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**EXPLAINING RURAL CALM AND RURAL UNREST
IN COSTA RICA:
THE COFFEE AND BANANA EXPORT SECTORS**

by

Lloyd A. Jansen

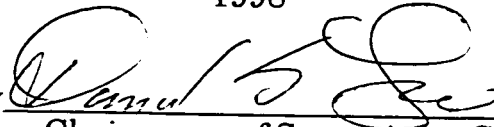
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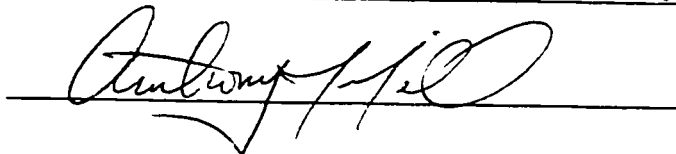
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Abstract

Explaining Rural Calm and Rural Unrest
in Costa Rica:
The Coffee and Banana Export Sectors

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This study examines, contrasts, and analyzes the near absence of unrest in the Costa Rican coffee sector and the somewhat regular unrest in the Costa Rican banana sector. An explanation for such divergent behavior within the same state is offered. This study also seeks to explain why state repression of agrarian unrest, relative to that seen in other states, has been so restrained. Additionally, this work also serves as a test of the theories proffered by Jeffery Paige in his 1975 book, *Agrarian Revolution*. Paige argues that specific types of relations of production lead to specific forms of agrarian social movements and unrest.

It is argued in this dissertation that the calm relations of production found in the coffee sector are attributable, primarily, to a historical shortage of labor. The shortage was significantly responsible for the creation of coffee smallholders, who are structurally predisposed not to participate in unrest. A shortage of skilled harvest labor continues to foster good patron-client relations on larger coffee estates and this, too, inhibits unrest. The shortage of labor is primarily a consequence of the small indigenous population that previously lived in what is now Costa Rica. Without a large, indigenous, popula-

tion whose labors could be exploited, moderated class relations developed during the colonial period. This history of calm class relations, reinforced by the structural conditions of coffee production, has led to a political culture adverse to extreme state repression. This, in turn, has led to limited repression in the banana sector. Repression has nonetheless occurred and the degree of this repression has changed over time, depending on the changing relationships of the workers to the state. While Costa Rica does not lend itself to a test of every aspect of Paige's theories, the evidence found largely supports his theses.

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To Jean, Anna, and Laura

CHAPTER ONE

EXPLORING THE DICHOTOMY OF RURAL CALM AND RURAL UNREST

The last three decades have seen a serious interdisciplinary focus on social movements that have been carried out by or with those who till the fields in developing, agrarian, states. Barrington Moore's significant 1966 publication, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, analyzed conditions that drove peasants to insurgency in old Europe. United States involvement in Vietnam stimulated extended interest in peasant social movements in the latter day "developing" countries as well as prompting new analyses of earlier peasant participation in revolutions. Eric Wolf, Jeffery Paige, Joel Migdal, Theda Skocpol, John Womack, James Malloy, James Scott, and Samuel Popkin are among those who have made notable contributions to the topic.

Journals steadily published contributions regarding peasant unrest and mobilization through the 1980s, sustained in part by cases again involving the United States and peasant combatants, this time in Nicaragua and El Salvador. With the resumption of relative peace in those two states, interest in peasant social movements has lessened, but it can certainly be no less important. Sixty-four percent of the populations in the 152 "developing countries" identified by the United Nations Development Program are classified as agrarian. In the 48 countries identified as the "least developed," an

average of 79 percent of the people are agrarian. These include such countries as India at 74 percent, Rwanda at 94 percent, Ethiopia at 87 percent, and Haiti at 70 percent. (UNDP, 1996: 152-53)

Research involving past events as well as "new cases" of peasant social movements, such as that of Chiapas, Mexico, continues to be published, if with less frequency. Revolutionary movements have drawn the most attention. France, Mexico, Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba, and Nicaragua have been well studied. Social movements that make little attempt to threaten the structure of the state are less studied, although analyses of land invasions in Honduras, plantation strikes in Tanzania, or rice riots in rural eighteenth century Japan, have been studied as well. A number of scholars, following Scott, have studied what has come to be called "everyday forms of resistance" -- unrest at the individual, sub-group, level. Whether at the group or sub-group level, all of these studies seek to explain why unrest has occurred.

Only a very small number of scholars have chosen to study the problem from the other direction. What explains the *absence* of social movements or unrest in developing agrarian states? What explains cases where those who sow and harvest the fields almost never feel compelled to resort to organized protest? When state violence against protesters is common in many states, what accounts for the absence or relative restraint of state repression when agrarian unrest does occur? Arguably, we have as much to learn from studying a state where relatively peaceful agrarian relations and minimal state violence prevail as from one where tillers of the soil frequently express their unhappiness in organized form and are met with

state repression. Costa Rica fits the former description and is the focus of this study.

A sleepy, subsistence-level, backwater in Spanish colonial times, Costa Rica's post-colonial growth was driven by the development and export of coffee, joined eventually by bananas, and then on smaller scales, cattle, sugar, citrus fruits, and other agricultural products. Since the early 1980s, exports have diversified tremendously. Nonagricultural products such as seafood, textiles, and manufactured garments have secured footholds in the modern export economy. So too have many exotic new agricultural and forest products such as strawberries, macadamia nuts, flowers, and hardwoods. The service industry has expanded greatly, especially with the tourist boom of the last decade. Coffee and bananas remain the third and second sources of foreign income, however, following tourism. Agriculture accounted for almost 80 percent of exports as recently as 1970 and has fluctuated between 46 and 69 percent in the last decade. (ECLAC, 1994)

The prevailing modern image of Costa Rica has been that of a peaceful agrarian state. Armyless since 1949, it has often been referred to as the "Switzerland of Central America," a state where small farmers live well off of their own lands, and touted by many as the only state in the region where law and honest elections have regularly prevailed. While many popular accounts exaggerate greatly, there is also a fair amount of truth in this image. When Costa Rica did have an army it was usually quite small and largely used for ceremonial events. Since its founding as a state in 1821, some eight national leaders (out of fifty-three¹) have been overthrown, but even these events

¹This number does not include some very brief interim administrations.

have been largely bloodless. Under the long reign of General and Liberal dictator Tomás Guardia (1870-76, 1877-82), the death penalty was abolished.

However bucolic Costa Rica may be in the relative sense, rural unrest (as well as the urban variety) does occur, even if it has always been tame in comparison to that of its neighbors in Central America or to the vast majority of agrarian states around the globe. Labor strife on the banana plantations has produced occasional, if few, fatalities when security forces have been brought in. These farms, carved out of the jungle with blood, sweat, tears, and malarial convulsions, have been plagued with periodic strikes and violence for over a hundred years. Agrarian workers have played roles in a few very brief civil wars, the last in 1948. In the large cattle *haciendas* of the northwestern Guanacaste Province, peasants have sometimes burnt down the homes of the *hacendados*. The Costa Rican press regularly reports of land invasions in these and other areas where idle lands invite the landless, and police sometimes respond with tear gas and beatings. Landowners and their hired agents periodically shoot squatters, sometimes resulting in fatalities. Sometimes the squatters shoot the landowners or attack them with machetes. Rural unrest and concomitant repression are certainly a part of the Costa Rican landscape.

Nonetheless, it is quite fair to say that agrarian unrest and state violence against agrarian labor in Costa Rica have historically been minimal when compared with other developing agrarian states. Peaceful coexistence has especially prevailed in the coffee fields of the Costa Rican central highlands, surrounding the capital of San José. These coffee fields have always

been the single largest source of employment in Costa Rica. Yet, while not absolutely immune to unrest, they have been remarkably peaceful for the better part of two centuries. Coffee smallholders and, on a very small scale, some coffee wage-workers, have formed organizations, carried out demonstrations, and engaged the state to protest conditions perceived as unfair or to otherwise protect their livelihoods. But organized violence by those who grow and harvest coffee has been virtually non-existent.

Of the many strikes in the banana sector, tensions have typically been high, as they typically are in strikes anywhere. But unlike similar cases in countries such as Mexico, the Philippines, or Kenya, where state or private armies will use massive force to break strikes, armed forces in Costa Rica, whether military or police, have played relatively restrained roles and plantation owners have never assembled their own armies. Deaths have not occurred during most strikes. Fatalities have resulted from clashes, but they have not numbered in the tens or more as they do in other developing states. Over the entirety of the century that is now concluding, state forces have possibly inflicted as few as seven worker fatalities in confrontations with banana strikers.² Any such deaths are tragic, but the numbers pale in comparison to the scale of tragedy common to agrarian labor strife in other developing states. It must be stated that significant numbers have been beaten or wounded in a small handful of strikes. But massacres do not occur in Costa Rica, A single death during a banana strike makes for headlines

²It is possible that some additional, undetermined, number of banana strikers died in 1918 while hiding from police in the jungle. Also not included in this figure is the 1979 death of a baby from tear gas inhalation during a confrontation between police and participants of a general strike in the city of Limón. The strike included participation of banana workers. See Figure 6.1, p. 213, in Chapter Six for summary of significant violent incidents during banana strikes.

and wrenching editorials in Costa Rica. In many states, it would rate a passing mention on page four, if it was even reported.

When the landless have invaded idle fields to farm for their families, there has been a similar restraint by the state. Government representatives typically engage in long negotiations before evictions are carried out--if they are carried out. It is not uncommon for the government to work out some arrangement for the land invaders to obtain legal custody of the piece of real estate in question. Fatalities are, again, rare, and almost never are carried out by the state.

In almost two centuries of producing and exporting coffee, both smallholders who grow the product on their own land and wage-workers who sow and harvest the beans for others have seldom organized collectively. Coffee smallholders formed common organizations briefly during the 1920s and 1930s to induce the state to intervene against coffee processors who were taking unfair advantage of the smallholders. The state itself has played a significant role since the early 1960s in organizing smallholders into production cooperatives and these organizations have served at times to represent the members in the political process. Smallholders, and some coffee wage-workers have organized into new collective political organizations in just the last two decades. These organizations now seem likely to remain part of the political landscape. They have taken action as radical as blockading highways. But such action has not resulted in violence on the parts of either the protesters or the state.

Thus, since Costa Rica's independence from Spain one and three-quarters centuries ago, agrarian violence has very much been the exception

and agrarian social movements have been both remarkably few and tame. This exceptional state of peacefulness raises numerous questions. What has produced it? Is there a model that can be reproduced and applied in developing states elsewhere that are rife with agrarian violence? While peacefulness has prevailed, can variables be identified that account for the unrest that has occurred? Why does it take the forms that it does? Why is violence greater outside of the coffee zones? Conversely, why has this violence not escalated? Why has there been no serious revolutionary movement in Costa Rica? Do agrarian relations in the coffee zone provide a model that can be reproduced in the banana zones of Costa Rica? How important is the role of the state? Is the relatively peaceful role of the state the result of something such as strong and wise leadership? Or is state action constrained by other structural variables? Have important variables that have effected this relative agrarian peacefulness changed over time? Are any critical variables responsible for these peaceful conditions now changing or likely to change in the future? Are the ongoing squatters invasions a sign of increased rural unrest?

If the squeaky wheel gets the grease, Costa Rica has appeared to most to be well oiled, not in need of excessive attention, especially in regards to unrest, both rural and urban. But it is precisely because Costa Rican rural unrest has been so minimal in relation to other agrarian states, that it is deserving of study. When research has focused on Costa Rican rural issues, it has largely emanated from the university community of Costa Rica. This has often consisted of published and unpublished student theses for bachelors and masters degrees. Little of this has reached an audience outside of Costa

Rica, and less yet in languages other than Spanish. A small handful of sources are routinely cited when issues of Costa Rican rural peasantry or labor are addressed in more general works.

What has made Costa Rica so different? The inequality of land distribution is comparable to that elsewhere in of Latin America. (See Table 1.1 on page 9) The rural landless population is estimated to be as high as 60 to 75 percent. (Nelson, 1983: 27) The 1984 Agrarian Census reports that the smallest farms, those of one to ten hectares, constitute 51.5% of all farms in the country but only account for 5.2% of the land area of the country's farmland. The largest farms, those of over 200 hectares, total only 3.5% of all farms, but account for 47.2% of all farmland. This inequality has not changed greatly in the latter half of this century over time even as the amount of farmland carved out of frontier areas has increased. In 1950, the smallest farms made up 51.9% of the total farms and 4.7% of the farm area, while the largest farms totaled to just 2.7% of all farms but possessed 54.9% of all farmland in the country. (González B., 1987: 97-99)

Slightly over half (51%) of Costa Rica's population of 3.6 million people still lives in areas defined as rural, about the same as Malaysia, the Seychelles, Surinam, Syria, the Philippines, Gabon and many other so-called "developing" states whose populations are somewhat equally divided between urban and rural inhabitants.³ Costa Rica's Central American neighbors are not dramatically different in this aspect. Panama's population is 47 percent rural. Guatemala is 59 percent rural; Honduras and El Salvador have rural

³As late as 1950 two-thirds of the total population of 800,875 was classified as 'rural.' Only in the province of San José did the figure drop below 50 percent." (LaWare, 1996: 19; citing DGEC, 1953: 45,49) The current population of 3.6 million is an estimate, based on various sources including UNDP, 1996 and ECLAC, 1996.

Table 1.1: Comparative Land Tenure Inequality in Selected Latin American States

State/Year	<u>Smallest Farms/ 1-10 Hectares</u>		<u>Largest Farms/Over 200 Hectares</u>	
	% of Farms	% of Farmland	% of Farms	% of Farmland
Costa Rica/1984	51.5	5.2	3.5	47.2
Costa Rica/1973	53.8	4.0	3.5	54.4
Costa Rica/1950	51.9	4.7	2.7	54.9
Brazil/1970	41.5	3.1	4.9	56.4
Peru/1972	87.3	10.9	0.5	71.6
Colombia/1971	73.2	7.2	2.1	56.0
El Salvador/1971	78.9	27.1	0.3	28.2
Ecuador/1974	75.3	11.6	1.2	39.3
Mexico/1970	61.2	1.2	6.3	89.8
Venezuela/1971	59.4	2.1	5.9	85.0

Sources: González B., "Rodrigo, Consideraciones sobre el Censo Agropecuario de 1984." *Ciencias Sociales (Costa Rica)* Vol. 37-38, 1987, pp. 91, 93-94; Wilkie, James W., ed., *Statistical Abstract of Latin America* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications) 1996, pp. 36-37.

populations of 57 and 56 percent, respectively. Costa Rica's most immediate northern neighbor, Nicaragua, is the least rural at only 38 percent, although this smaller fraction has shown in recent decades that it is quite capable of participating in rural unrest. (UNDP, 1996; ECLAC, 1994)

Costa Rica shares some other important history and similarities with its Central American neighbors. Notably, like most of Latin America, the isthmus experienced more than three centuries of Spanish colonization. All of the Latin American colonies had violent births involving the brutal conquest

of the indigenous population. Little discussed in "peaceful" Costa Rica is the virtual genocide of its pre-colonial population. And following independence, all of Central America and Mexico have lived in the shadow of the United States. The Spanish language is the official language. The Catholic Church is the overwhelmingly dominant religion.

But while some history and demographic indicators show similarities with neighboring Latin American and other developing states, many other indicators demonstrate that Costa Rica is different. Ninety-nine percent of Costa Rica's rural population, for example, has access to safe drinking water. Belize and Honduras are the only other Central American states identified in which over half of the rural populations have such access, and they rank at just 77 and 53 percent each.⁴ In El Salvador and Nicaragua, the figures are 38 and 23 percent, respectively. The adult literacy rate stands at 94.5 percent. Panama is close at 90 percent, but Guatemala has a rate at only half of that at 45 percent. The other Central American states have literacy rates ranging from 70 percent to only 54 percent. (UNDP, 1996)

Costa Rica and Panama both have relatively extensive access to telephones, with 9.8 and 9.3 phone lines per 100 persons. This is low compared to the average of 37.2 per 100 persons in the industrialized countries, but is dramatically higher than the access in the other Central American states, which range from 2.5 to 1.3 telephone lines per 100 persons. Ratios are similarly distributed for television ownership. A seemingly high 30 percent of Costa Rica's rural population lives at or below the poverty level, as defined by the United Nations. But the next best

⁴The percentage for Panama is not included in the UNDP report.

Central American state in this category, Panama, is a full 22 percent higher. Thus, while both Costa Rica and Panama have a relatively high rate of ownership of phones and televisions, we can easily deduce that those modern conveniences are concentrated in fewer hands in Panama than in Costa Rica. The percent of the rural populations living in poverty in both Guatemala and Honduras is 80 percent.⁵ (Ibid.) Elections and the transfer of power elsewhere in Central America are often, if not typically, accompanied by violence. Dictatorship enforced by military might has been commonplace. Costa Rica has held continuously peaceful elections for the last half century, and virtually the entire country participates in a *fiesta politica* on polling days.

In many ways, one can see that Costa Rica stands in stark contrast to its neighbors in Central America and most non-industrialized states of the world. The *Human Development Report 1996*, published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), gives Costa Rica a very high overall "human development index" ranking, placing it at number 31 of 174 states worldwide. Among other developing states, Costa Rica is ranked close to the Bahamas, South Korea, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Singapore. (Ibid.)

These socio-economic distinctions are partly a result of Costa Rica's welfare state benefits which were institutionalized in the 1940s and expanded upon in the following decades. The social safety net that the state provides to its citizens, both rural and urban, is one variable that accounts for the peaceful state of agrarian relations. But it will be argued here that such state policies constitute only a secondary variable which is largely a result of

⁵Percentages for El Salvador and Nicaragua are not included in the UNDP report.

the same, greater, historical variables that have primarily produced the agrarian calm.

For the questions at hand in this study, these differences between Costa Rica and its neighbors are more important than the similarities. These differences can be traced to pre-Colombian history. Unlike the rest of Latin America, the land that is now Costa Rica was sparsely inhabited by indigenous peoples. This, in turn, meant that little human labor was available for exploitation by the conquering Spanish. Contrary to other colonial territories, even the landed *conquistadores* who settled Costa Rica became little more than subsistence dirt farmers.

A central thesis of this study is that the historical shortage of labor, rooted in the sparsity of the pre-Colombian, indigenous, population, is the critical structural variable that has moderated class relations and agrarian relations of production in Costa Rica. The shortage of labor was a critical variable that led to the widespread establishment of coffee smallholdings. There was virtually no available labor to work estates. That coffee production was an answer to a labor shortage is now, perhaps, ironic. This is because coffee is not amenable to mechanical harvesting and remains, in modern times, a labor intensive crop. Further, the type of coffee grown in Costa Rica, arabica, requires harvest labor that is skilled. As such, the institutionalization of coffee as the national crop has insured that a labor shortage continues to this day even though large estates are well established. But because Costa Rica's peaceful agrarian relations of production can be traced to pre-Colombian population density, it will also be argued here that the Costa Rican model is one that can not easily be replicated elsewhere.

The questions posed by this study will be pursued through a longitudinal examination of Costa Rica's economic, social, and political development from the colonial period to the present. Specific and separate attention will be given to the two agrarian sectors that have historically provided the most employment for Costa Ricans and have also constituted the principal exports. These two sectors are coffee and bananas.

Coffee has been the preeminent export earner for most of Costa Rica's history as a state. Prior to independence from Spain in 1821, the colony had no significant exports. Quickly following independence, however, Costa Rica became the preeminent coffee exporter in Central America. It held that position until the coffee estates of El Salvador matched production in the late 1880s and then surpassed Costa Rica around 1910. (Brignoli, 1995: 240) The income brought wealth to the country for the first time. Coffee remained the leading generator of foreign income for over a century and a half, with a brief deviation in the early 20th century, until the late 1980s. Banana exports put coffee in second place both times. In the early 1990s tourism surpassed both in foreign earnings. Coffee still made up 12.5 percent of all exports in 1996.⁶ (*Tico Times*, 12/21/97: 19) Even as it has slipped from its number one ranking for bringing in foreign earnings, the coffee sector remains the largest employer, by far, in Costa Rica. Coffee accounts for 25 percent of all agrarian labor in the country and 6 percent of the total employment in the nation. (Ibid, 6/25/93: 22) A successful harvest can require a workforce of up to 200,000 persons during the November to February season -- some 11 or

⁶The world's largest consumer of coffee, the United States, bought 19 percent of the 1996 crop, followed by Germany at 18 percent, and the United Kingdom at 10 percent. About 10 percent of the crop is for domestic use. (*Tico Times*, 12/21/97: 19; Kenworthy, 1997: 24)

12 percent of the population age 12 and older. (Ibid., 11/20/87: 23; DGEC, 1984)

Coffee, like the Costa Rican population, is geographically concentrated. It is mostly grown in the *meseta central*, or Central Valley, where over 50 percent of the Costa Rican population resides on less than six percent of the national territory. (DGEC, 1984; Hall, 1991: 138) Some 35,000 farms are largely or completely devoted to the crop. Smallholders working less than five hectares make up 92 percent of the coffee farmers and produce 40 percent of the crop. Estates over 20 hectares in size make up a mere two percent of the farms, but produce 37 percent of the crop. Most farms represent multiple generations of family ownership. Most national leaders have had family ties to coffee, and its production has influenced the dominant culture in many ways. (*Tico Times*, 6/25/93: 22)

Bananas were developed as an export crop by entrepreneurs from the United States in the latter nineteenth century. A principal catalyst was the motivation to put railroad tracks, built from a new port on the Atlantic coast, to profitable use before the line eventually reached San José in the central highlands. Before the end of the century, Costa Rica was one of the top banana exporters in the world and has remained so ever since. Bananas are currently grown throughout much of the tropical lowlands of the Atlantic coast and in some areas of the southern Pacific coast lowlands.

Banana plantings are far less concentrated than those of coffee, however, and carried out via shifting cultivation. Expanses of jungle have been cleared, farmed, and abandoned when diseases and worms have taken too great a hold. Many of the abandoned farms are recovered again for further

cultivation in later years. In 1991, some 32,000 hectares were actively devoted to the crop, equaling about 29 percent of the area planted in coffee. (*Tico Times*, 12/13/91: 1; 6/25/93: 22) Non-producing lands or lands devoted to other uses but owned by banana companies, however, have often equaled many times the amount of land devoted to coffee. In 1996, the sector accounted for 16 percent of Costa Rica's total export revenues and the country was the second largest exporter of bananas in the world, after Ecuador. (*Ibid.*, 10/31/97: 16) In the 1990s, export earnings from bananas have surpassed those from coffee by two to three times, although the labor required is far less. (ECLAC, 1996: 132-32) In 1985 the banana sector employed 13,690 persons throughout the year. In 1990, after a state campaign to expand production, the figure was 18,845. (*Tico Times.*, 12/13/91: 4)

In addition to addressing questions posed above, this study will also serve to test, in part, the theories of Jeffery Paige as postulated in his 1975 book, *Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World*. Paige presents a model of class conflict to explain the rise of rural social movements and unrest. Paige draws on an impressively large base of data. He first builds a quantitative component based on 135 agricultural exporting sectors in 70 developing states. He supplements his quantitative study with case studies in three states that have experienced significant agrarian unrest -- Angola, Peru, and Vietnam.

Paige's work has been frequently cited, highly praised and severely criticized, but little tested. Costa Rica is perhaps an unusual case with which to test Paige's theories because agrarian unrest and the state response have been so restrained, but while his model is presented as one that can help

explain types of agrarian unrest, it may also help explain why a state has a relative lack of such unrest. And, of course, every state and export sector examined and tested will help either to strengthen or weaken the proffered theories. Any conclusion will only strengthen our collective base of knowledge, but the examination and analysis carried out in this work will serve, largely, to support Paige's theories.

Paige himself included Costa Rica's banana plantation and coffee smallholding sectors in the quantitative component of *Agrarian Revolution*. These two export sectors are, however, reduced to small bits of statistical data, analyzed conjointly with data from another 133 export sectors from around the globe. While the data from the two Costa Rican export sectors contributed to Paige's grander conclusions, one is unable to make specific conclusions about the Costa Rican cases. This study will intensely analyze the fit of these two sectors with Paige's model.

While Paige presents a model of class conflict, it is not dichotomous. According to Paige, peasants do not act simply because they are the oppressed class, but rather they act because of the specific ways in which their labor is exploited. Further, Paige argues, the degree of radicalism reached by any peasant social movement is also dependent on the capabilities that an upper class has to respond to the social movement. If an upper class is capable of making concessions, it ultimately will do so, argues Paige, thus avoiding serious escalation and radicalization of the social movement.

Paige's set of theories is ambitious and elegant, proffering specific forms of agrarian social movements, given differing but typical forms of

agricultural organization and relations of production. Paige argues that the major export crops in developing states each have typical modes of production, across states, with typical, concomitant relations of production. Thus, each export sector -- cotton, cattle, rice, etc. -- becomes another potential case study. Agrarian export sectors within the states, rather than the states themselves or the economic classes within them, are the units of analysis. In this sense, Paige's set of theories was groundbreaking. In using Costa Rica to test Paige's theories, the coffee and banana export sectors become embedded cases within the larger case study.

Paige specifies four types of agrarian relations of production between the two groups he calls "cultivators," those who labor in agrarian production, and "non-cultivators," elites in positions of power over the cultivators. The non-cultivators may be landlords, both traditional or corporate, or they may be bankers and middle-men who provide credit, crop processing, or agricultural inputs such as fertilizers or chemicals. Cultivators are classified into two types according to their income sources, those who are dependent upon possession of land for their livelihood, and those who are dependent upon wages. The non-cultivators are also divided into two types, those who are dependent upon the land they own, and those who earn income from capital investments.

Combined, these produce four ideal types of income source combinations between non-cultivators and cultivators. Each of these income source combinations, according to Paige, leads to different, expected, forms of agrarian social movements. With the non-cultivator income source given first in each instance, the income combinations and concomitant forms of

expected agrarian social movements are as follows. First is the land-land combination. If a social movement is produced under these circumstances, it will take the form of an agrarian revolt. Second is the capital-land combination, which can lead to a reform movement regarding commodity profits. Third is the capital-wages combination which can lead to a labor reform movement. Fourth and last is the land-wages combination, which can lead to either a nationalist or socialist revolution. This spectrum, with characteristics of the respective non-cultivators and cultivators for each income combination, is summarized, in over-simplified form, in Table 1.2 on page 20.

