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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

POLITICS AND EDUCATION IN COSTA RICA, 1880-1930

by

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To my greatest passion: Manuel

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS

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Doctor of Philosophy

POLITICS AND EDUCATION IN COSTA RICA: 1880-1930

by Astrid Fischel

From the late 1870s onwards, Latin American countries in general and Central America in particular, entered a new phase of economic organization. Even though the essence of the ideological parameters of this new phase was similar for all Central American nations, the implementation of these ideas was quite different in Costa Rica. While Liberalism in the rest of the isthmus seemed to provoke the strengthening of repressive systems inherited from the Colonial period, in Costa Rica it was associated with a search for consensus in the exercise of power.

Periodic reform movements have marked Costa Rica's history, restraining the dangerous condensation of social unrest which has been the spark of many revolutionary uprisings in other lands. Gradual change has allowed slow structural transformation, thus promoting a high degree of political and social stability. This political option has not been the result of chance; rather it is closely linked with peculiar social relationships and a particular power structure, in which the education system has played a most important role.

The process of development, disruption, and subsequent restoration of the "Liberal oriented political pact" favoured since the 1880s is the key issue of analysis in this thesis.

The relationship between politics and education during the period 1880-1930, is the centre of particular interpretation, since under the prevailing scheme of domination, one which favoured consensualism over repression, control over education became a most crucial element of competition in the political game.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Central American isthmus received but slight historiographical attention from those interested in Latin American studies up to the late 1970s. Thereafter, the profound socio-political crisis that launched these small countries into international focus transformed Central America into a social laboratory for the study and interpretation of popular upheavals against dictatorships and oligarchies. Costa Rica's peculiar socio-political development, lacking burning social issues, wars and dictatorships -primarily consensual rather than repressive- has been overlooked or ignored in most of these studies. For this reason, Costa Rica's past and present are challenging to the social scientist not only because of the marginal position the country has until now occupied in general analyses of Central America, but above all for the singularity of its evolution. In a region currently overridden with violence and injustice, Costa Rica stands out as a country with no army, politically stable and law-oriented. Thus, to unravel the roots of differentiation between Costa Rica and the remaining Central American countries represents both an intellectual challenge and an interesting lesson in political and ideological achievement.

The choice of education as an important issue for analysis is intimately linked to this aspiration. The study and interpretation of the role played by education in Costa Rican society provides a prism through which light can be shed on the social development of the

country.

From the late 1870s onwards, Latin American countries in general and Central America in particular, entered a new phase of economic organization. Even though the essence of the ideological parameters was similar for all Central American nations, the implementation of these ideas was quite different in Costa Rica. While Liberalism in the rest of the isthmus seemed to provoke the strengthening of repressive systems inherited from the Colonial period, in Costa Rica it was associated with a search for consensus in the exercise of power.

Periodic reform movements have marked Costa Rica's history, restraining the dangerous condensation of social unrest which has been the spark of many revolutionary uprisings in other lands. Gradual change has allowed slow structural transformation, thus promoting a high degree of political and social stability. This political option has not been the result of chance; rather it is closely linked with peculiar social relationships and a particular power structure, in which the education system has played a most important role.

Costa Rica's tendency towards consensus was clearly demonstrated by the interest shown by successive governments in the ideological apparatus, by the proportion of public expenditure devoted to education (See Table I), and by the results of the increasing numbers of students enroled and teachers employed (See Table V). The educational system -a key vehicle for the

generation and reproduction of that consensus- became a major, and indeed, very satisfactory ideological pillar of the new model of government.

The theme

The process of development, disruption, and subsequent restoration of the "Liberal oriented political pact" favoured since the 1880s is the key issue of analysis in this thesis. The relationship between politics and education during the period 1880-1930 is the centre of particular interpretation, due to the fact that under the prevailing scheme of domination which favoured consensualism over repression, control over education became a most crucial element of competition in the political game.

The reasons for a conjunctural analysis

When applied to the social sciences, the term "structure" generally refers to a set of specific economic, political and social conditions which occur within a historical movement of long duration. The fundamental relationships and basic functioning at the heart of a society's structure remain relatively stable but the structure itself only evolves very slowly.

The concept of "conjuncture", on the other hand, describes movements of short duration. A conjuncture describes a movement in which an accelerated movement of

change or a transitory alteration in the prevailing rhythm of social evolution takes place. The cumulative outcome of a number of conjunctures may lead to structural change.

The study of conjunctures permits both the elucidation of factors which alter the social dynamics, and an analysis of the structure itself. In turn, such analysis allows the investigator to establish the wealth of factors involved in the complex evolution of history, often seen as a simplistic and mechanical process.¹

Due to the nature of issues studied in this thesis, "conjunctural analysis" seemed to be the most adequate methodological formula.

The need to integrate political, economic and ideological variables was also my constant preoccupation. This is reflected in the structure employed to analyze each conjuncture under study: first, general political factors, followed by economic developments, and finally, educational aspects. After analyzing in depth the years 1880-1930, five specific conjunctures were identified:

1. 1880-1914: During these years the Liberal model of government, legally sanctioned in Costa Rica during the 1880s, was implemented. The period of development and consolidation of the Liberal state was reflected in the intellectual hegemony of the "Olympians", Costa Rica's most conspicuous Liberal advocates.

2. 1914-1917: The unexpected emergence of a radical

and polemical figure to the presidency ushered in "the interventionist parenthesis", a period when Liberal dominance was questioned and tampered with, from the apex of the polity.

3. 1917-1919: The conservative reaction that turned tyrannical. During these years, the prevailing political pact was unsettled due to the chaotic economic and political situation and the relative discredit of the ruling class. This allowed the leadership of social actors who had not previously participated in the political arena.

4. 1920-1924: The temporary dislocation of political activity and the opening of the political arena to new social actors stimulated serious conflict which centred on acquiring, maintaining and increasing power at the ideological level. Newcomers strived to overcome the Liberal scheme and formulate an ampler and more democratic 'political pact'.

5. 1924-1930: This period marked the restoration of Liberal hegemony due to the convergence of three major factors: 1. the disruption of the Reformist Party, (the only alternative political option at that time, which gathered the radical forces) 2. the buoyant Public Treasury, which minimized social and economic tensions, and 3. the rise to power of Ricardo Jiménez, an astute politician who was able to dismantle the opposition movement and attract former adversaries to the ranks of his party while simultaneously conducting a subtle purge of the reformist ideas that had hindered the Liberal

hegemony.

With this last conjuncture, the political-ideological cycle under study comes to a close. The analysis begins with the development and consolidation of the Liberal scheme in Costa Rica (1880-1914) and closes with the conjuncture in which that scheme is finally reestablished, surviving the threat which had conspired against it since 1914.

The reasons for studying ideology

As the product of tensions between social forces that aspire to attain political power by one means or another, political history must go far beyond the study of institutions to examine the human beings who created those institutions through processes of negotiation and political struggle. It is thus exceedingly important to analyze political-ideological discourse, not as the simple personal expressions of political actors but the reflection of their world-views.

Each social group has particular ways of perceiving the material world and its mental manifestations, and of focusing on an event through a certain set of values and beliefs. Some of these values and beliefs become hegemonic due to the imposition and persuasion of particular groups. Once the ideology of a dominant class is assimilated by subordinate groups, it is emptied of its class content and becomes universalized. In essence, this ideological submission is an identification with the

world-view belonging to the dominant class, even though this may be in direct contradiction with the objectives of other social groups.

In a society such as Costa Rica's, where political power is channelled principally through ideological rather than repressive mechanisms, control of these mechanisms -especially education- is critically important. For these reasons, Costa Rican historiography requires the study of ideology, although this has been largely ignored or under-emphasized. This investigation represents pioneering work in the field in that it attempts to surpass the limits of traditional studies of politics and education through an interpretative synthesis which encompasses 40 years of national history.

Educational reform and politics

Studies of the Costa Rican education system reveal that the only movements of profound change in education were born in the heat of an integral transformation of the national state; within such logics of change, the education system was given a privileged place. Under such circumstances, the reform initiated in the conjuncture of 1885-1889, was a process inscribed within the constitutive parameters of a new Liberal political project.² Under the protection of concrete political and ideological precepts, education emerged from a new conception of society, economy and state, and became a fundamental training and ideological tool.³

Attempts to carry out a profound reorganization of the national education system were repeatedly frustrated after 1890. The close relationship between change in education and the configuration of the state underlined the need to inscribe new attempts to consolidate the education system, within a general logic of reform of the state.

For this reason, the present study emphasises the conjuncture of 1914-1917, due to the relevance of the options that were proposed. Under the González Flores administration, education policies were not elaborated in a vacuum; they were defined at a point at which the structure of the régime was under severe pressure for global transformation. Hence, effective and permanent changes in education could have taken place only if González Flores's policies had been both sanctioned and accepted. Although the reformist tide initiated in the field of education in 1914 was to last until 1924, when it was totally reversed, the political developments of the period high-lighted the debate over education. At a time of re-elaboration of the 'social pact', the major ideological vehicle acquired particular significance. Control of this major ideological mechanism became a crucial point of political struggle.

The state of the art

Historical research in Costa Rica has been closely linked to the development of the social sciences. Before the 1970s, a decade of intense academic activity in the

humanistic and socially oriented disciplines, these studies were marked by political and legal considerations, which were clearly identified with a Positivist outlook. In that sense, key explanatory economic, cultural and social factors were marginalized.

The influence of various currents of thought, together with certain favourable academic conditions for the institutionalization of the social sciences, made possible the growth of scholarly research in the early seventies.

Major changes in theoretical approaches and perspectives in human and social disciplines took place at the University of Costa Rica. The School of History and Geography, the School of Anthropology and Sociology, and the School of Political Sciences, among others, distinctly reflected in their programs, methodological outlooks and textbooks, the influence of modern scientific developments in the field of social sciences, from Marxist to econometric analyses carried by the "Chicago Boys". These changes brought to the fore a new set of issues and problems and, simultaneously, opened the path for the legitimization of new views and perceptions concerning man, society and the state.

The development of the social sciences in the eighties has been closely linked to the overall situation of crisis in the Central American region. This critical reality inspired an intellectual and publishing "boom", which promoted changes in the academic agenda. New issues and topics, as well as the redefinition of old problems

in the light of a situation of political, social and economic turmoil, became major subjects of study.

Costa Rican historiography, was heavily influenced by French currents of thought (promoted by the journal Annales) and by neomarxism, both of which emphasized socio-economic factors and historical data which could be quantified. The study of political power and ideology was almost completely abandoned, and the work of prominent professional historians, such as Elizabeth Fonseca, Ciro Cardoso and Héctor Pérez, most of whom had studied in France, reflected the new trends.⁴

Social history in Costa Rica has been indirectly enriched in recent years by the contribution of British Marxist social historians, especially the work of E.P. Thompson. Eric Hobsbawm's and Perry Anderson's works have also offered important intellectual insights.⁵

From the 1970s until 1985, political studies were still the preserve of amateur historians who favoured anecdote and narrative accounts over scholarly interpretation.⁶ Not until the mid-1980s did a few academic political-ideological investigations begin to appear; these works were analytical rather than anecdotal and demonstrated a great rigour in the treatment of archival sources and in the application of theoretical-methodological precepts.⁷

The history of education occupies a singular position since, in general, little work has been done in this area, and most studies have been limited to

hagiographies or detailed accounts of the problems of a particular educational institution.⁸

A problem in current historical analysis in Costa Rica is the eagerness of some scholars to "adjust" facts to rigid theoretical propositions.⁹ Specialization in specific fields has also led to a general inability to reach more global explanations.¹⁰

The period between 1880 and 1930 has received relatively little attention from professional historians. Nevertheless, a certain amount of economic and social research with scientific underpinnings, has been published, such as the work of Carolyn Hall, Mario Oliva and Roger Churnside.¹¹ These have provided important data and interpretations which have cast some light on the contextual framework of the political-ideological phenomena analyzed in this thesis.

The following subdivision by topics and periods summarises the state of the art within the boundaries of the specific conjunctures which have already been outlined.

I. The state, education and society (1880-1914)

The majority of studies which deal with education during this period are institutional and treat the subject in isolation, advancing only timid observations about the effect of the political apparatus and economic variables. The writings of Luis Felipe González Flores

and Carlos Jinesta belong to this category. Even Carlos Monge's attempts to break away from anecdotal or narrative history fail to place developments within a global perspective.¹²

Some of the monographs on presidents and key figures in education are essentially oral history in print since their authors (Carlos Jinesta, Gonzalo Chacón and Hernán Peralta, in particular) were contemporaries of the personalities under study.¹³

The work of professional historians, especially after 1970, established a sound empirical base and provided greater depth of analysis, but did not relate developments in education to their economic, social and political context. This seems to be the case of the works of Paulino González and Hector Gertel.¹⁴

On the other hand, the thesis of Carmen Fallas and Margarita Silva, Surgimiento y desarrollo de la educación de la mujer en Costa Rica. 1848-1886¹⁵ stands at the forefront of a new, pioneering literature, which is both systematic and analytical, and which attempts to visualize the processes and changes in Costa Rican education in the light of social dynamics. While innovative in style, the propositions advanced in their thesis were not well supported since many of the sources cited are unfortunately not verifiable, so that doubt must be cast on the assertions which have been made.¹⁶

In 1986, this investigator published the article, "La educación en el proceso de formación y consolidación

del Estado costarricense"¹⁷, a preliminary work leading to an expanded publication one year later entitled, "Consenso y represión. Una interpretación socio-política de la educación costarricense".¹⁸ In this book, I used the study of education as a prism to elucidate key aspects defining the structure of political power in Costa Rica from Independence (1821) to the 1880s. That work was supported by a substantial empirical base of research which I carried out with primary sources. With the recent publication of "La clausura de la Universidad de Santo Tomás"¹⁹, I chose a new perspective concerning the underlying motives leading to the refusal to create a university in Costa Rica during the period 1888-1940.

A similar approach, by Ileana Muñoz in 1988 explores the historic interrelation between politics and education. In "Estado y Poder Municipal: Un análisis del proceso de centralización escolar en Costa Rica 1821-1882", Muñoz studied the manner in which the municipal authorities controlled and regulated education; by centralizing primary education, the state was able to weaken local power.²⁰

II. The Interventionist Parenthesis (1914-1917)

This is one of the most complex, yet curiously one of the least studied moments in the history of Costa Rica. Most written work has centred on President González Flores' attempted tax reform. His biographers Carlos Luis Fallas and Eduardo Oconitrillo have focused their attention on this period through the treatment of

González Flores as a solitary and misunderstood man.²¹ In contrast, Bernardo Villalobos' 1982 book "Alfredo González Flores. Políticas de seguros y de Bancas. 1910-1917", concentrated on economic variables, in particular those which affected banking and finance.²² As far as education is concerned, there are a few biographical works, such as Edgar Obregón's study of the educator Miguel Obregón, and others on Omar Dengo, and Roberto Brenes Mesén.²³

The writings of the major political actors reveal concern for both "high politics" and education. President González Flores and his brother, Luis Felipe González Flores, Secretary of Public Instruction, provide considerable insight into this turbulent era; many of don Alfredo's articles are speeches and explanations of national problems and the measures taken to solve them.²⁴ Don Luis Felipe, a prolific writer, has produced a wide variety of materials, ranging from declarations concerning specific issues in education to general reflections of a psychological and philosophical nature.²⁵

As might be expected, the work of journalists in this period captures the effervescence and controversy which broke loose as established order at even the highest levels came under question. Articles such as "De Heredia vino..."²⁶ or "Una entrevista con don Luis Felipe González"²⁷ provide vital insights into the conjuncture during this period.

III. The military interregnum (1917-1919)

This short period is arguably one of the most polemical in Costa Rican history. A long-standing tendency towards consensus was interrupted by the rise to power of a clique supported by military force.

Monographic studies have naturally focused on President Federico Tinoco. One of the most interesting biographies of the President was written by Eduardo Oconitrillo, who provided scrupulously accurate anecdotes and "pecata minuta" in an agreeable style.²⁸

The conduct of the Government, the treachery and nepotism of the political leaders have been severely criticized in a number of works. The writings of Jacinto López, Francisco Núñez, Julio Acosta, Jorge Volio, Ramón and Antonio Zelaya, Tranquilino Chacón, Gonzalo Chacón Trejos, Julio Barcos and even ex-president Tinoco provide vivid if highly subjective anecdotal accounts of events as witnessed by the authors.²⁹ In contrast, contemporary works such as those of Marvin Brenes and Olger González are more systematic and scholarly in their treatment of juridical and bureaucratic aspects of the Tinoco régime.³⁰ Hugo Murillo has provided an acute analysis of United States interference in the internal affairs of Costa Rica during the Tinoco administration in his multi-archival study which has used documents from both the U.S. State Department and the Costa Rican authorities.

Nevertheless, in terms of methodology and analysis and of political and ideological perspective, Alvaro

Quesada's works remain the most innovative. His treatment of narrative within the economic and ideological context of the Tinoco era is both stimulating and well-argued. He charts the emergence of a new literature which emerged in this period and contrasts strongly with the prevailing Liberal ideas.³¹ Unfortunately, tensions within this era have not been reflected in the literature on education, except in those biographies which make some allusions within the context of the activities of their subjects.

IV. After the storm (1920-1924)

This little studied period might be described in eschatological terms; the inferno, ruled by the Tinoco brothers, was followed by the purgatory of "puppet" Presidents (Juan Bautista Quirós and Francisco Aguilar Barquero), succeeded finally by the celestial redemption of Julio Acosta's "forgive and forget" policy. It is not surprising, therefore, that the literature on this period is dominated by the biographies of Julio Acosta and Jorge Volio. The life of Acosta was written by la Academia de Geografía e Historia, Francisco Nuñez and Eduardo Oconitrillo. Oconitrillo's work on Acosta is buttressed by a wealth of material, drawn from his extensive family's personal archives. That of Jorge Volio was written by Marina Volio (his daughter).³²

Victoria Ramírez's work, Jorge Volio y la Revolución Viviente, attempts to break free from anecdotal history to investigate the social "scenario" of the Reformist Party of which he was the founder.³³

Once again there is a dearth of writing on the history of education; accounts of the lives and ideas of prominent educators are no more than anecdotal, and structural changes are peripheral to their discussions.

V. Liberal Restoration and education (1924-1930)

This period marked the heyday of the personality cult in Costa Rican historiography. Political history, such as the thesis of Irene Estrada and Edgar Alfaro,³⁴ is limited to the isolated analysis of presidential administrations. Other authors, such as Eugenio Rodríguez and Joaquín Vargas, cover a wider field, but their work is also stamped by an emphasis on the life and activities of politicians.³⁵

Much of the work on education reflect this tendency. The biographies of Omar Dengo, Joaquín García Monge, Roberto Brenes Mesén focus on these men as personalities with special insight and vision, independent of the socio-political reality that surrounded them.³⁶ A dissection of the biographies helps to delineate the political-ideological tendencies of the period. Discussion of ideological currents and political practices are however, either absent or little developed. Though anecdotal, other works, such as the "Memorias" of Mario Sancho, offer a wealth of information.³⁷

Once again, journalistic sources prove vitally important; interviews, editorials and articles written under pseudonyms vividly illustrate the ideological

turbulence of the period.

Of recent authors, Orlando Salazar ventures a cautious analysis of the "political game" of the period.³⁸ Mario Samper attempts to go beyond traditional political studies, but his work arguably suffers from an excessive theorizing which obscures his interpretation of the phenomenon he wishes to discuss.³⁹

Primary and secondary sources

Concerning Latin America Marcello Carmagnani's study, and the Cambridge History of Latin America were extremely valuable in providing a general interpretation of the period. This was especially the case of the work of William Glade, Charles Hale, John Lynch and Rosemary Thorp.⁴⁰ Bill Albert contributes to the analysis on Latin America with acute insights into the economic, financial and cultural repercussions of the First World War.⁴¹ Ciro Cardoso and Héctor Pérez provide insight into the similarities and differences between developments in Costa Rica as compared to the rest of Central America.⁴² Thanks to his vast empirical base and the depth of his interpretation, Victor Bulmer-Thomas provides first-hand material for the analysis of Central American economics.⁴³ The work of Carlos González Orellana and

Jorge Mario García on Guatemala also serve as an important source of comparison.⁴⁴

While economic and social studies of rigour and value, such as those of Carolyn Hall, Lowell Gudmunson, Jeffrey Casey and Roger Churnside,⁴⁵ have been used, their findings have a counterpart in the primary sources -especially newspapers and Ministry of Finance Annual Reports- which provided data that became the backbone for economic and social interpretations. The books of Carlos Araya, Víctor Hugo Acuña, Mario Oliva, Vladimir de la Cruz and Carlos Luis Fallas provided some insights.⁴⁶

As far as political and ideological source materials are concerned, both Mercedes Muñoz and Gerardo Morales shed considerable light on certain aspects of the period.⁴⁷ Morales' study on intellectuals at the turn of the century, offers a wealth of different ideological perspectives. In more restricted vein, Muñoz not only attempts to de-bunk the myths concerning the Costa Rican military institution up to its abolition in 1949, but extends its analysis to the wider sphere of United States strategic interests.

From a theoretical vantage point, the present investigation searched for inspiration and orientation in diverse works, including treatises on the state and education as well as more general studies of politics and ideology. The works of Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, Michael Apple, Gregorio Weimberg, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Theodore Brameld, Martin Carnoy and Henry Levin, provided both insights and inspiration.⁴⁸

In the realm of general studies on education and the perspectives to be offered by theories of education, the work of Ileana Muñoz, Yolanda Rojas and Héctor Gertel provided interesting results.⁴⁹

Due to the paucity of research literature, the findings of this thesis have been derived from a wide range of primary sources. The most important of these were:

1. Annual Reports of the Ministry of Education (Public Instruction until 1922). These provide the most integral information regarding the internal functioning of the educational system. They include the reports to Congress from the Secretary (or Minister), and reports by teaching inspectors as well as school statistics.

2. Miscellaneous documents from the Ministry of Education, such as regulations, projects, program descriptions, laws, and circulars, including archival materials.

3. Plans for curriculum development. These clearly reflect the relation between education and official ideology.

4. Presidential Messages to Congress. These describe official policy in its outline form.

5. Annual Reports of the Ministry of Finances. These are essential primary sources explaining the economic context of political and ideological developments which affected education.

6. The Collection of Laws and Decrees. Pivotal legislation issued during the period, extremely useful for detecting juridical orientation of the state at specific moments.

7. Written works by prominent personalities connected with politics and education, such as Cleto González Víquez, the González Flores brothers, Ricardo Castro, Napoleón Quesada, Roberto Brenes Mesén and Jorge Volio.

8. Congressional Records, and reports from congressional commissions on Education and Finance.

9. Newspapers and journals. These provide insights on the "pulse" of the period, and are indispensable for identifying the different ideologies of the time, in particular those which departed from official policy.

Journalistic sources analyzed from the 1880-1930

period include:

La Gaceta. (1890-1940) The official publication for announcements of decrees, laws, reports, patent registrations, appointments and public contracting, also offering interesting editorials which clearly illustrate governmental policy on different subjects.

El Diario de Costa Rica (1910-1930 and 1943)

El Imparcial (1915-1919)

El Renacimiento (1920)

La Acción Social (1918)

La Epoca (1913-1920)

La Escuela Costarricense (1922-1924)

La Gaceta (1890-1940)

La Información (1914-1919)

La Linterna (1916)

La Noticia (1924)

La Nueva Prensa (1927-1932)

La Prensa (1919-1926)

La Prensa Libre (1901-1919)

La Racha (1915-1916)

La República (1914-1920)

La Tribuna (1920-1929)

The periodicals Educación (published by the Normal School) and La Escuela Costarricense illuminate pedagogical currents in vogue during the period, especially the ideas of John Dewey and the "New School", and provided a forum for ideas diverging from the dominant official ideology. The Revista de Historia

provides recent historical analysis and interpretations.

10. Correspondence between the governments of Costa Rica and the United States, (such as the "Statement of the Costa Rican Government to the United States", sent to Secretary of State Lansing by Ricardo Fernández Guardia in 1917).

11. Annual Consular Reports by Frank Cox, Britain's representative in Costa Rica.

In effect, a great deal of research into primary sources was required, in particular into basic sources as newspapers and periodicals, so as to study the written opinions of important figures of the period who witnessed its key events: Jorge Volio, Rómulo Tovar, Tranquilino Chacón, Napoleón Quesada, Omar Dengo, and Joaquín García Monge. Editorials and numerous articles, either signed or written under a pseudonym, proved to be extremely useful.

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Chapter One

THE STATE, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

1880-1914

I. THE STATE, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY (1880-1914)

A. The emergence of the modern state

1. The Liberal model of government

Ever since the late colonial period, Liberal ideas slowly infiltrated Costa Rican society. In contrast with most Latin American countries, the process in Costa Rica was accomplished with a minimum of friction and turmoil. Political authorities favoured eclectic and highly pragmatic solutions to solve the most urgent demands and needs.

During the first decades after political independence from Spain, achieved in 1821, the gradual process of implementation of Liberal postulates encountered no major shock or friction with existing power groups -including the Roman Catholic Church- who might have been reluctant to lose ancient privileges or prerogatives. The formation and consolidation of the state started with no strong ties to or remnants of an "Ancien Régime". The lack of a solid and profitable export commodity during colonial times had precluded the formation of a rigid social structure. This fact also allowed the early expansion of a new export crop, coffee, without major resistance from any social groups. Costa Rica was already experimenting with coffee in the second third of the nineteenth century, while the other Central American countries were still attached to colonial crops such as indigo.

Full development of the coffee industry, however, lead neither to the collapse of traditional land holding schemes nor to significant changes in the structure of the labour force.¹ In the stimulation of coffee production, the Nation state inspired with Liberal ideas touched neither powerful interests nor solid inherited structures. On the contrary, Liberal ideas were easily assimilated by society as a whole over a period of several decades.

In contrast to other Central American countries, particularly Guatemala and El Salvador, Costa Rica did not need a revolution to consolidate coffee expansion. However, the link between the consolidation of a Nation state and the prosperity brought by the coffee industry did create some friction among different interest groups, culminating in the 1880s with open confrontation between the government and the Catholic Church.²

On the eve of Independence, the nascent Nation state was obliged by its material and political weakness to delegate a series of social responsibilities to the Church and municipalities. With the material and political development of the state, governmental dependency towards those institutions started to diminish. The strengthening of the state demanded more centralization of power in the Executive branch of Government.³ By the 1880s, the conjunction of a solid state and a group of intellectuals with a precise and definitive political program finally crystallized in a model of Government under Liberal postulates. The Liberal Reforms, however, were to strike Costa Rican

society at the institutional rather than the economic level. These dispositions settled, once and for all, the supremacy of state control of the mechanisms of political and ideological domination over ecclesiastical and municipal power. The adoption of a Liberal model of government backed by Liberal intellectuals conformed the basic ingredients for political and ideological changes in Costa Rican society, opening the path for the modernization of the state.

2. Consensus and repression

A practically limitless agrarian frontier, a small and fairly homogeneous population and limited social polarization are key elements for explaining Costa Rica's evolution from colonial times to the establishment of the Liberal model of state. No serious social problems nor demands for order or repression were made upon the state apparatus. Coercive mechanisms such as the army were therefore weaker in Costa Rica than in the other Central American countries. Of course there were other problems, but Costa Rica nevertheless succeeded in maintaining a high degree of social and political stability.

By the 1880s Costa Rica was strikingly different from the other Central American countries. Land and labour structures allowed more egalitarian, less rigid social interaction. The search for civilian solutions to dynamic social problems discouraged the predominance of repressive military mechanisms in society. It is in this context that the assimilation of Liberal postulates

has to be understood. The other Central American countries depended upon repressive institutions in order to impose their political projects; political domination and repression went hand in hand. By contrast, in Costa Rica the search for agreement prevailed over repression.⁴

3. Education: pillar of the consensually oriented state

Political power and control are exerted in two basic ways: by the ideological apparatus, also referred to as the "Civil Society" (churches, schools, political parties and all those institutions advancing social values and beliefs and mediating among social groups and interest); and by repression, that is through the body of institutions forming the "Political Society" (government, the army, penal bodies and police forces). The state controls a network of ideological and educational functions. Clearly, consensual and repressive elements are complementary domination mechanisms; both are useful and used by every society. The major emphasis of one element over the other will determine if a given society is repressive or consensual-oriented.

The ideological apparatus plays a major role in a consensually oriented society. The exercise of political power is the expression of social and economic relationships. Moreover, ideology itself embraces the values, beliefs and other cultural elements of a world view that contributes to the reproduction and legitimacy of the establishment. Under these circumstances, the

state exerts two main functions: social direction and political coercion by means of a wide range of institutions.⁵

In the 1880s, a variety of factors favoured profound and long-range reforms in Costa Rica, including the political and material consolidation of the state. This movement was facilitated by a prosperous economy. Rising coffee prices in the international market provided the financial resources for reform. The educational apparatus became the special focus of interest, and the Costa Rican government wisely promoted education reforms as the best practical manifestation of the consensual option. The body of educational reforms carried out between the years 1885 and 1889 represented a prelude to the modernization of the whole society. In the new scheme, education acquired weight and significance on account of its role as a generator of consensus (See Table I). The new structure was designed with the main objective of turning education into a mechanism for social control and reproduction. Nevertheless, its reorientation was, at the same time, compatible with the requirements of the economic structure which demanded a certain degree of specialization and skill in the labour force.⁶

B. The consolidation of the agro-export economy

1. Coffee, bananas and sugar

As Costa Rican society advanced to the end of the

nineteenth century, the consolidation of the state apparatus acquired a more settled character. That is not to say that Costa Rican social stability was never threatened at one time or another. Ever since the 1830s coffee expansion and economic growth brought about political unrest caused by the "Coffee Barons" who competed for the control of the state apparatus. The period from 1830 to 1870 was marked by several coups d'état and the blatant manipulation of electoral processes. Yet despite this, government authority gradually strengthened its leadership, and in 1870 a new coup led by Tomás Guardia paved the way for a twelve-year administration that laid the foundations of the modern Costa Rican state.⁷

The period from 1870 onwards was a crucial phase in global economic growth. Industrial production in the countries of the world economic centre triggered an increasing demand for exports from peripheral economies, including Costa Rica. Economic surpluses, likewise, facilitated the creation of a capitalist market.⁸

Within this global context, Costa Rica was ready to promote ambitious infrastructural and institutional changes, once inserted into the world market. This insertion was initially achieved by the export of coffee; subsequently, the country was a recipient of foreign loans and finally it became a banana enclave and sugar exporter.⁹

The growth of Costa Rica's external sector was not a steady process, however, for it was hindered by

periodic crisis in the metropolitan economies. Throughout the period from 1870 to 1914, Costa Rica's economic growth remained strongly led by exports. The main consequences of the agro-export model were an unfavourable trade balance, a rapid growth of foreign and domestic debt and a disorganized internal market.¹⁰

2. The "social question"

During the first years of the twentieth century, the coffee industry expanded, and banana production and trade were consolidated. By 1913 Costa Rica exported more than 9 million stems of bananas.¹¹ This economy so dependent on primary exports had already suffered the adverse effects of cyclical crises in the economic centre; yet, since the long range trend of coffee prices was positive, Costa Rica made no move to reduce the predominance of coffee.

From 1890 to 1912, the population of Costa Rica's interior Central Valley, which was the major area of settlement, doubled. This demographic phenomenon stimulated both the growth of new towns and the expansion of the agrarian frontier. The transition to more advanced forms of material progress triggered a process of social polarization and, with it, the emergence of latent social needs. The population growth was fed in two ways: first by natural increase and second by the immigration of European skilled workers for construction, industry and journalism.¹²

This important factor came at a time of major social change. Such an atmosphere brought about the proliferation of socialist and anarchist ideas, reflecting radical international thought. Guilds and unions were established. A new philosophy permeated such movements, strongly questioning the prevailing Liberal ideology. At the same time, the dynamic participation of the press contributed to public debate. A journalist comments such period in the following terms:

De 1889 a 1900 nacieron treinta y dos periódicos diarios. Más que en ninguna otra época, y algunos de ellos perduraron varios lustros, fenómeno que hasta la fecha era inusitado en la trayectoria común de nuestros órganos políticos de duración efímera.¹³

However, few citizens had the necessary abilities to participate in public debate. Sound knowledge about national issues and critical attributes were scarce in a society where education had just begun to give fruits under rational parameters. For that reason, only a small group of citizens periodically expressed their ideas in the press, as being the "public opinion" of the country. In reality, the great majority of the population still was at the margin of the social and cultural developments of the moment.

As social problems proliferated, the differentiation between the opulence of the upper classes and the miserable conditions of the working class deepened. Under such circumstances an array of young, sensitive intellectuals imbued with socialist ideas organized a common front against imperialistic positions and official

policies.¹⁴

3. The masters of the political arena

Public affairs since the 1880s had been controlled by the most prominent Liberal politicians and jurists. Though small in number, the group was made up mainly of intellectual leaders, excellent writers, prominent lawyers and experts in rhetoric. For their intellectual prowess and their position at the top of the political ladder they were dubbed "The Olympians" not without wit or irony. These men -not a close group by any means- struggled among themselves for power and government control. Election processes were laboratories where everything possible was found from programmatic schemes to smart strategies and unethical, though legal, manipulation of the popular votes.¹⁵

Political parties became increasingly aware of the relevance the "social question" posed in Costa Rican society. Their programs began to be oriented towards the improvement of the living conditions of the working class. By 1914, embryonic workers' organizations had been founded, reflecting the influence of international political and social developments. "Germinal", created in 1912, was a centre for the discussion and analysis of social issues. Guilds and unions joined to found the National Workers' Confederation. In 1907, the nation's attention was attracted by the congressional debate over the proposal of the Job Accident Law. As Vladimir de la Cruz explains:

La situación social y de seguridad social era alarmante. Desde que la sociedad costarricense irrumpió al siglo XX se sufrió un cambio radical, especialmente vinculado en el campo social al desarrollo de los trabajadores de la construcción, que efectuaban sus trabajos sin ninguna protección. Esto hizo que desde 1907, con base al creciente número de accidentes de trabajo y a la desprotección total de los trabajadores, el diputado Enrique Pinto propusiera un proyecto de ley para proteger a los obreros y empleados de los accidentes de trabajo.¹⁶

The discussion of social issues and problems related to the working class expanded for several years. Yet, even though small concessions had been made by 1914, the political direction of the state remained in the hands of the "Olympians".¹⁷

C. Political development and education

1. The educational goals of the Liberal state

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Latin American nations had left behind the most difficult decades after Independence. They had also laid the political and economic foundation of the state. It was time to start the organization of the education system under Liberal postulates. From the 1850s onwards vast legislation on education matters systematized ideas and concepts already present in the official discourse of previous years.¹⁸ The link between the political projects of the Latin American oligarchies and the agro-

export economies sustained by Liberal ideas laid the foundations for the education system, ascribed with a privileged role as a modernizing agent. Latin American leaders, in the Liberal-Positivist current of thought, systematically proposed that the expansion of primary education was the key to material and spiritual growth.

Education, identified as a main channel for the diffusion of progress and modernization, thus became a justification mechanism, the instrument for subtle ideological indoctrination oriented towards the legitimacy of the social order. The main focus was the promotion of primary education. In this respect, education necessarily became compulsory and free.

The growing role of the state in the sphere of education led to a redefinition of the relationships between government, Church and municipalities. Liberal leaders who struggled to expand suffrage and consolidate civil liberties argued that the Republican state needed to create nationality bonds by means of generalized education in order to guarantee the survival of the system. Official policies were therefore directed towards the creation of a model reflecting and supporting the establishment.¹⁹

The agro-export economy imposed specific political and ideological demands on education. Such an economy needed hands with some degree of skill, specialization or rudimentary knowledge. Primary education was therefore promoted to foment the education of the masses.

Economic expansion likewise required men of law to direct the state apparatus and legitimise contracts, state-oligarchy relationships and inter-oligarchic relationships. Universities became in practice schools of law, essentially training students to guarantee legal land possession, commercial transactions and the financial activities of the state. Lawyers played a vital role in the early stages of the Liberal experience, particularly, as the drafters of the new codes of law that were to direct society. Most of them belonged to the same oligarchy they defended. Others of more humble origin became intellectual allies of the dominant group.²⁰

The educational system was structured in a fairly polarized manner: on the one side, compulsory generalized primary education; on the other, higher education for the governing elite. In the middle, there was also an often weak and narrow secondary schooling.

Costa Rica broadly reproduced this educational scheme. Yet, due to the consensual orientation of the political society, education was to play a much more relevant role than in most other Latin American countries.²¹

2. The great issues

Costa Rica's educational reform movement of 1885-1889 was a practical response to the integral transformation of the national state. The definition of

educational change was in fact an ingenious combination of the most conspicuous and advanced pedagogic thought in the world with the specific demands of Costa Rican society. The Minister of Public Instruction, Mauro Fernández, established the main administrative, technical and infrastructural parameters to guide the complex process of educational change in later years. The starting point was the establishment of complete control by the state in all matters concerning education. At the same time, Fernández placed particular attention on increasing educational revenues so that his many ideas and projects could effectively become a reality.²²

The evolution of education in subsequent years was marked by a clear identification of the country's political authorities with Mauro Fernández' parameters of educational change. Throughout the period from 1880 to 1914, Presidents and Ministers, journalists and intellectuals, praised Fernández' educational work. At the same time, they recognized the need to expand and improve the original project and to adapt it to the needs of an ever-changing society. The following comment is one of many which addressed this issue:

Las leyes de don Mauro han sido indudablemente la base granítica en que descansa todo el progreso cultural del país y solamente el transcurso de los años, que con su despotismo incontrastable hacen envejecer todo lo humano y lanzar hacia adelante por nuevos rumbos lo que en otras épocas pudo considerarse cercano a la perfección, hacen obligados los esfuerzos que cada nuevo Secretario de Estado en el despacho de Instrucción Pública intenta mejorar aquellas sabias leyes.²³

Thereafter, changes in the field of education were intimately related to the reproduction and improvement of the Liberal scheme.

a. Secondary schools

Although the first secondary school in Costa Rica was founded in the province of Cartago in 1869, it was not until 1885-1889 that secondary education became fully structured and organized.²⁴ Under the theoretical guidelines of Liberal and Positivist thought, state-supported male institutions experienced in practice a marked tendency towards Humanistic studies, to prepare the elected few for higher education. In that sense, the utilitarian aim of creating a skilful body of labourers and technicians was not satisfactorily accomplished.

Secondary school results -highly limited in terms of quality and quantity- prompted many politicians and intellectuals to join a long term open debate concerning the fate of secondary schooling. Influenced by religion and political conservatism, many critics advocated private secondary schooling. They argued that these institutions were too great a burden for the economically fragile state. This position largely coincided with the Constitutional amendment that limited to primary education its free and compulsory precept.²⁵

Opposing this position, many intellectuals defended state-supported secondary education. Moreover, they accepted the need to reform this level of education.

Their opinions rested upon the argument that secondary schooling was the prolongation of primary education. Therefore, its first mission was to make up for all deficiencies, and amend mistaken concepts. The aim of secondary education was to train not only "Bachelors" - or University candidates- but also to shape rounder individuals to adjust to the physical, moral and social order. Those who defended state supported institutions were at the same time reluctant to privatize secondary education, since that measure would make this level of education much more elitist. Private schooling was in the hands of the Church. So, those who hoisted the Liberal flag could not easily accept a reversal to strong ecclesiastical interference in the field of education.²⁶

In 1895, two provincial secondary schools in Alajuela and Heredia were closed. The Minister of Instruction, Ricardo Pacheco, argued that the administration of secondary schools was an occupation very divergent from the function of the state, and that the government had to close them due to the high cost of maintaining these institutions.²⁷

As a result of increasing popular discontent Congress reopened these provincial schools but the Executive branch vetoed the disposition.²⁸ One year later, the Minister of Education was defeated and the schools were opened again, only to be closed once more in 1899.²⁹ This time another provincial school, the Colegio San Luis Gonzaga, in Cartago, was also closed. Those schools remained closed until 1904.³⁰ During this period the Liceo in San José, was the only secondary

school functioning in Costa Rica.³¹

From 1897 to 1904 Costa Rica was hit by a severe economic crisis; thereafter, the economy began to recuperate.³² Yet, despite this fact, schools did not demand so much out of the National Treasury as to justify their closure. The intention to privatize this level of education lay behind the economic excuses. In 1914 secondary schooling was still state-supported despite several attempts at privatization.

As the Secretary of Instruction's Annual Reports clearly demonstrate, throughout the years 1880-1914, the government authorities often tried to re-orientate secondary education on more pragmatic and utilitarian lines. Yet, on the eve of 1914, its salient characteristics were still elitism and humanitarianism.

b. The teaching force

The achilles's heel of the great transformation of the 1880s was soon to be discovered: the teaching force. Although Mauro Fernández tried to improve training and labour conditions for teachers, his good intentions fell short of reality. Relating teacher training to the secondary schools was an unfortunate step, in spite of its economic rationale to make the best use of the same resources. The "teacher-training sections" were unable to produce the educators which the reform movement demanded. Low salaries and the lack of inducements and perquisites limited still further the number and skills

of teachers.³³

Recognizing the critical situation, subsequent government officials paid lip service to the teachers' problems. Yet, various attempts made to open a Teachers Training College were unsuccessful. Likewise, none of the moves substantially to increase teachers salaries and prestige were successful.³⁴

Already by 1896 Minister Ricardo Pacheco claimed that the main obstacle to educational advancement was the lack of trained personnel.³⁵ One year later he advocated the need to establish a Teachers Training College.³⁶ The unexpected economic crisis was to alter those intentions.

