonomy upon occurrence of vacancies, it is provided that the Legislative Assembly appoint not fewer than twenty-five alternate magistrates from a list of fifty prepared by the Supreme Court; and, further, that in cases of absences of magistrates, selections from among the alternates will be made by the Supreme Court by lot.[23] It would be difficult to say that even the California or Missouri plans of judicial appointment would more assuredly separate the judicial function from either executive or legislative interference.

Furthermore, the Costa Rican Constitution utilizes every possible contrivance to guarantee that executive control over the electoral process will be non-existent. The document grants to a *tribunal supremo de elecciones* complete authority over the "organization, direction and supervision of acts pertaining to suffrage".[24] *More significantly, the three magistrates and three alternates of the Tribunal are appointed by the Supreme Court of Justice by a "vote of no less than two-thirds of its members"*; they must have the same qualifications as magistrates of the Supreme Court; they hold office for six years, thus differing in that respect from the terms of either the legislators or the Supreme Court magistrates; and one principal and one alternate are elected each two years, thus assuring a staggering of terms.[25] There can be no doubt that framers of the Costa Rican Constitution were determined that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal should be entirely free from either executive or legislative control.

Finally, the Costa Ricans provided every possible precaution against undue or unauthorized executive control over budgetary matters. In accordance with usual norms, the executive prepares the budget, and the Legislative Assembly approves it. There is a proviso that the Legislative Assembly may not increase expenditures unless it also provides for corresponding revenue.[26] In special circumstances, the executive may "alter the use to be made of an authorized item", but *such an alteration constitutes an automatic "convocation of the Legislative Assembly into special session to act upon it".*[27]

[22] *Ibid.*, Article 12. As is well known among Latin Americanists, an effective police force serves in a paramilitary capacity.
[23] *Ibid.*, Articles 157, 158, and 164.
[24] *Ibid.*, Article 99.
[25] *Ibid.*, Articles 100 and 101.

The fact that the national treasury expends funds and that its directive officials are selected by the Council of Government, or President and his ministers, means, of course, that Costa Rica follows the usual presidential norm insofar as this department is concerned.[28] Where Costa Rica does depart radically from the more usual Latin American pattern is in provisions for an office of Comptroller General of the Republic. This office can only be compared to the U. S. General Accounting Office, for it exercises similar functions in terms of approval of all public expenditures as a prerequisite to their release. However, the Costa Rican comptroller is in at least one respect even more protected from executive influence than is his United States counterpart, in that his appointment is exclusively a legislative function, without presidential participation. His term is eight years, to commence two years after the beginning of a presidential term, and he may be reappointed indefinitely.[29]

It would appear that the Costa Rican President is not even master in his own executive house. The Constitution and a rigid civil service statute do provide a merit system for appointment of public employees and careful protections against their unwarranted removal.[30] But more than this, a large share of the functions of Costa Rican government are substantially outside of executive control, being under jurisdiction of some fourteen autonomous agencies and one hundred twenty-two small and large local and national semi-autonomous agencies.

Decentralization of Costa Rican executive functions follows a trend which began many years ago, possibly with the founding of the Banco Internacional de Costa Rica, in 1914.[31] Directors of the autonomous agencies are normally appointed with participation of the Legislative Assembly, by means which are designed to keep the agencies free of excessive executive control. The Constitution insists that the autonomous agencies must "enjoy independence in matters of government and administration", and their directors are responsible for their management.[32] Articles on the University of Costa Rica

[26] *Ibid.*, Articles 177, 178, and 179.
[27] *Ibid.*, Article 180.
[28] *Ibid.*, Articles 185–187.
[29] *Ibid.*, Articles 183 and 184.
[30] *Ibid.*, Article 192.
[31] Costa Rica, *Dictamen de mayoría de los miembros de la Comisión de Trabajo y Provisión Social de la Asamblea Legislativa sobre un proyecto-ley . . . las instituciones autónomas . . .* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1959), p. 11.
[32] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Article 188.

and on other autonomous institutions provide that legislation pertaining to them may not be passed without prior consultation with their directors.[33]

It is to be noted that in the 1958 budget, appropriations for the three branches of government and the *tribunal supremo de elecciones* amounted to 165,593,151.60 colones (colón: $0.15 U. S.), while those for the autonomous agencies came to 177,796,077.63 colones, or more than half the total governmental budget.[34]

An authority on Costa Rican public administration is Lic. Wilburg Jiménez Castro, who is Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences at the University of Costa Rica as well as Director of the Dirección General de Estadística y Censos (General Department of Statistics and Census). In an interview he complained of general lack of governmental cohesion and of insufficient coördination among executive branches. He agreed that the separation of powers is a worthy ideal, but contended that in Costa Rica the principle is carried to extremes, with each branch and autonomous agency moving in its own circle. Over the years, he pointed out, the executive branch has suffered from continuous budgetary parsimony; and the multiplication of autonomous agencies is now serving both to paralyze the executive function and to create a species of administrative chaos. While other governments are instituting cohesive reorganizations of their executive branches, the Costa Rican is moving in the opposite direction, and the administrative organization of the country is not abreast of the economic and social dynamism of the country.[35]

There can be no doubt that Costa Rican constitutional and other provisions are designed to preserve individual guarantees, legislative and judicial prerogatives, and electoral and financial realms from undue executive influence. Even important executive functions are divorced from presidential control. In these respects — whatever the reality of Costa Rican political life may be — Latin Americanists must agree that Costa Rican constitutional provisions are at variance with those in several other Latin American states; and there is evidence that actual practices within Costa Rican government,

[33] *Ibid.*, Articles 88 and 190. The same rule applies to the *tribunal supremo de elecciones* and to the *corte suprema de justicia*, which are not autonomous agencies, but separate arms of the government — with the added proviso that legislation pertaining to their interests may not be passed over their objections without approval of a two-thirds majority of the deputies (*Constitution*, Articles 97 and 167).

[34] Costa Rica, *Dictamen de mayoría*, p. 6. Autonomous agencies are the Banco Central, Banco Nacional de Costa Rica, Banco de Costa Rica, Banco Anglo Costarricense, Instituto Nacional de Seguros, Banco Crédito Agrícola de Cartago, Universidad de Costa Rica, Instituto Nacional de Vivienda y Urbanismo, Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad, Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, Ferrocarril Eléctrico al Pacífico, Consejo Nacional de Producción, Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social, and Patronato Nacional de la Infancia. The semi-autonomous agencies, which at last count numbered one hundred twenty-two, were largely, though not entirely, devoted to special education and public assistance and were generally, though not exclusively, of a local character (*Ibid.*, pp. 3–5).

[35] Interview with Lic. Wilburg Jiménez Castro, April 29, 1959.

insofar as autonomous agencies are concerned, do not depart very far from the constitutional provisions.

As we have implied earlier, however, formal constitutional statements may be quite unreliable as guides to political institutions and practices. It is therefore important that we survey the actual conduct of Costa Rican political life.

CHAPTER III

Political Parties

Latin Americans often speak of the "official party", or *partido ministerial.* It is common to think of opposition parties as existing in an atmosphere of great political insecurity, without real hope of securing political power by peaceful means. Their leaders count themselves fortunate if they can survive a political campaign without having to suffer physical injury, disruption of their political organizations, imprisonment, or exile. In reality, Latin America provides several exceptions to the presumed norm. Costa Rica is one of these.

Party history may be said to have begun in Costa Rica in 1889, when protagonists organized the Partido Constitucional Democrático and the Partido Liberal Progresista. These were highly personalist-oriented parties, and since that date much political controversy in the republic has related more to personal than to ideological differences. Though some party continuity can be traced through the past twenty to thirty years, it has been characteristic in Costa Rica for parties to switch allegiances, to offer and withdraw support of governments, and to move from one candidate to another with rather startling rapidity. For example, the present Partido Republicano derives from the old Calderón-Picado regime, which a Figueres-Ulate combination overthrew in 1948. However, President Mario Echandi (1958–1962) generally draws his support from Partido Unión Nacional, the party of Otilio Ulate, in combination with Partido Republicano, of Rafael Calderón Guardia. Partido Liberación Nacional, under leadership of José Figueres, served during 1958–1962 as the most consistent and vigorous opposition party. Though Unión Nacional was generally a moderate, middle-of-the-road party, publisher Otilio Ulate found occasion to give generously of the columns of his paper to both Communists and extremists of the far right.[1]

If any Costa Rican parties may be said to be of more or less "permanent" character, they are Liberación Nacional (PLN), Unión Nacional (PUN), and Republicano Nacional (PRN). There has currently been a Partido In-

[1] Rodríguez Vega, *op. cit.*, pp. 42 ff., stresses the personalist character of early Costa Rican politics; and Lic. Rodrigo Facio, *rector* of the University of Costa Rica, laments the lack of any really permanent parties during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (*Estudio sobre economía costarricense* (San José: Editorial Soley y Valverde, 1942), p. 66). By contrast, Ricardo Castro Beeche, publisher of *La Nación*, regrets that the day has passed when "occasional, non-professional politicians" would temporarily leave their professions, their businesses or their farm plots to take up the presidency "in the service of their country" rather than of some organized ideological party (*La Nación*, May 10, 1959, p. 6).

dependiente, an offshoot of PLN, as well as an illegal Communist Party, known in Costa Rica as Vanguardia Popular.

It is characteristic of Costa Rican politics that aside from informal legislative caucuses and jerry-built electoral structures, the only regularly organized and coherently operative party is PLN, which during the period 1958–1962 has been in opposition to the Echandi government. Liberación Nacional is the party of José Figueres and is one of several semi-socialist, democratic, anti-Communist, western-oriented parties of the Americas — as are Betancourt's Acción Democrática of Venezuela, Haya de la Torre's Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) of Peru, and the like. PLN stresses free elections, social reform, and the raising of educational, economic, and social standards; it advocates a mixed economy, with much proprietorship combined with social control and social consciousness; it tends to favor a large economic role for government, but generally through the medium of autonomous public agencies. The elected term of José Figueres (1953–1958) brought forth far-reaching programs for housing, public welfare, public health, public education, strengthening of democratic political processes, and so on. PLN may be said to have provided Costa Rica with a sort of Swedish-type New Deal. It is significant that in elections of 1958, the candidate of Liberación Nacional lost to more conservative Mario Echandi, of the PUN-PRN coalition.[2] Nevertheless, the party salvaged twenty of the forty-five seats in the one-house Legislative Assembly and could expect that from time to time four other independent members would collaborate with PLN to form an opposition majority.

Liberación Nacional is a highly integrated, formally structured party with popular and executive organs.[3] It undertakes careful periodic analyses of its own deficiencies, disciplines recalcitrant members, and even expels disobedient deputies from the ranks of the party.[4] It publishes numerous books, pamphlets, and journals, including the daily *La República* and the bi-monthly journal of scholarship and opinion, *Combate.* In collaboration with at least

[2] For data on PLN I am indebted to interviews with Uladislao Gámez, cultural secretary of Partido Liberación Nacional and former minister of education, May 1, 4, 5 and 18, 1959; and with Lic. Daniel Odúber Quirós, deputy and legislative leader, PLN, May 20, 1959; and the following sources: Daniel Odúber, *Lo que es su partido*, pamphlet, n.d.; Comité de Planes del Partido Liberación Nacional, *Plataforma política para la administración Orlich, 1958–62* (San José, n.d.); José Figueres, *Cartas a un ciudadano* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1956); same author, *Palabras gastadas* (San José, 1943); *Mensaje del señor presidente constitucional de la república, D. José Figueres, 8 noviembre 1953* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1953); and *Carta fundamental del movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (mimeo, n.d.).

[3] Structure is described in the *Estatutos, Partido Liberación Nacional* (mimeo, 1958). An example of vigorous analysis of party deficiencies may be found in Joaquín Garro, *La derrota del Partido Liberación Nacional* (2d ed.; San José: Imprenta Vargas, 1958, pp. 9–54.

[4] As when the party expelled Dr. Alvaro Montero Padilla, on the grounds that he had negotiated with the opposition to secure the presidency of the Legislative Assembly (*La República*, May 7, 1959, p. 7).

fourteen other Latin American democratic parties, PLN is a principal founder of the new Instituto Internacional de Educación Pública, which has its headquarters in San José and provides a full program of political education for a select group of students whom participating Latin American parties nominate in the hope they will become trained political leaders.[5]

Though PLN intends to be an ideological party with a view to programs for the national welfare of Costa Rica,[6] it does not altogether escape from the more characteristic *personalista* features of Costa Rican politics. Hugo Navarro Bolandi's *La generación del 48* is filled with purple passages about the grandeur of Figueres, the heroism of the anti-Calderón Guardia movement of 1948, and the greatness of "the man and the ideas that animated them".[7] Other publications stress the contributions of Figueres, and his writings and messages play a very important role in party propaganda. It is not certain, however, that Figueres himself exercises a close control over internal party affairs. Interviews indicated that while he will talk and write at great length about ideas and problems of the nation and the world, he shows little interest in the exercise of detailed party leadership.

In any event, it would appear that vigorous and effective opposition activity is not unknown to Costa Rican political life. Far from existing on the fringes of legality, or in the shadows of fear and insecurity, the Costa Rican opposition can play a highly significant role in the political affairs of the nation.

A disaffected offshoot of Liberación Nacional in the 1958 elections was the Partido Independiente, led by Lic. Jorge Rossi, who had been Minister of Economy in the 1953–1958 Figueres regime. Followers of Rossi became dissatisfied with methods used by Liberación Nacional in nomination of candidates, seceded from PLN, and proposed Rossi's candidacy. The subsequent election of February 2, 1958, gave about 102,000 votes to victorious Mario Echandi; 95,000 to Francisco Orlich, PLN; and 23,000 to Rossi. It is likely that without the split with Rossi and his followers, Liberación Nacional would have win the election.

Ideologically, Lic. Rossi claims that the independents stand about at the center of the Liberación Nacional spectrum and that they favor stabilization of prices, moderate state intervention in economic and social realms, and

[5] Director of the Institute is the Rev. Dr. Benjamín Núñez, a founder and leader of Liberación Nacional. During 1960–1961, Dr. Harry Kantor, University of Florida, served as full-time professor and collaborator with the Institute. Courses were offered in political parties, political theory, hemispheric and international relations, and history and sociology. See Instituto de Educación Política, *Introducción informativa* (mimeo, n.d.); and Newsletters, I, Nos. 1–4 (August 15, December 1, and December 17, 1960; January 15, 1961); Rafael Pantoja, "El Instituto Internacional de Educación Política," *Combate*, III (January–February, 1961), 59; and Instituto de Educación Política, *Información general* (San José, March, 1961).

[6] Gámez interviews, *supra.*, n. 2.

[7] Hugo Navarro Bolandi, *La generación del 48* (México, D.F.: Editorial Olimpo, 1951), p. 162.

state control over natural monopolies. The principal controversy, however, lay with the PLN mode of selection of candidates, which Rossi's followers felt gave insufficient opportunity to their favorite.[8] There can be little doubt that the Partido Independiente is a passing *personalista* phase of Costa Rican politics and that it will disappear from the scene with the normal changes which will occur in political alignments. It may be expected that Lic. Rossi, who is an able and cultured moderate from the Costa Rican business community, will continue to play a lively role in the political fortunes of the country. Relations between Rossi and the *figueristas* are not strained, and both sides are anxious for a *rapprochement*.

During 1958–1962 PLN and the independents have served as a vigorous, almost-majority opposition group in the Legislative Assembly. In the same manner, while José Figueres served as PLN President during 1953–1958, Unión Nacional took the role of opposition party under full protection of the law. Even during 1958–1962, it cannot be said that PUN has been in any sense an "official" party. President Echandi has had a slim majority in the Legislative Assembly on those occasions when the ten PUN members have secured assistance of all eleven of the PRN people as well as of two independents. Thus was a precarious balance established during 1958–1962, which made successful passage of any presidential program a highly problematical affair.

Unión Nacional is the centrist party of Costa Rican politics. Though founded officially in 1946 by publisher Otilio Ulate, its origins lie farther back, in 1942, when Lic. Fernando Lara Bustamente and Lic. Eladio Trejos founded the Partido Demócrata. It was in a convention of 1947 that Unión Nacional combined with the Demócrata and the then Social Democrático (José Figueres) to promote the candidacy of Ulate against that of Dr. Rafael Calderón Guardia, Partido Republicano. After the turbulence of the 1948–1949 period, as we have seen, Ulate secured the presidency. In the 1953 elections, Unión Nacional put forward Lic. Fernando Castro to oppose José Figueres of Liberación Nacional.

Unlike PLN, PUN is not a disciplined, ideological party. It generally follows the leadership of Otilio Ulate, who serves as the president of the party. According to Lara Bustamente, the party opposes government intervention in the economy, particularly insofar as direct government ownership is concerned. It is the view of members that political monopoly is more dangerous than private, as being even less subject to public control. The party favors strict observance of the rules of international law regarding self-determination and asylum. At the same time that the PUN regards the Nicaraguan Somoza dynasty with abhorrence, the party insists upon non-intervention

[8] For much of this material I am indebted to an interview with Lic. Jorge Rossi, May 22, 1959.

in the affairs of the neighbor republic. PUN members strenuously oppose the tendency of Liberación Nacional to support movements designed to overthrow the Somoza dynasty and similar dictatorial regimes. PUN organizes itself prior to each election in accordance with electoral law, but does not pretend to be a permanently structured party. According to Lara Bustamente, "We are in the center, with a view to the left." Though the party supported the Echandi candidacy in 1958, it is in no sense a *partido ministerial*. Its collaboration with the Partido Republicano cannot always be assured. Though it has coöperated with the PRN in supporting many Echandi measures, its distaste for the extremist, *personalista* tendencies of the *republicanos* is hardly less than its criticism of the highly organized, left-wing, but democratic, ideological steamroller that the *figueristas* have tried to build in Costa Rica. Personal differences between Otilio Ulate and Calderón Guardia may finally prevent any lasting collaboration between Unión Nacional and the *calderonista* PRN.[9]

Though Otilio Ulate is publisher of *Diario de Costa Rica*, that newspaper expresses extremist views of both far right and far left that seem to be rather out of keeping with the moderate opinions of PUN leaders. Costa Rica's largest daily, *La Nación*, whose director is Ricardo Castro Beeche, claims to be independent of political affiliation, but adopts a moderate tone which is more in keeping with the thinking of the centrist PUN. It generally supports the party's position, and during Echandi's term has been pro-administration in its political orientation. It is indicative of the character of Costa Rican politics that in 1958 Lic. Mario Echandi was the candidate of PUN and PRN without being strongly attached to either.