Paige further identifies each income combination with additionally descriptive names: commercial hacienda, small holding, sharecropping and migratory labor, and plantation. These characterizing names will not be used in this dissertation as they could prove more confusing than helpful as not all of them correspond well with the vernacular usage in Costa Rica. For example, Paige describes the land-land income combination as typical of the "commercial hacienda." While the corresponding income combination would fit most closely with some traditional cattle *haciendas* in Costa Rica, it would be confusing to limit the term to this combination type, as all large estates in Costa Rica may be called *haciendas*.⁷ Similarly, the capital-wages income combination is labeled as "plantation" agriculture by Paige. In Costa Rica, this income combination and name would both be consistent with the banana plantations of the coasts. However, there are large coffee estates, or *haci-*

⁷As will be discussed below, even these traditional cattle *haciendas* do not precisely fit Paige's definition.

endas, that fit the description of the income combination but which, in Costa Rica, are never called plantations.⁸

The following will explain each income source combination in more detail and outline how each will be found, through the research presented in this study, to fit or not to fit with the Costa Rican case.⁹ In the land-land combination, the non-cultivators are typically owners of large family lands. They are well off in terms of the local rural community, but they do not possess the means to invest heavily in machinery or technology to improve their profits. The large size of their land holdings, and, typically, hereditary links to nobles of the colonial era, confer an elite status in the Latin American culture. Corporate capital is seldom or little involved. The landowners rely mostly on traditional farming or livestock methods. Rather than pay wages, these landowners typically grant subsistence plots to peasants in return for labor elsewhere on the estate. The cultivators in the land-land combination are the peasants who work for the landlord and survive largely from the fruit of their subsistence plots which they are given use of in return for their work, although small wages may sometimes be involved in the exchange for labor.

Political conflict in the land-land income combination should be zero-sum. The landowner's income and status depend on the land. The peasant can only increase his or her income by increasing land area or by gaining ownership of the land. Landowners lose if peasants gain. While the landowner is conservative, so too, argues Paige, is the peasant in this situation. Both

⁸This is not the first time Paige has been criticized for conflating land-holding types. I.e. see Wolf, 1977: 750.

⁹All descriptions for the four income combinations based on Paige, 1975: 1-71.

Table 1.2: Paige's Income Combinations of Non-Cultivators and Cultivators and Expected Forms of Social Movements -- Simplified¹⁰

1. LAND-LAND INCOME COMBINATION

NON-CULTIVATORS = Landlords who grant subsistence plots in return for labor.

CULTIVATORS = Peasants who work the subsistence plots and for landlord.

EXPECTED FORM OF UNREST: Agrarian revolt.

2. CAPITAL-LAND INCOME COMBINATION

NON-CULTIVATORS = Middlemen.

CULTIVATORS = Smallholders producing export crops (may additionally produce domestic cash crops or subsistence crops).

EXPECTED FORM OF UNREST: Commodity profit reform movement.

3. CAPITAL-WAGES INCOME COMBINATION

NON-CULTIVATORS = Large land owners, corporations or individuals wealthy enough to afford expensive processing machinery.

CULTIVATORS = Resident wage laborers.

EXPECTED FORM OF UNREST: Labor reform movement (negotiations/strikes).

4. LAND-WAGES INCOME COMBINATION

NON-CULTIVATORS = Low tech landlords dependent on legal or extralegal force for economic survival who employ low-wage labor

CULTIVATORS = The low paid resident or migratory workers

EXPECTED FORMS OF UNREST: Nationalist or socialist revolution.

Source: Paige, 1975 1-71

are wedded to the land. If peasants organize politically, it will be to hold onto the lands they have, to expand their lands, or to gain ownership of the land. They will rarely organize politically for any extended time for any other purpose. Thus, when they do organize, it takes the form of an agrarian revolt. Their anger and their objectives are focused largely on the landlords, not the larger political system.¹¹

¹⁰Paige presents these four types in an even more simplified matrix. See Paige, 1975, p. 11.

¹¹Theda Skocpol argues that Paige draws a distinction between agrarian revolts and peasant activity that is revolutionary that is too distinct. "Although he never says so explicitly, Paige surely realizes that under appropriate military conditions such 'agrarian revolts' can have truly revolutionary consequences." (1982: 357) The Costa Rican case provides no history with which to engage this charge.

Paige offers Central American coffee *fincas* as examples of the land-land income combination. However, while Guatemalan and Salvadoran coffee *fincas* may fit this combination as defined by Paige, the coffee estates of Costa Rica do not. Some cattle *haciendas* in Costa Rica have approximated the land-land income combination, but good wages have almost always been paid. Even with this difference in wages, there have been small, localized, agrarian revolts that approximate the expectations of Paige's model. (Edelman, 1992; Gudmundson, 1983) Another aspect of the model is the typical presence of corrupt police forces that carry out, or otherwise support, the repression of the landlord. In Costa Rica, police forces are far less corrupt than is typical of many or most developing states. The Costa Rican state also has a long track record of intervening in land disputes with untitled peasants frequently winning possession of lands. The cattle sector, traditionally the third largest agrarian export, is not one of the sectors closely examined in this study. It is worthy of further exploration, however, within the context of the Paige model, to determine if and how it might correspond. It is possible that the land based peasants of these traditional cattle haciendas, even though receiving good wages, have been as equally willing to revolt as lesser paid counterparts elsewhere because, first, the potential of repression for participating in such a revolt is less, and, second, the likelihood of winning ownership of land is greater.

In the capital-land income combination, the non-cultivators are middlemen and the cultivators are smallholders producing export crops. Although the non-cultivators may actually be large landowners, it is of no consequence to this relationship. Since the smallholders are landowners, they

have no landlords. The non-cultivators/middlemen may own the expensive crop processing machinery that must be utilized by the smallholders so that their products will be suitable for export. The middlemen may also be those who supply necessary agricultural inputs such as fertilizers or chemical pesticides. They may provide necessary credit. Often, the same middlemen may perform all of these services. The smallholders can usually expect to see increased profits over time due to technological innovation. Their ownership of the land gives them a certain security and conservatism and they have a low class consciousness. Solidarity is difficult because these smallholders compete with each other for land, inputs, and access to processing facilities. They are not generally receptive to communist or other radical organizers who often are seeking to collectivize the lands of the larger land holders. This thesis is significant because it stands in direct opposition to other theorists who argue that small-holding peasants, for varying reasons, are the most likely to join a radical or revolutionary social movement. (Wolf, 1969; Scott, 1977)

While Paige argues that smallholders are resistant to joining radical causes, he does assert that, in times of economic depression, when profits fall dramatically, these same smallholders may support political movements aimed at restricting the middleman. The resulting battles are not generally zero-sum. The smallholders do not seek land concessions or the overthrow of the upper class or the state. The middlemen generally have a large enough share of profits to make some concessions.

The smallholders are more likely to organize for business purposes than for political. Farmers associations will organize to provide credit,

insurance, or processing facilities in competition with the middlemen. Sometimes this will lead to political activity for the purpose of furthering these goals, but if the organization continues for long, argues Paige, it will be to serve the economic functions, rather than to pursue an ongoing political agenda.

It will be seen that Costa Rican coffee smallholders and their relations with middlemen fit with the conditions of Paige's capital-land income combination on virtually every count. But in the period since the 1950s, the state has in many ways supplanted the middlemen. As such, protest that might previously been directed at the middlemen has been redirected at the state. The argument will be made in this dissertation that the state has, effectively, become the middleman in many ways and that the capital-land income combination of Paige's model, modified to account for this variation, will be supported by the Costa Rican case. Where the Costa Rican case could be seen to differ from the Paige model is that smallholders seem to now be maintaining longer lasting political organizations. But as these organizations still perform many business functions, and because relations with the middleman-state are, by definition, political, this is not a very great variation from the model posited by Paige.

In the third income combination, that of capital-wages, the non-cultivators are large land owners who utilize modern, capital intensive, farming methods and expensive processing machinery. While these land owners are typically corporations, they may also be wealthy individual owners. The cultivators are resident wage laborers. The expected form of unrest is the reform labor movement. The typical tactic is the strike. Goals

of the movement are typically limited to questions of wages and working conditions. The wage earners do not seek state power or nationalization of the plantation or estate. Conflict is focused on income from the land rather than ownership of the land. The unions have a strong class base and consciousness, although the solidarity of the unions is such that they may negotiate for members' gains at the expense of part-time or seasonal workers. Making something of a Gramscian analysis, Paige argues that when the economically powerful upper class landowners are confronted by a radical, class conscious work force that is well-organized, they will be both willing and able to bargain and make concessions.

A look only at the resident coffee estate workers of Costa Rica would give one doubts about the validity of Paige's expectations for the capital-wages income combination. In fact, recent research based in part on relations of production between these Costa Rican workers and their employers has challenged Paige's theories. (Anderson, 1993; Anderson and Seligson, 1994) Resident coffee estate workers do not constitute a radical, class conscious, or well-organized work force. The extensive research that follows in this work reveals almost no history of these workers carrying out strikes or even attempting to organize in any manner to gain wage increases or other employment benefits. A few, brief, isolated, efforts to unionize and strike in the late 1930s quickly fell apart due to lack of support. Sketchy evidence indicates that a few similarly brief and weak efforts may have occurred in the late 1970s.

The historical labor shortage in the coffee sector has kept this work force well paid and provided with other benefits. Coffee estate owners provide

direct benefits, over and above good salaries, such as housing and plots of land to allow the growing of subsistence foods. The owners maintain these patron-client relationships with their workers even in modern times because they can not afford to have those workers leave due to bad treatment. Workers have always had the option to take their harvesting skills elsewhere. The state additionally provides many other benefits to the resident coffee wage workers, as it does to most citizens, such as health and retirement benefits, schools, price subsidies for staple foods, etc. Class solidarity is also weakened because the resident wage-workers have strong family ties to coffee smallholders and work alongside smallholders who also work on the large estates but only part-time.

I will argue, in the pages that follow, that these factors explain why organized unrest has been unknown among the resident wage-workers of Costa Rica's coffee estates. I will also argue, however, that this does not invalidate Paige's theses regarding the capital-land income combination. I will further argue that the coffee sector even provides support for these theses, albeit weak support. There has been informal unrest that is non-union, peaceful, and small scale, which nonetheless approximates strike conditions.

Further, it will be argued in these pages, we can find strong support for the expectations posited by Paige for the capital-wages income combination elsewhere in Costa Rica. We need only look to the banana plantations of the coasts. These plantation workers have demonstrated a class consciousness from the founding days of the industry and have a history of strikes and work stoppages just as long. They have participated in unions and similar worker organizations since the 1910s. Communist influence has been great since

the beginning of the 1930s. And, as will be seen, strikes and work stoppages have been common even though banana workers earn higher wages than coffee workers. The work is typically much harder on the banana plantations, especially on new plantations where groves are carved out of jungle in harsh tropical conditions. Although simplified here, one principal argument that will be made in this work is that the alienating corporate, remote, and stratified nature of labor relations on the banana plantations has played a role in pushing these workers to develop a strong class consciousness. The patron-client relations of the coffee estates do not exist on the banana plantations, for many reasons that will be explored in this work.

The last of the income combinations, land-wages, is that which, according to Paige, can be expected to lead to agrarian revolution. The non-cultivators are land owners and traditional elites who are dependent on legal or extralegal repressive forces who facilitate the employment of low paid wage-workers. Profits are made because the labor costs are low. Investments are not made in modern processing machinery. Paige offers numerous export sectors as examples of this income combination. Malayan rubber plantations, rice sharecropping in both the Philippines and Vietnam, and migratory labor estates such as those producing grapes in colonial Algeria or those growing coffee in Kenya. Sharecropping constitutes wage earning in Paige's model because it is earning wages in-kind. As in the capital-wages combination, the workers are radical, class conscious, and well-organized. But unlike the non-cultivators of the capital-wages combination, these land based non-cultivators do not have the monetary reserves with which to make

concessions to strikers. The battle is zero-sum and can escalate to revolution. In some circumstances it is a socialist revolution. Under the right circumstances in colonial situations, it is a nationalist revolution.

The details of the differences leading to either socialist or nationalist revolution are not important for the Costa Rican case as the land-wages income combination simply hasn't existed in Costa Rica. Migrant wage laborers are used in the harvesting of coffee, sugar, and other crops, but their numbers have historically been so very small and dispersed that it would be extremely difficult for them to successfully organize a social movement. Sharecropping has similarly been rare in Costa Rica. Critically important as well, these small numbers of agrarian laborers have not been subject to the powers of repressive state police or private armies. When looking at migrant labor, however, the conditions are just now changing as Nicaraguan refugee migrants, living in Costa Rica, have begun to fill the coffee harvest labor pool. In the most recent years, they have, in fact, dominated the harvest labor.

Costa Rican elites, including large landowners, have never had the resources to organize repressive forces on a significant scale. It will be argued in these pages that this is, ultimately, one more consequence of the historical labor shortage. There are both large coffee and cattle *haciendas* whose owners little employ modern technologies and who hire wage labor. But, historically, the coffee workers and cowboys have both received high, not low, wages. (Edelman: 113) As wages on the cattle haciendas have lowered in modern times, the landlords have still been left without repressive forces to enforce conditions and wages that would compare to those in states where

similar workers have felt pushed to join a revolutionary movement.

Repressive forces have recently been used to quell banana worker strikes and, in the most recent case, specifically Nicaraguan strikers. The evidence will also show that Nicaraguans are more likely to be the recipients of repression than are Costa Rican workers. This raises interesting questions when we note the new shift to Nicaraguan labor in the coffee sector. Will we see a concomitant shift to repression in this sector?

The historical absence of the land-wages income combination, as defined by Paige's ideal type, means that one can not effectively test this part of the model in Costa Rica. The recent, incipient, move to repression in the banana sector, however, must necessarily be evaluated in combination with the evidence of a new migrant component in the coffee sector. Are these changes, together, creating, incipiently, the conditions for the land-wage income combination? Given that this is the combination that, Paige argues, can lead to revolution, it is worthy of analysis. Such analysis will be provided and it will be argued that the conditions of the land-wage income combination do not yet exist and are not likely to exist any time soon.

Few have actually tested the theories posited by Paige with the use of independently gathered data. However, among these few efforts, two known to this researcher use Costa Rica as a case study. Both have been made by Leslie Anderson, with Mitchell Seligson co-authoring the second. The first analysis, by Anderson alone (1993), is based on a comparative study of smallholding coffee growers in three states: Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Colombia. Anderson's analysis of Costa Rica and Nicaragua are based on her own superb field research, which she has utilized elsewhere to produce her

own cogent theory for explaining class harmony and antagonism in agrarian communities.¹² (Anderson, 1994) Anderson's findings about Costa Rican coffee smallholders are largely consistent with the data and arguments I will present in the pages that follow. Anderson finds that Costa Rican smallholders organize for reforms related to income from the production and marketing of their commodity. However, she finds that these smallholders organize for periods longer than Paige's model would predict. Because of this, and because Nicaraguan smallholders join the *Sandinista* revolutionary movement and because Colombian smallholders participate in land invasions and a land reform movement, Anderson concludes that Paige's theory is largely flawed.

Anderson's own methodology and analysis are problematic, however, for four reasons. First, her study lacks a longitudinal perspective. In Costa Rica it is largely confined to the 1980s, and her research in Nicaragua is limited to the 1970s. In the case of Colombia, Anderson does take a historical approach, even if the space limitations of her article make it necessarily "general" and "less extensive" than it could be. (1993: 510) Second, although the Colombian case has some historical grounding, Anderson's classification of "smallholders" in that case is subject to some questioning. The one-time smallholders Anderson examines in Colombia had become tenants, dispossessed of their own lands. A third, and minor criticism, is that her test only examines one export sector type, even though three states are involved. This, of course, is a standard limitation of case

¹²Anderson's theory is captured in the title of her book, *The Political Ecology of the Modern Peasant*. Greatly summarized here, the theory essentially employs a rational actor approach that explains why rural community members will help each other, even though a cursory examination might lead one to expect antagonistic inter- and intra-class relations.

study work; individual states are not likely to offer every possible situation, and even should they do so, it becomes seriously difficult for the researcher to examine all of them. This is all the more so if more than one state is involved, as is the case here. Related to the third problem, however, is that, in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, Anderson only examines one remote rural community in each. This does seem to create a stronger problem. Robert K. Yin, in his manual on case study research writes, "If an investigator has access to only a few 'sites,' or if resources are extremely limited, the ensuing case study may have to be on a topic of only marginal significance. This situation is not likely to produce an exemplary case study." (1984: 140) Yin's description seems to fit here.

Anderson concludes that the information collected by her case studies "reveals serious flaws," and "throws doubt upon the predictions and accuracy of [Paige's] theory." (1993: 519) She acknowledges, however, that her study is limited. "The findings of this article, of course, do not constitute a definitive assessment of Paige's theory . . . Similar case studies from other developing countries and regions would help in a further evaluation of the theory." (Ibid.: 520) The embedded case studies that will follow in this dissertation do not focus on other countries or regions. But they do tender a look at Costa Rica, as already discussed above, that is both very historically grounded and very comprehensive in scope.

Anderson's second Costa Rican test of Paige, authored conjointly with Mitchell Seligson, does not share the problem of limited sites and it utilizes a most intriguing approach. (Anderson and Seligson, 1994) Ultimately, however, it is even more problematic than Anderson's earlier solo study. The

authors acknowledge that all four types of social movement outcomes are not likely to be found in a single country. However, they argue that a well constructed survey of attitudes held by cultivators should, if Paige's theory is valid, produce a "consistent and predictable variation among the peasant types based on income sources in the direction that [Paige] forecasts." (Ibid.: 951) Anderson and Seligson use preexisting survey data that, they hold, allows for just such a test and the effort appears quite comprehensive.

The data is drawn from interviews with 531 Costa Rican peasants from 66 villages situated over 28 districts, the smallest administrative subdivision. A stratified and clustered area probability design was employed. A wide range of questions query the peasants in regards to their support or distrust of local and national government, unions, and the wealthy. The peasants are surveyed about the appropriateness of using legal and illegal means to counter adverse government decisions and they are asked how to resolve the problem of landlessness among peasants. This quite comprehensive effort produces conclusions unfavorable to Paige. The authors conclude that Paige's "theory is a poor predictor of attitudes and behaviors." (Ibid.: 963)

First among the problems, however, is that this is another ahistorical study. Although the specific period of the survey is not given, arguably a problem itself, the data set was apparently completed sometime in the early or mid-1970s. A cross-sectional snapshot of opinions may not be representative of attitudes over time. For example, if a major union had just been entangled in a serious scandal, even normally strong union supporters might have temporarily negative feelings towards such organizations.

This time limitation problem is compounded by a more significant difficulty, however. While constrained to just Costa Rica, the authors attempt here to test all four of Paige's income combination types. The problem is that, despite Anderson and Seligson's claim to the contrary, all four types do not exist in Costa Rica. The assertion that all four types can be found is based on a very narrow, and incorrect, reading of Paige. As discussed above, only an approximation of the land-land income combination type exists in Costa Rica. And the land-wages income combination type, which Paige proffers as the combination that can lead to revolution, does not exist at all. As has been noted above, income combinations where the non-cultivator is dependent on land and the cultivator is dependent on wages certainly *do* exist in Costa Rica. But to meet the requirements of the Paige model, this combination must exist with low wages and with landlords who are backed up by repressive legal or extralegal troops or police. Such conditions have not existed in Costa Rica.

Anderson and Seligson have interpreted the Paige model in a very simplistic way that is not justified by a reading of the extensive textual descriptions that Paige gives for his four income source combinations. Anderson and Seligson are correct to note that Paige offers a theory that is structurally deterministic. It is not, as these critics describe it, however, simplistic or narrow. Paige's classifications of each income source combination, as summarized above, are rich with tempering description. His introductory descriptions, as well as his own case studies, reveal that this is, indeed, a structurally deterministic set of theories, but they are also theories

that are complex and textured.¹³ Anderson and Seligson seem to have ignored this extensive text and have reduced Paige's model to a simplicity that is unjustified. Having done so, they then argue that Paige's theory can be salvaged, perhaps, by allowing for the introduction of other modifying variables. Anderson and Seligson argue that, "a revision of Paige's theory is in order such that his macro level or structural perspective is combined with micro level (contextual) and state variables to provide a more complete understanding of reformism and revolution." (1994: 970)

Anderson and Seligson are not the first to level such criticism. Other critics have asserted that Paige does not allow for the interplay of other variables such as regime type, shifts in patron-client relations, ethnic and racial friction, non-rural variables, etc. (Disch, 1979; Adas, 1977) But *Agrarian Revolution* is full of such contextual variables. Paige does not rigidly maintain, for example, that all land-wages income combinations will lead to revolution. He cites grape and lettuce production in California as two examples of such sectors where no revolutionary movement has ever existed. (Paige, 1975: 67) A few pages later, in another example, he writes of the Mau Mau in Eastern Africa.

A revolutionary nationalist movement, such as the Mau Mau, can only occur *if* the migratory estates develop in a settler economy and create a threat to the landholdings of the traditional elite. *Even then the periods in which such a revolt can occur are short. If the estates expand*

¹³Richard Salisbury, in his review of *Agrarian Revolution*, is also concerned that such simplistic readings will lead to misunderstandings of the theories. In his introduction, he writes, "Rather than try to spell out in inadequate detail its intricate structure and arguments, this unavoidably brief review will try to convince anthropologists that reading the full volume is mandatory." (1978: 133)

sufficiently, they will break the power of the traditional elite and reduce the migratory laborers to impotence. (Ibid.: 69-70, emphasis added)

Paige's theories should be seen, collectively, as a set that is structurally deterministic, but only to the extent that structural factors are necessary but not sufficient conditions. Paige provides a model that proffers the expected *forms* of social movements *if and when* agrarian social movements actually arise. He does not assert that a given form of agrarian relations of production will necessarily result in a social movement.

Paige's research and conclusions are still of such significance that they beg for cumulative case studies that test the hypotheses. Such cumulative studies will either tend to validate or invalidate the theories. If done properly, all such studies should illuminate additional contextual variables. The tests heretofore focusing on Costa Rica have only stirred up obfuscating storms. The failings identified in these studies mean that a test of these theories, in this state, is still desirable. More so, precisely because these tests were faulty, it is more important now to test Paige's theories in Costa Rica than if no such tests had previously been attempted.

Paige has also been criticized for his lack of historical grounding. (Flinn 1977; Adas, 1977) The cases examined in the quantitative component of *Agrarian Revolution* are confined to the twenty-three year period of 1948 through 1970, certainly longer than the studies carried out by Anderson and Seligson, but still covering only a rather limited period. The three case studies of Peru, Angola, and Vietnam are made in a relatively rich historical context, but the principal cases of agrarian unrest that are examined are confined to

the same 1948 to 1970 period.¹⁴ The study presented in this dissertation is not a snapshot of a brief period. Focusing on just one state, this study examines the entire historical development of Costa Rica's coffee and banana export sectors over time from their earliest foundations in the nineteenth century and further, examines earlier history that produced variables that still constrain relations of production.

As a case study of only one state, this analysis will of course face the limitation common to case studies limited to but one state; it will not offer a comprehensive comparison with other states. But because it is a historical examination and because it covers the vast majority of agrarian workers and peasants, it promises to be a significant case study with strong powers to explain the creation and extent of most agrarian social movements in Costa Rica as well as the absence of others.

While this study will serve as test of Paige's theory, it will be dedicated first and foremost to the original questions of how and why agrarian unrest has been so restrained in Costa Rica and what then accounts for the unrest that does occur. One reviewer has criticized Paige for not examining other forms of unrest outside of the four outcomes that his model predicts. (Adas, 1977) Banditry and millennial movements are examples given. Millennial movements are not recorded as a significant part of the Costa Rican rural history, but cattle rustling, particularly in the cattle *haciendas* of Guanacaste Province, have been a historical aspect of rural unrest in Costa Rica. Land invasions on idle cattle and banana lands have occurred regularly, though, and are deserving of examination. As with most studies, time and

¹⁴The cases in Peru begin in 1955 due to limited news archives. (Paige, 1975: 135)

length have determined limits to the reach of the work at hand. These issues will be but briefly addressed in the concluding chapter, but are certainly worthy of further research.

As our interdependent world economy has itself diversified and changed rapidly in the last few decades, we should wonder if labor relations in the export sectors examined in this study have changed in any dramatic ways in this same period. Students of Costa Rica know that, in fact, there have been changes. Young, urban, Costa Ricans are failing to respond to calls to help with the annual coffee harvest. Nicaraguan refugees are filling the gap. In the banana sector, unions that have always been strong have been nearly extinguished. This study will address these changes and consider how relations of production and concomitant agrarian social movements might change over time in Costa Rica.

Historical studies typically are framed within very limited periods, either encapsulating one or more eras or limited because of available data. Intensive studies, for example, can sometimes be devoted to some significant event as short as a year or a brief administration of a president. This study briefly looks at the three centuries of colonial Costa Rica and further back to the era preceding the colonial conquest because such examination offers a critical understanding of both the roots of the historical labor shortage and of the political culture over time. This study reaches to cover the long history of the coffee and banana export sectors because *Agrarian Revolution* and other studies have been criticized as failing to provide sufficient longitudinal comparisons. But this study continues to the very present, rather than stopping at some convenient earlier point, because the new changes in labor

relations *may* mean that the conclusions reached about rural unrest and rural calm do not apply in the most recent decades or may suggest that they won't apply in the future. It is worth noting that no other research known to this author analyzes the labor histories of the coffee and banana sectors of Costa Rica with such a comprehensive longitudinal approach as that undertaken here.

While most critics of Paige attack his methodology, Theda Skocpol largely challenges Paige's interpretations of the data produced by his tests and case studies. Skocpol questions "the notion that the simple fact of income from capital gives upper classes room to make reformist concessions to farmers or laborers." (1982: 374, *n* 5) The examination of the banana export sector in Costa Rica will show that, in this one case, the non-cultivating capitalists often, in fact, have made such concessions, even if they typically have not done so willingly. But it will also be demonstrated that a corporation is capable of simply abandoning production when the worker-cultivators make economic demands that draw beyond what the capitalists judge to be the bounds of reasonable profitability. While this latter point gives credence to Skocpol's challenge, this study will show that most accounts of conflict in the capital-wages income combination, in Costa Rica, support Paige's contention that the non-cultivators will make concessions to diffuse a threatening confrontation.

Chapter Two will present the historical development of agrarian relations of production, class relations, and the political system, throughout the colonial period of Costa Rica, spanning from the mid 1500s to 1821. The development of all of these aspects of Costa Rican life will be shown to be

intricately intertwined and interdependent. This chapter will lay out and analyze how, most importantly, the structural constraints of Costa Rica's historical labor shortage contributed early to calm class relations in the economically and politically dominant central highlands. The historical grounding provided in this chapter will prove critical to understanding later agrarian relations of production, class relations, and the political culture of modern Costa Rica.

Chapters Three and Four will examine the modern development of the coffee sector and the varying relations of production. These chapters will analyze the continuing development of class relations, political culture, and the political system. By the end of Chapter Three the state will be seen to have finally abandoned its largely *laissez-faire* approach to management of the coffee sector, taking its first steps in mediating agrarian relations. Chapter Four will examine and analyze the coffee sector during the period, after the 1930s, when the state has become a primary actor in the relations of coffee production.