In 1904 the Liceo was transferred to a large and comfortable building.³⁷ This change was accompanied by a change of direction in that institution's educational goals. Ever since its foundation, the main objective of Costa Rica's only full range secondary school had been to train future University students. Between 1904 and 1906 this institution was re-orientated towards teachers' training. This change clearly reflected a "conservative tone" in secondary schooling.³⁸

The "teacher training experiment" at the Liceo proves to be ephemeral. Soon after the inauguration of the González Víquez administration (1906-1910) the institution reverted to its previous vocation: the training of Bachelors. Notwithstanding the recognition Minister Anderson made of the urgent need to train teaching personnel in specialized centres, he argued in

1907 that the economic situation did not allow the appropriation of the necessary funds:

Los recursos económicos del país no permiten por desgracia el sostenimiento de esos centros especialmente dedicados a la formación de maestros.³⁹

Though Anderson discouraged the possibilities of specialization in the field of teacher training, he was nevertheless responsible for the first law to dignify the teaching career. The teacher's mission was officially recognized as one of the foundations of culture. The Reglamento Orgánico del Personal Docente prepared by one of Costa Rica's most outstanding pedagogic experts, Miguel Obregón, gave teaching personnel -for the first time- formal rights as well as obligations, and situated the teachers' work on a dignified professional plane.⁴⁰

Subsequent Ministers of Instruction Alfredo Volio (1908-1909), Ricardo Fernández Guardia (1909-1910), Nicolás Oreamuno (1910-1913) and Roberto Brenes Mesén (1913-1914), continuously referred to the need to establish a Teacher Training College. Yet, quantitative rather than qualitative aspirations in the sphere of elementary education may explain how those valid intentions were systematically put aside.

In order to ameliorate the great scarcity and deficiencies among teachers, successive administrations resorted to the same "crutch mechanisms": pedagogic conferences, tighter state control and supervision over teachers' work. Minister Volio unrealistically stated

in 1909, that the improvement of teachers training could be gradually attained without great monetary disbursements:

Se creyó más discreto proceder paulatinamente, agregando y modificando parcialmente hasta conseguir el resultado final de un modo insensible. Así se llegará, por transformaciones graduales, a la Escuela Normal, que de otra suerte demandaría considerables erogaciones.⁴¹

Later developments were to prove his statements misguided.

The training of teachers for secondary schools followed a different path. Ever since the foundation of the Colegio San Luis Gonzaga in Cartago in 1869, Government authorities did their best to recruit personnel from abroad to direct and teach in secondary schools. Even though the Liceo attracted the best elements after 1887, the other institutions also benefited from the influx of foreigners. At the same time, Costa Ricans were sent to Europe and the United States to study the Liberal professions. On their return, many taught in secondary schools.⁴²

In 1897 Chile offered to Costa Rica six full scholarships in its prestigious Pedagogic Institute.⁴³ Chilean generosity marked a flourishing period of Chilean-inspired intellectual activity in Costa Rica. Five years later, a new contingent of Costa Ricans were profiting from Chilean hospitality and influence.⁴⁴ The "Chilenoids" as they were popularly called, were to play a significant role not only as secondary school teachers,

but also as intellectuals and politicians.

Educational parameters of the period accounted for the differences in teaching personnel. The elitist oriented secondary schools required the best human resources in order to train the privileged few, while in primary education the main goal still was quantity before quality.

c. Utilitarianism and differentiated access to primary education

The conservative tide in secondary education was to have important effects on primary education. In 1895, Minister Pacheco classified all primary schools in three categories, gave each level a different study plan and program and reduced the number of compulsory subjects and courses.⁴⁵

Pacheco argued that different social conditions demanded different school programs. Thus, a country boy -born to continue in his father's occupation- did not need as much knowledge as a wealthy city boy whose family's main aspiration for him was the pursuance of secondary and, eventually it was hoped, university studies. The following comment made by Minister Pacheco is most revealing:

Por virtud de esa ley se retenía en el seno de la escuela, durante el mismo tiempo, al hijo del labriego pobre que aguarda ansiosamente el momento en que el desarrollo físico de aquél le permita dedicarlo a las faenas del campo para

alcanzar algún alivio de su difícil situación, que al del acaudalado, cuyo recursos alientan sus deseos de dar a la familia una educación conforme con los elementos de que él dispone y con el género de ocupaciones a que habrá de dedicarle. Idénticas asignaturas eran objeto de estudio para ambos educandos, y de uno y otro inconvenientes resultaban; la tardanza en el aprendizaje de ciertas materias que el más infeliz campesino no debe ignorar, por requerirlo así el simultáneo estudio de otras cuyo conocimiento a nadie daña, pero que sólo es indispensable para el ejercicio posterior de oficios o profesiones que el primero no habrá de seguir, y para una vida distinta de la que en el campo lleva.⁴⁶

Third class schools -which accounted for roughly 80% of all primary schools- were to offer only the minimum compulsory subjects plus a course in agriculture. In a two-year period children were to be prepared for agricultural activities. Second class schools differed from the former only in the number of compulsory subjects. These schools located in the most populous rural areas, offered some notions of science and history besides the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic. By contrast, first class schools, situated in provincial capitals expanded their programs with courses in Modern Languages (French and English) as well as Accounting and Pedagogy.

In 1900 Minister Facio reduced primary programs even more.⁴⁷ Three years later, Minister Leonidas Pacheco stressed the need to reform those programs in order to make them even more practical.⁴⁸ Yet, it was Minister Luis Anderson who best summarized -in 1907- the maximum of access and utilitarianism in primary education:

La experiencia se ha encargado de poner de relieve la urgente necesidad que hay de simplificar el plan de estudios primarios y eliminar de él cuanto no sea de verdadera utilidad práctica y de inmediata aplicación en la vida, a fin de dar mayor solidez a la enseñanza de las asignaturas principales, obtener que en todas las escuelas se imparta con toda efectividad el minimum que determine la ley y evitar el estancamiento en que por largo tiempo han permanecido no pocos de aquellos centros de educación.⁴⁹

In 1908 Anderson recruited two well known intellectuals -Roberto Brenes Mesén and Joaquín García Monge- to draft new programs.⁵⁰ New currents of pedagogic thought played an important role in the educators' work. As Monge and Rivas point out:

en 1908 surgió el primer gran movimiento pedagógico de Costa Rica, fundamentado en teorías educativas más humanas y en concepciones científicas del niño y del aprendizaje.⁵¹

Yet, despite the scientifically based study, their programs asserted the prevalent ideas of a utilitarian and stratified primary education. In spite of their innovative methodological ideas, their recommendations had to be greatly simplified.⁵²

Following the same pedagogic parameters established by Brenes and García in 1908, Minister Nicolás Oreamuno inaugurated in 1913 the "School-Farm Experiment". The transformation of rural schools into small laboratories, where pupils had the opportunity to link their education with agricultural work, was the essence of this

experiment.⁵³ One year later, Minister Roberto Brenes emphasized the need to expand and improve the school-farm scheme.⁵⁴ Utilitarianism and differentiated access to primary schooling were once again reaffirmed.

d. Education and women

The prolonged subordination of women in society acquired special connotations under the Liberal scheme. Ever since colonial times, woman was perceived as having been created to obey at all stages of her life: first her father, then her husband and later her sons. At the same time, her best virtues were proclaimed to be shyness, religiosity, modesty and tenderness, as well as discrete manners. With respect to man, woman was supposed to be pleasing, useful, loving and respectful. She was to tend and educate him as a child, and make his life sweet and pleasant. Thus, her role in society was limited to being a mother, wife and home maker. Her working status was limited to domestic activities and, to a lesser degree, agricultural or artisan tasks. Denied political rights, her only destiny was to marry, have children or become a nun.

From early childhood, woman was taught the "secrets" of becoming a good mother and a submissive wife. Thus, she was taught to wash, to iron, to cook, to make up rooms, to serve at table, and in particular, to listen to men with respectful silence.⁵⁵

In the 1840s, under the influence of Liberal ideas,

the education of women became the focus of debate in Costa Rica. In the exciting context of the country's nascent journalism, important politicians and intellectuals advocated and defended women's education.⁵⁶

Strengthening traditional values in order to turn women into good "citizen shapers", was the most important Liberal parameter with respect to women's education. From this point of view, women had to be more than pleasing, for they were to educate the men of the future. To strengthen women's education was thus to strengthen Republican institutions. Therefore, women were cultivated not to become citizens -with all the political and economic prerogatives which that would have implied- but to play a better role as mothers. Likewise, a cultivated woman was far more interesting and efficient as a wife. Thus, education was to prove beneficial not only to children but also to men as well as to the Republican state. Despite of this traditional tone, many people opposed women's education. Some argued that an "educated" woman would stop bearing children, others, that she would fall into shame and her honour would become dust. Yet others said that women would loose their modesty and delicacy.⁵⁷

In 1885-1889 Mauro Fernández reasserted women's right to an education. Under the influence of prevailing Positivist-Utilitarian thought, he advocated the need to train women not only as teachers but also in practical skills, such as sewing, canning and hat-making. In 1888 Fernández inaugurated the Colegio Superior de Señoritas, the first pedagogic-oriented school for women.⁵⁸

Regardless of the aspirations to make this luxurious school a Teachers' Training College, the Colegio Superior de Señoritas acted more as a moralizing centre, where girls perfected their earlier restricted and rudimentary knowledge than as a true pedagogic establishment. In a twelve year span only one hundred teachers graduated.⁵⁹

Minister Justo A. Facio clearly defined in 1901 the school's orientation:

Casi huelga decir que la educación moral, la primera de todas, es asunto a que consagra especialísimo cuidado el Colegio Superior de Señoritas y que ella se imparte allí en todos los momentos y a través de todas las asignaturas que el profesor hábil sabe utilizar en tal sentido no menos que en su parte científica. Los ejercicios domésticos influyen de manera poderosa en la formación moral de la niña, porque con ellos nace el apego al hogar y ese sentimiento abnegado que inspira y guía a la mujer, sin violencia, con dulzura en el cumplimiento de sus hermosos deberes sociales.⁶⁰

During the period 1880-1914, women's education did not lead to profound changes in the labour force. Yet, the process slowly widened women's domestic and social functions, in particular, teaching. In 1903, telegraphy, accounting, stenography and shorthand courses were opened in the Colegio Superior de Señoritas. This move was considered a beachhead to integrate women into business activities.⁶¹ Five years later, women were accepted for the first time in Heredia's provincial secondary school.⁶² By 1911, the Institute in Alajuela also became coeducational. That same year, three girls graduated in Heredia; one of them continued Pharmacy studies, another

entered Law School.⁶³

Even though some privileged women had had access to higher education by 1914, women themselves still helped to perpetuate their subordinate role in society. Most women had a distorted conception of their place in life because of religious and traditional male-oriented beliefs. Thus they defended the prevalent social order because in doing so, they thought they were defending their fundamental rights.

e. Church versus state

The most important political aim of Latin American Liberalism centred on the consolidation of a representative, democratic, republican and popularly elected government that would guarantee liberty of thought, expression and meeting. Liberal doctrine was aimed towards the constitution of a lay and sovereign state free of ecclesiastical impositions and controls. The Catholic Church was conceived as a subordinate power with respect to the state, an idea which challenged the inherited social order that had situated the institution in a privileged political and ideological place.⁶⁴

Freedom of religion and conscience was defended on the grounds of clearing intransigent and radical attitudes from the process of learning. In this sense, state policies were oriented towards eliminating from public instruction all limitations or deformities promoted by ecclesiastical interference since Colonial

times, thereby opening the way for scientific and intellectual development.⁶⁵

Ever since Colonial times, the Costa Rican Catholic Church was characterized by a notorious lack of material wealth.⁶⁶ Yet, poverty did not inhibit it from exercising a powerful ideological interference over society and, in particular, over education. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Church effectively controlled the content of education and Christian doctrine was the basis of instruction; around it revolved the remaining complementary courses. The weak state structure of the early decades of independence made the state dependent upon the Church and the municipalities. As the state became stronger in a political as well as material sense, those institutions gradually became increasingly superfluous.⁶⁷

By the 1880s, the Costa Rican state was prepared to assume functions that it had once delegated to the Church and the local governments. The educational reform movement in this period brought about not only the centralization of education by government and lay oriented instruction but a complete removal of the Church from matters of public education. The state restricted ecclesiastical and municipal interference in order to facilitate the implantation of the new Liberal-inspired educational as well as political-ideological ideals.

The new legislation, however, engendered suspicion and mistrust in the predominantly Catholic population. In that sense, doctrinal considerations became the main

obstacle to the consolidation of educational reform. During the 1890-1894 administration, the disposition by which religious teaching had been banned from public schools was removed. Yet, the apparent compromise between the Church and the Executive branch of government did not weaken state power since the state continued to control even religious instruction.

Once recovered from the harsh blow of the 1880s, the Church started to struggle hard to recuperate lost benefits and privileges. Apart from an abortive electoral attempt following the creation of the Catholic Union Party in 1891, it increasingly tried to interfere in educational matters. As Clara di Lucca explains:

Las reformas liberales del 84, aún vigentes, representaban un peligro para la Iglesia costarricense. De ahí que con el fin de defender los intereses de la Iglesia, amenazados continuamente con los gobiernos liberales, varios católicos se reunieron para formar un partido católico. El partido nace como una asociación cuyo fin primordial era detener en el país el avance liberal y proteger a la Iglesia.⁶⁸

f. The closure of Saint Thomas University

Ever since the foundation of Saint Thomas University in 1843, its evolution had been marked by an almost exclusive dedication to Jurisprudence, with the exception of short periods when Theology, Medicine and Engineering courses were offered. Moreover, the number of students that benefited from higher education was extremely

reduced. In its last decade of existence between 1878 and 1888 less than twenty students were registered each year.⁶⁹

In forty years of academic work, there were many attempts to make this institution a real university. Nevertheless, limited economic resources and limited access to secondary education inhibited full development of this level of studies. Up to the 1880s Saint Thomas was in practice not a University but a School of Law. Nevertheless, the existence of a school of law under the facade of university allowed the authorities to perpetuate the myth that one existed.

The closure of Saint Thomas University in 1888 opened a long debate that is still alive today. Many have blamed Mauro Fernández for bringing about assumed intellectual stagnation; others have praised him because they consider that the closure of the institution was a necessary step towards the structuring of a strong and healthy educational system. Still others have argued that Fernández' step was only "the long awaited dead man's funeral".⁷⁰

During 1885-1889, the government's main goal was to create an integrated education system vertically organized from primary to higher education. Thus Fernández thought it necessary to organize primary education and then continue with secondary schools and the university. Once he had laid the main parameters for primary and secondary school development in 1888, he focused on the problems of higher education. Fernández

soon recognized that the organization and functioning of Saint Thomas University did not fit in with his new conceptions. After serious analysis, he outlined a coherent plan for restructuring higher education.⁷¹

Like other Latin American leaders of the period, Mauro Fernández considered it necessary to establish a university less oriented towards Jurisprudence. Following true Positivist-Utilitarian thought, he decided to open the way to scientific and technical studies in order to promote Costa Rica's much needed economic development. Thus, Fernández destroyed the "University myth" so that a true re-structuring process of higher education could finally begin. In this sense, he focused primarily on the reorganization of the School of Law, so that it could better reflect and reproduce new ideological and political parameters favoured by the state. Regardless of those who have systematically argued that the closure of Saint Thomas lead to intellectual stagnation, the truth is that from 1880 to 1914, Judicial studies notoriously improved in quality.⁷²

At the same time, other advanced studies began a slow but important development. In 1895, the first step was taken towards the constitution of a School of Medicine: the creation of the Faculty of Medicine, Surgery and Pharmacy. As Minister of Instruction Pacheco wrote:

Con el objeto de fundar una escuela de Medicina, se organizó por ley de 3 de abril último, la Facultad de Medicina, Cirugía y Farmacia, encargada de la dirección y manejo de aquella.⁷³

In the absence of a University such schools depended in administrative and academic matters on Collegiate Bodies. The government merely provided partial support.

Regardless of their good intentions, the Government authorities had to accept in 1897 their inability to open the School of Medicine and Surgery. Arguing "insuperable difficulties" due to the current economic crisis, they decided to replace it with a School of Pharmacy. According to Pacheco:

A nadie se oculta que el establecimiento de un centro destinado a la enseñanza de la Medicina requiere, para que produzca resultados en armonía con los fuertes gastos que su sostenimiento exige, acopio considerable de elementos de que por hoy es difícil disponer. El Gobierno trata de vencer los obstáculos presentes para que en breve pueda realizarse tal institución. Restringida por tan poderosa causa la acción del Poder Ejecutivo a ese respecto, ha sido preciso limitarse a la creación de la Escuela de Farmacia.⁷⁴

One year later, the National School of Arts was created. Under the direction of Tomás Povedano, a notable Spanish painter, this establishment was to be the embryo of the later School of Arts. In the Annual Report presented to Congress in 1908 Pacheco referred to this establishment in the following terms:

El 12 de marzo del año anterior decretó el Poder Ejecutivo el establecimiento de ese centro de educación y se destinaron para instalarlo provisionalmente las galerías de la antigua universidad, antes ocupadas por el Museo Nacional.⁷⁵

In 1899 a School of Obstetricians was attached to the Medical Faculty.⁷⁶ Three years later, the Faculty of Pharmacy was created. The School of Pharmacy, under the direction of the Faculty of Medicine since 1897, was transferred to the Faculty of its own name.

In 1903, the Technical -later Engineering- Faculty was opened.⁷⁷ After many years of struggle to create the School of Engineering, the Technical Faculty decided to open that establishment in 1910. Nevertheless, the fragile economic backing and the small number of students registered lead to its subsequent closure almost immediately.⁷⁸ According to the Minister of Instruction:

La Facultad Técnica a principios de este año concibió y presentó el proyecto de una Escuela de Ingeniería que el Gobierno acogió gustoso apesar de que los fondos universitarios no dan bastante para sostenerla... desgraciadamente no se han presentado a la matrícula los alumnos indispensables para dar comienzo a los cursos.⁷⁹

The School of Dentistry was created in 1906,⁸⁰ but closed one year later since only one student had registered.⁸¹ In his Annual Report to Congress Minister Anderson explains:

Actualmente existen las Escuelas de Derecho, de Farmacia y de Obstetricia. La Dental hubo de ser clausurada por la Facultad de Medicina, en consideración a que en el presente año sólo se presentó un joven a inscribirse como alumno.⁸²

Throughout this period there were various attempts to create a School of Agriculture. Just as was the case with teacher training, the government systematically

claimed the need to establish agricultural studies. Yet, other educational concerns, such as the quantitative expansion of primary education, improvement of the Liceo de Costa Rica and the consolidation of Law studies, prevailed.

On the eve of 1914, higher education was marked by the overwhelming predominance of the School of Law. The schools of Pharmacy and Obstetrics had already produced important results, while the idea of reopening the Schools of Engineering and Dentistry gathered strength day by day.

Even though Costa Rica's higher education scheme reflected Liberal education parameters, state created scholarships allowed good students of humble origin to become notable professionals. Although small in number, these scholarships helped to create the myth that anyone who strived hard enough could have access to higher education. Thus, social differentiation was tempered by the possibility for the underprivileged to have access to education and through it, to prestige and wealth. Once again Costa Rica seemed to have found conciliatory ways to make political domination and social polarization easier for the subordinate classes to accept.

D. The shaping of new pedagogic parameters

1. The impact of new currents of pedagogic thought

In the international concert of nations, Costa Rica occupies a most modest place. As a peripheral economy, and a small country with a limited population, this nation has been greatly ignored and misinterpreted over the years. With no gold or silver mines, crude oil, diamonds or other potential elements of wealth, Costa Rica has often been described as a backward country.

Yet the reality of chronic economic turmoil and related fiscal problems notwithstanding, Costa Rica has shown a systematic and tenacious aspiration towards the improvement and modernization of her social structures. Thus, foreign currents of thought as well as other nations' solutions to various social problems and issues, including education, have always been relevant parameters to be studied and adapted to local circumstances.

Regardless of the fact that the Costa Rican intellectual élite has always been very small, up-to-date philosophic, political, economic and pedagogic ideas have continuously found very receptive intellectual grounds. This situation clearly manifested itself in the early twentieth century when new currents of pedagogic thought started to permeate Costa Rican society. In the middle of a vigorous intellectual context marked by the "social question", those ideas came to promote academic

debate as well as an active response by the press.⁸³

Clearly identified with German currents of pedagogic thought, Chile was to play a major role in Costa Rica's process of infiltration and adoption of vanguard educational postulates. Chilean influence penetrated through a variety of mechanisms: (1) Costa Rican students who studied between 1897 and 1903 at Chile's prestigious Institute of Pedagogy and Santiago Normal School; (2) Dr. Zacarías Salinas, a brilliant Chilean pedagogue who was the Liceo de Costa Rica's principal from 1900 to 1904; (3) periodic scientific publications such as the Revista de Instrucción Primaria and the Revista de la Asociación Nacional de Preceptores; (4) primary and secondary school text books and methodological manuals, and (5) Spanish translations of many relevant English, Swiss, North American and German scientific works.

The most definitive parameters of the German ideological and educational concepts which Costa Rica adopted through Chile can be summarized as follows: free thinking worship; rigorous scientific research; discipline, rectitude and method as fundamental values for character formation; and a strong Positivist philosophy which proclaimed as truthful only that which could be the object of scientific verification.⁸⁴ These pedagogic guidelines influenced the evolution of secondary rather than primary education. In particular, curricula and programs of the Liceo de Costa Rica which were drafted between 1900 and 1914, clearly reflected such parameters.

Costa Rica was also to benefit from the theories of Johann Pestalozzi. The Swiss educational reformer stressed the individuality of each child and the need to develop rather than to try to implant knowledge in him. According to Pestalozzi, education was more than the acquisition of knowledge; it was a harmonic process by which moral, physical and intellectual abilities were to be developed.⁸⁵ Those ideas, as well as his theory of the integration of school, workshop and farm were to have special connotations in Costa Rica's primary education. The school-farm experiment started in this country in 1912 was the best example of this new trend.⁸⁶

Johann Herbart's ideas also played a most important role in the Costa Rican intellectual arena. A follower of Pestalozzian thought, the German philosopher and educator developed a system of philosophy based upon the analysis of experience. The system included logic, metaphysics, and aesthetics as coordinating elements. Herbart believed that educational methods and systems should be based on psychology and ethics: psychology to furnish the necessary knowledge of the mind and ethics to determine the basis for the social ends of education.⁸⁷ In Costa Rica, Herbart's theories were to mark primary education with conceptions of kindness and cordiality.⁸⁸

The arrival of Transcendentalist ideas in the early twentieth century was also to have major connotations for education. These ideas, based on the spiritual reality of life, were aimed at improving human behaviour. Even though Kant served as inspiration, Ralph Waldo Emerson

became the most distinguished representative of Transcendentalist thought in the American Hemisphere.⁸⁹

The founding of the Theosophic Society in Costa Rica in 1904, was to promote still further the intellectual effervescence Costa Rica was experiencing. Theosophists believed in spiritual perfection through successive reincarnations. They also believed in great spiritual leaders and hoped for the advent of a superior mankind.⁹⁰

The opening of new horizons for the understanding of nature and man, the belief in man's unlimited capacity for interior knowledge, as well as the promotion of spiritual and moral principles, influenced conspicuous Costa Rican pedagogues. Minister of Instruction Roberto Brenes Mesén best reflected this trend. In his Annual Report to Congress in 1914 he stressed the need to re-orientate present educational parameters under spiritual and moral guidelines, because:

La más noble tarea de la escuela: desenvolver y fortificar dotes del ánimo, virtudes humanas. Un puñado de maestros, así sean apóstoles heroicos, no tienen fuerza para contrarrestar ni con su palabra ni con su ejemplo, la tremenda labor de destrucción de una tempestad eleccionaria... más hemos de entender que si algún interés existe por ampliarla y consolidarla no debe el Estado trabajar tan solo dentro del aula, sino también en las otras manifestaciones de la vida social, hasta donde su intervención pueda alcanzar...⁹¹

Brenes Mesén considered that the social context seemed hostile to the growth and proliferation of profound moral virtues. Thus he stressed the importance

of state control over a variety of social activities in order to consolidate the spiritual message transmitted through education.

By 1914, John Dewey's ideas had also started to impregnate Costa Rica's intellectual elite. His theories emphasized learning through several activities rather than formal curricula, and opposed authoritarian methods. Dewey believed that realistic preparation for life in a democratic society could not rest on repressive educational mechanisms. He felt that education should not be merely a preparation for future life but a full life in itself. His work placed emphasis not on the institution but on the student. A true pragmatist, he saw in science, industry and democracy, social experiences that must be used to plan the future improvement of society.

Dewey's ideas were greatly to influence Minister of Education Luis Felipe González (1914-1917), President Alfredo González' brother. His apprehension of logic and philosophy, the ever-changing, adaptive scheme, the way of planning action, of removing the obstacles between what is given and what is wanted, and the notion that truth works in practical experience, became Minister González' main pedagogic parameters. The foundation of the Escuela Normal was the best example of these intellectual preferences.⁹²

German pedagogic thought, Pestalozzi, Herbart, Theosophist, Transcendentalist, Pragmatist and Dewey (or the "Active School"), were the most important educational

postulates studied, discussed and sometimes experimented with in Costa Rica's educational system. Nevertheless, many other philosophic, economic, political, sociological and psychological ideas were also to influence the country's turbulent society at the beginning of the century.

2. Costa Rica's new intellectual elite

Ever since the late nineteenth century, Liberal intellectuals and thinkers had dominated the political arena. Yet, the "Olympians" had not been alone. Unsolved problems, new social needs and demands, plus the ever increasing process of social polarization, stimulated the study and analysis and new ways to understand political and social life, as well as new perspectives on democracy.⁹³ Even though Liberal inspired individuals still made up the largest and most influential intellectual group, a new pedagogic and intellectual cluster began to emerge.

Without ever being a formal group, an array of young, sensitive and studious Costa Ricans were to have one aim in common: the questioning of the Liberal utopia. Mainly from humble or non-upper class origins, they helped to reproduce the myth of social mobility through education. After graduating from the Liceo de Costa Rica, some followed pedagogic studies in Chile, while others registered in Costa Rica's School of Law.

Mesén, Juan Dávila, José Fidel Tristán, Elías Leiva, Nicolás Montero, Alfredo and Luis Felipe González Flores, and Alberto Rudín, among others, were to add new perspectives to the dominant discourse. The "Germinal" studies centre, the journal Repertorio Americano, radical newspapers, scientific magazines, the National Confederation of Workers and the "Ateneo de Costa Rica", became the appropriate channels for discussion and debate of new currents of intellectual thought.⁹⁴

During the years 1914 to 1917, a most peculiar conjuncture was to be the testing laboratory for vanguard social and pedagogic ideas. The course of events was finally to demonstrate the strength and range of the new proposals.

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Chapter Two

THE INTERVENTIONIST PARENTHESIS
(1914-1917)

II. THE INTERVENTIONIST PARENTHESIS (1914-1917)

A. New answers to old problems

1. The strains and problems of the dependency model

Costa Rica had consolidated its export-led economy by 1914. The country exported coffee and bananas, and to a lesser degree, sugar, and imported a variety of products, from capital goods to manufactures and raw materials. As such the country was much like many others, dependent to a considerable extent upon the fluctuations of the world market.

Coffee, which had emerged as the main crop as long ago as the 1840s, had been for more than fifty years Costa Rica's only export of significance. Local Costa Rican traders who relied upon English credit played a major role in coffee production. Costa Rica produced a high quality coffee which commanded a high price on international markets, and was largely sold for consumption by "high society".

The structure of coffee production and marketing contrasted strongly with that of bananas, which had become a major export staple in the 1880s. Banana "enclaves" were closely controlled by several US interests, based in New Orleans, Boston and New York. Banana production was therefore not as profitable for Costa Rican interests. Bananas require a specific climatic and physical environment, they are prone to

epidemics and ripen rapidly. They therefore require an expensive infrastructure if they are to reach the market in acceptable condition. The initial high capital cost of such infrastructure meant that banana production remained in the hands of US interests who naturally benefited.¹

The enclave is characterized as a specialized area of commercial agriculture. Isolated from the main population centres, the enclave had -during the first decades of development- very weak economic links with the rest of the country. Due to the fact that most revenues were sent to the major specialized market (the United States of America), this product had not contributed in an effective manner to Costa Rican economic development by 1914. No product was to compete with the predominance of coffee and bananas until the 1960s.² Nevertheless, by 1914, other agricultural products, notably sugar, made a significant contribution to exports.

This heavy dependence on a few exports of tropical staples meant that the Costa Rican economy like that of similar Latin American nations was subject to sharp cyclical economic fluctuations. An export economy based so heavily on coffee was particularly vulnerable because so much depended upon the fate of the Brazilian crop, and the price-fixing policies of the Brazilian government which set the "floor" for coffee prices. Brazilian overproduction in the 1890s had severe repercussions. From 1897 until 1904 Costa Rica experienced an economic recession that shattered dreams of continuous progress.

In accordance with the latter, people began to articulate the view that an economy dedicated to the export of agricultural staples would not always render increased benefits and prosperity.³

By 1914 it was apparent to local observers that economic and social benefits generated by the export-led economy lagged behind demographic growth. Drastic shortages of foodstuffs "crises de subsistence", perhaps the most dramatic by-products of coffee and banana expansion, were increasingly harsh, bringing with them deeper social antagonism.

The importation of basic foodstuffs -which might well in other circumstances have been produced quite easily in Costa Rica- consumed hard-won revenues derived from exports. At the same time, the political demands for social overhead capital -which could be financed from foreign loans- launched the country into a spiral of debt, both foreign and domestic.

Since no new significant revenues were forthcoming, the Costa Rican economy had begun to show signs of crisis by 1914. Thus, it is no surprise that the social question had become a burning issue in the same year.

2. An unexpected political outcome

The choice of Alfredo González Flores as President of Costa Rica in May 1914, might in these circumstances have seemed surprising. It was the result of an

agreement between the Republican and National Union Parties. In fact, González Flores became President by virtue of a specific, and even unusual, provision of the Constitution.

After a relatively peaceful development marked by no political upheavals and constitutionally elected -though not always effective- governments, Costa Rica faced a difficult political situation when three factions of the dominant class presented candidates in the elections of 1913. Weak political parties, non-existent political programs and highly charismatic candidates made this a particularly "personalistic" and aggressive presidential race. The press reflected daily the tense atmosphere as did La Epoca in May, 1913:

Con profunda pena leemos casi a diario en hojas volantes y aún en algunos periódicos, artículos preñados de insultos soeces, groseras injurias y frases ponzoñosas contra los candidatos a la presidencia y contra algunos de sus partidarios. Esta conducta incorrecta en todo sentido, que no puede traer sino malas consecuencias para el país, no afirmo que sea exclusiva de determinado partido, pues tales publicaciones las ha habido de los tres bandos.⁴

One month later the same newspaper said:

Ayer fue un día de agitación, de movimiento, de sobresalto y aún más, de palos y golpes... Numerosas comisiones salieron por los pueblos por el tren, a pie y a caballo, dispuestos a gritar mucho desde las tribunas públicas. La policía se vio obligada a disparar tiros al aire para dispersar la gente.⁵

In the elections of 7 December 1913, none of the three candidates received the required absolute majority of votes. Under these circumstances Congress -in accordance with constitutional dispositions- had to choose the President among the two candidates with the highest number of votes. While Congress enjoyed a recess until May 1914, a surprisingly active process of political pacts and compromises started to take place between members of the different factions. At last, the Republican Party, which had obtained the highest number of votes, proposed an elegant formula: a compromise candidate from Republican headquarters who would head a coalition between that party and the National Union Party, the second ranking political opponent.⁶

Regardless of many demonstrations of discontent, in particular from Civil Party members, González Flores became Costa Rica's next President.⁷ A young lawyer from the province of Heredia, González Flores was hardly an unknown political figure. He had been elected as a Republican Congressman in 1910, and he had achieved prominence as the proposer of several controversial social reforms. He was also known to possess a detailed knowledge of the social conditions of the country. Though his arrival to the office of President may have been thought irregular, his intellectual qualities made him an ideal "compromise" candidate.⁸

Given the peculiarities of his designation, the González Flores government was weak from the beginning. As the head of a hurriedly formed coalition, he had neither personal constituency nor loyal Congressmen.

Moreover, the powerful Republican Party leader, Máximo Fernández, did not support González Flores, for he felt the Heredian had usurped his place. Furthermore, the National Unionist Congressmen were very loyal to their leader, Dr. Carlos Durán, while the Civilists formed a highly homogeneous and powerful opposition block.

It was not surprising that the party elite should have believed that they could manipulate the man from Heredia. At thirty six, a confirmed bachelor, his tweed suit seemed out of place among the severe grey and black suits of his fellow politicians. Newspapers were soon to lampoon the new President. The following comment appeared in La Linterna on 23 December, 1916:

De Heredia vino un muchacho y ya no quiere volver, que en Heredia no hay castillos ni cosa que revolver. Y disque tiene vestidos de chinilla que algo cuesta y hombre que viste chinilla ni cambiándole la testa. Ser designado de un modo o del otro es muy humano pero hay que ver ante todo de no coger hasta el codo si acaso le dan la mano.⁹

Appointed to office with the help of the most influential Liberal politicians of those years, González Flores was nevertheless soon to demonstrate clear signs of a fine intelligence and a powerful will, besides his intellectual independence.¹⁰

3. The González Flores administration

While previous Presidents had resorted to traditional Liberal nostrums as solutions to the chronic

economic problems of the country, Alfredo González Flores appears in retrospect to have stressed the need to find new ways to resolve economic problems. Nevertheless, the first Inaugural Speech (on 8 May, 1914) was circumspect, it outlined such a program in a form which was deliberately vague. The speech was notable in two respects: it stressed the link between financial and political structures and the connection between political stability and unemployment. In one part of the speech González Flores said:

Las graves cuestiones de Hacienda, con lo que dejo dicho, siguiendo autorizadas opiniones modernas, se ve que las considero en íntima relación con la estructura política. Firme ésta, aquellas encuentran fácil solución.

El Crédito Público, eje alrededor del cual gira toda la economía nacional, será especialmente atendido en el gobierno que he de presidir. Y esta atención no será con la perspectiva de obtener nuevos créditos sino para el mejor fundamento del bienestar económico.¹¹

Later on he would emphasise:

No puede haber democracia donde hay miseria y ésta vive donde no hay trabajo. Se procurará en la administración que con mi nombre se inaugura que ninguno tenga pretexto para la vagancia.¹²

Though solutions were proposed in only the most oblique form, the President specifically referred to his well-known socially oriented bill proposing the National

Mortgage Bank:

Es natural que cada hombre que llega a ocupar el delicado puesto desde el cual estoy dirigiendo la palabra a esta respetable Cámara traiga un ideal concreto que espera realizar en determinado punto administrativo. Yo deseo, señores diputados, que en nuestro país llegue a ser institución viviente una de crédito agrícola hipotecario. Tengo fe en que con la colaboración muy patriótica y muy ilustrada vuestra, no terminaré esta administración sin que banco hipotecario que reclama con urgencia nuestra agricultura, quede establecido prestando sus servicios. Tengo fe en la eficacia de aquel organismo; tengo fe en que con él muchos y numerosos campos, improductivos hoy, se abrirán a la producción; tengo fe en que una casa bancaria de la índole a que me refiero dará un impulso vigoroso a nuestra agricultura, base fundamental de Costa Rica.¹³

González Flores also made reference to the need for bridges and roads. Nevertheless, it was by calling attention to the need to raise the numbers attending school that he was able to make the intellectual leap towards a greater role for the state:

El ciudadano de mañana, a quien estamos obligados a preparar hoy para las exigencias de entonces, merecerá en mi gobierno las mayores atenciones. La escuela actual, de conformidad con apreciaciones, ya desde hace mucho tiempo expuestas por especialistas en el ramo, debe tener un fin individual y otro colectivo. Si al través de un aspecto procura capacitar al niño para su mejor éxito en la vida, al través del otro debe proceder teniendo en cuenta hacia dónde se dirige la colectividad en su papel mundial para acondicionar los elementos que la constituyen del modo más perfecto para ese fin. Esta administración se empeñará en que la escuela busque y siga la orientación que le

corresponde a Costa Rica.¹⁴

González Flores made very clear the emphasis his administration placed on education. Drawing upon modern pedagogic and social theories, he designed a new approach for the school system, with both individual and collective aims. Thus, the school system was to prepare and train students not only to reach individual prowess but also to improve society as a whole. He stressed the need to eradicate illiteracy and idleness. Therefore, he firmly pointed out the state's responsibilities towards education, and in particular, the enforcement of school attendance. The following quotation is most revealing:

Ya no hay razón de valor que justifique ningún analfabetismo entre nosotros. (...) imperdonable es en el Estado el menor descuido en el cumplimiento de ese su deber de preparar hombres para la lucha de la vida y ciudadanos para el derecho y la libertad. La mirada del Estado debe permanecer de continuo fija en la escuela que no es otra cosa que la luz que va adelante alumbrando los nuevos derroteros que ha de seguir la sociedad.¹⁵

Confronting realities was to be more difficult than making speeches, however subtle and well-honed they might be. The outbreak of the First World War in August-September, 1914 occurred before González Flores could bring in the new measures.

The world conflict was to have a distorting effect on trade. Exports as a whole would increase during the world conflict, rising by 10.28% between 1913 and 1917

(the year in which González Flores left office). Nevertheless their destiny would change; Europe imported coffee via Falmouth (75.64% in crop year 1913-1914). Such trade was bound to change after the declaration of hostilities, a much larger proportion going to the United States. Though the USA supplied an ever-larger percentage of imports between 1912 and 1914, the trade was clearly disrupted by the war, imports from the belligerents falling by 74.90% between 1913 and 1915.

Total imports fell by 48.43% during the comparable period. This occurred because Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Italy and Great Britain were to suffer the effects of the war: while some countries were blockaded, others had their commerce distorted.¹⁶ (See Table II).

The impact of the war was immediate. Writing in his annual report for 1914, Consul Cox stated that the value of exports had risen by 5.25% while that of imports had fallen by 13.05%. He wrote that:

The fall in the value of imports in 1914 was due to causes arising from the war, and to depression in the banana trade. Imports were more or less normal until September, since when a great reduction in all imports, except food-stuffs, has occurred.¹⁷

President González's early aspirations were affected by the economic crisis brought on by the new war. The first signs of the impact were the dislocation of the main markets for Costa Rica's export goods, the monetary shortage (due to the retraction of loans) the higher prices of import goods (due to adverse international

exchange rates), the interruption of Costa Rica's suppliers as well as reduced and more expensive maritime transportation. It may be noted that in 1914, 47.53% of shipping was British, and a 16.19% was German.¹⁸

Costa Rica's fiscal structure proved unable to survive the new conjuncture. Since customs dues were the main sources of revenue (58%) -the second was the liquor monopoly (25%)- the National Treasury soon began to feel the strain. All this made it increasingly difficult for the authorities to soften the impact of the war.¹⁹ (See Table III).

Panic soon set in and González Flores was given extraordinary faculties by Congress on 8 August, 1914, in order to alleviate the crisis situation.²⁰ By extensive use of such attributions over a nine-month period, he decreed numerous emergency measures which naturally reflected his concern to increase the role of the state. Some of these dispositions were highly beneficial, others proved to be mistakes. Yet, without exception, all of them denoted concern for the crisis and expressed an energetic response to the crisis.

One unfortunate measure taken was the reduction of public personnel salaries and ancillary benefits.²¹ González argued that he had to choose between decreasing those revenues or firing a considerable number of government employees. He considered the first option more humanitarian. Of course, this unpopular measure had a negative effect on González Flores' public image from the first months of his administration.²²

The President's interest in the social impact of the crisis was not surprising. During the preceding administration, González Flores, then a Congressman, had presented a bill to create the National Mortgage Bank. This institution was, he argued, vital to stimulate the diversification and development of agriculture so as to benefit the small and middle-sized tenant farmers. He had emphasised the country's "natural vocation" for agriculture, but argued that investment had been diverted to commerce and the large landowners, with unfortunate results for the quantity of production. The bill had been approved by Congress after heated deliberations, only to be vetoed by President Ricardo Jiménez. Long-entrenched monopolistic interests in the financial sphere had prevented that motion from becoming a reality.

Using his "extraordinary powers" the President promulgated a law on 9 October, 1914 establishing the Banco Internacional de Costa Rica as a government bank of issue and mortgage institution. This would serve two purposes -to help resolve the financial crisis, and provide the agricultural community with capital to prevent shortages as well as increase output. It was authorized to issue up to 4,000,000 colón (10.45 colón = one pound) in notes to bearer; one half of this issue was to be lent to the Executive government at 6% interest. The rate of interest on loans to the agricultural community was restricted to 10% per annum.²³

As part of its reaction to the panic the government raised additional revenue by increasing customs duties and creating an export tax on coffee. As reported in

The Times:

Messrs. C.J. Hambro & Son announce that the Government of Costa Rica has passed a law placing a tax on the export of coffee to provide exchange for the service of the foreign debt.²⁴

The gold standard was also suspended by denying banks the option of changing their currency for gold and forbidding the export of specie. The creation of Rural Boards for Agricultural Credit, the prohibition of land claims close to the Panamanian border, the creation of General Deposit Warehouses, laws regulating mercantile insurance and insurance companies and the establishment of Escuela Normal, were some of the measures taken between August 1914 and May 1915. The inauguration of a new period of Congressional sessions ended the President's extraordinary attributions granted by decree.²⁵

As the war continued into 1915, the fiscal problems of the administration had become more serious. They were not helped by the strain of negotiating inherited border problems with Panama and Nicaragua, struggling to eradicate a menacing locust patch in the countryside and trying to stop a cholera epidemic coming from the Caribbean.²⁶ Nonetheless they prompted the President to embark on a new course, one which broke with the Liberal tradition and one which had only received an oblique reference in his speech to Congress.

This course was spelled out very clearly in his message to Congress on 1 May 1915. González Flores was

to stir up Congress and the country very deeply. He urged Congress to take up the issue of fiscal reform. In a clear and positive way, the President tried to awaken the Congressmen's consciousness of the need to reorganize the obsolete and unfair system of taxation. Clearly inspired on Liberal postulates, Costa Rica's tax system had rested upon indirect contributions (customs and liquor and tobacco rents) since nineteenth century. His presidential speech -highly imbued with social considerations- reflected not only his profound understanding of Costa Rica's problems, but also a wide knowledge of the world's newest and most advanced scientific economic theories.

González Flores bravely defied Liberal positions when he defended the urgent need to transform the system of taxation and establish direct contributions. He argued that without that transformation, most social and economic problems could never be satisfactorily tackled. At the same time, he stressed the importance of state intervention in eradicating the most harmful effects of contemporary social development. In a highly challenging manner he said:

Se impone como necesidad imperiosa para la vida de la República, como una exigencia del principio de equidad y como un axioma democrático, una reforma radical en nuestro sistema rentístico y fiscal. Esta reforma, a mi juicio, debe basarse en dos principios fundamentales: primero que cada uno contribuya en la medida de su capacidad económica y que crezca progresivamente la contribución para los más pudientes, y segundo que en lo posible pesen sobre los favorecidos con ellas los gastos para las obras de fomento y de interés local o especial.²⁷

The extensive and brilliant speech was equally to shock upper class and Liberal Congressmen, aggressive journalists and coffee barons.²⁸ Even though many recognized his clear intelligence and determination, very soon his ideas started not only to be feared but also to be clearly contested.