Partido Republicano Nacional (PRN) is without doubt the most *personalista* and least ideologically oriented party in Costa Rican politics. The group emerged around the figure of Dr. Rafael Calderón Guardia in the early years of his presidency (1940–1944), and since that time its single coherent, consistent theme has been the promotion of the political interests of this very popular leader.

Dr. Calderón Guardia, a distinguished physician who enjoys a large personal following, was elected to the presidency in 1940. His election, and the absence at the time of any substantial opposition against him, may be attributed to a fortunate combination of general popularity among all sectors of the population with support by wealthy coffee growers. To many he was a well known and beloved family doctor, and there were many younger Costa Ricans who could say with pride that it was Dr. Calderón Guardia who

[9] For much of the information on the Partido Unión Nacional, I am indebted to the Lara Bustamente interview, *supra*, Chapter I, n. 8.

had brought them into the world. It is said that he did not abandon his practice after his election to the presidency, and that more than one baby owed its successful delivery to the ministrations of the President of the Republic.[10]

It is not clear that Calderón's mastery of political concepts was proportionate to his medical attainments. During 1914–1925, he had studied medicine in Europe, where he had absorbed a rather miscellaneous set of reformist ideas and a concern for the welfare of his people and his country. He came to think of himself as guided by deep moral and religious principles, though he was not explicit as to their exact nature. He was troubled over the problem of poverty and was desirous that his governmental program elevate the economic, moral, and cultural condition of the working people. His writings leave no doubt that he was moved by a deep sense of social consciousness, misty though his ideological conceptualization may have been.[11]

When he assumed the presidency in 1940, he could boast of neither a coherent political philosophy nor an organized political party. Shortly after his inauguration, his followers founded the Partido Republicano Nacional, with a view to working out a program of social reform and rallying political support behind the new President. Measures of social reform followed in quick succession. Legislation provided for a new, sweeping social-security program, a new labor code, some land distribution, and the like. Conservative elements, of course, began to move into the opposition.[12]

During the same period, there was established the Vanguardia Popular, under direction of Manuel Mora, who was then and is today the leader of the Communists of Costa Rica. According to Alberto F. Cañas (PLN), Vanguardia Popular was in fact formed in 1943, a few moments after dissolution of the Communist Party and with the same directorate and personnel.[13] No one, including the Vanguardia Popular leadership, questions the Communist origins of the group. That Vanguardia Popular was the Communist Party under a new name is the finding of the Biesanz team and of all other commentators on the point.[14]

President Calderón needed organized support for his governmental pro-

[10] For much factual information on Dr. Calderón Guardia, I am indebted to an interview with Deputy and Lic Guillermo Villalobos Arce, a leader of the PRN, May 7, 1959.

[11] Especially, Dr. Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia, *El gobernante y el hombre frente al problema social costarricense* (San José: By author, n.d.), pp. 5, 11, 13 *et passim*. For a lyrical paean to the virtues of Dr. Calderón, there is Fernando Torres Vincenzi, *Doctor Rafael Calderón Guardia — esbozo biográfico* (San José: Imprenta Lehmann, 1940). According to this volume, Calderón was the embodiment of perfection — an emotional and intellectual giant among dwarfs, comprehensive, of great vision, devoted only to the most elevated realms of thought, highly cultured, brilliant, patriotic, democratic, indefatigable; an architect of social welfare, exemplary and of profound spiritual depth, etc., etc.

[12] Villalobos interview, *supra.*, n. 10.

[13] Alberto F. Cañas, *Los ocho años* (San José: Editorial Liberación Nacional, 1955), p. 49.

[14] Biesanz, *op. cit.*, pp. 111, 169, and 220.

gram and for his embryo Partido Republicano, and Vanguardia Popular was ready to assist him. In his eulogy of Dr. Calderón Guardia, Lic. Albertazzi quotes Dr. Teodoro Picado, subsequent *calderonista* President, to the effect that "... *vanguardistas* comprised almost 60 per cent of our forces ..."[15]

There can be no doubt that the government and political movement of the naïve Dr. Calderón Guardia were heavily infiltrated with Communist personnel and influence. In a manner typical of opponents of western democracy, the PRN-Vanguardia regimes of 1940–1948 showed little or no respect for majority rule, individual rights, or the supremacy of the law. Elections became notoriously corrupt. The election of Picado in 1944 occurred in such an atmosphere of fraud and real or threatened violence that it would not have been realistic to have expected any effective opposition to emerge. The Calderón-Picado machine discouraged one minor opposition figure from running, and drove José Figueres out of the country. There were farcical legislative elections in 1946. In response to irresistible popular demand, an autonomous electoral tribunal was established prior to the 1948 presidential elections. In the contest, publisher Otilio Ulate contended against Dr. Calderón's bid to return for another, nonconsecutive term. The electoral tribunal announced the victory of Ulate. The Picado-Calderón-dominated Legislative Assembly claimed fraud by the tribunal, and annulled the election. The Figueres-Ulate revolt followed. Those who are versed in the ways of the disparagers of western democracy will not be surprised that Picado and Calderón fled to Somoza's Nicaragua. Calderón later returned to Costa Rica, and Picado died in Nicaragua in 1960.

It is indicative of the tolerant side of Costa Rican politics that upon inauguration of the Constitution of 1949, and the end of rule by the Figueres *junta*, the Partido Republicano Nacional was reorganized and is again vigorously active in Costa Rican politics — as usual, under inspiration of Dr. Calderón Guardia. During the 1958–1962 term it has held eleven seats in the Legislative Assembly. There can be no doubt that the party is today as ideologically incoherent as it has always been, and its addiction to the personality of Dr. Calderón (now a deputy in the Legislative Assembly) appears to be the one unwavering characteristic of its political orientation. Though the party is not so Communist-oriented as in the halcyon days of the alliance with Vanguardia Popular, it is clear that the few Communists in Costa Rica find political shelter in it. During 1958–1962, the PRN generally supported the government of conservative President Mario Echandi — along with a motley collection of wealthy landowners, some extreme rightists,

[15] Albertazzi, *op. cit.*, p. 44. Albertazzi intended the Picado quotation to indicate the dependence of the regime on the Communists, as a justification for the alliance between PRN and *Vanguardia Popular*.

and publisher and ex-President Otilio Ulate, who in 1948 joined with Figueres in the revolutionary movement against the Calderón government. *Diario de Costa Rica*, the Ulate newspaper, gives much of its space to the columns of columnists, such as Merwin K. Hart, from the extreme U. S. right wing. On April 15, 1959, Manuel Mora, Costa Rican Communist leader, delivered a one-hour radio diatribe in which he tried to show that it was not really Dr. Calderón Guardia, but rather extreme pressure from the U. S. Embassy, which had achieved Figueres' expulsion from the country during the first PRN administration. *Diario de Costa Rica* was the only Costa Rican newspaper to carry the full text of the Mora speech, or for that matter even to devote more than a few lines to the address, even though publisher Ulate had joined with Figueres in the revolution against the Calderón machine.[16] There can be no doubt that Costa Rican politics make strange bed-fellows and that Partido Republicano Nacional makes the strangest of all.

There have been some occasions in Costa Rican political history when overwhelming majority support for a party machine has seemed to impose temporarily some elements of one-party rule on the country. Such, for example, was the 1940-1948 period under the PRN-Vanguardia-Calderón-Picado regime. Though the 1953 election was among the most uncorrupted in Costa Rican history, there can be no doubt that the subsequent term under a PLN president and a large PLN legislative majority left small opportunity for the opposition to influence effectively the course of government. This situation, however, was far from making Costa Rica a one-party state; and the opposition returned in 1958 to collaborate in the election of Mario Echandi. Costa Rica has almost never known the sort of integrated, official, one-party domination which has transpired in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and at one time or another in most of the countries of South America. The usual generalized descriptions of *partidos ministeriales* and of insecure, harassed opposition parties cannot be applied to Costa Rica.

Costa Rican law on political parties provides another clue to the country's characteristic attitudes toward political contest. Any twenty-five people may form a political party by proclaiming their intention before a notary.[17] The law provides that parties may be national, provincial, or cantonal, depending

[16] *Diario de Costa Rica*, April 16, 1959, pp. 14, 17, and 19. The speech was broadcast into the streets of downtown San José from amplifiers atop the *Diario* building. Mora devoted a large portion of his address to a vitriolic attack on Figueres. A few weeks prior to this event, the first break between Fidel Castro and José Figueres had occurred. The Mora speech was broadcast just three and one-half months after the January 1, 1959, seizure of power by the Castro revolution in Cuba and the dislodgment of dictator Batista. One may speculate regarding the furious concern which Mora felt for Castro's defense against social reformer Figueres, even at that early date.

[17] Costa Rica, Tribunal Suprema de Elecciones, *Ley orgánica del registro civil y código electoral:* "Código electoral" (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1953), Article 57. For actual electoral activity, larger numbers of members must be shown, depending on the level; for example, there must be three thousand members for permission to participate in a national election.

on the level of elections in which they participate and offer candidates.[18] The only important restrictions on their formation are that they may not be organized within six months of an election, nor may candidates be inscribed within two months of an election.[19] Parties may propagandize at any time, but may only carry on public demonstrations within two months of an election. The law forbids demonstrations by two or more different parties in the same town on the same day. Otherwise, permits for demonstrations will normally be issued by provincial governors and local *jefes políticos*, as local representatives of the central government are called.[20] Parties may carry on any meetings or other programs within their own clubs or premises at any time, except only that the headquarters of different parties may not be within 200 meters of one another.[21] While Costa Rica is not a notably anti-clerical state, the law does forbid parties to use religious propaganda for political purposes — that is, the use of religious symbols or messages for political advantage.[22] The law provides that for purposes of electoral organization, a party must establish assemblies at various territorial levels — district, cantonal, provincial, and national. All party members in a district participate in the *asamblea de distrito*; five delegates from each district attend the cantonal assembly; the same number from each canton participate in the provincial assembly; and ten from each of the seven provinces attend the national assembly. Finally, there must be a *comité ejecutivo*, comprised of a president, secretary, and treasurer, to carry out decisions of the *asamblea nacional* of the party.[23] The national, provincial and cantonal assemblies nominate candidates at the various levels — that is, for President and Vice-Presidents, or for deputies (elected from provinces) or for municipal councillors (elected by cantons).[24]

Even more relevant to the point is the fact that Costa Rican law provides for governmental payment to all nationally inscribed parties of a subsidy which is designed to compensate them partially for costs incurred in participation in national elections. Thus it was that on April 21, 1959, under authority of a specific determination by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, President Echandi ordered that amounts proportionate to their votes in the 1958 elections be paid to the political parties, as follows: PUN, 1,913,740.77 colones; PLN, 2,355,053.74 colones; Independiente, 575,830.61 colones; and PRN, 601,182.05 colones.[25]

[18] *Ibid.*, Article 63.
[19] *Ibid.*, Articles 64 and 76.
[20] *Ibid.*, Articles 79 and 80.
[21] *Ibid.*, Article 82.
[22] *Ibid.*, Article 87.
[23] *Ibid.*, Articles 60 and 61.
[24] *Ibid.*, Articles 73–75.
[25] *La Nación*, April 19, 1959, p. 23.

Party organization, then, is not encumbered by complex and prohibitive rules. A small number of interested persons may readily organize a political party, and the obstacles to participation in national elections are not great.[26] Costa Rican political practice has little in common with the official one-party system which is characteristic of several other Latin American republics; and the law goes to some lengths to preserve the free multiparty system of the republic.

[26] Kantor, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 *et passim*, summarizes important rules relative to procedures of party inscription.

CHAPTER IV

Elections and Opinion

It is customary to think that fraud and official coercion are characteristic features of Latin American elections; that it is unusual for the opposition to secure power through the ballot; that the losing party usually claims it has been cheated, and threatens darkly of revolution; that the executive lays a heavy hand on the election process, and the whole operation is so arranged as to guarantee victory for the party in power.

There are several exceptions to this alleged Latin American norm. Costa Rica exemplifies one of these. There can be little doubt that contemporary Costa Rican elections are quite free of the sorts of coercion and fraud that are said to characterize the voting process in neighboring countries. It is the view of Ricardo Castro Beeche, publisher of *La Nación*, that Costa Rican electoral democracy is well developed and that its defects are minor.[1] In his thorough study of the Costa Rican election of 1953, Professor Harry Kantor found no evidence of electoral corruption and concluded that control by the autonomous Supreme Electoral Tribunal facilitated fair elections. According to him, election campaigning was active and unrestrained, with posters, vigorous newspaper comment, rallies, parades, demonstrations, lists of adherents of the opposing candidates, and so forth. Finally, PLN candidate José Figueres emerged victorious despite endorsement by most of the newspapers of his conservative opponent, Fernando Castro Cervantes.[2]

Electoral conditions in Costa Rica have not always been so nearly perfect. Direct election of the President was not introduced until 1913. The secret ballot was not put into use until 1926. Stringent guarantees against electoral fraud and official coercion were not fully elaborated until the election of 1953.[3] But even before modern provisions had assured electoral integrity, there was a tolerance about Costa Rican political difference which was unusual for Latin America. Thus it was that the distinguished Lic. Ricardo Jiménez Oreamuno, who had served as President of the republic during three non-consecutive terms, could write in 1942:

> I do not know whether it is still characteristic of the rest of America that one is born either a liberal or a conservative. But I do recall that among some states of our isthmus there have persisted such profound differences as to cause fratricidal battles, which have brought tragedy and pain to the homes of Central America. In that aspect, political life here has always been quite different. Intensity has characterized our political campaigns. Interests of the contending bands have clashed violently. Nevertheless, with the passing of the electoral contest we have again become the same brothers that we were before. The personal or political aggravation is forgotten. Passion is buried; and each one returns to his habitual chores, satisfied with victory or resigned to the defeat... This is a glorious tradition that endures, and I hope it will be eternal...[4]

[1] Interview with Ricardo Castro Beeche, director, *La Nación*, May 20, 1959.
[2] Kantor, *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 62–67 *et passim*; and especially Chapter V, on the conduct of the campaign.
[3] Busey, "The Presidents of Costa Rica," *The Americas*, XVIII (July, 1961), 55–70.

Contemporary Costa Rican political leaders express the same spirit. Near the end of the 1958 election campaign, President José Figueres said, "He who does not know how to lose, ought not take part in a democratic contest."[5] After the defeat of his party in the same elections, he announced his surprise that anyone should conjecture as to whether he would deliver power to the victorious opposition.[6]

The *tribunal supremo de elecciones* is responsible for all electoral functions of the republic. (We have already described the mode of selection of its three magistrates by the Supreme Court of Justice.[7]) Two departments comprise the TSE: the Departamento del Estado Civil keeps the Civil Register, on births, matrimonies, and deaths; the Departamento Electoral is concerned with elections, and relies in part on the Civil Register lists. These must be kept constantly up to date. Changes in the registry appear monthly in the official *Gaceta*, and daily in the periods between convocation and holding of elections.[8] The TSE prepares *cédulas*, or identification booklets, which voters must present for voting as well as for several other acts requiring their official identification. These contain photograph, signatures of the citizen and of Civil Register officials, and personal data.[9] In this respect, Costa Rican practice resembles that of most other Latin American and European countries, where individuals must always be in possession of official identification documents. But Costa Rica differs from her neighbors in the elaborate precautions which the law provides against political tampering with electoral rights.

Stringent regulations are designed to preserve electoral order and to prevent abuse of voters. The law prohibits all electoral activity by executive officials, including the President of the republic, military personnel, and the like.[10] There may be no political deductions from public salaries. The Legislative

[4] *Selección de artículos originales del prócer, Ricardo Jiménez Oreamuno* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1946), pp. 53–54. Lic. Jiménez served as president during 1910–1914, 1924–1928, and 1932–1936.
[5] "Estos diez años," *discurso pronunciado por el Sr. Presidente de la República, D. José Figueres, 29 de enero de 1958* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1958), p. 5.
[6] "Las elecciones de 1958 y el futuro de un gran movimiento popular," *discurso de José Figueres Ferrer, 7 febrero 1958* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1958), pp. 3 and 4.
[7] *Supra*, Chapter II.
[8] Costa Rica, Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones, *op. cit.*: "Ley orgánica del registro civil," Articles 1, 2, 34, and 57.
[9] Ibid., Article 64; and *La Nación*, August 23, 1959, p. 69.
[10] Costa Rica, Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones, *op. cit.*: "Código electoral," Articles 84–88. The reference is to the *guardia civil*, since Costa Rica is presumed not to have an army.

Assembly must consult the TSE on all electoral matters, may only override the TSE opinion by a two-thirds vote of its membership, and may not override the tribunal's views by any sort of vote either within six months before or four months after an election.[11] When the Legislative Assembly requests the opinion of the TSE on a matter within the concern of the tribunal, it is customary for the TSE to publish its views in the daily newspapers of the capital, generally in prominent full-page spreads.[12]

Juntas electorales are established at provincial, cantonal, and local levels, with one regular and one substitute or *suplente* member from each party on each *junta*. The TSE establishes the *juntas provinciales* as recommended by the participating parties; the *juntas provinciales* name *juntas cantonales* in the same manner; and the *juntas cantonales* set up local *juntas receptoras*, also on recommendations by the various political parties.[13]

Elections occur on the first Sunday of February, each four years, after official convocation by the TSE during the first fifteen days of the preceding August.[14] Electoral law provides that in those cases where persons must work on election day, employers must provide them with one-hour leave with full pay, to permit them to vote.[15] Voting age is twenty. Although literacy is not required for voting, it is a prerequisite for election to public office.[16]

On arrival at the polls, the voter must show his *cédula*. Officials provide him with three ballots — for municipal, provincial, and national choices, respectively.[17] Ballots are uniform, are prepared by the director of the Civil Register, and are of the party-list type. National ballots present the presidential candidates under their respective party labels; provincial ballots list names of candidates for deputy; local ballots give the voter an opportunity to select among party lists for cantonal councils.[18] Voters indicate their choices by indelible ink thumb-print at the bottom of favored columns.[19] The law provides detailed rules on protection of ballots against misuse, and on their final counting by the *juntas* at the various levels. All ballots must be forwarded by *juntas* to the next higher level, and ultimately to the TSE, which announces the vote count as early as possible. The law provides rigid rules for severe punishment for infractions of electoral codes.[20]

According to the Constitution, a plurality (if over 40 per cent of total votes cast) is sufficient to elect the President and two vice-presidents. If no party achieves such a plurality, a second run-off election is held during the first Sunday of April between the two top contenders. The Constitution contains a curious, and original, provision to the effect that where two presidential candidates receive the same number of sufficient votes, the older of the two (and his collaborating vice presidential candidates) will be declared elected![21] For elections to the Legislative Assembly, the system of proportional representation, under a modified Hare system, is used.[22]

It is certain that electoral laws alone do not guarantee freedom or fairness of elections. The exceptionally careful provisions of Costa Rican electoral law would seem to indicate, however, that there is a real intention of assuring impartial choice of candidates on the basis of unfettered voter preference. Actual experience in elections, as shown in recent presidential contests and as reported by competent observers, such as Professor Kantor, should leave no question about the achievements of Costa Rica insofar as electoral matters are concerned. On another count, therefore — that of electoral integrity — contemporary Costa Rica probably provides an exception to alleged Latin American patterns.