Chapters Five and Six will focus on the development of the banana export sector, the concomitant relations of production, the history of strikes and violence in this sector, and the changing role of the state *vis-à-vis* the employers, the workers, and the unions. The banana sector will be seen to have developed largely as a foreign enclave in the sense described in dependency literature. The workforce will be shown to change dramatically in national and ethnic make-up over time. While relations of production between the employer and the employed have not changed significantly over time, the role of the state in influencing those relations of production has

changed significantly. Chapter Five will conclude with the first instance of serious state mediation in the relations of production of this sector. Chapter Six will look at the period from the 1940s to the present. Over this period, the workers will often be assisted by the state, but will find that assistance suddenly withdrawn in the last two decades of the century. The reasons for these changes will be explored.

Chapter Seven will conclude this study. Looking at the combined evidence from the coffee and banana sectors together will facilitate a comparative analysis of why the coffee sector has been so calm and the banana sector has been so tumultuous. This will include a comprehensive analysis of the theories put forth by Jeffery Paige in *Agrarian Revolution*. Further, a paradigm will be put forth that will help to explain why and when the Costa Rican state resorts to, or refrains from, the use of repression in the agrarian sectors and why repression is restrained relative to that of other developing agrarian states. Analysis will demonstrate why the calm relations of production in the coffee zone are unlikely to be reproduced in the banana sector. It will also be argued that historical variables largely beyond the control of the Costa Rican state are largely responsible for the calm and restrained unrest in the two sectors examined. As such, there is no 'model' that can be reproduced in other states. Analyzing changing economic and labor conditions, this chapter will also offer some speculative analysis about the likelihood of increased agrarian unrest over time in Costa Rica.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROOTS OF MODERATED CLASS RELATIONS: THE HISTORICAL SHORTAGE OF EXPLOITABLE LABOR

There is no continuity between precolonial and present day relations of production or land tenure patterns in what is now called Costa Rica. Before the commencement of the Spanish conquest Costa Rica was a frontier where the cultures of Mesoamerica, South America, and the Caribbean came into contact, via commerce, war, and overlapping use of land. Boundaries were still evolving. Except for the Nicoyan peninsula, the pacific northwest of present Costa Rica, populations were scattered and light.

In the Nicoyan peninsula, a culture with mostly northern roots was flourishing. It was the southern terminus of Mesoamerica. Chorotegas, Mangues, Orotinas, and Bagaces had all migrated southward, extending the Mesoamerican frontier, and eliminating, evacuating, or absorbing aboriginal peoples with South American or Caribbean ancestries. At the time of the Spanish conquest, these outer settlements included communities famous for pottery and cotton weavings that were traded as far north as the Aztec lands of what is now Mexico. Political structures and religious practices were consistent with others in the Mesoamerican region. Corn, the principal crop, was intensely cultivated as were beans and cacao, supporting a somewhat dense population. Organized in chiefdoms, tributes were paid by groups of

lesser status to those with more. (Sandner, 1962: 22; Nelson, 1983: 27; Edelman, 1992: 37; Newson, 1987: 335)

In the highland Central Valley (*meseta central*), and on the central Atlantic slopes lived more than ten scattered populations, linked culturally to the Caribbean. Among them were the Huetar, the Terbi, and the Bribri. Though each population had its distinctions they all shared much culturally. Features such as elected male and female leaders (*caciques*) and language indicate a linkage to the Arawac population of the Caribbean. Communities were small and, in Caribbean style, houses were built off the ground. Principal crops, based on shifting cultivation, were tubers, cacao, and peach palm, a variety that produced a floury red-orange fruit, rich in carotene.¹ Unlike their Mesoamerican neighbors, corn was raised only in small amounts and then was used principally for brewing *chicha*, an alcoholic beverage. Social relations between tribes was largely egalitarian; tributes were not paid. Spanish conquistadors also report finding outposts of indigenous traders from northern Mesoamerica who acquired gold, copper, and silver metalworkings. (Sandner, 1962: 23; Newson, 1987: 335)

The third zone was that of Diquís, the southeastern area of present day Costa Rica and the northeastern area of present day Panama. It was the northern terminus of a South American culture with cultural connections to the Chibchas (Colombia) and the Andeans. Contact with the other two zones was minimal. Principal tribes were the Quepos, the Cotos, and the Borucas. It is theorized that this area was settled about 1,000 years ago. Communities remained small and dispersed, a result of frequent internal

¹*Bactris gasipaes*. In Spanish, it is known as *pejibeya* or *pejibaye*. Its origin is the Amazon.

warfare. Principal crops were peach palm and tubers, but in 1563 Vásquez de Coronado reported of the Quepos that there was all manner of food in great abundance, including cultivated cacao, corn, beans, yuca, bananas, plums, and gourds. Cotton, for thread, was also cultivated. (Sandner, 1962: 24)

Columbus anchored at Cariarí on the Atlantic coast, present day Puerto Limón, for 17 days in 1502 on his fourth and final trip to the New World. Further Spanish contact with the region, except for the Nicoya peninsula adjacent to Nicaragua, was infrequent and passing until 1522.² At that time the Spanish conquest of what would become the colony Costa Rica officially commenced with two simultaneous expeditions, one by land and one by sea, both from the north. The first consisted of 100 soldiers entering through the northwest, and the second of four ships making a coastal inspection on the Caribbean side. The first settlement, Bruselas, was made under the supervision of Francisco Fernández Córdoba in 1524. Located near what is now Puntarenas on the Pacific coast, Córdoba dismantled and abandoned Bruselas after two years as León and Granada in Nicaragua were founded. Few indigenous people had contact with the Spanish during this brief period. Conquest began in earnest 13 years later when the *Audiencia de*

²The Nicoyan peninsula and limited adjacent lands southwest of Lake Nicaragua were separately administered during the colonial period, variously as the *Alcaldía Mayor de Nicoya* and as the *Partido de Nicoya*, administrative categories of lesser status than that of the colonies. It alternately had administrative liaisons with Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The majority of the area was incorporated into the *República de Costa Rica* as the Guanacaste Province on July 25, 1824, a few years after independence from Spain, although Nicaragua refused to renounce its claim to the territory until 1858. July 25 is celebrated as a national holiday in Costa Rica.

Panamá commissioned Hernán Sánchez de Badajoz to bring the province of Cartago, or Costa Rica, under control.³ (Sandner, 1962: 27)

Sanchez de Badajoz and others, typically advancing with armies no bigger than 80 or 100 soldiers, found the going difficult. Rough coastal terrain, jungle diseases, and lethal resistance by the indigenous peoples were serious obstacles for the small armies. Consequently, by 1560, Costa Rica was the only province in Central America that had no fixed center of Spanish population. Under the authority of the *Audiencia de Guatemala* since 1549, it was only in 1572 that Costa Rica was functioning administratively as a colony. (Sandner, 1962: 28) But it was the weakest link of the colonial chain. A 1573 count put the Spanish population of the colony at 55. (MacLeod, 1973: 332)

Fortune making for Spaniards in the New World was tied to the successful conquest and exploitation of *both* the land and the labors of the indigenous population. The Spanish had horses and powerful weapons with which to overwhelm the native population and to take the land. But the abundant land was of little value unless, after the conquest, there was also abundant labor. In Costa Rica, there were few to be conquered and fewer yet who survived the conquest or who did not flee to remote jungle lands. It is impossible to say with certainty how many people lived in Central America before the conquest, but one reliable source estimates the number at more than three million. (CSUCA, 1978: 20) The heaviest pre-Colombian concentration was in the land that came to be known as Guatemala. The number living within the present day boundaries of Costa Rica is estimated

³The name, Costa Rica, was first used in documents in 1534. (Sandner, 1962: 27)

to have been a mere 90,000, or less than three percent of the population of the region. (Newson, 1987: 336; Fonseca, 1986: 32-33) Within a short time, this small population was virtually eliminated. Costa Rica would be a colonial province very distinct from others. There would be almost no labor to exploit and this fact would greatly influence the economy, class relations, and the political culture of Costa Rica for centuries.

Slavery of the native population was outlawed in the Spanish colonies in 1549, although other oppressive forms of labor exploitation replaced it. Within what are the present-day boundaries of Costa Rica, these laws were largely irrelevant outside of the Nicoyan peninsula, a territory administered separately from Costa Rica during the colonial period. (See *n* 2, this Chapter.) The Mesoamerican peoples in Nicoya were captured as slaves for export to other areas of the Colonial empire as there were no readily apparent sources of precious metals locally. Nicoya and Nicaragua together suffered "a large scale shipment of Indian slaves to aid in the conquest of Peru and in the portage of Peru-bound cargo across the Isthmus of Panama." (Edelman, 1992: 38) Estimates of the numbers of such captives range from a low of 50,000 to a high of 500,000 for the entire Nicaragua-Nicoya area. (Ibid.) In the first two decades after Columbus' arrival, some of the indigenous population was also probably captured on the Atlantic coast for lethal work in the mines of Hispaniola "to replace the native force which was rapidly dying out there." (Woodward, 1985: 27)

Capture for slave exportation usually meant early death. But most of the indigenous peoples who avoided capture faced the same fate in their homelands. Many died in their resistance to the conquest. Others suffered

because early Spanish invaders raided crops, too busy looking for gold to produce their own harvests. (Creedman, 1977: 120) But most probably succumbed to European diseases which effected a virtual genocide. (MacLeod, 1973: 1-20, 98-101, 205; Edelman, 1992: 38-39) The loss of productive lands to settlers also sometimes led to starvation. A very small portion of the population "disappeared" via reproduction in interracial unions with the Spanish, producing the racial class of *mestizos*.⁴

Linda Newson calculates that the indigenous population of Nicoya-Guanacaste declined by 95.8 percent after first contact with the Spanish in 1522 from about 63,000 to only about 2,600 by the middle of the sixteenth century. (1987: 336) Reports indicate a slower, but still horrific, decline in the rest of what is presently Costa Rica. The Bishop Bernardo A. Thiel estimated a decline outside of the Nicoyan peninsula of 45 percent in the first 89 years, from 27,200 in 1522 to just 14,900 in 1611. (Fonseca, 1986: 32-33) Many outside of Nicoya survived longer because they escaped from the small Spanish forces into tropical forests. By the 1660s, however, the indigenous population for all of Costa Rica had been almost obliterated, estimated at less than 2,000 and still declining.⁵ (MacLeod, 1973: 331)

⁴A count by the Bishop Thiel in 1625 for the jurisdiction of Cartago revealed 436 persons of Spanish heritage, 144 Indians, and 16 *mestizos*, along with 69 persons of other origins. (MacLeod, 1973: 228)

⁵The indigenous population would continue to decline precipitously before slowly rising in later centuries. In 1950, the indigenous population had grown to a mere 2,692. The largest indigenous community in 1950 was that of Cortés y Boruca with 334 inhabitants. (Sandner, 1962: 26) Native descendants remain, by many measures, a separate caste from the settler descendants. Most indigenous peoples were denied citizenship until 1991 and were only made eligible for health benefits provided by Costa Rica's Social Security system (*la Caja*) in 1995, fifty-three years after the system was established. (*Tico Times*, 3/15/91: 5; 9/8/95: 1) Obtaining a unanimous vote for citizenship in the National Assembly, an indigenous Guayami stated, "I am very excited. It is the first victory we have won in 500 years." (Ibid., 3/15/91: 5) Carolyn Hall (1985: 42-43) notes the speculation of William Deneven that perhaps 400,000 indigenous persons lived in Costa Rica on the eve of the conquest, but most researchers cite figures much smaller.

The conquerors of were always of more than one mind regarding the exploitation of the indigenous population. The most zealous conquistadors were anxious to exploit the natives for rapid extraction of wealth without any regard for the well being of those exploited. Others, most notably Bartolomé de las Casas, a friar of the Dominican Order who worked in Chiapas, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, sought for moral reasons to treat the indigenous population much more humanely and fought within the Spanish hierarchy to limit the brutality throughout the colonies. Finally, others were less concerned with morality but pragmatic enough to realize that harsh measures more rapidly depleted the labor force.

The first institutionalized system of labor exploitation attempted in Costa Rica was the *encomienda* system. Under this system, nobles and ranking conquistadors⁶ were, in essence, made tax collectors over indigenous communities. Natives living within the territory of the *encomienda* were required to pay tributes to the *encomendero*. Failure to pay resulted in imprisonment, death, or other harsh punishment, although the *encomendero* was putatively responsible, as well, for the physical and spiritual well being of the humans under his charge. (Woodward, 1985: 55; MacLeod, 1973: 128-134) Enterprising *encomenderos* were able to enrich themselves in the process. But Costa Rica did not lend itself well to this method of enrichment. Costa Rica was too sparsely populated and there were so few Spaniards to supervise the coerced labor, that escape to the wilderness was easy.⁷

⁶Calvary soldiers qualified as *encomenderos*. Foot soldiers had to work the land themselves or coerce the scarce indigenous labor. (Sandner, 1962: 29)

⁷The Bishop Thiel calculated an indigenous population for 1569 in all of Costa Rica of 17,200, a Spanish or white population of 113, a *mestizo* population 170, and 30 Africans. (Sandner, 1962: 29)

After the *encomienda* system was abolished in Central America, the *repartimiento* system was employed to similar effect. Under this system, native males between 16 and 60, typically organized by village, were required to contribute specified periods of labor, such as one week per month, to Spanish settlers, sometimes at a several days' walk from the villages. (Woodward, 1985: 43) But like the *encomienda* system, and for similar reasons, this system was little effective or used in Costa Rica. At times, the scattered and decimated indigenous populations were "reduced" to centralized villages called *reducciones* wherein the natives were to receive some measure of protection. Despite such efforts, the natives were left with conditions akin to slavery and were often brutally mistreated while employed to collect indigo and other natural products. The unfenced *reducciones* also were subject to the invasion by the Spaniards' semi-feral cattle which devastated crops. (Edelman, 1992: 47)

African slavery was legal in Central America until 1824 -- three years after independence from Spain was won. As with indigenous slavery, however, it was little organized in Costa Rica as again there was insufficient Spanish labor available to the large land owners with which to control and supervise the imported slaves and no economic logic existed for sending military personnel from elsewhere in the colonies for this purpose. Few landowners could even afford to purchase this imported labor. (Creedman, 1977: 185; Salazar Mora, 1990: 271) A handful were utilized for cattle ranching and indigo harvesting in the areas of Nicoya and nearby Esparza.⁸ Some Africans were also briefly exploited towards the end of the colonial

⁸A Spanish census for Nicoya-Guanacaste in 1611 recorded 50 Spaniards, 2,000 natives, and 50 "negroes, mulatoes, y mestizos." (Edelman, 1992: 48)

period for the cultivation of cacao on Atlantic lowlands. (MacLeod, 1973: 333, 337) It is estimated that there were 50 to 200 African slaves in the entire country at the time of emancipation in 1824. (Creedman, 1991: 31; Purcell, 1993: 2)

The Spanish colonizers of Costa Rica thus found themselves at a competitive disadvantage with their compatriots in other Latin American colonial holdings for several reasons. Most Spanish immigrants were drawn to Mexico, Guatemala, or Peru, where large indigenous populations could be exploited and where all manner of institutions, including universities, were consequently established to support the settlers. Fewer numbers went to the other colonies, and the fewest of all went to Costa Rica. The smallness of the settler population in Costa Rica also led to a smaller domestic market, even when the labor could be utilized to produce goods.

The labor shortage also, naturally, restricted any effort to produce products for export. Export difficulties were compounded by the fact that the highland *meseta central*,⁹ where most Spaniards settled, was not conveniently located to ports, making Costa Rican products expensive relative to those of other provinces. The Pacific coast, although a long ox cart journey from Cartago, the colonial capital, was much easier to reach than the Atlantic coast. The latter was accessible only through tropical jungle and steeply sloped terrain. Thus, products destined for Europe required ships that had to sail around Cape Horn. Also, colonial authorities in Guatemala were less eager to make investments in this province farthest from the administrative

⁹Relative to other areas of Costa Rica outside of the Nicoyan peninsula, a larger indigenous population originally lived in the area. The hope of exploiting this indigenous labor was a factor in the selection of the site.

center. Finally, the nobles who were granted land and administrative positions in Costa Rica had less capital personally available for development investments because those given grants in Costa Rica were usually "petty rural nobles" whose "fortunes were relatively modest" in comparison with those of the "high nobles" who were granted the more lucrative locations elsewhere. (Stone, 1975: 360)

Indigenous labor in Nicoya-Guanacaste facilitated a small amount of export trade, extracting, for example, dyes from indigo and murex snails, brazilwood, and spinning and dyeing cotton threads. (Edelman, 1992: 46)

Large cattle haciendas made some small profit from the export of leather and bartered some meat locally, but labor shortages prevented the establishment of any large scale enterprises. Cartago served as a way station for the overland shipment of mules to Panama from Nicaragua and points north. The colonial government had permission to charge a small tax on each mule and some local entrepreneurs managed to raise some mules for the trade. The *meseta central* has a temperate climate which allowed a small wheat industry around Cartago to make some profit from export to Nicaragua via overland travel, but no one became rich from this activity. (MacLeod, 1973: 337,274) Flour, corn, hens, and live pigs were sent by small frigates to the cities of Panama, Portobelo, and Cartegena but Costa Rica was "never much more than an appendage to the more vital zone at Panama." (Ibid.: 274) By 1640, however, demand for products from Costa Rica diminished as farms with greater labor supplies on the coasts of Peru and in the Audiencia de Quito began to dominate as suppliers to Panama. (Ibid.) Most Spanish immigrants, regardless of social status or official position, found themselves

dependent upon their own labor and they had to content themselves with subsistence crop and small scale livestock production.

The level of living came to be so low that [the] nobles had to work the land and live in the same state of misery as the rest of the population. Thus, towards the end of the colonial period, Costa Rican society presented an egalitarian countenance unknown in other parts of the continent. (Stone, 1975: 37)

One source reports that, "even the governor of this . . . colony farmed his own land." (Barry and Preusch, 1986: 185) Aristocracy and class privilege, by the seventeenth century, were most notable for their absence.

A small cacao boom on the Atlantic coast, from about 1650 to 1750, did lead to modest wealth for a few. A small number of African slaves, counted in the tens, were employed.¹⁰ The best source of labor, apparently, was from newly captured and illegally enslaved natives who were living in the jungles around Talamanca. (MacLeod, 1973: 333, 337)

For more than twenty-five years the Urinama Indians were moved permanently or seasonally to the cacao groves to perform work there. The numbers were not large, but sufficient Indians were involved, when combined with resident slaves and owners, to allow the fields a moderate growth and prosperity. (Ibid.: 333)

In addition to the labor shortages, other factors limiting cacao profits included tropical diseases and the "persistent" tyranny of pirates. They stole the harvests, burned housing, and destroyed equipment. (Ibid.: 336) Slaves often opted to join the pirates, or, by some accounts, were kidnapped. (Ibid.; Purcell,

¹⁰The numbers of *negroes* for all of Costa Rica were placed at 55 in 1675 and 89 in 1699 by the Bishop Thiel. (MacLeod, 1973: 228)

1993: 23) In the latter days of colonialism, some profits were also made from the export of tobacco and silver. (Gudmundson, 1986: 42-43)

As the small indigenous population was largely driven to the frontier or eliminated, a somewhat homogeneous population of whites and *mestizos* filled almost all of the social roles in colonial society. In other colonies with greater indigenous populations, by contrast, racially heterogeneous populations led concomitantly to sharply heterogeneous class structures with wealth greatly concentrated and poverty widespread. Wealth was always unequally distributed, and concentrated among relatively small numbers in Costa Rica as well, but much less so than elsewhere. (Gudmundson, 1986: 65, 85)

"Wealth for ... Costa Ricans meant thousands of pesos at most, not the hundreds of thousands and millions of their Mexican counterparts." (Ibid.: 85)

Thus, in Costa Rica, a humbler colonial, and post-colonial, elite emerged. As late as 1853, a foreign visitor, Wilhelm Marr, observed somewhat disdainfully that the elite was rather too close to the common person.

On market day the president of the republic does not disdain to cut some yards of gingham for a peasant; the treasury minister becomes hoarse in his efforts to prove to the client that he ought to buy a miserable glass. Behind the improvised counters there are officials, captains, and majors selling nails, feather cutters, and scissors; magistrates of the Supreme Court sell cotton socks; lawyers find buyers for underwear. . . . What's more, ecclesiastics occupy on an interim basis the office of lord of the measuring stick while the

proprietor dines. . . This mercantile spirit is a sad phenomenon in a country agricultural by nature." (Gudmundson, 1986: 68)

Marr also noted that President Juan Rafael Mora could be found with his cabinet at the evening cockfights, placing bets with all comers, be they elites or peasants. (Ibid.: 85-86)

In the *meseta central* many, if not most, settlers rented subsistence plots (*ejidos*), pastures, or woodlands (*comunidades*) from the local government, or had access to unsurveyed frontier lands (*baldíos*) and could thus survive without selling their labor to others. Corn and beans were the prevailing crops. The rented lands could be passed on in a hereditary fashion, more or less, although residences were maintained in the villages and cities proper. Virtually all village households worked the land for a living as did a large minority of city residents. Sometimes, local officials required the provision of occasional wage labor to nearby private landowners as part of the *ejido* or *común* rental agreements, but this never amounted to a great source of labor. The private landowners typically had herds of cattle in outlying areas. (Gudmundson, 1986: 33, and 1995: 116-17)

In the hot lowlands of Nicoya-Guanacaste, *estancias* and *sitios* were also municipality and town lands that were available in similar fashion, except they were officially for the grazing of cattle herds of mixed ownership. (Edelman, 1992: 40-41) Owners identified their intermingled cows and steers by brands. Small ranchers with herds of 5 to 15 cattle also regularly grew subsistence crops and formed squatters communities on the public lands. The economy that developed in colonial Costa Rica was primitive, based largely on subsistence and barter. Cocoa beans were a more common

currency than silver pesos. (Woodward, 1985: 45; MacLeod, 1973: 340)

The nobles and *conquistadores* were awarded titled lands measured in *caballerías*, a term signifying the cavalry rank of the men who received them. Such a soldier typically received two or three *caballerías*, with the conditions that the land be sown, that ownership not be transferred for some specified period, and that the lands not infringe upon indigenous communities. With the lack of labor, the first condition was not enforced, and in unfenced cattle areas the last condition could not be enforced either. Smaller grants, called *peonías*, were to be made to foot soldiers -- *peones*. "In practice, few if any *peonías* were ever awarded since Spanish conquerors were usually able to lay claim to having served as cavalry and eschewed the disparaging term *peón*, . . . which in the New World had come to be associated with Indian laborers." (Edelman, 1992: 40-41)

The manner in which *caballerías* were originally 'measured' would ultimately create a fair amount of chaos and contribute to much fraudulent land grabbing by large land owners over the centuries. The Crown defined *caballerías* in terms of the number of cattle that could graze or the amount of seed that could be sown. More specific measurements evolved over time leading to later disputes over whether titles were based on older or newer *caballerías*. (Ibid.: 41) Marc Edelman reports that "old" *caballerías* were invariably at least 135 hectares in size whereas by the mid-nineteenth century they were 45 hectares.¹¹ (1992: 379n) The *caballerías* in the cattle lands of Nicoya-Guanacaste were invariably much larger than those awarded in the *meseta central*. In the late sixteenth century and in the seventeenth

¹¹One hectare is equal to 10,000 square meters or 2.47 acres.

century, many lands were marked out more formally with *mojones*, stone markers. In the Guanacaste lands closest to the Nicaraguan border, natural landmarks and buildings were used for the same purpose, leading also to much contention over boundaries in later years. (Edelman, 1992: 42)

In the late sixteenth century, with population pressure low, the Crown began to recognize many *de facto* occupations of land with additional privatizations. Through the payment of fees, many *sitios* were converted to private hands. This had a significant effect in Nicoya-Guanacaste, where cattle were feral and roamed immense territories. A royal promulgation in 1754 gave a two percent titling fee commission to local officials serving to accelerate the privatization process. The available literature implies that these new privatizations went to those who already held title to other lands. The term, *hacienda*, appeared for the first time in conjunction with these additional privatizations and the concomitant remeasuring of titled lands. (Ibid.: 41-42)

Membership to the lower ranks of elite Costa Rican colonial society could often be achieved simply with the having of "servants or monetary income in themselves." (Gudmundson, 1986: 56) But status as one of the higher elites was strongly linked to land ownership. Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr. notes that,

Because of the feudal traditions of Spain, and the eventual predominance of agriculture in the isthmus, social and economic security and advancement in the colony depended upon landholding. From the beginning settlers fought and intrigued to secure land titles. . . . Land tenure offers insight into much of the social and economic history of

colonial Central America, for it reflects the rising and falling fortunes of the principal families. (1985: 42)

While land ownership was important for holding a secure place in Costa Rican "society," a small number who became key merchants came to hold the most power.¹² This would be especially true after the rise of the post-colonial coffee industry in the mid-nineteenth century. These powerful merchants, nonetheless, were "almost always intertwined with bureaucratic, ecclesiastical, and landed interests through familial or political alliances when not in one and the same entrepreneur. . ." (Gudmundson, 1986: 56) To the present day, only two presidents in Costa Rican history have not been of families descended from the so-called "Dynasty of the Conquistadores," landed families all.¹³ (*Tico Times*, 12/30/94)

With the virtual annihilation of the indigenous population, there was much more land than the settler population could use. Edelman describes the depopulated Nicoyan peninsula as "essentially a zone of empty spaces with minuscule scattered settlements and a single *pueblo de indios*." (1992: 38) Mitchell Seligson has written that,

Out of this system of land tenure grew a tradition in which "settlers had a 'natural right' to the *use of* as much land as necessary to subsist.' Land was viewed as essentially limitless in supply, while the demand for it made by the tiny colonial population was almost

¹²"There is a growing literature on eighteenth-century Spanish America that suggests precisely this merchant dominance as a general pattern." (Gudmundson, 1986: 56n; literature cited at length)

¹³The two exceptions are José Figueres Ferrer and his son, José María Figueres. I do not have sufficient information about Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, who at the time of this writing is the President-elect. Press accounts describe him as the son of "a middle-class family in San José." (*Tico Times*, 2/6/98: 6)

nonexistent. As a result, there was simply no market for agricultural land, and *possession was denied to no one*. (1980, pp. 8-9, emphasis added)

Seligson has, perhaps unintentionally, captured well the land tenure contradictions for most white settlers of Costa Rica. Seligson is most accurate when he above quotes Carlos Joaquin Saenz¹⁴ in stating that settlers had essential *usufruct* rights to the land. Possession, or titled ownership, however, was very difficult to obtain for most colonial settlers, although something approaching *de facto* ownership was common in the frontier areas and rented *ejido* lands may have seemed like family properties since they could be passed down the generations. Without a title, however, land "possession" was always tenuous.