He seemed determined to use the crisis in government finance as the opportunity to reconstruct the fiscal system from the top to the bottom. While the González Flores speech was a determined breach of Liberal precepts, it should not be interpreted as the action of a man desperate to gain access to resources at any cost. He was certainly aware that his government could borrow from USA sources. At the same time local banks were not unwilling to lend money. The fact that there were alternatives made the speech seem more shocking to the black and grey-suited ranks of coffee barons, prestigious lawyers and traders in Congress. They immediately leapt to the attack. So did journalists.

The opposition was reinforced when the government once again dealt with the income of public officials. Government started to pay one third of their salaries in promissory notes falling due at the end of the financial crisis. In practice, that meant that their real income had been sharply reduced. The government fought back a rising tide of criticism in September 1915 by setting up a new newspaper, appropriately named El Imparcial and owned by a coterie of friends of the President.

On 6 September, -only five days after the first

issue of El Imparcial appeared- González Flores sent his fiscal reform to Congress. The reluctant reception of his ideas and the proximity of mid-term Congressional elections prompted him to withdraw the projects a few weeks later. By then, González Flores realized that victory over Congress on the fiscal reform depended upon the successful outcome to a coming mid-term Congress election. By the end of 1915, the President had fabricated a majority of 20 out of 22 Congressmen by using fraud. By means of a fraudulent process, González Flores thought he had finally created the conditions for approving the tax reforms.²⁹

Machiavellian irony seemed to be the prevailing line of thought: the ends justify the means. Nevertheless, 1916 was to be a most difficult year for the González Flores administration. Blaming the President for the increasing economic and social turmoil, few understood the scope of the measures he proposed. As he developed his ideas more freely, González Flores became the centre of crude and sarcastic criticism.³⁰ Said La Racha on 27 January 1916:

En el banquete que los chinos de Puntarenas dieron al joven de los zapatos blancos y de las medias caladas, se habló de historia.

Un chino inquirió: -¿y usté no está señor plesidente en la histolia?

-Yo creo que solo están los presidentes muertos.

-Qué lástima que usté no apalesca allí.

Though González Flores became more and more isolated, he never abandoned his high ideals, nor did he narrow their range. He was determined to have the fiscal

reforms approved so that many socially-oriented projects -including an educational reform- could become a reality. The new system of taxation sanctioned on 18 December 1916 should be seen as vital to a general reform programme which paid attention to the necessity for sustained investment in social overhead capital.³¹

By that time President González Flores felt that he had finally won. Nevertheless, the organization of the "masters of the political arena" in a common journalistic and parliamentarian front, backed by growing social discontent, were finally to fracture the interventionist parenthesis.

B. The first steps taken towards educational reform

1. Growing pains

Though Costa Rican political authorities repeatedly attempted to improve upon the educational achievements of former reformer, Mauro Fernández (whose reforms spanned the 1880s), old unsolved problems as well as new social demands created a sense of crisis by 1914.

During the preceding period of 1880-1914, Costa Rican primary education had shown a conscious and constant expansion; schools, teachers and students had more than tripled in number in that time. Such growth demonstrated that the Liberal goal of generalizing

primary education was being accomplished.³² Nevertheless, qualitative development had lagged behind numerical expansion. The deficiencies and scarcity of teaching personnel, parents' reluctance to comply with educational duties and the inadequate contents of the curriculum in primary education had been major issues since the 1880s. By 1914, these problems, though tempered, still haunted the educational sphere.

Low salaries, lack of professional prestige, failure to open a Training College and the limited results provided by "auxiliary mechanisms" to alleviate teaching deficiencies, had lead to chronic weaknesses in primary schooling. The absence of a solid teaching basis had long term consequences. Firstly, it inhibited a proper implementation of new study plans and curricula. Secondly, it greatly limited educational benefits due to the restricted area of knowledge most teachers had. Lastly, it inhibited the promotion of high quality pedagogic messages.

The main elements still limiting school attendance by 1914 were ignorance about its benefits to the student and society, economic constraints, and the requirements of an agricultural labour force. Even though Boards of Education had played an important role promoting good will, responsibility and solidarity towards educational matters and making effective compulsory laws, the fact is that parents' reluctance was stronger than the law. Within a scheme to generalize mass education at the primary level, this problem was to be a great concern which was always present in the minds of the authorities.

Minister of Instruction, José Astúa Aguilar referring to the latter, said in 1905:

Todas las administraciones han mirado con predilección los intereses de la enseñanza, y este Gobierno que comprende y reconoce su influjo incontrastable en nuestro desarrollo, no ha omitido diligencia, ni perdido ocasión para hacer que los establecimientos del ramo llenen su misión en el movimiento docente (...) la escuela debe impartir una instrucción suficiente a satisfacer las necesidades generales de la nación, esto es, que de una parte le suministre lo que ha menester toda colectividad en el momento actual de la civilización, y que de otra estimule sus energías y aspiraciones de acuerdo con su modo de ser, con sus recursos de trabajo, con su estado social, político y económico, sin traspasar los límites del campo en que han de desenvolverse naturalmente nuestros destinos.³³

Study plans and curriculum "experimentation" had been implemented by nearly every previous administration to that of González Flores. Somehow every new government had wanted, not only to improve the contents of the curriculum, but also to leave its own mark in Costa Rica's educational development. Thus, personal points of view as much as the influence of different currents of pedagogic thought led to the periodic drafting of new plans and curricula. As expectations were much greater than results, each administration had tried to surpass its predecessor by delineating that scheme which their experts considered to be the most adequate answer to educational needs.³⁴

In contrast with primary education, which was designed to encompass society as a whole, secondary

education was very elitist. The main goal of secondary education was to filter a few well-trained individuals into higher education, so that they could join and improve political and technical groups in the future. Given that the Liceo de Costa Rica had the best human and material resources, the most adequate and modern study plan and program, this was the secondary school which had been most systematically studied throughout the period.³⁵

The most notorious characteristic of Secondary education of the period was to recruit prestigious experts from abroad to direct and teach at the Liceo; to send Costa Rican students abroad to study so that later on, they could return to teach there, and finally, to provide the Liceo the best possible infrastructure, curriculum and organization.

It was not surprising, therefore that provincial schools did not receive the same attention as the Liceo de Costa Rica. Apart from intervals when they were closed, these institutions suffered from a chronic lack of teaching personnel and material resources. Even though some distinguished intellectuals were hired to work in them, educational needs greatly outnumbered human and material resources.

The shape of higher education -the last step in the education pyramid- reflected a systematic aspiration to improve the School of Law and to widen the scope by creating new Professional Schools. Notwithstanding that intention, judicial studies absorbed most University income and the narrow intellectual possibilities of a

highly elitist secondary school system left little scope for diversification.

Apart from the problems mentioned above, social dynamics had created increasing pressure in educational matters. The growth of population, the development of the economic structure, growing demands for new skills, the spread of the notion that access to education provided a path to upward social mobility, the desire to integrate new pedagogic and philosophical ideas, the need to strengthen the bonds of nationality as well as the aspiration to rely more and more on education to reproduce and legitimise -through consensus- the established order, were society's most relevant educational goals.

In a country where periodic reforms tended to diffuse problems, which might otherwise have become insuperable, where gradual change led to comparatively smooth and rapid structural change, educational issues represented a relevant political and ideological priority. By 1914 the time had come to adapt the educational system to new social needs and demands. In 1914, Costa Rica was not experiencing an educational crisis, but natural growing pains. Thus, when the González Flores administration assumed power a new intellectual elite was anxious to launch a new educational reform. The only difference was that by this conjuncture the change was to take place within a different political-ideological framework: a vanguard attempt that was to have a very specific outcome for education.

2. "To educate is to socialise"

The new Minister of Instruction, Luis Felipe González -the President's brother- had demonstrated throughout his professional life a true vocation for education. At 32, he was not only a dedicated secondary school teacher, but a well-known intellectual who actively participated in public debates on different aspects of education.³⁶ His impressive defense of state-supported secondary schooling, his militant laicism, his socially oriented thought as well as his profound knowledge about the latest educational theories, had given him a distinguished place among the qualified new elite.

The González Flores brothers, who shared values and ideals, were determined to transform the system of education. They stressed that contemporary problems made it increasingly necessary to widen the educational sphere by giving this issue a new direction, so that it might effectively eradicate traditions of prejudice and narrow mindedness. They argued that social problems were firstly educational problems. Thus, social problems could find appropriate solutions in the school.³⁷

According to this point of view, the school's most important role was its social function. Social activities and relationships had first to be developed in the school. Therefore, school had to be considered from a sociological perspective, in which the link

between society, family and school became the most important issue. The student was an individual before he became part of the social conglomerate; consequently, it was necessary to create the indispensable link between family and school, so that both training mechanisms could be maximised and optimal "socialising" results could be obtained.

Luis Felipe's most important concerns were related to providing more effective compulsory mechanisms to assure school attendance, to promote closer relationships between parents and citizens on a variety of educational issues, to create a more comfortable, pleasant and rewarding atmosphere in which learning took place. He was equally concerned to improve the quality and increase the size of the teaching force, widen the social scope of the pupil intake into the secondary school and to provide a new impetus to the curricula for primary and secondary schools.³⁸

He considered that the sheer diversity and depth of educational problems compelled the political authorities to analyze social and educational reality with great care. He was to take two years before establishing the most relevant parameters of educational change. Nevertheless, during this two-year span, important steps were taken towards achieving his dearest aspirations.

Once the Escuela Normal was created in November, 1914, a long awaited aspiration finally had become true.³⁹ Since it was endowed with the best human and material resources Costa Rica could offer at the time,

this institution was to reflect, from the start, the Minister's preferences for improving the teaching force. The weight of the latest pedagogic currents of thought, especially, Pragmatist and Transcendentalist ideas, was felt in this institution. The school was to become the vanguard of educational reform. A laboratory for the discussion and the experimentation of new methods and theories, the Escuela Normal was to be the target not only of admiration but also for criticism. In the following comment, La Linterna summarized -although by using a mockery approach- much of the prevailing adverse feelings:

Las cosas de la Normal herediana. Allí se puntea el porvenir de Costa Rica, se preparan los grandes meditabundos y meditabajos, los futuros maestros que a fuer (sic) de llantos y sollozos nos darán una juventud grande por su sensiblería, verdaderas magdalenas que a falta de energía regarán con sus lágrimas los campos de nuestra actividad aún sin explotar.

El edificio es suntuoso, su mobiliario corre parejas con la belleza de la arquitectura. Mientras en las escuelas primarias falta hasta lo más indispensable en la enseñanza, el templo de las cinco puntas en Heredia cuenta entre otros lujos con sabrosonas butacas que rivalizan con las de nuestro coliseo; las que fueron traídas por don Luis Felipe en su cuarto y ojalá último viaje con el laudable propósito de que el gran bíceps (sic) de los meditabundos no se resienta. Así se gimotea a todo gusto. Lástima da que a la juventud no se la ponga bajo la custodia de la lógica en vez de rodearla de esa sensiblería histérica que hoy invade a ciertos intelectuales...⁴⁰

Co-educational considerations, the fact that the Escuela Normal was created in the province of Heredia and

not in the country's capital, exceedingly good infrastructure and surroundings as well as the best teaching staff; an excessive concern for ethical and spiritual issues and close identification with Dewey's ideas became the target of special concern. Using the press as the main vehicle for discussion, a most interesting public debate took place between those who held conservative views on education and those who favoured drastic change.⁴¹

Better working conditions and improvement of the technical skills of personnel in service, were some of González' first tasks. These were achieved by the creation of compulsory summer meetings and special training courses at the Escuela Normal, besides other measures designed both to rationalise and make effective the roster of official personnel.⁴²

Since he had become very concerned with the promotion of home-school interaction, González Flores created new mechanisms of control: Head of the Administrative Section, Ministry Auxiliary Directors and Secondary School Inspectors. At the same time, the Sanitary Department was created to prevent infectious diseases and other illness and to promote hygienic habits in the school population, and the Agricultural Department was established to promote courses in agriculture in primary schools, particularly the rural areas.⁴³

Since he had become highly concerned with the promotion of home-school interaction, González Flores encouraged parents' meetings as well as the creation of

various ancillary foundations. Through many strongly enforced measures, he was able to organize periodic primary and secondary school meetings. By compelling parents to share education, social goals and benefits, Minister González was able -in a relatively short time- to develop new attitudes and concerns towards educational issues. The latter was reflected in higher school attendance and by many material donations.⁴⁴

Foundations such as the "School Kitchen", the "Milk Glass" and "Clothes for the Poor" were sponsored by the Ministry of Instruction though their administration lay in private hands. Since they were linked to primary schools, these organizations were created to alleviate the most significant side-effects of poverty.⁴⁵ By supplying daily meals, milk and clothing to poor school children, the foundations were creating an opportunity not only to bring parents closer to school, but also to demonstrate the acute social problems of the period. Once again, social considerations seemed to be the guiding light for official policies.

With regard to women, however, Minister González was to favour a most discriminating position. With the exception of the Escuela Normal, where girls attended the same courses as male students, he emphasised the need to create separate curricula for women and men, in particular, at the secondary level.⁴⁶

A true exponent of the prevailing male position of the period, he considered that women had to be trained for domestic chores rather than intellectual activities.

In an interview given to La Prensa Libre in 1915 he expressed the following ideas about a woman:

Su carácter débil, maleable y por regla general falto de fortaleza, se ajusta con mayor facilidad a los sucesos y se conforma casi siempre con el estacionarismo no atacando casi nunca los hechos y las cosas con ánimo de cambiarlos con propósitos reformistas. Es paciente en todo momento y soporta con resignación todo cuanto viene y cuanto ocurre esperanzada siempre en que las cosas cambien por sí mismas porque considera que los efectos del esfuerzo en su propio provecho quedan fuera de su acción y de su alcance. Su manera femenil con que considera las cosas se deriva no tanto de la educación que ha recibido como de su idiosincrasia psicológica al contemplar la vida bajo un aspecto más simple y banal tiene forzosamente que ignorar los medios mediante los cuales evoluciona hacia mejores formas.⁴⁷

Since he was sincerely frightened by the "dangerous imbalance" in favour of women teachers (73% to 27% men)⁴⁸, he decided -as a first step- to dismiss married female teachers. The Technical Director of the Ministry (Justo A. Facio) was ordered not to recruit those teachers again. He argued that women's supposed "mental inferiority", domestic responsibilities, extreme nervous sensibility and passiveness made them less competent than male teachers, because:

La carrera del magisterio exige un esfuerzo tan grande y constante de inteligencia, de voluntad, de acción, de equilibrio con las autoridades, los alumnos, las gentes y las cosas, que la cerebración de la mujer no la soporta o si se aplica a conseguirlo no lo hace impúnemente para su salud. (...) el juicio, el raciocinio, forman las últimas etapas de la

evolución intelectual y ponen de manifiesto la superioridad mental del hombre. (...)

Resumiendo, tenemos que las aptitudes adquisitivas y elaborativas de la mujer difieren de las del varón. En las últimas, son evidentemente superiores las del varón.⁴⁹

Therefore Minister González stressed the need to train and motivate men so that male students could be well educated. The influence of women's "nature" in his view, prevented the most complete development of male virtue.

The displacement of married women from teaching activities was also related to the prevailing moral codes. Due to the fact that a married woman was thought to be no longer "pure", she was automatically the focus of malicious thinking. This problem became more critical when she was pregnant, and created the possibility of questioning "Nature's most hidden and shameful secrets". Many of those who wrote about the issue argued that in the tropics, sexual behaviour was rampant, many considered that women's place in school after the first two grades was pernicious for male children. Thus, ignorance about women's mental attitudes and distorted moralistic views, did little to achieve some amelioration in their position in society, in this period. The influence of such traditional views was such that the Minister's views did not appear absurd.

Since he was anxious to expedite the curricula, Minister González carried out a detailed but rigorous study of Costa Rican reality so that he could find a

proper way to combine the latest educational thought with the country's particular requirements. In this connection he asked teachers and students, as well as pedagogues, to point out the most outstanding problems in education, and to suggest possible ways of correcting them. He was clever enough to elicit the participation of teachers and students in the process of educational reform and was therefore able to gain support among them for the radical transformation for which he was striving.

The promotion of civic values and the celebration of national holidays was a major political and ideological goal during these years. President Juan Rafael Mora's centennial birthday was celebrated with great ostentation while three new official holidays were decreed: National Hero Juan Santamaría's Day, Teacher's Day -in memory of the great reformer, Mauro Fernández-, and Tree Day, in recognition of Pragmatist Dewey's influence. At the same time, Columbus Day and Independence Day were re-emphasised.

The conversion of two military buildings into schools was a major occasion to praise Costa Rican democracy and civilian life, while it helped strengthen the role of education in society.⁵⁰ Since the army still played a fairly important function as keeper of law and order, the González Flores brothers and some relevant Congressmen, believed that the time had come to reduce military influence on society. They argued that a peaceful country had no need of large military contingents and that resources spent on military activities should be better used on education.

Unfortunately, Federico Tinoco, powerful Minister of War did not feel himself able to share those aspirations.

C. A detailed project for global educational reform

1. The proposed changes

Despite the severe economic problems experienced by the country between 1914 and 1916, the educational system had undergone a most impressive evolution. Regular conferences, parents meetings, faculty board member meetings, numerous measures and legislation, were some of Minister González Flores' early achievements. Regardless of the fact that some of the measures he had taken had attracted some criticism, in particular, the organisation of the Escuela Normal, don Luis Felipe was still very much admired and respected.⁵¹

In a context of increasing public criticism towards President Alfredo González' government, Minister Luis Felipe González seemed to be the only senior government official who received positive recognition. Influential intellectuals, who wrote in the most important newspapers, systematically pointed out both the clarity of the Minister's views and the dedication which he brought to his work.

Luis Felipe González had made it very clear from the start that he wanted to carry on a comprehensive reform.

Referring to Costa Rica's most revered reformer Mauro Fernández' great work in promoting the reforms of the 1880s, González said that time had come to reformulate those "fundamental bases" in the light of modern pedagogic and social theories. A great admirer of Fernández, Minister González tried to emulate his personal example.⁵²

In July 1916, Luis Felipe presented to Congress the first three of what were planned to be a large number of bills for educational reform. These were: (1) The Organization of the Ministry of Instruction and Fine Arts; (2) The Organization of Secondary Schools, and (3) The Organic Regulations for Teachers Training College and Secondary Teaching Personnel.⁵³

The Organization of Secondary Schools was aimed towards the creation of a harmonic unit of primary and secondary education. He stressed the need to generalize popular education so that democracy could be more vigorous and useful. Nonetheless he advocated selective secondary education. In his opinion, the first four years of secondary studies had to be accessible to the largest possible number of students, whereas the last two were to be a selective funnel for higher education. At the same time, he stressed the need to create "parallel" institutions, also called agro-technical training schools, in order to encourage economic development.⁵⁴

In relation to training college and secondary school personnel, González insisted on the need to increase efficiency and to make teaching a well-defined, stable



and attractive profession. He emphasised that the "Teaching state" had -without any doubt- the right to request from public officials their best efforts in order to accomplish its educational goals. At the same time, appropriate working conditions, and entitled benefits were to be guaranteed by the state. Thus, regular salary rises and job stability were to be enforced.

The approval of secondary school and training college legislation encountered no problems. Yet, the proposed organisation of the Ministry of Instruction, was to provoke great opposition.⁵⁵ This bill was marked by a highly centralistic spirit. The Ministry was to be given full control of all educational matters. It increased state supervision over public education and strongly tightened control over private education. Moreover, it widened the Ministry's ability to guide and supervise artistic activities.

The promotion of several branches of intellectual, scientific and artistic studies and research was one of the main objectives of the project. Thus, the bill advocated the organization of arts contests as well as the foundation of a diversity of cultural centres, such as museums, libraries and scientific, artistic, and literary societies. These centres were to be state-supported or at least, to be the object of material support. Moreover, it included the creation of numerous state scholarships so that many Costa Ricans were able to study either in the country or abroad. The bill also made provision for the creation of state-aided art schools and the Ministry was to exert complete control

over technical and administrative affairs.

To carry out this ambitious project, Minister González considered it necessary to structure the Ministry in a highly technical fashion. He created ten "auxiliary units" under the immediate direction of the Minister to organize and direct a range of activities: the Primary Education Technical and Administrative Department; the School Statistics Department; the School Health Department; the School Building Department; the School Agricultural Department; the School Equipment and Furniture Department; the School Accounting Department; the Secondary School and Special Education Inspection Department; the Art and Cultural Inspection Department; and the Department of Libraries and Museums. He also emphasized the need to recruit specialists and professionals to work in the educational field.⁵⁶

In a society marked by the "free spirit of Liberalism" this bill was to cause tremendous commotion. Not only did it limit the private enterprise over private education, which was effectively controlled by the Catholic Church, and concentrate "dangerous amounts of power" in the hands of state officials, but it would also lead to high levels of government expenditure. Few needed reminding that the zealously preserved pyramidal structure of education, a key element for the preservation of the establishment, would be undermined by widening the scope of education through many scholarships and state-supported institutions. La Interna reacted very soon to the projected changes in the field of education:

Más reformas. Está escrito. Don Luis Felipe hará carrera, carrera que si sopla buen viento ha de llegar a la inmortalidad, allí descansa y sigue. En esta semana presenta al Congreso el trampolín sobre el que va a tomar el impulso de la tal carrera, o sea un proyecto de ley reformando totalmente el plan de enseñanza... El principal espíritu de la ley es la centralización de la enseñanza. Aunque los colegios privados no quedan suprimidos, se verán tan apretados que no ha de sostenerse en pie ninguno por bueno que sea el mobiliario de que goce.⁵⁷

The project for the organization of the Ministry of Instruction and Fine Arts was in fact the matrix of radical change. Interventionism and higher expenditure in the field of education meant that the state had to provide the funds for those changes. Thus, educational reform and fiscal reform were interdependent. The fact is that higher expenditures coupled with the new role assigned to education would have brought about profound social change.

2. Congressional and popular reaction

All important legislation presented to Congress, was assigned to ad hoc commissions for study and report. Once these commissions gave their recommendations, the bill was discussed by all members of Congress in a plenary session and a final decision was taken. Due to the nature of certain bills, a unanimous decision among commission members could not always be achieved. Therefore, differences of opinion often gave way to

heated debates.

The bill for the reorganization of the Ministry was to produce a deep division between the three members of the Commission of Instruction. While two members favoured Luis Felipe González Flores' proposal, the other tenaciously opposed it. In arguing the need for educational improvement and defending Minister González' aspiration of technical excellence, Alberto Calvo and Clímaco Pérez recommended fellow Congressmen to approve the bill.⁵⁸ José Joaquín Soto, a Civilist (Opposition) Congressman, prepared an extensive and devastating speech against the proposal. Since he was clearly identified with prevailing Liberal thought, Soto fiercely attacked the interventionist tone of the project. He argued that strong centralisation led to hideous despotism, and counterattacked one and every argument sustained by González Flores, especially where the latter had advocated state control over private education.⁵⁹

Congressional procedure dictated that once the reports of ad hoc commissions were known, Congress in full initiated the discussion. However, because the reports of the Instruction Commission were presented very near to the close of Congressional ordinary sessions - which initiated in May and ended in August- the proposal was left on stand-by until the following period of ordinary sessions.

Even though full Congressional debate had been delayed, the project had created considerable consternation among both the public and the press.

Liberal intellectuals -who had once praised Luis Felipe González Flores' work on education- mercilessly attacked the changes he had proposed. By calling them "dangerously radical ideas", many journalists started to demand González Flores' dismissal from the Ministry of Instruction. Even though some supportive voices were heard, they were soon silenced by an overwhelming roar of protest. Warm solidarity from fellow educators and sympathizers did little to stem the tide of opposition.

In the context of the deteriorating economic situation, the prospect of new taxes, the personal criticism directed at an isolated president, the education bill (with its social and ideological stance), indicated that for many the "interventionist threat" had gone too far. Time had come to stop the González Flores brothers.

D. An abrupt ending

On 27 January, 1917 a coup d'état led by Federico Tinoco, Minister of War, was to erase the interventionist parenthesis. The movement reflected deep social and political resentment towards the González Flores administration. Even though the "consensual tendency" had been disrupted by the military coup, the first since 1870) it was to receive overwhelming popular support.⁶⁰

Unaware of the real causes of economic turmoil and cleverly lead by the press, popular opinion blamed the President for the critical situation. The meaning of his

proposed reforms was not grasped by the popular masses, and thus, they did not support Alfredo González Flores. In any case, it was not the masses who were to decide the administration's fate. Long-entrenched interests and benefits threatened by the President's interventionist thrust had been able to form an opposition front which was increasingly united. The coup d'état was to be the radical outcome of their activities.⁶¹

Though President González's manifest desire for re-election was the pretext for the movement, the fact is that the fiscal reforms and state interventionism had been the major cause of reaction. Not only had he alienated the coffee barons, the Catholic Church, the financial oligarchy and foreign investors -in particular, banana and crude oil interests-, but the sense of political and social order had also been under threat from the government. Within the context of increasing economic turmoil and social discontent, the masters of the political arena thought it necessary to regain complete control of the state apparatus. The established order had to be preserved, and, with it, the interests of dominant groups.

Aside from fiscal and banking concerns, dominant groups would not accept the proposed educational changes. Within the prevailing Liberal scheme, education was expected to keep to its assigned role: on one hand, to transmit rudimentary knowledge to the majority of the population and to standardise values, beliefs and a particular world view; on the other, to prepare the elected few to direct the state apparatus and economic

development. By means of differentiated training, education allowed the reproduction of the prevailing class division in the context of a highly polarised, though not always evident, social structure. Moreover, it helped maintain and legitimize the "status quo" through the generation of a "consensus". Promotion of and popular identification with, the Liberal political project created the myth that education was a mechanism of social mobility, regardless of the fact that only a few from humble origins, really made it to the top.

The proposed educational reform would have altered the Liberal scheme considerably. Widening the scope of education scope and making the benefits of higher education available to many more students were to produce an immediate reaction. The real opposition came from the government's public abandonment of the Liberal ideas. This represented a dangerous ideological threat. Fearful of the new social orientation of education, many believed that the established order was at stake. By promoting a more democratic and equitable society as well as potentially eradicating the prejudice and traditional views about social classes the education bills became real threats to the narrow social pyramid which was the Costa Rican establishment. The old myth about Costa Rican egalitarianism and democracy was laid bare. The ideological parameters of social domination had not only been questioned, they had been questioned by the government. The elected authorities had also tried to redefine ideological parameters under a new light.

The 1917 coup d'état was the immediate answer to

threatened economic and ideological interests. Notwithstanding the fact that the movement was to fracture momentarily the consensual tendency favoured from the 1880s, it was carried about to preserve not only the existing social order, but also the prevailing domination scheme. In this sense, to legitimize the new government became the first and most relevant objective of Federico Tinoco and his vast constituency. The instalment of a Constituent Assembly, the drafting of a new Constitution -in which the most conspicuous and prestigious intellectuals intervened- and the call for Presidential elections, were the mechanisms used to invest the former Minister of War with the required and expected veil of legitimacy.

Having eradicated the interventionist threat, many believed that Costa Rica was to reassume its peculiar political stability. Nevertheless, the economic and social turmoil of the period and military influences were to allow the enthronement of a "military interregnum". During the next two years, the consensual vocation was to be severely tested, as was the role played by education.

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Chapter Three

THE MILITARY INTERREGNUM

(1917-1919)

CHAPTER III. THE MILITARY INTERREGNUM (1917-1919)

A. The early days of the regime1. The legitimization farce

After three years of economic turmoil and political threat, the coup d'état was perceived as a panacea: it was to cure all the unwanted distortions that the interventionist parenthesis had favoured. For the dominant classes, it represented a return to the "Good Old Establishment" in which the long-standing privileges of a reduced elite would no longer be threatened by government officials and their "exotic" measures. For the masses, it meant an end to the penurious months of hunger and scarcity, and for the Church, the dissolution of unwanted control over its activities, in particular private schooling. Foreign interests saw the event as an opportunity to negotiate new contracts on more advantageous terms.

That the overthrow was welcomed by so many clearly demonstrated the extent of discontent with the González Flores regime; even political treason seemed justified. The general euphoria enabled the usurper easily to consolidate his power. The day after the coup, in an attempt to legitimize his régime as quickly as possible, Tinoco called for elections to create a National Constituent Assembly.¹ His intention was to elaborate a new Constitution, thereby providing a legal framework for the presidential elections which would legitimize his presidency. This mechanism was commonly used in Latin America to legalize a de facto government.

On 10 February, Tinoco himself named the Provincial Electoral Boards; thirteen days later he decided that the election of the National Constituent Assembly would be held on the same day as the presidential election. Citizens were to vote in two separate ballots, one for members of the Assembly and the other for President.²

The election of 1 April was peaceful and orderly, but nevertheless, the absence of opposition and the flagrant inflation of ballot papers converted the process into a political masquerade. The greatest farce was the election of delegates to the National Constituent Assembly. The candidates had not been announced or presented beforehand, nor had they engaged in political campaigning; on the day of the elections, the official newspaper simply published a list of persons for whom the citizens were required to vote. This was to guarantee from the start a submissive legislative power.³

With the complicity of the reigning political élite, Tinoco had not only been the sole candidate but was also invested as President by a dubious National Assembly that had still not, until then, decreed the new Ley Fundamental (Constitution). As Hugo Murillo points out:

La ironía de la situación es que Tinoco bien pudo haber ganado una elección a la presidencia por medios legítimos. Su popularidad en esos momentos ha sido plenamente demostrada; (...) Pero Tinoco no se arriesgó a una elección legítima y se decidió por un proceso irregular y fraudulento.⁴

During those first weeks, Federico Tinoco was a very popular man, backed by illustrious intellectuals, bankers, coffee barons, and high ranking prelates. He was also able

to obtain public support from the most prominent and respected politicians, including five ex-presidents. These men were to play a major role in the elaboration of the first draft of the new Constitution, which would serve as the basis for discussion in the National Assembly.⁵

On 8 June, in an impressive ceremony, members of the three powers of the Republic pledged loyalty to the new constitution. On that same day, the Constituent Assembly was dissolved and a new bicameral system (Senate and Congress) installed in its place.⁶ This day marked the return of the country to "constitutional normality".

Federico Tinoco staffed his Cabinet with an array of prominent politicians. The one exception was his brother José Joaquín, a well-known socialite and "playboy" who was appointed First Delegate (Vice President) and Minister of War. Until then, Joaquín had not occupied public office. On the other hand, Federico Tinoco ("Pelico"⁷) had been a congressman and a skilful political plotter and schemer. What he lacked in academic preparation, he compensated by extensive bureaucratic experience and respected standing in society. His wife enhanced his status, as she was the daughter of educational reformer Mauro Fernández and a well-respected lady of letters.

The Tinoco brothers belonged to a prominent and aristocratic family which had once controlled one of the largest holdings of coffee and sugar cane production and exportation. Theirs had been a "silver spoon" childhood, spent in luxury, with liveried domestic maids and travels to Europe and the United States. As the only males in a family of nine children, they had been extremely spoiled, and had grown up believing that the world was theirs.

However, the Tinocos had squandered their fortune and become bankrupt. Resentment and frustration, and a strong desire to regain their power and wealth had made them easy prey to corruption.⁸ Referring to Tinoco, Jorge Volio wrote:

La Presidencia había sido el objetivo constante de toda su vida, el móvil único de sus diversas intentonas revolucionarias... pero, cómo llegar a obtenerla en buena lid, en un país de orden y de ley que hasta entonces se había respetado para escoger a sus Presidentes y en donde su insignificancia intelectual, su vida de libertino y de derrochador, su carencia de escrúpulos y de sentido moral, su falta de méritos de ninguna clase, en una palabra, su absoluta incapacidad para el Gobierno, era de todos conocida, inhabilitándolo para presentarse al debate eleccionario. (...) no quedaba otro camino a Tinoco que el cuartelazo a mansalva por la traición.⁹

Ramón Zelaya said of the two brothers:

Otro de los toques morales que es indispensable no olvidar (...) es su extraordinaria vanidad - hija naturalmente de su ilimitada ignorancia- que les hizo e les hace creer que el mundo, que la humanidad no existe sino para rendirles homenaje.¹⁰

Ya es de todos sabido que ni uno ni otro posee instrucción para poder redactar discretamente una carta. Su cultura es muy superficial y de pura etiqueta, como que crecieron en un ambiente de elegancia y de buenas maneras.¹¹

Aristides Jiménez Tinoco, a relative, said of them:

Son individuos que han vivido bajo la creencia de que los hombres fueron creados para servirles de lacayos.¹²

2. Political and economic setbacks

Even though Costa Rican society had happily accepted Tinoco, the continuous deterioration of the economy presaged political disturbance. The popularity of the first days gave way to increasing concern and distrust.

The prolongation of the First World War damaged still further an economy which was already weak. As the war progressed, so did financial and economic troubles. The closure of the British market to Costa Rican coffee on 23 February 1917 was a devastating event, causing a temporary 50% reduction in the value of Costa Rica's major export product.¹³ As Minister of Finances, Manuel F. Jiménez said in 1918:

La guerra europea no había tenido en Costa Rica funestas consecuencias mientras el país pudo contar con una relativa normalidad en sus exportaciones e importaciones a los mercados en los que acostumbraba colocar sus productos. El cierre del mercado de Londres al café de Costa Rica, es a mi juicio, la medida más desastrosa que haya podido imponerse a la economía de la República y a esa circunstancia gravísima - puesto que representa la reducción del valor de nuestro café en un cincuenta por ciento- se sumó el día 6 de abril, la declaratoria de guerra de los Estados Unidos a Alemania con las extraordinarias restricciones del comercio, consecuencia obligada de ese acontecimiento.¹⁴

Income from import duties plunged, as did other traditional sources of state income. The sharp decrease in imports on which Costa Rica depended so heavily not only affected customs taxes revenue, but also provoked a crisis in the availability of subsistence goods such as foodstuffs, and clothing; scarcity in turn led to speculation, hunger, and social unrest. (See Table IV).

Cut off from external credit, the bankrupt Treasury was hard pressed to meet its financial obligations. Shortly after the coup, the government reduced the salaries of already underpaid bureaucrats and permitted the first issuing of fiduciary paper currency. Federico Tinoco was to write many years later:

La crisis producida por la guerra europea afectó también hondamente a Costa Rica. El descontento era general, y si la situación lesionaba intereses de los particulares, al gobierno lo sorprendió dentro de un sistema fiscal inadecuado para afrontar tamaño cataclismo. Fue más que desastroso: las entradas del presupuesto público se redujeron a la mínima expresión, y su principal renta, la de aduana, bajó hasta tocar los peldaños del ridículo.¹⁵

In addition to the negative effects caused by the Great War, the stubborn refusal of the President of the United States to recognize the Tinoco government provoked diplomatic isolation, and economic and financial asphyxia. Attached to moral and political considerations, including respect for the 1907 Washington Treaty, which among other things clearly stated that de facto governments would not be recognized by the U.S., and encouraged by Alfredo González Flores, who had sought refuge in the USA, Wilson dismissed from the start any possibility of diplomatic recognition for the Tinoco government. Legal justifications, pleas, and the offer of Costa Rican waters, ports and land for US military bases failed to dissuade Wilson from his sense of the righteousness of his decision.¹⁶

Wilson pressured European and Latin American countries to abstain from recognizing the regime, and was partially successful: only Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Honduras, El

Salvador and Guatemala declined to follow Washington's instructions. This widespread rejection of his government's legitimacy delivered a hard blow to Tinoco's domestic and international prestige. The resulting diplomatic isolation also had harmful effects on Costa Rica's foreign trade and closed off sources of credit from Europe and the United States during a period of severe economic stagnation.¹⁷

Panama's and Nicaragua's refusal to recognize the administration was to have particularly serious consequences; very soon, their territories were to become platforms from which Tinoco's enemies would base their offensives to overthrow him.

Wilson also warned US capitalists not to negotiate with the Tinoco regime. His menacing "advice" proved effective in halting credits that had already been approved in the U.S. Nevertheless, he could not prevent Minor Keith -the UFCO tycoon and man of multiple enterprises and influence- nor Lincoln Valentine -a representative of USA crude-oil interests- from helping the Tinocos. In fact, both transnational businessmen had been charged of orchestrating the overthrow of the González Flores regime. At any rate, they ignored Wilson's position and continued to consolidate their interests in Costa Rica.¹⁸

Tinoco responded to US intimidation with defiance and scorn. He sent word to Wilson that his country would survive without foreign aid and that recognition by the United States, while desirable, was not indispensable; he would not beg for recognition because he had the support of his people, and would remain as President of Costa Rica for the duration of his six year term, vowing that only through "brute force" would he retire.¹⁹

3. Public opinion turns critical

Wilson's steadfast refusal to recognize the regime placed Tinoco in an extremely vulnerable position in both political and financial terms. In the face of this threat, Minor Keith used his leverage in Costa Rica to strengthen Tinoco's hold and prevent the return of the González Flores group. He negotiated soft loans from private banks and developed a plan to raise fiscal revenues through an export tax on coffee and new public certificate bonds. (Banana exports, of course, were to be exempted from such taxes.) Keith also guaranteed maritime communication with the United States and bought military supplies through Guatemala's dictator, Manuel Estrada Cabrera.²⁰

Meanwhile, inflation and devaluation were the most serious results of a rapidly deteriorating economy. At the moment of the coup, the Costa Rican colón was at two-to-one parity with the US dollar; six months later, the exchange rate had risen to four colones to the dollar. As a result of devaluation, gold and silver coins were withdrawn from circulation. Even the smallest transactions met with obstacles, and business was almost paralysed.²¹

Traditionally, Costa Rica had minted its coins in the United States; now, the USA refused to perform this service. The majority of businessmen therefore issued paper coupons which were, however, extremely difficult to redeem. This financial anarchy finally led to the prohibition of private issues of paper coupons. In desperation, the government permitted the first fiduciary issues of paper money, and minted large supplies of copper coins in order to fulfil its increasing administrative liabilities.²²

The government stopped servicing Costa Rica's foreign debt, and in December 1917, France made clear that if interest due was not paid she would send an intervenor to take control over custom duties. Tinoco had no alternative and was forced to withdraw the gold reserves of the International Bank in order to satisfy French demands.²³

Although Public Treasury resources became scarcer by the day, Tinoco had to honour the promise he had made to national and foreign interests to abolish the tax system based on direct contributions, a system feared by all. However, pressure of events compelled him in December 1917 to impose a 10% tax on the net profits of banks, bankers and money lenders; a 1% tax on capital invested by foreign banks in their Costa Rican branches; a 10% tax on lottery prizes, and a 2% tax on gross sales in commercial and industrial establishments.²⁴

The economic crisis particularly affected public employees. Bureaucrats' salaries were the object of successive reductions and delays. Increasing unemployment, and speculation on the prices of foodstuffs and other articles of popular consumption, led to hunger and general unrest. The inability of the government to gain international recognition, plus increasing economic difficulties prompted many members of the oligarchy to withdraw their support and criticize the régime openly, especially when the new taxes were enforced.²⁵

Tinoco's friends and enemies alike had predicted that non-recognition and the economic crisis would bring about the collapse of his régime; the question was whether Tinoco would leave because of diplomatic and "moral" pressures or would have to be ousted by force.²⁶

With the loss of support from the general population, the Tinoco régime turned to repression in order to maintain political power and, step by step, Costa Ricans' civil rights were limited. Press and mail censorship became the first signs of restraint.

Although some prominent members of the oligarchy began to voice their dissatisfaction, the majority remained silent. Most of them feared the return of González Flores, and with him, the same threats to their long-held prerogatives and benefits.

4. The consensual tendency at stake

Since the late nineteenth century, Costa Rica had experienced relatively peaceful development, unmarked by political upheavals or serious social unrest. Although electoral processes were marred by fraud and manipulation, disputing political factions sought to avoid violence and refrain from openly flouting constitutional forms.

At the same time, external threats had also diminished. Thus, in accordance with the functions assigned by law to the armed forces (preservers of internal and external order), these corps had played a very passive role. Nevertheless, the armed forces had taken an active part in politics through electoral processes by manipulating popular suffrage and electoral results.²⁷

Gradually, this implicit role was to generate discontent in some groups towards the military. However, most intellectuals and politicians of the period were convinced of the necessity of this institution. Although

there had been various attempts to reduce the army's budget and diminish its role, on the eve of the coup the Ministries of War and Navy still accounted for a large percentage of the national expenditures and the military enjoyed prestige and power.²⁸

The role that had been played by the army since the late nineteenth century was drastically transformed in 1917. Once the constitutional order was disrupted, the military became the main channel of political power. The consensual tendency favoured by the development of the state since the 1880s was thus overturned.