References to journalistic expression, which have been incidental to the preceding survey, should leave no doubt that Costa Rica has a free press. There is no evidence of government pressure on or subsidy of any of the newspapers. Professor Kantor's 1953 study makes it very clear that the press is highly partisan and rather irresponsible, but under no shadow of governmental control.[23] Research by Professor Fitzgibbon on components of Latin American democracy gives a high rating to Costa Rican freedom of expression.[24] Observation confirms what other studies have contended.

The principal dailies of Costa Rica are *La Nación*, *La República*, *La Prensa Libre*, and *Diario de Costa Rica*. *La Nación* is the largest, with the most comprehensive national and international news coverage. It is generally critical of Liberación Nacional and of José Figueres, and supports Unión Nacional. Its tabloid-size pages are filled with long letters to the editor, interviews with political figures, and a rather disorganized mish-mash of news from politics and society. National affairs occupy by far the greatest portion of the pages of *La Nación*, but even its limited coverage of foreign news is greater than is to be found in any other Costa Rican newspaper. A typical edition may run well over thirty pages of closely printed news interspersed in a rather unpredictable manner with advertising. There is a vigorous editorial

[11] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Articles 95–102.
[12] As in "Se Pronuncia el Tribunal Electoral. . . ." *La Nación*, November 21, 1958, p. 16.
[13] Costa Rica, TSE, *op. cit.*, Articles 39 and 42–45.
[14] *Ibid.*, Articles 97 and 98.
[15] *Ibid.*, Article 168.
[16] *Ibid.*, Articles 1 and 5.
[17] *Ibid.*, Article 104.
[18] *Ibid.*, Article 27.
[19] *Ibid.*, Article 114.
[20] *Ibid.*, Articles 121–126, 130, and 158.
[21] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Article 138.
[22] Costa Rica, TSE, *op. cit.*, Articles 134–138.
[23] Kantor, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 58–61.
[24] Russell H. Fitzgibbon, "A Statistical Evaluation of Latin American Democracy," *Western Political Quarterly*, IX (September, 1956), 607–619.

page, with lively and often quite perceptive comment, which generally takes a moderate position on Costa Rican political questions.

La República, another tabloid newspaper, is quite obviously a party organ for Liberación Nacional. News coverage and editorial comment are invariably favorable to the PLN position. Views unfavorable to PLN rarely or never find their way into the columns of *La República*, and its coverage of non-political news is sketchy. *La Prensa Libre* appears variously in tabloid and full newspaper size, and is another supporter of Liberación Nacional. Though *La Prensa Libre* gives the appearance of being something more of an all-round newspaper than does *La República*, with broader coverage of national and world news, it actually follows the PLN line very closely. *La Prensa Libre* tends to devote much space, large headlines, and impassioned editorials to the minor comings and goings of local political figures, chance remarks of officials, real or imagined "deals" between the President and others, and the like.

Diario de Costa Rica, whose publisher is Otilio Ulate, was once the leading daily of Costa Rica. Now it usually appears in tabloid format and contains standard short items from foreign press services and from some extremist right-wing columns from the United States. The newspaper is more bitterly critical than any other of José Figueres and the PLN, and will devote considerable space to almost any attack against the *liberacionistas*, from whatever source.[25]

Remaining newspapers are small afternoon sheets of little importance to the politics of the country. Except for one remarkable publication, weekly and monthly journals are essentially without political significance. The exception is *La Semana Cómica*, a ludicrous eight-page illustrated tabloid whose principal object is to poke fun at all political leaders of all persuasions. This weekly, in addition to its satirical "news stories" and cartoons in a vernacular that only a Costa Rican could entirely understand, publishes composite photographs of leading politicians, including the President, in attitudes and poses which in the United States could cause trouble under the laws of libel. In one issue, a prepared photograph shows José Figueres, dressed in peasant costume and barefoot, walking around the countryside with his lamp in search of an honest man; another purports to depict Deputy Lic. Fernando Lara Bustamente in a bar, dancing the hot-cha-cha with a girl who is clothed in a bathing suit — the point being that Deputy Lara is not always immobile, but is actually capable of moving. Another "photograph" shows Minister of the Interior Joaquín Gené Vargas, with a stupified, pop-eyed expression, and

[25] *Supra*, Chapter III, n. 16. Ulate has published *¿Hacia dónde lleva a Costa Rica el Señor Presidente Figueres?* (San José: By the author, 1955), a collection of articles which bitterly attack Figueres and his 1953–1958 administration.

the caption claims that Vargas is applauding after some remarks by Deputy Daniel Odúber, his PLN opponent. However, "he is not applauding Odúber, but those who are whistling at Odúber; and the fact is that Don Joaquín has always looked on Don Daniel with bad eyes." Another shows President Echandi in company with "la señorita adúltera" (the adulterous miss), and her walls are covered with pictures of all the deputies. A half-page photograph, entitled "Our Ambassador in the United States", shows Ambassador Escalante lounging with a beautiful blonde, and the caption explains, "Ambassador Escalante was the object of warm attentions by the governments of El Salvador, Bolivia, and Brazil, as a consequence of his assistance with the coffee problem . . ."[26]

Insofar as press freedom is concerned, there can be no question that Costa Rican journalists write as they please — often with a smaller sense of responsibility than might be desired, but certainly free of all official control or influence.

Nor can there be any doubt that the Costa Rican public actively shares in the making of political decisions and is generally prepared to accept the consequences. Luis Alberto Monge, deputy and a PLN leader, considered that though there are weaknesses and faults in the political institutions and processes of the country, its democratic sense is well developed, and a regression is not likely. He stressed that popular participation is decisive at all levels of Costa Rican government, and that citizens do exercise much influence over the decision-making processes of the municipalities (cantons) and of the various *juntas* for education, social protection and welfare, and the like. Deputy Monge emphasized that though President Echandi could not depend on having a majority in the Legislative Assembly and was elected by a minority (because of the defection of Rossi from the PLN), Costa Ricans would be content to wait until the next election to express their choice for national offices. This attitude, he pointed out, is at variance with the practice of several other Latin American countries.[27] It was the view of Lic. Guillermo Villalobos Arce, a leader of PRN, that Costa Rica is a mature democracy. Despite the deep involvement of his *calderonista* party in the events of 1948, he stressed that Costa Rica's political recovery from the terrors of that period reveal that she is well along the road to stable, popular government.[28]

There can be no question that genuinely competitive elections and vigorous popular participation in politics and in public expression are regular features of the Costa Rican political scene.

[26] *La Semana Cómica*, III, 24 and 28 (April 25 and May 28, 1959).
[27] Interview with Deputy Luis Alberto Monge, *Partido Liberación Nacional*, April 27, 1959.
[28] Villalobos interview, *supra*, Chapter III, n. 10.

CHAPTER V

The Legislative Assembly

Executive dominance over legislative processes is a characteristic theme in the study of Latin American government. A study of Costa Rican legislative-executive relationships should be instructive as to realities of political-power distribution in the republic.

The Costa Rican Constitution provides for a one-house *asamblea legislativa*, with forty-five members to be elected each four years and ineligible to serve during an immediately succeeding term of office.[1] The Costa Rican legislative body shares its unicameral features with those of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, and Paraguay.

There are fifteen *suplentes*, or substitute deputies. When a *diputado propietario* must be absent, a *suplente* is chosen from among the fifteen, who, if possible, is from the province and party of the *propietario*. If this condition cannot be met, the next alternative is to try to select a *suplente* from the same province, regardless of party or, if that is impossible, then from the same party though from some other province or, as a last resort, by lot.[2]

The Legislative Assembly is supposed to follow the split-session practice, with a first period from May 1 to July 31 and a second from September 1 to November 1;[3] but because of abuse of special sessions, this constitutional provision loses meaning.

Deliberations of the Legislative Assembly are guided by an elected *directorio*, which serves for two years and consists of a *presidente* and two secretaries as well as a vice-president and two *prosecretarios*. Prior to selection of the *directorio*, at the beginning of a new session, initial deliberations are in charge of a *directorio provisional*, which consists of the six eldest deputies in the Assembly.[4] The secretaries keep records and perform chores related to rolls, documents, correspondence, and the like.[5] The *presidente* may (1) preside, (2) open and close sessions, (3) name standing committees (*comisiones*), (4) recognize deputies in the order in which they indicate their wish to speak, (5) bring abusive deputies to order, with the proviso that in the case of grave offenses a majority of the Legislative Assembly may suspend deputies for periods of eight days, fifteen days, or one month, depending on the number of offenses, and with corresponding loss of salary, and (6) clear the galleries

[1] Articles 106 and 107.
[2] Costa Rica, Asamblea Legislativa, *Reglamento de orden, dirección y disciplina interior* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1956), Article 14.
[3] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Article 116.
[4] *Reglamento*, Articles 1–6.
[5] *Ibid.*, Article 10.

whenever by shouts, whistles, blows, or other demonstrations the Assembly is interrupted in the conduct of its business.[6]

Deputies must have permission of the *presidente* to absent themselves up to three days per month, and of the Assembly for longer periods. The usual penalty for such unexcused absences as make a quorum impossible is forfeiture of salary in proportion to the number of days of absence; and even excused absences of over three days may result in forfeiture of salary for the corresponding period.[7]

Rules provide for an order of the day which is similar to that of other national legislative bodies. Sessions are supposed to begin at 4 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and at 9 a.m. on Friday, with the exception that they begin at noon on May 1, to hear the annual message of the President of the republic.[8] As will be seen later, these rules are significantly related to the realities of legislative-executive relationships.

A bill (*proyecto de ley*) may be introduced by the executive branch, through the appropriate minister, or by a deputy. The *presidente* of the Assembly announces its introduction and subject-matter and refers it to an appropriate standing committee (*comisión*), of which there are fourteen, of three members each. If there is question as to which *comisión* should consider it, the bill may be studied jointly by two *comisiones*. Except under special permission of the *directorio*, a standing committee must return a bill within eight days after receiving it.[9] On the basis of its hearings and deliberations, a *comisión* may present both a majority and a minority report. In reality, since *comisiones* are comprised of only three members each, it is not unusual for their reports to be rather predetermined by party or party-alliance considerations, and for the "minority" report to be simply the objections of the lone dissenting member.[10] If a committee report is unfavorable, and is accepted by the Legislative Assembly, the matter may not come up again until the next session. If the Legislative Assembly rejects a committee report, the question may be turned over to a new *comisión*. Upon a subsequent rejection by the Legislative Assembly, the matter is dropped for that session.[11]

[6] *Ibid.*, Article 9.
[7] *Ibid.*, Articles 12, 28, and 29.
[8] *Ibid.*, Articles 27 and 32. See *infra*, n. 29.
[9] *Ibid.*, Articles 15–18 and 23. For much of this material on formal legislative procedure, I am also indebted to Gámez interview, *supra*, Chapter III, n. 2.
[10] For example, during 1959 the Committee on Labor and Social Welfare consisted of two members from Liberación Nacional and one from Unión Nacional. A "majority" report opposing a presidentially inspired bill which would compel autonomous agencies to contribute to the social-security fund is signed by the two PLN members, and one gets the impression that the member from Unión Nacional may not have participated in the committee "deliberations" in a meaningful way (Costa Rica, *Dictamen*). The following are the legislative committees: foreign relations, budget, public education, interior, labor and social welfare, public works and highways, public finance, agriculture and colonization, commerce and industry, public health and social protection, aviation and marine, taxes and municipal loans, internal rules, and Constitution and legislation (*La Prensa Libre*, May 8, 1959).
[11] *Reglamento*, Article 25.

Debates may be extremely vigorous, and rules make clear that discussion on a given bill does not cease until all who desire to speak have done so.[12] Rules require that there be three different debates, which often consume a considerable period of time. The first of these debates is the most important and deals with the fundamental principles embodied in the *proyecto ley*. The second is perfunctory and of little importance. The third relates to matters of expression and of the mechanics of presentation and appearance of the bill.[13] In debate, the deputies rise by their seats, and do not come forward to address the Assembly as occurs in Mexico and several other Latin American legislative bodies. The Costa Ricans thus avoid any exaggerated impression of an orator-audience situation.

The final vote may be one of three different types: (1) the *ordinaria*, in which the affirmative rises and the negatives remain seated, (2) the *nominal*, where each deputy orally records his *sí* or *no*, with an explanatory speech which may not exceed twenty minutes, and (3) the *secreta*, where deputies deposit white (affirmative) or black (negative) balls in urns.[14] The *ordinaria* is the most usual type of vote; the *nominal* may be employed when requested by one member and approved by a majority of the Assembly; the *secreta* occurs in specially prescribed cases.[15] As one may determine by calculation, if each deputy takes advantage of his speaking privilege under the *nominal* voting procedure, the total count would consume no less than fifteen hours! As we shall see later, the Costa Rican *asamblea legislativa* has plenty of time for this or anything else that might strike the fancy of its members.

Budget debates are limited by controlling deadline dates; otherwise, they proceed very much like other legislative business.[16]

Within the Assembly, party organization is quite simple. The small size of the body and of the party delegations permits the PRN and PUN members simply to get together informally with their leaders from time to time. PLN holds a weekly meeting of its legislative fraction. Formal caucuses and party committees on committees, policy, and the like are unknown to the Costa Rican national legislature.[17]

In its actual conduct, there can be no doubt of the significant role played by the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly. Its deliberations are never characterized by the sorts of pusillanimous votes of approval and applause for executive proposals that feature the so-called legislative "debates" of Mexico

[12] *Ibid.*, Article 36.
[13] Gámez interview, *supra*, Chapter III, n. 2.
[14] *Reglamento*, Articles 51-54.
[15] *Ibid.*, Article 55.
[16] *Ibid.*, Article 47.
[17] Gámez interview, *supra*, Chapter III, n. 2.

and of several other Latin American republics. Legislative sessions are broadcast, and the newspapers are full of reports on legislative differences of view. Depending on their political persuasions, newspapers and broadcasters praise and criticize both the Legislative Assembly and the President of the republic, freely, vigorously, and almost without respite. One gets the impression that the entire country is intensely and almost incessantly concerned with legislative debates, their merits and demerits, and probable outcome.

The Legislative Assembly, or its *comisiones*, will formulate vigorous charges and condemnations of the executive, which are given wide publicity throughout the country. The President will publish defenses against writs which individuals, including deputies, file as protests against his official acts. Commentators charge the *asamblea* with invading the judicial realm, or the executive sphere, or the prerogatives of some of the autonomous agencies. The President and his ministers plead — sometimes in newspaper columns and often unsuccessfully — for passage of the bills they favor. In fact, according to the distinguished Lic. Wilburg Jiménez Castro, the President must spend so much time writing letters to the editor and exchanging views with callers that he has little time left for regular administrative duties.[18]

Observers have long commented on these egalitarian features of Costa Rican political life, and it appears that from a very early date many presidents had to deal with considerable legislative opposition. The great Lic. Cleto González Víquez (1906–1910 and 1928–1932) had to work in the face of an opposition majority, and the same seems to have occurred even in very early years, during the nineteenth century.[19]

The opening of the Legislative Assembly session of May 1, 1959, may not be typical of all such meetings, but it was indicative of the pattern of legislative-executive relationships in a Latin American country where not only executive dominance is not assured but legislative supremacy may in some instances be the more usual pattern.

It is customary in most of the Latin American republics for the address from the President to be the principal feature of the opening meeting of the annual legislative session. In Mexico, for example, the opening of Congress,

[18] Jiménez Castro interview, *supra*, Chapter II, n. 35. Some examples of newspaper comment: "Nuevos contratos bananeros le piden al ejecutivo," *La República*, April 30, 1959, p. 4; "La asamblea invade funciones del poder judicial," *La Nación*, May 17, 1959, p. 6; "El ejecutivo como encargado de mantener el orden y tranquilidad," *La Nación*, June 9, 1959, p. 11 (a statement by President Echandi); "Acusación contra Presidente Echandi fué formulada y se pidió investigación," *La Nación*, July 28, 1959, p. 14; "Semana de trabajo en la Asamblea Legislativa," *La Nación*, June 22, 1959, p. 6; and "La política y la función parlamentaria," *La Nación*, April 29, 1959, p. 6. The informality of presidential relations with the public is revealed by the fact that the President drives his own car and may often be seen driving on the streets of San José. It is said that when there are social functions which he attends, he picks up and leaves friends at their homes and goes everywhere without protection (Castro Beeche interview, *supra*, Chapter IV, n. 1).

[19] Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla histórica*, pp. 107 *et passim*; and Monge Alfaro, *Historia de Cos'a Rica*, pp. 154 ff

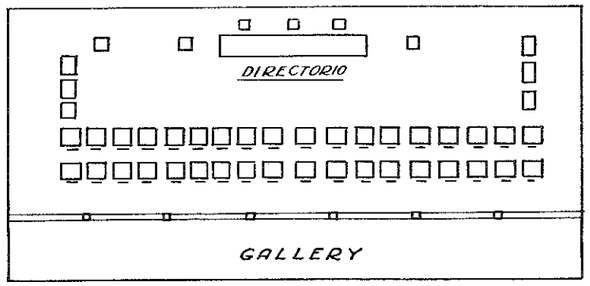

FIGURE 2. Interior Plan of the Legislative Assembly

on September 1 of each year, is marked by great pomp and ceremony as the gathered deputies, senators, cabinet members, foreign diplomatic representatives, and other dignitaries await with bated breath the arrival of the President to open the legislative session. The President's speech, which may consume several hours, receives the unstinted plaudits of almost all sectors of public opinion, and newspapers and other journals have a heyday with great advertisements from popular organs and business firms, which congratulate the President on the excellence and probity of his annual message.