To obtain titled land required the proper political connections in Spain or with local office holders. The policies of establishing *ejido* and *común* lands granted to local governments were, in part, intended to encourage settlement in organized villages and towns, and also to assure the subsistence of those residents. Private ownership of land, was then, politically impossible for most common settlers. Beyond this fundamental obstacle, the titling of land was also a costly process beyond the means of an average family.

Many also settled on untitled frontier lands, but this was not a guarantee of security. The clearing of virgin forest was a labor intensive, time consuming, and risky enterprise. Tropical diseases were less problematic than in some colonial frontiers because plenty of arable land was available in

¹⁴Carlos Joaquin Saenz P., *Population Growth, Economic Progress, and Opportunities on the Land: The Case of Costa Rica*, Ph.D. dissertation, U of Wis, 1969.

the cooler highlands.¹⁵ Risk was mostly connected to the uncertainty of possession. Frontier settlers were always subject to possible government or private confiscation of their lands at some later date. This was increasingly so in the latter half of the eighteenth century when the authorities took to burning houses and crops of unauthorized settlements, forcing peasants to either move to the sanctioned settlements or move yet further out into the frontier. (Samper, 1990: 51-52)

Sometimes, even usufruct rights to the most accessible common lands of the local governments could also be difficult to use. Gudmundson writes that colonial Costa Rica was made up of "nucleated settlements" where "villages quickly reached a point past which land close to the settlement site (within half a day's walk, for example) was fully occupied, forcing an increasing number of households either to accept relative poverty and dependent status or to move beyond the village's land claims." (1986: 27-28)

That some settlers had difficulty obtaining or readily utilizing land is significant because such situations gave impetus to a budding labor force and to an artisan class. But even most of those belonging to these emerging classes maintained smaller plots in the more distant *ejidos* and *comúnes* such that "extreme hardship and the threat of starvation could be avoided." (Gudmundson, 1986: 31) Some artisans did, however, manage to establish very successful businesses. (Ibid.: 65) This new generation of monetary¹⁶

¹⁵Costa Ricans would not significantly exploit their own tropical lowlands on the Atlantic coast until the late nineteenth century. Even then, they still largely avoided the hazards themselves by importing labor. See Chapter Five. For another example of the hazards of tropical diseases for settlers in lowland territories, see Pelzer, 1945, p. 113 re the Philippines.

¹⁶Cash and cocoa beans.

incomes also stimulated a small local market, benefiting those with greater growing capabilities. (Ibid.: 28)

As was typical of lands in the Spanish empire, the Catholic Church in Costa Rica came to possess large land holdings. With the virtual genocide of the indigenous people, however, the missionaries' role in Costa Rica was to be far more limited than that of their counterparts in the Philippines or elsewhere in Latin America where significant indigenous populations survived. Franciscans were given the Costa Rican franchise by the Church and they established a chain of *cofradías*, variously defined as saints' cults or fraternal, lay associations. (Edelman, 1992: 43; Woodward, 1985: 22) The *cofradías* were awarded immense properties with which to earn profits for the support of the missions.¹⁷ Some of the lands, in the cattle territories of Nicoya-Guanacaste, are reported to have been at least 13,500 hectares and maybe larger than 40,000 hectares at the time they were auctioned off in the 1830s and 1840s by post-colonial liberal governments.¹⁸ (Edelman, 1992: 43) These large lands failed to enrich the Church, however. Edelman writes that "the presence of *cofradías* around the *pueblo de indios* [in Nicoya-Guanacaste] made the peninsular subregion a *de facto* zone of smallholders, since *cofradía* properties were used for the cultivation of cotton, cacao, plantains and maize by local residents" squatting on the land. (Ibid.)

To find agrarian unrest, one should logically look at who was exploited. In Costa Rica these were the small populations of conquered natives and African slaves. The research here has not found recorded instances of any

¹⁷Tithes known as the *diezmo* (10 percent of income) were also collected by local officials for the support of the Church. (Edelman, 1992: 45; Torres Rivas, 1993: 15)

¹⁸The confusion regarding the size derives from the fact that the records list the sizes in *caballarías*, a measure subject to varying definitions. See discussion in text above.

revolts or uprisings by the few, scattered, Africans. Edelman, however, describes numerous indigenous revolts in Nicoya-Guanacaste during the 1700s.

Between 1721 and 1753 the Nicoya Indians staged several rebellions against the tribute demands of Spanish officials, expelling one governor (*corregidor*) from the province [of Nicoya], forcing another to seek refuge in the church, and threatening the life of a third, who was only saved by the intervention of a company of militiamen. . . . Gabriel de Santiago y Alfeirán, a particularly exigent *corregidor* . . . required cash payments, in addition to maize and dyed thread, and reneged on promises to pay laborers who built his indigo workshop, actions that ignited another uprising in 1760. . . . The Indians, led by the community's indigenous officials (*principales*), beat and shackled Santiago y Alfeirán and locked him up for a week. Hoping for justice from the Audiencia, they then set off to Guatemala with their prisoner, who was taken from them and freed by government troops in southern Nicaragua. (1992: 46)

Nine months later, the governor was reinstated and the *principales* were arrested. This, in turn, ignited riots by indigenous women who freed their captive men.

Where the surviving indigenous population was greater, as it was -- and is -- in the other colonies, it produced larger labor pools of both *indígenas*¹⁹ and *mestizos*. Both were integrated into a class and racial hierarchical system with the purely indigenous on the bottom, the mestizos above them,

¹⁹*Indígena* is a Spanish term for indigenous peoples in Central America, more respectful than the more common *Indio*.

and the pure-blooded Spaniards (and others of European extraction) above both of them. Those on the bottom, the most exploited, have long histories of agitation and rebellion. In Costa Rica, the indigenous populations have also found themselves at the bottom of the class ladder. In modern times, they have been pushed to the outer edges of the labor system, however, living a marginalized existence on remote reservations. Combined with their continued small numbers, their modern protests have been easy for most Costa Ricans to ignore. They have come to play no significant role in agrarian relations of production. Their colonial marginality has meant that they would continue on the margins of Costa Rican society into the future.

Among the settlers, cowboys and subsistence farmers in Nicoya-Guanacaste were known to rustle cattle (Edelman, 1992: 50) and one looking for colonial unrest might be tempted to classify this as at least an "everyday form of resistance" as articulated by James Scott and others. But one must consider, too, that the history is replete with instances of *hacendados*²⁰ rustling from each other and *cofradías* appropriating any cattle that wandered onto their lands. Nicoya-Guanacaste was a wild frontier with only the scarcest enforcement of laws by security forces. Rustling by cowboys might more accurately be seen as an everyday form of taking advantage of a low risk, commonly accepted, opportunity. Similarly, non-licensed growers of tobacco produced their contraband by squatting on remote Crown lands, calculating that they could outwit the understaffed authorities. (Samper, 1990: 57-58) This type of activity could be classified as a mild form of rebellion, but does not conjure a passionate image of 'unrest.'

²⁰*Hacienda* owners.

The elite held immense properties while the common settlers had only usufruct rights to public lands or squatted. Inequality, in this sense, was great. Poverty existed, but many or most great land owners had dirt under their fingernails and government officials also worked their own plots and could be found running market stalls. Of critical significance, the elite had little exploitative power over the subsistence farmers. The elite did not enrich themselves with the sweat and blood of the peasants. Any jealousy that existed in the white and *mestizo* community by the common people towards the elite did not translate into overt or organized unrest. In contrast, *relative* to other colonial territories, Costa Rican settlers seem to have experienced a fair amount of class harmony.

One might explain the provision of *ejidos* and other usufruct lands by crediting the elite with a sense of enlightened *noblesse oblige* from its feudalist past. Indeed, the system was a replication of the traditional arrangements in Spain. (MacLeod, 1973: 124) But such policies were no doubt necessary to recruit immigrants to populate the colonies. A change in these policies would certainly have hindered the arrival of settlers. The elite could only hope that the continued arrival of settlers would eventually create a labor pool. They would have defeated such hopes by cutting off the inflow prematurely. Secondly, if the elite land owners attempted to force the poor settlers to work on their lands under circumstances such as indentured or other restricted forms of servitude, the landlords would have had little means to combat rebellion or escape to the vast frontier.²¹ Such a policy would have been at

²¹At the end of the colonial period, the population still occupied less than five percent of the territory, and four-fifths of the population was concentrated in the *meseta central*. (Samper, 1990: 9)

odds, at any rate, with colonial policies. Such forced labor was generally reserved for the indigenous population, imported African slaves, and prisoners.

The common experience of settling a new land and sharing the concomitant labors probably contributed, by most relative measures, to a cross-class peacefulness of the white settlers. Of course colonial, white, Costa Rica was not some bucolic democracy. It was the colonial extension of an hierarchical, authoritarian, empire. The Crown, Church officials, *conquistadores*, and their relations held the spiritual, economic, and political power. One must thus conclude, then, that the almost non-existent *opportunity* for the elite to exploit their less wealthy fellow settlers played as strong, if not stronger, a role in the halcyon class relations than did any common frontier experience. Although small in number, it is the indigenous population that was harshly exploited and it is here, logically, that fervid unrest is found. But the surviving indigenous population was so grievously small as to be almost irrelevant to the greater development of colonial class relations in Costa Rica.

In the years following independence from Spain, with the rise of commercial crops, principally coffee, bananas, and beef, there would be dramatic and sometimes rapid changes in land tenure and relations of production among the descendants of the settlers, foreign entrepreneurs, and imported labor. Because of continuing labor shortages, especially in the coffee sector, some of these changes would reproduce elements of the peaceful agrarian relations described here. The history presented here may also have contributed to a modern day political culture that restricts violence by the state.

But harsh exploitation of labor, particularly in the banana sector, would nonetheless come to produce agrarian unrest in Costa Rica. Agrarian workers and the state would both come to employ violence at times. These developments will be examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RISE OF THE COFFEE SMALLHOLDERS, THE RISE OF *BENEFICIADORES*, AND THE INCIPIENT MEDIATION OF THE STATE

There is much disagreement over exactly when and how the first coffee beans were introduced to Costa Rica, but most accounts specify the end of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth. The source was either Cuba or Jamaica. (Sandner, 1962: 42; Seligson, 1980: 14; Facio, 1978: 39; Creedman, 1991: 65) What is agreed, first, is that it was the perfect export crop for the high altitude, temperate, *meseta central* with its volcanic and alluvial soils. And second, it is agreed that it fundamentally changed the economic and social structure of Costa Rica.

In 1804, seventeen years before the end of Spanish colonialism, coffee and a few other crops were made exempt from certain taxes in an effort to assist their development as potential export crops. (Sandner, 1962: 42) The first farm devoted primarily to coffee wasn't established, however, until 1816 or 1819. (Ibid.; Creedman, 1991: 65) Despite the ideal growing conditions, and a growing market in Europe, farmers initially lacked both cultivating skills and capital, and any beans exported had to be carried in limited quantities by pack mules to Puntarenas on the Pacific coast, the only accessible port.¹

¹This transportation was also slow, as was sea shipment by sailing ships around Tierra del Fuego and on to Europe. The imperishable quality of unprocessed beans was another feature that made this commodity well suited for the highland *meseta central*. The Atlantic coast, with its steep mountains and dense tropical forest, was considered too

And it was difficult to imagine how any crop could be grown on a large scale since Costa Rica lacked a surplus labor force. Nonetheless, after attaining independence late in 1821 post-colonial officials rapidly implemented significant and creative initiatives to deal with these obstacles.

Under the Spanish, the major townships had been given a fair measure of self-governance. The *ayuntamientos* (councils) had been selected by local elites and had some powers to distribute and regulate local lands, to establish tribunals for the settlement of disputes, to tax and undertake public works, and to establish police and militia forces. (R. Williams, 1994: 199-200) Thus, when independence arrived, mostly a surprise to the uninvolved and remote Costa Ricans, governing structures at the local level were well established and ready to act.

The local officials of the province of San José immediately passed a decree granting free lands and coffee seedlings to anyone agreeing to plant the crop. The officials of Cartago and La Union provinces soon *required* all resident families to plant twenty to twenty-five coffee trees in the yards around their houses. In 1825, the national government, newly installed in San José², joined the effort and exempted coffee profits from the principal tax, the *diezmos*. In 1831 the first state-wide land reform was declared: private title to any state land could be attained with the planting and continuous cultivation of coffee for five years. Peasants, now possessing rudimentary skills in the production of this new cash crop, seized the state's offer.

treacherous for road building and was accessible only by a "hair raising" canoe trip. (Creedman, 1991: 139)

²Cartago lost its status as capital when its defenders lost a small and very brief civil war in April 1823.

A new class of smallholders rapidly emerged. The government incentives were complimented by initiatives in the private sector. Large landholders in distant areas sold small parcels cheaply in the hopes of developing local labor supplies for the production of coffee. (Samper, 1990: 3, 240) Both the government and the large landowners sought foreign capital for further expansion. (Seligson, 1980: 15) Commons lands typically disappear in any state when it transitions to an agrarian-export economy. In this sense, Costa Rica was typical. But because of the continuing labor shortage, and in quite atypical fashion, Costa Rican peasants were largely enclosed *in* rather than *out* of the former commons lands, even as the upper class enlarged many of its own holdings.³

By 1832, these undertakings had produced very noticeable results. The first major shipment of coffee to Europe, via Chile, was arranged with German capital. In 1833, British financing facilitated the initiation of direct shipments to England. Coffee had been introduced to Europe in the seventeenth century and was gaining popularity as an after dinner drink among the British upper classes. They appreciated the mild flavor of the arabica beans achieved with the growing conditions of the high altitude Central Valley. Britain would continue as the principal source of capital throughout the coffee boom.⁴ (Creedman, 1991: 65; Seligson, 1980: 15-16)

³Contrast the Costa Rican case with that of sixteenth century England, as described by E.P. Thompson. "Enclosure . . . was a plain case of class robbery, played according to the fair rules of property and law laid down by a Parliament of property-owners and lawyers." (1966: 218) El Salvador offers a regional comparison. Indigenous populations and *mestizos* were both dispossessed of their community-owned lands in the early 1880s via laws that transferred ownership to those establishing large coffee estates. (Brignoli, 1995: 240)

⁴British sea captain William Le Lacheur arranged the first, and continuous, financing and shipments, and profited further by establishing his own import house in England. The import house is still in business under the name John K. Gilliat and Co., Ltd. (Seligson, 1980: 16)

The state continued to use its power to facilitate and encourage the expansion of the crop, even hiring foreigners to establish agricultural colonies in the more distant forested areas.⁵ (Seligson, 1980: 15) By 1841, coffee was sufficiently established that the government, rather than exempting coffee from taxes, now established a specific coffee export tax to build a desperately needed ox-cart road to the port of Puntarenas on the Pacific coast. The road was completed by 1846. (Seligson, 1980: 16) Another tax was then initiated to provide for road maintenance. Growers apparently supported these levies as they also contributed additional moneys through privately organized fundraisers to build bridges for the road. (Stone, 1975: 88-89) Some of the large growers earned significant wealth by establishing large cart transport businesses. (Gudmundson, 1995: 121)

By 1845, twenty-four years after independence, coffee accounted for 81% of all exports. Tobacco was a weak second at 8%. (Sandner, 1962: 44) No other Central American state at this time approached such dependency on a single crop.⁶ (Gudmundson, 1986: 4) Finally, Costa Ricans had found a source of enrichment, and they were decades ahead of their neighbors in successfully establishing this product. (Winson, 1989: 10) As the economy of the industrial revolution fueled growing demand for coffee in Europe, Costa Rica found its organizational efforts well rewarded.

The largest profits went to the European importers while the local exporters still made good returns. The least profit went to the small growers who worked the soil. But a material transformation of the society was

⁵These colonies were not generally long lasting.

⁶El Salvador, in the 1920s and 1930s, would ultimately exceed this degree of dependence with coffee accounting for 90 percent of its exports. (Brignoli: 240)

effected at all levels. The same ships that carried away the coffee beans brought back modern tools, stoves, glass, and other conveniences. (Seligson, 1980: 16-18) While most prospered from the direct production of coffee, others ventured into retail trade. Cultivation of other cash crops, mostly for domestic consumption was also stimulated. (Stone, 1975: 89) "In the critical period between 1800 and 1880 both peasants and holders of wealth became an agrarian bourgeoisie and mercantile smallholders, rather than simply continuing passively in their earlier, precapitalist roles." (Gudmundson, 1986:19) Large landholders grew richer, but as labor remained scarce, the relatively few holders of large lands had no extreme economic advantage over the new preponderance of smallholders.

But both wealth and land would increasingly concentrate from the mid-nineteenth century onward, however, following the importation of newly invented mechanical processing machinery. Previously, any family could carry out its own husking through crude crushing methods with animals. Although Costa Rican coffee was of a high quality in flavor, beans damaged in such processing were of lesser value than whole beans. But more significantly, growers had been unable to process enough crop to meet the growing European demand. Large landowners had been able to process little more than small landowners because of the continuing labor shortage. Mechanization was to change all of this.

Those with access to sufficient capital were able to establish mechanized coffee processing plants known as *beneficios*. These entrepreneurs were generally the very largest *cafetaleros* who already had the appropriate financial connections to obtain the necessary loans from Europe or had made

sufficient profits from cart transport operations or other businesses connected with the export of coffee. There were also some foreign capitalists who moved to Costa Rica and established themselves as *beneficiadores* -- owners of *beneficios*.⁷ (Winson, 1989: 21)

Small growers could not afford their own *beneficios* but they found that they could nonetheless increase their profits, too, by having their coffee processed elsewhere and then using the time saved to work part-time for a larger grower or *beneficiador*. The large growers and the *beneficio* owners also borrowed foreign capital both to expand their lands and to hire these workers. Relations of production were changing dramatically and coffee output grew dramatically. From 1832 to 1870, the annual harvest rose steadily from 23,000 kilograms to 11,000,000. (Seligson, 1980: 19)

Although mechanized processing did free up more labor, a shortage nonetheless continued, resulting in exceptionally high wages. This, in turn, made salaried employment increasingly attractive. Mitchell Seligson calculates that full time work would have equaled \$75.00 a year in 1844 or 1846. (1980: 20) And these wages continued to rise steeply over the next several decades. Rates for monthly wages increased from 7.5 pesos in 1844 to 15-18.75 pesos in 1856 and to 25-30 pesos by 1869. The labor shortage contributing to these increases was exacerbated in 1856 when a cholera epidemic killed seven percent of Costa Rica's population. (R. Williams, 1994: 127) Even urban dwellers were attracted by the wages during the harvests and there was sufficient work for them.

⁷Winson reports that foreign *beneficiadores* often purchased their own coffee lands later. (1989: 21)

Because of higher wages and a more equal distribution of coffee lands in Costa Rica than in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, less of a social stigma was attached to harvest labor so that even teenagers of middle-class families became accustomed to picking coffee. It is said that during the peak of the season San José would empty as people flowed to the surrounding countryside to pick coffee. (Ibid.: 128)

The *beneficios* also had high labor demands during the harvests, employing women as hand-pickers who sorted the beans. Each processing plant needed from 100 to 300 women at peak processing times when the harvests came in. (B. Williams, 1994: 8)

Unable to pay such high wages, small family producers could still increase production, but only to the extent that they could increase their self-exploitation. Seligson suggests that sons of smallholders were drawn away to work on the large coffee *haciendas* and thus became permanent wage workers.

It is quite likely that many of the children of these smallholders left the family plot to work on the hacienda, while either retaining their small piece of inherited land for subsistence crop production or selling the plot altogether for a dowry. . . . Work on the hacienda did . . . have its distinct advantages. First, it was secure. . . . A final and perhaps most important reason why many sons of small holders chose hacienda labor was the fact that the high wages paid on the plantation meant that they could improve their lifestyle at least marginally. Remaining on the family plot offered no possibility of such improvement. (1980: 21-22)

Gudmundson, however, makes convincing use of census records to argue that most *hacienda* coffee workers were salaried only part-time and continued working the family lands.

Seasonal wage laborers were themselves smallholders. Peasant smallholding caused high wages and relative labor scarcity rather than being subverted by them over the initial coffee transition. Indeed, from the late 1820s the larger landowners commented, either perplexedly or contemptuously, upon the peasantry's supposed 'lack of interest' in sustained wage labor. (1986: 76-77)

If we examine the 1870s and later, however, Seligson's argument gains validity. A few factors should be noted. First, at that time in Costa Rica, all offspring, male and female, inherited equally the land of their parents, and by this time, many small farms were evolving into plots too small to sustain families. (Samper, 1990: 216) These problematic divisions were often exacerbated because of "legal expenses and ecclesiastical bequests [which] could amount to a considerable part of the household assets." (Ibid.: 223) One heir sometimes purchased the inheritances of his or her siblings, leaving the others without land at all unless they bought land elsewhere, usually requiring migration away from the family homestead to frontier areas. Many, but not all, did so migrate. (Ibid.: 216-226) Those who surrendered their share of the farm, but were unwilling to move to the frontier were likely to assume wage work on the estates.

Second, the continuing success of coffee, combined with a slowly expanding population, caused land prices in the *meseta central* to soar by the latter decades of the nineteenth century. (Seligson, 1980: 24; Samper, 1990:

55 *nn* 18 and 20) Thus, it is at this point that high wages, in conjunction with these newer factors, would produce a strong incentive for some to take wage work as their exclusive or primary income. Also in years when coffee prices dropped, some small owners likely lost their lands because of debts. As these mortgages were generally owed to the larger landowners, the defaulted properties were often added to the existing *haciendas*, concentrating land ownership and requiring more wage laborers. (Seligson, 1980: 25-27) Smallholders remained numerous, but by the turn of the century fifty percent of the production had aggregated into the hands of five percent of the farmers. (Bell, 1971: 6) Both Seligson and Gudmundson present a dichotomy of smallholdings and estates. But it is also likely that the most successful smallholders also expanded and became 'medium' sized landholders, employing smaller numbers of wage earners.⁸

Gudmundson also sees this shift to wage labor, but focuses on the concomitant downward mobility of peasants in the early twentieth century. By this time, frontier land in the furthest reaches of the *meseta central* had all been occupied. "By converting land itself into a commodity, the seeds were being sown for the rapid demise of the precapitalist order." (1986: 77) It was now difficult for a peasant to establish a new coffee farm. While alternatives to wage labor, such as moving beyond the coffee region, still existed, starting one's own coffee farm had been perhaps the most popular and convenient alternative.

⁸See Anderson, 1994, pp. 70-71 for a modern example of a medium sized landholder who employs two resident families on his land and, presumably, additional temporary workers during the harvest season.

If one wanted to remain in the *meseta central* to be near family or simply to continue doing that work which was familiar, wage work on coffee estates or for medium sized farmers became a more attractive option. But as the land suitable for high quality coffee filled up, there was also a drop-off in demand for labor needed to clear and plant the new farms. Thus, even though a labor shortage continued at harvest times, these factors combined to lower wages in the first half of the twentieth century almost as fast as they had risen in the latter half of the previous. (Ibid.) Even these lower wages remained high, however, by Central American standards. They also remained high in comparison to what someone could earn striking out as a small farmer of corn and beans, for example, in Guanacaste Province or other regions.

Prior to the development of coffee, there had existed among the peasantry a rather egalitarian economy of subsistence farmers. The early years of the coffee boom seems to have raised the standard of living in a similarly egalitarian fashion as most made some small profits from the small numbers of coffee trees they initially possessed. By the mid-nineteenth century, though, slight class distinctions were becoming apparent among those of the lower class origins. Those most successful achieved the status of *finquero*, or farmer, while those with less business or farming talent, or simply worse luck, acquired the pejorative appellation of *maicero*, a simple tiller of corn. (Gudmundson, 1986: 75, 87)

At least the first fifty years of coffee development, nonetheless, brought a generalized prosperity to Costa Ricans of the Central Valley. The available literature fails to show any effort to organize peasants or farmers in

the coffee region and one would not expect to find such efforts when, by the standards of the time, virtually all were improving their standards of living. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, the developing capitalist economy was creating discernible class differences and a relative inferiority of those less successful. But this, still, did not lead to notable unrest or organization. Smallholders with poor returns would find it difficult to organize protests against the *beneficiadores* or other middle-men such as lenders (usually the same), since neighbors in similar relationships had prospered. And, probably more importantly, there still remained other options for those who hadn't done well as coffee farmers.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a failed smallholder could opt for high-salaried work on a coffee estate. And if one was unhappy with the employer, other work could readily be found. If a family lost its property due to debt, it might later start over, perhaps by moving to farther frontiers. The northwestern end of the *meseta central* in Alajuela Province was a common destination for many who migrated until it, too, was quite saturated around 1880.⁹ (Gudmundson, 1986: 51, 53) Others who managed to hold on to their properties could get by, in difficult times, by partially returning to subsistence farming. This was not difficult as smallholders always had diversified crops even when coffee was the greatest source of income. (Samper, 1990: 201-11; Winson, 1989: 16) Smallholders also bartered

⁹Seligson writes that many, "attracted by the high salaries," also migrated in the latter nineteenth century to the new banana zone on the Atlantic coast. (1980: 67) Other researchers such as Philippe Bourgois, who have done specialized studies of the banana zone, present convincing evidence that few Costa Rican central highlanders worked in the banana zone until the 1920s. (1989: 182-83) See Chapter Five of this dissertation for a further discussion.

foodstuffs and labor with each other, further lessening any need for a high cash income. (Samper, 1990: 215-16)

The labor shortage was exacerbated in the final half of the nineteenth century when the military temporarily expanded. In the latter years of the century, this did not, however, offer a serious career opportunity for many as the terms of service were very temporary. The income from coffee did facilitate a significant initial expansion to 5,000 men in 1852 -- five percent of the population. This expanded temporarily to 9,000 in 1856 when Costa Rica joined other Central American states in fighting and defeating the forces of *el filibustero* William Walker, a North American who envisioned himself as conqueror of the isthmus. After 1870, careers in the military were limited to a core of 500 officers, but, ostensibly, all men between the ages of 18 and 30 were required to serve brief terms of service. Initially, these terms were one year in length, but after 1892, owing to both the coffee sector labor shortage and the cost of maintaining the military, terms were shortened to two months. (Salazar Mora, 1990: 271-81)

It is important to note that the expanded military was not used as a force to repress the general population. Rather, it was used as a tool of the coffee oligarchy to defend its political power against challengers as well as for legitimate national defense purposes.¹⁰ The oligarchy greatly reduced the ranks of the army, and decommissioned a small navy, when threats to the

¹⁰Military threats from both Nicaragua and Guatemala existed in the latter half of the 1870s. Nicaragua initiated a brief invasion in 1878. The overthrow of President Juan Rafael Mora (1848, 1849-59) in 1859 exemplifies the coffee oligarchy's use of the military to defend its interests. In that year, Mora, a well-off merchant and a national hero in the battle against Walker, attempted to found a national bank. The coffee elite viewed this as a threat to its ability to control and profit from credit in the coffee sector via its links to British financing. When Mora attempted a counter *coup d'etat* in 1860, he was captured and executed. (Salazar Mora, 1990: 273; Creedman, 1977: 129)

oligarchy's power, both internal and external, were perceived to lessen after the turn of the century. (Ibid.)