The régime's response to increasing social unrest and opposition was to convert the military into major protagonists in the political arena. This was also the mechanism used by the governing group to accumulate power and resources.²⁹

The nature and personal history of the Tinoco brothers, in particular of José Joaquín, help to explain this phenomenon. After several years of material limitations, they finally had the opportunity to reinstate themselves financially and socially. For José Joaquín, the army provided not only a means of political domination and social control, but also military paraphernalia -uniforms, ceremony, medals, and titles- all of which granted prestige and elegance to his image. José Joaquín even went so far as to create a cadet academy, a luxurious and aristocratic establishment to train the sons of élite families.³⁰

In July 1917, Tinoco requested of Congress, extraordinary powers claiming that Costa Rica needed to prepare for an eventual threat of a German invasion.³¹ In

reality, he wanted sufficient power to suppress the growing popular discontent. A few days later, Tinoco ordered the detention of many citizens, whom he accused of planning an uprising. That same month, El Imparcial published several articles which were extremely critical of the government. The newspaper was run by Rogelio Fernández Güell, ex-delegate to the Constituent Assembly and respected man of letters. Fernández Güell criticised the increasing concentration of power in the hands of the President. These comments incited the tense governing group to use repressive measures in order to silence opposition; the newspaper was closed. As Eduardo Oconitrillo comments:

"El Imparcial" se había constituido en el único diario de oposición y sus críticas contra el régimen, casi todas firmadas por el notable periodista Rogelio Fernández Güell o editoriales en los que era fácil adivinar el estilo de su Director, censuraban valientemente al Gobierno. Por esa razón, el Presidente de la República lo mandó a cerrar y su último número circuló el 25 de julio de 1917.³²

Tinoco increased the total number of soldiers from 500 to 5,000 men and bought ammunition and arms from his Guatemalan friends. At the same time, he organized an extensive espionage system that was to provide surveillance of Costa Ricans and of enemies in Nicaragua and Panama. Men of dubious qualifications acquired powerful positions in the army, and others enlisted in the secret service (the first in Costa Rica). Tinoco also established strict control over foreign and domestic mail, and censored the press.³³

B. Education and the coup d'état**1. Another act of treason**

Roberto Brenes Mesén became the new Minister of Public Instruction. He was renowned for his progressive pedagogic and philosophic ideas, and was well respected as a writer and poet. His influence had extended over different administrations and institutions, and he had been both a diplomat and Minister of Instruction earlier on (In 1913-1914). Although much criticised by conventional thinkers, Brenes Mesén was a key figure of the new intellectual elite.

Influenced by transcendentalist and pragmatist tenets, Brenes Mesén had transformed the Escuela Normal into an active centre of avant-garde thought and intellectual debate, with the support and manifest enthusiasm of the González Flores brothers. He had also exerted great influence over his fellow teachers, particularly Omar Dengo and Joaquín García Monge.

Although his attempts in 1908 to alter educational practices at the primary school level had been unsuccessful,³⁴ he remained determined to implement the "New School" in educational policies. The González Flores administration had seemed to provide an extremely positive environment for converting his educational theories into concrete study plans and programs. On the one hand, the President and his brother shared Brenes' conviction that the school's most important function was social. They believed that education should be considered from a sociological perspective wherein the link between school, family, and work was essential. On the other hand, the

emphasis given by the President to education was a guarantee that his projects and ideas would be approved and conscientiously endorsed.

Brenes Mesén had already presented the first draft of his primary school programs to the Minister of Instruction. The essence of the new pedagogic approach was to transform schools into living laboratories where students had the opportunity to relate their education to their surroundings and everyday life. These new programs became a key element within the global educational reform planned by the González Flores brothers.³⁵

Brenes Mesén had more than ideas in common with Alfredo and Luis Felipe. When his supposed involvement in a diplomatic scandal forced his sudden return from Washington,³⁶ the González family had welcomed him to their home in Heredia, where he lived for several months. Years later, Alfredo González would write:

Pocas veces afectos que no proceden de la sangre fueron tan estrechos y tan cordiales por mi parte como los que me unieron a Roberto Brenes Mesén. Mucho tomé en cuenta las cualidades de su mentalidad brillante y bien cultivada, pero más apreciaba las de la integridad de su carácter moral. Sus relaciones conmigo eran fraternales; por largo tiempo en mi casa tuvo él su vivienda, y en mi mesa de familia tuvo siempre, cuando lo quiso, su asiento.³⁷

Did Brenes Mesén know in advance about the conspiracy to overthrow the González Flores administration? Don Alfredo believed he did, although there is no evidence that he was involved in the events of 27 January:

El 27 de enero él (Brenes Mesén) debió ser de los

conjurados. Lo fue en espíritu: no tuvo ánimo para serlo materialmente: se contentó con ser luego un paniaguado (sic). Desde 1916, Brenes Mesén que alimentaba conmigo y con mi familia las mejores relaciones, que vivía en mi casa, que ocupaba situaciones en mi Gobierno, se afanaba con el buen suceso de la usurpación de Tinoco. De ello tuve conocimiento en Nueva York. Estaba Brenes Mesén en el plan de la traición y estaba listo para ponerle el hombro al andamiaje de la usurpación, como lo hizo, yendo a un Ministerio, sin cuidarse de devolver la llave de mi casa de habitación donde tenía la suya.³⁸

It is certain that on the day of the coup, Brenes Mesén went to visit Alfredo González Flores at the American Legation, where the latter had sought political asylum. Don Roberto offered González his solidarity and respect and lamented his country's misfortune in falling into the hands of the two "jayanes" (ruffians).³⁹

The following day, however, Brenes Mesén was summoned to Federico Tinoco's office and offered the Ministry of Public Instruction; three days later, he accepted the position.⁴⁰

Brenes Mesén later explained that he had been forced to choose between his friendship with Alfredo González and his family, and his dedication to education. It was the fear of having his educational programs rejected by an unreceptive new Minister that had led him to take the position himself. In a letter addressed to Tranquilino Chacón don Roberto said:

en 1915 y 1916 había concebido proyectos de importancia que exigían para su ejecución la presencia de amigos en el Ministerio. Mis programas, en proyecto entonces, ya habían sido presentados en 1915 y se había pospuesto su consideración para más adelante. La ocasión de

trabajar por todo eso me llegaba. Acepté. No me llevó pues al Ministerio el deseo de otra cosa que la conservación de lo entonces existente y el fomento de la Educación Pública. (...)

Había aceptado el Ministerio con la promesa de que en mi Departamento no entraría la política. Cuando el señor Presidente juzgó que debía retirárseme la promesa me aparté del Gabinete.⁴¹

In spite of explanations and justifications, another betrayal marked the beginning of a new period; this time an omen of the tragedy to befall education.

2. Continuity and change

Although Roberto Brenes Mesén shared most of the pedagogic postulates that had oriented educational reform in the past administration, he felt that some ideas would not be accepted by the ruling classes at that time. Therefore, he was willing to sacrifice the most radical project -the organization of the Ministry of Instruction and Fine Arts- in order to secure other measures, particularly the laws concerning the organization of secondary schools and the regulation for teacher training and secondary school personnel. Furthermore, he was determined to implement his primary school programs and introduce critical pedagogic and curricular changes at the secondary school level.

The organization of the Ministry of Instruction and Fine Arts had provoked such negative reaction because it struck directly at the established order. Brenes Mesén thought it necessary to regain the confidence of the dominant groups, so he buried the project, not wanting to jeopardize either his personal future or the future of

Costa Rican education.

During the first weeks of the Tinoco régime, there were few changes in the Ministry of Instruction. Most high-ranking public officials stayed in their positions and teachers continued with their work. The only important vacancy resulting from the coup was the administration of the Escuela Normal, previously occupied by Brenes Mesén.

Joaquín García Monge, a bright and controversial thinker who ardently defended his nationalistic views and anti-imperialist position in the press was appointed director of the Escuela Normal. An outstanding member of the new intellectual élite, he was Brenes Mesén's friend and colleague and shared his ideas on education in general. The two men had married sisters and thus were linked by family interests.⁴²

At that time, prominent intellectuals and politicians were affiliated with either the Colegio de Abogados (lawyers' professional association) or the Escuela Normal, depending on social origin and status, profession, or, most importantly, ideals and world views. The Colegio de Abogados attracted Liberal thinkers who determined political trends. This group also shared a high social status.

The teacher training institution, on the other hand, had become the centre for progressive political and pedagogic study. Although most educators also taught in secondary schools, they met in the Heredia institution to discuss and examine different currents of thought from esotericism to pragmatism. These intellectual analyses were not only academic but also involved a critical

questioning of the established social order, and the privileges of the dominant groups which were concerns of students and teachers alike.

Most academics did not belong to the social élite: they had made their way up the social and academic ladder through scholarships, especially those offered by the Chilean government. The "Chilenoids" had become the trend-setters. Roberto Brenes Mesén and Joaquín García Monge were among those who had studied in the prestigious Pedagogic Institute of Santiago.⁴³

The students at the Escuela Normal were of humble origin, for the most part. In an educational system characterized by elitism, teaching was one of the few career opportunities for the under-privileged, especially women. Furthermore, a few students from the Escuela Normal were permitted to enter Law School and thus attained the highest academic status.⁴⁴

During the first year of his appointment, Brenes Mesén concentrated on the final formulation of his primary school programs. The National Museum was transferred to the Ministry of Instruction and the school system accounts were segregated from those of the National Accounting Office.⁴⁵

Don Roberto was determined to transform the school into a kind of workshop where a more complete man, spiritually richer and more productive in his work, would be forged. He wanted to give education with a social orientation and adapt rural and urban instruction to specific community needs. Inspired by the "Active School" movement, Brenes wanted to strengthen integral human formation. In short, he sought a "humanitarian pragmatist"

perspective to education.⁴⁶ The primary school program became in reality the first step towards consolidating these pedagogic and philosophic goals. This was the platform from which other changes would be launched.

Although deeply involved in his work, Brenes Mesén could not ignore the increasing economic decline and dictatorial excesses of the government. The salaries of public personnel, including teachers, were continually reduced; Brenes was forced to dismiss a considerable number of teachers and merge several schools in different communities. In the province of Guanacaste, only 20 of 45 teachers "survived" the re-organization.⁴⁷

Don Roberto was also conscious of the growing antagonism between Tinoco and the Escuela Normal due to the critical attitude of the director and staff. Nevertheless, he tolerated the many irregularities in exchange for the time and means to implement his programs.

On 21 December 1917, Brenes Mesén's primary programs were approved by Congress.⁴⁸ Disregarding the country's increasing difficulties and the problem of the educational sector, Brenes was overjoyed; his long-cherished dream had become a reality.

At the beginning of 1918, Brenes was forced to confront a serious problem. One of his recently published poems, "Pastorales y Jacintos", received stinging criticism in EOS, a widely read literary magazine. Although signed with a pseudonym, Brenes and his friends believed the author of the review to be Carlos Gagini, a celebrated writer and pedagogue who had been Brenes' intellectual adversary for years. When Brenes passionately denounced

the article and charged Gagini with the authorship, Gagini ultimately challenged him to a duel. Gagini's "innocence" was proven and excuses reciprocated, but not before some had asked Brenes to resign as Minister of Instruction.⁴⁹

On 12 March 1918, as political repression and social unrest increased dramatically, Brenes Mesén decided to resign. He could no longer bear the dictatorial regime, the censorship, and the repression of dissenting teaching personnel, particularly at the Escuela Normal. There had even been an attempt to close that institution and dismiss García Monge. In the end, ideas, ideals, and family ties proved stronger than political ambition, and Don Roberto retired.⁵⁰

Because of a new constitutional disposition, resigning Ministers were required to stay six months in Costa Rica before leaving the country. Brenes Mesén was placed in charge of the Public Library and taught in the Liceo until his return to the United States. He was to remain teaching in that country for more than twenty years before returning to Costa Rica in 1939.⁵¹

3. A turbulent Ministry

On 20 March 1918, the government decreed "interim status" for all secondary and normal school administrative and teaching personnel. The measure was aimed at dismissing all discordant elements under the guise of personnel reorganization. One day later, Anastasio Alfaro was named Minister of Instruction.⁵² A man of science, Alfaro had not been involved in politics. He had been Director of the National Museum and had dedicated his life

to teaching and research.

The critical and rebellious attitude of García Monge and his fellow teachers ultimately prompted Tinoco to intervene in the Escuela Normal in April, 1918. Shortly afterwards, Carlos Gagini was named to replace don Joaquín García Monge as director. Upon the dismissal of García Monge, all the members of the staff resigned, but pressure and threats forced the return of most teachers. One outstanding exception was that of Omar Dengo who bravely defied the régime by retiring to teach in a humble rural school.⁵³

Anastasio Alfaro initiated his appointment under the severe strain caused by the drastic political measures taken in the field of education. The dismissal of García Monge, the "reorganization" of teachers training and secondary education and the penurious economic situation that compelled the administration to close even more schools and dismiss a greater number of teachers, haunted his Ministry even before it began.

However, Alfaro decided to proceed as normally as possible. He was also determined to follow his predecessor's pedagogic path.⁵⁴ Closely identified with the "Active School" orientation, he wanted to implement Brenes Mesén's primary school programs as soon as possible. His admiration for Don Roberto was clearly reflected in his comments about those programs:

tienen los programas actuales una tendencia agrícola e industrial adaptables a las condiciones y necesidades del país, que por sí solas recomiendan ese plan, digno por otros muchos títulos de nuestra ferviente recomendación.⁵⁵

Despite his initial intentions, Alfaro was to confront increasing criticism and contempt. In June 1918, a highly articulate teacher, Ricardo Castro Meléndez, published a series of articles in which he sternly accused the Government of grave irregularities.⁵⁶ Meléndez described how in different educational institutions examinations had been approved and titles received through fraudulent means. Referring to a graduate school where he worked, he said that the director, feigning honesty, asked teachers not to supervise their students during the examinations in order to prevent any possible subjective aid. However, a few minutes after the teachers had gone, the students began to cheat, with the complicity of the school authorities. Although Meléndez was able to present evidence (some written paper frauds), the Director of the school did not take any punitive measures against the students.

He also denounced that fraud had been committed in the recently held official examination for Bachelor and teachers titles. Concerning the teacher's certificates, he said that even habitual drunkards had been able to acquire the right to teach. At the same time, Meléndez referred to the awarding of "State Professorship" titles to some educators. Alleging that this honour was conferred to some by their own colleagues, supervisors or subordinates, don Ricardo described his surprise that certain people had accepted that farce.

Meléndez mentioned that in light of such a "great harvest" of titles and certificates, many honourable teachers and professors had resigned, arguing that it was criminal to teach without meeting the required conditions. He went so far as to claim that the promotion examinations

were in reality masquerades in which comedians, adulators and praters were given an opportunity to advance.

Don Ricardo also denounced the special treatment and advantages enjoyed by certain school directors who had three to four posts at the same time and thereby earned extremely high salaries. Finally, Meléndez attacked the recently implemented school curricula. He said that the programs were an enigma to teachers and students alike, and an irresponsible experiment in times of deep problems and limitations. He emphasized his comments by saying that:

El desorden general se ha empeorado con el ensayo prohijado, imprudente y desgraciado por el mismo ministerio, de unos programas de enseñanza respecto a los cuales no han podido ponerse de acuerdo dos jefes y menos dos maestros. Se debe decir no a la labor exterior de puro formalismo. El empirismo educativo nos ataca inhumana y cruelmente; nuestros niños son cuilos de ensayo de las lucubraciones e idealismos del señor exministro de Instrucción Pública.⁵⁷

Meléndez's articles aroused passionate reaction. Many people wanted to denounce the dismissal of many teachers and professors, and the numerous irregularities committed in the education sector. However, they feared imminent repression. Meléndez paid for his courage (he was temporary expelled from teaching),⁵⁸ but he was responsible for breaking the silence of educators.

Don Ricardo's allegations revealed that, because of the increasing personnel reductions for political reasons, the Government had had to resort to employing unqualified teachers in order to keep existing schools functioning. At the same time, they showed that loyalty and flattery were amply rewarded by the dictator with titles and positions.

Meléndez's observations about Brenes Mesén's primary programs initiated a long and heated debate that was to last for several years. The controversy confronted leading members of the new intellectual élite with conventional thinkers, and ultimately determined educational orientation for years to come.

As time passed, more voices were heard to criticize the programs. Some argued that the programs were deficient, and lacked precise limits with respect to subjects matters; others said that such rapid innovation could only lead to failure.⁵⁹ In the face of this criticism, Minister Alfaro appointed three commissions that were to analyze not only the controversial primary school programs but also teacher training, secondary and higher education studies. He summoned well-known and respected educators, prominent lawyers, and politicians to participate in this review. Carlos Gagini, Fidel Tristán, Roberto Brenes Mesén, Joaquín Vargas Calvo, Alberto Brenes Córdoba, Ricardo Jiménez, Pedro Pérez Zeledón, and Leonidas Pacheco were among those who participated.⁶⁰

In addition to these political and philosophic controversies, the school population was confronting other serious problems. As the Primary Inspector reported, an increasing number of children failed to attend school due to poverty and lack of clothing. Furthermore, a serious measles and influenza epidemic had considerably affected the students.⁶¹

A long cherished desire to build a monument in memory of Mauro Fernández found its realization in Alfaro's Ministry. Although many other administrations -in

particular, that of González Flores- had wanted to materialize in this way popular admiration and gratitude towards the educational reformer, various factors had prevented its construction. In this period of severe educational problems, however, the building of the monument was perceived as crucial to raise the morale of teachers and students. In addition, the monument would delight Federico Tinoco, whose wife María, was don Mauro's daughter. On Independence Day (15 September), in the Edificio Metálico Plaza, Minister Alfaro inaugurated a beautiful monument made by the renowned Costa Rican sculptor, Juan Ramón Bonilla.⁶²

In November 1918, Carlos Gagini finally decided to defend himself in public. Ever since his nomination as the director of the Escuela Normal, he had been the target of systematic criticism and rejection. Nevertheless, he had waited several weeks to reply to his detractors. In an article published in La Prensa Libre, Gagini explained that after García Monge's dismissal in April, he had faced a very difficult time at the Escuela Normal. The majority of the teaching staff had lamented don Joaquín's departure with hysterical and exaggerated sorrow, and the students had embarked upon a poisonous passive resistance. In addition to these "emotional" problems -intimately linked to political considerations- Gagini claimed that the Escuela was a disaster in terms of discipline, cleanliness and studiousness. He blamed García Monge for his inability to find solutions to serious academic and behavioural problems. Don Carlos also intimated that a subreptitious campaign against the government was being directed by the teaching staff.⁶³ In this particular matter, Gagini was not mistaken.

As the year came to an end, the teaching force was the object of more personnel reductions and increased censorship; some were even imprisoned.⁶⁴ The germ of rebellion spread slowly but surely; the teachers were preparing -without fully realizing it- to play a major role in the overthrow of Tinoco.

C. The limits of civilian endurance

1. The armed movement

The first seditious movement against the Tinoco regime (July, 1917) culminated with the imprisonment of a few people who were guilty of political intrigues, and many more who were innocent victims. The Tinocos were not taking chances, and imprisonment was a key instrument to intimidate potential traitors.⁶⁵

Nine months after the coup, a new conspiracy was planned. Under the leadership of the Volio brothers - Alfredo and Jorge- twelve prominent Costa Rican politicians were ready to confront violence with violence. The group had expected the aid of the United States, but Wilson refused to support Tinoco's overthrow by violent means. He was convinced that only through "moral force" could a constitutional and legal government be established in Costa Rica.⁶⁶

The old Cartago family of Volio Jiménez was large and distinguished, and linked to agriculture, law, politics and religion. Of seventeen brothers and sisters, four members were outstanding. Claudio, an influential prelate who became a bishop in Honduras; Jorge, a priest graduated from

Louvain in Belgium and a man of advanced political action and ideals; and Alfredo and Arturo, articulate lawyers and politicians. Although related by family ties (Arturo was married to Tinoco's niece), the friendship between both families had turned into hatred long before the coup. An "offense of honour" that implicated Alfredo and one of the Tinoco sisters, was the cause of the feud. This enmity proved pivotal at this moment of political deterioration and unrest. The Volio brothers, particularly Alfredo, were natural opposition leaders.

Alfredo Volio planned to go to Panama to obtain aid from United States authorities based in the Canal Zone, and later move to Nicaragua where he would launch an invasion. He believed that the Costa Rican people would massively join the movement once it began, and trusted that a series of popular uprisings would compel Tinoco to step down. However, Volio's plans were frustrated in Panama when he was unable to obtain the help he had sought from the US.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, a small group of politicians, most of whom had been members of the González Flores administration, united under the leadership of Rogelio Fernández Güell. This group had the support of the United States Chargé d'Affaires in Costa Rica, Stewart Johnson. In defiance of President Wilson's policies, Johnson was determined to help overthrow the régime.⁶⁸

In February 1918, Tinoco was warned by his secret espionage service about the imminent danger of an armed insurrection, and had time to react and counter-attack. He ordered the immediate imprisonment of civilians suspected of having participated in the plot. Among them was Arturo Volio, Alfredo's brother, and some others whom

the police compelled to confess.⁶⁹ Tinoco also ordered military reinforcements in strategic sites such as ports and frontiers.

Although frustrated and heartbroken, the few remaining revolutionaries continued with their plans. The rebels' lack of military experience, co-ordination, and arms and ammunitions favoured Tinoco. By 27 February 1918, the armed movement had been dismantled, most rebels had been captured, and the government had recovered political control.⁷⁰

The first serious attempt to overthrow the Tinoco regime ended tragically. On their way to safety in Panama, Rogelio Fernández Güell and some of his followers, found resting and unarmed, were massacred by the Government's henchmen.⁷¹ This crime convulsed Costa Rican society.

The February movement, although unsuccessful, undermined still further Tinoco's support, causing even some members of his cabinet and a few high ranking public officials to turn against him.

In March 1918, Alfredo Volio and his men made a weak attempt to launch an invasion from Panama. Although it never materialized, the movement deepened the tension that surrounded Tinoco while stimulating more domestic dissension and protest. Fourteen men with twenty-one rifles were significantly magnified by rumours and alarmist news from Panama. Tinoco reacted by setting up more restrictive military measures, increasing forced recruitment and implementing even more repressive measures.⁷²

Several weeks later, the revolutionary group decided to leave Panama, and took refuge in Nicaragua. With President Emilio Chamorro's consent and support, the Costa Ricans started to organize an armed movement. Chamorro was convinced that Tinoco represented a threat to Nicaragua.⁷³ Therefore, he decided not only to protect the rebels but also to provide the organization with men, arms and ammunitions.

Tinoco desperately sought allies to confront this new threat. He found the greatest assistance in Nicaragua, among Chamorro's enemies. The Nicaraguan Liberal Party helped Tinoco reorganize the army and provided him with the military expertise that the Costa Ricans lacked. Furthermore, many Liberal partisans came to join the Costa Rican army and occupied high ranking posts.

Fearing an invasion from Costa Rica, Chamorro tried to convince other Central American countries to help overthrow the Tinoco regime. Although El Salvador and Guatemala refused, Honduras agreed to provide ammunitions and men. President Wilson did not sympathise with this turn of events. In obstinate fashion, he refused to subscribe to an armed movement against Tinoco.⁷⁴

In December 1918, the revolutionaries suffered a great misfortune. Alfredo Volio suddenly died in Nicaragua, presumably of malaria.⁷⁵ The group named Julio Acosta - González Flores' Minister of Foreign Relations and a diplomat- to take the vacant leadership. This incident delayed still further the already slow preparations for invasion.⁷⁶

During the first months of 1919, the revolutionary

movement based in Nicaragua acquired strength. Meanwhile, Tinoco was preparing the counterattack. He adopted strict security measures, and forced the military recruitment of many workers, especially peasants. The recruitment further disrupted the economy since the crucial coffee crops were ready for harvest.⁷⁷

In May 1919, the invasion was finally launched with three hundred revolutionaries, of whom only 32 were Costa Ricans. The movement was intrinsically weak. First, Julio Acosta did not have any military training or experience; second, the group was very small and poorly equipped; finally, Acosta faced frequent desertion and disciplinary problems among the mercenaries. The numerical and military inferiority with respect to Tinoco's forces was evident.

The first military clashes were small in scale. However, on 26 May 1919, a major confrontation took place. The battle of "El Jobo" was a rotund failure for the revolutionaries.⁷⁸ It decimated the group and almost terminated the movement. Nevertheless, the rebels remained in Costa Rican territory, in the northern province of Guanacaste, where they were involved in continuous but minor skirmishes.⁷⁹

Although the results of the revolutionary uprising were decisively negative, they did not constitute a total victory for Tinoco. First, the presence of the rebels in Guanacaste created serious economic problems and increased the already dangerous social unrest. Second, their activities threatened to engage Costa Rica in an international conflict with Nicaragua and Honduras. Finally, the revolutionary activities in Guanacaste became an inspiration for the rebels in the rest of the country.

2. Popular uprising and teacher leadership

While a few revolutionaries painfully prepared the armed movement in Nicaragua, in the Costa Rican capital of San José, underground agitation was growing. This time it was not the political elite who were conspiring to overthrow a feared and despised government. Those who had supported the Tinoco coup d'état -with few honourable exceptions- were not engaging in political intrigues or machinations. Although most of them did not approve of development of events, they nonetheless accepted the dictatorship in order to safeguard their interests and privileges. Even the ex-presidents abstained from protesting openly against the régime, after Tinoco imprudently and despotically altered the Constitution they had drafted with so much care.⁸⁰

Where were the "Olympians"? What was the Colegio de Abogados doing to help depose the dictator? It was apparent that the majority of the leading Liberal politicians were keeping their distance. They did not want to endanger the establishment by letting it fall once again in the hands of political newcomers and social reformers. Jacinto López, an acute Venezuelan critic, was the first to denounce such complicity publicly. In 1917 he wrote:

El señor Tinoco ha causado un incalculable daño a su patria y a la América. Su patria, excepcional y famosa entre las Repúblicas centroamericanas por su amor a la paz y a la libertad, por la estabilidad y la benignidad de sus gobiernos, por su adhesión al orden y a los procedimientos normales (la Constitución contaba medio siglo de existencia, caso raro en América,) ha sufrido en su crédito, y sin duda se ha

debilitado en su confianza en sí misma y en su moralidad pública. La Asamblea Constituyente no tuvo reparo en llegar hasta la sordidez, duplicando sus dietas por el hecho de celebrar sesiones nocturnas además de las sesiones diurnas. Los redactores del proyecto de Constitución presentado a la Asamblea, cobraron, cada uno, tres mil colones por su colaboración. La América ha sufrido también en su crédito, y el ejemplo será nocivo. La causa de la legalidad y del derecho es hoy más débil en América por ese golpe. Y la libertad no ha salido viva de esa aventura. El 16 de mayo la Asamblea Constituyente invistió al señor Tinoco de Facultades extraordinarias. Era la reaparición de la dictadura, ahora con sanción legal, y a la postre, del gastado proceso de formalidades convencionales para la aparente y nominal restauración del Gobierno Constitucional.⁸¹

Three years later, Tranquilino Chacón commented:

¿cuál de tales ex-Presidentes protestó después en alguna forma -reiterando ostentiblemente su apoyo al señor Tinoco- precisamente cuando éste empezó a hacer de las suyas, alterando en un sentido despótico el proyecto de constitución y reduciendo a Costa Rica a la última miseria moral y económica como nunca antes se había visto.
(...)

Vimos al lado de Pelico en una fiesta de la Independencia Nacional a don Bernardo Soto, acompañado de los caballeros don Luis Anderson y don Jorge Morales Bejarano. Departían los tres fraternalmente con Pelico. ¡Qué sarcasmo! La tiranía celebrando la libertad!⁸²

On the other hand, the élite had been spared the most negative effects of the crisis. Although some of its members had to pay new taxes, many benefited from the economic situation. As coffee and banana exports increased and speculation of many kinds proliferated, the traditional way of living of the privileged remained unchanged. Furthermore, many had succumbed to the tempting glamour of

the Presidential "court" participating in its extravagant parties and ceremonies.⁸³

Therefore, the dominant groups were not to play a role in the overthrow of tyranny. Who, then, was to assume the leadership? As the traditional political cluster moved into the background, members of the new intellectual elite moved forward and accepted the challenge. The Normalistas and their pupils were to lead the country once again to political stability.

In November 1918, a series of popular marches were organized, supposedly to celebrate the end of the World War and the allied victory. However, those demonstrations very soon degenerated into protest marches against the government. On 13 November, 1919, the demonstrators gathered in front of the United States diplomatic mission. Shortly after their arrival, the police force intervened and dispersed the demonstration.⁸⁴

The next day, a large crowd defied the government's warnings and gathered again in front of the American Legation. This time they sang patriotic songs and cheered the United States, President Wilson and leading opponents of the Tinoco regime. At the same time they started to rail against Tinoco and his regime. Stewart Johnson the US Chargé d'Affaires, aggravated police tension when he agreed to give a spontaneous speech. In an obvious reference to Tinoco, he said his country had defeated kaiserism in Europe and that the United States was now determined to eradicate it in Central America. This was the excuse awaited by the repressive forces to break up the demonstration. By means of vicious sabre blows on the backs of the demonstrators, the multitude was rapidly dispersed.⁸⁵

Johnson claimed the police action was an insult to the United States government; Tinoco replied that the gathering had been illegal and that Johnson was using the diplomatic mission to organize a demonstration against the government. On 15 November, Tinoco discussed with his cabinet the possibility of expelling Johnson. The day after, in Congress, he pronounced an extremely harsh speech against the Chargé d'Affaires. The United States Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, ordered Johnson to return immediately to his country and to close the diplomatic mission in San José.⁸⁶

The withdrawal of Johnson did not end the dispute between the administration and the American diplomatic representatives in Costa Rica. Representation of the United States fell to Benjamin Chase, the Consul in San José. Like Johnson, Chase was to interfere in Costa Rica's domestic problems; he also criticised the government and helped the rebels.⁸⁷

In May 1919, the Argentinean union leader and intellectual, Julio R. Barcos arrived in Costa Rica and gave several lectures in San José with great success.⁸⁸ On 4 June, when he was addressing a large audience, a teacher, Matilde Carranza Volio, interrupted him to denounce the Tinoco regime. Arguing that she was a victim of persecution because of her relation to the Volio brothers, Doña Matilde prompted other teachers to express their animosity towards the dictatorship.⁸⁹ This incident initiated a series of popular demonstrations that were to have far-reaching consequences for Tinoco. Three days later, a group of teachers inspired by Barco's ideas, decided to create the National Teacher's Association in

order to unite and fight for their rights.

On Monday, 9 June, a critical week began. That day a group of school inspectors, directors and teachers were called to the Presidential Palace. Juan Dávila, Fidel Tristán, José Guerrero, Patrocinio Arrieta and Miguel Obregón were among the well-known educators convoked. The Ministers of Instruction and of the Interior presented the visitors with a letter that they and their subordinates were to sign.

The aim of this document was to force all government employees publicly to support the régime and condemn the revolutionary movement. Furthermore, the document would compel them to contribute 20% of their already wretched salaries to the government to finance increasing military expenditures.

The document began to circulate in the schools on Tuesday. Teachers were to sign one sheet if they agreed with the conditions of the document, and another sheet, if they opposed it. It was evident that the government would later take reprisals; José Guerrero and Esther de Mezerville, San José school inspectors, were the first educators to defy the régime and sign the "blacklist"; thereafter, the teachers' rejection was almost unanimous.⁹⁰

The following day, Tinoco was compelled to halt the circulation of the document. Furious, he threatened to close primary and secondary schools in order to carry out a "personnel reorganization". It was clear that the dictator planned to punish the rebellious teachers. That same day, in the Liceo de Costa Rica, the student Napoleón Pacheco pronounced a vibrant speech inciting his classmates

to support the teachers who would not sign the infamous letter. The harangue ended with a passionate demonstration against the régime. The Liceo director, Juan Dávila, fearing a Government reprisal, dismissed the students. Once in the streets, the 400 Liceists headed towards the Colegio Superior de Señoritas cheering the revolution, Julio Acosta, and the educators who had refused to sign the letter.

The protest march soon became a large demonstration. As the students walked down the streets, many other students, children, men, and women joined the group in spontaneous support of the prevailing general discontent towards the régime. However, it was not to last for long. The police intervened and dissolved the crowd. Sabre blows and beatings subdued the movement and several students and teachers were arrested.⁹¹

That afternoon, the teachers were summoned to a meeting in the Edificio Metálico with the aim of naming the directors of the new National Teachers Association. However, the President, fearing a conspiracy, sent the Technical Head of the Ministry of Instruction, Salvador Villar, together with a police detachment, to prevent the teachers from entering the building. In response, the teachers pulled out some Pacaya leaves -green being the colour of the revolutionaries' flag- and walked silently to the Juan Rafael Mora plaza, located in front of the National Theatre. There, they asked Julio Barcos to speak, and later, they named by acclamation the new directors of their association. Finally, they sang the National Anthem.⁹²

On Thursday, La Información published an interview in which Tinoco stated that he was determined to reorganize

the teaching personnel; he would decrease their numbers but pay better salaries to those who stayed. In the same edition, the Minister of Instruction announced that the school inspectors would be suppressed and school holidays would begin.⁹³

The government reprisal did not halt the rebellion. That same afternoon the students and teachers of Colegio de Señoritas lead a new protest march. This time many more people, including numerous workers, joined the group. Many students and teachers were dressed in green and carried pictures of Julio Acosta. The demonstrators tried to gather in the Central Park but police surrounded and closed the area, claiming that such marches were forbidden. The leaders decided to assemble in front of the U.S. Consulate. Advancing towards Chase's offices, the crowd grew larger and more excited. From the Consulate balcony ardent speakers openly criticized the régime and even denounced the Tinoco brothers as "bandits". The crowd cheered again, and urged Chase to give a speech. He finally accepted and thanked the people in Spanish. Then, addressing the crowd he spoke just one sentence:

el mundo simpatizaría con ellos si supiera lo que les estaba pasando⁹⁴

Until that moment, the police had observed the movement cautiously. However, that phrase was enough to unleash their anger and violence. They began to beat the crowd with sabre and strap blows, hitting children, women and men indiscriminately, even using the "Knox bomb", a potent water fire extinguisher, to disperse the crowd. Many people sought refuge in the American Consulate.⁹⁵

On Friday 13, La Información published an Executive disposition which prohibited all meetings and marches, threatening to imprison and impose fines on all those who disobeyed:

Al público se hace saber: Queda prohibida toda reunión o aglomeración de personas mayores o menores de edad en calles, plazas, u otros lugares públicos, cualquiera que sea su objeto, así como las que sin licencia pretendan celebrar en salones destinados a conferencias o discursos para el público.⁹⁶

However, the tide of rebellion could no longer be contained. The people's endurance had been severely tested; the moment had come to unleash their frustrations and contempt, even at a price that Costa Ricans were not used to paying: violence. As Eduardo Oconitrillo points out:

Las amenazas del Gobierno no podían ya amedrentar al pueblo de San José que amaneció ese día enardecido, deseoso de cobrarse el ultraje hecho a las maestras y a las colegialas el día anterior y el ordenado cierre de escuelas.⁹⁷

Once again, the leaders were teachers and students. The inflamed crowd ended its march by burning La Información, the official régime newspaper and symbol of the tyranny. This time, the police fired directly into the multitude, killing several people and injuring many more.⁹⁸

After the burning of the newspaper, 121 teachers resigned. Minister Anastasio Alfaro, fearful of the teachers' belligerency also resigned. He was substituted by Guillermo Vargas Calvo. A presidential decree ordered compensation to the owners of La Información and the police

became more alert, suspicious and violent. As Julio Barcos later wrote:

Enseguida se implantó el régimen del terror. Si al acto de justicia popular se le ha llamado bolchevismo en acción, cómo podría llamarse el procedimiento terrorista del Gobierno que asesina mujeres y niños indefensos en la vía pública? Desde ese momento la consigna de la policía era: el que grite un viva, un tiro! Y el homicidio alevoso y cobarde abrió su serie en todas las calles de las ciudad...⁹⁹

These were the ominous and immediate consequences of the tragic week. However, the movement had fatally injured the regime. From then on, its days were numbered.

The role played by teachers and students had been crucial. Not only had they shown great courage and strength, but also the capacity to assume the leadership necessary to overthrow the régime. When the established ruling elite did not react, the educators proved ready to assume the challenge and defy the tyrant. They were to have the honour of awakening the civic dignity of the country.

D. The final collapse

1. The threat of invasion

Benjamin Chase was in conflict with the Tinoco regime from the moment he assumed control of the American Legation. He did not hide his profound dislike of the dictatorship nor his desire to see another man as President of Costa Rica.

As Tinoco furiously recognized:

El Cónsul Chase se ha dejado manipular por los revolucionarios, ya sea porque heredó los prejuicios de Johnson o porque ha caído bajo la influencia de los intrigantes revolucionarios quienes son sus amigos íntimos.¹⁰⁰

When the revolutionary invasion began in May 1919, Chase's nervousness reached an almost paranoid level. He asked the State Department for prompt and adequate measures to protect the lives and property of United States residents in Costa Rica. He urged for the presence of warships on both coasts and, if possible, marines in San José as long as the situation was not resolved.

After the incidents of 12 and 13 June, he exaggerated even more the danger to American residents in Costa Rica and insisted on the necessity of sending warships to Puntarenas and Limón immediately. He later sent alarmist messages to the warships anchored in Bluefields, Nicaragua to come to the rescue of U.S. citizens. The captain of the "U.S.S. Castine" rapidly complied with the demands of Chase and anchored in Limón.

The arrival of the "Castine" in the Atlantic port further complicated Tinoco's situation. Thinking that an armed invasion from the US was now inevitable, Tinoco assumed a conciliatory attitude while he tried to prepare a counter-attack. Tinoco requested a group of Latin American diplomats stationed in Costa Rica to help him halt the landing of marines. The commission was able temporarily to convince the captain of the "Castine" that there was no danger to the lives or property of US citizens.¹⁰¹

2. A cornered dictator

The convergence of three factors finally made Tinoco's situation untenable: increasing popular unrest, Acosta's military skirmishes in the North and the ever-present threat of an armed invasion from the United States. Tinoco was under intense pressure to abandon the country; even members of his government were asking him to leave in order to save the country from civil war and foreign military intervention.

On 7 August, the Minister of War told a group of soldiers and policemen that he and his brother had decided to leave the country in order to prevent an intervention by the United States. In a highly arrogant fashion, José Joaquín started his speech by saying:

Compañeros: He venido para comunicarles el paso que van a dar los Tinoco. Pero antes quiero que en vuestra memoria y en vuestros corazones quede grabado el nombre de nosotros los Tinoco, porque oíganlo bien, hemos logrado con nuestra energía salvar al país de la intervención extranjera y como honrados y patriotas no hemos querido permitir que los americanos se apoderen de esta tierra tan querida y digna de vosotros. Nos vamos los Tinoco, pero nos vamos porque nos da la gana; bien podríamos estar en el poder 5, 10, 20 años si quisiéramos.¹⁰²

That same afternoon in Congress, Federico Tinoco delivered a harsh speech attacking the United States, and requested permission to leave the country for health reasons.¹⁰³

On 9 August, José Joaquín resigned as First Designate; Congress named Juan Bautista Quirós to replace him. Two days later, José Joaquín was killed by an unknown assassin

while he was walking home. It is still not known whether his murder was the act of a political or personal enemy.¹⁰⁴

José Joaquín's death accelerated Federico's departure. The next day, in a brief ceremony, Tinoco designated Juan Bautista Quirós as his successor and signed his resignation as President. One hour later he departed to Limón where he boarded a ship for England, never to return to Costa Rica.

But Tinoco's departure did not end Costa Rica's political upheaval. Juan Bautista Quirós was not accepted as President by either the Government of the United States or Acosta's revolutionaries. The United States Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, sent extremely arrogant instructions which were, in short, an ultimatum to Quirós to leave the Presidency. The United States sent a warship to Puntarenas in order to exert more pressure. Quirós called leading politicians for advice; the majority of the sixty "notables" voted to accept immediately the demands of the US. The drama initiated on 27 January 1917 ended in an embarrassing compliance with Uncle Sam's dictates. Not only had the country suffered domestic strife; it had also received a resounding blow to its sovereignty. Jacinto López keenly pointed out:

en Costa Rica la destrucción del Gobierno Constitucional ha tenido por consecuencia el abatimiento de la soberanía y de la independencia nacional.

Por obra y gracia de la ambición (...) de Tinoco, un Gobierno extranjero ha venido a ser (...) el árbitro de las cuestiones políticas internas del país. El despotismo, que era desconocido en Costa Rica (...) no sólo ha matado la libertad (...) sino que ha destruido la nacionalidad.¹⁰⁵

The appearance of despotism in Costa Rica -even though easily imputed to a group of unscrupulous men- had deeper roots. It originated in the dominant groups' fears of losing their privileges and benefits. Although these groups had favoured a consensually oriented state ever since the late nineteenth century, they accepted flagrant political irregularities in order to maintain their economic prerogatives and social status. It is not a coincidence that with few exceptions, the most prominent Liberal politicians and respected lawyers who had a particularly profound understanding of the constitutional and legal violations, remained silent and passive.

As long as consensus reproduced the traditional social structure, it was favoured by the governing elite. However, when ideological submission proved insufficient to prevent structural changes that were to alter considerably the established order, that same elite approved momentarily the use of force in order to regain its power and control. The combination of external and domestic factors was to turn temporary force into institutional repression. Yet most members of the oligarchy preferred to accept this course of events in order to safeguard their status and privileges.

Although most Costa Ricans would prefer to believe that the "Military Interregnum" was the deed of one man and his close associates, in reality Tinoco could not have stayed in power without having the support -or the passive acceptance- of prominent members of the oligarchy.

During thirty months of tyrannical rule, the dominant groups suffered no ill-effects of the political and economic chaos; on the contrary, many profited. It was the

low-income masses, and particularly, public employees - including teachers- and urban workers, who suffered the weight of the crisis. Meagre salaries, unemployment, speculation, scarcity and hunger became their everyday problems. As the economic turmoil deepened, so did their difficulties.

The protest demonstrations were a logical consequence of their situation. Under the dictatorial régime, the first timid attempts to denounce existing conditions were severely punished. In the face of repression, only popular leadership was able to unite the hitherto dispersed voices of opposition. When traditional statesmen refused to take the lead, a new force assumed leadership: the teaching personnel.

The role of teachers as leaders was not surprising. Filling the political vacuum, members of the new intellectual élite -especially those who assembled in the Escuela Normal- took up the challenge of defying the dictatorship from the very start. While some chose to confront the régime through revolution, others decided to struggle underground. However, increased repression halted a widespread opposition movement until June 1919.

The teachers at the Escuela Normal exerted great leverage over their pupils as well as their secondary and primary school counterparts. Not only respected as educators, they were highly appreciated as intellectuals who often defied the established order and official ideology. At the same time, in a country which had placed such political and social importance on education, teachers were highly respected. Even though members of the teaching profession were underpaid (as they are today) they were the

object of special esteem and deference from the masses. Furthermore, in numerical terms the teaching force was very influential, accounting for roughly one-quarter of all public employees.

The attempt to force educators to sign the circular in June 1919 provoked their uprising, and with it, the outbreak of a general protest movement against the régime. Under the leadership of the teachers -most of whom were women- other public employees, urban workers, and artisans were to unleash their frustrations and contempt; while a few revolutionaries were fighting in Guanacaste, in San José common people had taken the initiative to overthrow the tyrant. For Tinoco and his men, these opponents proved more powerful than the revolutionaries.

