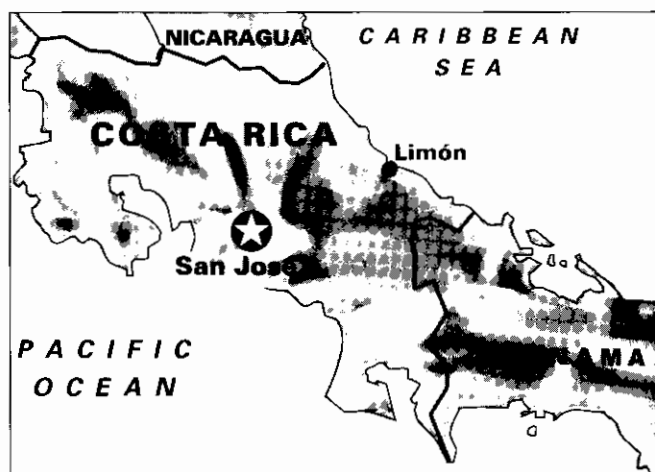


COSTA RICAN REVOLUTION (1948)

By Central American standards, the insurrection that broke out in Costa Rica in 1948 was unusually brief and limited in its violence, yet it was almost certainly the single most important political event of the century for this country. The outlines of the modern political system emerged out of the “Civil War of 1948,” as it is called in Costa Rica, as did a deep respect for the integrity of elections and democratic practices, the contemporary political party system, the elimination of the military as a political force, and leaders who personally and through their heirs have dominated politics to this day. A clash between the traditional oligarchy and modernizing sectors over the social agenda and the influence of communists in government were the major issues creating the conditions for the insurrection. Electoral fraud was the catalyst that set it off.

In the period 1936–1940 the elected government of León Cortés Castro carried popular favor through an extensive public works program but shunned social reform. In 1940 Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia, hand-picked by Cortés and representing the traditional oligarchy, was elected to the presidency by a landslide. To the surprise of many of his conservative supporters, however, he quickly began reforms, eventually implementing a social security system, a labor code, a public housing program, a progressive income tax, and the reopening of the University of Costa Rica.

In order to govern in the light of increasing opposition from the oligarchy, in 1942 Calderón forged an alliance with the Communist Party, which had won 16 percent of the votes in the congressional elections of that year. This alliance alienated an even wider segment of the Costa Rican population, including many small farmers. Nonetheless, in 1944 Teodoro Picado Michalski, hand-picked by Calderón and supported by the Communists, easily defeated Cortés and held the presidency until the 1948 elections. By that time, three groups had formed an alliance to oppose Calderón’s bid for reelection. The Social Democratic Party was a fusion of an ostensibly apolitical study group, called the Center for the Study of National Problems, and Democratic Action, led by José Figueres Ferrer. Figueres previously had been exiled to Mexico by Calderón as a result of an inflammatory radio speech that he made in 1942, but he now returned with a plan to overthrow the government by force. The other two opposition groups were the Democratic Party, consisting of supporters of now deceased president Cortés, and the National Union Party, comprising supporters of conservative



newspaperman Otilio Ulate Blanco. In July 1947 the opposition alliance supported a strike of businesses in protest against the new income tax law, the strike serving to unify the conservative and reformist members of the opposition.

The February 1948 presidential election was marred by voting fraud on all sides. The opposition, united behind Ulate, appears to have won the popular vote over the Calderón-Communist alliance, but the electoral tribunal declared that the alliance had won a majority in the legislature. The legislature, which had the final authority to ratify the election results, annulled the presidential vote but accepted the results of the legislative election. This drove elements of the opposition to support Figueres’s plan for an armed revolt, which broke out on March 12, 1948, and resulted in the loss of between one thousand and two thousand lives, most of them civilian. An end to the war was negotiated on April 19 under the auspices of U.S. diplomats.