In the early twentieth century, when wages fell, there continued nonetheless a "chronic labor shortage," such that wage employment was still relatively easy to procure. (Winson, 1989: 31) And while affordable, temperate, frontier land suitable for coffee was no longer available¹¹, lands in the more distant provinces, good for other crops or cattle, remained cheap and available. Some even established coffee farms in the less temperate climates, producing lower quality beans. A serious labor shortage also existed in Guanacaste Province until the mid-1930s such that cattle *hacendados* offered monetary incentives, and sometimes land, to attract settlers. (Edelman, 1992: 100-03) Smallholders fairsing poorly could also supplement their incomes, as before, with seasonal work on the coffee *haciendas*.

Historical data are as yet unavailable to indicate how estate owners incorporated the labour of smallholders. It is fairly certain that they were the labour reserve of the large grower, though some growers were apparently able to secure temporary labour in the larger towns, also. There is little evidence to suggest peak seasonal labour demands were met in any other way, such as with migrant labour. Certainly, in this respect, coffee estates in Costa Rica differed from those elsewhere in Central America . . . where a migrant labour system involving highland subsistence farmers was integral to the reproduction of the large commercial estates . . . (Winson, 1989: 19)

¹¹Larger growers, the *cafetaleros*, could still expand by obtaining temperate lands previously used for pasture or other crops, although dear prices also limited these growers. (Winson, 1989, 40)

By the 1920s, Costa Ricans were also beginning to join the many foreign laborers on the now established -- and thus less hazardous -- banana plantations that were first developed on the tropical Atlantic coast in the late nineteenth century. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, the labor was still extremely arduous and the threat of tropical diseases, though lessened, was still present. Usually, taking such work also meant separation from one's family. Another possible deterrent to the white Costa Ricans of the *meseta central* was a racist apprehension about working with the Jamaicans and others of African descent whose labor dominated the plantations, as well as with Nicaraguans who Costa Ricans have always disparaged. Complicating these racist fears, Hispanics were relegated to the lower ranks of a hierarchy. The ranking put white administrators at the top who hired English speaking West Indian blacks in the more privileged lower levels of administration. Hispanics found themselves given the hardest work. Costa Ricans found themselves working alongside uneducated Nicaraguans. They also found themselves viewed as second or third class citizens in their own country. The Atlantic zone had multiple disincentives for highland Costa Ricans who needed work. However, wages paid by United Fruit were approximately twice that earned on the coffee *haciendas* and provided yet another alternative for dissatisfied or unfortunate coffee smallholders. Small numbers took the opportunity in the 1920s and larger numbers followed in the 1930s. (Bourgeois, 1989: 181; Purcell, 1993: 26-28, 41-43; DGEC, 1927)

One might expect to find unrest at least among the wage workers of the *haciendas*, especially given that their much higher paid counterparts in the banana plantations were striking somewhat regularly. However, coffee

hacienda workers, unlike the mostly foreign labor on the banana plantations, had virtually the same options or alternatives available to them as the coffee smallholders had.¹² If the *hacendado* treated them harshly, they could migrate to the frontier or to the banana plantations, or, give the continual labor shortage, they could always find work with other estates. An employment census in 1932 reported an ongoing labor shortage outside of the urban areas. In 1936, the government gave free railroad passes to those willing to work in rural areas. (LaWare, 1996: 56) Logically, most *hacendados* would strive to maintain good relations with their workers to prevent their defections. In fact, most *hacendados* allocated small plots to their resident wage workers who then could supplement their incomes with subsistence crops. (Winson, 1989: 19)

In further contrast to the banana workers, coffee *hacienda* workers found it difficult to organize collectively for structural reasons. The resident *hacienda* workers worked alongside the temporary labor drawn from the smallholder families and towns, producing a combined force with differing needs or potential grievances. The work was enhanced by its social nature. Family members or friends would typically harvest a tree together, socializing while working. Further, the coffee *haciendas* in much of the *meseta central* were often actually made up of non-contiguous smaller holdings, dispersing the settlements of the resident workers and minimizing their contact with their fellow permanent workers. This contributed to the maintenance of patron-peasant relations with the *hacendado*. Anthony

¹²As will be discussed in the next chapter, foreign laborers employed in the banana plantations did not have the option to relocate in Costa Rica; they were restricted to the Atlantic coastal area.

Winson stresses that, "the personalistic nature of *patrón-peon* relations made collective organisation of these labourers to raise incomes all but impossible." (1989: 19, 30) Many wage workers were also employed by the owners of smaller estates who worked alongside their employees, creating, probably, even stronger patron-peasant relations.

In summary, we can see that unrest among both the coffee smallholders and wage workers was avoided in the first 100 years of coffee production because the standards of living improved significantly for most at first then remained essentially comfortable. And if one's situation was difficult, one had other options for surviving and potentially even prospering. Further, structural conditions made it difficult for either group to organize for purposes of negotiating improved conditions.

By the early years of the twentieth century, a growing sense among the smallholders of injustice by the *beneficiadores* was producing some minor collective rumblings, although there was nothing that would be defined by most scholars as 'organized unrest.' (Gudmundson, 1995: 121) The research of Víctor Hugo Acuña Ortega and Iván Molina Jiménez has uncovered discontent among smallholders upset with the prices paid them by the *beneficiadores* and with the practice of regional price fixing. Agitation, though still far from serious, began to take on an organized form in the 1920s. In 1922, 200 smallholders in Heredia founded an association "to fight for their interests," and a similar organization took root in Alajuela. (1991: 162) A few years later, in 1924,

a group of producers¹³ from Turrialba complained in the newspaper about the difference of the price fixed for this region with respect to the price in San José and also complained of other arbitrary measures of the *beneficiadores* . . . as, for example, the manner in which the product received was measured. In 1925, a group of producers from Hatillo tried, without success, to organize and undertake a movement for better prices. In 1926, via newspaper, the producers of Tres Ríos, Turrialba, Aserrí, and Heredia protested over the fixed prices of the *beneficiadores*. In 1927, Mr. Andrés Venegas, a lawyer and politician, who fought in this decade in favor of the producers, published a violent attack against what he called *el trust* of the coffee *beneficiadores*.

(Ibid.: 161)

In addition to publishing grievances in the newspapers, smallholders also organized trial efforts to circumvent the *beneficiadores*. In 1922, in Santo Domingo de Heredia, there was an attempt to form a cooperative for the purposes of building a patio for a collectively-owned *beneficio*. Another attempt to form a cooperative was made in Turrialba in 1928. (Ibid.: 161-62) The efforts to create coops apparently failed due to a lack of capital.

Demands made by this burgeoning and dispersed movement included the following:

- The intervention of the government in the price fixing of unprocessed coffee

¹³The term "producer" can refer to any landowning or land leasing grower of coffee, but, as used by Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, it refers to small and medium holders of coffee lands and usually to the former. (1991)

- The granting of credit by the *Banco Internacional* (the state bank) to the small producers
- The creation of a smallholder cooperative for processing coffee
- And putting at the disposition of the small producers the sale price of coffee for export (Ibid.: 162)

The literature available does not indicate that any of these efforts and demands resulted in any reforms during the 1920s.

Although none of this would register as serious discontent in most agrarian states, it is perhaps significant that these class tensions were apparent in Costa Rica in the 1920s, a time of prosperity for coffee growers. Costa Rican coffee prices rose throughout the decade and attained record highs from 1926 through most of 1929.¹⁴ (Winson, 1989: 37; Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, 1991: 164) Even though smallholders were prospering, there was obviously a perceived sense of unfairness *vis-à-vis* the *beneficiadores*.

The tensions already existing in these good times were stretched taut with the onset of the Great Depression at the end of 1929. The *beneficiadores* reacted quickly to the initial falling of prices by halting monetary advances to the smallholders, demanding the settlement of outstanding debts, and founding the *Asociación Nacional de Cafetaleros*. *Cafetalero* representatives in the national Congress introduced measures to have the state fix the prices, hoping, it seems, to have the power of the state enforce what had already been practice. (Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, 1991: 162-63)

¹⁴The average 1926-29 price was over US \$0.50 per kilo. (Winson, 1989: 37)

In the coming year, 1930, the number of smallholder assemblies and meetings multiplied, followed by the further founding of numerous local associations. The principal concerns remained those of price fixing and fairness. The proposed law was condemned. (Ibid.: 162-63) Nonetheless, organization among the smallholders remained quite dispersed and weak. Meetings and publications in opposition to the *beneficiadores* remained very localized and were not coordinated in any unified fashion across the *meseta central*.

Some large coffee producer/processors sought to take advantage of this weakness, before it was overcome, by first coopting the smallholders. A campaign was initiated with the objective of having the smallholders join the *beneficiadores* in a common organization, arguing that both groups could live "in harmony and pursue common interests." (Ibid.: 164) The effort was rebuffed.

The coffee crisis was less drastic than in most other coffee producing states as Costa Rica's product remained the premiere coffee in Britain. Costa Rican coffee obtained the highest prices there and in much of Europe, to where it was re-exported.¹⁵ (Winson, 1989: 38) But prices fell dramatically nonetheless. The average price for exported beans in 1930 was a third lower

¹⁵The crisis steepened sharply in 1934 when the German Nazi government stipulated that all its imports must be matched, in kind, by the exporting country being required to purchase German goods of equal value. Costa Rica could not easily do this without seriously damaging its own small industrial base and other trading relations. Since perhaps more than 30 percent of the Costa Rican coffee arriving in London was reexported to Germany, the Costa Rican government nonetheless made a concerted effort to comply, fearing the loss of this significant market. The *New York Times* reported, for example, that the Costa Rican Government awarded a contract for cast iron pipe to a German firm, with payment made directly with coffee, even though American and British firms had underbid the Germans. In spite of such difficulties and losses, by 1936, Costa Rican coffee was still fetching twice the price of other Central American beans. (*New York Times*, 11/25/34: IV, 8; Winson, 1989: 37-38, 48 n 3)

than in 1928 and had fallen a third again by 1932, a year of particularly poor quality. Worse still, for the small producers, one analysis indicates that the prices paid to smallholders by the *beneficiadores* fell at an even steeper rate, as the latter tried to salvage some of their own losses.¹⁶ (Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, 1991: 164-65; *New York Times*, 1/17/32: III 8) This could only heighten the sense of unfairness felt by the smallholders.

Finally, on March 27, 1932, the disparate small and medium sized producers officially united as the *Asociación Nacional de Productores de Café*, meeting in Guadalupe under the leadership of attorney Manuel Marín Quirós. In June, Marín Quirós proposed to the Congress the passage of a law that would regulate the prices paid to the producers by the *beneficios*. This, of course, was another proposal to transfer the fixing of prices to the domain of the state, exactly what the smallholders had previously opposed. One must assume that the wording of the former and latter proposals was advantageous, in each case, to the authoring parties. (Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, 1991: 165)

Following a year of lobbying, propagandizing, and rallying, the Congress, in July of 1933, established the *Junta de Liquidaciones de Café*, and charged it with regulating both the price of coffee and the margin of profit of the *beneficiadores*. The *Junta* was established with, and under, the *Instituto de Defensa del Café de Costa Rica* (IDECAFE), created to promote the development and export of coffee. (Ibid.; Seligson, 1975: 28)

The processor-exporters had lost a battle, but succeeded, four months later, in having effected a law modifying the power of the *Junta de*

¹⁶Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez cite Clorito Picado in the *Diario de Costa Rica*, Sept. 15, 1932, pp. 1-2.

Liquidaciones to regulate the margin of profit "more in accord with the interests of the *beneficiadores*."¹⁷ (Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, 1991: 166) The Congress also allocated 500,000 *colones* to the *Banco Internacional* to finance loans for the purchasing and processing of coffee, making it easier for the processors to pay the required higher prices to the smallholders. (Ibid.) The battle lines had been drawn and the first organized class skirmishes over coffee production carried out. No side had a clear victory or loss, but a century of *laissez-faire* coffee pricing between smallholders and middlemen had come to an end, and the precedent of state intervention had been set.

In the next few years, notable disputes would continue between the smallholders and the larger producers and processors. Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, observe that, "1934 is probably the year of maximum activity of the *Asociación* of small producers." (1991: 166) In this year, energy was also directed to electoral politics. Besides supporting candidates sympathetic to smallholders, the Association rallied behind a budding Party of Socialist Action, supporting a slate of congressional deputies for the province of San José. The effort, however, was an electoral failure. The following year, 1935, would deliver another blow to the smallholders when their Association president, Marín Quirós, was removed from the price-fixing *Junta de Liquidaciones de Cafe* by a *cafetalero* at the helm of IDECAFE.¹⁸ (Ibid.)

¹⁷"The coffee barrons managed to maintain a large measure of control In the case of the *Junta de Liquidaciones*, all they needed for control was two out of the three votes, and since two representatives from the coffee industry were elected by the Instituto Nacional de Defensa del Café, which in turn was dominated by the largest coffee interests, control . . . was easy to establish." (Seligson, 1975: 28)

¹⁸It is not clear when Marín Quirós was originally appointed to the *Junta*.

Protests continued in the press and the government eventually responded. On April 1, 1936, IDECAFE approved a new rule strengthening the regulation over the *beneficiarios*. Significantly, IDECAFE carried out sanctions, for the first time, against *beneficiarios* who failed to pay the prices set by the state. (Ibid.: 167) At this point, aside from some continued protests in the press, Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez conclude that "everything appears to indicate that the movement initiated in 1932 was exhausted." (1991: 166-67)

By the early 1930s, the numbers of coffee *hacienda* wage-workers equaled those of coffee smallholders.¹⁹ (Winson, 1989: 16) Although the estate owners cut wages during the Depression, this research has uncovered no record of labor organization or unrest prior to the late summer of 1934, when there were reports of a threatened strike in the Turrialba region. (*New York Times*, 9/1/34: 6) A work stoppage in the Atlantic banana zone, which came to be known as *la gran huelga*, or the great strike, had been declared on August 8. (See Chapter Five.) The threatened coffee worker strike was finally declared on October 22, as an early coffee harvest was getting under way and as the banana strike continued. After nine days, on October 31, the coffee strike collapsed due to a reported "lack of support." (Ibid., 11/2/34: 40)

The powerful strike in the banana zone was under the leadership of the recently founded Communist Party. It had been very active in San José, Cartago, and their outlying urban areas. Leaders and activists transited through Turrialba on the train line to the Atlantic coast banana plantations.

¹⁹Winson, drawing on the records of a special coffee census, reports that 144,000 men, women, and children lived on coffee farms in the early 1930s, with 21,576 listed as owners and 21,424 listed as coffee estate laborers. (1989: 16)

Turrialba was the last stop on the line that was still in the coffee zone before the trains descended to the coastal banana plantations. On its premontane fringes, farmers shaded their coffee with borders of banana trees. At this edge of the coffee region, sugar estates and cattle pastures shared the terrain. The Communists had successfully organized in the cities and in the banana plantations, with broad popular support. Now they hoped to get a foothold in the coffee zone and Turrialba was no doubt a convenient location. Reports before the coffee strike indicate that the Communists were vying for union leadership with other labor organizers. The influence of the Communists and the ongoing banana strike seem apparent. (*New York Times*, 8/20/34: 20; 8/21/34: 11; 9/1/34: 6)

The prospect of a strike among the coffee wage workers probably sent alarm through officials in San José. A *New York Times* report from a San José correspondent likely represented their concerns.

This harvest lasts only a few months and is not a weekly matter as with bananas. The loss from a strike in the coffee plantations would be much greater than has been the case in the banana fields. . . . Wages have not been as good and living conditions no better on the coffee plantations than in the banana fields. In the circumstances it would appear that it will be much easier to foment and win a strike in the coffee-producing highlands. Possibly the revolt in the banana lands has been only a testing of strength by the Communists for a bigger uprising in the highlands." (9/30/34: IV 2)

The government sent fifty troops to Turrialba shortly before the strike and another fifty when the stoppage was declared. For the small Costa Rican

Army, this represented a significant dispatch. In September, when it was briefly and erroneously believed that the banana strike had been settled, the government had enacted a 500 person peacetime limit to the size of the Army. (Ibid.: IV 8) A significant portion of this small army was already in the banana zone in October. The troops in Turrialba apparently engaged in no confrontations with the coffee strikers during the brief strike. Eugene Miller, citing the Communist journal, *Trabajo*, makes very brief reference to perhaps as many as three or more other coffee worker strikes, also in Turrialba, through 1940.²⁰ Details are not available at this time to this researcher, but none of these strikes are referred to elsewhere in the literature and it seems that the other strikes were of no more consequence than the 1934 strike. Referring to all of these coffee strikes, including that of 1934, Miller writes, "These strikes, which on occasion were led by women, were of short duration and were limited to a small number (40 to 150) of workers. Isolated and uncoordinated these strikes met with limited success." (1992: 132)

This is not to say that the 1934 coffee strike was of no consequence. In response to the strikes in both of the principal export sectors, as well as other labor agitation including two sugar worker strikes in Turrialba, the government undertook regulation, for the first time of agrarian worker wages. As 1934 drew to a close, a minimum wage of 25 *centimos* an hour was established for coffee and sugar workers while 50 *centimos* was set for banana and cacao workers. A minimum work day of six hours was also established.

²⁰Miller actually writes that the strikes occurred through 1948, but he only cites issues of *Trabajo* through 1940 (11/3/35, 11/27/37, and 9/15/40) and it is assumed that the 1948 date was entered erroneously. (1992: 132)

(Miller, 1992: 109 ff; 132-33) At the same time, the state also took further action on behalf of the small and medium coffee growers. Via its *Banco Internacional*, the state "assumed the acquisition of, and promoted the establishment of, coffee *beneficios* in areas where they didn't exist or were not meeting the demands of the growers." (Cazanga S., 1987.: 17) Additionally, the government implemented a new land reform law, "whereby every landless citizen has the right to acquire free fifty acres of virgin land," promoted as "a bulwark against growing communism." (*New York Times*, 12/8/34: 2)

The role of the press was no doubt significant in the passage of the various reforms affecting those in the coffee sector. One paper, *El Diario de Costa Rica*, gave especially strong coverage and support to the smallholder cause. Besides publishing protests, communiqués, and letters of support for the smallholders, the paper also published, from 1933 into 1936, "*Campaña Cafetalera*," a regular column by Marín Quirós which seems to have been an important "instrument that served to centralize and conduct the fight" of the smallholders. (Acuña Ortega and Molina Jiménez, 1991: 165)

Another factor that enhanced smallholders' political clout was that their efforts were paralleled by large landholders whose *beneficios* had succumbed to the competition of larger *beneficiadores*. The former *beneficiadores* had now fallen subject to the price controls of their former competitors. "These larger producers could, as a group, exercise some pressure on the government and, as early as 1930, began to do so." (Seligson, 1975: 27-28) As *beneficios* disappeared, it left those remaining with less competition, increasing opportunities for the price fixing that the smaller growers came to protest.

These conciliatory actions by the state stand in sharp contrast to many other states such as Guatemala or the Philippines where the larger landowners and processors, via control of the political institutions, have often, if not systematically, been able to use the state police and military forces as tools to oppress any who have challenged them. The military government of El Salvador, installed with the collaboration of the coffee oligarchy, carried out massive oppression during this same period following an unorganized and drunken riot by indigenous coffee estate wage workers. In January 1932, some 2,500 to 4,000 coffee workers, armed with rocks, sticks, and machetes, ransacked two towns and killed twenty *mestizos*, mostly guards and police. The government, citing a communist threat of a general insurrection, responded with a massacre – *la matanza* – estimated to have killed up to 34,000 Salvadorans or four percent of the population. Most of the victims were indigenous – men, women, and children who lived off work in the coffee plantations. (Brignoli, 1995: 250-57; Gettleman, et al., 1981: 59-60)

As the massacre began, a plantation owner published his observations of the rebellion in a newspaper. He noted that he had witnessed all of his nearly 200 workers in the mob, as well as the workers of his neighbors and brothers. Among his conclusions, he wrote, "It is our wish that this race be exterminated." (Brignoli, 1995: 255) The government was apparently listening to growers with such feelings as it continued to hunt and murder the indigenous workers, communists, and labor activists, over the next few months.

Violence has also been a part of agrarian movements in Costa Rica, on the part of peasants, landowners, workers, and the state, and this will be

addressed in Chapters Five through Seven. However, the degree of violence pales in comparison to that in other states. The state's role in the coffee conflicts in the mid-1930s, however, was largely one of brokering conciliation and compromise on the part of the more powerful landowners and *beneficiadores* in favor of the weaker agrarian smallholders and workers. This behavior on the part of the state was the beginning of a pattern that has been oft repeated in other agrarian conflicts. The *beneficiadores*, to be sure, retained much power over those who produced and harvested the coffee for processing. But they did surrender some power through the intervention of the state. The smallholders were sufficiently appeased and the incipient movement was quelled.

It is still fair to argue, even though the state acted to control the *beneficiadores* and advance the causes of the coffee growers, that the state in fact represented the interests of the *beneficiadores*. Discussion above illustrated how the coffee oligarchy had used the military to protect its political interests in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The major economic interests and the government were both still controlled in significant measure, by these same men. *Beneficios*, of which there were approximately 220 in the mid-1930s (Winson, 1989: 21), were owned by the wealthiest men of Costa Rica. As discussed in the previous chapter, the political families and the successful entrepreneur and land owning families of the colonial period were generally one and the same, those with roots going back to the original, intertwined, noble, landed, ecclesiastic, and bureaucratic families. This remained largely true in the 1930s, although small numbers of German and other immigrants had also established coffee estates and

beneficios. In the economic realm, the tentacles of the most successful families embraced far more than coffee. Winson writes,

It is apparent . . . that the business affairs of the large *cafetaleros* not infrequently went beyond the coffee industry and other agricultural pursuits, such as sugar cane production and livestock farming. Felipe J. Alvarado, for instance, was described as being involved with banking, transport agencies, steamship lines and industry, in addition to his coffee *beneficio* and 400 *manzanas* of land in production. Another estate owner is noted to have been an important merchant in San José, while involvement in banking was mentioned for several other important *cafetaleros*. The Tournon family was involved in a major brick manufacturing company, gold mining activities and was the agent of a major European shipping line. Thus, by the 1930s and probably much earlier, a small group of a few hundred individuals had attained a dominant position in the nation's most important economic activity, as major coffee cultivators, as the sole proprietors of processing facilities and through a monopolistic control over agricultural credit and the exporting of coffee to Europe. In addition, a small nucleus in this group apparently had considerable influence in those few other economic activities that had emerged in this still primarily agrarian based economy. (1989: 24)

These same economic elites were, from the time of independence, also the principals of the government. Initially, large land holdings were required in order to hold the higher political offices. In 1841, under the strongarm rule of Braulio Carillo (1835-37, 1838-42), the requirement was changed to the

possession of both capital and a cash income of relatively large sums. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the impetus of the oligarchy to make Costa Rica a modern state brought about reforms that led to substantially increased access to education (for both males and females), a press more open to the discussion of new ideas and initiatives, and the spread of democratic concepts. Rafael Yglesias Castro, a strong, Liberal, semi-dictatorial president at the turn of the century (1894-1902) liked to boast that Costa Rica had more school teachers than soldiers.²¹ (Casement, 1925: 26; Creedman, 1977: 217-18) These changes, however, intrinsically and ironically laid the groundwork for the eventual lessening of the economic elites' hold on government.

The newly educated masses in fact secured direct suffrage for men in 1913. The votes, however, were cast verbally, and Winson holds that, "this system was especially intimidating for the *peones* on the coffee estates, who might jeopardize their positions should they not vote for the candidate favoured by their *patrón*." (1989: 24) Since there was still a labor shortage, this argument is suspect. It is possible, though, precisely because a largely *positive* patron-peasant relationship existed, that the workers would be embarrassed to publicly vote against their *patrones* or their designated candidates. If anyone in the coffee sector was intimidated into voting as directed by the estate holders, it would more likely have been the smallholders. The smallholders have traditionally obtained advances on their crops from estate holders, especially the *beneficiadores* who purchase their crops

²¹This was true if one did not count the drafted soldiers, serving two month terms. In 1900, there were 500 career soldiers and 863 teachers. (Salazar Mora, 1990: 257, 274-75)

for processing. Dependent on established relations, a smallholder might indeed have been wary to vote contrary to the wishes of his *patrón*.

Regardless of the motivations of the voters involved, the economic elites of the coffee industry remained in control of the national government. The *beneficiadores* did grant the newly educated smallholders and farm workers more control of the local governments but retained their more critical political positions of privilege in the oligarchy at the national level. (Winson, 1989: 24-26) Winson argues that suffrage reforms, including the secret ballot implemented in the late 1920s,

did not in themselves seriously threaten the dominance of the *cafetaleros* in national politics. Even by the 1930s it was clear that any real challenge to electoral candidates of the oligarchy were usually deflected by a well developed system of fraud and corruption. Moreover the *coup d'état* directed against González Flores in 1917 demonstrated the oligarchy's ability to handle leaders who, once in power, were so bold as to place the economic well being of other sectors, or the society as a whole, above that of the coffee oligarchy. (1989: 26)

In fact, "the society as a whole" was dependent on the success of coffee, since most taxes, for most of the state's history, have been derived from this historically dominant export. Fifty-three men have headed Costa Rica since 1821. Forty have been in the coffee business.²² Some like cattle baron and general Tomás Guardia (1870-82) have had other primary professions, but

²²This number includes José Figueres Ferrer (1948-49, 1953-58, 1970-74) and his son, José María Figueres (1994-98) although the family does not descend from coffee elites. The elder Figueres purchased a large coffee farm and a *beneficio* after his first term in office. The family is also one of the principal producers of coffee sacks.

like Guardia, also profited from the coffee business. (R. Williams, 1994: 217-23)

Since coffee interests were so well represented in government, it can be reasonably concluded that, despite their public efforts to the contrary, it was these same men who were involved in the state intervention. This, in turn, means that the 'intervention' was, in fact, a concession. The economic elites surrendered only a small amount of political power to the lower classes. But it was sufficient to restore the relative harmony to the economic relationship from which the elites would continue to profit while depending upon the supply of unprocessed beans from those below them.