After Tinoco's departure, the country was faced with the difficult task of reconstruction. The established system had been disrupted in such a way that the elaboration of a new political and social pact was imperative. Costa Rica was devastated economically and at a critical crossroads politically. Although the traditional governing élite still held economic power and political control, their authority had diminished. This situation was to render possible the opening of the political system and the interplay of various forces which strived to achieve power and influence.

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11. Idem. Page 114.
12. Quoted by Ramón Zelaya, Op.Cit. Page 5.
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30. Idem.
31. La Información, (1917) 22 July.
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33. Murillo, (1981) Op.Cit. Pages 95-97.
34. See Chapter I, point C.
35. Brenes, Roberto. (1943) "Entrevistas" In: Diario de Costa Rica. 10 to 25 February.
36. During 1915, Costa Rica's diplomatic representatives in Washington, Roberto Brenes Mesén and writer Manuel González Zeledón (better known as "Magón") were accused of permitting an enemy ship to change its Liberian flag for a Costa Rican flag. The "Marina Quesada" supposedly transported

ammunitions and arms from the United States to Panama. Referring to this incident said La Epoca on 13 April:

Fuimos los primeros en dar al público la noticia de que algo anormal sucedía en las alturas gubernativas, que había dado origen a un conflicto con nuestro ministro en Washington; fuimos los primeros también en advertir a nuestros lectores, que había caído del alto puesto a que lo elevara el favoritismo oficial, el conocido exprofesor Roberto Brenes Mesén...

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61. La Prensa Libre. (1918). 13 July.
62. La Prensa Libre. (1918). 16 September. (Bonilla became very famous after obtaining a gold medal in a prestigious sculpture contest held in Paris, France, in 1907).
63. La Prensa Libre. (1918). 6 and 11 November.
64. Zelaya (1919) Op.Cit. Pages 57-63.
65. Oconitrillo (1980) Op.Cit. Chapter IV.
66. Volio (1918) Op.Cit. Pages 34-45.
67. Oconitrillo (1980) Los Tinoco. Op.Cit. Pages 43-56.
68. Murillo (1980) Op.Cit. Chapters V-VI.
69. Arturo Volio was my grandfather. Ever since I was a child, my mother and aunts, told me -many times- how their father and his friends had been imprisoned and mistreated under the tyrannic rule. Arturo Volio was married to Zoila Guardia Tinoco (my grandmother) who was Federico Tinoco's niece.
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72. Murillo (1981) Op.Cit. Page 116.

73. Tinoco's stubbornness in holding on to power threatened to engage Central America in an international conflict. The possibility of United States' armed intervention created great concern.
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93. La Información. (1919). 12 June, 1919.

94. Murillo, (1981) Op.Cit. Page 140.
95. Barcos, (1919) Op.Cit. Page 99.
96. La Información. (1919). 13 June.
97. Oconitrillo (1980) Los Tinoco. Op.Cit. Page 167.
98. Barcos, (1919) Op.Cit.
99. Idem. Page 108.
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Chapter Four

AFTER THE STORM

(1919-1924)

CHAPTER IV. AFTER THE STORM (1919-1924)

A. The aftermath of tyranny

1. The return to constitutional normality

Tinoco's designated successor, Juan Bautista Quirós -former Minister of Public Works and Director of the International Bank- was to last only a few weeks in power before being ousted from the Presidency. Quirós had wanted to remain for the rest of Tinoco's six year term, which would have expired in May, 1923.¹

Don Juan Bautista immediately tried to win public favour and support, and made a good start. He promised to free all political prisoners, invited rebels and exiles to return to the country, lifted the press censorship, demobilized the armed forces, and requested the departure of Nicaraguan mercenaries who had assisted Tinoco.²

Nevertheless, Quirós was rejected by the people, suspicious of his intimate association with the Tinoco régime. Many feared that he would not call for elections and would be unable to control the army. The US State Department agreed with this view, and decided that Quirós could not stay in power.³

The North Americans had three main reasons for opposing Quirós. In the first place, when Wilson determined his policy towards Costa Rica in January 1917, he vowed not to recognize Tinoco or any government

organized by him, his relatives or close associates. Second, the United States had not recognized the 1917 Constitution, which was still standing in 1919. Third, the revolutionary group led by Acosta would not accept Quirós as president because:

su gobierno no es nuevo ni diferente; no es sino una continuación del régimen ilegal y repudiado por Tinoco...⁴

On 13 August, ex-president Alfredo González Flores informed Robert Lansing that Acosta and his men would not disarm until constitutional order had been re-established. Six days later, the United States decided that Quirós should relinquish power to Francisco Aguilar Barquero, Third Designate during the administration of Alfredo González Flores. Barquero would serve as interim leader until a free and open election, in accordance with the 1871 Constitution, could be held. According to Lansing:

El poder gubernamental debe ser depositado en manos de Francisco (Aguilar) Barquero sucesor del poder ejecutivo en el régimen de Alfredo González Flores. (Aguilar) Barquero debe convocar a elecciones para presidente en la fecha más temprana que sea posible. Cuando se haya hecho ésto, se habrá cumplido con las formalidades legales necesarias para constituir un gobierno legítimo y merecedor del reconocimiento de los Estados Unidos.⁵

With Wilson's consent, Lansing sent instructions to Consul Benjamin Chase on 30 August that amounted to an ultimatum: Chase was to communicate that the US government would not recognize Quirós, and suggest that

his refusal to withdraw from the presidency would provoke direct intervention by the United States.⁶

In response to this arrogant meddling in Costa Rica's domestic affairs, Quirós decided to convoke a "Board of Notables". He called the country's most prominent politicians, including former presidents, in order to make a decision. With the exception of a few dissenters who opposed submission to the dictates of the United States, the majority of the sixty members voted in favour of complying with that country's demands.⁷

Although Aguilar Barquero frankly admitted that the Constitutional term for which he had been elected had already expired (May 1918), he was willing to accept the nomination in order to save national autonomy and prevent armed intervention. Nonetheless, he stated that he was not going to call immediately for elections, as some groups wished; instead he would wait until peace and harmony were restored in the country.⁸

On 2 September, Juan Bautista Quirós' short term came to an end. By decree, Francisco Aguilar Barquero, the provisional President chosen by the US and former Designate of the González Flores administration, acceded to power. He immediately declared the 1917 constitution to be null and reinstated that of 1871.⁹ Nevertheless, Aguilar Barquero's decision to keep Juan Bautista Quirós as Minister of War -an extremely sensitive post- and his resistance to calling for elections were opposed by both the State Department and González Flores' group. Two US warships were sent to Puntarenas. Faced with imminent

armed intervention, Aguilar Barquero complied immediately with the demands of the United States government. He called general elections for 1 December 1919, under the 1871 Constitution, decreed general amnesty for all political crimes committed during the Tinoco regime, and dismissed Quirós.¹⁰

On 13 September, Julio Acosta together with some one hundred men victoriously entered San José. Acosta was welcomed as a hero by a frenzied multitude. That same day, Don Julio was proclaimed candidate for the Presidency.¹¹ A few weeks later, the revolutionary leader would be elected constitutional President of Costa Rica.

The 7 December elections were a patriotic festival. By an overwhelming number of votes, Julio Acosta was elected President of Costa Rica. With his election, the "Military Interregnum" had finally come to an end, but Costa Rica was to reassume civilian life in very difficult economic and social circumstances.¹²

2. A bankrupt Public Treasury

After thirty months of dictatorship, the national treasury was in a disastrous condition. The domestic debt had tripled since the coup, an increase of more than 21 million colones. There were many money orders in private hands which the government had to redeem; there was a near total lack of metal currency; interest payments on the internal debt were heavily in arrears; government credit was completely ended in Costa Rica and

abroad. Furthermore, another fiduciary emission, this time amounting to 15 million colones, had been authorized by decree in 28 June. As Tomás Soley Güell explained:

Treinta meses de esta clase de finanzas -si tal nombre merecen las actividades de aquel Gobierno contra el Tesoro del Estado y contra la economía nacional- habrían de dejarnos sin circulación monetaria, con el fardo de una deuda injustificable, reatados por contratos onerosos, y con el bochorno histórico de procedimientos administrativos reñidos no sólo con los sanos principios económicos y hacendarios, sino también con los de la ética.¹³

During his eight-month administration, Francisco Aguilar Barquero had concentrated on re-establishing order and repairing the harmful financial consequences of Tinoco's regime. He annulled dubious contracts awarded to Tinoco's close associates involving the match and cigarette paper monopolies, the deposit and sale of liquors, as well as all "donations" and other payments made out of the budget.¹⁴

In addition, Aguilar Barquero decided to halt the enormous 15 million colón fiduciary emission, and decided to refrain from acquiring new debts. Regardless of the fact that most public resources were already committed to specific credits, -in particular, foreign and domestic loans- the President thought it necessary to confront economic penury rather than increase indebtedness.¹⁵

A few days before Tinoco's departure, the regime had extended several onerous bills against the Banco Internacional, which were in different hands waiting to

be redeemed against the new fiduciary emission. Concerning these cheques and bank notes, irregular negotiations had taken place.¹⁶ In order to prevent the payment of such notes, the Provisional Government decreed a one year moratorium in favour of the Banco Internacional, declaring that all matters regarding those debts would require authorization by Congress. Aguilar Barquero also abolished the hated sales tax, which proved in any case, to be difficult to collect.¹⁷

A sense of optimism and an influx of foreign currency helped to revitalize the depressed economy. Aguilar Barquero's financial measures were welcomed by the public. He inspired great confidence not only because of his kindness, his unpretentious family life, and his honesty, but also because he seemed to have a clear vision of public affairs.

The price of coffee increased to record breaking heights; while the 1918 harvest brought in 8 million colones in 1919, coffee revenues had more than tripled, to 25 million colones. Because of its high price on the world market, sugar also became a major export product. The value of the colón improved considerably, as its premium over gold decreased from 450 to 285%.¹⁸ In all of these improvements, psychological as well as purely economic factors played a role.

Prosperity and a general atmosphere of confidence permitted rapid and trouble free salary negotiations between the government and business sectors and several workers' unions and associations. Wage increases were

also granted to many public employees, including teachers.¹⁹

The end of the First World War, the craze for quick profits, domestic confidence, the need to restock poorly supplied commercial establishments and the attractive prices received for exports were factors which contributed to the extraordinary increase in imports: 8 million colones in 1918, 16 million in 1919 and 38 million in 1920.²⁰ The increase reflected not only quantity in real terms but the higher costs of imported goods. As Minister of Finance, Nicolás Chavarría explained:

La escasa importación a que se vio obligado nuestro comercio de 1915 a 1918 inclusive, hizo que consumida toda la existencia de mercaderías importadas que en el país había en 1914, nos encontrásemos desprovistos de casi todo, cuando se abrieron de nuevo libremente al comercio del mundo los mercados europeos y americanos.

La necesidad, pues, de proveernos de efectos de comercio y acaso también el afán de lucro a que se habituaron quienes habían aprovechado los años de escasez para vender con ganancias no soñadas sus existencias, hizo que en pocos meses nuestras aduanas se vieran colmadas de mercaderías y que en el año de 1920 se haya registrado la más grande importación habida en Costa Rica.²¹

During 1919 and the first months of 1920, the excellent price of coffee and high prices obtained for sugar, cocoa and leather on the world international market, created extreme confidence and high expectations. People believed that gold -foreign currency- was to be abundant, and imports consequently soared. (See Table

IV). Nevertheless, this confidence proved to be ill-founded. In the case of coffee, as opposed to 25 dollars that were expected as net price per "quintal" (46 kilograms), 15 dollars were finally received. In the case of sugar, the final volume exported was considerably lower than that which had been projected.²²

Erroneous calculations, consumer euphoria, salary rises, and the exaggerated prices of imported articles very soon brought an inflation and with it the 1921-1922 economic crisis that was to haunt the first two years of the Acosta administration. The government was forced to restrict some imports and confine the privilege of emission to the national bank, the Internacional. This last step was designed to create special revenues for paying off domestic debts.²³

The combination of austere financial measures - among others, the creation of an Audit and Control office to regulate public expenditures and the adherence to annual budget laws- and the increase in the price of exports, particularly coffee, promoted economic recuperation after 1922. The project to give the state bank sole emission of currency created extensive debate. After many months of confrontation between those who favoured interventionism and those who held to traditional Liberal concepts, the state bank thesis finally triumphed. The government re-established the free circulation of gold and silver (which had been prohibited in 1914 because of the severe economic crisis) and unified the design of bank notes.²⁴

From 1923 onwards the economy improved notably. Not only was the price of coffee, sugar, and bananas increasing in the international market, but for the first time in many years (ever since 1910) the country was able to reduce the public debt, and end the economic period with a surplus. Furthermore, the trade balance was positive.²⁵ (See Table IV).

Economic prosperity lasted for several years. During this time, the government's policy, true to Liberal postulates, was oriented towards the expansion of traditional exports, coffee in particular. At the same time, it favoured increasing imports in order to augment public resources through customs revenues. As the Public Treasury recuperated, certain taxes were eliminated, such as the bank taxes decreed during the Tinoco administration.²⁶

B. The political game

1. New actors in the political arena

The economic crisis as well as several financial measures taken by government particularly affected the living conditions of the working classes. From 1914 to 1919, public employees experienced successive salary reductions and dismissals, while the decrease in imports and the devaluation of the colón, resulted in scarcity and price increases in basic foodstuffs. The "subsistence problem" became a crucial issue for the workers; hunger and unemployment were common enemies.²⁷

The 1914-1919 period reflected the limitations of Costa Rican democracy, but at the same time, it opened the political arena to new participants.

During the interventionist parenthesis (1914-1917), the role of the working classes seemed minimal. The distrust of some unions and associations towards the electoral system, the negative effects of the economic crisis, and some of the measures taken by President Alfredo González Flores -in particular, the reduction in public employees' salaries- prevented the masses from sympathizing with and supporting González Flores and his reformist project. However, during Tinoco's dictatorship, many working people did not remain passive in the face of the abuse and arbitrariness of government, and the critical deterioration of their living conditions. Groups of urban workers joined the teachers and other public employees to protest bravely against the régime in the November 1918 and June 1919 demonstrations.

The popular mobilization led by the teachers, was to be decisive in the overthrow of the dictatorship. While political leaders remained passive, subordinate social actors strived to restore constitutional normality. However, although the tyrant had been expelled, the "subsistence problem" had not disappeared. In 1919 and the first months of the following year, low salaries and the high prices of consumer goods combined to worsen the already difficult living conditions of the common people. During those months, there were also shortages of basic staples such as bread, beans, sugar, molasses and meat. The working classes and certain sectors of the press

attributed the shortages -and their immediate consequences, exorbitant prices- to speculation, monopoly and the export of products such as sugar and meat.

At the end of 1919, teachers, other public employees, and urban and rural workers were extremely happy about the restoration of democracy. Most of them enthusiastically supported Julio Acosta's candidacy for President. Their participation in the electoral process was to have very positive results, uniting different subordinate groups and favouring the adoption of more democratic methods for political decision-making.

The composition of the Legislature was a sign of the new times. Competition for the popular vote had broadened the bases of support. A process of "ruralization" in the electoral game led to the incorporation of middle class sectors from the countryside.²⁸ From its first week in session, Congress was nicknamed by the press as the "Hermenegildos and the Hormidas Congress" because of three representatives of peasant origin who bore these names.²⁹ In fact, in 1920, Congress had opened its doors to political newcomers. The Hermenegildos and Hormidas peasants; a representative of the working class, Gerardo Matamoros; a professor and historian, Francisco Montero Barrantes, among others, were to alter the well preserved redoubt of the political élite.

During the first half of February, 1920, an unprecedented series of strikes also signalled changes in the political arena. Some public employees and

several unions, such as the masons and carpenters, decided to stop working, and to fight for their rights. Poverty was the detonator, but the workers' uprising also reflected the recent political mutation: the relative weakening of the dominant groups, and the strengthening of the working sectors, particularly in the urban areas.³⁰

The role played by urban working groups in Tinoco's overthrow and the restoration of democratic order, and the discredit to many members of the governing élite because of their complicity with tyranny, both favoured the strikers. Francisco Aguilar Barquero's government promptly accepted most of the public employees' demands, especially, the eight-hour working day and a 20% salary rise. The government's attitude to the workers' movement was characterized by moderation and conciliation. Like the government, most employers yielded rapidly to the workers' demands.³¹

Aguilar Barquero's provisional government (September 1919–May 1920), was one of national unity, characterized by the consensual relationship among different social groups. His administration provided a time of economic renascence, active political participation and great expectations for social and economic changes, in which the needs of the working people were met with sympathy. Neither government nor business employers adopted intransigent positions that might threaten the prevailing national acquiescence.³² The official position was

clearly reflected in an editorial in La Gaceta:

El movimiento huelguista que aquí y en otros lugares de la República se ha difundido en estos días (...) es un fenómeno social constituido por la suma de aspiraciones, justas, en su mayor parte, que buscan necesaria y legítima satisfacción. El Gobierno de la República, que vive atento a esta clase de manifestaciones, porque ellas son reveladoras de las necesidades ambientes, no ha podido mostrarse extraño o sordo a los requerimientos de la clase obrera, que en esa forma reclama un poco del bienestar a que tiene derecho.³³

In general terms, the press assumed a very positive attitude towards the workers. Many journalists congratulated the strikers for their tranquil and orderly conduct. At the same time, they stimulated a harmonious and fair solution between employers and employees.

International events also played a role -though marginal- in the unfolding of the strike. The Russian Revolution, the revolutionary movements in Mexico and Europe, and the slow infiltration of socialist and communist ideas in Costa Rica, created in certain leaders, a sense that a new era for the working masses was to begin. As Víctor Hugo Acuña points out:

...el malestar popular causado por "el problema de las subsistencias" y por el desempleo logró al fin aflorar cuando las condiciones políticas nacionales fueron propicias y cuando un clima de esperanza invadía los medios obreros de todos los continentes.³⁴

After winning salary rises and the eight-hour working day, urban working groups began to struggle for

subsidized housing. During the preceding years, the construction of new houses to meet the requirements of normal population growth had been halted. Thus house rents increased two to three times in value. Because of workers' pressure and also the government's sincere interest in alleviating the problem, leasing and construction laws were passed. These dispositions maintained the rental rates of 1920 and freed the construction of inexpensive houses from any tax for a period of two years. Furthermore, a new tax -one quarter of a cent per kilogram of imported merchandise- was created to finance the building of workers' residences and schools.³⁵

The working classes' struggles and the government's reaction, launched a national debate about the solution of 'social problems'. On one side were the traditional Liberals who opposed any form of state interference in the economy, such as price controls and the regulation of commerce and exportation; on the other were those who accepted limited intervention by the state to attenuate the most negative effects of speculation and poverty.

Although working groups had been able to obtain important concessions in 1920, they were still not seriously ready to confront the dominant élite. They lacked a political platform of their own. After 1920, popular sectors acted in a more unified and autonomous way in order to demand increased state intervention in the resolution of social problems. The "Low-Cost Leasing Law" of 1922 and the "Working Accidents Law" were examples of their influence and pressure in Congress.

At the same time, they became conscious of the need to organize in order to increase their participation in the political game.

In January 1923, the General Workers' Association decided to create a workers' political party. The creation of the Reformist Party fulfilled their political aspirations. The Reformist Party was the result of two processes: first, the goal of urban workers' associations -strengthened after the Tinoco overthrow and the 1920 strikes- to unite and acquire a role in the political arena through a political party; and second, Jorge Volio's arrival in Congress in 1922, with a discourse of strong social content. His political posture harmonized with that of the workers. Although they did not pursue a radical change in the state structure, they nonetheless favoured a gradual change in society.³⁶

Jorge Volio had worked with Julio Acosta as a revolutionary and political supporter. Nevertheless, as soon as he realized that Acosta was not going to embark upon a "political renovation", and was unwilling either to alter the status quo, or punish Tinoco collaborators, Volio and others who shared his views distanced themselves from the old revolutionary leader. The dissidents wanted more than just restoration of the constitutional order broken in 1917; they wanted to put into practice new objectives, and new ideals that would lead to important transformations in Costa Rican society.

As Alvaro Quesada says:

Los jóvenes "revolucionarios" más inquietos y radicales -Mario Sancho, Jorge Volio, José María Zeledón- denunciaron en la "impenitente retórica" y la "teosófica serenidad" de Acosta, la restauración de la "vieja tradición oligárquica", y en sus llamados a "la concordia de la familia costarricense", una componenda con la "camarilla tinoquista" que había apoyado la oligarquía.³⁷

With ardent rhetoric, Volio proclaimed a new kind of politics. He was determined to break the traditional oligarchic and personalistic political system, and both to introduce new doctrine as the focus of political competition and a political program that would favour popular sectors rather than dominant groups. Harshly judging the past "military interregnum" he said:

¿Qué fue el tinoquismo? Ese monstruo de dos cabezas y tres apetitos, lujuria, sangre y robo, que tantas lágrimas y tanta sangre nos hizo derramar, no es más que el fruto exacto, la expresión natural y espontánea de esta corrompida sociedad josefina, de la fatídica argolla y del Olimpo, la clase alta que viene pesando sobre el país desde hace 50 años.³⁸

With reference to the events of 1919 he argued passionately that:

La revolución libertaria de 1919 tenía un ideal y una finalidad que no se han realizado todavía pero que se van a realizar algún día. El ideal es dejar atrás los Olímpicos y abrir el alma a la acción con ansias renovadoras. (...) Sustraer el poder de la clase oligárquica que ha gobernado a Costa Rica y devolverlo al pueblo, para que él haga lo que le parezca.³⁹

Volio severely attacked President Acosta's "forgive and forget" policy. For him, this idealistic concept of peace and love towards all in reality disguised an attempt to restore the old order, and, with it, the prestige and influence of prominent collaborators of the Tinoco regime. He also felt that the stupid fraternal embrace and the empty words of accord could not legitimize the marriage of virtue and vice, since nothing could be built over crime.⁴⁰ Already, Volio's socialist and nationalistic beliefs and practice had compelled him to abandon the priesthood in 1915. Now, his inflamed words were greatly to antagonize the governing élite. It is however, important to point out that this highly intelligent man was prone to ill health; extreme excitability often signalled problems in his health.

The reformist project aimed at revitalizing several different sectors. Politically, its goal was to stimulate increased participation in political life by the general populace, including women. Economically, tax and agrarian reform were contemplated, such as offering free land to peasants and nationalizing subterranean resources. These postulates contrasted markedly with those of the traditional political parties. Its ideology, leadership, and constituency differentiated this political cluster from the start.⁴¹

Educational reform was to include more support for secondary schools, ample finance, the creation of agricultural colonies, a new vocational and arts school and the foundation of a modern university. Point 16 of

the Reformist Party program stated:

El Partido Reformista no da preferencia a éste o aquel sistema educativo, cree sí en el valor y misión de la escuela que pueda desarrollar carácter, idealismo y hábitos de trabajo. El Partido Reformista sostiene que la enseñanza secundaria debe mantenerse como complemento indispensable de la instrucción primaria y por tanto debe ser costeada por el Estado. Como corolario de ambas, el Partido Reformista propenderá a la fundación de un tipo moderno de Universidad que garantice la cultura nacional. El Partido Reformista además intensificará la educación rural, establecerá una Escuela de Agricultura y otra de Artes y Oficios. Resumiendo: el Partido Reformista destinará en el Presupuesto la suma de dinero ampliamente necesaria para darle educación al pueblo.⁴²

Although Volio himself belonged to a family of the governing elite most members of the new party came from subordinate groups. Although education opportunities had been very limited for the majority, some Reformists were renown intellectuals;⁴³ others were self-taught men.

After 1919, the workers' movement was oriented towards the search for new and different ways to participate fully in the political system. Even though there were other perspectives, the majority hoped to create a political party that would represent the interests and aspirations of popular groups. Such idea gave birth to the Reformist Party. The party was conceived not only for the purpose of improving the living and working conditions of subordinate groups, but also, to provide a dynamic political alternative to the anaemic traditional parties.⁴⁴

The creation of the Reformist Party allowed a vibrant interplay of forces between those who had dominated the political arena and those who strived to sustain their political niche. The political game - highly imbued with personalistic and clientele practices - was altered by the introduction of programs and doctrine. The new strategy was to foment greater and more direct popular participation. This participation was aimed towards the attainment of governmental power, as the most immediate way to achieve a series of gradual reforms that would lead to a more just society, where riches would be more equally distributed.⁴⁵ Jorge Volio challenged the established order for the second time in the twentieth century. However, while Alfredo González Flores had depended on an intellectual language, to be read, Volio utilized a popular language, to be heard.⁴⁶

The Reformist Party refused to contemplate pacts or alliances with other parties holding different doctrinal principles. It even went so far as to state that such alliances had been a mockery in Costa Rican political life.⁴⁷ In an effort clearly to differentiate his constituency from those which had supported members of the traditional political élite, Volio embarked upon a promise that he was unable to fulfil. He was to pay a very expensive political price for his inconsistency.

2. The policy of "forgive and forget"

On 8 May 1920, the reopening of Congress, with Julio Acosta as President, saw Costa Rica once again on the

track of constitutional course.

Despite Acosta's landslide victory and the fact that 36 of the 43 deputies were his partisans, he became distanced from Congress because of his policy towards members of the Tinoco régime. Members of the Legislative body insisted that the wrong-doing be punished, but Acosta preferred reconciliation to vengeance, claiming that only a united Costa Rica could confront its social and economic problems and begin reconstruction. He said that:

No anida en mi corazón el ruin apetito de venganza, ni deseo que Costa Rica adquiera semejanza alguna con otros países en que las pasiones de partido son inexorables. La revolución tiene en su programa la palabra "sanción" y debe explicar su alcance. Queremos que todo aquel que por procedimientos tiránicos violó el Derecho y causó daño, sea castigado dentro de la esfera de la ley y por ministerio de los Tribunales. Para todos los demás, para los que por error lamentable de criterio y por un fenómeno imputable a la comunidad y a la ofuscación en que se vivía, cooperaron en alguna forma con el gobierno de los Tinoco, para ellos invoco el sentimiento de fraternidad y de concordia que siempre nos ha caracterizado y que constituye un timbre honroso de los costarricenses.⁴⁸

Although his feelings were appreciated by some, the majority of his followers understood the situation from a very different perspective; their sense of justice required a form of public vendetta against the friends and beneficiaries of the Tinoco regime. The first act of the revolution had been the removal of the tyrant; the second had to be the abolition of the establishment that

had made that tyranny possible.

Another perspective interpreted the political events as two different epochs for Costa Rica. The first was characterized by the gloomy and dictatorial oligarchies represented by the Olympians, with Ricardo Jiménez (1910-1914) as their last and major exponent. The second, - initiated by the González Flores administration-as the beginning of a new epoch of regeneration from the old political hacks. An epoch of democratic, social, and economic indoctrination which had been interrupted by the Tinoco treason. According to their view, such treason had been abetted by the cowardly silence of the dominant class.⁴⁹

During the Acosta administration, the designation of Alejandro Alvarado Quirós as Minister of Foreign Relations provoked uneasiness. Formerly a close associate of Tinoco, Alvarado had broken violently from the régime and had been imprisoned. Nevertheless, he was not considered a wise choice for this strategic public position, particularly by Acosta's old comrades. As Arturo Volio, the new President of Congress, argued:

Diferentes grupos de diputados adictos al señor Presidente, trataron de persuadirlo de su propósito de constituir un Gabinete que no respondía a las necesidades de aquel trascendental momento, de su nueva política de quietismo y respeto a todo lo pasado, como si no se tratara más que de sustituir hombres y no sistemas y prácticas viciadas. El señor Acosta fue sordo al clamor público, no quiso poner a tono su espíritu con los grandes ideales que antes lo agitaron y desairó a la gran mayoría del Congreso.⁵⁰

In June 1920, Congress passed the "Compensation Law", which authorized the payment of 205,000 dollars to foreign officers and soldiers who had participated in the revolution against Tinoco: 144,000 for Costa Rican revolutionaries, and 60,000 for the families of those who had died during the campaign (all in American dollars). The last article mandated payment of credits in both Costa Rica and Nicaragua to compensate for expenses incurred in the organization and support of the army. This law also created "Compensation Bonds"; in order to service these bond issues, some custom taxes were increased and a 0.25 colón surcharge imposed on the sale of each bottle of liquor.⁵¹

The Compensation Law was another point of disagreement between the Executive and the Legislative branches of the government. Acosta vetoed the disposition and Congress overrode his veto. Acosta did not approve the compensation payment for Costa Rican revolutionaries, arguing that the Costa Ricans who had participated in the armed movement had done so to defend their country from repression and dishonour; he thought that economic compensation was not proper and that it would diminish the glory of those who had fought in the revolution. He said that:

Hubo gloria en la actitud asumida por los que se enfrentaron al déspota? Entonces no hay paga en dinero. Hubo paga? Entonces no hay gloria; que no se puede servir a dos señores.⁵²

The Presidential veto produced a furious reaction from the majority of the revolutionaries, and caused many

of his partisans who did not approve of his "forgive and forget" policy to turn against him. However, the President did receive support from the press and general public opinion was divided. Some journalists argued that, in addition to moral reasons, compensation payments should not be paid because they were untimely, given the country's critical financial situation.

The teachers who had participated in the 13 June march sent the President a letter congratulating him for the veto. The Workers' Organization, for its part, organized on 5 July a march of support in which workers, teachers, and the general public participated. Meanwhile Congress engaged in heated debate over the Presidential veto.

With the veto, Acosta lost popularity and the support of party members. Although his beautiful and idealistic rhetoric is still an inspiration, the "Compensation Law" did not, in effect, ruin the Treasury and the revolutionaries who were paid did not lose their glory. As Eduardo Oconitrillo says:

Se recuerda a los revolucionarios como un puñado de valientes que hicieron posible la caída de los Tinoco, no como a soldados de fortuna que se beneficiaron con unos cuantos pesos.⁵³

Yet another law created great tension between the President and the Legislature. The first part of the project contemplated Tinoco's trial for military rebellion. The second concerned the annulment of all acts and measures, including contracts, cheques and

payments, as well as the 15 million colón issue already annulled by Aguilar Barquero's provisional government. The so called "Nullity Law" was approved on 20 July 1920. Acosta, fearing a strong negative reaction from the diverse interests that would be affected by this disposition, decided to veto the "Nullity Law" and once again, the Congress overrode his veto.⁵⁴

The dispositions of the "Nullity Law" were to affect financial operations between the Banco Internacional, and the Royal Bank of Canada. Since Canada had no foreign policy of its own, it was represented abroad by the British government. At the end of Tinoco's administration, Manuel Jiménez the Minister of Finances, deposited a cheque for 1 million colones in the account of the Royal Bank. When the cheque was cashed the subsidiary received unconventional paper currency, called "sheets" because of their large size. The Minister had promised the Royal Bank that they would be able to exchange the "sheets" for regular bank notes within a short period, when the 15 million colón issue started to circulate. However, the government fell before it was able to fulfil that promise, and the Aguilar Barquero and Acosta governments refused to honour the transaction because it was illegal. First of all, at the time of the agreement, the British government had not recognized the Tinoco administration. Secondly, the Royal Bank authorities had been aware that it was not legal to administer a rotatory fund, which they had done. Finally, they had accepted the extremely irregular bank notes, knowing well that these did not conform to legal form, signature or registration.⁵⁵

On 13 July, Mr. Frank Cox, the British Consul, presented two notes of protest to the government, in which he demanded that it pay the 1 million colón debt to the Royal Bank. Cox also prevented the government from annulling a crude oil contract with a British firm (John Amory & Son) which had been approved in June 1918. Congress rejected a settlement proposed by the British in February 1921. The difficult litigation was ultimately resolved satisfactorily for Costa Rica at the end of 1923.⁵⁶

As had been the case with the "Compensation Law", public opinion was divided with respect to the Presidential veto of the "Nullity Law". Some argued that Acosta had acted under pressure from foreign interests, in particular, British; others maintained that don Julio was protecting Tinoco. The veto produced more heated legal and moral debates inside and outside Congress, in which patriotism and the judgment of the Tinoco regime played a major role.

After several other Presidential vetoes and Congressional overrides, the relationship between Acosta and his former partisans became extremely tense. Nevertheless, an unexpected incident temporarily diverted those tensions, when an old border problem with Panama was incited by foreign oil companies.

Traditionally Panama had coveted the rich lands of Costa Rica's Golfo Dulce and its fertile bordering lands. Panamanian settlers now invaded Costa Rica's Coto region with the support of the oil companies, provoking a

military confrontation between the two countries. The outcome of the first struggles indicated the clear inferiority of the Costa Rican army. Nevertheless, Costa Ricans were inflamed with patriotism and wanted to defend their sovereignty at any price. Direct intervention by the United States temporarily resolved the conflict in favour of Costa Rica. The "Coto tragedy" united Costa Ricans and helped to consolidate the national reconciliation policy of Acosta.⁵⁷

The economic crisis and dictatorship meant that the Costa Rican political arena was opened to new actors. During the Acosta administration, the participation of the working sectors and the passionate militancy of young idealists was to bring about the approval of various socially oriented laws. Despite the protests of the traditional governing élite, state interventionism was also reflected in economic and financial policies.

During Acosta's administration, the definition of a new political and social "pact" became the core of political struggle. The system's deterioration after the crisis and tyranny had disrupted the existing social order. Thus, the redefinition of political and ideological parameters became an essential part of politics during those years. In this dynamic environment, different social forces strived to attain or maintain as much power as possible. The confrontation between prominent traditional politicians and emerging political actors was to demonstrate how strong the forces of tradition still were.

C. Political revival and education

The definition of a new political and social "pact" had profound repercussions in education. In a country where ideology and consensualism played such an important role, education became a key focus of debate. The struggle between traditional and avant-garde forces found in education a fertile area for obtaining political power and social control.

Although the political order had been disrupted by the "Military Interregnum", the pedagogic perspective favoured in the González Flores administration had persisted. With the exception of the controversial Ministry of Instruction and Fine Arts project, Brenes Mesén had not only maintained but reinforced the "New School". At the same time, Minister Anastasio Alfaro had given faithful support to Brenes Mesén's efforts.

The Aguilar Barquero and Acosta administrations favoured the pedagogic changes. Nevertheless, growing criticism from various social groups began to discredit the educational reform. Liberal thinkers, who opposed state interventionism and social orientation, the Church, which strove for more power, and teachers who did not understand the new didactic methods, all loudly voiced their opposition to the new pedagogic orientation.

1. A brief but fruitful effort

The naming of Joaquín García Monge as Minister of

Instruction during Aguilar Barquero's provisional government had guaranteed the permanence of the pedagogic advances. Strongly identified with avant-garde philosophical and pedagogic currents of thought, and linked by friendship to Brenes Mesén, García supported from the start the changes made by his predecessor, particularly the primary school programs.

García Monge's appointment to the Ministry came at a time of uncertainty. The economic crisis had had a severe impact on the educational sector: numerous schools had been closed and many teachers had lost their jobs. García's first task was to reopen as many schools as possible, re-employ teachers, and raise their salaries. Given the economic limitations of the period, he was to do fairly well in meeting those objectives.

García Monge was bent on improving the teachers' economic situation as well as their professional status. He introduced important reforms to the Teaching Personnel Organic Regulations, increasing the established tariffs and improving the category and promotion parameters. He also encouraged the creation of new taxes in order to augment the teachers' pension fund.⁵⁸

The Minister was determined to expand cultural opportunities, in particular for peasant children. He wanted to raise the compulsory period of education in rural areas, and stimulate a vocational and practical orientation.⁵⁹ He believed that educational expenditure should be increased, but thought that total spending was not as important as the quality of the general cultural

output.⁶⁰

During his short Ministry, García was able to encourage the development of school foundations and ancillary societies, and was very concerned with children's physical, emotional and mental health. He favoured the creation of school colonies for the vacations, and state protection for poor children in terms of shelter, food, and education. His aim was to create in the near future a national children's hospital so that society's most precious asset -children- would be well cared for. He argued that:

... conviene declarar una vez más que la mayor de las riquezas de la República son sus niños, y que el Gobierno y los particulares deben tener como primera obligación cuidarlos desde la cuna hasta los 15 o 16 años, alimentarlos, vestirlos, educarlos, cuando de eso necesiten por la incuria o la pobreza de sus padres. Ha llegado el tiempo de considerar inconcebible que los niños de un país crezcan degenerados porque no se alimentan bien, porque no se curan, no se abrigan, no se educan.⁶¹

García stimulated the foundation of public libraries, including mobile ones. He thought that access to books was a key element for promoting cultural and mental change. He was also concerned with the development of hygienic habits, and with agricultural and vocational studies in schools.

In the field of higher education, he promoted the establishment of a national agriculture school and took the first step towards the foundation of a university. He gave land to the existing faculties (Engineering, Law,

Pharmacy, Medicine, Dentistry) to construct the future university buildings.⁶²

One of the most important acts of his Ministry was the passage of the Education Code.⁶³ The meticulous re-compilation of existing laws and dispositions was carried out by two ex-Ministers of Education, Luis Felipe González Flores and Justo A. Facio; this code reflected the new educational orientation favoured by the state.

In September 1919, García Monge's appointment as Minister of Public Instruction had coincided with the launching of Repertorio Americano, an academic and pedagogic journal that was to attain great influence and prestige among intellectuals. After ending a short but fruitful term as minister, he dedicated the rest of his life to the enrichment of Costa Rica's cultural life through the diffusion of progressive philosophical, political and social thought. Repertorio Americano became an open window to world intellectual movements and one of Latin America's most prestigious journals for more than forty years.

2. A consensual Ministry (1920-1924)

a. Calm waters

President Julio Acosta appointed a prestigious and respected educator as Minister of Public Instruction. Miguel Obregón had been reformer Mauro Fernández's closest aid and collaborator.⁶⁴ Furthermore, he had

served for many years with particular wisdom and dedication as the primary school General Inspector, as well as the Director of Public Libraries. Don Miguel had also participated in varied educational projects, serving on commissions for the evaluation of national education, and the design of programs and curricula.⁶⁵ A modest, reserved, and discreet man, he had worked all his life for the improvement of Costa Rican education. Despite his unpretentious behaviour, Obregón was admired and esteemed, his importance in the education sector undisputed.

Although Miguel Obregón did not belong to the so called argolla pedagógica -the group of young intellectuals who favoured avant-garde pedagogic orientation such as the "New School" movement- he supported the educational evolution of recent years. His open mindedness in accepting educational progress, and close ties of family and friendship with the most prominent members of the above mentioned "circle", caused his appointment to be received favourably and lent support to his continued implementation of his predecessors steps.

Roberto Brenes Mesén, Joaquín García Monge, Omar Dengo and Luis Felipe González Flores were the intellectual leaders of the education movement. Don Miguel had a special relationship with each one of them. Brenes Mesén was an illegitimate child (or "love child", as he himself liked to describe his birth)⁶⁶ and had been raised and educated by his uncle, Alberto Brenes Córdoba, a renowned lawyer and magistrate. Brenes Córdoba and

Miguel Obregón had maintained a close friendship since childhood; Roberto Brenes Mesén grew up loving his protector's friend. Don Miguel cherished Roberto Mesén's eagerness and capacity for learning, and his dedication to study. Mutual respect and admiration developed between the two.⁶⁷

Omar Dengo, for his part, called Obregón, "Papá Miguel". When don Miguel's only brother, Rafael, died very young, he left four small children, a girl -María Teresa- and three boys. Although unmarried at the time, don Miguel assumed paternal and economic care for the infants. Even after he married and had eleven children of his own, don Miguel never abandoned his brother's offspring. His nephews came to love him as a father. María Teresa eventually married Omar Dengo. To Dengo's long standing respect for the educator was added a special esteem due to his wife's relationship with Dengo. Calling don Miguel "papá" reflected his feelings towards Obregón.⁶⁸

Joaquín García Monge had been don Miguel's student and admirer. When he became Minister of Instruction in 1919, he gave full recognition to Obregón Lizano's capabilities and dedication to education. As he stated emotionally in his message to Congress in 1920:

Y cuánto le debo y agradezco a don Miguel Obregón, mi mentor, mi compañero de labores en la Secretaría. Sin su larga experiencia, sin su ilustración y modestia a toda prueba, sin el cariño que tiene por los maestros, sin su fe inquebrantable en la enseñanza pública, ¡cuán poco me habría sido dable hacer!⁶⁹

Obregón did not have similar deep emotional ties to Luis Felipe González Flores, but both men respected one another professionally.⁷⁰

Miguel Obregón Lizano's wealth of experience in educational matters was reflected in his efforts as minister. Moreover, tremendous equanimity and desire for consensus characterized his work. Although he was to be the target of growing criticism, particularly regarding secondary school issues and the primary school programs, he nonetheless continually responded with serenity and wisdom.⁷¹

During his term, Obregón's efforts were oriented toward the improvement of the primary schools and of teachers' economic and professional status. He raised the education budget from 13% (1920) to 21% (1922) of total national expenditure (including the servicing of the public debt) and channelled more than 75% of these resources to common schools.⁷²

Obregón stressed school supervision and control. He organized school inspection services and encouraged the creation of the National Education Council.⁷³ Don Miguel also promoted the development of the School Sanitary Department and the establishment of infant clinics for poor children. In addition, he gave particular encouragement to the expansion of public libraries.⁷⁴

He was concerned with the functioning of local school boards in fund-raising and resource allocation. Protected by the "Low-Cost Housing Law" of 1923 -which

allotted education part of an import tax- Obregón was able to negotiate a 600,000 colón loan for the building of schools. He was determined not only to increase revenues but also to free school board resources from state management and control.⁷⁵

The Teaching Personnel Law, passed in 1921, raised teachers' salaries by proportions ranging from 20% to 80%. Obregón complemented these significant wage increases with the "Retirement and Pension Law" of 13 September 1923, which bolstered the resources of the Teachers Pension Fund.⁷⁶ He believed in the "regeneration" of teachers through social recognition of their value.⁷⁷

Obregón Lizano was also very much concerned with the development of the Escuela Normal appointing Omar Dengo as director. Obregón believed that this teacher-training institution promoted liberty and independence, as well as a spirit of intelligent cooperation in faculty staff.⁷⁸

In order to improve the quality of education in Costa Rica, don Miguel was determined to increase the number of certified teachers. Only a third of the educators had received a teaching diploma, and of these, 50% remained in San José.