In Costa Rica, the annual legislative session also opens with a presidential address. As we have seen, the Costa Rican legislative rules provide that this one meeting must open at noon instead of at the more usual hour of four o'clock. There is some ceremonial formality when the *guardia civil* marches through the streets of San José with drums beating and colors flying, symbolically to protect the President and the deputies. Also, a measure of dignity is lent to the occasion when members of the diplomatic corps file solemnly into the legislative chambers to take their seats of honor and to await arrival of the President of the republic. There, all resemblance to customary Latin American practice is likely to come to an end.

It will be useful to describe briefly the physical situation of the present Costa Rican legislative assembly chamber. The room, a temporary accommodation in a building which houses many of the executive departments, measures about ninety by thirty-five feet.[20] Most of the deputies have desks in two long parallel rows, and face the *directorio* table. There are a few additional desks in two small rows, near the ends of the room and at right angles to the others. In the front and to the right of the *directorio* there is a set of

[20] The legislative body was in temporary quarters because former President Figueres' administration had sold the aged *palacio nacional* to the Banco Central, and a new edifice was to be built.

amplifying controls, and desks for messengers are on each side of the ornate *directorio* table. Pictures of distinguished historical figures line the walls in front and along the two sides. Behind the last long row of deputy seats there is a rail; behind that, a rather small area, with movable chairs, for the galleries, or *barra*. When sessions stimulate a great deal of interest, there are insufficient chairs for the spectators, and many of them must stand.

On May 1, 1959, legislative reception of the presidential message had to await election of a *directorio*. This preliminary stage was made particularly tumultuous by the behind-the-scenes vote-trading which succeeded in placing one Dr. Alvaro Montero Padilla in the presidency of the *directorio*. Dr. Montero, at odds with his PLN colleagues because they had failed to endorse him as *presidente* of the *directorio*, made his own arrangements with the opposition. With the help of a solid phalanx of opposition votes, plus one independent and his own personal vote, he was able to secure the necessary twenty-three votes for his own elevation to the post. This stage of the proceedings was orderly enough, though accompanied by loud speeches of condemnation from members of Dr. Montero's own party and some shouts of indignation from the galleries.[21] The point, of course, is that arrival of the dignitaries, as well as presentation of President Echandi's address, had to wait for over two hours until the tempestuous Legislative Assembly could recover its composure. In several Latin American republics such a situation would be unknown.

Finally the promenade of honored guests began. First there was the diplomatic corps; then the comptroller of the republic; next, the cabinet ministers; and finally the President. All of this transpired amidst increasing disturbance from the gallery, with scattered applause which was submerged in a rising uproar of hisses, catcalls, and booing, culminating with the entry of President Echandi in a deafening pandemonium of abuse. It was obvious that the opposition — probably members of Liberación Nacional — had filled the gallery with young toughs who were bent upon making it impossible for the President to deliver his message.

Dr. Montero Padilla, who in any event would have found it difficult to preserve order after his own earlier performance, made no attempt to bring order into the proceedings, despite the clear rules which direct the *presidente* of the Assembly to do so. Some deputies, particularly from the PLN, seemed to be enjoying the taunts even while they went through the pretense of trying to calm the agitators.

When the initial noise subsided, the President began his speech. Interrup-

[21] A detailed account of the Montero Padilla episode is in *La Prensa Libre*, May 1, 1959, and all Costa Rican newspapers of May 2. On May 7, PLN expelled Dr. Montero from its membership (*La República*, May 7, 1959, p. 5).

tions were almost constant and continued for long periods during which it was impossible for Echandi to proceed. During the demonstrations from the gallery, the President reacted with forbearance, patiently waited for the uproar to diminish, and proceeded with a few more phrases before the next interruption.

The crowd shouted Figueres' nickname, "Pepe! Pepe! Pepe!" and "Viva José Figueres!" When President Echandi was about to enter upon a new subject, the crowd roared, "Make it short, don Mario! Make it short, don Mario!" When Echandi spoke of public works, the shout was, "What works? What works?" and "Listen to him! Listen to him! Oh, you don't say!" When he mentioned a respected former president, León Cortés (1936–1940), the gallery jeered, "You're no León Cortés!" In response to President Echandi's stated policy of non-intervention in Nicaraguan internal affairs, there were shouts of "Friend of Somoza!" and "What do you have to say about Somoza, don Mario?" The President turned to each new page to the accompaniment of moans from the audience, and shouts of "We don't want Echandi! We want Figueres!" President Echandi was booed as he left the chamber as he had been booed when he entered.

In subsequent interviews, leaders of all three major parties agreed that the practice of jeering the President had been begun by anti-Figueres forces, on May 1, 1958, when President Figueres had attempted to deliver his annual message just eight days before turning the post over to incoming Mario Echandi. Even Lic. Fernando Lara Bustamente, PUN leader, freely admitted that on that date elements that were "carried away by election enthusiasm" taunted President Figueres. Lic. Lara, a supporter of Echandi, agreed that such conduct was reprehensible.[22]

Uladislao Gámez, a PLN leader and former minister of education in the Figueres government (1953–1958) confirmed the Lara version of the origins of the practice and added the information that it was Echandi himself, just prior to his inauguration of May 8, 1958, who led the anti-Figueres demonstration from the gallery on May 1 of that year. Sr. Gámez claimed that the heckling of the President has now become an accepted feature of the Legislative Assembly and that if PLN would withdraw its hecklers, the other side would take advantage of their absence to harass PLN deputies and give vocal support to the President.[23]

Lic. Guillermo Villalobos Arce, of the PRN, offered substantially the same version and also volunteered the information that it was Echandi himself, then a deputy, who began the practice in May of 1958. Lic. Villalobos called it a species of *pachuquismo* (hooliganism) which had entered the legislative

[22] Lara Bustamente interview, *supra*, Chapter I, n. 8.
[23] Gámez interviews, *supra*, Chapter III, n. 2.

halls. Villalobos also attributed the disorder to the passions of 1948–1949, which have not entirely subsided, and to a general disrespect for public authority which has developed out of the violent episodes of that period.[24] Apparently, however, it was not unusual even before the uprising of 1948 for spectators in the galleries to instigate uproars in the legislative chambers. Alberto F. Cañas writes that on March 1, 1948, during the closing days of the Calderón-Picado epoch, legislative opposition to the regime was drowned out by obscenities from the galleries and that this has been recorded.[25]

Lic. Jorge Rossi, leader of the Independent Party and a candidate in the 1958 presidential election, stressed personalism, emotionalism, and the injection of public passion into the governmental process as obstacles to the fullest realization of Costa Rican democracy. He was one of the few political leaders to decry the intemperate anti-Echandi outbursts in the legislative gallery.[26]

To the uninitiated, as to this writer, such chaotic disrespect for the orderly processes of government may seem like an utter travesty on democracy, surely destructive of the institutions of free government. It is startling that after the tumultuous legislative session of May 1, 1959, no Costa Rican newspaper made mention of the anti-Echandi demonstrations. The columns of all newspapers were full of details about the Montero Padilla episode and referred to the distressing confusion which had resulted from that event, but the unrestrained taunts and insults which organized toughs had hurled against the President of the republic escaped journalistic attention. Likewise, the comments of the leaders of the three major political parties were singularly restrained and unperturbed, though none openly favored such chaotic behavior. Though Uladislao Gámez of the PLN admitted that violent demonstrations in legislative assemblies have nothing in common with democracy, he claimed that if the presiding officer of the Assembly were to try to control them, newspaper headlines would immediately cry "anti-democratic!" Ricardo Castro Beeche, publisher of *La Nación*, confirmed this view when he stated that any attempt at curbing the outbursts would be cited as an undemocratic act. It was Castro Beeche's view that the public disrespect for the President leads to no injurious ends and seems to do no harm. The publisher, who generally supports Echandi, agreed that the heckling may represent an excessive version of liberty, but insisted that he would rather have that than any of the excesses of tyranny.[27] One could argue that the first may lead to the second.

[24] Villalobos Arce interview, *supra*, Chapter III, n. 10.
[25] Cañas, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
[26] Rossi interview, *supra*, Chapter III, n. 8.
[27] Castro Beeche interview, *supra*, Chapter IV, n. 1.

One may wonder whether such events may not corrode the free political institutions which Costa Rica has developed. One may also argue that Lic. Ricardo Jiménez's 1942 description of Costa Rican political moderation may be in need of some amendment.[28]

It should be mentioned in conclusion that the Costa Rican *asamblea legislativa* meets during almost every week day of the year. Though Article 116 of the Constitution limits sessions to May 1–July 31 and September 1–November 30, there is no clear statement that deputies are not to be paid if they extend their sessions. Present salaries are one hundred twenty-five *colones* ($18.75) per day per deputy, and the legislature has yielded to the temptation to meet nearly all year around, if even for an hour or less per day. As a consequence, the nearly continuous sessions of the legislative body, even though not always accomplishing anything of great moment, tend to stimulate political passions throughout the country. One may derive some small relief from the knowledge that daily meetings may be quite brief. As an editorial in *La Nación* put it, "Quoting from the operetta, the functionary who works is far more dangerous than the one who remains away from his office."[29]

The Costa Rican Legislative Assembly, then, plays an active role in the governing processes of the country — a role which at times borders on irresponsibility. Whatever one might think about their impact on stable democracy, the rules and the actual conduct of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly clearly indicate that the body is anything but a subservient, pliant tool in the hands of the executive.

[28] *Supra*, Chapter IV, n. 4.

[29] *La Nación*, August 12, 1959, p. 6. In May of 1959, the deputies decided to add about five hundred *colones* ($75.00) each to their monthly salaries by meeting on Saturdays. "Los señores diputados se aumentan el sueldo," *La Nación*, May 9, 1959, p. 6. For information on the almost interminable legislative periods, I am indebted to Odúber interview, *supra*, Chapter III, n. 2.

PART II

CAUSAL ELEMENTS

CHAPTER VI

Costa Rican Society and Economy

The preceding pages suggest that government and politics in Costa Rica differ rather sharply from the more usual Latin American patterns. The Costa Rican President is not a strong figure in the governmental processes of the country. His powers to restrict constitutional guarantees are so narrowly circumscribed as to be almost non-existent. Constitutional provisions are designed to protect in a meaningful manner the autonomy of courts, accounting and expenditure of public funds, election processes and autonomous agencies. Unless the President be the leader of an unusually integrated party, such as the PLN, and enjoy support from a majority of the seats in the Legislative Assembly, he may find himself badly buffeted by adverse political forces. Even when he commands a majority of the deputies, he is far from enjoying the sort of one-party mastery that is characteristic in several other Latin American republics. Opposition parties can and do function very vigorously, with considerable reason to hope that they may ultimately secure the presidency. An election may turn a government out of office, and officials generally respect the decisions at the polls. Press and other public opinion is often openly critical of the executive, and attacks on the President can be vitriolic and heated. Far from being a subservient creature of the executive, the legislative branch is independent and vigorous, and can and sometimes does make life very miserable for the President.

Of course, several of the features of Costa Rican political life are to be found elsewhere in Latin America, and all of them occur in some measure in such republics as Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil. However, there is good reason to claim that in the more usual Latin American context, Costa Rica is a virtually unique case. There can be no doubt that special factors have been at work in Costa Rica to create political conditions at variance with and considerably in advance of the Central American and even the general Latin American norms. Preparatory to surveying some of those special causal elements, it is appropriate that we review some important features of the Costa Rican social and economic background.

The Social Environment

Class lines in Costa Rica are less rigid than in nearby countries. Sociologists John and Mavis Biesanz made clear in their 1944 study that while there is class stratification in Costa Rica, it is not formidable nor excessively rigid. They noted particularly the lack of a feudalistic, non-producing, parasitic

"leisure class", such as is commonly found elsewhere in Latin America.[1] A study by sociologist Sakari Sariola, on social patterns of Turrialba, Costa Rica, takes the same view. Sariola claims that, "... the often presented claims of Costa Ricans of their land being free of class prejudices seemed supported to a great extent by data on Turrialba."[2] At another point, Sariola states that "... there was no concrete 'leisure class' in Turrialba."[3] The Sariola study, which finds that class lines are blurred and that there is opportunity for upward social mobility, cites instances of individual advancement from the level of farm laborer to that of middle class merchant of some affluence.[4]

Personal observation confirms the sociological findings. There are servants, but they are not so numerous as in most other Latin American countries. There is contrast between rich and poor; but display of wealth in Costa Rica is not so offensively ostentatious as in most other parts of Latin America, and the poor by no means overwhelm cities and countryside as they do in many other countries of the region. The usual upper-class Latin American disdain for physical labor is not carried to ludicrous extremes in Costa Rica.

Likewise with economic standards. The visitor senses this when he notes numerous small, brightly painted houses in towns and countryside. In Costa Rica one may walk about in most parts of city or country, night or day, with more personal security than in most other equivalent parts of Latin America. Even rural communities have running water. Almost the entire country is electrified.

Statistical studies confirm what observation suggests. According to a report of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1948, living standards of Costa Rica were above those of any other Central American country or of Mexico, and were surpassed, in the Mexico-Central America-Panama region, only by those of Panama, which included the Canal Zone.[5]

The *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, which is prepared by the Committee on Latin American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, reveals much the same kind of information. Whether in terms of housing, or health services, or production of electrical energy, or transportation and communications, Costa Rica stands ahead of her neighbors.[6]

Even on the peninsula of Nicoya (Guanacaste Province), which is outside

[1] Biesanz, *op. cit.*, Chapter II.

[2] Sakari Sariola, *Social Class and Social Mobility in a Costa Rican Town* (Turrialba, C.R.: Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences, 1954), p. 110.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[4] *Ibid.*, especially pp. 103–112.

[5] International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Economic Department, *Informe sobre la economía de Costa Rica*, a report prepared by Albert Waterston (San José: Banco Nacional de Costa Rica, 1948).

[6] Committee on Latin American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, *Statistical Abstract of Latin America* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1960), especially Plates 6, 11, and 14.

the *meseta central* and not thought of as sharing the same living standards, it would appear that life is a grade above that in much of the rest of Central America and Mexico. Philip L. Wagner, in a thorough study of the region, reports that the people there live a very simple, poor life—with just enough basic necessities to sustain them without abject deprivation, but without the normal amenities of cultured existence. He reports the meals as adequate, though simple — with soup, meat, fruit, some greens, rice, beans, eggs, coffee, and much corn. Such variety would be rare in rural areas of most of the rest of Central America and Mexico, and Wagner is of the opinion that meals are probably more substantial than are those of Mexican peons. He also finds that farm work is not so burdensome as in nearby Latin American regions.[7]

The Costa Rican record on education and literacy tells much the same story. All statistical reports agree that Costa Rica stands ahead of most of her neighbors in terms of numbers of schools or teachers per capita, budgetary expenditures on education, and levels of literacy.

During colonial times there was very little education of any kind. Classical, medieval methods of teaching prevailed, with much memorization and little or no encouragement to independent investigation. What little education there was, was conducted in church schools or at home. A Casa de Enseñanza de Santo Tomás was established in 1814, and after independence, in 1843, it became the University of Santo Tomás.[8] Shortly after independence, laws made some provision for education of the young, but it would appear that they had little impact and that during most of the nineteenth century Costa Rica could hardly be distinguished from her neighbors insofar as educational achievement was concerned.[9]

During his second term, President Jesús Jiménez (1868–1870) made important strides toward attainment of higher educational levels for the country. A normal school was established in San José; professors were brought from Europe; plans were made for free, obligatory primary education; and in 1869 an amendment to that effect was incorporated into the Constitution. Attempts were also made at establishing primary schools in each canton.[10]

[7] Philip L. Wagner, *Nicoya, A Cultural Geography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1958), pp. 215 and 241–244.

[8] Alberto Quijano, *Costa Rica, Ayer y Hoy* (San José: Borrasé Hnos., 1939), p. 52.

[9] Laws of 1823 and 1828 provided rules for establishment of schools. In 1832, a law declared that if education of children were not properly taken care of by parents, the State would turn the children over to "workers, artists, or honorable persons" who could provide for them and give them a good education. See Carlos Monge Alfaro, "Comentarios sobre los primeros años de existencia republicana," *Revista de ciencias jurídicas-sociales*, Universidad de Costa Rica, I (December, 1957), 141 and 149. There is no evidence that this drastic measure was actually enforced. But as we shall see, *infra*, a compulsory education law of 1886 repeated the same provisions.

[10] Le Comte Maurice de Périgny (chargé de missions dans l'Amérique Centrale), *La république de Costa Rica — son avenir économique et le canal de Panama* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1918), p. 77; Guillermo Solera Rodríguez, *Beneméritos de la patria y ciudadanos de honor costarricenses* (San José, 1958), p. 61; and Joaquín Bernardo Calvo, *Apuntamientos geográficos, estadísticos e históricos de la república de Costa Rica* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1887), pp. 140–141.

Despite these early efforts at promoting public education, little was actually accomplished until the administration of Lic. Bernardo Soto (1885–1888). In the national budget for 1885–1886, of a total expenditure of 3,152,448 pesos, only 93,320 were allotted to education; but 359,504 pesos were appropriated for the military, and 930,609 pesos for "miscellaneous expenses".[11] According to the census of 1883, not over 15 per cent (26,759) of the total population (182,073) could read and write.[12]

It was in 1886, with passage of a compulsory and free education law, that a dramatic improvement in Costa Rica's educational levels began to occur. As early as 1892, the census showed a literacy figure of 20 per cent.[13] A new Atlantic railroad facilitated the exportation of coffee and the reciprocal importation of books, publicists, artists, and intellectuals generally.[14] But the major share of the credit belongs to President Bernardo Soto and his able minister of education, Mauro Fernández. According to the provisions of the law for which they were responsible, education was to be free and obligatory between the ages of seven and fourteen, fines of twenty céntimos a day were to be imposed for absences, and, in cases of continuous absence, children were to be put in the care of persons other than their parents. The country was divided into school districts, and there were to be *juntas de educación* to recruit personnel and equipment for instruction. Around the turn of the century, about a half-dozen secondary schools were in operation throughout the country. By contrast with the parsimonious educational budget of 1885, that of 1888 provided 300,000 pesos — over three times the previous amount — for educational purposes.[15]

Today, free and compulsory education is provided for in the Constitution. The fundamental law guarantees academic freedom as a right and stipulates that the state shall supply indigent pupils with food and clothing. The state supports the University of Costa Rica, which is the contemporary successor to the old University of Santo Tomás.[16] Officially reported illiteracy figures are lower than those for any other Central American country or, for that matter, for any country of Latin America other than Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. Illiterates are cited as constituting 21.2 per cent of the population over the age of ten as compared with 40 per cent and more for the Mexico-Central

[11] Enrique Villavicencio, *República de Costa Rica* (San José: By the author, 1886), pp. 44–45.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 30; and Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, Dirección de Estadística y Censos, *Monografía de la población de la república de Costa Rica en el siglo XIX* (San José, 1951), p. 28.