They continued to rule, via the IDECAFE, on the day-to-day grievances regarding payments to the producers. The monetary concessions were softened, also, by the provision of state loans to the *beneficiadores*. And as to the estate workers, the minimum wage laws were probably somewhat insignificant in weakening the power of the large estate owners. Wages did begin to climb again and Winson argues that the minimum wage law of 1936 "undoubtedly contributed to the general rise." (1989: 48 *n* 8) It is more likely, however, that the market, taking the continuing labor shortage into consideration, had more to do with this rise. There was little in the way of enforcement mechanisms and the law was easy to evade.²³ (Miller, 1992: 66,132-33; Winson, 1989: 126)

²³Labor courts had jurisdiction over minimum wage laws beginning in 1943, but this did little to help those in non-coffee rural areas who challenged employers for underpayment. Courts took *patrón-peon* relations into consideration and ruled that non-monetary provisions from the employer such as housing or even fruit and firewood that the peasants collected from their employer's property could count towards the wage. (LaWare, 1996: 162-63)

Power derived when capital concentrates can facilitate oppression. In the case of *beneficiadores* versus coffee smallholders, that oppression was realized only very mildly, in the initial form of unfair prices paid to the smallholders. After a century of quite peaceful relations in the coffee sector, the incipient activism of smallholders amounted to nothing more than some feeble attempts to collectively organize and a restrained, civil, propaganda campaign carried out in the newspapers. These actions were, initially, neither radical nor particularly effective.

The low coffee prices and reduced incomes produced by the Great Depression must be seen as critical variables occasioning the intensified political action of the smallholders as well as the labor organizing of the strikers in Turrialba. Yet, even these acts were very restrained. Also fueled by the Depression was the more serious unrest of the banana zones, along with urban strikes, both of which contributed to the rising popularity of the newly founded Communist Party. These variables must also be factored into the equation producing the concessions. It was in the state's perceived interest to contain the sparks of unrest in the coffee sector with simple concessions before the other unrest carried over and fanned the tinder.

The responses of the state were as restrained as the protests that prompted them, but they were nonetheless significant. The significance lay first in the fact that the state had intervened in what had always been a *laissez-faire* relationship between those who grew and harvested the coffee -- smallholders and wage-earners -- and those who had economic power over them -- the *beneficiadores* and estate owners. The state had appropriated some of the power of the latter for itself. Since the state was largely

controlled by the coffee oligarchy, these initial appropriations did not, in themselves, mean that this was a significant power shift. What is important is that the groundwork for an increased state role in the relations of production in the coffee sector had been laid.

The state, however meekly, had asserted itself as a player. And though the actions on behalf of the smallholders and wage-earners were not dramatic, the significance can be seen when the actions are compared to those taken by other states. The Costa Rican state, representing the interests of the coffee oligarchy, did not respond to the demands of the smallholders and wage-workers with force and repression. Rather, in contrast to actions taken by other agrarian oligarchies in other states, the coffee oligarchy and the state in Costa Rica acted with what could be described as enlightened self-interest. Significant revenues were not diverted into the use and maintenance of armed forces. Minimal concessions were made and production continued with virtually no interruption.

The state would be slow to expand upon its new, incipient, power, although the occasional reform was pushed through. For example, in 1937, the *Juntas Rurales de Crédito* were established to provide credit to small and medium sized coffee growers, reflecting one of the early demands made when the smallholders had first organized in the 1920s.²⁴ (Cazanga S., 1987: 17-18)

Those cultivating the coffee fields would make no serious demands of the state over the next few decades. But the state would evolve dramatically through the 1940s and early 1950s. As World War II deepened the economic

²⁴Although, apparently, the credit provided would be insufficient and smallholders would still often need to obtain credit from *beneficiadores*, typically in the form of advances on upcoming harvests. (Cazanga S., 1987: 96-101)

crisis in the country, the 1940s would find Costa Rica engulfed in social turmoil, culminating in a brief civil war in 1948. Throughout this period, the state would assert itself as a real force between capital and labor. The smallholders and *hacienda* workers of the coffee sector, however, would be remarkably detached from the social activism of the period. Not until the 1950s would they again challenge the state to defend them against new abuses by the coffee elite. The state, building upon its new powers gained over the 1930s and 40s, would finally, then, show significant independence in acting to curb the power of the coffee oligarchy. These developments will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NEW INDEPENDENCE OF THE STATE: FROM MEDIATOR TO USURPER OF POWER

The 1940s was a period of serious social turmoil, intense change, peculiar political bedfellows, and unprecedented state involvement in the affairs of society.¹ It also saw, at the end of the decade, a disputed election, a small civil war, and new safeguards insuring honest elections. In the first half of the decade, the government would enact a wide range of social reforms, including the very significant creation of the Social Security System that would eventually provide both health care and pensions for most Costa Ricans.² Urban workers and the Communist Party would both play significant roles. The coffee oligarchy, because of its broad involvement in other economic sectors and its traditional power in government, would be very involved in the many social battles. Most of the rural population, however, including those in the coffee sector, though feeling the aching effects of the World War shortages and steep inflation, largely observed the political upheaval from a relatively safe distance with little or no direct participation.

¹The decade's events are very complex and can only be dealt with briefly in this chapter. Chapter Six will further explore the events and their consequences. For more detailed accounts of this period, see the works by Aguilar Bulgarelli (1974), Bell (1971), Rodriguez Vega (1981), Miller (1992), and LaWare (1996). The first is perhaps the best telling. Rodriguez Vega offers a very succinct, but useful account. The latter two focus specifically on the intersection of labor and politics.

²The Social Security System is officially called the *Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social* and is generally referred to, simply, as *la Caja*, or "the fund."

Smallholders and wage-workers had safety nets not available to their urban brethren -- subsistence plots and bartering networks. Benefits from the 1940s reforms also helped cushion, though not erase, some in the coffee sector from the economic hardships. Year-round employees on coffee farms received health and pension coverage under the Social Security program enacted in 1943. It was funded with compulsory contributions from the employer, the employee, and the state. (Bell, 1971: 30) Many provisions of the new Labor Code also benefited these wage-workers, such as a severance pay plan and worker disability insurance. These benefits did not, however, initially extend to smallholders. Nor did they extend to the vast majority of the wage-workers who, as seasonal employees, typically did not meet a three-month minimum employment requirement. (*Tico Times*, 10/9/92: 4; McPhaul, 1990: 10; LaWare, 1996: 232-33)

A new rural credit program was implemented that may have helped smallholders, although there is evidence that smallholders were still often dependent on advances from *beneficiarios*. It is not clear from the available literature how much those in the coffee sector were able to partake of other social programs that provided such benefits as free shoes and subsidized housing. (LaWare, 1996: 68-69; Cazanga S., 1987: 96-101; Hall, 1985: 149) A 1942 land reform law may also have provided aid to failed smallholders or unhappy wage-workers, although it is not clear if many from the coffee sector took advantage of it. The law was allegedly designed to facilitate land acquisition by agrarian squatters. Even though the law was manipulated and

abused by large land owners, squatters did obtain lands and this may have contributed to agrarian calm during this period.³ (Rowles: 159-61)

The reforms of the 1930s remained in place and apparently were not challenged by the *beneficiarios* and estate owners. Combined with the subsistence plots, the bartering, and the applicable parts of the 1940s reforms, those who worked the coffee fields apparently experienced a decade of calm relations with the *beneficiarios* and *hacienda* owners even though they did, like everyone else, experience economic hardship. This research has discovered no records of strikes or other unrest in the coffee sector during this period. Nonetheless, as the Labor Code was passed, the coffee oligarchy demonstrated that the few minor strikes at the end of the previous decade had left them nervous. Much of the Labor Code was devoted to matters involving employee-employer negotiations and the regulation of strikes. However, for the stated reason of national security, coffee workers, along with those in the banana and government employee sectors were prohibited from striking. They were required, instead, to have their serious disputes resolved by a labor court. Coffee workers presented no challenge to this law.⁴ (LaWare, 1996: 99-100; *Código de Trabajo*: 172-73)

Following the 1948 Civil War, coffee estate owners pressured the provisional government of José Figueres (May 8, 1948-November 8, 1949), himself a small coffee *hacienda* owner, to eliminate the Labor Code's pro-

³The law provided for the compensation of landowners whose lands were taken by the government by awarding them other lands. Large landowners manipulated appraisals and actually incited squatters to invade their lands. Their original lands were over-valued while State lands obtained were under-appraised. "Huge latifundios were created as a result of the misapplication of this law." (Rowles: 161)

⁴The ban on coffee worker and government employee strikes would remain on the books until 1998 when the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court would declare it unconstitutional. (*Tico Times*, 3/6/98: 5)

vision for severance pay, claiming that it was a heavy burden and that "it had caused perpetual conflict between growers and workers." (LaWare, 1996: 232) Luis Alberto Monge⁵, a young leader of the Catholic sponsored *Rerum Novarum* union, active in other economic sectors, attacked the proposal. He noted that because the estate owners relied overwhelmingly on seasonal work, most of their wage-workers did not even qualify for the severance pay. The estate owners thus had a much lower burden than did those of other economic sectors. Intriguingly, the Council of Industries also stepped forward to oppose the proposal of the estate owners. The proposal was buried.⁶ (LaWare, 1996: 232-33)

The government had learned to flex its muscles during the 1940s. After the Civil War, with expanded powers, it was the state, not the *beneficiadores*, that would give the smallholders a new cause -- taxes -- to oppose. The government was suffering financially for several reasons. First, the tax base had been hurt by the decreased trade over almost two decades during the Depression World War II. Next, Costa Rica's own brief war had destroyed infrastructure. The provisional post-Civil War government of Figueres also cited "administrative looting" on the part of the recent governments. Lastly, many of the young idealists who staffed the first governments after the Civil War, particularly those associated with Figueres, had a social reform agenda to carry out.

⁵Monge would be elected Costa Rica's president in 1982.

⁶The business leaders may have opposed the estate owners' proposal simply out of fear of opening the severance pay issue to debate. As it was, the law was full of loopholes. The business leaders may have feared that tampering with the law would backfire and that a tightened, and thus more expensive, law might result. (LaWare, 1996: 234-35)

For all of these reasons, these first post-War governments set out to do what is the most unpopular action of any government. They had to increase revenues through additional taxes. The question was where, or on who, to place the burden. In the tradition carried down from the Spanish, Costa Rica had always relied primarily on export and import duties for its tax base and secondarily on taxes on government licenses and services. To this day, income taxes are very rare in Latin America.⁷ A wider revenue net was needed.

The provisional Junta of Figueres did not initially cast a net that would tax smallholders. Idealists in the government felt that there were citizens who could, and should, more fairly share their gains via a more direct form of taxation. Less than a month and a half after assuming the reins of government in 1948, Figueres decreed a 10 percent tax on "wealth". The tax failed to bring in the revenues hoped for, however, in large part due to widespread tax evasion by the well-to-do. (Rodríguez Vega, 1981: 179-80; Winson, 1989: 78) Another action that was more successful in bringing in revenue was the decreed nationalization of the private banking sector.⁸

These actions were among many that the governments of the next few decades would enact, continuing the expansion of the state's control of, and redistribution of, wealth and the state's role in previously private affairs of

⁷An income tax was briefly attempted during the administration of Alfredo González Flores (1914-17). In great part because of the tax, he was overthrown.

⁸The State already owned the *Banco Nacional de Costa Rica* (formerly the *Banco Internacional de Costa Rica*). Private banks were merged into the *Banco Nacional* and the *Banco de Costa Rica* and the *Banco Anglo Costarricense*. The *Banco Crédito Agrícola de Cartago* was created in the 1960s. The *Banco Popular* was created in the 1970s. The state banks facilitated provincial development and personal credit. Customer service deteriorated and interest rates rose in the early 1980s during the debt crisis. In 1984, private banks were allowed under strict restrictions. In 1996, most of the restrictions ended. Most other State businesses were being privatized as well. (*Tico Times*, 9/27/96: 1,9)

society. Often both were achieved together.⁹ The elites had provided their own undoing when, in their efforts to make Costa Rica a modern state, they had implemented universal education and universal male suffrage.¹⁰ Now, with a brief, but firm, hold on government, Figueres successfully pushed through two constitutional reforms that would build on these reforms and further loosen the hold of the elite in the affairs of the state. A Supreme Electoral Council, appointed by the Supreme Court, was given strong and broad powers to regulate and supervise elections. Concomitant with this, addressing the institution that was responsible for irregular transfers of state power throughout Latin America, the military was abolished.¹¹ Although tiny and poorly equipped, the army had carried out the *coup d'état* of 1917 and others in the previous century. Governments would be more accountable to voters than ever previously.

President Otilio Ulate (1949 to 1953), elected in the first post-war vote, did not share all of Figueres' enthusiasm for the socialization of private businesses. But he had lent verbal support to the Communists and their reformist efforts during the 1940s, even as he opposed the governments that carried out the reforms. (Bell, 1971: 50-51) "To establish peace on solid foundations," he declared in 1943, "it is necessary to lay its cement over a more just distribution of the wealth, to effect the abolishment of misery and to guarantee that man has work and social, economic, and political security." (Rodríguez Vega, 1981: 167) He was also aware that the redistributive social

⁹For a succinct listing of the many reforms enacted from 1948 to 1970, see Rodríguez Vega, 1981: 182-83)

¹⁰Female suffrage was finally won with the constitutional reforms of 1949.

¹¹For extra measure, the civil police were divided into two forces, the *Guardia Civil* for urban areas, and the *Guardia Rural*, for rural areas. This division remained in place until the 1990s.

reforms already enacted in the 1940s, as well as Figueres' efforts, were immensely popular.

Under Ulate, the National Assembly passed a law in 1951 that would be harder for the coffee elite to evade although it also failed to bring in significant revenues. This legislation required all exporters to sell to the Central Bank all foreign currencies collected in sales. The foreign currency act was a direct attack on the coffee oligarchy. "As coffee exports generated at the time of the passage of this law were well over half of the total dollars entering the Official Exchange Market, it was the coffee interests in particular that were affected by taking away the right to sell their foreign exchange in the free market." (Winson, 1989: 78-79) Winson writes that no "well-orchestrated opposition" materialized in spite of "sporadic outcries." (Ibid.) Arguments citing the pressing interests of the nation carried the day. But the *beneficiadores* were also likely distracted because the government was already debating another proposed law that could, and would, hit them even harder.

In March 1950, an *advalorem* tax was proposed on the sales of beans to the *beneficios*, and as such, was actually directed at the growers, large and small, rather than at the *beneficiadores*. Since almost all of the latter were also large growers, the tax would nonetheless hit them as well. The tax was proposed at the rate of 4.5 percent for the first year after the law went into effect and then 2.25 percent after that. The *beneficiadores* organized a campaign to oppose the tax. Rather than argue on behalf of themselves, however, these large *cafetaleros* cleverly orchestrated a propaganda effort to win sympathy for the smallholders who, they alleged, might perish under the

new tax burden. In *La Nación*, the largest daily and a longtime ally of the coffee elites, the *beneficiadores* pleaded that the smallholders "must not disappear because this fortunate distribution of land in small plots has endowed our country with a consistency of order, a spirit of peace, a love of freedom and a solid foundation for democracy." (Winson, 1989: 79) The government, meanwhile, in an effort to manipulate the same public sentiments, was attempting to portray the tax as one opposed solely by the large coffee interests. (Ibid.: 80)

The smallholders activated their own organization, the previously obscure *Asociación de Pequeños Productores*, and mounted their own campaign. Organization was carried out at a laggard pace, however, and it was well over a year before efforts finally produced a public demonstration. Winson writes that "several thousand farmers" held a public rally in the Summer of 1951 to protest the tax. (1989: 79) One of the leaders, quoted by Winson, put the number of participants at "forty thousand." (Ibid.) The smallholders made it clear that they did, indeed, oppose the tax. But they also made it plain that they did not want the *beneficiadores* using them as a front for their own interests.

While the *beneficiadores* had sympathetic coverage by *La Nación*, the small and medium coffee growers were well represented in the pages of the next largest paper, *El Diario de Costa Rica*. *El Diario* was owned by Ulate and was virtually the official paper of the ruling government. Not only did the government influence its content, but members of the government paid close attention to what reporters and editors brought to the paper. Once the smallholders gained the public eye, the *beneficiadores* fell victim to their own

propaganda. Since the public accepted that a hardship on the smallholders would be counter to the national interest, the government ultimately agreed to exempt the small and medium coffee growers from the proposed tax.

The final legislation, passed in January 1952, implemented an *advalorem* tax that fell upon the *beneficiadores* directly and alone, fixed to a sliding scale depending on the price of coffee in the international market. A concession made to all growers, large and small, was a legislative stipulation that no further taxes could be imposed on coffee at any stage of the production or export processes for ten years. But the early 1950s were good years for coffee production and prices and it would be two decades before the next real slump. The new tax essentially doubled all coffee taxes going to the government, the entire increase coming from the pockets of the *beneficiadores*. (Winson, 1989: 83-86)

Not only did the smallholders avoid the tax, they still would benefit greatly from the reform programs which the tax partly financed. A large rural development component of the reforms included electrification, telephone lines, new roads and bus services, drinking water and sewage systems, improved schools, and state owned industries. The programs were designed to raise the quality of life for Costa Ricans across class lines. They brought fundamental change to the lives of the rural populations in the *meseta central* and, over time, throughout Costa Rica.¹² They required, and achieved, a moderate redistribution of wealth.

The *advalorem* tax was a much bigger victory for the smallholders than any reform achieved during their previous political foray in the 1930s.

¹²See Anderson, 1994, pp. 64-66 for a good example of how one small coffee growing community benefited over the years from the government's programs.

The tax victory fundamentally demonstrated a shift in power in Costa Rica that, significantly, has not been reversed, although it is the perception of many that the wealthy have regained some of their previous power in the government after the 1960s.¹³ Winson provides an excellent analysis of the change at the time.

This tax guaranteed that the state would have a substantial share in the income generated by higher coffee prices in the future, income that in the past had been almost entirely appropriated privately by producers and processors, in proportion to their economic power. . . . From the political point of view, this struggle over the surplus produced with coffee would seem to have established a definite break, in terms of the relations between the agrarian bourgeoisie and the state. Part of the surplus that had traditionally been appropriated by the dominant social group within the coffee sphere -- the producer-processors -- in fact the most powerful economic interests in the country, had been tapped . . . The fact that this legislation was implemented despite the protracted and at times shrill campaign of the *Camara de Cafetaleros* and spokesmen for the oligarchy outside this organization . . . is testimony to the fact that a new balance of political forces was taking shape within Costa Rican society. (1989: 86-87)

While still very influential, the political hegemony of the coffee oligarchy had been weakened. Other interest groups now had defenders and advocates in prominent positions. Beginning with the founding of the *Instituto de Defensa del Café* in the 1930s and deepening significantly with the events

¹³I.e., see Anderson, 1990, esp. pp. 93-94.

of the 1940s and 50s, the role of the state had changed from that of a minimalist caretaker to that of an interventionist actor. The state would further this role dramatically with the promotion of cooperatively owned *beneficios*, striking yet again at one of the financial pillars supporting the coffee elite. The effort to develop these coops would initially be weak. By the 1960s, however, it would seriously affect relations between smallholders and the *beneficiadores*.

The concept of coop *beneficios* was not invented by the post-Civil War governments. The first attempts at developing such coops were those of the 1920s and 30s. As discussed in Chapter Three, those efforts failed because the smallholders were unable to secure sufficient funding. The state would make its first effort to promote coffee processing coops in 1943 as part of the then ongoing reform frenzy. Idealists based at the *Centro para el Estudio de Problemas Nacionales* (hereafter *el Centro*) were promoting the idea of state support after studying the peasants' coops of Mexico recently initiated among the many reforms of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40).¹⁴ Costa Rican President Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia (1940-44) felt a need to take the issue from *el Centro*, an organization extremely critical of his administration, and make it his own. But the law that emerged was quite weak and only one state sponsored prototype coffee coop was founded. Another law passed by Calderón's chosen successor, Teodoro Picado (1944-48, made administrative

¹⁴*El Centro* was founded in 1940 by young activists and intellectuals who were upset with what they saw as continued politics of favoritism and personalism. Significant among the founders were Rodrigo Facio and Alberto Martén Chavarría. José Figueres joined in 1944 when he returned from almost two years of exile, imposed for using a radio speech to harshly attack Calderón as a demagogue. The *Partido Social Demócrata* (PSD) was founded in 1945 by a wing of *el Centro* that included the above named. These men and others from the PSD would, in turn, help found the *Partido Liberación Nacional* (PLN) in 1951 that would dominate much of Costa Rica's politics over the remainder of the century.

changes in the governmental departments administering coops but did almost nothing to further promote the financing and development of additional coops. (Cazanga S., 1987: 22-58)

Meanwhile, in spite of the 1930s laws regulating the prices paid by the *beneficiadores* to the growers, many of the former had developed new methods with which to cheat the latter. In accordance with the 1930s laws, prices paid to the growers were based on prices obtained by the *beneficiador* on the international market. While the *total price* paid was a matter of public record, some *beneficiadores* adjusted their books to represent higher amounts of coffee sold for that price. The result was the recording of a lower price *per unit* and thus a lower price paid to the growers. Further, it was left to the *beneficiadores* to pronounce judgment on the quality of the beans delivered and there was no course of arbitration for any grower who disagreed. Selling to another *beneficio* was difficult or impossible.

First, even with the new state credit programs, small growers still frequently obtained advances on their harvests from specific *beneficiadores*, and thus would be obligated to sell their harvest to those processors. Secondly, if a grower was not so encumbered, the beans would suffer in quality if not delivered for processing within 24 hours. Using a more distant *beneficio* would require additional transportation which might not be available, affordable, or rapid enough. A *beneficiador* might reject the beans altogether if he determined that they had started to ferment. (Cazanga S., 1987: 96-101) These problems were particularly pertinent to newer growers who had been growing lesser quality coffees in regions distant from

the *meseta central*. Some of these areas had no local *beneficios* and were very dependent on the services of the closest processor or processors. (Ibid.: 107)

The issue of credit contributed to strained relations between the smallholders and *beneficiadores* in another way as well. When small growers were unable to obtain bank credit, *beneficiadores* sometimes used money borrowed from banks and then lent it to the growers at higher interest rates. (Ibid.: 96-101) This "permanent debt" as Assembly Deputy Luis Alberto Monge put it in 1961 also further limited small growers from ever financing cooperatives. (Ibid.: 96)

Figueres assumed office again in 1953, this time as elected president (to 1958), and as head of the new *Partido Liberación Nacional* (PLN). The PLN was the new political vehicle for those from *el Centro* and the Party resurrected the coop concept for sectors across the Costa Rican economy. But the legislation that emerged in 1953 was again inadequate. Only two more coffee cooperatives were established before 1960. The government was still not providing sufficient economic assistance.

The PLN lost the 1958 elections, replaced by the *Partido Unión Nacional*, affiliated with Ulate, but now headed by Mario Echandi, fierce opponent of Figueres. Under Echandi (1958-1962), in 1961, the cooperative movement was finally given serious state support. The support would be reinvigorated by following administrations through the early 1970s, producing a series of laws progressively strengthening the development of cooperatives for farms and businesses processing agricultural, industrial, and cottage craft, products.

The most important initiatives supporting the cooperative movement were in the area of credit. In addition to facilitating access to credit for small farmers, credit used for forming cooperatives was given with an eight year grace period on amortizations and at a low rate. (Cazanga S., 1987: 107-12) Coops were also given ten year exemptions to land taxes and were allowed to make duty free purchases of tools, machinery, and other necessary imported inputs such as fertilizers. Electric power was made available at reduced rates. (Winson, 1989: 108)

Some landless peasants took advantage of both the coop legislation and separate land reform legislation, passed in 1962, to establish coffee farms and *beneficio* coops in areas outside of the *meseta central*.¹⁵ The government also facilitated the sale of existing *beneficios* to cooperatives. Some *beneficiadores* were willing to sell because of the anticipated competition from a coop *beneficio* that would be built if they did not sell first. Others sold because they had old equipment or had managed their businesses poorly. In some unfortunate cases, the coops unwittingly assumed debts with the purchase of an existing *beneficio*. For the most part, however, cooperatively owned *beneficios* and the concomitant supportive legislation have substantially altered the power relations between small growers and the traditional *beneficiadores*.

Given the extra hardships of the newer small coffee farmers in distant regions, it was they who initially seized the initiative to form cooperatives. In the late 1960s, when prices were depressed, many smallholders from the traditional coffee growing area of the *meseta central* followed suit. There were

¹⁵Two cooperatives were established in this manner. Other small coffee farmers who have established themselves outside of the *meseta central* have also formed cooperatives.

a total of 31 *beneficio* cooperatives by 1979 (Cazanga S., 1987: 111-12; Winson, 1989: 108) and later press accounts identify others. By the 1977-78 harvest, cooperative *beneficios* were processing approximately one third of the coffee picked nationwide. (Cazanga S., 1987: 145) By 1980, the traditional, private, *beneficios* had lost two-thirds of their processing business outside of the beans that they processed from their own estates. This loss motivated many *beneficiadores* to establish new estates in the distant areas outside of the *meseta central* so that they would have more of their own coffee to process.¹⁶ (Gudmundson, 1995: 121)

In a sample of 240 coffee farms affiliated with coop *beneficios* throughout the country in the 1980s¹⁷, José Cazanga S. found that 95 percent were small farms or small "medium" sized farms of 50 *manzanas* or less, farmed with family labor only or with the help of a few wage-workers.¹⁸ These same farms produced 70 percent of the coffee harvested among the 240 surveyed. The largest nine farms were larger "medium" sized holdings averaging 166 *manzanas*¹⁹ in size, although the amount of land devoted to coffee on these farms averaged only 37 *manzanas*. (Cazanga S., 1987:155) Smallholders are clearly the primary beneficiaries of this state sponsored movement. The

¹⁶Increased urbanization in the *meseta central* has been another factor prompting the development of estates in the distant regions. Urbanization has led to high land values and prompted many landowners to sell their traditional coffee lands.

¹⁷Cazanga S. (1987) sampled 20 members from each of 12 coffee coops somewhat representative of the geographical distribution of the 31 coops operating nationwide. None of the three coops in Guanacaste Province, an area of low coffee quality, were included. But four other included coops, located outside of the *meseta central*, are perhaps sufficiently representative of the Guanacaste coops. (See pp. 165 and 256, 262-265)

¹⁸Geographer Carolyn Hall (1985: 149) calculates that a family, alone without employed labor, can maintain a coffee farm of a size ranging from 4 to 35 hectares. This upper limit equals approximately 50 *manzanas*.