The minister also wanted to attract more men to a profession in which the ratio of women to men was 4 to 1. Most male educators and politicians, including don Miguel, believed this domination by women was the major

cause of school mediocrity and stagnation. Furthermore, Obregón concurred with the prevailing view that female teachers impeded the healthy emotional development in boys, particularly in the tropics, where male "inclinations" were precocious. He argued that:

la educación de [los varones] debe ser dirigida por maestros varones, a fin de que lleve el sello de firmeza moral y de modelación verdadera que encausa la corriente de fuerza avasalladora de la naturaleza viril y basta, precozmente desarrollada en nuestros climas.⁷⁹

Don Miguel hoped that the new salary increases and the stimuli that had been introduced in the recently approved Teaching Personnel Organic Law and retirement benefits, would motivate more men to become teachers.

At the end of his ministerial term, Obregón felt quite satisfied with regard to primary education. Although he did not pretend that Costa Rican schools and educational systems were perfect, he believed that notable progress had been made during the previous four years. Not only had the number of teachers, schools and students increased, but, the average attendance -a school indicator favoured by specialists- had risen significantly. Furthermore, teachers had a more solid economic and social standing.⁸⁰

His sense of accomplishment was well justified considering the conflicts he had confronted during the 1920-1924 period, conflicts that had arisen around three specific areas: the Education Code, secondary schooling, and the primary school programs.

b. Turbulence

The Education Code project drafted by Luis Felipe González Flores and Justo A. Facio in 1920 received Minister García Monge's enthusiastic support. The code contemplated the compilation of existing laws and dispositions, and the introduction of important reforms, such as mechanisms to increase resources and stimulate socialization through education; the creation of the National Education Council; and the establishment of the Foreign Students' Foundation. It was analyzed and approved by a commission of primary school inspectors and secondary school directors. Legally sanctioned by the provisional government, the document required only Congressional ratification. As García Monge hopefully stated:

Aprobado ya por el Gobierno del señor Aguilar Barquiero, es ley de la República, una de las más importantes y trascendentales que le ha tocado en suerte promulgar. Es bastante probable que dentro de poco este Congreso conozca de tal Código; del patriotismo y de las luces de ustedes dependerá que salga con bien de la aventura.⁸¹

However, on 20 December 1920, the disposition that would give legal life to the Code was annulled. Arguing that, some aspects of the document did not comply with the educational expectations of many specialists and Congressmen, Obregón tried to minimize the impact of the reversal by pointing out the code's positive achievements. He emphasized that the document drafted by González Flores and Facio would be an invaluable working draft for the elaboration of an improved code,

in which some issues, such as the nature of local boards of education, would be given more importance.⁸²

The annulment of the code was to provoke the major educational debate of the period. In due adherence to press practices of those years, anonymous articles appeared in several newspapers, in particular, La Verdad. Highly critical of the code orientation, the authors sheltered behind pseudonyms in order to attack, sometimes violently, their ideological opponents.⁸³

In June 1921, Luis Felipe González analyzed his opponents views. He explained that most of the anonymous articles reflected Carlos Gagini's well known style. It was a surprise to read comments meant to sabotage the work of others, because Gagini "had always tried to demonstrate that only his work was of value". Don Luis Felipe also mentioned that most of the criticism expressed an adherence to polices of the past, and a concomitant rejection of socialization through education. He pointed out that his interest in expanding ancillary institutions, creating a centre for technical studies and an office for research and experiment -in short, his desire to provide more educational opportunities and benefits- was feared by the traditionalists.⁸⁴

Discussion on the Code of Education lead to increased criticism concerning educational advances already in place, particularly, primary school programs. Once again, Minister Obregón maintained a conciliatory attitude in order to defuse the ideological confrontation between opponents and defenders of programs. He

sustained a "middle of the road" position in which he tried to emphasize the positive aspects of the programs and minimize their defects. Although he was unable to find appropriate solutions to some problems, such as many teachers' lack of adequate training, Obregón supported the new pedagogic orientation. He said that:

Es claro que la escuela debe tener una labor genuina e intensamente local y, en lo posible, individual. Para esto hay que eliminar de ella todo lo que no sea de utilidad práctica y de aplicación inmediata a corregir necesidades sentidas; lo que quiero decir es que la escuela es la antesala de la vida ulterior del escolar, y que sólo debe atender cuestiones de absoluta infinitud con las faenas que esperan al educando que la frecuenta, constituyéndose en tránsito de la vida misma del vecindario. Dentro del marco de estas tendencias no caben programas uniformes, constituidos esencialmente por listas de temas concretos y determinados a manera de léxico, lo que para muchos sería el desideratum en la materia.⁸⁵

The "Active School" advocates argued that the programs were only a guide for teachers and should be adapted to specific circumstances. Teachers had to interpret those parameters as well as the pedagogic spirit that lay behind them, and not expect to use the programs as a recipe. The "Active School" advocates believed that the school was not only an institution for the transmission of knowledge but a place to forge the children's spirit.

Ideological considerations apart, it was true that there was no correspondence between the objectives that guided the new orientation and practical results. There

were two major obstacles to implementation of the programs. First, the administrative structure -because of the prevailing political instability, and its archaic organization- proved unable to control the functioning of the new programs. Second, the teaching personnel was not adequately prepared to experiment with psychological and pedagogic innovations.

Since the programs were focused on "topics" or "modules" linked to relevant issues, and not to specific subjects, it was essential to organize teams of trained teachers to implement them. Without this trained personnel, the programs were bound to fail.

During the Acosta administration, the debate about the primary programs continued. Teachers, parents, traditionalists, and other groups of public opinion participated in a controversy that lasted several years. School inspectors and directors also contributed their experiences of the programs' achievements and failures. Some considered them to be perfect, others believed that they required adaptation to new circumstances, still others felt that they should be totally eliminated. The fact that the author of the programs had left Costa Rica to live in the United States, weakened the position of the avant-gardists. At a moment when explanation and defense of the new pedagogic parameters became critical, Brenes Mesén was absent.

Discussion was not limited to the practical application of the programs; ideological concerns also predominated among prominent Liberals and avant-garde

thinkers. The confrontation between tradition and reform was increasingly reflected in the debate between maintaining or abolishing the programs. As conservative forces slowly strengthened, they voiced more and more loudly their opposition to the avant-garde pedagogic orientation.

The controversy was fuelled with the renewal of the long standing "secondary school debate". In moments of political revival, the role played by secondary schools became more relevant, whether to maintain and consolidate the "old order", or to modify the hierarchically structured social pyramid. The forces of tradition were augmented by the Church, which favoured the privatisation of the secondary schools. The Church already had control of most private schools in the country, and expected that the elimination of state subsidies to secondary schools would enable it to achieve even greater ideological and economic control over education.

The pedagogic orientation favoured by "the circle" encouraged the expansion of benefits to secondary schools so that the prevailing social and economic structure would be modified. Disregarding the fact that primary education still demanded much attention and resources, the "circle" was determined to augment secondary school revenues in order to open educational opportunities for many more youngsters, particularly in technical and vocational careers.⁸⁶

Conventional thinkers adhered to the position that the state should give the necessary support to make

primary education available at all levels of society. They argued that secondary schooling and, even more so, higher education was for the "chosen few" who were to be trained for leadership in politics and economics. Thus, state resources should be invested in primary education, while secondary education was to survive with private resources. Liberating the state finances from secondary school subsidies would allow the government to increase primary education expenditure. For many, this argument was complemented with a subtle reasoning that privately-paid schooling would guarantee the perpetuation of the existing class structure.

Minister Obregón's position on secondary schooling differed from that of the "pedagogic circle". Don Miguel favoured the privatisation of secondary education so that the state could finance remedies to problems and shortages of the primary sector. Nevertheless, he believed that such a step should not be taken until society as a whole reached an economic level that would allow any interested parent to pay for his children's studies, and mercantilistic and exclusivist doctrinal views would be effectively restrained. He argued that:

Entregada la Segunda Enseñanza exclusivamente a la iniciativa particular, el Gobierno haría una considerable economía de sus recursos y de sus energías administrativas, las que -en buena parte- habrían de ser consagradas a un mayor beneficio de la Enseñanza Primaria que demanda mayores atenciones de las que hoy se prestan. Pero al amparo de nuestra libertad de enseñanza, únicamente restringida por la moral, serían de temer los graves prejuicios que se derivan de una democracia exclusivista y tendenciosa dentro de determinado círculo de

ideas filosóficas (...) De otra parte, se harían sentir el imperio del espíritu egoísta de especulación que rebaja la dignidad de la Ciencia y cultiva el mercantilismo (...) y el sectarismo que esclaviza el pensamiento habría de dominar con funestas consecuencias en la dirección de la vida nacional.⁸⁷

The Minister's desire to find a point of consensus in this controversy was clearly reflected in these words:

Sin propósito de externar ideas de bandería ni de imponer criterio, me atrevo a manifestar que hemos de mantener el status quo en espera de mejores tiempos de capacidad cultural y económica, pues, en Administración Pública, la mejor consejera es la sabia experiencia propia, o la que nos brindan países de la edad y posibilidades iguales al nuestro, pero más cultos y versados, hasta tanto no nos favorezcan una prosperidad tal que permita a todos los padres de familia que lo deseen la educación de sus hijos por su propia cuenta y mientras no nos inspire una conciencia más sanamente liberal y menos egoísta en la dirección que debe impulsar la cultura superior a que tiene derecho todo costarricens.⁸⁸

Regardless of his intention to maintain the status quo, the economic situation in 1921 was to prompt Minister Obregón to allow a significant increase in secondary school tuition and registration fees. It was even rumoured that the government wanted to close some secondary schools.⁸⁹ Those rumours had some foundation; Minister of Finances, Alberto Echandi had threatened to resign if state subsidies to secondary schools were not abolished. President Acosta and Miguel Obregón disagreed, so that Echandi resigned.⁹⁰

Obregón Lizano proposed to introduce changes in secondary school curricula. In 1921, he sanctioned a curriculum whose orientation was indisputably conventional. In a clear withdrawal from the vocational and practical perspective promoted by Brenes Mesén ever since 1913, the modifications turned away from specialization and implemented a more rigorous and disciplinarian structure.⁹¹

As far as the Colegio Superior de Señoritas was concerned, Obregón reduced the hours dedicated to scientific subjects, increased the girls' time in moral and religious classes, and gave more emphasis to the school's traditional orientation towards teacher training.⁹²

The significant increase in secondary school fees which followed provoked an immediate reaction, particularly from non-conventional thinkers such as Rómulo Tovar, the director of La Prensa. For him, the expensive tuition would lead to the death of secondary schools. Others argued that it would be a mistake for the state to end support to secondary schools, because in accordance with the Constitution, primary school was obligatory and secondary schooling was facultative; nevertheless, both levels of education were free.⁹³

The curricula was also an important issue of debate. Some considered it necessary to educate for work and to de-emphasize scholastic perspectives and theology.⁹⁴ Others believed it necessary to convert secondary schools into instruments of renovation and refrain from the

increasing tendency to graduate "Bachelors".⁹⁵ Still others believed that because the teaching force was saturated with female teachers, the Colegio Superior de Señoritas should stop training still more teachers and focus on home and family-oriented courses. An editorial in La Prensa stated in February, 1922, that the Colegio Superior de Señoritas needed to be reorganized so as to prepare women to be "señoras de su hogar". Furthermore, it stressed that the expansion of culture did not necessarily include training "Bachelors" or increasing the number of women teachers.⁹⁶

The Church also attempted to exploit the education debate to its advantage. Some high ranking prelates, particularly Rosendo Valenciano (La Mercedes Church priest), exacerbated the conflict by denouncing the fact that certain members of government were renowned theosophists, including the President, and that Enrique Jiménez Núñez -a doctrine sympathizer- taught in the Colegio Superior de Señoritas. The priests excitedly demanded the prohibition of such doctrines in the secondary school curriculum and the dismissal of Jiménez Núñez.⁹⁷ In reality, the issue of theosophy was only a pretext; the Church, like other groups, wanted to exert pressure and gain influence in the political game; its aspirations to revert the 1884 dispositions were to culminate in a bill presented to Congress in 1923.

The Church's activities further inflamed the ardent controversy. Several intellectuals denounced its interference, and stressed the need to maintain lay education. Distinguished society ladies publicly

supported the Church, calling for the spiritual "purge" of the secondary school curriculum and teachers. Still others threatened all those who did not support the Church with "divine retribution".⁹⁸

During Obregón Lizano's ministry, the belligerent challenging of educational advances did not lead to their total reversal. Although the Education Code had been annulled, the pedagogic orientation favoured by the state ever since the González Flores administration persisted. The temporary maintenance of the status quo was allowed by the consensual minister, who, although he did not totally subscribe to the new pedagogic advances, was determined to respect them. Minister Obregón Lizano continued to emphasize the positive aspects of reform and tried to diminish the indisputable deficiencies.

D. Teachers and politics

Because of the decisive role played by the teachers in the overthrow of tyranny, traditional forces began to fear the political power that this united group might exert, and therefore tried to curb the teachers' participation in politics. In several editorials and unsigned articles which appeared in La Prensa and La Tribuna between 1921 and 1924, it was argued that teachers should not participate in politics because of the nature of their work; teachers should be superior models for their pupils and thus their image as educators should not be "contaminated" by political agitation. Teachers had to be "politically neutral",⁹⁹ and protect

children from adult annoyances and troubles.

The reason that lay behind those who opposed -with such naïve arguments- proselytising by teachers, was without doubt, the fear of seeing the teaching personnel consolidate as a political force.

Among the teachers who counter-attacked was Fausto Coto Montero. In April 11, 1923 he answered a recent editorial in La Tribuna in the following terms:

No deben participar los maestros en política porque la política es apasionada y personalista? Más razón para participar. No debe existir temor a que el niño conozca los resortes políticos reales, es parte de su formación cívica.¹⁰⁰

Moisés Vicenzi, a writer and an educator, was also to voice his opinion in favour of the teacher participation in politics:

Los maestros deben seguir haciendo opinión como lo hicieron en la campaña política, sin fijarse en estrecheses de bandería.¹⁰¹

Another controversial issue further incited the debate over teachers and politics: the women's suffrage movement. Although still in its infancy, the crusade encouraged lively discussion and fervent support or opposition. The movement was led by Angela Acuña, the first woman to graduate as a lawyer in Costa Rica. She was supported by several respected female teachers and a few prominent male politicians and educators, including President Acosta.¹⁰²

In July 1920, a project to reform Article 55 of the Constitution was presented to Congress. The document was to allow literate women over twenty years of age to vote in municipal elections, and permit them be elected as alderwomen. Although the project had been sanctioned with the signature of 30 Congressmen, it never became law. While the suffrage movement received significant support from distinguished intellectuals, increased pressure from conventional thinkers retarded women's political emancipation for years to come.¹⁰³

Within a political context in which traditional forces feared the attainment of power by teachers, it became crucial to exclude from the electoral game three quarters of this belligerent and influential group. Thus, political marginalization was the consequence of long established social and moral codes, as well as of political competition.

E. A political alliance

In the December 1923 elections, three parties contested for the presidency. The Agrarian Party (Partido Agrícola) represented powerful coffee barons, bankers, and old partisans of the Tinoco regime. Their wealth allowed them a great deal of control over the electoral machinery; most members of the party sought political power in order to maintain and increase that wealth. The procedures followed by the Agrarian Party to elect its candidate -Alberto Echandi- and elaborate a platform, revealed its members' interest in giving the

political group some democratic elements that would make it more attractive to subordinate groups.¹⁰⁴

The Republican Party (Partido Republicano) brought together several celebrated "Olympians". Ricardo Jiménez had become the uncontested leader of the political group -founded in 1897- when he was elected President in 1910. Indeed don Ricardo was the most influential political leader in Costa Rican politics for over fifty years. His leverage over the political actors was such that his rule came close to autocracy. Since he had skilfully evaded responsibility for the Tinoco fiasco, and waited for an appropriate moment to act, he was to be the key figure in the Liberal restoration that was to come.

Don Ricardo attracted a wide variety of political forces. At a time when class consciousness was still diffused and subordinate groups had not effectively united, his attractive political stand and personality exerted great magnetism. Even prominent members of the new intellectual élite supported Jiménez Oreamuno. Waiting for better times in order to organize politically, Omar Dengo and Joaquín García Monge -among others- backed Jiménez. The ideological inconsistency between doctrine and practice of prominent non-conventional thinkers was justified by the belief that more social changes could be achieved from working within the reigning parties than from the outside where the chance of electoral gains were still remote.

With his charismatic personality, Jorge Volio was supported by certain urban working sectors particularly

artisans. However, the Reformist Party derived its electoral strength from a wide rural base.¹⁰⁵ During the short time of ten months, Volio developed a political group that competed effectively with prestigious traditional politicians and consolidated parties, obtaining one-fifth of the total national vote.¹⁰⁶

As was the case ten years earlier, none of the three presidential candidates won an absolute majority of votes in the elections of 1923. Under such circumstances, Congress was called upon to decide whom to seat in the presidential chair. Alberto Echandi had obtained the majority of national votes, and Congress was dominated by Agrarian Party sympathizers. According to numbers and affiliations, Volio and his partisans became the great decision-makers; the nomination of the new government lay in their hands.¹⁰⁷

Although Volio had explicitly promised not to embark on any political pact, Ricardo Jiménez cleverly manipulated the political situation in his favour. Stressing the profound ideological difference between the Reformists and the Agrarians, Jiménez Oreamuno convinced Volio that an alliance with the Republican Party was the only way to implement the social reforms he desired. He even went so far as to subscribe to certain important points in Volio's political program. Furthermore, he offered Volio the second Vice Presidency, the Ministries of Education and Public Works, and the payment of all the debts acquired by the Reformists during the elections.¹⁰⁸

Volio analyzed carefully which of the two contending

parties could better guarantee social development and progress in Costa Rica. Although both represented the interests of dominant groups, the Republican party had indicated greater willingness to support moderate change. On the other hand, Volio and his partisans could not accept the return of Tinoco's collaborators. Abstaining from voting in Congress would only lead to the sanctioning of the Agrarian Party. In light of these considerations, Volio finally accepted Ricardo Jiménez's proposal.¹⁰⁹

The Jiménez-Volio pact was a severe blow to the Reformist Party. Some prominent party members abandoned the organization, disappointed and frustrated, thereby weakening the original force of the reformistas. At the same time, the political group was viciously attacked by the Agrarians and became the focus of erroneous and malicious interpretations by diverse social sectors. Finally, Ricardo Jiménez shrewdly manipulated the political arena, effectively diminishing the impact of the reformist thrust. In the face of these events, Marina Volio concluded that:

Analizando la decisión de Volio con perspectiva histórica y estudiando la incidencia que tuvo en la vida misma del partido, debemos reconocer que la determinación fue nefasta para el reformismo.¹¹⁰

The unfolding of events during the succeeding administration was to confirm the magnitude of this political miscalculation.

The events of 1914-1919 had disrupted the political

evolution which Costa Rica had undergone since the late nineteenth century. The economic crisis and the unexpected electoral results of 1914, paved the way for the introduction of controversial reforms. The changes were aimed not only to alleviate the economic penury of the state, but also to transform the prevailing political and ideological structure of society.

The Tinoco régime was the misguided answer of the dominant groups to the fears of losing their privileges and benefits. Although the oligarchy did not free its grip on political control, its standing in society had nonetheless, deteriorated. The cowardly acceptance of tyranny temporarily discredited prominent politicians. This fact, together with the accumulated efforts of some workers' associations and the active participation of teachers and other subordinate groups in Tinoco's overthrow, permitted the opening of the political arena to new social actors.

The Acosta administration provided the scenario against which different social forces strove to attain - or maintain - power and control. In the heat of the struggle, non-conventional politicians obtained important concessions, such as the "Low-Cost Housing Law". The emergence of the Reformist Party increased the expectation of social change and political participation. However, the gradual recuperation of traditionalist forces and the discredit of Reformism were to slow down and, in some cases, even revert, the social changes initiated in 1914.

Parallel to these political developments, education reflected changes and conflict. Although the most radical aspects of educational reform had been ameliorated, important advances nonetheless prevailed at the end of the Acosta administration. Increased pedagogic debate demonstrated that education was to be the focus of political and ideological struggle. It also showed that the forces of tradition were growing ever stronger as a result of evident failures of the educational experiments and the lack of effective defense of the educational advances.

The consensual ministry of Miguel Obregón Lizano did not go back on the existing educational changes but neither did it consolidate the taken reforms that had already been introduced, or carry out any new ones. His failure to implement much needed measures, such as the transformation of the archaic administrative structure and inadequate training of teachers, precluded the consolidation of educational reform. As long as acknowledged weaknesses were unresolved, the education reform became more and more discredited.

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48. Acosta, Julio quoted in: Oconitrillo, Eduardo (1990). Julio Acosta. El hombre de la Providencia. San José (in press) Page 154.
49. Chacón (1920). Op.Cit. Pages 17-45. Also, Volio, Jorge (1924). Op.Cit.
50. Volio, Arturo quoted in: Oconitrillo (1990) Op.Cit. Page 238.
51. Oconitrillo (1990). Op.Cit. Chapter XII.
52. Acosta, Julio quoted in: Nuñez, Francisco. (1973) Julio Acosta. San José. MCJD. Page 58.

53. Oconitrillo (1990). Op.Cit. Page 197.
54. Idem. Chapter XIII.
55. Idem. Pages 198-206.
56. Idem.
57. Idem. Chapter XVII. Also, La Prensa. (1921) "Editorial" 11 March.
58. Memoria de Instrucción. (1920). Pages III-X. (This Memoria was published in 1924).
59. The majority of rural schools offered only I and II grade.
60. Memoria de Instrucción. (1920). Page III.
61. Idem. Page IV.
62. Idem. Page VII.
63. Colección de Leyes y Decretos. (1920). Decreto #20, 28 April.
64. Fischel, Astrid (1987). Consenso y Represión. Una interpretación sociopolítica de la educación costarricense. San José, Editorial Costa Rica. Chapter III.
65. Memorias de Instrucción. Years 1886-1920.
66. Dengo, María Eugenia. (1974). Roberto Brenes Mesén. San José. MCJD. Page 17.
67. This inside information was given by the son of Miguel Obregón, the prestigious Costa Rica historian, Rafael Obregón.
68. Idem.
69. Memoria de Instrucción. (1920). Page III.
70. During the González Flores administration, don Luis Felipe arguing the need to reorganize the National Library, had displaced Miguel Obregón as its Director. This decision was not welcomed by many, not only because Obregón had been the founder and dedicated director for more than twenty five years, but also because he never received any pay for his work. In an effort to redeem

himself and also because he sincerely meant it, don Luis Felipe later wrote exceedingly favourable comments about Miguel Obregón and his educational work.

71. La Prensa. (1921) 16 August. Idem. (1921). 30 August. Idem. (1922). 17, 22, 24 and 28 February. Idem. (1922). 1, 2, 9 March. Idem. (1922). 16 December. Also, La Tribuna. (1923). 13 February. Idem. (1923). 9 March. Idem. (1923). 7, 8, 11, 17, April.
72. Memorias de Instrucción. Years 1921-1924.
73. Memoria de Instrucción. (1923). Page VI.
74. Obregón, Edgar A. (1974). Miguel Obregón. San José. MCJD. Chapter V.
75. Memoria de Instrucción. (1924). Pages XVII-XVIII.
76. Colección de Leyes y Decretos. (1923). Decreto #182, 11 September. Page 336.
77. Memoria de Instrucción. Page XVI.
78. Memoria de Instrucción. (1924). Pages XIX and XXVI-XXX.
79. Memoria de Instrucción. (1921). Page 3.
80. Memoria de Instrucción. (1924). Pages XX-XXVI.
81. Memoria de Instrucción. (1920). Page IX.
82. Memoria de Instrucción. (1922). Pages V-VIII.
83. La Verdad. (1920) 5 and 9 June. Also, La Tribuna. (1920). 13, and 16 June.
84. La Tribuna. (1921). 9 June.
85. Memoria de Instrucción. (1921). Page 4.
86. La Prensa Libre. (1921). 20 April. Also, La Prensa. (1922). 28 February. Idem. (1922). 1 March. Idem. (1922). 6 December and, La Tribuna. (1923). 17 April.
87. Memoria de Instrucción. (1921). Page 23.
88. Idem. Pages 23-24.
89. La Prensa. (1921). 20 April.

90. Obregón, Rafael. (1990). Personal interview. 17 March.
91. Memoria de Instrucción. (1922). Pages XIV-XVI.
92. Memoria de Instrucción. (1923). Page XII.
93. La Prensa. (1921). 20 April.
94. La Prensa. (1921). 30 August.
95. La Prensa. (1922). 17 February.
96. La Prensa. (1922). 28 February.
97. La Prensa. (1922). 22 April. Idem. (1922). 3, 16, 17 and 20 May.
98. Idem.
99. La Tribuna. (1923). "Editorial" 8 April.
100. Coto Montero, Fausto. "En contestación a un editorial" In: La Tribuna. 11 April.
101. Vicenzi, Moisés. (1923). In: La Tribuna. 9 April.
102. Calvo, Yadira. (1988) Angela Acuña. Forjadora de estrellas. San José. Editorial Costa Rica. Chapters XII-XV and XVII.
103. La Prensa. (1920). 20-25 July.
104. Ramírez (1989). Op.Cit. Page 55.
105. Samper (1988). Op.Cit. Pages 210-212.
106. Ramírez (1989). Op.Cit. Chapter IV.
107. Idem. Pages 128-141.
108. Volio, Marina (1973). Op.Cit. Pages 221-232.
109. Idem. Pages 182-232.
110. Idem. Page 222.

Chapter Five

LIBERAL RESTORATION AND EDUCATION
(1924-1930)

CHAPTER V. LIBERAL RESTORATION AND EDUCATION (1924-1930)

A. The Olympian rule

1. The aftermath of the Reformist endeavour

The presence of the Reformist Party for the first time in the 1923 Presidential campaign altered the electoral game. The Reformist Party represented the interests of popular sectors and its political structure was based upon doctrinaire principles. Although the Party was not favoured in the ballot box, the campaign demonstrated that the Reformists had the capacity to oppose the traditional parties. That the party won one fifth of the national vote in December 1923 was a significant indicator of its strength among subordinate groups. In the face of this electoral shift, Liberal politicians looked for new ways to halt and diminish the political impact of Volio and his followers.

In an astute political move, President Ricardo Jiménez encouraged Reformist participation in his government. Not only did he fulfil his pact with Jorge Volio by giving the Reformists the Ministries of Public Works and Education and the second Vice-Presidency, (Volio held the Vice-Presidency) but he also accepted three of their five representatives to the Congressional Directory. These measures were meant to lure the Reformists into political alliance with his government. Don Ricardo, recognizing the potential power of the Reformist movement, preferred to make small concessions, rather than have direct confrontation.¹ This harmonious

relationship was merely the first step towards controlling and dominating the movement.

A few days after the elections, the CGT (Central General de Trabajadores) called a meeting to found the Casa del Pueblo, a cultural and political institution whose objective was to unite all workers unions. The Casa was meant to educate workers and stimulate their class consciousness. Furthermore, it was to become the centre for discussion and support of Reformist projects presented to Congress. In reality the Casa was the next step needed to expand the Reformist political base.

Although the party implemented important changes that were to strengthen its administrative and political structure, it confronted serious problems. The support given to Ricardo Jiménez, Volio's leadership, and the payment of campaign debts became three issues of controversial debate inside and outside the political group. Some influential Reformists did not accept the political pact and loudly voiced their frustration, undermining not only the party's image but that of Volio too. In the face of this criticism, Volio became the target of questioning and censorship. Although he maintained control, his prestige weakened even among his own followers.

The debt issue demonstrated a long-standing defect in the political system. In those years, the party which had won the electoral race was allowed to pay its campaign debts by forced "contributions" from public employees. The justification for this unjust procedure

was that every new administration offered jobs to political sympathizers and allowed -benevolently- some opponents to keep public office. Therefore, since public employees "benefited" from the political change, they were compelled to pay a price: a 2% salary reduction.

The payment of the Reformist party's campaign costs had been included in the Jiménez-Volio pact; don Ricardo had promised to cover these debts as part of their agreement. Nevertheless, meeting this commitment required additional contributions from public employees. The issue was to unleash passionate opposition, particularly from belligerent teachers who resisted the continuation of such a corrupt practice. The debt issue was to further weaken Volio and the Reformist Party.²

Reformists meetings gradually diminished. The lack of activities reflected not only the party's difficulties, but also the prevailing political situation. Don Ricardo Jiménez had been able to project an image of paternalism and benevolence which was very appealing to certain sectors of subordinate groups. His clever management of politics was demonstrated by his defense of consumer goods prices, the "Accident Law", the insurance monopoly, women's right to vote and his support of electoral reforms that were to benefit common people. Popular support for Jiménez Oreamuno was further bolstered by the remarkable economic recovery due to the rise in export prices.³

The mid-term congressional elections of 1925 proved to be the final opportunity for Volio and his group to

act as an independent political party. This time, scant popular support reflected the party's discredit; the Reformists were able to elect only five deputies, one of whom was Volio himself.⁴ The political setback was accompanied by Volio's illness. Increased opposition and tension finally exacerbated his nervous condition -a situation that was masterfully manipulated by Ricardo Jiménez and other prominent Liberal politicians. Volio's confinement in a mental institution in Belgium in 1926, was to be the temporary finale to this political drama.⁵

After Volio's departure, the party survived for only a few more years. Although some members struggled to maintain adherence to the party's program, principles and bases of social support, the Reformist Party was increasingly perceived as being more interested in public office than in the needs of popular groups. In reality, however, the Reformist party was being effectively absorbed in a brilliant political game managed by the President and other prominent Liberals. This absorption would ultimately lead to the Party's disappearance after the 1932 Presidential elections. As Victoria Ramírez clearly summarizes:

El papel del Partido Reformista en la historia política del país, se caracteriza por presentar dos momentos básicos: -el primero arranca con su fundación, el 25 de enero de 1923, y concluye con las elecciones de medio período para diputados, en diciembre de 1925. Durante ese momento inicial, el Partido Reformista se perfiló como un partido independiente comprometido con las luchas de los trabajadores costarricenses.

El segundo momento, dio inicio en 1926 cuando

el líder máximo del Partido, el General Jorge Volio Jiménez, "dejó" acéfalo al reformismo "gracias" a una hábil maniobra del entonces Presidente de la República Ricardo Jiménez Oreamuno. A partir de ese acontecimiento, el Partido Reformista dejó de aparecer en forma independiente y comenzó a perder capacidad de respuesta ante las demandas de los trabajadores. Finalmente en 1932, participó por última vez en un proceso electoral al lado del Partido Republicano.⁶

At the moment of the Reformist Party's extinction, there were other timid attempts to organize the working sectors politically. A few days before the presidential elections of December 1927, the Socialist Party was founded. Despite its name, the party did not endorse revolutionary change but rather gradual reform, and was unable to attract more than a handful of sympathizers.⁷

After 1927, crusades for the defense of national interests and those of the working classes, were led by prestigious intellectuals, particularly, Joaquín García Monge, Omar Dengo and Carmen Lyra. The anti-imperialist movement was provoked by the clear interest of the Electric Bond and Share Corporation, a United States-based company, in expanding its influence in Costa Rica. Workers, politicians and intellectuals strove to nationalise water resources in order to oust the company from Costa Rica. The nationalist movement was also active in sanctioning a new and highly disadvantageous contract for Costa Rica with the United Fruit Company (UFCO).⁸

A common front against imperialism led to the foundation in 1927 of the Seccional Costarricense de la

Liga Anti-imperialista Americana. This organization played an active role in the struggles against United States intervention in Central America, particularly in Nicaragua. In 1928, Omar Dengo, Joaquín García Monge and Luis Felipe González Flores were among those who founded the Liga Cívica, a more formally structured front against imperialism.

During Cleto González Víquez's administration (1928-1932) the presence of foreign intellectuals with reformist and socialist views -Rodolfo Wedel Quirós, Adolfo Braña, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, Francisco de Heredia- favoured the development of more coherent ideological orientations for popular organizations. Nevertheless, government censorship soon neutralized such influences on the workers.⁹

In 1929, Joaquín García Monge founded the Workers, Peasants and Intellectuals' Alliance Party (Partido Alianza de Obreros, Campesinos e Intelectuales), which participated in the mid-term congressional elections of 1930. In a biting speech, García Monge criticized not only the "oligarchic order" but also the dying Reformist Party, because of its compromises with the political parties of the dominant classes. In that same year the Revolutionary Association of Culture (Asociación Revolucionaria de Cultura, ARCO) was created. With the aim of diffusing revolutionary thought and organizing the workers, this association was to play an important role in the later foundation of the Costa Rican Communist Party in 1931.¹⁰

During the period 1924-1930, the political force gained by popular sectors during the early 1920s experienced a significant setback. The dissolution of the Reformist Party and the clever manipulation of the political arena by old-time Olympians, left little opportunity for alternative political dialogue. Although several attempts were made to organize popular groups in order to defy the existing order, these received scant popular support. While the 1919-1923 years had been characterized by the active political participation of popular groups, the 1924-1930 period was marked by relative stagnation.

In 1930 Costa Rica began to experience the consequences of the 1929 international economic "crash". After several years of extraordinary economic prosperity, the country confronted severe financial crisis.¹¹ This abrupt change in the economy was to have deep political reverberations, one of the most important of which would be the reactivation of the popular movement.

2. The sorcerer of Irazú

Because of his extraordinary influence on Costa Rican politics, Ricardo Jiménez was nicknamed "el brujo del Irazú" (the sorcerer of Irazú). Referring to the location of one of his farms on the slopes of the Irazú volcano, the epithet reflected the general sense of reverence that don Ricardo generated; Jiménez Oreamuno seemed to have the answers for all sorts of economic, social, and political problems.

Opponents and partisans alike recognized don Ricardo's brilliant and cultured mind. His masterful manipulations during half a century made him the undisputed king of Costa Rican politics.

Don Ricardo's long and fruitful political life was initiated when he became President of the Municipality of San José in 1885. A notable lawyer, he was subsequently elected President of the Supreme Court at the age of 31. He served in several Ministries and was elected twice to Congress. He was elected three times to the Presidency (1910-1914, 1924-1928 and 1932-1936). At the age of 84 (in 1939) he embarked unsuccessfully upon his fourth presidential race. Jiménez Oreamuno is the only Costa Rican to have been President of the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary bodies.

Clearly identified with Liberal thought, don Ricardo became the intellectual leader of the "Olympians". His "common sense" demeanour hid the depth of his political orientation. As Eugenio Rodríguez points out:

Pero lo que le da originalidad y sustancia a la actuación de don Ricardo no es la ausencia de un pensamiento doctrinario: ésta sería una grandeza muy discutible. Su acierto estuvo en "disimular" la ideología, apropiándose de tal modo que llegó a parecer de subalterna importancia; estaba allí, escondida, realmente superada por el análisis circunstancial que don Ricardo hacía de los hechos.¹²

Whether analyzing everyday problems or discussing high level philosophical issues, "el brujo del Irazú"

displayed a clever and sagacious wit. His comments - and some of his allusions to moral and religious issues were quite daring- delighted the general public.

Strange omens marked the inauguration of two of his Presidencies. The 4 May, 1910 earthquake which destroyed the city of Cartago, the colonial capital of Costa Rica, occurred four days before don Ricardo took office.¹³ The still more violent earthquake of March 1924 took place a few weeks before Jiménez Oreamuno was invested as President.¹⁴ In both cases, national mourning for the dead and widespread material damage greeted his Presidential term. Each time, don Ricardo confronted the emergency bravely and efficiently. With the aid of foreign and domestic loans, he reconstructed the majority of buildings and other public works that had been destroyed by the earthquakes, particularly schools.¹⁵

After the political turbulence of the recent past, Ricardo Jiménez was a key figure in the restoration of a Liberal "conciliation". The exercise of political power through persuasive mechanisms found a perfect niche in the 1924-1928 administration. On the one hand, repressive forces were discredited after the 1917-1919 fiasco. On the other, the combination of economic prosperity and a certain degree of political acquiescence, favoured the return to civilian ways.

During the 1924-1930 period, Liberal dominance and traditional thought once again controlled the political and ideological arena. However, important mutations such as the new aggressiveness of avant-garde intellectuals

such as Joaquín García Monge and Omar Dengo, and popular political associations such as the Socialist Party, gradually undermined the foundations of Liberal hegemony. The decade of the thirties was to mark the turning point for Liberal dominance.

3. Economic prosperity and politics

The economic recuperation which had started in 1922 accelerated rapidly in the following years. Favourable export prices and the capable management of the public treasury by the Minister of Finance, Tomás Soley Güell (1922-1928), stimulated notable economic progress.

Soley Güell's extensive administrative effort was crucial in the return to financial stability. His decisive measures to end monetary distortions and reduce the public debt helped to restore the public treasury. During his first extremely difficult year in office, the Minister competently confronted the financial disorder, exorbitant debts and stagnation of public services which were the result of both the Great War and the Tinoco tyranny. Describing his effort during 1922, he said that:

Tocóle en suerte a este Gobierno una tarea ardua y laboriosa. Liquidar las pérdidas sufridas por el país durante la Guerra Europea, las ocasionadas por la Administración Tinoco y las producidas por los movimientos populares que marcaron el fin de aquel régimen y que iniciaron la vuelta a la normalidad.

Fue preciso reorganizar servicios públicos

suspendidos, depurar otros contaminados por los procedimientos del régimen caído, atender a distintos ramos de la Administración desprovistos de los elementos necesarios para su funcionamiento y refaccionar empresas del Estado...

Al mismo tiempo era forzoso aceptar un fuerte aumento en la Deuda Pública, creado por fallos judiciales recaídos en reclamaciones contra el Estado, por el crecimiento de intereses sobre obligaciones que no era posible atender y por el demérito constante de nuestra moneda. Y para hacer más grave la situación del Erario y más difícil la marcha de la Administración, todas o casi todas las Rentas Públicas estaban gravadas y sujetas a distintos contratos de préstamos de violenta amortización y de alto tipo de interés.¹⁶

Costa Rica ended the fiscal year with a reduction of the public debt for the first time in many years. In spite of the fact that he eliminated certain tributes - such as the Bank and sales taxes created in 1918 - extreme austerity in public expenditure, increased efficiency in the use of reserves and the sound use of public credit provided optimum results. Of course, the increasing influx of foreign currency due to favourable coffee, sugar and cacao price, also contributed greatly to economic rehabilitation.

The prevailing Liberal orientation of the state was clearly reflected in the tax system. Although Soley Güell recognized that direct taxes were more equitable than indirect taxation, he believed that, in practice, such a system encountered two major obstacles: the taxpayer's "displeasure" at being told the exact amount of his contribution, and the lack of an efficient administrative

structure of tax collection.¹⁷ In 1922, the bank taxes were eliminated under the pretext that the government would re-establish direct contributions. These, however, were not put into operation, and the skilful move was really performed to liberate the influential group of bankers from taxes. The sales tax was likewise eliminated both because of the merchants and manufacturers' resistance, and of the difficulty in collecting it.¹⁸

Soley Güell also abolished export taxes. Arguing that Costa Rica obtained its economic well-being from exports, he considered it "inconvenient" to tax this source of wealth. As he explained in 1924:

Para un país como el nuestro que deriva su bienestar económico de la exportación de los artículos de su agricultura y que cuenta con tierras suficientes para proveer holgadamente a su consumo interno y en triplicar el volumen de su comercio exterior, no son los más indicados los impuestos que gravan la exportación.¹⁹

Costa Rica therefore soon returned to the old structure, where customs duties, and liquor and tobacco sales taxes provided the bulk of the national treasury revenues. At a time of increasing foreign trade, monetary circulation and general prosperity camouflaged once again the vulnerable and unjust taxation system.

The stabilization of the exchange rate, a balanced budget, the increase in the value and volume of exports (thanks to the optimal conditions of the international market), the regeneration of public credit and the

conscientious control of fiscal revenues, were -in the Minister's opinion- the causes of the economic revival. In 1925, a contented Soley told Congressmen:

Si en los informes anteriores pude mirar con optimismo al futuro, tal vez con algo de atrevimiento que sólo podía hallar disculpa en el conocimiento de los recursos de nuestra tierra y del esfuerzo de sus habitantes, en éste, es la contemplación de esperanzas convertidas en realidades, la que me permite daros y pediros albricias por la constante mejora de la Hacienda Pública y por el aumento visible de la riqueza nacional.²⁰

One year later, he announced with pleasure that the fiscal period had closed with the highest amount of public revenues ever collected, representing a 10% increase over the balance of the previous year. As Soley said:

Ningún ejercicio fiscal registra Costa Rica con mayor producto de las rentas públicas que el actual.²¹

In his 1927 Report to Congress, don Tomás described the economic development of the previous year in the following terms:

Ningún año ha sido tan próspero para la República, hacendaria y económicamente, como éste de 1926. La buena marcha de la Hacienda Pública, la solidez y el crédito que ha llegado a alcanzar se reflejan en la excelente cotización de los valores del Estado, en el constante incremento de las Rentas Nacionales, obtenido por natural desenvolvimiento y no por la fuerza de nuevos tributos, y en la liquidación de nuestros presupuestos con

notables superávits.²²

In his last message to Congress in 1928, Soley Güell enthusiastically analyzed the financial effort of the previous four years. Arguing that economic and fiscal progress had been constant and solid since 1924, he explained:

Cada uno de los cuatro años ha señalado un aumento en nuestro intercambio comercial, una mejora en la Hacienda Pública, una mejor solidez en nuestro crédito, y en suma, un aumento de la riqueza y bienestar para la población y una mayor capacidad para seguir desenvolviendo y mejorando las condiciones de la vida de nuestro país.²³

Don Tomás also pointed out that economic progress was reflected in the decrease of criminality, particularly against private property, as well as in the improvement of mortality rates, which he attributed to better hygienic conditions and a higher standard of living.²⁴

In May 1928, Cleto González Víquez was invested for the second time as President of Costa Rica. A celebrated "Olympian", the respected lawyer and historian had been President during the period 1906-1910. In 1910 he was succeeded by Ricardo Jiménez. In his turn, Jiménez would pass the office back to González Víquez. (In 1932, don Ricardo was to receive the Presidential seat from don Cleto). Although in "competing" political parties, don Cleto and don Ricardo shared more than the Presidency; they had in common Liberal thought and practice.