[13] *Loc. cit.*; and Esteban A. de Varona, *Costa Rica* (México, D.F.: Unión Gráfica, S.A., 1957), p. 28; and Quijano, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[14] A. de Varona, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[15] de Pérignу, *op. cit.*, pp. 79–82; Solera Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 77; Monge Alfaro, "Comentarios," pp. 144–148; Calvo, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–143; Quijano, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–72 *et passim*.

[16] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Articles 78, 79, 82, 85, and 87.

America region. In northern Latin America only Panama (28.2 per cent) and Cuba (23.6 per cent, pre-Castro) are near the Costa Rican record.[17]

Some scholars would caution against becoming too enthusiastic over the Costa Rican figures on education. They warn of the usual discrepancies in official figures. They point out that simple knowledge of reading does not make a person really "educated" or even "literate", that in fact it is rare to find books in the rural areas of the country, that the rural schools may have only two grades, and that a small proportion of children ever get through the six elementary grades, to say nothing of secondary or preparatory school or university.[18] In a rather different vein, the Rev. Benjamín Núñez, famous priest and PLN leader, and director of the Instituto de Educación Política, claims that Costa Rica is in need of more scholarly political information, more libraries, and more courses and scholars who would be adequate to provide the political education of the Costa Rican people. According to Fr. Núñez, there are instances in Costa Rica, as elsewhere in Latin America, where schools are so in need of texts that they accept schoolbooks from the Communists. It is his view that there is a great need for translations of substantial political-science texts, which are almost unobtainable in Costa Rica.[19]

Many of the criticisms of Costa Rican education, particularly regarding its quality, are no doubt well founded. It must be borne in mind that official reports on Costa Rican education are probably no more faulty than those of her neighbors, including the United States, and that on a comparative basis Costa Rica stands considerably ahead of nearby Central American countries and Mexico in all aspects of education. Observation of the multitudes of schools, of the crowds of school children with their books, of the unusual number of bookstores, and of the central library, which is jammed each day with young people, indicates that the statistics have some validity. The educational attainments of the rural areas are of course lower, as in all of Latin America. But all indications are that the general level of Costa Rican education is among the highest in Latin America.[20]

Relative social fluidity and rather fortunate economic levels, as well as

[17] Committee on Latin American Studies, *op. cit.*, Plate 4. See also Plate 5 on schools, teachers, and enrollment and Plate 16 on contemporary budgetary outlays for education. Also relevant would be Plate 7 on newspaper circulation and other cultural indices. On a per capita basis, Costa Rica stands well ahead of any other Central American country, or Mexico, in every particular. These findings are further confirmed in detailed comparative figures to be found in United Nations, Comisión Económica para América Latina, Comité de Cooperación Económica del Istmo Centroamericano, *Compendio estadístico centroamericano* (México, D.F., 1957), Chapter XI, "Educación, cultura," pp. 121–125.

[18] J. Luis Barahona, "El gran incógnita: Visión interna del campesino costarricense" (unpublished Licenciado thesis, University of Costa Rica, 1953), p. 117; and Sariola, *op. cit.*, p.14; and letter from Dr. Harry Kantor, Department of Political Science, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, November 26, 1958, wherein he claims that while higher than the usual Central American level, Costa Rica's literacy is pretty much a "myth".

[19] Interviews with the Rev. Benjamín Núñez, May 15 and May 18, 1959.

[20] *Supra*, n. 17.

comparatively high educational attainments, have no doubt contributed to the maintenance of the political standards we have reviewed in earlier chapters. However, the educational achievements are relatively recent, and, as we shall see, Costa Rica was known in earlier centuries for her unusual impoverishment. In any event, of course, we must still seek more primordial causes for the political, social, and educational characteristics which we have described.

Costa Rica, like the rest of Central America, is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. Catholicism is in fact constitutionally established as the religion of the state.[21] Hence, there is no unusual religious feature which would distinguish the republic from other Latin American nations.

A remarkable number of able statesmen, including several distinguished scholars, have occupied the Costa Rican presidency and other positions of official leadership.[22] They have no doubt exercised decisive influence on Costa Rican political and social development. The fact that men of such stature have often risen to positions of political prominence is itself a phenomenon which must be a product of special factors in Costa Rican background and environment. It must be our task to determine what those special, fundamental factors have been.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY

Christopher Columbus touched on the Caribbean shore of Costa Rica in 1502. Subsequent explorations proceeded in a desultory sort of way for nearly sixty years, and serious settlement of the region did not begin until the period 1560–1564, after the Iberians had conquered most of the rest of their American territories.[23]

[21] Costa Rica, *Constitution*, Article 76. The Constitution grants freedom to other sects to practice their faiths.

[22] The United States would have been well served if it could have counted among its presidents such distinguished figures as the progressive Juan Mora Fernández (1824–1833), the educator, Dr. José María Castro Madriz (1847–1849 and 1866–1868); the very able General Próspero Fernández Oreamuno (1882–1885); the educator and democratically oriented Lic. Ascensión Esquivel Ibarra (1889 and 1902–1906); the outstanding liberals and scholars, Lic. Cleto González Víquez and Lic. Ricardo Jiménez Oreamuno (several different non-consecutive terms, 1906–1936); the conservative, well-balanced Lic. León Cortés Castro (1936–1940) or the enlightened, dynamic José Figueres (1953–1958). It would be impossible to find so many scholars and statesmen in the administrations of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, or Honduras. It is as though Costa Rica had a whole series of presidents of the calibre of the great José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay or Benito Juárez of Mexico.

[23] Leading names in the 1560–1564 "conquest" of Costa Rica are the Rev. Juan de Estrada Rávago, Lic. Juan de Cavallón, and don Juan Vásquez de Coronado. Fr. Estrada's venture was unsuccessful. Lic. Cavallón brought in colonists, weapons, and domestic animals, during 1561–1562. However, he so mistreated and antagonized the Indians of the *meseta central* that he jeopardized his plan of settlement. Costa Rica owes its successful colonization to don Juan Vásquez de Coronado, *alcalde mayor de Costa Rica*, 1562–1566. Vásquez de Coronado was a humane man of great comprehension, who resolved not to commit violence against the Indians, but to secure their friendship and co-operation. See Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, pp. 64 and 66; Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla*, pp. 24–28; A. de Varona, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–14; León Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica durante la dominación española, 1502–1821* (Madrid: Tipografía de Manuel Ginés Hernández, 1889), pp. 98–102.

The historian Fernández Guardia claims that Columbus had nothing to do with naming the region *Costa Rica* and that it was not until 1539 that official documents from the Audiencia of Panama designated the region in that manner.[24] In any event, there was nothing particularly rich about the resources of Costa Rica. The soil of the *meseta central* was and is very fertile. Though there were rumors of minerals in the region, and though the Spanish found Indians who worked with gold, they turned up no ready sources of the precious metal; and there were no feasible commercial outlets for crops.

As was the practice in colonies of those times, "the conquests were conducted at the expense of their leaders, who then indemnified and enriched themselves with the despoliation and work of the Indians."[25] The *conquistadores* tried to establish the usual *encomienda* system, in which there would be grants of huge expanses of land, complete with Indians. There are scholars who have claimed that the *encomiendas* constituted an implantation of Iberian feudalism to the Americas; others, like the famed Argentine academician, Dr. Alfredo L. Palacios, contend that the colonial economic system in the Americas was actually a version of slavery.[26]

But in Costa Rica there was no mineral or commercial wealth to be secured from the land, and the non-sedentary Indians were too intractable to permit their easy exploitation. As Rodríguez Vega states the matter:

> Colonial wealth was unknown to us. The systematic exploitation of the great mines of the continent began in the seventeenth century. In Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Huancavelica or Potosí, the land was beginning to yield the fantastic golden fruit of which the conquerors had only imagined in their covetous dreams. . . . We had no mines. The conquerors and their descendants had to struggle against nature in order to extract her fruits. The lack of mines determined that the seventeenth century would mark the Costa Rican people with the brand of poverty. The inhabitants had no desire to resign themselves to such a precarious destiny . . . But there was no remedy but to dedicate themselves to the cultivation of the land. . . .[27]

The very first governor, Vásquez de Coronado, complained to Philip II of the complete neglect from which the province suffered,[28] and the complaints continued to pour in to the Spanish Crown and Council of the Indies during the three centuries of Costa Rican poverty and isolation. The whole story of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is one of general poverty, of simple peasant people, of a stagnant, isolated agrarian subsistence economy without

[24] Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla*, p. 22.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[26] Alfredo L. Palacios, *Masas y elites en Iberoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Columbia, 1954), pp. 28, 29, and 32.

[27] Rodríguez Vega, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–17.

[28] María del Rosario Molina Coto, *La embajada de la provincia de Costa Rica ante la corte del Rey don Felipe II en 1565* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1946), pp. 13–14.

any identifiable leisure class.[29] Lic. Rodríguez Vega insists there was no parasitic aristocratic class in Costa Rica,[30] and Professor Monge Alfaro writes:

> The major portion of the people were simple in spirit, almost without culture, and without any pretensions to nobility. The cultivation of the land evolved into the development of the small property. This matter of each having his own; of knowing no submission to the feudal exploitation of powerful masters of the land; of each earning what he could by his own efforts, explains the sentiment of equality which developed from a very early time. For that reason, Costa Rica was a land of tillers, of proprietors of the small parcels of land. In Costa Rica there were neither slaves nor servants; all were persons who commanded respect for their qualities as human beings. It is not strange, then, that we have called the eighteenth century the century of the farmer.[31]

The same writer tells us that in the mid-eighteenth century, Governor Carrandi y Menán reported that every inhabitant had to raise his own food — *including even the governor himself*. This was unknown in any other part of the Spanish domains.[32] Another governor in the same plight was Diego de la Haya Fernández, who reported to the Crown on March 15, 1719, that "...each resident must sow and cultivate whatever his household needs to use and consume for the year. Even the governor must perform this labor, for if he didn't he would perish."[33] Governor de la Haya concluded his report by describing Costa Rica as the "poorest and most miserable Spanish possession in the Americas." As early as 1626, one governor had proposed that the wretched colony be placed within the domains of the province of Nicaragua, because there were insufficient funds in Costa Rica to pay the salary of the governor — or even of the treasurer himself![34]

The population seems to have remained static for many years, and reports from 1573 to 1626 continued to number the inhabitants at only fifty families, "all in absolute poverty", or "all poverty-stricken because of the lack of any commerce".[35]

If equal poverty was one motif of Costa Rican colonial life, isolation was another. Costa Rica was virtually cut off from commercial or other contacts

[29] Facio, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–13; León Fernández, *op. cit.*, pp. 187, 281 ff., and 354–358; Rodríguez Vega, *op. cit.*, p. 17 and almost throughout the book; Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, pp. 81–82 and 132; and Manuel de Jesús Jiménez, *Noticias de Antaño* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1947), II, entire book. The Jiménez volume is a particularly touching, poignant account of simple artisans, soldiers, governors, and others who lived out their narrow, poverty-striken lives in the Costa Rica of the colonial period. There was simply no commerce, and therefore no merchant class; and no landed aristocracy could develop in such an environment. The land yielded no wealth for anyone, and unearned increment was unknown.

[30] Rodríguez Vega, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[31] Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, p. 129.

[32] *Loc. cit.*

[33] Francisco Montero Barrantes, *Elementos de historia de Costa Rica* (San José: Tipografía Nacional, 1892), p. 106.

[34] León Fernández, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

[35] *Loc. cit.*; Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla.*, p. 35; and Tomás Soley Güell, *Historia económica y hacendaria de Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Universitaria, 1947), I, 85.

with the outside world, and the inhabitants eked out their lives in the valleys and hollows of the *meseta central* with virtually no effective communications even among themselves. The only population centers were the villages of Cartago and Esparza and some Indian *reducciones*, or reservations, and all of these utterly lacked any public facilities or even commercial establishments or markets.[36] The people isolated themselves from the governmental and religious centers around the capital, Cartago, and hardly left their farms for anything, even when under ecclesiastical or governmental order to congregate in the churches for worship or at the seat of government for payment of taxes. On one occasion, the bishop of Nicaragua reacted to the obstinate refusal of the self-willed peasants to attend church by announcing a remarkable excommunication of the entire population of Costa Rica.[37] There is no evidence that this caused the independent farmers to budge from their plots. Efforts of Spanish colonial governors to bring the individualist Costa Ricans under effective political control were no more successful than were those of the bishop of Nicaragua.[38]

Some big plantations were formed on the eastern, or Caribbean, side of Costa Rica. A small commerce with Panama opened in 1601, by mule train. This commerce stimulated cacao cultivation in the south, and Costa Ricans got a taste of what might have occurred throughout the country had there been more resources and better communications. The plantation owners used Negroes and captured Indians, whom they constantly replaced with new captives as death from overwork took its inevitable toll. The owners preferred to live in Cartago, and it was seldom that they visited their unhealthy plantations.[39]

In general, however, the isolation of Costa Rica from centers of Spanish administration cut its inhabitants off from class distinctions which were so typical of other areas of Latin America.[40] On the temperate central plateau, which was to be the cradle of the Costa Rican republic, involuntary egalitarian poverty and isolation from control forged an independent, individualist

[36] Lic. Carlos Meléndez Ch., *¿A Dónde Vamos?* (San José: Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, 1953), p. 51.

[37] The perturbed bishop described the Costa Ricans as "rebellious and disobedient", and placed a general curse upon all of them. He prayed that their children would become orphans and their women widows; that the sun would disappear during the day and the moon during the night; that they would be reduced to beggary without succor; that the plagues of Egypt would be visited upon them; that the earth would swallow them alive for their sins; and that their souls would be extinguished and they would all descend into Hell. The bishop was apparently rather upset. Jiménez, *Noticias*, pp. 335–336.

[38] Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, pp. 103, 106, 116–118, 122–123, and 127; Facio, *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 17–18, and 27; León Fernández, *op. cit.*, p. 370; Rodríguez Vega, op. cit., pp. 17, 22–24, and 28–30; Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla*, pp. 58–59; Félix Belly, "A travers l'Amérique Centrale: Le Nicaragua et le canal interocéanique," *Costa Rica en el siglo XIX*, ed. Ricardo Fernández Guardia (San José: Editorial Gutenberg, 1929), pp. 479 ff.; and Abelardo Bonilla, "El costarricense y su actitud política," *Revista de la Universidad de Costa Rica*, X (November, 1954), 33–50.

[39] Meléndez Ch., *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[40] Interview with Lic. Carlos Meléndez Ch., Chief of Anthropology Section, National Museum of Costa Rica, May 20, 1959.

farming people who would submit to no tyranny, no taxation, and no obligation "except the cultivation of the soil".[41] Professor Monge Alfaro says:

> We conclude that the Costa Rican peasant is individualist and isolates himself from the centers of culture. And a most important point, which should be a source of reflection, is that in all corners of the plateau the same spiritual and social type of man lived and lives, with the same manner of thinking and feeling yesterday and today. In other lands of this same America, in place of one single type there were formed distinct types, separated by abysses of vanity and wealth. On the one hand, human beings who were practically slaves; on the other, the great and rich masters of the land, possessors of noble coats of arms, and even in the republican era, odious differences separate the men of the same country into distinct classes.[42]

In an interview, the very able and distinguished Professor Monge Alfaro insisted that to understand Costa Rica today, one must know the Costa Rica of the eighteenth century.[43] There can be no reason to doubt Professor Monge's judgment on this point. Eighteenth-century Costa Rica was so different from almost any other part of colonial Latin America that the period played an unquestionably significant role in the later development of the republic.

Records of the early nineteenth century, after independence, tell a similar story of an independent, egalitarian people without deep class cleavages, even though by that time new commercial activity and prosperity were impelling important social changes. As late as 1826, it took a company of soldiers seven days to march from San José to the Pacific coast port of Puntarenas, over a rugged, insecure trail.[44] But travellers carried back reports of simplicity, cleanliness, tranquility, security, and a budding prosperity that would soon bear its fruits in new but still flexible class lines and in the provision of an educational system available to all.[45]

John L. Stephens reported as follows:

> The buildings in San José are all republican; not one is of any grandeur or architectural beauty, and churches are inferior to many erected by the Spaniards in the smallest of

[41] Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, p. 127.

[42] Carlos Monge Alfaro, *Geografía social y humana de Costa Rica* (San José: Imprenta Universal, 1942), p. 16.

[43] Interview with Carlos Monge Alfaro, professor of history, University of Costa Rica, May 5, 1959.

[44] Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Cosas y gentes de antaño* (2d. ed. rev.; San José: Editorial Trejos Hnos., 1939), pp. 54–55.

[45] Several such works are included in Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Costa Rica en el siglo XIX*. A most interesting volume is Moritz Wagner and Carl Scherzer, *La república de Costa Rica en Centro América (1856)* (San José: Biblioteca Yorusti, 1944), in which Chapter VI relates the simplicity of life and architecture, and the lack of elaborate, aristocratic structures so common elsewhere in Latin America. Wagner and Scherzer found an important developing upper class, but agreed that class lines were less rigid than in the rest of Central America (*ibid.*, pp. 113–114). When one reads John L. Stephens, *op. cit.*, Chapters XVI–XVIII, one is reminded of the present-day pastoral charm of rural Costa Rica. (*vid. supra*, Prologue.) Stephens reported that in Costa Rica the Church fathers were so poor that it was not the custom for a "stranger to plant himself upon one", as one might do in other parts of Central America (*ibid.*, pp. 288–289). It was also Stephens who told of the plain, simple appearance of the office of Dictator Braulio Carrillo and about the shop which Carrillo's wife managed in the same building (*ibid.*, pp. 290–291). An excellent article on the isolated, unrestricted life of Costa Rican proprietor-farmers in 1825 is Carlos Monge Alfaro, "Comentarios," pp. 123–150.