¹⁹Approximately 116 hectares.

improved incomes has prompted one researcher to describe the coop members as a new "bourgeoisie." (Reventos Vorst, 1983: 2)

The formation of cooperative *beneficios* and the enacting legislation, with the special credit arrangements and other incentives, are additional variables that have further lessened class tensions between small to medium growers and the wealthier independent *beneficiadores*. Not all small and medium growers have joined cooperatives, but independent *beneficiadores* know that the growers who deliver beans to them have the option of joining the cooperative movement.²⁰ This has put pressure on these *beneficiadores* to eschew unfair treatment of the growers.

Coops provide other benefits in addition to collective ownership of *beneficios* and preferential credit arrangements from the state bank. Coops make group, discounted, purchases of products and services. Some provide technical advice to members. Some provide additional credit services for members. And the cooperatives can be a social organization. Some coops organize cultural events and other social gatherings. (Cazanga S., 1987: 189)

The cooperatives collectively belong to an overarching organization, the *Federación de Cooperativas de Caficultores* (FEDECOOP), also formed with government initiative in 1962 by the Department of Cooperatives. FEDECOOP also provides technical services and is chartered to purchase or fabricate all of the materials, equipment, and machinery required by its members. It further provides credit for such purchases. FEDECOOP makes

²⁰It is not clear from available data what percentage of small and medium coffee farmers belong to coops. Hall (1985: 162) has extrapolated data from the 1974 Agrarian Census to show that small and medium growers (less than 200 hectares) held about 87% of the coffee growing land in Costa Rica. As coops were processing one third of the harvest in the late 1970s, it is clear that many, and probably a majority, of small and medium growers were still processing their beans through private *beneficios*.

further inroads into the turf of the coffee oligarchy as it is also chartered to purchase all of the coffee of its members for selling on the international market, circumventing the export houses otherwise monopolized by the coffee elite. (Winson, 1989: 108, 112-13 n 47) By the late 1970s, FEDECOOP was marketing 30 to 35 percent of all coffee exported from Costa Rica. (Cazanga S., 1987: 303)

Regional consortiums of coffee cooperatives have also been formed. A news account about one consortium, COOCAFE, representing 2,300 farmers affiliated with coops in Guanacaste Province and Montes de Oro, indicates that the consortium management has savvy marketing skills, packaging specialty coffees to the US such as *Cafe Paz*, or Peace Coffee, to take advantage of Costa Rica's peaceful image in the United States, and packaging coffee to Europe as *Café Reforesta* to appeal to environmentalists whose governments have supported reforestation programs in Costa Rica. COOCAFE has promised to plant one tree in Guanacaste Province for every 250 gram bag sold in Europe. (*Tico Times*, 6/7/91: 23)

While the government has given cooperative ventures much support and incentive, it has also attempted to restrain them politically. Cooperatives are constitutionally prohibited from acting in national politics. (Anderson, 1994: 65) But this provision apparently does not apply to the overarching FEDECOOP. FEDECOOP and *UPANacional*, a peasants' union that includes coffee smallholders (see below) both challenged the government over a 10 percent tax on the production value of the 1988-89 crop. When the government would not retract the tax, FEDECOOP took the matter to the Supreme Court, challenging the constitutionality of the tax. (*Tico Times*,

8/23/91: 26) Created by the state, FEDECOOP has come to challenge the authority of its parent.

It should be noted that cooperative *beneficios* also process coffee from non-members. This situation means that small and medium coffee growers, collectively, have become *el beneficiador*, and have the potential to exploit fellow smallholders through their new power. They are, of course, subject to the same restraints, discussed in the text, that now inhibit private *beneficiadores*. However, the financial collapse of one coop in San Pablo, south of Cartago, resulted in the only case of collective smallholder violence uncovered in this research. In May, 1992, two years after failing to receive payment for delivered coffee, coffee growers and townspeople totaling around 300 persons, rioted and attacked a supermarket and warehouse owned by the coop, but closed for the previous eight months since the coop went bankrupt. The rioters looted, and loaded into their vehicles, food, radios, TVs, refrigerators, and other goods. Four police (*Guardia Rural*) tried to stop the looting and one rioter received a gun-shot wound. FEDECOOP had promised to liquidate the assets and pay the farmers when the coop collapsed but had not yet done so. (*Tico Times*, 5/8/92: 26)

FEDECOOP and the defunct coop were the targets of this violence. But in usurping the power of the coffee elites, the state, as exemplified by the FEDECOOP court case cited above, has now become the principal focus of perturbation by the coffee smallholders if blame is cast when income expectations are not met. To a lesser extent, this is also true for unhappy estate wage-workers. By extension, in recent years, it is the state that has become

the primary locus of unrest among the coffee smallholders when such perturbations bubble to a boil.

Leslie Anderson has documented recent examples of this with her impressive field work in the highland coffee producing village of San Luis in the province of Alajuela. The smallholder families she studied represented three and more generations as local coffee farmers, going back to before the turn of the century when the district was the northwestern frontier of the *meseta central*. With its high altitude and volcanic soil, the best coffee can be grown here while staple crops such as beans, corn, and rice fair poorly. Most farmers, then, grow coffee almost exclusively and use their profits to buy food. (1994: 66, 75)

Before the era of state involvement, the typical 'needs' of the coffee smallholder were credit, seed, small tools, and animals for ploughing new fields. Much of these were obtained from the local *beneficiador*. In recent times, the so-called green revolution has created a dramatically increased 'need' for inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers. And with modern changes such as state credit services, paved roads, and radio and television advertising, farmers have been able to avail themselves of a wide market for needed goods. In the matter of fertilizers, the coffee growers of San Luis have strongly favored and tended to purchase expensive, high quality, products from Europe.

The state has largely replaced the *beneficiadores* in the providing of credit and has filled some of the other middleman roles as well, sometimes using its expansive powers to its advantage in the market. The government attempted to reduce or eliminate the importation of the European fertilizers

and thus force the coffee farmers to use fertilizer produced domestically by a state company. Anderson does not give the time period of this effort by the government but one can deduce from the context that it was in the 1970s or 1980s. Anderson's account of the peasant response is succinct.

San Luis villagers and other peasants nationwide opposed this effort and demanded access to the best fertilizer available on the world market. . . . The peasants were largely successful. The government agreed to fertilizer imports for a period of time during which the domestic fertilizer producer, Fertica, was required to substantially raise its quality. After that grace period, imports would decline if peasant producers were satisfied with Fertica's improved product. San Luis villagers informed me that Fertica had indeed raised its quality and that they were now sufficiently satisfied with it to substitute Fertica's brand for imported fertilizer. (Anderson, 1994: 73)

Unfortunately for the study at hand, Anderson does not report the measures utilized by the peasants in this action. However, the following case, also hers, is both more detailed and an exemplar of non-violent political protest taken to great lengths.

Inflation, part of the international economic crisis of the latter 1970s and early 1980s, drove the cost of coffee farming inputs up while the world prices for coffee remained flat. Credit rates soared from 5 percent to 23 percent by 1985 and growers were stretched thin. Some smallholders defaulted on debts and lost their lands, creating fear and tension among others. Factories closed and state businesses assumed great debts. It was a turbulent time across Costa Rica. Anderson's interviews reveal that the

smallholders accepted the beliefs, popularized in schoolbooks and by the media, that they were the backbone of Costa Rica's economy and culture. It was proper, they believed, that their country should assist them in hard times. (Ibid.: 75-76)

As in the earlier crises, the smallholders again organized. This time they joined the revitalized unionization movement that had been spreading across the country since the mid-1970s. In May of 1981, a peasants' union, *UPANacional* (National Union of Small Agriculturalists and hereafter referred to as UPA), was founded in Cartago. UPA soon expanded to include other regions in the country and had sixteen-thousand members within four years, making it the largest peasants' union in the country. While landless and wage-earning peasants also joined (see below), UPA focused almost completely on the problems of the small and medium farmers. The attitude of the peasants "was that the state held an obligation to soften the impact of the economic crisis on very important citizens and national contributors such as themselves." (Anderson, 1994: 76-77)

Quickly following its founding, the union petitioned President Rodrigo Carazo (1978-82) to ameliorate problems involving credit, crop insurance, imports, prices, and marketing. When the state replied with no more than sympathetic rhetoric, UPA published its demands in *La Nación*, again achieving little. UPA carried out a march from the legislative assembly to the President's house and on to the Central Bank, but the government remained passive. At each step, the government's inaction prompted UPA to take more radical steps. Anderson recounts the action that ultimately achieved results:

Finally, they organized a major blockage of the nation's highways. Peasants turned out across the central region to stand and sit on all the major highways. No agricultural produce could reach the cities. Conservative political actors condemned the blockage and the media carried accusations of communism and antidemocratic tendencies, but despite the outburst, the state did not respond with repression. Faced with a food shortage in the cities and anger from a variety of commercial and popular sectors adversely affected by the blockage, the government moved to negotiate. It met with union leaders and listened to peasant concerns and demands. The state promised to meet a reduced number of the demands originally presented, and the peasants lifted the blockage. (Ibid.: 77)

These escalating actions were repeated various times between 1981 and 1984. Rather than starting with the most radical action each time new problems arose, the peasants tried the most conservative approaches first, but repeatedly were willing, ultimately, to resort again to highway blockades. And invariably, the blockades again pushed the government to make compromising concessions to the smallholders. "Union organization allowed the peasants to halt the economic decline and launch a movement to restore economic justice, as they defined it." (Ibid.: 77-78)

Over time, increasing numbers of people in the government and the press came to recognize UPA and its demands as legitimate. By 1985 the blockades were no longer necessary. The government was willing to make concessions at the early levels of protest. The union won concessions on

issues such as reimbursement for crop losses and the establishment of an UPA import cooperative.

Newspapers treated these peasants' demands as legitimate, and accusations of communism diminished. Union leadership consciously maneuvered the organization into this more accepted position by adopting some of the state rhetoric about the value of Costa Rican democracy, national independence, and the importance of private property. (Ibid.: 78)

The lessening of the charges of communism was quite significant when one considers that the press and much of the country were engaged in a new red-scare campaign, following the 1979 victory of the socialist *Sandinistas* in neighboring Nicaragua. (See Chapter Six.)

While many coffee estate wage-workers joined their employers in UPA and participated in the blockades, there is little evidence, following the 1930s Turrialba strikes, of significant estate wage-worker protest *against* their employers. David LaWare briefly notes that in the late 1940s, "large coffee planters and other conservative elements linked with the opposition movement against Calderón helped to fund the Catholic labor movement." (1996: 71) LaWare, in documenting the Costa Rican labor movement in the 1940s through the mid-1950s, makes no mention of any union organizing or work stoppages in the coffee sector. The coffee elite, with its financial interests in other sectors of the Costa Rican economy, was no doubt trying to create a less radical alternative to the Communists who were dominating the very active labor movement in the bananas and urban industries sectors.²¹ The

²¹See Chapter Six for more about the Catholic labor movement.

coffee elite had little financial investment in the banana sector, but its diversified portfolio included much of the urban industries. Beyond protecting its non-coffee interests, the coffee elite may very well, also, have been attempting to protect itself against any future radical organizing in the coffee fields.

There is no available evidence of strike activity in the coffee groves between the late 1930s and the late 1970s, when there were apparently some work stoppages again. As in the earlier cases in Turrialba, the details uncovered through the present research effort are limited, but the events of the latter 1970s again appear restrained. Winson, without making specific citations, makes passing reference to "sporadic strike activity" at the time. (1989: 126) He also makes a vague reference to the creation of one or more coffee worker unions after 1975. (Ibid.: 127) He notes the insignificance of these efforts as well, however.

By [1976] the now legalized Partido Vanguardia Popular (formerly the Communist Party of Costa Rica) had noted at its 12th Congress that, with respect to the national labour movement, "one of the factors of weakness of the working class is the low level of organisation of the proletariat of the coffee and sugar plantations. The sector is organising very slowly." (Ibid.: 126-27)

One journalistic investigation (Vega M., 1984: 12A) into the continuous strikes throughout the country from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s emphasizes the large numbers of work stoppages in the banana and public

sectors, but makes no mention of activity in the coffee sector, still, as always, the largest employment sector.²² (*Tico Times*, 11/20/87: 23; DGEC, 1984)

As mentioned above, some coffee wage-workers joined *UPANacional*, the union dominated by smallholders. Many coffee wage-workers joined UPA, marched in the marches and sat on the highways, alongside the small and medium landholders who employed them. At a first glance, one might wonder very much at this collaborative effort. Anderson, though, documents a very symbiotic relationship between the wage-workers and the coffee growers who employ them. In her case study of San Luis, this relationship extends to the village in general as well.

The participation by wage-workers in UPA indicates, for many, that they want their employers to do well because it means the employers have more to share, both in work and in benefits. Not all coffee wage-workers who join UPA participate in the union's protests. Some join for direct benefits such as reduced worker payments to *la Caja*, the Social Security fund by which they obtain health care, and some join the union's cooperative consumer projects where discounts on such things as work clothes and tools are obtained. (Anderson, 1994: 79) But the workers who protest with UPA see their employers' cause as their own and as that of the community. One enthusiastic supporter told Anderson, "I am very much in favor of UPA. It helps everyone and we have to help it. The more bodies there are [during a blockade], the stronger it is, the more power the union has. UPA benefits the whole village." (Ibid.: 79-80) In examining why the coffee wage-workers

²²The coffee oligarchy, nonetheless, expressed its nervousness about the strike atmosphere with paid ads in newspapers criticizing strikes in other sectors as influenced by "ideologies and politics alien to our [Costa Rican] traditions." (*La Nación*, 8/23/79: 5A)

protested *with* their employers, the evidence can also explain why the workers do not carry out major strikes or other significant collective actions *against* their employers.

As argued in Chapter Three, in regards to earlier time periods, the continuing labor shortage of coffee workers has forced the growers to treat their employees well. In 1987, it was reported that some 200,000 persons would be needed for the upcoming harvest. That would equal between 11 and 12 percent of the entire population aged twelve and over.²³ The director of the *Instituto de Café* urged the country "to unite to make sure none of the estimated 3.2 million-sack harvest [was] lost due to a lack of labor." The Ministry of Labor was participating in a harvest recruitment campaign. (*Tico Times*, 11/20/87: 23; DGEC, 1984) The government has regularly taken out recruitment ads in newspapers, enticing potential harvesters with the prospect of earned money but also appealing to their sense of patriotism. (i.e., *La Nación*, 10/18/72: 19)

With the ongoing shortage, coffee growers cannot afford to let their patron-peasant relationships weaken.²⁴ And while owners need *enough* labor, they also need *skilled* labor. Robusta coffee beans, grown in Mexico, Brazil, and Africa, will stay on the tree until picked. Arabica beans, grown largely in Peru, Colombia, the Caribbean, and Central America fall to the ground as soon as they are ripe. Workers must pick the *cerezas* (coffee "cherries" or beans) at just the right time and the trees must be picked over many times as the beans individually ripen. Also, trees picked poorly in one year will fail

²³This is not meant to mean that children under age twelve are not employed. Any able child is welcomed when the labor is short.

²⁴See also Carolyn Hall, 1991, re the ongoing shortage of skilled coffee workers.

to produce at peak levels over one or more following years, compounding the use of unskilled labor. (Anderson, 1994: 69; *Tico Times*, 11/4/94: 11) The fact that the trees need repeated harvesting also increases the amount of labor required.

Anderson relates the case of a medium sized landholder who Anderson says is representative of the best of the employers. With sixteen *manzanas* of prime coffee land, this coffee grower hires workers for the harvests and manages his farm year round with the help of two resident workers.

His permanent workers, Carlos and Juan, live in rent-free homes on Ely's property. In addition to minimum wage, he pays their social security benefits, offers them free milk and cooking fuel, periodically makes them small interest-free loans, and allows them to till a corner of land for their families' use. Ely's workers labor long hours for him. When I visited his home, I often found them working long after most workers had quit for the day. Ely was one of the favored employers during harvest time. He always had pickers lined up long before the harvest season began. Ely spoke thoughtfully about his treatment of his workers: "They are good men; they work hard. I can depend on them to get a job done. Since I give them a house and other things, they feel an obligation to me." (Anderson, 1994: 70)

Such concern on the part of the *patrón* in agricultural societies is an anomaly in the modern age of export agriculture. The world market has increased competition and induced landlords to maximize profits. And the growing phenomenon of absentee landlordism eliminates any potential fellowship that can develop from face-to-face contact. Absentee landlordism

around the world has been stimulated by the growth of higher education, which the children of large landlords are able to take advantage of. These children typically pursue city careers and hire overseers when they inherit their estates. And as long as labor is abundant, as it is in most developing states, landlords have no economic motivation to treat their workers well. The estate usually continues to have strong sentimental ties for the owners. They enjoy spending holidays at the estate house, riding horses in the country, etc. The workers, however, come to be seen as remote components of a business arrangement.

David Sturtevant has written of the changes in the patron-peasant relationship in the Philippines as export agriculture quickly became the norm there in the 1920s. Previously, landlords had typically provided the tenant with a water buffalo and had accepted fifty percent of the crop as rent. A new generation of landlords began requiring tenants to rent the plough animals and required rent of sixty percent of the crop. The new generation still gave loans as well, but interest rates increased and ranged from fifty to *five-hundred* percent. (Sturtevant, 1976: 56-74)

On the largest estates, the *haciendas*, tenants and wage laborers were most likely to live in virtual slavery. Resident employees and tenants were usually born on the hacienda and lived out their lives within its boundaries. The 'normal' indebtedness of a share cropper was exacerbated for the *hacienda* workers, who were required to purchase all supplies and food from the *hacienda cantina* at inflated prices. Contracts required the resident workers to remain within the *hacienda* limits -- a confinement enforced by armed guards and the civil courts. (Ibid.)

Even death was not a release from debts as the tenant's children were then held responsible. As tenants could seldom pay off their substantial debts, they were subject to the constant beck and call of the overseer. If a new chicken house needed building, the peasant could be ordered to build it -- without direct compensation or perhaps in return for an extension on a loan. The same would apply to a new road. Customs also called for the tenants to deliver expensive gifts such as animals or rice on the *hacendado's* birthday or other special occasions to insulate oneself against the latter's disfavor. The *hacendado* could fine residents who fished without permission, allowed outsiders onto the estate, or who failed to attend the estate's Catholic church. Even weddings could require the landlord's permission. To appear as a witness in court proceedings also required it. If a tenant slipped past the armed guards, the *hacendado* could have the police arrest the peasant for evading his or her debts. (Ibid.) Many of these conditions continue to prevail in present day Philippines, where police, judicial, and military officials are sometimes more beholden to a powerful *hacendado* than to the local civil system.

Children of large landlords in Costa Rica have also attained higher educations and many are, concomitantly, pursuing city careers. Census data for 1973 indicated that about 48 percent of large estates with over 200 hectares were administered by managers. (Hall, 1985: 150) The data does not make distinctions between coffee and other estates and it is quite likely that this percentage reflected a higher rate of absenteeism on cattle *haciendas* which are often owned by foreigners. This might still leave a substantial minority of large coffee estates run by managers, however, and

anecdotal evidence suggests that the numbers of absentee coffee farmers have grown in the last few decades. One San José columnist has written, "Today, many men believe they can run a [coffee] farm from a table in the Union Club." (*Tico Times*, 1/20/89: 11; see also 2/8/91: 33) But regardless of whether the number of absentee owners is high or low, a continuing skilled labor shortage in Costa Rica should require both owners and managers to treat their workers well or lose the good workers to other farms. Managers and owners who do live on the farms typically join in the harvests, working alongside the wage-workers.

The power relationship between coffee wage-workers and landowners in Costa Rica is complex. Agrarian studies around the world commonly highlight the power of landlords over that of their tenants. And of course landlords, especially the largest, do have more economic power in terms of class. They live in nicer houses and have access to other material goods, services, and leisure activities, that are beyond the reach of the typical worker. But in respect to any terms of agreement regarding worker duties, remuneration, and benefits, the coffee wage-worker in Costa Rica also has substantial power.

A grower who fails to offer or provide a quality work agreement and environment may pay with heavy consequences. Workers can fail to use their greatest care in picking the beans, damaging both current and next years' crops. Sometimes workers will resort simply to a work slowdown, producing the same poor results. And of course, workers can simply refuse to work. Anderson notes that workers can also resort to

malicious gossip and character assassination. Even these mild sanctions are serious penalties in a small community where everyone knows everyone and word travels like wildfire. A good reputation will be indispensable when the next harvest season rolls around . . .

(Anderson, 1994: 68-69)

Growers will help the seasonal workers outside of the harvest season as well to insure that the favor will be returned when the next harvest starts.

Anderson observes that, "it is less expensive to offer paternalistic extras to poorer villagers than to risk heavier losses to the coffee crop by disgruntled and resentful workers." (Ibid., 1993: 502)

Anderson does not give specific instances of these work actions and, only studying the small and medium landholdings of San Luis, she includes no references of such work slowdowns or stoppages on large estates. One can infer, however, that a large estate owner would be subject to the same sanctions. Patron-peasant relations prevalent on the coffee farms of all sizes have no doubt inhibited the formal organizing of workers across farms and estates. But the workers of any one grower, unhappy with the grower's treatment, should be able to withhold services without the benefit of formal union membership. A skilled worker who is unhappy with conditions seems always to have had the ultimate option of quitting and obtaining work on another coffee farm.

This seems to be the case even as technology has greatly lessened the numbers of permanent workers on the coffee farms. While the harvests still require skillful hand picking, the applications of fertilizers and pesticides by machines has replaced much manual labor of previous times. Landless

workers in the coffee communities still profit well during the harvest seasons even though the work is temporary and supplemented by other income sources. And even temporary workers establish relations with *patrones* from whom they receive additional benefits. Only a minority of large estates have traditionally employed harvest workers from further than ten or fifteen kilometers from the *hacienda*. (Hall, 1991: 143; Winson, 1989: 122-27; Stone, 1975: 148-205; B. Williams, 1994: 8)

The usual work conditions, then, are apparently seen as fair by the workers. The workers are treated well enough, and possess sufficient power to readily find other employment, that they are quite hesitant to carry out strikes. As the economic crisis hit the coffee landowners in the early 1980s, wages for the workers failed to keep up with the cost of living (Anderson, 1994: 76), but there is no available evidence that workers carried out collective work stoppages.

Anderson writes that the workers "treasure the coffee economy just as the landed do." (1994: 68) The common community and family histories and ties also, no doubt, contribute to the good *patrón-peon* relations, although, this is surely secondary to the lack of opportunity for exploitation. Anthropological and political studies carried out in other states are replete with cases of wealthy villagers harshly exploiting the labor of poorer villagers and even of family members -- simply because they can. (i.e., Griffiths, 1988; Kerkvliet, 1990; Gould, 1990) Capital typically concentrates into the hands of those most willing to exploit labor to its fullest potential. It would only take a few hard-nosed 'businessmen,' with the right opportunities, to dramatically change the relations of production between themselves and their employed

coffee workers. Such opportunities have been largely absent throughout the entire history of Costa Rica's coffee export sector.

Before closing this chapter, some new, significant, shifts in coffee labor must be noted. First, there has been a very large influx of Nicaraguan labor. In the past two decades, in reaction to the *Sandinista* Revolution, counter-revolutionary efforts, and a disastrous economy, waves of Nicaraguan exiles have taken refuge in Costa Rica. In 1989, it was estimated that up to 290,000 Nicaraguan refugees were in Costa Rica, most of them illegally. (*Tico Times*, 12/8/89: 23) The number had dropped to perhaps 60,000 in early 1991, a year after counter-revolutionary efforts had ceased. (*Ibid.*, 2/8/91: 8) By mid-1997, following several years of severe economic turmoil and extreme unemployment in Nicaragua, the numbers had risen again, this time to between 250,000 and 500,000. (*Ibid.*, 5/16/97: 5)

As of May 1997, there was fifty percent urban unemployment in Nicaragua. According to Costa Rican sociologist Carlos Sojo, it was even worse in the Nicaraguan countryside, where "nearly ninety percent of the population [was] unemployed or underemployed." (*Ibid.*, 5/16/97: 5) Many are working in Costa Rica's informal sector, as *cuida carros* (car watchers), flower vendors, etc. Others have found employment as domestic workers, in construction, in agriculture, and elsewhere. As Nicaragua is also a coffee producing nation, many of these refugees have harvesting skills valued by the Costa Rican growers. Costa Ricans hold many prejudices against Nicaraguans, but growers have been happy to have them fill the labor gap.

The second shift in labor has dovetailed with the first. Young, urban, Costa Ricans have begun to see coffee picking as demeaning labor and have

not been responding to the annual recruitment campaigns. By the time of the 1996-97 harvest, Nicaraguan workers constituted 75 percent of the wage-workers.²⁵ (Ibid., 1/24/97: 11) The banana and cattle sectors have long employed many Nicaraguans, but the coffee sector has historically relied on local labor. Eugene Miller reports that in 1927, the coffee workforce was 98 percent Costa Rican. (Miller, 1992: 33) A close reading of other accounts indicates that it was still overwhelmingly Costa Rican before the Sandinista Revolution escalated in the late 1970s. At the time of the 1996-97 season, the official unemployment rate was six percent. The Ministry of Labor calculated that if both the coffee and sugar cane harvests employed all Costa Rican labor, the rate would have temporarily dropped to just one percent.²⁶ (*Tico Times*, 1/24/97: 11)

Coffee growers complain that the educational system has failed both to instill the traditional work ethic and to teach young people about their "duty to go out and pick." (*Tico Times*, 2/8/91: 33) Teenagers and young adults are taking jobs in Costa Rica's growing consumer and service economy, working in offices, stores, and restaurants. A coordinator for an organization of small and medium agricultural producers complained to a journalist that, "Even in the agricultural schools, they tell them not to get their hands dirty." (Ibid.) Another probable factor is the xenophobic and racist attitudes held by most Costa Ricans against Nicaraguans. Costa Ricans view themselves as a nation different and superior to the others of

²⁵In the sugar cane estates where the work is far more grueling, the percentage of Nicaraguan workers was 90 percent. (*Tico Times*, 1/24/97: 11)

²⁶It is not, of course, possible to recruit many of the unemployed. Many, for example, have disabilities, lack transportation, or cannot leave dependents such as small children or elderly parents at home.

Central America. But their greatest animus is reserved for Nicaraguans whom they view, variously, as dirty, lazy, uneducated, Indian, unruly, thieving, communist, and as usurpers of Costa Rican jobs. The last may be ironic because Costa Ricans may be voluntarily surrendering coffee-wage jobs, in part, out of the discomfoting thought of working alongside *campesinos nicaraguenses*.

An additional very important factor that is no doubt influencing Costa Rican reticence to pick coffee is that the urban labor movement has succeeded in recent times in raising wages in the non-agrarian sectors to a level comparable with, or perhaps higher than, wages of the coffee estates.²⁷ In mid-1991 the average wage for a job in San José was about US\$9.60 per eight hour day, or US\$238 per month. (*Tico Times*, 4/26/91: 27; ILO, 1997: 679) In the coffee estates, a good picker harvesting a minimum of 10 *cajuelas* a day was earning about US\$8.33 a day, or about US\$217 per month for a six-day work week during the three month harvest season.²⁸ (*Tico Times*, 2/8/91: 22, 33) Many if not most urbanites would not be among the best pickers and would earn less than that.