Juan Rafael Arias became the new administration's Minister of Finance. From his first days in office, Arias pledged to continue his predecessor's work, and requested Tomás Soley Güell to assist him with his advice and experience.

In his first presentation to Congress in 1929, don Juan Rafael expressed the pleasure it gave him to deliver such an optimistic report. He added that during the last year, financial activities presented:

un balance tan halagador que no encuentra tal vez paralelo en nuestra historia.²⁵

Arias also explained that the year's economic summary did not reflect any substantial innovation with regard to previous years; he had followed a discreet and judicious policy that was directed at consolidating Tomás Soley Güell's fine work.²⁶

The following year, Minister Juan Rafael Arias presented yet another enthusiastic report to Congress. Referring to the excellent results of 1929, he said that:

No tiene precedente en ningún ejercicio fiscal anterior el producto verdaderamente excepcional de las rentas públicas en el año que reseño, el cual cerró brillantemente una era de crecimiento incesante de los ingresos ordinarios del Estado.²⁷

He went on to explain that while the country's population had augmented by 11.76% during the year, the income from ordinary revenues had increased by 52.18%.

Three-quarters of this increase was made possible by the continual rise in customs dues. In 1929, these reflected a 169.05% growth with respect to 1924.²⁸ (See Table III).

Minister Arias also referred to the October 1929 financial "crash" in the United States. He explained that a credit from First National Corporation of Boston for \$2,750,000 (dollars) to finance the construction of public works had been halted by the financial disaster, and other resources would have to be found to meet the expenses of work already begun. The public debt had already increased with respect to the previous year from 76 million colones to 81 million. Despite the economic problems of the United States, Arias was, nonetheless, very optimistic about that country's eventual recuperation.²⁹ He emphasized his positive message to Congress, saying:

Resumiendo la breve información consignada en los párrafos anteriores, cabe afirmar que la situación de la hacienda pública durante el año pasado fue tan brillante como en los ejercicios precedentes; las rentas fiscales (...) rindieron más de lo que presupuso; los gastos se ajustaron estrictamente a las disposiciones legislativas; y el pequeño aumento de la deuda pública, debido a las ingentes obras de progreso material emprendidas por la presente administración, está muy bien compensado por el superávit económico que estas obras representan.

Costa Rica's economic prosperity ended in 1929. During the following three years, the country experienced profound financial crisis peaking in 1932. Decreases in exports and imports, and an increasing public debt

characterized those years. The Public Treasury revenues serve as indicators of prosperity and crisis. In relation to the revenues collected in 1923, there were successive increases of 11.77% (1924), 20.40% (1925), 25.15% (1926), 32.90% (1927), 38.41% (1928), and 42.02% (1929). From 1929 on revenues decreased successively until 1932.³⁰ The economy only began to recover in 1933.³¹ (See Table III).

Costa Rica was guided by a most homogeneous economic policy from 1922 to 1930. This period was characterized by the long ministry of Tomás Soley Güell -a brilliant, self-taught economist- and the efforts of Minister Juan Rafael Arias, a close follower of Soley Güell. The efficient and rational management of the Public Treasury rendered optimal results. Of course, favourable international developments also allowed Costa Rica to enjoy its own "Golden Twenties".

As economic life prospered, so social turbulence diminished. Although some intellectuals and workers' associations remained active and became even more belligerent, the majority of people increasingly identified with the existing political system; material progress, clever manipulation of ideology, and small concessions to popular groups attracted their support. The Liberal order was thus restored with the acquiescence of subordinate groups. Persuasion rather than repression once again characterized the orientation of the Costa Rican state: consensualism at its best.

The 1930-1933 economic crisis challenged the

existing order. Unemployment, shortages, and hunger mobilized large groups of people into protest street marches and riots. The foundation of the Communist Party in 1931 and the extended and difficult "Banana strike" in 1934 were signs of new social turbulence.³² Economic penury provoked increased criticism against the prevailing political scheme: Liberalism and consensual domination were threatened once again.

B. The politics of education

1. Of ministers and politics

During the 1923 Presidential race, in another astute political move, Ricardo Jiménez Oreamuno offered Omar Dengo the Ministry of Education. Attracting celebrated members of the new intellectual élite gave Jiménez not only an image of "open mindedness" but the possibility of neutralizing their criticism.

The unexpected outcome of the Presidential election, however, upset Jiménez's campaign promise to Dengo, since the Jiménez-Volio pact established that the Reformistas were to control the Ministries of Public Works and Education. Don Ricardo tried to compensate by offering him the Ministry of Foreign Relations, but Dengo, highly frustrated, declined.³³

Jorge Volio chose Napoleón Quesada to be the Minister of Education. A respected professor of literature at the Liceo de Costa Rica, Quesada had

sympathized -although not fervently- with the Reformista Party. The designation of don Napoleón was not welcomed by the "pedagogic circle". As early as 7 May 1924, a newspaper article commented on this group's discontent because of Quesada's alleged pedagogic deficiencies and traditional views.³⁴

One day later, in an interview with the same paper, don Napoleón asserted that education had become a political hot bed where politicians and pedagogues struggled to obtain control. After pointing out that his was the most controversial Ministry of the nation, he said that education was "the most important function of the state" and that "education interested people in a trascendental way".³⁵

When asked about the "circle's" opposition, he answered that he did not believe that their passionate criticism was unhealthy; the problem was that they thought him so insignificant in relation to them. However, he believed that it was an "optical" illusion because he also thought that they were small. Referring to the circle, he said with great wit:

Desde su cumbre me ven pequeño, pero es un error de óptica. Yo los veo pequeños por lo lejos que se han colocado.³⁶

Although Napoleón Quesada was to be warmly greeted by teachers -particularly, those from the primary schools- he had to confront the resignation of high ranking Ministerial officials who opposed his appointment.³⁷ Quesada was thus forced to call secondary

school professors to assist him in the Ministry, a decision which diminished the already small teaching staff of secondary schools.³⁸

The initial years of the Jiménez Oreamuno administration were very turbulent in the field of education. Numerous newspaper articles gave proof of the increasingly heated debate between "modernists" or "pedagogic circle" sympathizers, and "traditionalists" or "neanderthals". However, it was not only pedagogic issues which excited the atmosphere. Personal as well as political matters became the focus of ardent debate.

On 17 May 1924, Napoleón Quesada, a widower for many years, married a young student of humble origin.³⁹ This provoked cruel criticism of the Minister of Education's private life.⁴⁰ However, not all comments were negative. Several newspaper articles mentioned Quesada's great knowledge and his outstanding literary abilities. As La Noticia, wittily commented:

Dicen que un simple mortal con la mitad de lo que sabe Polón [diminutive of Napoleón] tiene que indigestarse.⁴¹

Minister Quesada was soon confronted by Jorge Volio's demands. Taking advantage of the Jiménez-Volio pact, the Reformist leader was determined to have a voice heard in all matters concerning education. However, as early as 24 May, one newspaper commented that although Jorge Volio thought don Napoleón a Reformist, in fact, he was more "Jiménist" than don Ricardo Jiménez.⁴²

On 28 May, La Noticia reported an incident between Volio and the Head of Primary Education, Patrocinio Arrieta. It seemed that Arrieta had not accepted a list of nominations submitted by don Jorge. Volio furiously ordered Arrieta to comply with his orders, and reminded him that because of the political pact, the Ministry of Education had to be Reformist. Volio even went so far as to ask for Arrieta's resignation if he was not a Reformist. Annoyed, Arrieta replied that although he was a "Jimenista", his political inclinations had nothing to do with obligations related to his position.⁴³ One day later, Patrocinio Arrieta publicly accepted that Jorge Volio had made certain "just" recommendations to him.⁴⁴

On 13 June, a newspaper article described an exchange of protest letters between Jorge Volio and Minister Quesada over the selection of a librarian for Alajuela. President Ricardo Jiménez had proposed the lecturer, Tranquilino Chacón, a respected ex-Congressman and professor from that province. Chacón refused the offer, but suggested his son-in-law, Antonio Padilla Soto, also a lecturer. Volio, on his part, had proposed a shoemaker who belonged to the Reformist Party. Between the shoemaker and the academic, Minister Quesada chose to appoint Padilla Soto. Annoyed, Volio sent a letter to Quesada saying that, because of this defiance, from then on, all issues that the Minister would like to discuss with him would have to be channelled through the Party Secretary. Napoleón Quesada answered Volio bluntly, telling the Reformist leader that education was not at the service of politics.⁴⁵ This problem inaugurated a fierce confrontation between the two men.

A few days later, La Tribuna reported an incident that had occurred in the Municipality of San José. During the last session, municipal members -the majority of whom were Reformists- had discussed Volio's desire to replace Napoleón Quesada with Justo A. Facio as the Minister of Education.⁴⁶ In that same session, Facio had been named President of the San José School Board, without following established procedures. According to legal procedure, School Inspectors were required to submit a terna (three candidatures) to the Municipality, which would then select the new member for the School Board. However, the Municipality of San José directly appointed its chosen candidate and partisan.⁴⁷

The incident aggravated the friction between Volio and Quesada. However, because of Facio's long and respected work in education, Minister Quesada finally approved his appointment. The elderly but still lucid and competent Facio was to play a very controversial role as the President of the School Board of San José.

In February 1925, Volio requested his close friends, Luis Cruz Meza and José Miguel Madrigal, to ask Quesada for explanations concerning an article recently published in La Opinión in which don Napoleón had been quoted as saying: "no me importan los ataques ni las infamias del cura Volio."⁴⁸ Minister Quesada argued that he had been misinterpreted and he meant no harm to Jorge Volio.⁴⁹ Volio rejected Quesada's excuses, and challenged the Minister to a duel. However, don Napoleón ignored the affront.⁵⁰

A few weeks later, Volio and Quesada were once again drawn into conflict. The Minister had appointed a new official -Gonzalo Zayas Bazán- to supervise and control the management of School Board funds. Zayas Bazán discovered many irregularities, including a loan that the School Board of Santa Ana had made to Jorge Volio. In accordance with established rules, such a use of resources was forbidden.

Volio defended himself by claiming that he had made regular payments on the principal plus interest, and that "his only sin was to be poor".⁵¹ Debate on the issue engrossed Congress for days. Jorge Volio's defenders skilfully focused the discussion on the legality of the Zayas Bazán appointment and his functions, to draw attention away from the irregular loan. The debate was cleverly manipulated by the Congressional President and his brother, Arturo Volio.⁵²

In March 1926, Jorge Esquivel, the second highest ranking official in the Ministry of Education (Oficial Mayor) was dismissed on charges of corruption. Esquivel had been the Oficial Mayor ever since the González Flores administration. His dismissal escalated claims of administrative corruption in public offices, particularly, in education. In the face of such criticism, President Jiménez commissioned the School Accountant, Carlos Jinesta, to investigate the allegations of administrative irregularities.⁵³

Meanwhile, Minister Quesada was the object of vicious criticism by Reformist Congressmen. Volio used

every opportunity to take revenge on Quesada; even the supposed use of the Ministerial automobile by his wife and mother-in-law became an issue for discussion. Ernesto Ortiz, a Reformist Congressman spitefully commented that it was impossible to allow the Ministry car to be used by Quesada's cook to carry lard and vegetables. Don Napoleón replied that the cook walked to the market and that he did not abuse the official car.⁵⁴

In August, in one of the most turbulent Congressional sessions ever held, Volio and his partisans accused Minister Quesada of grave irregularities. Offering detailed information, they claimed, among other things, that the Minister and some of his subordinates had accepted "special" payments from certain contractors for the building of schools.⁵⁵ In face of such grave charges, Don Napoleón refused to appear in Congress; he preferred to send a letter to Congress explaining his participation in the events.⁵⁶

President Ricardo Jiménez defended Quesada in Congress. He said that such unjust accusations were unacceptable because it was obvious that they were politically motivated.⁵⁷

On 19 August, La Tribuna published an extensive analysis of the arguments and evidence presented. The article described Ricardo Jiménez's clever rebuttal of each and every charge made against his Minister.⁵⁸

An anonymous and abusive article which appeared on

the 21 August in the Diario de Costa Rica prompted Minister Quesada to go the next day to the home of the journalist responsible. There Quesada supposedly took out a revolver and threatened to kill him. Only the timely intervention of Quesada's son ended the drama.⁵⁹

The atmosphere became more and more heated. On 31 August, Dacio Quirós, the Head of School Constructions, was attacked with a firearm by a subordinate, José María Artavia Solano. Artavia blamed the corruption controversy as the cause of his attack.⁶⁰

Two days later, Minister Quesada was accused of publicly attacking Reformist Congressman, Enrique Fonseca Zúñiga with a whip. His two sons were also blamed of threatening the same Congressman with a revolver.⁶¹ The next day, La Tribuna announced Napoleón Quesada's "fall" due to the Fonseca Zúñiga incident. The newspaper also commented that Quesada had asked President Jiménez for an audience to submit his resignation, and that the President had respectfully refused, wanting more time to investigate recent events. Jiménez finally accepted his resignation, but in a considerate gesture towards Quesada, avoided replacing him with one of his adversaries. The President appointed Luis Dobles Segreda.⁶²

The feud between Napoleón Quesada and Jorge Volio was a battle between two brilliant and cultured minds, and two strong-willed and excitable personalities. The effects of this passionate confrontation would lead the first to a humiliating resignation and the second to the

deterioration of his mental health.⁶³

The Volio-Quesada confrontation indicated that although Costa Rica returned to a consensual domination scheme in which the dominant class subtly -and indeed highly effectively- exerted social power and control over subordinate groups, the sphere of politics and ideology continued to be a hot bed of debate between conventional and non-conventional thinkers. At the peak of the political ladder, consensus seemed not to be the rule during the first two years of the Jiménez Oreamuno administration.

The new Minister of Education, Luis Dobles Segreda was a well-known writer and poet. He was also a respected secondary teacher who had once directed the Alajuela Institute. During the 1923 Presidential campaign, Dobles had fervently supported Alberto Echandi's candidacy. After the electoral defeat, he decided to leave Costa Rica for the United States.⁶⁴

When Patrocinio Arrieta resigned as Head of Primary Education in March 1926, Ricardo Jiménez asked Dobles to accept the post. Many partisans criticized the President's choice because Dobles had not been a "Jimenista". Others supported the President because he had put Dobles' technical qualifications before political considerations in making the appointment.⁶⁵

Dobles was to inaugurate his term as Head of Primary Education under very special circumstances. The education sector was a volcano of philosophical and

political confrontation. Moreover, its personnel were systematically accused of administrative corruption. At the same time, newspaper articles continually denounced the problems and deficiencies in education. Since Minister Quesada had not responded to many of the accusations and charges, Dobles took upon himself the responsibility of explaining the official position, which he did with expertise. Although still very young, he masterfully confronted the "pedagogic circle".

While the Minister increasingly retreated into solitude and resentment, the Head of Primary Education, Luis Dobles Segreda, started to discuss diverse educational issues in the press.⁶⁶

With the exception of the "circle", the news of Dobles's appointment as Minister of Education was warmly welcomed. Dobles had played a remarkable role as Head of Primary Education and many were confident that his leadership would prove most beneficial for the country.

Omar Dengo and Joaquín García Monge, however, publicly voiced their disagreement with the appointment of Dobles Segreda. Don Joaquín said that he was extremely disappointed with the recent changes in official educational policy and that he no longer wished to work with public institutions. He said that the "pedagogic circle" wanted to remain apart. He further emphasized that:

Es verdad que mis tendencias son radicalmente opuestas a las del señor Dobles Segreda quien se identifica con el señor Quesada y como es

lógico, continuará su obra. (...) es cuestión de tendencias y no de hombres.⁶⁷

From the moment he took office, Dobles made very clear his admiration and respect for Napoleón Quesada's efforts and promised to continue with his predecessor's programs. Dobles consolidated the reversal of policies initiated by Napoleón Quesada, so that the avant-gardist primary school programs were totally eradicated.

Although don Luis favoured traditional philosophical and pedagogic views, his ministry was most fruitful. His first task was to reduce the tension in education and restore confidence. He was a bright, active, and dedicated man who tried to improve all aspects of education, including the fine arts. His only weakness seemed to be vanity, and a dislike of opposition.⁶⁸

When Ricardo Jiménez's administration came to an end, Cleto González Víquez, the new President, asked Dobles to stay in office. This ended speculation about who was to be the next Minister of Education. García Monge and Omar Dengo had been mentioned as possible candidates.⁶⁹

During the González Víquez administration, Dobles enforced his conventional policies. Changes at the secondary level were widely criticized by progressive educators, particularly, Omar Dengo and Joaquín García Monge. Even the venerable elderly Justo Facio, objected to the reversal of certain pedagogic advances. In the

face of criticism, Dobles conceitedly said:

mis planes de educación se mantendrán firmes y la caída de ellos sería mi retiro del Ministerio.⁷⁰

During the first days of November 1929 Minister Dobles faced a serious dilemma. President Cleto González Víquez strongly objected to a project to raise teachers' salaries, and asked Minister Dobles to defend the government's position in Congress. The Congressional debate on the project monopolized public attention for several days. Passionate speeches were pronounced both in favour and against increasing the salaries, accompanied by applause, cheering and booing by the many teachers and members of the public who congregated daily in Congress as spectators. At first, Dobles was willing to follow the President's instructions. However, in light of the increasing criticism and also because of his true feelings about the justness of such raises, Dobles declined to continue defending the official position.⁷¹

On 6 November, during a heated Congressional session, the teachers present and some Congressmen compelled Dobles to justify the government's stand but he refused. That same day, he presented his letter of resignation to President Cleto González Víquez.⁷²

Feeling he had been abandoned at a critical moment, Don Cleto was very annoyed with Dobles and accepted his resignation.

As a newspaper article commented:

El Presidente de la República (...) se duele de que estando en la barra no hubiese bajado, el señor Secretario, a defender al gobierno, cuando caía sobre éste una tempestad de nustus. (sic)

El incidente político parlamentario surgido de la iniciativa que se discute en el Congreso para aumentar los salarios del personal docente culminó con la caída del Secretario de Educación Pública, profesor Luis Dobles Segreda.⁷³

León Cortés, a polemic young Congressman from Alajuela, became the new Minister of Education. Highly respected for his sharp mind and strong personality, Cortés had distinguished himself by his potent rhetoric and decisive opinions. He had particularly opposed Jorge Volio and the Reformist position in Congress due to his conventional world view, and he sympathized with Napoleón Quesada and Luis Dobles' ministerial efforts. Since he supported neither avant-gardist pedagogic orientations, nor progressive philosophic and political ideas, León Cortés left the established programs and policies unaltered.

After a brief term (November 1929 to May 1930), he was transferred to the Ministry of Public Works. He was substituted as Minister of Education by Ricardo Fournier. Fournier was compelled to resign a few months later in the midst of corruption charges. On January 13 1931, the beloved and respected Justo A. Facio was re-appointed Minister of Education, but died in office a few weeks later.⁷⁴

2. The Church's interference

During the Jiménez Oreamuno and the González Víquez administrations, the Church continued its battle to recuperate lost privileges in the field of education. In the face of the undisputable Liberal restoration, the Church sharpened its tone, and became more aggressive in its demands. Intolerance and bigotry distinguished the institution, even towards its own dissenting members. An example of the latter was the suspension from priesthood of Father Ramón Junoy because of Relicario a pamphlet in which he had criticised the bishop and some conventional prelates who had supported Tinoco.⁷⁵

The most controversial figure was the priest of La Merced Church, Rosendo Valenciano, a most retrograde man, who went as far as burning publicly "indecent" books, most of which were famous works of classical and contemporary literature such as Byron's poems and Victor Hugo's Les Misérables.⁷⁶

The Church's struggle was mostly aimed at the reversal of the 1884 "anticlerical" laws. It ardently strived to annul the disposition which prohibited monastic orders and Jesuits to settle in Costa Rica. At the same time, the Church attempted to restore state-subsidised religion classes in primary and secondary schools as well as to censor the content of education. Defending the Church's stand and severely attacking the Liberals, priest Carlos Borges argued:

Es evidente que los ciudadanos católicos tienen el derecho de pedir que se enseñe religión

católica en las escuelas, pue es la de la mayoría y del estado mismo.

Los Liberales no son consecuentes ni justos, cuando se empeñan como dicen, en mantener sus conquistas en la enseñanza pública, refiriéndose al laicismo. Siendo así, que ellos mismos son los primeros en reconocer que el ciudadano sin religión es un elemento peligroso en la sociedad.

La Iglesia Católica es una institución de veinte siglos de existencia, indestructible, gloriosa, siempre porque sus fundamentos son la verdad misma de Dios, revelada a los hombres y los hombres y los poderes invisibles de las tinieblas no podrán jamás destruir lo que es intrínseca y enteramente cierto. No estamos pues, temblando ante las conquistas que tanto blasonan. El individuo en particular o aquella sociedad podrán abandonar las filas de nuestra verdadera religión, pero la Iglesia Católica, como tal, subsistirá siempre sobre todas las instituciones humanas y aún sobre sus propias ruinas. (...)

Es pueril y ridículo el miedo que tienen algunos Liberales de la enseñanza de la religión católica en las escuelas. La religiosidad de un pueblo es la mejor garantía de su amor al trabajo, a la honradez y a las buenas costumbres.”

Borges went on saying that the same tyrannical laws that impeded the coming together of Catholic congregations, opened the doors for harmful Protestants who:

vienen de Norteamérica a sembrar la cizaña y a fomentar las luchas religiosas en los pueblos hispanoamericanos, como ya lo hemos presenciado aquí, donde todos somos cristianos y no necesitamos de misioneros de nuevo cuño, que más falta hacen en su propio país, los Estados

Unidos, en donde hay más de sesenta millones de ateos.⁷⁸

Such belligerence reflected itself even in rural areas. The confrontation between school teachers and local priests became common place. In Villa Colón, the priest even went as far as to prohibit children from going to school. He argued that official atheist schools were "centres of perversion".⁷⁹ San Isidro in the province of Heredia and Taras in Cartago, were also the sites of serious confrontations between teachers and priests.⁸⁰

The vacation colonies (Colonias Veraniegas) or summer schools, also became the focus of ecclesiastical interference. Because the Board of Directors was constituted by a majority of theosophists and Liberals, prelates as well as lay Catholics criticised the children's supposedly "deviate" indoctrination.⁸¹

In July 1929, Carlos Meneses, a priest and Congressman, presented the Legislature with a bill to revert the standing religious dispositions of the 1884 laws. The project declared the state obligation to appoint and pay religious teachers and annulled the entrance restrictions on monastic orders and Jesuits.⁸² After heated debate in Congress, the bill was rejected and the 1884 dispositions remained in force until the 1940s.⁸³

3. Feminist activism and teachers

Apart from pedagogic debates, the educational arena was further excited by the increased belligerence of the small feminist movement. Supported by a few but prominent male politicians, several women -the majority of whom were teachers- decided to express their political views in a series of newspaper articles. Some, including Angela Acuña, Corina Rodríguez de Cornick, Sara Casal de Quirós and "Paulina" (a pseudonym) ardently claimed the right to vote for women;⁸⁴ others supported a "restricted vote", that is, suffrage rights only for educated women. They believed that ignorant women were an easy prey of interference, in particular, from the Church. María Isabel Carvajal (better known as Carmen Lyra) a prestigious kindergarten teacher and writer and "Melissa" (another pseudonym) were among those who favoured that line of thinking. They believed that if women were indiscriminately given the right to vote, they would help to propitiate:

(la) entronización de poderes oscuros y la desorganización más espantosa.⁸⁵

In accordance with established laws, minors, drunks, idiots, delinquents and women were prohibited from voting. In the face of such discriminatory dispositions, Pedro Pérez Zeledón -a prominent and highly prestigious lawyer who had specialized on constitutional law- became the most ardent advocate of women's rights.

He argued that:

La intervención de la mujer costarricense en las elecciones dará a estas limpieza y corrección. (...) Por qué se le equipara al ebrio, al imbécil, al delincuente y al vago?⁸⁶

Although other respected politicians publicly expressed their solidarity with the movement, the prevailing political and ideological environment would not accept women's suffrage.⁸⁷ The Liberal restoration did not ease the way for women's struggles. On the contrary, the strengthened forces of tradition tried their best to diminish still further women's role in society. Vexation and discrimination against female teachers was the immediate result.

In February 1925, Congress was to found the best temporary solution to the increasingly ardent suffrage dilemma. By a majority of votes, it decided to discuss women's right to vote after the definition of a new Electoral Law.⁸⁸ Although the logical move would have been to include in such a law women's new political rights, strategy and not logic moved the Congressmen. They wanted to delay the discussion of such a controversial issue in order to quieten down the passionate unfolding of events.⁸⁹

Parallel to the struggle for the vote, female teachers also confronted open discrimination with regard to employment and salaries. The 4-to-1 ratio between female and male teachers prompted authorities, politicians and educators to favour male salary

increases, employment and position discrimination. The primary school head -Patrocinio Arrieta- publicly blamed the existing deficiencies in teaching personnel on the imbalance between the sexes. He argued that there were female teachers who hardly knew how to read and write; that in San José only 8 out of 500 school teachers were male. He mentioned that some male Normalistas earned only 90 colones per month and that the future was very bleak for male teachers because the highest salary they could hope to gain (if they were Normalistas) was 160 per month; teachers who had a "Superior Title" earned 140 colones and with nothing more than an "Elementary Title", 120 colones. Arrieta concluded that there was no stimulus for male teachers.⁹⁰ Of course, he did not mention that female teachers earned as much or even lower salaries than their male counterparts.

Although the right to vote made no progress during this period, feminist activism proved successful with respect to salary discrimination. Belligerent female teachers opposed on two occasions, in May-June 1926 and in November 1929, the legal sanctioning of salary rises for male teachers. A newspaper article signed by "Alcuino" mentioned, that although Congressmen had accepted the need to augment male teacher's salaries, they had not discussed the project because they were afraid of an active feminine crusade.⁹¹

With regard to employment discrimination, the small but strong feminist group was not so successful. In January 1927, Minister Dobles ordered the Administrative Head of Primary Education to elaborate the teaching

personnel roster for 1927. Using direct and clearly discriminatory measures against women, Dobles emphasized the need to increase the number of male teachers.⁹²

During 1926 and 1927 female teachers also played a key role in the struggle to prevent salary discrimination against "C" category teachers.⁹³ Minister Quesada first and later Minister Dobles, as well as several Congressmen, favoured this discrimination in order to encourage untitled teachers to study and improve themselves. However, the extremely low salaries of "C" category teachers prompted many -particularly titled colleagues- to defend untitled teachers. In January 1926, an article signed by "Ignaba" offered a particular defence by comparing teacher salaries with those of domestic maids. He said that a regular cook earned a total of 110 colón per month: 50 colón as her salary and 60 colón as board and food. According to "Ignaba" the cook enjoyed her life, was appreciated, and had ample leisure time and freedom. On the contrary, a "C" category teacher after two years of practice and overwhelming work could only aspire to earn 80 colones.⁹⁴ Disregarding the pressures of teacher and public opinion, Congress finally decreed a 10% salary rise restricted to titled teachers.⁹⁵

In June 1926, the Minister of Finance, Tomás Soley Güell excited even more the teachers' spirits. He declared that the Teachers' Pension Fund (created in 1907 and modified in 1923) was bankrupt and the government was not going to subsidize any more teachers' pension payments as had been the case since 1923. As far as he

was concerned, it was a case of simple mathematics; the percentage contributed by the teachers and the revenues that had been created by the government to support the pension fund, were not enough to cover the total expenditure. Soley Güell favoured the elimination of the Pension Fund. He explained that the government had decreed compulsory public personnel insurance and that teachers would have to comply with such disposition. This meant that teachers had to contribute with 5% of their salaries to the insurance fund.⁹⁶

In the face of such comments, teachers argued that ever since 1907 they had been paying a percentage of their salaries to the Pension Fund; for that reason, they would not allow the government to eliminate, all of a sudden, established rights.⁹⁷ In the Edificio Metálico, passionate orators even incited to violence to compel the authorities to treat teachers with justice, not only with respect to the Pension Fund but also with respect to salaries. They even went as far as to talk about the possibility of a general strike.⁹⁸

The "pension issue" dragged on for many months. Several modifications to the standing Pension Law of 1923, suggested by Minister Dobles, aroused furious opposition from the teaching force. These reforms were not only aimed at increasing the teachers contribution but also at diminishing the benefits. As Dobles mentioned:

Esta ley fue bombardeada en largos debates de prensa, que venían de parte interesada, y que recibieron la controversia de nuestra parte.

Los profesorados de todo el país se asociaron para elevar memoriales señalando cuanto creían malo en la ley que iba a dictarse.⁹⁹

In May 1929, Minister Dobles urged Congress to find an adequate solution to this burning problem. He suggested allotting an annual amount of the national budget to cover the costs of the Teachers' Pension Fund.¹⁰⁰

The Pension Fund dilemma exasperated teachers' spirits and unleashed the most controversial salary struggle of the period. The belligerent participation of several Congressmen -particularly Reformists- in favour of the wage increases and the suggestion that the 1918 Bank taxes be re-established to subside the increase, produced heated public debate. The major result was Minister Dobles' resignation in November, 1929.¹⁰¹ One day later, Congress rejected the increase by 23 votes to 17.¹⁰²

The debate concerning teachers and politics initiated during the Acosta administration, continued with growing passion during the Jiménez Oreamuno administration. In 1925, a circular sent by Patrocinio Arrieta, the primary school technical head, prohibiting all teaching personnel to get involved in politics, exasperated the heated atmosphere still further. Some teachers criticized the fact that while they were compelled -as were other public employees- to "contribute" 2% of their salaries to pay the debts incurred in electoral campaigns, they were impeded from participating in politics. As Claudio Hernández said,

the government told the teachers to "shut their mouths and open their wallets".¹⁰³

The judiciary personnel was barred from participating in political activities. During this period of an imperfect electoral system in which fraud was still common, it was presumed that members of the judiciary would be able to manipulate electoral results as they wished. The major political parties thus tried to neutralize those public officials by prohibiting them from participating actively in politics. Following the same line of argument, many advocated teachers' political neutrality, a goal finally sanctioned in the 1925 Electoral Law.¹⁰⁴ Referring to the measure, President Ricardo Jiménez said that:

Según nuestras leyes, sólo hay dos clases sociales a las que no se concede libre e irrestricta facultad de propaganda electoral: la de los funcionarios de justicia y la de los maestros de escuela. Tanto los unos como los otros no deben tomar más parte en las elecciones populares que las de emitir su voto. Esta restricción, talvez excesiva con respecto a los maestros, no reza con los demás empleados.¹⁰⁵

The political neutralization of teachers oriented their energies toward economic claims. The passionate salary struggles of the period 1924-1930 reflected teachers' militancy. Because of the 4:1 ratio in favour of female teachers, women played a major role in these struggles. Among them, feminists became the indisputable leaders of the movements.

C. The education dilemma: tradition versus modernism

1. School programs

From the moment of his first newspaper interview in May 1924, Napoleón Quesada criticised the existing primary education programs. Although he commented that both the opposition and the defense of these programs had been fanatical, he said that, in reality, they were not working well in any school. Furthermore, he had been told that teachers followed the programs only when observed by school inspectors. Quesada promised he would personally visit schools in order to verify the effectiveness of the programs.¹⁰⁶

On 9 May, Moisés Vicenzi asserted that education in Costa Rica was marked by the struggle between "modernists" and "non-modernists".¹⁰⁷ A few days later, a newspaper editorial commented that general public opinion supported Minister Quesada, to halt "experimentation", and to develop an educational system appropriate to Costa Rica's specific needs. The editorial expressed definitive opposition to the "circle":

De acuerdo con las opiniones del público, el Ministro de Educación Pública tiene gran aceptación. Que la educación deje de ser campo de ensayo y experimentación pedagógica. Debe acabar las corruptelas, la lisonja a determinados círculos y a la fabricación de personalidades "ad-hoc". Innovar es peligroso, lleva a la anarquía pedagógica. La educación debe de estar adecuada a nuestro carácter.¹⁰⁸

In December 1924, Congressman Santos León Herrera enumerated the country's educational problems and deficiencies, particularly the imbalance between investment and output. He said that, although the government allotted increasing resources to the educational sector, the results were extremely poor and education was in chaos. The Congressmen's claims were supported by Jorge Volio and other Reformist representatives, and Minister Quesada was summoned to Congress to report on the situation.¹⁰⁹

On 11 December, in a lengthy session, Quesada analyzed the most relevant problems of education. He called attention to the shortage of school buildings, and the steps the government had taken to remedy it;¹¹⁰ he mentioned the need to establish a link between primary and secondary education, and he criticised parents' indifference towards school issues. He differed publicly with Congressman León Herrera, saying that there was no chaos in education, only problems.

However, Napoleón Quesada did address problems in pedagogic areas and in the existing primary education programs. He said that in reality the programs were merely incomplete methodological guides. In his view, these programs were very ambiguous and set no specific standards for teachers. Don Napoleón said he favoured a minimum number of subjects for study.

Criticising the "exaggerated dogmatism" he said that every teacher had to be free to use his own didactic procedures and methods. He rejected the prevailing

"topic system", that is, the obligation to derive all knowledge (language, arithmetic, geometry, geography, history, science, etc.) from one sole object, act or occasion.

He agreed with the idea that lessons had to correspond to a plan and that learning should be intuitive. He favoured personal research and inductive as well as deductive methods. However, he said that scholarship had deteriorated because students did not receive appropriate stimuli. There were too many celebrations and assemblies, which in reality were nothing but "propaganda activities" to boost the image of certain figures. This situation had led to the decline of study and science. Minister Quesada said that effort had disappeared with respect to studies and that discipline was necessary to strengthen the students character. He said that "pedagogic modernism" favoured "sweet" teaching, and learning through playing. Quesada emphasized that, on the contrary, real life was a difficult struggle and that schools should prepare children to confront this reality.¹¹¹

The following day, Quesada continued his explanations in Congress. He mentioned that during the last 20 years the field of education had been an arena for unbridled experimentation. He believed that the aim of primary education was to provide rudimentary knowledge whereas the goal of secondary education should be more than simply preparing youngsters for the liberal professions. Quesada said that secondary schooling should promote the defence of democratic institutions,

and train responsible citizens. He said that he noted too much audacity and vanity in youngsters, especially in the Normalistas, and that he favoured discreet humility.¹¹²

Quesada's declarations in Congress opened an ardent pedagogic debate. The first sign of the ideological turbulence was Omar Dengo's resignation. Stung by Quesada's allusions to the Escuela Normal, Dengo decided to leave the administration of the institution; however his resignation was not accepted.¹¹³

Roberto Brenes Mesén also reacted violently to the Minister's statements to Congress. He sent several passionate newspaper articles from New York defending his position. He said that Napoleón Quesada judged his programs by out-dated criteria, and inferred that Quesada and his supporters were mediocre souls anchored to the past.¹¹⁴

In February, Quesada agreed to be interviewed by the press. He commented on Moisés Vicenzi's recently published article in which he described the Ministry of Education as "neanderthal" officials. Don Napoleón replied that Vicenzi could talk all he wanted about "modernist pedagogy", but that Brenes Mesén's policies had led Costa Rican education into a mire of debilitating uncertain, sickly and perturbing musings which in reality were the enemies of balance and harmony.¹¹⁵

In a public letter addressed to the prestigious educator, Ramiro Aguilar, Napoleón Quesada passed

judgement on Roberto Brenes Mesén's influence during the past twenty years, blaming him for all the illness and problems in education. Referring to Brenes' work, don Napoleón said:

Su labor pedagógica ha sido funesta, dirigida hacia un estado contemplativo y adormecedor. Exhibicionismo, melagomanía, vacuidad, malsano sentimiento, panteísmo abrumador y postrador, viejísimo nirvana. Lo contrario de lo que hoy necesita nuestra juventud. Ideal de anonadamiento, de confusión de las cosas y las personas, desprecio por el juicio de los hombres, sólo llevado por el juicio de su conciencia, equiparado a criterio divino.¹¹⁶

Referring to the "Quesada Marina" diplomatic scandal,¹¹⁷ the minister asked sharply how a man who had been Minister under Tinoco and whose diplomatic and political activity had endangered the name and dignity of the country, presumed to pose as the mentor of youth. Quesada claimed that Brenes Mesén despised and insulted teachers and imposed an intellectual dictatorship with his irritating pedagogic criteria. Finally, he maintained that Brenes' students at the Liceo had disliked his lessons because:

sus lecciones [eran] dogmáticas y extravagantes, con un verbo aceitosamente místico y ternuroso (sic).¹¹⁸

Two days later, Minister Quesada reassumed his passionate verbal attacks against Brenes Mesén. He reiterated that Brenes had created an intellectual dictatorship in Costa Rica, and that his eagerness for novelty had led to pedagogic anarchy. He also claimed

that the teachers had kept silent before Brenes Mesén because of fear and apathy. Finally, he said that Brenes' moral condition was extremely dubious since he had betrayed the family that had given him shelter (the González Flores family).¹¹⁹

Ramiro Aguilar replied publicly to Minister Quesada. He agreed that Brenes Mesén had been very damaging to the educational sector, that he had imposed an intellectual dictatorship, and that he despised common teachers. Aguilar commented that Brenes had never accepted opinions or suggestions. He also recalled that during the González Flores administration, a Program Commission had been working very well until it had occurred to the Minister of Education -at the last moment- to invite Brenes Mesén to collaborate. From his first day, Brenes ridiculed the Commission's work and imposed his own criteria. Aguilar, a member of that Commission, had tried to voice his suggestions, but Brenes had ignored him.¹²⁰

As the days passed, more educators and politicians entered the controversy. Congressman Santos León begged the Minister to return to serenity and "common sense" and put an end to educational novelties that had been advocated simply because they were utilized by more advanced nations. However, he asked Quesada to correct these errors silently, or in other words, to end the feud with Brenes and get down to work.¹²¹

Carlos Gagini stated publicly that the validity of the philosophical theory behind the programs' did not

have to be discussed, but that eight years after their implementation, the practical results were very poor. According to Gagini, not even the Normalistas had been able to use the programs correctly, and school children had been unable to assimilate them.¹²²

Omar Dengo decided to initiate a series of lectures to defend his teacher, friend and ideological companion. In the course of lively dialogues, Omar Dengo and Joaquín García Monge lashed out against the adversaries of the absent "master". The lectures, presided by ex-president Julio Acosta, pointed out Brenes Mesén's ideal of socializing education, and described his major accomplishments: secondary school co-education in Heredia (in 1908), the defense of lay education and avant-garde primary programs.

García refuted those who said that Brenes had not accepted suggestions and opinions, saying that don Roberto had developed the primary school programs with the advice of teachers. Dengo also referred to Brenes Mesén's literary accomplishments; although Carlos Gagini had said that don Roberto's grammar textbook was a plagiarism, it was one of the best ever written in the country.¹²³

La Tribuna, published a weekly column titled "Los acontecimientos de la semana" in which recent events were analyzed during this pedagogic controversy. The column favoured the Minister's position. One of its commentaries recalled that Brenes Mesén was the intellectual "papá" of Omar Dengo; that Dengo's lectures

were no more than a series of "chinitas" (petty accusations) directed at Napoleón Quesada; that no concrete defense of Brenes Mesén's work had ever been presented; and finally, that don Napoleón had "touched" the magister of pedagogy.

Juan Rudín, a celebrated teacher, said that, due to the fact that he had differed from the "pedagogic circle's" orientations, he had been censured as retrograde and ignorant and, together with his colleague, Fidel Tristán, had been a victim of a smear campaign in the Liceo de Costa Rica and the Colegio Superior de Señoritas. Rudín mentioned that he had been against the "topics" system because they had led to ridiculous and boring discussions that were a waste of time. Furthermore, he said that the supposed "social education" consisted of nothing more than celebrations and assemblies, and that "individual liberty" was, in reality, "letting children do whatever they wanted".¹²⁴

From his death bed, Carlos Gagini reiterated his 1903 commentaries in La República in which he had analyzed the plagiarism of which he accused Brenes Mesén. Gagini said that Brenes' grammar textbook had long excerpts copied from works of the Spanish educator F. Díez, as well as from Sweet, the British linguist. He also mentioned that the illustrious philologist, J.R. Cuervo, had already pointed out the plagiarism, which he had personally verified. Gagini said that Dr. Hansen, commissioned by the University of Chile to analyze Brenes' grammar, was the one who had established the "peculiar" similarity between Brenes' work and Sweet's.¹²⁵

Gagini died a few days later.

With a desire to end the conflict, on March 24, President Ricardo Jiménez publicly expressed his opinion. Although he was a friend of both Brenes and Quesada, he said nevertheless that the ideological battle had been instigated by Brenes' aggressive response to Quesada's statements in Congress. Don Ricardo said that the Minister of Education had based his pedagogic views on technical considerations and had not attacked Brenes Mesén personally. Furthermore, Costa Rica valued freedom of thought. Refusing to give his opinion on the ideological confrontation itself, don Ricardo shrewdly said:

cuando pelean dos toros bravos, hay que apartarse de ellos porque el que saliere huyendo se lo lleva a uno de pasada.¹²⁶

The President's intervention calmed down the debate on the primary school programs. Although he refused to state his opinion publicly, it was evident to all that Ricardo Jiménez favoured a return to traditional education. Napoleón Quesada had received the green light to proceed with the changes he desired. President Jiménez was not the only one to favour such a move; Liberal politicians, conventional thinkers, and the majority of the teaching force and the press, encouraged Quesada to define new programs.

Technical mistakes as well as ideological and political considerations were finally to reverse the avant-garde pedagogic movement that had begun in the

González Flores administration. The absence of teacher participation in defining the programs, the lack of appropriate training, and insufficient administrative control over their implementation, discouraged both teachers and administrative personnel from identifying with and supporting the pedagogic advances. Furthermore, the intellectual distance between the "modernists" and the "neanderthals" -encouraged by the "pedagogic circle" and their advocates- created resentment among teachers towards the "modernists", particularly against Brenes Mesén.