> villages. Nevertheless, it [Costa Rica] exhibited a development of resources and an appearance of business unusual in this lethargic country [Central America]....
>
> The State of Costa Rica enjoyed at that time a degree of prosperity unequalled by any of the disjointed confederacy. At a safe distance, without wealth enough to excite cupidity, and with a large tract of wilderness to protect it against the march of an invading army, it had escaped the tumults and wars which desolated and devastated the other states [of Central America].[46]

In 1804, planters had introduced coffee to Costa Rica. Near the end of the nineteenth century, banana production, under American investment, became an important source of wealth. Some Costa Ricans accumulated fortunes. New class differences emerged. Railroads were built to the Atlantic and the Pacific, and the present close network of internal communications on the central plateau began to develop. The isolation and poverty of the country came to an end. But the imprint of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries left its mark. For Latin America, a phenomenon had emerged. That phenomenon was Costa Rica.[47]

THE INDIANS

Meanwhile, what had happened to the Indians?

When the Spaniards arrived in Costa Rica, there was no shortage of aborigines. Although the European population remained relatively stationary at a few score families until the early part of the seventeenth century,[48] the estimated Indian population of the early colonial period runs as high as 27,000.[49]

These were no Mexican or Andean Indians, accustomed to long centuries of organized slavery at the hands of their own native masters; they were in the main a turbulent, unbridled people, and the poverty of the Costa Rican agrarian subsistence economy provided little to sustain them at the forced labor which the Spanish tried to impose upon them.

The three centuries of colonial rule were marked by almost incessant Indian wars, indigenous uprisings, desperate attempts by the Spanish at capturing Indian slaves to be shared amongst the colonists, bloody retaliations by the Indians against the Spanish abuses, violent massacres on both sides, flight of Indians into the inaccessible, almost legendary Talamanca region of southeastern Costa Rica, and ravages of disease and exploitation which destroyed the Indians whom the Spanish did capture and put to work. Finally, though there was some mixing between Spanish and Indian, there was not so much as

[46] Stephens, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

[47] Materials on the nineteenth-century commercial epoch in Costa Rica are numerous. One should consult Facio, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–52 *et passim*; Monge Alfaro, *Geografía*, pp. 17 *et passim*; Rodríguez Vega, *op. cit.*, pp. 98–102 *et passim*; and Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, pp. 195–196 *et passim*.

[48] *Supra*, n. 35.

[49] A. de Varona, *op. cit.*, p. 11; Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla*, p. 6.

among Europeans and the more sedentary, docile Indian peoples of other parts of the Americas.[50] Though there may have been between twenty and thirty thousand Indians and fifty Spanish families in the mid-sixteenth century, by the opening of the nineteenth century there were only about eight thousand Indians out of a total population of approximately fifty-two thousand.[51] Wagner and Scherzer estimated that by 1853 there were seven thousand pure Indians in a population of some one hundred fifty thousand.[52] In 1950, out of a total population of 800,875, there were only 2,692 indigenous people; and 782,041 were "white and *mestizo*". Of the entire population of the country, 97.38 per cent spoke Spanish, and only 0.32 per cent spoke Indian languages.[53]

Costa Ricans often express the view that their so-called "whiteness" accounts for their relative political maturity. Responsible scholarship cannot accept such a theory. The "white supremacy" thesis must of course confront the usual scientific obstacles; but one need only note several contemporary European governments, including those of Spain and Portugal, to reject such a view entirely. Nor is it altogether true that Costa Rica is overwhelmingly "white". A notable portion of her people is *mestizo*. Census figures, which report "white and *mestizo*", throw no light on this.

Homogeneity of culture and language is another matter and has no doubt played an important role in making relative political harmony possible in Costa Rica. However, a consideration of the political affairs of other rather homogeneous states — e.g., El Salvador, Honduras, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, and others of Europe, Asia, and Africa — makes clear that the factor of homogeneity alone does not explain the comparative political and social maturity of Costa Rica.

Extreme poverty prevented emergence of an aristocratic leisure class. Lack of minerals, combined with ferocity of Indians, compelled the Spanish to per-

[50] There can be no doubt of the accuracy of this summary. All the records attest to its truth, whether in terms of large numbers of original Indians or of their ultimate fate. See Manuel de Peralta, *Límites de Costa Rica y Colombia — nuevos documentos para la historia de su jurisdicción territorial* (Madrid, 1890), pp. 31-62 and 65-67; Luis Felipe González, *Origen y desarrollo de las poblaciones de Heredia, San José y Alajuela durante el regimen colonial* (San José: By the author, 1943), pp. 7, 26 *et passim*; Juvenal Valerio Rodríguez, *Turrialba, su desarrollo histórico* (Turrialba: By the author, 1953; and San José: Editorial Tormo, n.d.), pp. 7–45, 57, and 63; Soley Güell, *op. cit.*, I, 63 and 83–84; Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, *Monografía*, p. 17; Martz, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, *Atlas estadístico*, p. 24; León Fernández, *op. cit.*, pp. 100, 111 ff., 125, 134, 149 ff., 173–174, 191–193, 203, 206, 219, 392 ff.; Montero Barrantes, *op. cit.*, pp. 44, 52–87, 91–92, 103–104; Fernández Guardia, *Costa Rica en el siglo XIX*, pp. 23, 314, 414–415; A. de Varona, *op. cit.*, p. 18; Rodríguez Vega, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–19; Meléndez Ch., *op. cit.*, pp. 48–53; Wagner and Scherzer, *op. cit.*, pp. iii and 201–205; Sariola, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 and 8; Stephens, *op. cit.*, p. 292; Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, pp. 76, 85, 90, 99, and 102; Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla*, pp. 8, 23, 33, 37–39, and 49; and Molina Coto, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8. It is further confirmed in interview with Meléndez Ch., *supra*, n. 40.

[51] Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, *Monografía*, *loc. cit.*

[52] Wagner and Scherzer, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

[53] Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, *Censo de la población de Costa Rica (22 mayo de 1950)* (San José, 1953), Table XXV, "Color o raza de la población de Costa Rica," p. 34; and Table XXVI, "Lengua materna de la población de Costa Rica," p. 35.

form their own work and forged a comparatively homogeneous Costa Rican culture. The paucity of resources had one more result which was of crucial significance to the appearance of a free, democratic society — that is, the general distribution of the land. It is to that subject that we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER VII

The Distribution of the Land

We have seen that several elements played their roles in creating the rather unusual political conditions that prevail in Costa Rica. Educational standards, enlightened leadership, comparatively high economic levels and flexible class lines have all had their impact on Costa Rican political life. Ethnic homogeneity has no doubt contributed in some measure to a degree of political understanding. It is quite certain that a sort of rough egalitarianism, without parasitic leisure classes — that is, the conditions that arose from paucity of minerals, commercial enterprise, or exploitable Indians — played a most significant and primordial part in the emergence of all of the conditions we have described. There yet remains another element, which we have barely touched upon, but which is deserving of close attention — namely, the distribution of the land, or the numbers of small landed proprietors.

Land distribution and proprietorship of the past

When the Spanish first arrived in Costa Rica, they immediately set about carving out the great landed estates, or *encomiendas*, complete with Indians, as was their custom. We have seen that they soon discovered that absence of resources, utter lack of commercial markets, and hostility of the Indians, made it impractical to maintain such large plantations. This was particularly true on the *meseta central* to the west of Cartago. To quote Professor Monge Alfaro:

> They could not count ... on *encomienda* Indians to help them with their agricultural tasks. In the west the descendants of the Spanish worked the land with their own hands, with the help of their families. Thus, in the lands situated to the north and south of the Virilla river, there emerged small plots whose products hardly sufficed for the maintenance of the colonists and their children ... in the west, farmers established themselves and depended exclusively on their own efforts, on the product of their properties. Despite the misery in which they lived, despite the burdensome toil in the exploitation of the land, here it was that the economic and social bases of Costa Rica were prepared ... by the middle of the eighteenth century, the lands of the west were settled by numerous families who worked them.[1]

Lic. Rodrigo Facio, in his study on Costa Rican economic history, leaves no doubt about the predominance of small landed properties on the *meseta central* during the later colonial period. According to him, all the reports and records of the time confirm this fact:

[1] Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, pp. 115 and 116; and Abelardo Bonilla, "El costarricense," *loc. cit.*

> Nevertheless, parallel to that situation of backwardness and poverty, and as the natural consequence, the colony left behind one favorable consequence within the social order: The small property as the only form of land ownership ... from the economic point of view, the farm was small and of a production without much variety, since the local markets, by their paucity, would permit nothing else .... All that explains ... the democratic and egalitarian tone of colonial Costa Rica and of the first years of the republic. All the Costa Ricans, in general, were landed proprietors, and the lack of any pronounced division of social class made the formation of contrasting interests impossible.[2]

Professor Monge Alfaro expresses the point dramatically:

> An interesting thing about the colonization process at the headwaters of the Virilla river was the large number of family nuclei which appeared, on land which remained well distributed. Each family had its own property. Each man was a proprietor, soul and master of his plot, of the bit of land which with his own effort and with the help of God gave him what he needed to live ... There was land for all; whoever desired it could become a proprietor ... In an environment of labor, without any [class] animosities, the small property took its place in the history of Costa Rica, and prior to the appearance of more complex political forms gave an undeniable democratic profile to the country.[3]

The reports of Costa Rican land distribution continued through the nineteenth century — some no doubt based on hearsay, others on actual observation. Robert Dunlop, a mid-century traveller through the country, reported that each family possessed its own coffee or sugar-cane plot. Thomas Francis Meagher, a vacationer in Costa Rica, reported for the same period that two thirds of the population owned land.[4] A French chargé wrote as late as 1918, "In Costa Rica ... the system of the great landed estate does not exist. The lands are extremely distributed and there are few families who do not possess their own house with a plot under cultivation."[5] Dana Munro, writing in the same year, reported "practically no landless class" in Costa Rica.[6]

There can be no doubt of the existence of large *haciendas* off the *meseta central*. We have seen the impact which the Panama road had on commercial raising of cacao.[7] Much later, the United Fruit Company came to control banana marketing in the same area. Nor can it be questioned that in northwestern Costa Rica large *haciendas*, as a response to cattle raising, became an important basis of production. John L. Stephens made allusion to these, and they are known to play a significant role in today's Nicoyan economy.[8]

[2] Facio, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 and 26; also asserted by Rodríguez Vega, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 21, 101, *et passim*.
[3] Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, p. 126. The author makes the same points in his *Geografía*, pp. 16 and 19.
[4] Fernández Guardia, *Costa Rica en el siglo XIX*, pp. 95 and 314.
[5] Périgny, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
[6] Dana Munro, *The Five Republics of Central America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918), pp. 142–143.
[7] *Supra*, Chapter VI, n. 36; and Monge Alfaro, *Historia*, p. 92. Professor Monge makes several references to the large *hacienda* system which developed around and to the east of Cartago, in contrast to the small proprietorships which dominated the plateau to the west thereof (*ibid.*, p. 116).
[8] Stephens, *op. cit.*, pp. 287–297 and 311; and Wagner, *Nicoya*, pp. 206 *et passim*.

As we shall see later, widely distributed proprietorship exists in the same regions with the big estates; and all the evidence of historical record compels us to the conclusion that on the *meseta central*, particularly to the west of Cartago — that is, in the ecumene of the Costa Rican nation — wide distribution of ownership of small landed properties, at least during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, played a crucial part in the economic, social, and political development of the republic.

PRESENT LAND DISTRIBUTION AND PROPRIETORSHIP

During recent years some writers have questioned the view that wide distribution of land ownership persists in Costa Rica in modern times.[9] But Costa Rican politics do continue to evolve toward greater stability and democracy, and factors which were operative in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries cannot be expected to influence Costa Rican politics and society forever. If there actually is concentrated ownership today, then there must be other important factors at work in the Costa Rican environment. It is therefore important that we sketch in the present-day patterns of Costa Rican land ownership.

The Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences, which functions under auspices of the Organization of American States, conducts agricultural experimentation, teaching, and research at Turrialba, to the east of Cartago. Consequently, several studies have been made on the eastern slope of the plateau, and many reports of concentration of land ownership in Costa Rica are based on findings from that area. Such reports stress existence of a very few large estates which cover huge areas, and of large numbers of people who are dependent upon them.[10]

[9] Lic. Eugenio Rodríguez Vega suggests that with the advent of commercial coffee production in the early nineteenth century, small proprietorship was destroyed in favor of the big *hacienda*-type production. (*Op. cit.*, p. 102.) Professor William S. Stokes finds that, "in recent years about one-half of the coffee trees have belonged to about five per cent of the owners", and that "75 per cent of the coffee growers cultivate fewer than three and one-half acres" each (*Latin American Politics*, pp. 172 and 178). In a letter to this writer, December 27, 1958, Professor Stokes insisted that reports of wide distribution of land ownership in Costa Rica are not altogether accurate. Professor Harry Kantor is especially insistent that according to census figures, "land-holding in Costa Rica was not as equitable as some writers have claimed", and he makes his point by revealing existence of several very large properties which occupy a large portion of the land of the country (*The Costa Rican Election of 1953: A Case Study*, pp. 7–9). In a letter to this writer, November 26, 1958, Professor Kantor called alleged land distribution in Costa Rica a "myth". He has also produced a list of Latin American countries showing percentages of their territory occupied by large *haciendas* (1000 hectares or more), which indicates a figure of 29.6 per cent for Costa Rica; he lumps Costa Rica with Brazil, Chile, and the Dominican Republic as indicative of the problem of the great landed estate in Latin America, and differs with Professor Preston E. James' view that Costa Rica is a land of many small proprietors ("Agrarismo y tierra en Latinoamérica," *Combate*, III (January and February, 1961), 9–14).

[10] Particularly Charles P. Loomis *et al.*, *Turrialba* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1953). Paul Cross Morrison found a huge landed estate of 5024 *manzanas* (*manzana*: 1.727 acres) in the district of Juan Viñas, near Turrialba, as well as three other large farms, totaling 1032 *manzanas*, with the remaining sixty-two farms of the district averaging only 5.2 *manzanas* each. He finds that in the Juan Viñas district, though there are only sixty-six different farms, or *fincas*, there are 4192 people ("Land Utilization, Cartago to Turrialba, Costa Rica," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters*, XL (1955), 205–206). He finds that Juan Viñas is "essentially a company town on one of the largest *haciendas* in Costa Rica". He finds, further, that in the district of Paraíso, in the same region, there are 108 persons on fourteen holdings totaling 786 *manzanas*, of which the four largest properties contain 607 *manzanas* of land. He states that in the entire district there are 2254 rural people and 132 *fincas* with a total area of 4867 *manzanas*, of which 3358 are in thirteen *haciendas* (*ibid.*, p. 208). Speaking of another part of the area between Cartago and Turrialba, he states that nearly 3000 people are dependent on some 200 farms containing 3050 *manzanas* of land and that six estates with over one hundred *manzanas* each have a total area of 983 *manzanas*, or almost one third of the total surface of the district (*ibid.*, p. 211).

Despite the Turrialba reports, there is much evidence that in modern-day Costa Rica land ownership is still widely distributed among many proprietors. One needs only to walk through the countryside, to view the numerous small farms or *fincas*, each with its own small, neatly painted dwelling, to know that the Turrialba studies somehow fail to tell the whole story of Costa Rican land distribution.

Lic. Jorge Rossi, presidential candidate in the 1958 election, is manager of a Costa Rican coffee-buying firm. On May 22, 1959, I was with him in his office, where a seemingly endless line of coffee-*finca* owners received checks for crops they were selling. The distinguished and very able Lic. Rossi explained that small property is the rule on the *meseta central*, that statistics do not give the whole story at all, and that only observation of the countryside can provide the true picture. As we shall see, even statistics seem to indicate a wide distribution of land ownership in Costa Rica; and there are many other sources to confirm Lic. Rossi's contention.

In editorials during April–July, 1959, *La Nación* insisted that ownership of land in the republic is still widely distributed; that some 60 per cent of the lands are nationally owned and open to cultivation by settlers; that the *latifundio*, or land-monopoly system, does not exist in Costa Rica in the same degree that it does elsewhere in Latin America; that in Costa Rica the problem of "men without land" does not occur; that whatever incipient *latifundismo* may have begun in Costa Rica has come to a halt; and that much agitation about the "land problem" in Costa Rica is inspired to promote the political fortunes of its advocates.[11] Evidently there are important commentators who still find a rather wide distribution of landed proprietorship among the rural people of Costa Rica.

It is not easy, however, to present the whole picture of land ownership in Costa Rica. For one thing, many individuals secure income from ownership of small plots as well as from labor on the big *haciendas*. Professor Robert Hunter, project leader at the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences at Turrialba, pointed out in an interview that many persons who are listed in the census statistics as "employees" may actually have pieces of land from which they secure a part of their incomes, and that even where

[11] *La Nación*, April 20, 1959, p. 6; July 12, 1959, p. 6; July 15, 1959, p. 6; and July 17, 1959, p. 6.

an individual owns no land, he is likely to have relatives who do and so possesses a sense of independence and security.[12] Ing. Miguel Angel Muñoz, chief agrarian statistician of the Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, stated that among so-called *peones* are numerous individuals with small properties on the side, others (perhaps 10 per cent) who are migratory, and still others who have additional employment in the city. He also described another category of people who are neither *patrones* nor *peones*, but who live in small, comfortable houses, of middle class appearance, wherein various members of the family may have varying sources of income — that is, one or two working on the family plot, others working in the city or on other *fincas*, and still others running small businesses on the side.[13]

Many of the recent reports on land distribution in Costa Rica stress the portion of cultivated area occupied by very large *haciendas*. The Turrialba studies do this for a selected region, which is admittedly dominated by large estates. But even for many parts of that section, insufficient consideration is given to the individuals who may also possess small plots from which they secure a part of their incomes; and little attention is paid to the numbers of people who work small properties, *outside the big estates*. Thus the Morrison study indicates dominance by very large estates; and yet, when referring to one section, Morrison finds that "much of the land belongs to two or three farms . . . higher on the slopes more of the land is in small holdings . . . perhaps as many as three hundred fifty people, other than those in the two villages, are spread over the area, but nearly two thirds of them live in the upper part."[14]

In other words, the *land* may be predominantly in very large farms; *but about two thirds of the people rely for their incomes on their own small holdings*; and this, outside the *meseta central* where land ownership is thought to be more widely distributed.