The coalition fell apart immediately after the truce was signed but eventually agreed to allow Figueres to lead a revolutionary junta for eighteen months, after which Ulate would take over as president. A new constitution was forged in 1949 abolishing the army and establishing universal suffrage while banning parties such as the Communists. Figueres did step down after eighteen months but was elected president in 1953 as head of the National Liberation Party, which was to become Costa Rica’s most cohesive and electorally successful party. The supporters of Calderón formed the major opposition electoral alliance. The social reforms of Calderón, however, were not only maintained but greatly broadened by the National Liberation Party, resulting in exceptionally high levels of social welfare. In the 1990s sons of both Calderón and Figueres succeeded their fathers as presidents of the country.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bell, John Patrick. *Crisis in Costa Rica: The Revolution of 1948*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971.
- Booth, John A. *Costa Rica: Quest for Democracy*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998.
- Longley, Kyle. *The Sparrow and the Hawk: Costa Rica and the United States during the Rise of José Figueres*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997.
- Seligson, Mitchell A. *Peasants of Costa Rica and the Development of Agrarian Capitalism*. Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980.
- Yashar, Deborah J. *Demanding Democracy: Reform and Reaction in Costa Rica and Guatemala, 1870s–1950s*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

COUNTERREVOLUTION

By definition, counterrevolution can occur only when and where a revolutionary transfer of power has already begun. When it happens, counterrevolution provides some of revolution's most vivid scenes, from France's Vendée insurrection of 1793 to the U.S.-backed mobilization against Nicaragua's 1979–1980 Sandinista revolution.

Only rarely does a revolution bring to power a single, unified band of revolutionaries. Instead, the typical successful revolutionary force is a coalition of disparate opponents of the displaced regime. Similarly, revolutionary seizure of power often generates opposition by three rather different clusters of activists: displaced power-holders; allies, clients, and beneficiaries of those power-holders; and other enemies, rivals, and victims of the new rulers. Since the French Revolution of 1789–1799, those who control a revolutionary government have often labeled their domestic opponents as counterrevolutionaries. In those cases, "counterrevolution" has referred to whatever and whomever leaders identified as blocking their own revolutionary programs.

Beyond such polemical uses of the term, counterrevolution also identifies a significant political process. Outside support for counterrevolution (including support from exiles and refugees who have exited from the revolutionary regime) often makes a great difference to its course, but it does not in itself qualify as counterrevolution. Strictly speaking, counterrevolution refers to certain processes arraying domestic opposition against holders of revolutionary power. Once a revolutionary coalition has taken over a state and dislodged its previous rulers, we can speak of a revolutionary regime. If and when domestic opponents of the revolutionary regime then begin to offer concerted public resistance against revolutionary measures and personnel within the regime's own territory, we can reasonably call the process counterrevolutionary. A full-fledged counterrevolution reverses the usual revolutionary situation; it opens a serious,

visible split between those who currently control the state (now the revolutionaries) and those who have gathered substantial domestic support for alternative claims to power (now the counterrevolutionaries).

Natural-history theorists of revolution such as the American scholar Crane Brinton have commonly argued that every revolution generates its own counterrevolution, indeed that only successful counterrevolution restores former revolutionary regimes to political equilibrium and domestic peace. Revolutions that have occurred since the eighteenth century, however, suggest different conclusions; the extent, character, and consequences of counterrevolutionary action have varied enormously from region to region and time to time. Revolutionaries, for example, faced fierce, armed domestic opposition through large sections of southern and western France between 1793 and 1795. In contrast, the Cuban revolutionary coalition that came to power in 1959 rapidly cowed, conciliated, or exiled its opposition. Once its forces seized control of Havana, it never faced widespread and open opposition from within its own territory. The Cuban Revolution's many enemies, often supported by the United States, formed almost entirely outside the country, and they attacked from outside as well.

CONDITIONS FOR COUNTERREVOLUTION

Singly and in combination, two main circumstances promote counterrevolution: first, seizure of state power by a group having a narrow social base or many domestic enemies; second, splits in revolutionary coalitions after they have come to power. Relatively pure examples of the first set of circumstances occur when military, religious, or nationalist factions seize state power in the name of revolutionary programs, thereby generating widespread opposition; for example, although Austrian and Russian military forces from outside Hungary ultimately crushed its Magyar nationalist revolution of 1848–1849, the revolution's threat to non-Magyar nationalities had already incited armed opposition from Croats and others before the decisive battles with Austrian and Russian armies began. Great Britain's rapid spiral from parliamentary victory over King Charles I into civil war between 1647 and 1648 combined the first and second circumstances. First, British royalists and opponents of English hegemony retained strong support in parts of Ireland, Scotland, and even England throughout the revolutionary period from 1640 to 1660. Second, the victorious Puritan-dominated revolutionary army began expelling from Parliament its former allies, Presbyterians who enjoyed substantial backing in Scotland and northern England and who after their expulsion joined the military opposition. The Russian revolutions of 1917 provide a somewhat purer example of the second set of cir-