However, the pedagogic reversal cannot be fully understood unless political and ideological explanations are considered. During the Jiménez Oreamuno administration, the restoration of Liberal dominance meant at the same time, the return to a traditional world view and educational elitism -rudimentary education for all, and secondary and superior education for "the chosen few". The impetus the avant-garde pedagogic programs had provided for a more just and open society, was finally halted.

a. Primary school

In his first Annual Report to Congress in May 1925, Minister Quesada explained that the definition of the new programs had encountered difficulties due particularly to the differing criteria among the Program Commission members. While some favoured changes, others wanted to maintain existing pedagogic policies. Clearly annoyed

by the conflicting opinions, Quesada said that:

Tal desacuerdo demuestra que el criterio de algunos maestros está aún morbosamente influído por un sectarismo o por un sentimentalismo, o por un temor supersticioso que durará mucho tiempo como prejuicio de nuestra enseñanza. Quizá aún estamos presenciando algo parecido a la devoción silenciosa y medrosa de las ranas por el enorme madero que Júpiter les envió de rey.¹²⁷

Shortly after his presentation to Congress, Minister Quesada dissolved the controversial commission and created a new one whose members were more sympathetic to his points of view. The second commission was made up of Auristela de Jiménez, Atilia Montero, Evangelina Solís, Amado Naranjo, Abel Fernández and Juan José Monge, all of whom were teachers.¹²⁸

In accordance with the official position, primary school teachers rather than philosophical and pedagogic theorists would define educational policies. The teachers' classroom experience was to be the most important factor in the elaboration of the new programs.¹²⁹

On 24 February 1926, the outline of the new program was finally completed. Named the Integral and Practical Education Plan (Plan de Educación Integral y Práctica), it was divided into four categories: Man and Society; Man and Nature; Maternal Language; and Mathematics. Man and Society was subdivided into: Moral Culture, Social Culture, Civic Culture, and Domestic Science. Man and Nature consisted of Geography and History, Agriculture,

and Nature Studies. Maternal Language included Reading, Spelling, Grammar, Calligraphy and Composition. Mathematics comprehended Arithmetic, Accounting and Geometry.¹³⁰

The programs were not conceived as rigid methodological formulae, but as guidelines for teachers; they were also standard for schools throughout the country. Adaptations would be made according to regional needs, such as the pursuit of agricultural studies in rural areas.

The Plan was indisputably "scholastic" in orientation, with an emphasis on literature and courses on morality. In addition the plan sought to replace teachers' and students' "carefree" attitude towards learning, favoured by the previous programs, with rigorous discipline. As the introduction of the Plan clearly stated:

Ultimamente se han abandonado los viejos rieles y se entró de lleno y exclusivamente en una pseudo-moral activa (...) Un espíritu de novelería, de charlatanería, de ostentación, de falsa virtud, está acabando con la concentración de la mente, con el pudor de la mente que da robustez a la conciencia moral.¹³¹

A few weeks later, Minister Quesada ordered all schools to begin using the program on a trial basis for the rest of the academic term. Recognizing that they were neither complete nor perfect, don Napoleón intended to evaluate the programs throughout the year and later introduce any necessary changes or modifications.

However, printing problems and the corruption scandal in which the Minister was enmeshed, delayed the general diffusion of the programs.

When Luis Dobles Segreda became Minister of Education in September 1926, he promised to continue his predecessor's policies, but wanted to analyze the programs before their final implementation. He favoured a reduction in the number of subjects and more concrete guidelines for teachers.¹³² The meticulous revision and resulting modifications took several months. It was not until 19 February 1929 that the programs were finally sanctioned by law.

The primary school programs were warmly welcomed by the majority of teachers. With the logical exception of those closely identified with the "pedagogic circle" most felt that the new programs were easier to follow. In an attempt to summarize teachers' generally positive feelings, Martha Hernández -herself an articulate teacher- publicly congratulated the Minister's work.¹³³

For the most part, conventional thinkers also gave enthusiastic support to the Plan, although some resented that the programs had excluded the Church. As Ricardo Castro Meléndez argued, there should be a close relationship between school, Church, state and home. He thought that a religious -not solely moral- orientation needed to be enforced.¹³⁴ Despite the Church's tenacious efforts to recover its former influence in education, ecclesiastical interference was still controlled because of the prevailing Liberal regime.

b. Secondary school

In his first press interview, Minister Quesada clearly articulated his special concern for the secondary school. He described the serious shortage of teachers and the problem that most were former primary school teachers who became self-taught specialists. Quesada pointed out that the teaching personnel should not be the object of discouraging criticism and censorship; on the contrary, they needed stimulation and appreciation. While arguing the need to raise secondary school salaries, he mentioned his own case: upon returning for a full 40 hours of teaching per week he received a very modest salary.¹³⁵

On 17 August, an article signed with a pseudonym criticised secondary school education. The author argued that it promoted an "intellectual proletariat" because of the massive production of "Bachilleres". The author claimed that most "Bachilleres" became administrative parasites and favoured an abnormal organization of society. He stressed the need to diminish the intellectual proletariat.¹³⁶

Napoleón Quesada also favoured changes in secondary education. In his first Annual Report to Congress, he argued that the prevailing policies needed revision, and that the curriculum in the different secondary schools should be standardized. He explained that the Council of Directors -constituted by the secondary school headmasters- was already working on a draft.¹³⁷

With Minister Quesada's collaboration, the programs were completed and implemented in 1925, but public reaction was extremely negative. Too many course requirements and an overly long daily schedule were the major objections. The "pedagogic circle" severely attacked the lack of scientific education.

On 22 April 1926, Omar Dengo, Director of the Escuela Normal, explained that he had refused to participate in the design of the new programs because the nature of his institution was different than that of secondary schools. Dengo said the programs had been designed without the participation of the "pedagogic circle", and were extremely deficient because they had relied on neither scientific nor technical research. Although he and González Flores recognized that certain parts of the program were excellent, Dengo considered the elaboration of new pedagogic policies required more than common sense. He said that:

Por más prudencia y por más medios pedagógicos, en otros países no se construye a golpes del sentido común. Los programas debieron responder a estudios científicos y no al capricho de personas o intereses de círculo.¹³⁸

Other educators participated in the debate. Emel Jiménez, a Liceo de Costa Rica professor, focused his criticism on the overly ambitious curriculum.¹³⁹ Luis Felipe González Flores, preoccupied by the potential "mental strain" this might place on students proposed to found a Psychological Institute to evaluate student behaviour.¹⁴⁰

Annoyed by the strong criticism, Minister Quesada replied that the previous secondary school policies had favoured idleness, a noxious tendency he was determined to alter. He said that:

Se ha censurado por personas en quienes razonablemente tenemos que suponer preparación profesional para juzgar esta obra, que ella exige demasiado trabajo por parte de los alumnos (...) Creo yo, a este respecto, que ha trascendido hasta los colegios de Segunda Enseñanza cierto sentimentalismo, cierto mimo para los educandos, que se traduce en el deseo de evitarles en lo posible el esfuerzo, del estudio, de la adquisición de conocimientos y hábitos de investigación.¹⁴¹

A few days before the fall of Minister Quesada, a newspaper editorial severely attacked the secondary school programs. It mentioned that Luis Felipe González Flores had sent the programs to be evaluated by Víctor Mercante and Alfredo D. Calcagno, two renowned Argentinian educators. Their judgement was that the programs were "excessive and monstrous". The editorial concluded that every and each member of the commission must have included all the subject areas that he thought important in the curriculum. According to the author, the work of the commissions would collapse under the weight of its own deficiencies:

Desplomado por su propio peso y muerto aplastado por su propia frondosidad.¹⁴²

From the moment he took office, Luis Dobles Segreda focused his attention on modifying the new programs. He held various meetings with secondary school directors in

order to study educational needs. In his 1927 Annual Report to Congress, Minister Dobles said in reference to increasing criticism:

Hace tiempos viene diciéndose, en todas partes, por los profesionales de la educación y por los profanos, que la Segunda Enseñanza está padeciendo una crisis lamentable y que nuestros bachilleres no están hoy preparados hoy como lo estaban en otros tiempos. (...). Para mí, y para casi todos lo que de estas cosas hablan, el daño está en el plan de estudios, al menos en su mayor parte. Con 16 materias en el plan no puede haber estudiante bueno.¹⁴³

Dobles then emphasized the need to reduce the number of subjects, not only to improve the quality of education, but also to prevent possible mental or physical strain on students:

Tengo la impresión de que es preciso, es urgente, reducir ese plan de estudios, si queremos llegar a un acierto mayor en nuestra Educación Secundaria. Porque además de no poder ahondar ninguna materia, estamos torturando la inteligencia del alumno con una carga excesivamente pesada e imposible de llevar a cuestas sin arruinar la salud. Porque nada haríamos tampoco con estudiantes que logren dominar todas las materias de esos planes si llegan al final de la ruta tuberculosos o neurasténicos, en una visible y sensible ruina física y mental.¹⁴⁴

Secondary school directors opposed his idea of reducing the number of compulsory subjects, but Dobles finally imposed his point of view. On 20 June 1927, the government legally sanctioned the new program. The document divided school subjects into compulsory and

optional subjects. The first consisted of: Mathematics, Language, French or English, History, Geography, Natural Sciences, Physics, Chemistry, and Civic Education. Optional subjects were: Psychology, Logic, Social Education, Agriculture, Typing, Accounting, Domestic Arts, Handicrafts, Drawing, Music, and Physical Education.¹⁴⁵

The new programs were severely attacked by avant-garde thinkers. Some believed that Dobles' reduction of the number of compulsory subjects was exaggerated. Others criticised the indisputably "scholastic" orientation, centred on Language and Mathematics. Others lamented the de-emphasis of important subjects such as Agriculture and Psychology, and the complete elimination of Administrative Law, Political Economy, and Public Administration from the curriculum.

In view of the reluctance of some secondary school teachers' to implement the new programs, Dobles ordered a "personnel reorganization" and dismissed dissenters. This injustice was publicly denounced by Joaquín García Monge and others.¹⁴⁶ However the new programs remained unaltered, due to widespread general support and Dobles Segreda's steadfast determination.

2. The forced contributions

The shortage of school buildings due to chronic financial deficiencies and the recent March 1924 earthquake, compelled the San José School Board

President, Justo A. Facio, to collect compulsory "contributions" from the residents of the capital. President Jiménez and Minister Quesada supported the initiative.¹⁴⁷ Facio justified his decision in accordance with the 1886 General Education Law -still in force- which had established the possibility of imposing on district neighbours, contributions proportional to their income.¹⁴⁸ This disposition, however, with very few exceptions, had never previously been enforced.

On 3 October, Patrocinio Arrieta, the Head of Primary Education, publicly stated the Ministry's desires to generalize forced contributions to other education districts. Arrieta explained that the central government paid all public education salaries, and that according to the General Education Law of 1886, local School Boards were responsible for covering the rest of educational expenditure. He said that ever since the nineteenth century the central government had created special taxes to augment the finances of local institutions. Subsidies and loans were mechanisms further used to help the education districts meet their infrastructure needs. However, compulsory contributions were not only necessary to defray the existing school building shortage, but also to foment in residents a "sense of property" towards schools. Such a feeling would supposedly stimulate citizens to care for these establishments.¹⁴⁹

In November, the official newspaper La Gaceta, published a detailed list of San José residents and their corresponding quotas.¹⁵⁰ The inventory -an impressive piece of demographic data- created commotion among San

José residents, in particular because of the judicial compulsion or imprisonment clause. The "detalle forzoso" as it was called, incited an ardent debate between education authorities, politicians, neighbours, and workers' associations.

Some opponents argued that according to the Constitution, primary education should be free, and the state should defray all expenditure on education. Others believed that although contributions were necessary to face the urgent infrastructural demands, the established quotas were excessive. Still others considered that the inventory reflected a speedy qualification procedure - or even malice- because rich people had been treated too "softly" whereas humble workers and artisans had been unjustly appraised.¹⁵¹

Justo Facio publicly defended the "detalle". He explained that the list of 18,000 residents had been scientifically elaborated using Property and Electoral registers. Furthermore, the "Junta" (district council of education) was to give payment facilities and a control board was to be created to manage the funds. Moreover, the San José School Board was willing to analyze all complaints.¹⁵²

By November 14, the "Junta" had received more than 15,000 complaints. Facio summoned the School Board to analyze the "detalle" situation. He said that San José had more than 60,000 inhabitants, 15% of whom were schoolchildren. In view of these numbers, 9,000 children should be going to school, yet only 4,000 attended.

Furthermore, there should have been be at least 20 schools but only 9 were functioning. After a long debate about the "detalle", the Board finally rejected various alternative quota proposals from workers' associations.¹⁵³

On 18 January 1925, La Tribuna announced that the revision of "detalle" was almost finished.¹⁵⁴ One month later, the same newspaper announced that not even 25,000 colones had been collected, and, furthermore, that it was a shame that the public had agreed to raise more than 50,000 in three months for the building of the bull ring while it had not supported the school contributions.¹⁵⁵

In June 1926, a newspaper article commented that the "detalle" had finally been forgotten.¹⁵⁶ A few weeks later, Minister Quesada was forced to resign in the middle of accusations of corruption. In view of the ministerial crisis and after two years of sterile struggle, the controversial "detalle" succumbed.

Technical empiricism, public reaction against direct taxes and the resistance of the government to enforce judiciary compulsion led to the abolition of the "detalle". However, the economic prosperity of the period was to ameliorate the negative impact of its abolition. The Jiménez Oreamuno administration was to be known by the people for its achievements in the construction of public works, especially roads and schools.

3. Epilogue at Escuela Normal

In October 1924, Omar Dengo and Luis Felipe González Flores publicly declared that the Escuela Normal was undergoing severe financial problems and needed urgent help. The recent earthquake had destroyed many parts of the building, while the growth in school population and curricula had created new demands. Both emphasized the special nature of the training college as a national centre where youths from all over the country came to study. It was a very different place from secondary schools, institutions where only students with private means could pay the tuition fees. Highly inspired, Dengo argued that the Escuela Normal was the most democratic institution in Costa Rica because it was:

La escuela del pobre, del campesino y del provinciano sin recursos.¹⁵⁷

Disregarding the fact that the new government officials did not particularly favour the teaching training college, Dengo's extraordinary dedication was to prevent it from decaying. It kept its privileged position as the niche of avant-garde pedagogic and philosophical thought. However, the Liberal restoration indisputably limited the range of its practical influence.

On 18 November 1928 Omar Dengo died at the age of 40.¹⁵⁸ After ten years as the director of the Escuela Normal and one of the most prominent leaders of the advanced pedagogic ideas, his sudden death was an appalling shock for the field of education.

Minister Luis Dobles asked Justo A. Facio to direct the Escuela Normal. In spite of his advanced age, don Justo accepted. However, a few weeks later, don Justo resigned. He argued that Minister Dobles had "resurrected" obsolete curricula for the secondary schools and that he was not willing to accept the pedagogic retreat.¹⁵⁹

Joaquín García Monge publicly stated that Facio's resignation was caused not solely by the disagreement over secondary school curricula but also because of the recent "personnel restructuring" in secondary schools and the training college. Facio was annoyed by the dismissal of many lecturers who opposed the changes proposed by the Minister.¹⁶⁰

Many names were discussed as possible candidates for the direction of the Escuela Normal. Guillermo Tristán, a Liceo de Costa Rica lecturer; Carlos Raitel, the director of the German School; and Juan Dávila, a respected professor who was presently working in Chile.¹⁶¹ García Monge proposed lecturer Carlos Luis Sáenz, a bright and restless colleague.¹⁶² Minister Dobles finally decided to invite Dávila to take up the post. Dávila left the direction of a secondary school in Iquique, Chile, to comply with the Minister's request.¹⁶³

The death of Dengo precipitated Joaquín García Monge's final withdrawal from the educational scene. Greatly saddened by Dengo's sudden disappearance and disappointed by the unfolding of educational events, don Joaquín concentrated on his literary journal Repertorio

Americano.

Dengo's death symbolized the closure of an educational cycle that had begun in 1914. His farewell also seemed to be the farewell of the belligerent "pedagogic circle" that had challenged the prevailing Liberal scheme for over a decade. Although the other prominent members of the "circle" did survive don Omar, they no longer acted as a "circle". The chapter of avant-garde changes in education finally came to a close.

4. The University dream

With regard to higher education, Costa Rica had advanced little since 1914. The Escuela Normal (1914) and the Faculty of Dental Surgery (1915)¹⁶⁴ had been created and some steps had been taken towards building the future university campus, but in 1924, Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Law and Engineering were still autonomous faculties rather than part of a university, as they had been a decade earlier. Of these, only Law and Pharmacy had their own schools, and the Faculty of Medicine supported the school of Obstetrics and Nursing.¹⁶⁵

From 1888, when the Saint Thomas University was closed, until the University of Costa Rica was created in 1940, higher studies were organized in professional schools, which were in turn linked to their colegios or faculties. The faculties -constituted by their respective guilds- directed all administrative and professional matters of their members, including the

professional schools. The state's function was to cover the budgetary deficiencies of the colegios, and of the professional schools, in particular.

During this interval many attempts were made to reopen the university, and the issue was constantly discussed in journalistic and intellectual circles. On 29 July 1890, decree #64 had reestablished the University of Saint Thomas in "all its attributions and privileges";¹⁶⁶ this included the building, library, consolidated capital and other assets that had belonged to the university. The measure was not enacted, however, because of political and economic pressures: government offices continued to occupy the university building, and a major part of the education budget had been dedicated to the expansion of primary schools.¹⁶⁷

Under the Liberal state, higher education was clearly elitist. Access to secondary schooling was extremely restricted, and university education, both at home and abroad, was limited to a few privileged students.

This elitism reflected Costa Rican society: a pyramidal social structure that was hierarchical and differentiated. In order to maintain the "status quo", prominent members of powerful groups made attempts to restrict further access to higher education. Arguing that the country was saturated with lawyers, the most conservative sectors, including ex-President Cleto González Víquez, proposed that the School of Law be closed. In fact, Costa Rica had very few high ranking

professionals. An editorial in La Prensa Libre commented:

En la sesión de hoy resolverán los señores abogados la suerte de la ilo tempore (sic) famosa escuela de Derecho, en la actualidad tan discutida y deprimida, al punto de que jurisconsultos como los señores don Cleto González Víquez, don Leonidas Pacheco y otros consideran sano y conveniente su cancelación. Por otra parte La República ha manifestado editorialmente el mismo pensamiento de los jurisconsultos citados y en el mismo público se suma harta animosidad contra dicho centro.

La Prensa Libre quiere permitirse hoy poner su grano de arena en este negociado el cual tiene indirecta relación con el porvenir del país. Echamos sobre el tapete nuestro cuarto a espadas, aún cuando guardemos sobre esto absoluto pirronismo y creamos a pie juntillas que todo continuará tal como hoy existe sin que se atrevan los unos ni los otros a mover el menor guijarro en la dificultad conocedores experimentados de lo que pueden en Costa Rica los intereses creados y el carácter asaz apático, indolente y negado de iniciativas para reformar y progresar. Así pues, creemos que la escuela quedará en pie al amparo de tan dulce y lacrimosa expresión "pobrecita".¹⁶⁸

Disregarding those who opposed the expansion of higher education opportunities in Costa Rica, some intellectuals with a greater sense of social and academic responsibility, continued to struggle for the reopening of the University. It seemed that their voices had finally been heard in 1917, when a new Constitution sanctified the creation of a university in Costa Rica;¹⁶⁹ but this was invalidated with the fall of the Tinoco regime.¹⁷⁰ The Constitution of 1871 was reinstated and with it, this advance for higher education was

obliterated.

Thanks to the influence of Joaquín García Monge, Minister of Instruction during the presidency of Francisco Aguilar Barquero, (2 September, 1919 to 8 May, 1920) the various faculties were granted a plot of land opposite the Parque Morazán, in the centre of San José, as the site of the future university. This was later exchanged for a larger area of land farther away from downtown San José, in the Potrero de los Gallegos (today the site of the Law Courts).¹⁷¹ As a result of this transaction, the faculties acquired an additional 50,000 colones to begin construction. Don Joaquín commented:

La Escuela de Farmacia (...) no tiene casa propia y en vano ha sido buscarla. Sin embargo, no hay que olvidar esto, hay que instalar bien los pocos cursos universitarios que aquí tenemos. Hay que organizar la nueva universidad. Para comenzar, ya se les dio a las Facultades un terreno en qué ubicarla. Es oportuno repetir ahora lo que entonces dije al señor Alvarado Quirós, que tanto se empeñó en conseguirlo. "Ya hemos dado el primer paso y tengo la certeza profunda de que un día no muy lejano, declararemos abierta a la curiosidad de nuestros jóvenes la Casa Superior de Enseñanza, que revivirá en Costa Rica, los días mediterráneos, clásicos, de la amistad sincera, del diálogo profundo, de la palestra y el juego, de las nobles inquietudes del espíritu".¹⁷²

The decade of the 1920s, was a period of intense and effervescent ideological activity, and the university issue was defended with particular passion. Rómulo Tovar, Corina Rodríguez de Cornick, Alejandro Alvarado Quirós (the President of the Colegio de Abogados), and

others, further charged the heated atmosphere in education with proclamations in favour of a university.¹⁷³

In 1925, Congress responded to this pressure by issuing a disposition that encouraged the Executive Power to give life to Decree #64 of 1890 and re-establish the University of Saint Thomas. However, President Ricardo Jiménez definitively halted this initiative.¹⁷⁴

A 9 May 1926 article in Diario de Costa Rica, commented on several intellectuals' enthusiasm for the construction of the university, and mentioned that Mr. Borges and Mr. González Lahmann, the owners of lots adjacent to the university property, had promised generous support. Furthermore, the González Lahmann family would permit only the construction of "chalets" of considerable value in the area in order to maintain the required "status".¹⁷⁵

Three days later, the same newspaper stated that the problem of the university seemed to have been resolved, and that the ideals for which Colegio de Abogados President, Lic. Alvarado, had struggled for so many years would finally be fulfilled.¹⁷⁶ According to the newspaper, the Faculty of Law¹⁷⁷ was well equipped in terms of material and human resources and the Faculty of Pharmacy already had its own school, and would only need to change headquarters; for the moment, it would not be possible to establish the School of Medicine, but the Faculty of Dental Surgery would shortly open its teaching institution.

Reference was also made to the future establishment of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters and the unification of the different faculties. Elías Jiménez Rojas, a respected, self-taught, scientist, was mentioned as the most likely candidate for university rector. The article argued that the administration of public education would experience a radical change because it would be under the university body, rather than political or ministerial control.¹⁷⁸

On 15 September 1926, members of the existing faculties of Law, Engineering, Pharmacy, Medicine and Dentistry gathered for the solemn inauguration of construction work on the first building of the future university campus.¹⁷⁹

Designed by engineer Francisco Salazar and architect Teodorico Quirós, the structure was divided into five aggregates sharing a "sala magna", and would be constructed of re-enforced concrete; the facade would reflect Ionic and Greek influence.

According to an extensive newspaper report appearing two days later in La Tribuna, the inauguration was widely attended, as Alejandro Alvarado Quirós gave the ceremonial authorization for construction work to begin. The newspaper claimed that the university would become the main focus of Costa Rican culture:

sustrayéndola desde luego de las manos del Poder Ejecutivo, de sus combinaciones violentas y de los influjos aveces morbosos del mundo político que todo lo desnaturaliza y todo lo corrompe.¹⁸⁰

The Law building was satisfactorily completed a few months later, and the Faculty of Pharmacy some years later. However, the other three faculties had to wait until 1940 for their buildings.

The School of Agriculture finally became a reality in 1926.¹⁸¹ Government authorities had long advocated the need for agricultural studies, as well as teacher training. Both of these educational goals were delayed for many years due to other educational concerns, in particular, the need to expand primary schooling.

In 1930, Congressman Luis Demetrio Tinoco presented a project for the creation of the University Council, a preliminary step to the foundation of the university. However, other Congressional members did not respond to his initiative. As Luis Demetrio Tinoco said several years later:

presenté al Congreso Constitucional, siendo diputado, el proyecto que creí que iba a traernos a breve plazo la Universidad: el proyecto de creación del Consejo Universitario y que esa iniciativa murió al nacer. ¿Falta de ambiente? ¿Temores de las Facultades o Colegios de Profesionales? Nunca lo he sabido. Sólo sé que la Comisión legislativa no rindió dictamen. El proyecto quedó sepultado en los archivos del Congreso.¹⁸²

Thanks to Teodoro Picado, Minister of Instruction during Ricardo Jiménez' third administration,¹⁸³ a technical mission led by Professor Luis Galdámez arrived from Chile to evaluate Costa Rica's educational system. As a result of its extensive analysis, the Misión Chilena

elaborated a formal proposal for integral reform of the country's education, and the creation of a university.

The detailed project contemplated the statutes of a modern centre of higher studies, including the concept of institutional autonomy. Nevertheless, once again, government officials disregarded recommendations to found a university.

During the years 1888-1940, higher education in Costa Rica was characterised by the predominance of the School of Law and Pharmacy and by a strong and autonomous administration. The creation of the Faculties of Medicine (1895), Engineering (1903), Dental Surgery (1915), the foundation of the schools of Arts (1897), Pharmacy (1897) Obstetrics (1899), Nursing (1922),¹⁸⁴ Agriculture (1926), and the construction of the first university buildings (Law and Pharmacy) constituted the major achievements.

However, the dream of founding a true university faded away. Disregarding the voices of support, the government authorities always found excuses - particularly, financial considerations- to delay this.

Regardless of the government's apparent indifference, enthusiastic arguments were voiced in support of a university. The need to found a research centre for social analysis, to train professionals and to expand the benefits of higher education to more youngsters were major topics of discussion. However, the key issue of debate was the idea -favoured by most university advocates- that the future university should

be the guiding institution for educational matters in the country, responsible for defining the parameters in primary, secondary, teaching and higher education.

In reality, the essence of the debate was whether education should be divorced from politics. The prevailing feeling was that the problems in education resulted from political interference. Therefore, the only way to guarantee that decisions would be based on technical rather than political considerations was to withdraw education from the control of the government.

The foremost exponent of this idea was Dr. Clodomiro Picado, a well-known scientist. In July 1929, Picado presented to Congress his project to create a University Council that was to control all technical resolutions concerning education. In his view, the Ministry of Education should only administrate educational parameters. As Picado established in Point #1 of the project:

Créase con fondos propios un Consejo Universitario¹⁸⁵ que dictará su propio reglamento y a cuyo cargo quedan todas las resoluciones técnicas concernientes a la enseñanza primaria, secundaria y universitaria.¹⁸⁶

The Liberal restoration did not favour the creation of the university. Notable Liberals, in particular, Ricardo Jiménez, the undisputed king of the political arena, opposed such an idea. Scientific analysis of society's wrongs and injustices and the expansion of the benefits of higher education provoked concern among

conventional thinkers who feared for the disruption of the hierarchical social order.

Furthermore, the separation of education from politics could not be permitted under the prevailing domination scheme. In the consensually oriented state, ideological domination was best exerted through education.

In the context of the consensual domination scheme that had characterised Costa Rica since the end of the nineteenth century, education had become one of the most important mechanisms for the exercise of political power, due to its functions as an efficient transmitter for the dominant ideological discourse. For this reason, the governing élite of those years -and even of the present- would never accept the political neutralization of such a crucial apparatus.

The crystallization of the university dream was intimately linked to the prevailing political and social scheme. Throughout the period when politics was dominated by the "Olympians" or by their close collaborators, it proved impossible to reach such a goal.

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CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The González Flores administration has been the object of various studies and analysis. Professional as well as capable and rigorous amateur historians have centred their attention on the President's peculiar personality, the impact of the First World War and the economic causes of the coup d'état. Regardless of the fact that some have hinted that the "interventionist parenthesis" was the first serious questioning of the Liberal scheme, ideological explanations have been marginal to general interpretations.

Without denying the relevant role played by economic factors, analysis of key ideological phenomena is essential to grasp the real meaning of the interventionist parenthesis. This thesis suggests that the González Flores administration desired much more than fiscal and banking reforms: it aimed to dismantle the prevailing ideological discourse and to create a new hegemonic system.

Within the context of a consensually oriented society, the "Civil Society" becomes the essential terrain of political struggle. In that sense, the group which dominates "Civil Society" and dictates the terms in which the consensus is defined is the hegemonic group. In the case of societies where civil society is weak (eg. Guatemala), the aim generally is first to dominate the "Political Society". Once they have gained control of the latter, such groups exert domination and subsequently, attain hegemony over "civil society".

Because of Costa Rica's consensual vocation, the educational changes proposed by González Flores were openly to question the ideological essence of the prevailing scheme of domination. Since ideology is the main mechanism for exerting political power and education, one of the principal channels for transmitting and imposing ideology, major changes in this apparatus prompted an immediate reaction. When the dominant groups in Costa Rican society recognized a major threat to the foundations of their privileged mechanism for generating consensus, they reacted radically to prevent the dismembering of the prevailing discourse.

During the interventionist parenthesis, Costa Rica did not experience a hegemonic crisis. That is, the dominant classes did not lose their capacity to direct society ideologically and culturally. Therefore, they did not lose their capacity to generate and organise consensus. Even though the contradictions and problems generated by the Liberal scheme became apparent during this period, strong, positive forces worked together to defend and reproduce prevailing social structures.

Both the economic crisis and the serious questioning of the Liberal scheme were absorbed and assimilated by the Liberal system because the whole net of cultural relationships, a certain social structure and a dominant world view, coincided with existing power interests. As a consequence, ideological domination dissimulated social contradictions.

The 1917 coup d'état and the subsequent conservative

reaction that turned tyrannical, temporarily unsettled the prevailing political pact due to the chaotic economic and political situation and the relative discredit of the ruling class. The temporary dislocation of political activity was to favour the opening of the political arena to new social actors who strived to overcome the Liberal scheme and reformulate a wider and more democratic 'political pact'. However, the astute realignment of the forces of tradition under the leadership of President Ricardo Jiménez and a buoyant Public Treasury halted an early process of "democratization" of the polity.

Although the Liberal scheme was questioned between 1914 and 1924, the influence of Liberal politicians pervaded national political life. The temporary political setback they suffered in 1914 was relatively easy to reverse once the economy had recuperated and Olympian rule was once more enthroned. In 1924 the Liberal parameters were restored, albeit with modifications suited to the moment. The realignment under Jiménez meant at the same time changes in the education field: these reflected a conservative option favoured by the ruling classes. The elimination from power of those who argued for the "Active School" and the undermining of interference by the "pedagogic circle" in education by the new authorities were the most significant outcomes of Liberal restoration. The voluntary exile of Brenes Mesén, the death of Omar Dengo (1928) and the practical seclusion of Joaquín García Monge in his Repertorio Americano eased this process. Dismembered, the "pedagogic circle" no longer presented a united opposition to "Liberal values".

The restoration of traditional Liberal values with all they implied for education was reflected in the new primary and secondary programs, characterized as they were by a minimum number of subjects and provided ample methodological liberty for teachers. The emphasis on native Language (Spanish), Moral and Civic Education and Mathematics signalled a return to "academic" orientations. As "elitist education" was re-established, secondary schools maintained their traditional role, that of training a small number of privileged "Bachelors", who either obtained scholarships to study in foreign countries -in particular the liberal professions- or entered the existing higher education in Costa Rica. They later became the technical and political cadres of the state.

A restored Liberal state of such narrow perspectives naturally provoked a more challenging attitude from the teachers and the Catholic Church. Feminist activism was the motor force behind the teachers' struggles in those years. After 1924, the leadership who oriented the teachers demands tended to shift imperceptibly from the intellectuals at the Escuela Normal to belligerent primary school teachers, most of whom were women.

The decades-long hatred by prelates of prominent Liberals -particularly, Ricardo Jiménez- stimulated a passionate defence of lost ecclesiastical privileges. This provoked serious conflict between Government authorities and the Church. This tension was to be reflected on increasing problems between rural parish priests and school teachers.

The onset of a conservative limited agenda inevitably delayed the effective implementation of a university. Ricardo Jiménez and other conspicuous Olympians and conventional thinkers astutely opposed the foundation of an institution which they believed would threaten the prevailing political and social hegemony. Naturally enough, they alleged other excuses -in particular, the lack of financial resources- to hide their real concerns. The hierarchical social structure which they defended had to be preserved. The opening of the benefits of education to many more aspirants would threaten the established order.

On the other hand, the "neutralization" of education could -under no circumstances- be allowed. Secular and Liberal education was designed to provide rudimentary education for the rural labourers and technical/legal education for the elite. It did not provide for either the cultural assimilation of the impoverished, nor for the atmosphere of cultural experimentation inherent in a university which followed the tenets of the new age. This did not discourage personal mobility but it was extremely filtered. In a veiled, "consensual" manner, Costa Rica avoided the experience of Peru or Argentina when the university emerged as a threat to the existing social order in the 1920s.

In contrast to the usual path followed by the other Central American countries, the conservative sectors in Costa Rica were able to confront the radical political threat without the use of violence or repression. With the ingenious use of ideology, the political force gained

by popular sectors during the early 1920s was significantly minimized. The discredit of the Reformist Party and the manipulation of politics by Ricardo Jiménez and his followers left little opportunity for other political options. Although several radical attempts emerged to defy the existing order, these received scant popular support. However, the radical belligerency of certain sectors provided some evidence that the political system had undergone important mutations.

During the period 1924-1930, Costa Rica experienced the flourishing of Liberal dominance, which indisputably altered the course of education charted by the interventionists in the previous decade. Notwithstanding the fact that the Liberal scheme was to be severely tested once again during the early 1930s -when an abrupt change in the economy was to have an impact on the political structure- this model of government established in the 1880s remained effectively hegemonic until 1940.

The study of Costa Rican education reveals that the only movements of profound change in education were born in the heat of a global transformation of the state. The 1880s provide ample proof of this. Clearly the education system could not be treated in isolation, independent from the socio-political reality which circumscribes it. Education is an intrinsic part of the social "whole" and as such it cannot remain aloof from the ideological and political policies which direct its global functioning. For this reason, the attempts to alter radically education between 1914-1924 were extremely vulnerable from the start. They lacked an appropriate political,

fiscal and "Civic structure".

Though the 1940s witnessed the close of the Liberal era in Costa Rican politics, the Liberal restoration which began in 1924 ensured that the Liberal parameters in education left an indelible mark on society and politics in the twentieth century. The evidence provided by time-series data suggests that primary school enrolments as proportion of the appropriate age-groups remained at high levels through the period 1885-1930. Though school enrolments have climbed sharply since the 1940s, the content and purpose of educational policy have been marked by the "consensual scheme of domination" chronicled in this study. That is not to say that the reformists of the 1920s did not eventually triumph, but rather that the new régime within which they evolved did not imply the destruction of the consensual tradition.

Even today, Costa Rica still relies heavily upon ideological submission rather than violence or direct repression, so it was natural that the Liberal parameters would be absorbed after the 1940s. This may well have been inevitable since the demise of the armed forces in 1949 not only as an instrument for the maintenance of order, but also as a potential symbol of national cohesion, provided a natural opportunity for education to assume this role.

The political life of Costa Rica in the years 1880 to 1930, is in reality the history of a hegemonic elite which contained internal competition within certain prescribed rules enshrined in the system of education.

In contrast to the other Central American countries, political competition in Costa Rica was contained because the socio-political structure of the country precluded it. That is not to say that Liberal ideas were any different, they were simply implemented in a society in which certain nexus, particularly those between the ruling class and the subordinate groups, were masked under the notions of "consensus".

However, the consensual project of the San Jose elite did not extend to all parts of the Costa Rican population, despite its claims to be the "national" model of government. This was demonstrated most clearly in respect to the region of Limon with its distinctive economy, population and caribbean culture. This enclave, created by the operations of the banana companies and their requirement for contract Jamaican-born english speaking migrant labourers and their Costa Rican-born children, was overtly marginalized from the benefits of public education and was thus, largely spared from the consequences of the model defined by 'Olympians'.

Costa Rica has escaped revolutionary upheavals in the past decade precisely because historically its political evolution has been characterized by periodic reforms and the prevalence of consensus over repression. Perhaps this thesis can orient future political and ideological analysis by concentrating attention on the mechanisms through which such a 'consensus' has been achieved.

TABLES

TABLE I
EDUCATION EXPENDITURES
(in millions) *

YEAR	TOTAL ORDINARY EXPENDITURE**	EDUCATION	%
1884	1.38	0.08	6
1885	1.26	0.09	7
1886	1.40	0.16	12
1887	1.56	0.23	15
1888	1.78	0.43	24
1889	3.11	0.45	14
1890	2.84	0.49	17
1891	2.80	0.46	17
1892	2.70	0.43	16
1893	2.73	0.49	18
1894	2.73	0.49	18
1895	2.79	0.53	19
1896	3.60	0.63	17
1897	4.69	0.78	17
1898	4.38	0.75	17
1899	3.33	0.62	19
1900	4.07	0.78	19
1901	3.86	0.72	19
1902	3.49	0.61	17
1903	4.41	0.83	19
1904	4.11	0.81	20
1905	5.91	0.92	16
1906	7.09	1.14	16
1907	7.78	1.26	16
1908	5.72	0.84	15
1909	7.29	1.13	16
1910	8.86	1.10	12
1911	9.54	1.08	11
1912	9.32	1.28	14
1913	10.11	1.37	14
1914	9.78	1.40	14
1915	9.15	1.24	14
1916	9.76	1.36	14
1917	12.37	1.46	12
1918	9.29	1.00	11
1919	17.85	1.09	6
1920	15.54	1.13	14

(Table I - cont)

1921	13.66	2.58	19
1922	12.48	2.75	21
1923	13.76	2.60	19
1924	15.58	2.73	18
1925	19.42	2.96	15
1926	17.76	3.31	19
1927	18.77	3.68	20
1928	23.48	6.30	27
1929	23.67	4.83	20
1930	27.28	5.03	18

* Accounts are shown in colones.

** The category "Ordinary Expenditures" refers to disbursements made by the Executive Power to each of its ministerial cabinets, plus expenditures of the Legislative and Judicial branches. Not included are payments made in relation to the operation of state monopolies or the service of the external debt.

Disbursements of the Legislative body are included as of the year 1903. Expenditures corresponding to the Judicial branch appear from the year 1921.

Source: Memorias de Hacienda Years 1885-1934.

TABLE II

COSTA RICAN IMPORTS 1913-1915 *

	1913	1914	(% fall)
GERMANY	2,883.867	92,427	96.80
AUSTRIA	7.420	157	97.88
BELGIUM	100.987	2.006	98.01
FRANCE	833.364	180.928	78.29
ENGLAND	2,772.740	1,751.702	57.43
ITALY	366.877	295.947	19.33
TOTAL**	6,965.255	1,751.702	74.90

* Not total imports, excludes those from neutrals.

** Amounts are shown in colones.

Source: Memoria de Hacienda, 1915.

TABLE III

PERCENTAGE OF CUSTOMS REVENUES IN TOTAL REVENUES

(in millions)*

YEAR	TOTAL REVENUES	CUSTOMS REVENUES	%
1912	9.95	6.01	60
1913	9.61	5.57	58
1914	8.60	4.79	56
1915	6.33	2.73	43
1916	7.53	3.77	50
1917	6.86	2.64	38
1918	7.95	1.16	15
1919	11.89	3.50	29
1920	17.84	7.52	43
1921	17.88	7.13	40
1922	18.97	8.39	44
1923	20.52	9.88	48
1924	23.26	11.36	49
1925	25.78	12.95	50
1926	27.42	14.25	32
1927	30.58	16.19	53
1928	(n/a)	18.15	54
1929	35.40	19.20	54
1930	27.47	(n/a)	(n/a)
1931	24.75	12.35	50
1932	23.09	10.44	45
1933	23.89	11.24	47

* Accounts are shown in colones.

Source: Memorias de Hacienda. Years: 1913-1934.

TABLE IV

COSTA RICAN FOREIGN TRADE

1911-1934

(in millions) *

YEAR	IMPORTS	EXPORTS	SUPERAVIT	DEFICIT
1910	16.99	18.01	1.02	
1911	19.08	19.19	0.11	
1912	21.67	21.43		0.25
1913	18.68	22.20	3.52	
1914	16.24	23.36	7.12	
1915	9.63	21.44	11.81	
1916	16.20	23.92	7.71	
1917	12.03	24.48	12.44	
1918	8.03	20.70	12.66	
1919	16.17	24.01	7.84	
1920	38.01	26.80		11.30
1921	19.73	25.56	5.82	
1922	17.94	30.58	12.64	
1923	39.14	51.33	12.19	
1924	48.01	66.26	18.25	
1925	55.29	65.66	10.39	
1926	55.30	75.85	20.54	
1927	65.24	72.23	6.99	
1928	71.57	78.54	6.97	
1929	80.65	72.79		7.86
1930	47.72	71.85	24.13	
1931	38.19	62.82	24.63	
1932	23.99	37.52	13.54	
1933	28.87	48.57	19.70	

* Accounts are shown on colones

Source: Memorias de Hacienda. Years 1912-1934.

TABLE V

PRIMARY SCHOOL STATISTICS (1885-1931)

YEAR	SCHOOLS	TEACHERS	STUDENTS	AVER. ATT.*
1885	229	219	13.314	
1886	138	278	14.478	
1887	200	33	12.868	
1888	190	360	11.041	
1889	195	372	11.114	
1890	237	440	12.618	
1891	258	477	15.805	
1892	237	482	16.815	
1893	275	585	19.922	70%
1894	293	640	18.768	74%
1895	324	718	21.913	78%
1896	328	784	21.913	78%
1897	375	903	23.277	75%
1898	375	873	23.484	75%
1899	273	729	19.414	78%
1900	286	871	20.998	87%
1901	292	869	22.388	80%
1902	280	585	19.922	
1903				
1904	376	890		
1905	387	991	22.780	79%
1906	388	1.056	23.606	83%
1907	347	828	25.957	86%
1908	357	752	27.452	85%
1909				
1910	324	922	28.246	85%
1911				
1912				
1913	413			
1914	419		34.624	
1915	471	1.335	34.703	
1916	451	1.478	36.752	
1917	460	1.548	34.936	
1918	232			
1919	315	1.052	29.800	
1920	411	1.346	35.485	89%
1921	398	1.315	38.221	88%
1922	398	1.332	39.059	89%
1923	423	1.354	40.968	90%
1924	442	1.379	38.672	88%
1925	451	1.447	38.822	88%

(Table V - cont) .

1926	475	1.554	39.995	90%
1927	482	1.562	40.444	91%
1928	498	1.691	33.654	
1929		1.704	46.527	
1930				
1931	512	1.884	51.280	94%

* Average Attendance to school of enroled children.

Source: Memorias de Instrucción (Educación) Pública
1885-1932.

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