A crude but not entirely unreliable way to determine Costa Rica's land ownership distribution as compared with that of neighboring countries *is to relate numbers of economically producing farms, or* fincas, *to total numbers of agrarian people*. For these purposes, an "economically producing *finca*" will be established as being any farm having thirty or more *manzanas* (51.81 acres; 20.88 hectares).[15]

[12] Interview with Professor Robert Hunter, Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Turrialba, Costa Rica, April 22, 1959.

[13] Interviews with Ing. Miguel Angel Muñoz, San José, Costa Rica, April 30 and May 10, 1959.

[14] Morrison, "Land Utilization," *loc. cit.*

[15] This is based in part on the Muñoz interview, *supra*, n. 13. Ing. Muñoz stated that where an individual owns less than fifty *manzanas*, there is likely to be at least some employment elsewhere — in a professional position, or as policeman, storekeeper, or teacher near the plot of land or in city or town. Though *fincas* below fifty *manzanas* may not be the sole source of income for a sizeable family, agricultural conditions vary greatly from one part of the country to another; and it seems safe to assume that thirty *manzanas* should be adequate to provide a family with a large portion of its sustenance and to make employment elsewhere only of secondary importance. It is certain that in several countries of Central America, possession of as many as thirty *manzanas* (over fifty acres) would be considered good fortune indeed. In the data which follow, the essential conclusions on land distribution in Costa Rica are not materially changed either by considering units smaller than thirty *manzanas* or by giving attention to those which are larger than fifty *manzanas*. Of course the size of an "economically producing" *finca* would vary according to fertility, location, etc., but such variations would not reduce the validity of these findings.

Unless we assume that very large numbers of such *fincas* are owned by single individuals, we must conclude that such a ratio will indicate, though quite roughly, the possible proportion of *patrones* to *peones*. For each *finca* there must be a *patrón*. Lic. Wilburg Jiménez Castro, whom we have already identified as dean of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences of the University of Costa Rica and director of the General Department of Statistics and Census, claimed in an interview that in Costa Rica it is unusual for one person to have more than one *finca*, though there are some who do. Ing. Miguel Muñoz of the same statistical office stated (a) that it would be an exaggeration to say that over one thousand proprietors have two or more *fincas*, and (b) that their numbers would not appreciably affect the Costa Rican land-holding picture.[16] We may safely assume that several such units are no more likely to be held by one individual in Costa Rica than in the other countries with which we shall make comparisons. Tenancy, therefore, is not notable in Costa Rica, as seems to be borne out by statistical reports, which indicate that not over 0.8 of one per cent of the cultivated land is let or rented to tenants — that is, only 13,025 hectares out of a total of 1,811,703.[17]

We may test our proposed method by citing some comparative figures, shown in Table I, for Costa Rica and its provinces. The first column of the table indicates that for each economically producing *finca* in Costa Rica, there are 10.8 active agrarian people — or, to put it another way, that one out of each 10.8 such persons may be assumed to be a proprietor of such a *finca*; that whereas one out of each 7.5 persons may be a proprietor of an economically producing *finca* in Guanacaste Province, only one out of every 22.9 actively agrarian persons may operate such *a finca* in Cartago Province, and so on.

[16] Muñoz interviews, *supra*, n. 13. The definition of a *finca*, as used by the Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, confirms this usage: "A *finca*, for purposes of the census, is any extension of land . . . whose labors are executed, directed or administered directly by a single person or with the help of others. The *finca* may consist of one or more lots or parcels, not necessarily adjoining but situated within the same *cantón* or among neighboring *cantones*, provided that together they form part of the same technical or economic unit." (Costa Rica, *Atlas estadístico*, p. 59.) Essentially the same definition of a "unit of exploitation", or *finca*, is used by the Inter-American Institute of Statistics, from whose reports we will draw comparative data on land ownership in representative countries. See Pan American Union, Inter-American Institute of Statistics, *La estructura agropecuaria de las naciones americanas* (Washington, D. C.: Pan American Union, 1957), p. 13.

[17] United Nations, Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL), Comité de Cooperación Económica del Istmo Centroamericano, *Compendio estadístico centroamericano* (Mexico, 1957), Cuadro 19, "Regimen de tenencia de la tierra . . . ," p. 24. Similar information, stated in *manzanas* (18,637 rented out of 2,592,220, or 0.7 per cent), is to be found in Costa Rica, *Atlas estadístico*, Cuadro 4, "Extensión de las fincas . . . ," p. 59. According to this same source, 2.1 per cent of total *numbers* of *fincas* are rented by tenants.

TABLE I

Agrarian People and Farms in Costa Rica and Its Provinces

	Number of economically active agrarian people per economically producing *finca* (30 *manzanas* or more)[a]	Ratio of clearly independent agrarian people to total agrarian population, according to occupational enumerations[b]	Per cent of area occupied by *fincas* over 1430 *manzanas* (1000 hectares)[c]
Cartago Province	22.9	1/7.4	26.3
Heredia Province	21.1	1/6.9	15.5
Limón Province	16.2	1/3.8	47.3
San José Province	12.3	1/3.8	6.6
Costa Rica	*10.8*	*1/4.2*	*29.6*
Alajuela Province	10.5	1/3.8	14.9
Puntarenas Province	7.9	1/4.3	18.3
Guanacaste Province	7.5	1/3.1	49.9

[a] Derived from Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, *Censo agropecuario de 1955* (San José: 1959), Cuadro 61, "Número y superficie total de las fincas . . . ," p. 121; and *ibid.*, Cuadro 125, "Personal ocupado durante la semana anterior al censo . . . ," p. 313. For the country as a whole, as for each province, the numbers of active agrarian people were divided by the numbers of economically producing *fincas* over thirty *manzanas* (51.81 acres; 20.88 hectares. *Supra*, n. 15). For an explanation of methodological procedures by the Costa Rican statistics office, see Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, Dirección General, etc., *Censo agropecuario de 1955 (resultados obtenidos por muestreos)* (San José: 1957), a preliminary tentative study. The statistical methodology is more briefly explained in the final *Censo agropecuario de 1955, supra*, pp. xi-xxxix.

[b] Derived from Costa Rica, *Censo de la población, 1950*, Cuadro 25, "Rama de actividad de la población económicamente activa," p. 210, in which the economically active population is classified as (1) employees, (2) employers, (3) self-employed workers, and (4) family members without remuneration. In this column of Table I, (2) and (3) are joined, as indicating clearly independent people. All this can hope to accomplish is to present the crudest kind of comparative data for proportions of employers and self-employed workers to the total economically active agrarian population. Unfortunately, because the *Censo agropecuario de 1955* does not give us clear-cut tables on numbers of independent agrarians, we must compare 1955 figures (first column) with 1950 figures (second column). It is certain, however, that there would be no reason for marked changes to occur in the ratios between over-all categories.

[c] Derived from Costa Rica, *Censo agropecuario de 1955*, Cuadro 61, "Número y superficie de las fincas, según extensión de las explotaciones, por provincias, 1955," p. 121.

That there is some validity to this method is revealed when we juxtapose our ratios of independent agrarians (second column) alongside our people-*finca* ratios (first column). That is, we find that our independent-agrarian scale bears a rough correlation to our people-*finca* scale and that the position of a given province in the second column is not very different from its position in the first. Only Puntarenas Province and the figure for the entire republic depart in one column from the places they occupy in the other. In such crude correlations, of course, retention of decimals is probably not justified, and their omission eliminates discrepancies between the two columns.

The third column reveals that if we list proportions of cultivated area occupied by huge estates — that is, if we follow the more usual mode for allegedly determining ownership concentration or distribution — we derive no correlation whatever.

These rough measuring devices indicate no more than that for purposes of determining concentration or distribution of land ownership, it is quite obviously more useful to relate numbers of active agrarian people to *fincas* than simply to show proportions of cultivated area occupied by large *fincas*, or *haciendas*. *Figures on proportions of cultivated area occupied by large estates are quite misleading, for they fail to consider the use to which the remainder of the land is put.* The extreme example is Guanacaste Province. The percentage of the area of Guanacaste occupied by huge *haciendas* over one thousand hectares (1430 *manzanas*) each is 49.86 — for all practical purposes, half the cultivated or utilized terrain of the province (Table I, third column). Yet, the ratio of independent to total agrarians in Guanacaste Province (second column) is the highest in Costa Rica; and this fact is confirmed, insofar as such imperfect correlations can be confirmed, by reference to the people-*finca* ratios (first column). The point is *not* that about half the cultivated land of Guanacaste is occupied by a few (fifty-three) very large *haciendas*. The point is that the remainder of the land of Guanacaste Province contains no fewer than 3,676 different *fincas* of thirty or more *manzanas* each, distributed among fewer than 28,000 economically active people — that is, men, women, and children who were working, whether as family members or for wages.

And so for Costa Rica it is far more important to know that for the entire country there are about 10.8 economically active agrarian people for each commercial *finca* (first column) than it is to know that 29.6 per cent of the country is occupied by 160 huge estates which constitute only 0.35 per cent of the total number of *fincas*.[18]

We have seen that it is probably valid to determine patterns of land distribution by relating numbers of agrarian people to total number of *fincas*. We are now prepared to make comparisons between Costa Rica and some of her neighbors.

Some Latin American statistical services and methods are quite speculative and inaccurate. It is to be noted, for example, that whereas other Central American countries have undertaken regular agricultural census studies, figures from Nicaragua are simply "provided by the Dirección General de Estadística y Censos of that country on the basis of the agricultural inquiry (*encuesta*) of 1952",[19] which could mean that in lieu of any regular census, some estimates were made in the offices of the Nicaraguan Statistics Department. Figures are listed below (Table II) for those countries of Central America and northern South America whose statistics either are available or may be assumed to bear some rough relationship to the facts. Mexico is

[18] Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, etc., *Censo agropecuario de 1955* (*supra*, Table I, n. c).

[19] United Nations, *Compendio estadístico*, p. xi.

TABLE II

Agrarian People and Farms in Selected Countries of North America and Northern South America

	Number of economically producing *fincas*[a]	Number of economically active agrarian people	Number of economically active agrarian people per economically producing *finca*
Costa Rica	*13,641*[b]	*148,837*[f]	*10.9*
Panama	11,949[c]	131,839[f]	11.0
Colombia	169,610[d]	2,028,240[g]	12.0
Ecuador	34,898[d]	765,320[g]	21.8
Honduras	20,412[c]	538,014[f]	26.4
El Salvador	10,793[c]	412,646[f]	38.2
Guatemala	13,698[c]	659,550[f]	48.2
Canada	570,633[c]	788,054[g]	1.4
United States	3,422,339[c]	8,631,012[g]	2.5

[a] Thirty *manzanas*, twenty hectares, or fifty acres or more. From Pan American Union, *La estructura agropecuaria*, pp. 19–38.

[b] 1950. It will be noted that whereas figures of Table I, first and third columns, rely on the Costa Rican *Censo agropecuario de 1955* (Table I, n. a), those of the first and second columns of Table II, even for Costa Rica, rely on different sources (*supra*, n. a, and *infra*, nn. f and g). Because of resulting discrepancies in years, the Costa Rican ratio of Table II thus becomes 10.9 instead of 10.8 as in Table I. The difference, of course, is negligible.

[c] 1950.

[d] 1954.

[e] 1951.

[f] From United Nations, *Compendio estadístico*, Table 6, "Población economicamente activa . . . ," p. 9.

[g] As percentage of total economically active population. Committee on Latin American Studies, *Statistical Abstract*, Plate 8.

omitted from the table only because of the role of the unusual *ejido*, or Indian-type collective system, in that country.

It may be that in other parts of Latin America, it is even more common than in Costa Rica for one individual to own two or more pieces of agricultural property. In such case, Table II would have to be corrected to show more extreme concentration of land ownership in neighboring countries. There is no reason to suppose that such multiplication of individual ownership is more common in Costa Rica than elsewhere.

With all due consideration for differing census dates, probability of gross errors in reports in some cases, and imperfections in translation from one unit of measurement to another, it is clear that by comparison with her neighbors, Costa Rica is favorably situated insofar as distribution of landed properties among agrarian owners is concerned. Costa Rica's land is much more widely distributed than is that of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, or Ecuador. There are perhaps more proprietors per agrarian person in

Costa Rica than in Colombia, and the land-distribution patterns of Costa Rica are rather equivalent to those of Panama — this with full recognition granted to the great landed estates of the Arias and Arias Espinosa and other clans in Panama.

Inclusion of Canada and the United States in Table II is useful to suggest that the figures must have some kind of approximate validity. With all their King ranches and modern factories in the field, both countries are known for their rather wide distribution of land ownership among large numbers of agrarian people. Their low position on the scale, while not to be taken as showing an exact comparison, is no doubt in some rough consonance with the facts.

Costa Rica is still a land of many agrarian proprietors. There may not actually be one proprietor for every 10.9 active agrarians; the figure may be anywhere from one in five to one in fifteen, depending on sizes of families, roles played by family members in the economically active agrarian population, and so forth. That there are many proprietors, probably more per capita than in most neighboring countries, would seem to be established.

There are many other indications of the large proportion of landed proprietors in Costa Rica. For example, the Costa Rican figure for agricultural sales of all specified crops for 1955 is 35,152,418 colones. Sales of crops from *fincas* of 30 to 285 *manzanas* — that is, from the moderate-sized *fincas* — totaled 16,847,207 colones, or about 46 per cent of the whole. *Haciendas* over 285 *manzanas* in size sold only 4,428,143 colones in crops, or about 13 per cent of total sales. Estates exceeding 1430 *manzanas* (1000 hectares, 2470 acres) — that is, the really big plantations that some writers stress as occupying almost 30 per cent of the total area — *sold only 1,841,268 colones, or about 5 per cent of the total Costa Rican value in crop sales!*[20]

Writers have produced tables which purport to show that large numbers of workers in Costa Rica are employed on the great *haciendas* — for example, that *haciendas* of over 1000 hectares (1430 *manzanas*) occupy up to 30 per cent of the total cultivated area and employ as many as fifty or more individuals each.[21] *The point, of course, is not how many people are dependent on individual large estates, but rather, what proportion of the total agrarian population is dependent on such huge* haciendas. If we take the agricultural census of 1955, we find that of a total of 162,945 agrarian people, 9,733, or less than 6 per cent of the entire active agrarian population, were situated on the *haciendas* of 1000 hectares or more.[22]

[20] Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, etc., *Censo agropecuario de 1955*, Cuadro 147, "Ventas . . . ," p. 379.

[21] Kantor, *The Costa Rican Election*, Table I, p. 8; and Harry Kantor, "Agrarismo y tierra en Latinoamérica," *Combate*, III (January-February, 1961), pp. 9–14; chart, pp. 10–11.

[22] This and the following material is derived from Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, etc., *Censo agropecuario de 1955*, Cuadro 125, "Personal ocupado durante la semana anterior al censo . . . ," p. 313.

Those who worked on *fincas* ranging above 285 *manzanas* — that is, on farms which required from 14.1 to 93.2 individuals for the maintenance of each — totaled 33,706, or only about 21 per cent of the total economically active agrarian population. Conversely, 79 per cent of Costa Rican farmers were dependent on *fincas* below 285 *manzanas* in size, which required from 1.6 to 7.7 individuals for their maintenance, on the average. This category includes 72,765 persons, or about 45 per cent of the total, who were dependent on small *fincas* ranging from one to 30 *manzanas* (1.727 to about 50 acres). The fact that the smallest of these could not maintain a whole family is immaterial here, for one person might work the small plot while other members of the family were employed elsewhere; but such family members are not included among the agrarian sectors of economically active people. Finally, 56,574, or about one third of the total economically active agrarian population, were dependent on moderate-sized *fincas* from 30 to 285 *manzanas*, which would be sufficient for employment and subsistence of all members of the family.

It seems evident that, whatever proportion of total *area* they may occupy, the huge estates play but a small role in the total Costa Rican employment or production structure. Neither the company town of Juan Viñas[23] nor the individual huge estates in Guanacaste or Cartago are representative of the total Costa Rican economic picture. What can be easily observed by simply walking through the Costa Rican countryside is confirmed by the statistical evidence, crude as it must be, which comes from all sides.

The Costa Rican *Censo agropecuario de 1955* further confirms what should need no further proof. According to that report, there were in 1955 a total of 162,945 persons actively engaged in agricultural pursuits. Of these, 88,648 were "producers and members of their families who worked without remuneration", and 74,297 were "personnel with remuneration".[24] In other words, not over 46 per cent of the agriculturally active people worked for others. The remainder were either proprietors or members of their families who cooperated with them. There is no escape from the conclusion that proprietorship is widespread among Costa Rican agrarian people.

This fact says nothing about the widespread, unauthorized movement into uncultivated lands, which has been occurring in dramatic form in Costa Rica, in only lesser degree than in Panama and Honduras. Perhaps as much as 10 per cent of the cultivated surface of Costa Rica is held in this form, under a sort of "squatters' rights" system, and there is no absentee land-

[23] *Supra*, n. 10.

[24] Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, *Censo agropecuario de 1955*, Cuadros 37-39, pp. 73-77.

owner nor government which dares to stand against the movement.[25] It is a strange twist of terminology that such producing squatters are called *parásitos*, but this is the case wherever this phenomenon is occurring. Whatever *latifundia* system may have been incipient in Costa Rica must necessarily collapse before the unorganized mass occupation of unused private and public lands.[26] Because it is impossible to drive these people from their illegally occupied land, the government has adopted measures designed to secure title for them, and it is becoming understood throughout Costa Rica that the man who holds land without cultivating it cannot complain of its occupance by others who are more productive than he and that to work the land is to secure title thereto. The big *hacienda* system, insofar as uncultivated lands are concerned, can be no barrier to acquisition of land by needy cultivators.[27]

There can be little doubt that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were characterized by distribution of the land of the Costa Rican *meseta central* among many small proprietors. Nor can it be questioned that this land distribution played an important role in impelling Costa Rica toward egalitarian tendencies which are still evident in this century. The distribution of land, born of shortage of resources and commercial poverty and intransigence of Indians, encouraged personal independence and refusal to submit to arbitrary command.

Though there was an incursion of large estates into the Costa Rican economy during the nineteenth century, and though there were always several huge *haciendas* to the east of the *meseta central*, these did not reverse the basic character of Costa Rican property ownership. Professor Monge Alfaro appears to be among the more accurate reporters on this, when he speaks of a tendency of small proprietors to diminish after the mid-nineteenth century, but nowhere claims that all or even a startling proportion of them vanished.[28] Not only have all proprietors not vanished, but they continue to serve as an importannt bulwark against social chaos and political tyranny. It also seems highly probable that small proprietors are not limited to the *meseta central*, but that they are present in large numbers in other and previously unsuspected parts of the country.

It was not poverty alone which drove the Costa Ricans to a certain rough

[25] The figure of 10 per cent is estimated from United Nations, *Compendio estadístico*, Table 19, p. 24, from figures on land surface covered by "other forms" of ownership as compared with cultivated surface of the country. The figure may run as high as 31 per cent for Honduras and 45 per cent for Panama. Definitions in the cited statistical source make it clear that squatters comprise most of the "other forms" of land ownership.

[26] Hunter interview, *supra*, n. 12; and interviews with Antonio M. Arce and Juvenal Valerio Rodrígues, agronomists at Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Turrialba, April 22, 1959.

[27] Monge Alfaro interview, *supra*, Chapter IV, n. 27. Also described in Soley Güell, *op. cit.*, Chapters I and II.

[28] Monge Alfaro, *Geografía*, p. 20.

egalitarianism. Rather, the poverty in resources promoted distribution of land ownership, and the two working on each other produced an alchemy which had a profound effect on subsequent Costa Rican political and social institutions. The other factors — education, excellent leadership, rather satisfactory economic levels, social fluidity, and the like — arose in part out of the peculiar conditions of distributed proprietorship which were characteristic of Costa Rica, and have come in their turn to supplement the effects of that egalitarian influence.

The presence in the Costa Rican population of numerous independent proprietors, both in the past and the present, must be given a central place in the development of Costa Rican political and social institutions of this century.

Lt. Col. Theodore Wyckoff, U. S. Army, writes in a thoughtful article on military elements in Latin American politics, that "where democracy flourishes — and even where it flourishes with occasional military intervention — there is also to be found the condition of powerful contervailing forces." Such a system of countervailing forces, he finds, "could serve as a framework for a democratic party system. This, in fact, is what seems to have happened in Costa Rica."[29] Lt. Col. Wyckoff is primarily concerned with classes and political parties. The countervailing forces in Costa Rica have arisen in large measure out of the system of land distribution, of numerous proprietors. In this sense, Lt. Col. Wyckoff's allusion to Costa Rica is entirely correct.

Conversely, one is impelled to respect the view of many scholars that land monopoly has played a very significant role in patterns of dictatorship and instability in much of the rest of Latin America.[30]

These notes on Costa Rican democracy lead one to reflections of a more general sort on the problem of human freedom. It is to those reflections that our epilogue will turn.

[29] Theodore Wyckoff, "The Role of the Military in Contemporary Latin American Politics," *The Western Political Quarterly*, XIII (September, 1960), 761–762.

[30] E.g., among many others, Merle Kling, "Towards a Theory of Power and Political Instability in Latin America," *Western Political Quarterly*, IX (March, 1956), 21–35.

EPILOGUE

It seems likely that in Costa Rica a rather unusual distribution of landed proprietorship has stimulated the appearance of general liberty and that there has not been an extremely wealthy parasitic class possessed of sufficient power to stifle popular freedoms.

It would be foolhardy indeed to claim that all hope for free government must rest upon property distribution and absence of exploitative elements. The cases of Chile and Uruguay are well known.[1] Since 1948, even Ecuador would seem to provide a most unexpected demonstration that a country may develop some minimal forms of popular government in the face of land monopoly and concentration of wealth. One might find numerous instances in Europe, Asia, and Africa, where a modicum of democratic institutions develop or persist despite heavy monopolization of property and presence of a non-producing, exploitative, and parasitic class. In Asia, for example, there would be modern-day India; and for centuries Britain herself could hardly be classed as a land free of extreme wealth, class rigidity, or land monopoly. Various other factors have encouraged the growth in these countries of rather popular and democratic political institutions. For example, in Britain — as possibly in Scandinavia and ancient Athens — the sea afforded a mode of escape for the disaffected and may have combined with other elements to enhance the social consciousness of political leadership.

We cannot say, then, that institutions of free government can only arise where there is social egalitarianism and multiplicity of proprietors. What we might claim, and with some assurance, is that where property ownership is widely distributed and the extremes of poverty and luxury are not marked, the institutions of popular government are almost certain to find a favorable soil. Whereas it is possible to find some democratic practices in the same societies with land monopoly and non-producing classes, it is less easy to find tyranny where property ownership is distributed and class differences are mitigated. This consideration leads us to speculations regarding the social ferment of our times.

The American, French, and other liberal revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were in large measure dedicated to the proposition that man as an individual must be liberated from the concentrated authority of the Crown, from the fetters of feudal or ecclesiastical monopoly, and from the general tyranny of unmitigated, uncontrolled centers of exploitative power.

[1] In both countries, *latifundia* and poor, landless peons play important roles in the economic process. However, it is notable that in Chile there is a people-*finca* ratio of 11.0, which would indicate that there are many small farms in areas not occupied by the big *haciendas*. *Vid. supra*, Chapter VII, nn. a and g of Table II.

There have been several deviants from the liberalism of that period. One, for example, has consisted in a furious suspicion of all government, which has gone hand in hand with a peculiar blindness to the dangers of concentrated private power. To certain self-styled "libertarians" or "conservatives", of the present age, the liberation of man from the chains of political tyranny is all that matters; his suffering at the hands of private exploiters is of little or no significance or concern.

For our purposes, another deviant from nineteenth-century liberalism is of more immediate interest. That deviant is Marxism. For Marxism and the Marxists, while drawing a part of their theoretical sustenance from the liberal attack on the privileged orders, have entirely disregarded the liberal defense of man against all concentrated authority. If he can convince himself that the state is somehow the embodiment of the working classes, then the Marxist poses no objections to the concentration of all power in the hands of the political authorities. The peculiar magic or alchemy that makes a given state correlative with the workers, arises out of the curious Marxist belief that if one says so often enough or loudly enough, then it must be so. The Marxist is largely immune to much of the revolutionary excitement of the past two centuries, which directed its withering fire against political tyranny. Whenever the Marxist decides that a given state is a workers' state, he convinces himself that the state is not a menace to, but rather a protector of, the interests of the class he favors.

Marxism thus purports to take a step forward in its attacks against a rather specialized so-called capitalist or bourgeois class; but in doing so it takes a most important step backward when it embraces the very institutions of untrammeled political power which fell under the scorn of the liberal revolutionists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It may be argued that Marxism is more retrogressive than were the institutions of a George III or Louis XVI, for Marxism would combine total economic monopoly with total political tyranny. There can be no countervailing power. Nothing can stand against the monolithic state. From this point of view, one may suggest, and not altogether whimsically, that Marxism stands rather to the right of Ivan the Terrible. In any event, Marxism builds a bridge between nineteenth-century liberalism and the Divine Right of Kings.

Nowhere is this schizophrenic character of Marxism more strikingly epitomized than in its demand for the collectivization of the land — one of two measures of land reform popular in this century. Though quite different from each other, the two have been interwoven in the reform movements of the contemporary period. The first measure consists simply in the break-up of great landed estates, in the encouragement of widespread proprietorships, in

the formation of societies of many landowners. The other, which is wholly or partially Marxist in inspiration, consists in the so-called collectivization of the land. As with much of Marxism, the differences between this reform and the older patterns are difficult to detect. The sloganization is quite modern and very revolutionary in spirit. The actual content may be somewhat less than profound.

The two types of land reform may be confused in the same general social movement. Thus, the Mexican revolution has encouraged both small proprietorship and the so-called *ejido*, or coöperative but not exactly collective agrarian endeavor. The Soviet and Chinese and Cuban revolutions, as is well known, have adhered to the collective form. It is a curious but revealing fact that is is often far easier to change from feudal to collective systems than from feudal to distributed-proprietorship forms. Collectivization may not require important changes in land boundaries. Old administrative structures may be partially maintained. Officials, such as overseers, foremen, and the like, may be retained under new names. Bookkeeping systems need not be drastically upset. The old company store, or *tienda de raya,* becomes a *tienda del pueblo* and goes on conducting business as usual. Marketing patterns need not be disturbed. There is not such a need for new roads and other connecting links. Collectivization, in fact, may not be a particularly radical reform. It has more in common with the old system of private land monopoly than the modern-day revolutionists would care to admit.

In a recent study the distinguished Professor Marco Antonio Durán, head of the Department of Agricultural Economics of the Escuela Nacional de Agricultura at Chapingo, Mexico, writes that in his country the agricultural land is now divided about equally between coöperative or *ejido* properties and non-ejidal plots. After revealing that 63 per cent of Mexican agricultural production is accounted for by the private properties and only 37 per cent by the coöperative enterprises, Professor Durán attributes the lower production of coöperative properties to several factors — among them, inadequate investment and private financing opportunities, and excessive agrarian population in precisely the depressed areas where the government had to provide relief by creating the *ejido* form.[2] Many other Mexican writers have directed their attention to this productive differential.[3] As Professor Durán points out, the difference in production figures between the two forms has been a cause of much comment, both emotional and other.

It can be argued that distributed proprietorship establishes energizing forces

[2] Marco Antonio Durán, "El desarrollo de la agricultura mexicana," *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, III (January, 1961), 20-22.

[3] E.g., see Armando González Santos, *La agricultura* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957).

which are no more present in collectivization than in a baronial estate; that in fact the multiplication of farmer-proprietors may constitute the more profound revolution of the two. Such is the view of President Dr. Ramón Villeda Morales of Honduras, and his Liberal Party, who are undertaking a sweeping program that envisages the creation of a nation of small proprietors. Dr. Villeda has stated that a farmer-proprietor is "liberated from the political influence of the land barons". Further, President Villeda contends, Honduras may thereby obstruct the "infiltration of totalitarian doctrines whose agents take advantage of the conditions of misery in which the people live".

With or without political effort, many thousand Honduran farmers are promoting a sort of profound social revolution of their own. Squatters now occupy as much as 31 per cent of the cultivated land of the republic. The same movement is occurring in Panama, where up to 45 per cent of the cultivated land is illegally occupied by the so-called *parásitos*.[4] Thus, government promotion of land distribution may in many instances simply legalize what is occurring already, and stave off more violent protest movements.

It is important to note that, without elaborate governmental establishments for distribution of seed and technical aid or for provision of machinery or credit, the private, non-collective half of Mexican agriculture is responsible for 63 per cent of agrarian production of that country. In Honduras and Panama, and in other Latin American republics, people who enjoy no sort of governmental assistance whatever are illegally occupying land and are producing crops. The land itself is providing them with a poor but sufficient sustenance, and is all that is needed to initiate cultivation.

None of this should come as a surprise to those who know of the opening of virgin lands in the United States and Canada. No one who has seen pioneers at work in Alaska should be startled that men can go on a piece of land armed only with simple tools and a "grubstake", and carve out homesteads and ultimately whole communities. Nor should this information surprise those who know of the social and economic histories of other lands where proprietorship has been well distributed, as in many of the countries of Western Europe, and New Zealand, and Australia, and probably many other unsuspected spots around the globe.

More to our point, these are precisely the places where political tyranny has found no secure foothold, where not only economic opportunity but also the institutions of freedom have had their surest foundations. What may be seen clearly by the observer who will but look about him, what was contended by liberal socio-political theory of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is obscure only to the feudalist of the fifteenth and the collectivist of

[4] *Supra*, Chapter VII, n. 25.

the twentieth. The feudalists and the collectivists alike seem unable to escape from the medieval concept that a great fief, whether run by the lord of the manor or the lords of the state, affords the greatest hope for the earthly salvation of man. It would be intriguing to weave an argument around the theme that Marxism, while certainly constituting a direct assault on capitalism, was born more of a nostalgic yearning for a familiar medieval past than of any genuine desire to move forward into an uncertain future. Karl Marx's origins in the semi-feudal Germany of the mid-nineteenth century could lend some credence to such a proposition.

All of which has much to do with the contribution of distributed proprietorship to liberty, and of liberty to the progress of mankind. The land-value taxation proposals of Henry George were more complex in concept and in probable impact than any simple creation of proprietors by fiat. Nevertheless, it is not inappropriate at this point that we quote the nineteenth-century reformer. As we know, he was talking about land monopoly in more than merely agrarian terms:

> The general subjection of the many to the few, which we meet with wherever society has reached a certain development, has resulted from the appropriation of land as individual property. It is slavery of this kind to which the enduring pyramids and the colossal monuments of Egypt bear witness... The white parasols and the elephants mad with pride of the Indian rajah are the flowers of grants of land. And could we find the key to the records of the long-buried civilizations that lie entombed in the gigantic ruins of Yucatán and Guatemala, telling at once of the pride of a ruling class and the unrequited toil to which the masses were condemned, we should read, in all human probability, of a slavery imposed upon the great body of the people through the appropriation of the land as the property of a few... It was not nobility that gave the land, but the possession of land that gave nobility...[5]

Conversely, George contended, the equal opportunity to use of the land can be a basis for the growth of liberty. Liberty herself, he maintained, is a veritable engine of human progress:

> ... Where Liberty rises, there virtue grows, wealth increases, knowledge expands, and in strength and spirit the freer nation rises among her neighbors... Where Liberty sinks, there virtue fades, wealth diminishes, knowledge is forgotten, invention ceases, and empires once mighty in arms and arts become a helpless prey to freer barbarians!
>
> Only in broken gleams and partial light has the sun of Liberty yet beamed among men, but all progress hath she called forth...
>
> Shall we not trust her?[6]

As we have noted in the preceding chapters, in Costa Rica both the distribution of proprietorship and the achievement of liberty are far from

[5] Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, 1879 (New York: Schalkenbach Foundation, 1954), pp. 349-352.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 547-548.

complete; but the Costa Ricans have attained a degree of both that is unusual in Latin America. If the preceding line of reasoning is valid, it may be argued that a century and a half ago Costa Rica had already undergone an unannounced revolution that was more profound in its ultimate social and political impact than anything that has yet occurred in Mexico, or in collectivist Cuba, or China, or the Soviet Union. Costa Rica broke at an early time with feudal arrangements in which a parasitic few could strangle the opportunities of the majority of the population and could reduce propertyless masses to beggary, misery, sloth, ignorance, and spiritual and physical death. The collectivist and quasi-collectivist nations have filled the air with new slogans, but it may still be *le change mais la même chose*. As in many modern dictatorial or one-party states, their governments have made great efforts to improve the physical façade, and even the mastery of educational tools by their peoples.

Nevertheless, there is much force to the argument that these nations will only know a genuine burst of productive energy when the propelling force of individual liberty has been unleashed and has replaced the compelling hand of the political inheritors of the old baronial fiefs. One may speculate on the powerful forces that a distributed proprietorship would have stimulated in the Soviet Union!

If this argument be valid, then many countries of the West have already undergone the important stages of their final revolution — that is, the revolution for distributed opportunity and for human liberty. Where the effects of that revolution have not been subverted by new inequalities and new oppressions, it is possible that the ultimate classless society, the dream of anarchist and communist alike, is actually on the way to realization. One may argue that the collectivist organization of society does not lead to the end of the renowned dialectic, but away from it. Both classless society and liberty find a more congenial soil in the distributed proprietorship of unmonopolized capitalism than in either the environment of feudalism or in that of its collectivist cousin.

It may well be that the great revolutions of Mexico, Cuba, China, and the U.S.S.R. are yet to come. Then, in the words of the Mexican national anthem, "the earth to its center shall tremble!"

And it would appear there are things we can learn from the Rich Coast — a land without important mineral wealth, and without a notable exploitive class, but with some access to the bounty of nature and a certain measure of liberty.

APPENDIX

RECENT COSTA RICAN ADMINISTRATIONS*

President	Notes	Dates
Lic. Ascensión Esquivel Ibarra		1902-1906
Lic. Cleto González Víquez	first term	1906-1910
Lic. Ricardo Jiménez Oreamuno	first term	1910-1914
Lic. Alfredo González Flores	overthrown by force	1914-1917
Federico A. Tinoco Granados	a violent period	1917-1919
Gen. Juan Bautista Quirós and Lic. Francisco Aguilar Barquero	two interim administrations	1919-1920
Julio Acosta García		1920-1924
Lic. Ricardo Jiménez Oreamuno	second term	1924-1928
Lic. Cleto González Víquez	second term	1928-1932
Lic. Ricardo Jiménez Oreamuno	third term	1932-1936
Lic. León Cortés Castro		1936-1940
Dr. Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia		1940-1944
Lic. Teodoro Picado Michalski	tension, electoral fraud; overthrown by force	1944-1948
Government by *junta*, under leadership of José Figueres		1948-1949
Otilio Ulate Blanco	presumed elected in 1948	1949-1953
José Figueres		1953-1958
Lic. Mario Echandi		1958-1962
Francisco J. Orlich		1962-1966
Dr. José Joaquín Trejos Fernández		1966-1970

*Adapted from Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla histórica de Costa Rica* (28th ed.; San José: Librería e Imprenta Lehmann, 1957), pp. 134-136; and James L. Busey, "The Presidents of Costa Rica," *The Americas*, XVIII (July, 1961), 55-70.

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Meléndez Ch., Carlos. Chief of the anthropological section, National Museum, May 20, 1959.

Monge, Luis Alberto. Deputy, Partido Liberación Nacional, April 27, 1959.

Monge Alfaro, Carlos. Professor of history, University of Costa Rica, May 5, 1959.

Muñoz, Miguel Angel. Agrarian economist, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, April 30 and May 10, 1959.

Núñez, Rev. Benjamín. Director, Instituto de Educación Polftica, and a leader, Partido Liberación Nacional, May 15 and 18, 1959.

Odúber Quirós, Daniel. Deputy, Partido Liberación Nacional, May 20, 1959.

Rodríguez, Juvenal Valerio. Department of Economics and Welfare, Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Turrialba, Costa Rica, April 22, 1959.

Rojas Espinosa, Alvaro. Chief, office of planning and co-ordination, Ministerio de Agricultura, April 29, 1959.

Rossi, Jorge. Presidential candidate in elections of 1958 and the leader of Partido Independiente, May 22, 1959.

Villalobos Arce, Guillermo. Deputy, Partido Republicano Nacional, May 7, 1959.