While the work is a boon to the refugees, they have also filled what otherwise would have been an increasingly critical labor shortage for the growers. The Nicaraguans' value was demonstrated by their absence during the 1990-91 harvest, when the refugee population had temporarily dropped.

²⁷Although average wages were rising throughout Costa Rica, relative to inflation they were lower than those of the late 1970s. (Clark, 1997: 78)

²⁸These wages are for the November 1990 to February 1991 season. To help put the wages in perspective, a journalist's interview with a Nicaraguan refugee living in Limón Province indicated that rent for a basic house required between US\$48 to US\$60 per month. (*Tico Times*, 12/8/89: 21-22) The average wage for the entire agrarian sector at this time was US\$132. (ILO, 1997: 679)

An estimated US\$15 million worth of coffee beans, perhaps some five percent or more of the crop, fell to the ground, unpicked, due to a lack of sufficient labor.²⁹ (Ibid.)

It is not possible to conclude, based on the recent journalistic accounts available, if the shifts in the labor force are dramatically affecting relations of production between coffee wage-workers and their employers. With the new, record level, inflow of Nicaraguans, it is possible that, for the time, the historical labor shortage has been abated, even as Costa Ricans are refusing the labor. As indicated above, however, the 1987 harvest needed some 200,000 workers. Estimates of the numbers of Nicaraguans in the country vary widely and may be as "few" as 250,000. This includes children which in recent times have made up a very high percentage of the Nicaraguan population. It also includes urbanites lacking harvesting skills. The shortage of skilled labor may be very real and ongoing. If the numbers of refugees are actually closer to the upper estimate of 500,000, it is possible that the labor shortage has eased.

Other factors that could alter the relations of production are the fact that most of the refugees have been illegal and the xenophobic feelings held by most Costa Ricans towards Nicaraguans. Without work permits, the Nicaraguans are not entitled to earned payments to the social security and health system (*la Caja*) and other labor benefits. Wages are paid under the table. It does not appear that Costa Rican coffee farmers are paying the

²⁹The five percent estimate is a broad guess. The total value of the 1991 crop could not be ascertained. But other sources report it was a better crop and was fetching better prices than the crops of the next few years. Total coffee export revenue for 1992 was about US\$200 million. In 1994, when a Brazilian coffee freeze raised prices, coffee export revenues for the year were expected (as of 8/94) to reach US\$540 million. (*Tico Times*, 4/23/93: 30; 6/25/93: 22; 8/19/94: 21)

Nicaraguans below-standard wages. Also, the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan governments signed an agreement on May 13, 1997 that is designed to facilitate the dispensing of work permits. (*Tico Times*, 5/16/97: 1, 5) Costa Rican authorities have indicated that there will not be mass deportations. (Ibid., 10/31/97: 15)

The matter of xenophobia is more difficult to analyze. There is no evidence in the journalistic accounts that it has affected relations of production in the coffee fields. Growers continue to need skilled labor and continue to pay good wages to those who will provide it. Xenophobia towards Nicaraguans will be discussed further in the next two chapters and further analysis will be carried out in the concluding chapter. For now, it can be simply said that there have been dramatic, recent, changes in the coffee labor force that *may* change the relations of production with coffee growers. Changed relations of production that disfavor the workers *could* produce future unrest. However, the data presented here suggests that relations of production are not yet changing dramatically.

CHAPTER FIVE

BANANA REPUBLIC ON THE ATLANTIC COAST: FROM STATE ABDICATION TO STATE INTERVENTION

As with coffee, there are contrary accounts regarding the origins of the banana in New World. The *conquistador*, Vázquez de Coronado, investigating the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, reported the presence of the fruit in 1563 and others later corroborated the report. But evidence elsewhere suggests that these explorers encountered plantains rather than their sweeter, smaller, cousins.¹ (Wardlaw, 1935: 22-27; Sandner, 1962: 24; May and Plaza, 1958: 3-4) Regardless of the true account, according to records that C.W. Wardlaw, in his 1935 account, asserted were "definite, complete, and beyond dispute," the Spanish friar Tomás de Berlanga introduced a sweet version of the fruit to Santo Domingo from the Canary Islands in 1516. (1935: 27) From there, the suckers and bulbs were distributed to the other islands of the Caribbean and then on to the mainland. These bananas flourished and came to provide sustenance to colonists, African slaves, and the vanquished native populations.

In the 1830s, a French botanist and chemist, Jean Francios Pouat discovered the Gros Michel variety in Martinique.² The tree's height, the

¹Accounts may vary because the definitions of the Spanish words *plátano*, *banano*, and *banana* have varying and even contradicting definitions throughout the Spanish speaking world. In Spain and Mexico, for example bananas are *plátanos* while *plantains* are *bananos*. In Central America, the definitions are reversed.

²It is also known as the Jamaica banana and as the Martinique.

symmetry of the bunches, and the evenness of the color were all superior to other known varieties. How it came to be there is a mystery as the variety was later found to be widespread in Malaysia. Pouat propagated the Gros Michel in Jamaica. When the commercial banana export industry exploded into life near the end of the nineteenth century, the Gros Michel was of such superior quality that it became the exclusive commercial stock throughout the Caribbean and Central America.³ (Wardlaw, 1935: 29) By the first years of the twentieth century, however, a root fungus known as Panama disease began a slow decimation of the Gros Michel. New plantations were established but Panama disease always caught up eventually. By the late 1950s, the genetically bred Giant Cavendish banana was introduced. Resistant to Panama disease, all commercially grown bananas in Costa Rica are now varieties of the Cavendish.⁴

Any study of labor relations in the banana export sector in Costa Rica will of course focus on those who plant and harvest the fruit. But it must also account for those such as railroad workers and stevedores. They have been equally integral to banana production. In the early years of banana production in Costa Rica, most of these workers labored for the same, single, monopolistic concern. In strikes and other labor actions, the railway and dock workers have often stood shoulder to shoulder with those who labor in the fields.

³Many of the earlier varieties can still be found on small farms and in the jungles of Central America.

⁴The Cavendish is less hardy and requires special boxing to minimize bruising. It also is vulnerable to nematodes and must be treated with dangerous pesticides. The Cavendish may also, ultimately, become susceptible to Panama disease as nature, itself, is creating new genetic versions of the fungus. (Email from Steve Marquardt, 4/24/97)

The development of the banana export industry in Costa Rica indeed begins with the building of railroads. Costa Ricans, in a conscious effort to join the modern world, wanted trains to connect the four principal cities of the *meseta central*. They also wanted a railway to carve a path down the eastern slopes of the *Cordillera Central* and through the steamy tropical jungle of the Atlantic lowlands. The best port on either coast, Puerto Limón, awaited them. Without a railway, coffee was transported two days by oxcart or mule to the inferior Pacific coast port of Punta Arenas. From here, some steamers took another two-day trip to Panama and transferred goods to a railroad that crossed the isthmus. Other ships took the product down to and around Tierra del Fuego before crossing the Atlantic to Europe or heading north to New Orleans or New York. Coffee sent over the new railroad and via new Atlantic ports would save time and money.

The development of the railway and the early history of bananas in Costa Rica both revolve principally around one man from the United States, Minor C. Keith. It was Keith who organized and supervised the building of the railroad linking the Atlantic coast port of Limón with the *meseta central*. In 1871, General Tomás Guardia, Liberal strongman of Costa Rica (1870-76, 1877-82), originally awarded a construction contract to Henry Meiggs, an entrepreneur who was already laying track in Peru. Meiggs passed on the contract to his nephew, Henry Meiggs Keith. The latter, in turn, recruited his younger brother, Minor. Minor C. Keith was very ambitious and better able to adapt in the tropical climate than was his brother. He soon was in charge.

In 1884, thirteen years after commencing the construction, the intercity lines were completed as was ninety-eight miles of the route from the

Atlantic. But Keith's funding from the Costa Rican government was exhausted. He cleverly negotiated a new contract, with British financing and grand concessions for himself.⁵ The British investors agreed not only to pay for the remaining fifty-two miles of construction but to partly reimburse the financially strapped Costa Rican government for its original construction costs.⁶ Incorporating as the Costa Rica Railway Company, the investors received in return, an exclusive ninety-nine year lease of the rail system from San José and Alajuela to Puerto Limón, commencing when the line was completed. The Railway Company was also granted immunity from import taxes.

Keith negotiated for himself a land grant of astounding proportions. The government granted his company, "800,000 acres of undeveloped national lands along the railroad line or in any other part of the country, to be selected by the company, with all the natural wealth which said areas contain." (Kepner and Soothill: 45) He had already been experimenting with banana plantings alongside the tracks he was building and his first shipment of 350 bunches had been sent to New York in 1880. (*Tico Times*, 7/15/94: 32) This land would form the foundation for Keith's banana empire. While equipment, rails, and rolling stock had been hauled to the *meseta central* by teams of oxen, the Atlantic route fed itself track and equipment as it expanded from the Port of Limón. With plantations alongside the uncompleted tracks, Keith could utilize the railroad for large profits before it was even finished.

⁵The Soto-Keith Contract.

⁶Costa Rica received 600,000 British pounds, about 38 percent of what it had expended.

Keith's company was further exempted from land taxes for twenty years, although the contract also provided that any lands not developed in the same period would revert to the government. (Ibid.) While the scope of the land grant was phenomenal, it must be noted that Costa Ricans considered the jungles of Limón to be dangerous and nearly uninhabitable. Costa Rican leaders and coffee growers wanted a modern railway to the Atlantic. They could pay for it with grants of land that otherwise, they believed, would lie idle. Further, the contract provided that after twenty years the government would additionally receive tax revenues on land that Costa Ricans were little likely to develop on their own. As a final bonus, it was expected that Keith's infrastructural development would open the Atlantic Coast to further development opportunities for Costa Ricans. The returns for Costa Ricans, however, were to be long in coming and smaller than hoped for.

The railway was inaugurated on the first day of 1891, nineteen years after its commencement. Costa Rica obtained its coveted modern railway, but many workers, almost all of them imported from other countries, paid a price far more dear than did the Costa Rican government or its British investors. An estimated 4,000 men perished during the first, and hardest, twenty miles of construction alone. (Ibid., 31; Adams, 1996: 81-82; Purcell, 1993: 26) The laborers carved a path through dense and damp jungle. They felled trees, dug drains, spanned waterways and ravines, and laid track. Torrential tropical rains collected in the puddles and ponds created by the moving of trees and earth, creating fine breeding grounds for malaria carrying *anapholes* mosquitoes. Deaths from this tortuous affliction were great in number. Snake bites brought illness and more death. Very few men who

came to Limón for work brought wives.⁷ Men toiled and suffered far from their families, homes, and community structures. The 1883 census reports one doctor for the province of Limón, no postal employees and no clergy. (DGEC, 1883) By 1892, one clergyman had been added to these totals. (Ibid., 1892) More than a few who survived the work and despair were killed in drunken brawls, especially common on payday. A rice-based diet, devoid of beans, eggs, meat, or fish, brought on beri-beri. The other leading maladies were malaria and malnutrition.

The victims came from many countries -- Jamaica and elsewhere in the West Indies, the Canary and Cape Verde islands, Italy, Portugal, and China, among others. Small numbers of blacks from the United States were hired but they were soon attracted by work on the Panama canal and moved on. White North Americans were hired for management and other higher echelon jobs. (Purcell, 1993: 26; DGEC, 1883 and 1892) The rest were given the brutal work such as clearing rainforests, building railroads, and harvesting bananas. The migration was part of a worldwide phenomenon related to the expansion and intensification of capitalism. Conditions were hard in many countries around the world. Keith would never have succeeded had he not found so many desperate, hungry, men. For the workers however, this migration was at best a hellish salvation, and at worst a cruel death far from home.

Few highland Costa Ricans ventured to the Atlantic banana zone. Until about 1900, wages for this very difficult work were below those of the

⁷"A newspaper reporter in Barbados at the turn of the century described thousands of [dockside] Barbadian women 'wailing at the top of their voices,' as a ship of contracted laborers lifted anchor for Central America." (Bourgeois, 1989: 49)

mountain coffee fields. (Bourgois, 1989: 180) Those who did travel to the coast retreated very quickly and, as others from the *meseta central* heard the reports of hardship and death, potential replacements refused to go. As early as late 1872, the government ordered all Costa Rican *peones* to evacuate the coastal area for health reasons. (Purcell, 1993: 25) The other potential source of domestic labor was the indigenous population. But Native Americans had no more interest now in being exploited by the white man, or in being exposed to his diseases, than they had in the previous centuries. They mostly remained in their jungle retreats.

In the face of tragedy and a continual hunt for new labor, Keith nonetheless expanded his operations following his grant of land in 1884. Bananas were a new crop making their way to the United States market and Keith thought that he had a good opportunity to make a nice profit. After his first plantations were established along the existing tracks, he soon expanded and laid his own tracks to service his growing plantations. He continued to import laborers for both railroad expansion and banana production. The government of General Guardia facilitated the importation of labor and even assigned military officers to head up work crews. (De la Cruz, 1984: 32-33)

Chinese railroad workers were recruited as indentured servants. Keith essentially owned them for the eight years of the contract in which they were generally required to work up to 12 hours daily, with three days off annually for religious functions. At the end of their contract, the Chinese would be granted return passage home with some small savings. General Guardia's government issued a resolution agreeing not "to intervene in any manner in the contracts." (De la Cruz, 1984: 29) When Keith ran out of money in 1884,

the Chinese laborers were unable to finish their contracts and return home. During this time, Keith sold these human laborers and their contracts to others outside of Limón Province for a substantial profit.⁸ (Ibid.)

Overseers used whips to discipline workers. At times, the Chinese laborers fled from their camps. If captured by the military, they were put in chains. In January of 1874, a riot erupted over contract violations and general hardship. What specifically sparked the riot was the requirement that the Chinese work on the *Día de Reyes*, a holiday for other workers, and the fact that it was raining. Their contracts did not require them to work when it rained. Keith's company requested military assistance from the Governor of Cartago who responded with 35 troops, described in one account as "a mob of defiant savages." The troops wounded, killed, and imprisoned uncertain numbers of the workers. (De la Cruz, 1984: 32)

Although unrest among workers was common, there are no available records of organized labor actions on the Atlantic coast until 1888. The first such documented labor strike was carried out by Italian railroad workers in that year. Keith had recruited some 1,500 Italians the year before. In June 1888, some 60 Italians had been arrested and fined for "conflicts" with the company. In October, Keith failed to deliver one month's wages to the Italians. Already fed up with the harsh conditions, the Italians walked out. Those who were able traveled to Cartago and San José to carry out protest marches. Local citizens helped them out with food and lodging. Police patrols protectively surrounded Keith's office and residence, where Italians were protesting in great numbers. The government intervened and negotiated a

⁸The 1892 census reports 28 Chinese in Limón Province while another 147 were reported elsewhere in the country. (DGEC, 1892)

settlement requiring Keith to pay the workers. Keith had pressured the government to force the Italians back to work, but, due to public opposition, the government refused. By March of the following year, most of the Italians had managed to return to Italy. (De la Cruz, 1984: 33-35; Adams, 1996: 82)

It is likely that Costa Ricans were sympathetic to the plight of the Italians because the latter were, like the former, of European stock. The government's intervention on their behalf was very much the exception rather than the rule, at least in regards to worker disputes in the banana zone. Legal protections for workers were few indeed. The Civil Code of 1888 dealt only very briefly with labor relations. (LaWare, 1996: 44) There was but a small industrial base in Costa Rica. The coffee workers were not demanding protection. And the workers of the banana plantations were almost all foreigner and non-white and, therefore, of little concern. Nonetheless, when disputes arose in the urban areas, it was not uncommon for the government to take an interventionist role of a conciliatory nature in response to the workers. (LaWare, 1996: 46-47)

Of all the immigrant groups, those who best survived and worked under the harsh conditions were those of West African heritage from the West Indies. "The Europeans and North Americans in Puerto Limón marveled at their ability to withstand the unforgiving environment." (Adams, 1996: 82-83) In particular, the young West Indians were remarkably resistant to malaria which afflicted all other workers in great numbers. The worst strain in Costa Rica, *P. falciparum*,

often produces extremely serious -- if not fatal -- consequences. The most grave cases develop delirium, convulsions, coma, and rapid death.

Patients may also develop central-nervous-system involvement, acute pulmonary insufficiency, gastrointestinal symptoms, jaundice, and renal failure. *P. falciparum* can cause rapidly escalating parasitemia and death within several days. (Ibid.: 77)

The less serious strain, *P. vivax*, is seldom fatal but still produces shivering and chills, followed by high fevers, and finally "a 'wet stage' when body temperature drops precipitously, and the exhausted patient lies drenched in perspiration." (Ibid.) Enlarged spleens were a common result.

Modern epidemiological research has concluded that the *plasmodia* micro-organisms that produce malaria probably originated in West Africa. Over centuries, West Africans had developed resistance to *plasmodia*, even as they carried them in their blood streams. Slave traders brought malaria to the new world in the blood of the human cargo. Malaria was probably first introduced to Costa Rica when West African slaves were imported to work on cacao farms in the Atlantic lowlands and they were bitten by *anapholes* mosquitoes, the carrier that transmits malaria when it then bites other humans. It is possible that the Spanish even introduced new anapholine species to Costa Rica in the water ballast of their ships.⁹ (Ibid.: 80) Keith little understood why the West Indians were so hardy. He knew, however, that they served his purposes well.

An extra advantage for the white administrators from the United States was that most of the West Indians spoke English. Small numbers

⁹Unfortunately, those who were most resistant to *P. falciparum* malaria were carriers of sickle cell disease and suffered from that malady in older age. "As these patients age, renal failure and osteonecrosis become increasingly common. In the absence of medical assistance, mortality rates are high." (Adams, 1996: 78) Of course, by the time they were afflicted, they would have been past their prime as laborers and their late life illnesses were no doubt of little concern to Keith.

came from the French speaking islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. The English speaking islands of St. Lucia, St. Kitts, and Barbados also provided small numbers, but most came from the more greatly populated, and English speaking, Jamaica. Jamaica's main employment, the sugar industry, was in the midst of a depression when the railroad construction began in Costa Rica. Only recently emancipated from slavery, most of these West Indians could not find work at home that would even provide a subsistence living. (Bourgois, 1989: 50) These were desperate men.

By 1874, between 766 to 1000 West Indians were among 2,500 railroad workers working for Keith. (Seligson, 1980: 65; Purcell, 1993: 26) The 1883 census reports that "Jamaicans" accounted for 886 of the 1,858 inhabitants of Limón.¹⁰ (DGEC, 1883) Nine years later, the census only reports 541, even though Keith had brought in some 10,000 West Indians between 1881 and 1891.¹¹ (DGEC, 1892; Bourgois, 1989: 48-49) Even with resistance to malaria, many a West Indian perished. Descendants wryly comment today, "Under every one of those *poleen* [railroad ties] is the body of a colored man." (Purcell, 1993: 26) Workers also moved back and forth between Limón and the Panama Canal project, creating larger and smaller populations at different times. The pattern, over time, however was a

¹⁰The total population of 1,858 is highly questionable. It is not clear from the census and from other literature available if the indigenous population is counted or not. The 1864 census gives the population of Limón Province as zero even though it is known that indigenous communities lived there. (DGES, 1892) The 1892 census gives the total population as 7,484 while only listing 1051 as foreigners. (Ibid.) Bourgois indicates that most of the non-foreigners were indigenous natives. "In 1880 only 600 non-Amerindians resided in all of Limón Province." (1989: 180) Other research by Bourgois (1989) and Purcell (1993), discussed below, indicates that there were very few Hispanics from Costa Rica or other states in Limón between 1872 and 1912.

¹¹This number is also probably too high, as the census labeled all West Indians as "Jamaicans." The next highest groups of foreigners were, respectively, Nicaraguans at 128 and United States citizens at 78. (DGEC, 1892)

gradual increase of the West Indian population. Women were eventually allowed to join the men and families were established. By 1927, the census reported more than 19,000 West Indians. (Purcell, 1993: 26; DGEC, 1927)

Keith had incorporated his various construction and banana operations under the name of the Tropical Transport and Trading Company. He succeeded in taking over two similar companies in the Panama and Santa Marta Provinces of Colombia before Panama seceded in November, 1903.¹² Of the approximately twenty leading companies involved in the banana trade near the end of the nineteenth century, the most successful were the three under Keith's control and the Boston Fruit Company, exporting from Cuba, Jamaica, and Santo Domingo. In 1899, these four companies merged and took the name United Fruit Company.¹³ Andrew W. Preston, of the Boston Fruit Company, was named President. Keith was named First Vice President and was left in charge of operations in Costa Rica and Panama, overseeing the production of bananas and cacao, contracts with subcontractors, and the expansion and running of necessary railways. In a few years, he would

¹²Panama declared its independence and sovereignty with the military backing of the United States. The latter thus secured control of the Panama Canal on its own terms.

¹³In following years, United Fruit and its various divisions would operate under many names. Some will be specified in the text that follows. Usually, the name United Fruit, or reference to "the Company" will be used for the sake of continuity and clarity, even if press or other accounts might use other names. From 1929 to 1990, most of the Company's operations in Costa Rica were carried out under the subsidiary name *Compañía Bananera de Costa Rica*. Following a merger with AMK Corporation in 1970, the parent company became United Brands. After Carl H. Lindner purchased a controlling interest in 1987, the name was changed again, in 1990, to Chiquita Brands International, expanding on the brand name used since 1944 in the United States. Other names used by the company in Costa Rica have been *Compañía Bananera del Atlantico (COBAL)*, *Chiriqui Land Company (Chirilanco)*, and *Compañía Palma Tica*. The Company has also gone by many unofficial names including *la Bananera*, *la Frutera*, *la Compañía*, *Yunai* (from the initial enunciation of United), *Mamita Yunai* (Little Mother United), and *el pulpo* (the octopus). Yet other names have been used in other countries where United Fruit has operated.

establish railroad and banana operations in Guatemala, in a fashion very similar to that which he had followed in Costa Rica. (Brockett, 1988: 31)

A small company with bananas concentrated in one area can suffer financial ruin in the event of a tropical storm or some other calamity. Spreading operations over a wide geographical area, creating a safety net, was one of the motivations for the merger. "An equal or more important consideration, although denied by spokesmen of the company, appears to have been the desire to monopolize the industry." (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 35) Following the merger, the company wasted no time to employ legal and illegal pressures involving stock purchases, trade and pricing agreements, and more, to deepen its dominance in the trade. United was so big that it could take a temporary loss in a competitor's market to underprice the rival until it succumbed to a takeover bid. Occasionally, physical thuggery was employed.

One night [in 1912], after bananas had been harvested and left on railway platforms for delivery the next morning to the Atlantic Fruit and Steamship Company, gangs of men under orders from an officer of the United Fruit Company arrived in motorcars and chopped up the fruit with machetes. On another occasion a train loaded with bananas to be delivered to the Atlantic's ship was delayed because the railway held up the dispatcher's orders. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 67)

The rivals were not always any less ruthless or ethical.¹⁴ They were simply smaller and ultimately lost.

¹⁴One competitor's battle with United Fruit involved land in a disputed border area between Costa Rica and the newly independent Panama. The president of the rival company, "actually urged the [Panamanian] National Assembly to decree that the Executive take possession of the land . . . This belligerent action, which very probably

Meanwhile, the Costa Rican Railway Company also had a large investment to recoup and used its *own* monopoly status in an effort to achieve that end. Coffee producers in the *meseta central* found transport prices exorbitant and many grudgingly continued to ship from the Pacific coast.¹⁵ (Seligson, 1980: 53) Keith also found the prices high for his banana shipments. He had already built his own, private, spurs to his outlying plantations. After the incorporation of United Fruit, the company operated these lines through a subsidiary, the Northern Railway Company. Keith was named president and proceeded to undertake a fierce competition with the Costa Rica Railway, building a somewhat parallel line across Limón Province and then building a competing wharf adjacent to that of its competitor. The Costa Rican government, annoyed by the monopolistic prices of the Costa Rica Railway, facilitated the Northern's expansion. In 1905, the Costa Rica Railway succumbed to a takeover by the man who had built it. Included was the transfer of the remainder of the 99-year lease.¹⁶ An even greater monopoly resulted, combining railways and plantations. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 48-50)

Over 80 percent of the banana industry in the Americas was in the hands of the young United Fruit Company at the beginning of the twentieth century. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 35) In Costa Rica the growth was dramatic. In 1884, approximately 420,000 stems were exported. At the time

would have precipitated war, the Assembly refused to take." (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 60)

¹⁵The Panama Canal was completed in 1914, providing another quick but also apparently expensive route. "Few exporters used the canal. . ." (Seligson, 1980: 53)

¹⁶The transfer of the lease was apparently illegal, but Keith's power was such that Costa Rica also succumbed and, in 1908, withdrew its challenge and canceled the prohibitive provision of the Keith-Soto contract. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 50-51, 366 *n.* 14)

of United Fruit's incorporation in 1899, the figure was 2,962,771 stems. By 1913, before the ravages of Panama disease precipitated a decline, a peak of 11,117,833 stems were exported. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 51-52) While workers perspired and sometimes gave their lives, United Fruit's investors profited quickly and handsomely. An investment made in 1900 increased in value an average of 17 percent yearly through 1930. (Ibid.: 36-37)

With a continuing labor shortage, wages were increased over time to further induce men to come and assume the hardships of life in the Atlantic lowlands. The pay had begun to surpass that of the *meseta central* by 1900. (Bourgois, 1989: 181) But Costa Rican Hispanics only began to arrive again around 1912, when great areas of plantation infrastructure were significantly established and as rising wages were nearly double those of the coffee zone.¹⁷ (Ibid.; Purcell, 1993: 26-28) Most Hispanics arriving in Limón before the 1920s, however, were not Costa Ricans. Rather they were Nicaraguans, escaping from a continuing cattle boom, just over the border from Guanacaste Province, that began in the late 1800s. Thousands of subsistence peasants were displaced by expanding cattle *haciendas* that required little labor. Other Nicaraguans were political refugees, out of favor with the latest military regime. (Bourgois, 1989: 182-83)

The rising wages in the banana zone were not made only to attract new workers but also to appease the increasingly militant West Indian workers. The labor shortage, as in the *meseta central*, gave workers a measure of power. It is widely, and erroneously, believed that West Indians did not carry out or lead any organized or collective labor actions in Costa

¹⁷"According to elderly informants, by 1915 banana workers in Limón were receiving twice as much as agricultural laborers in the Central Highlands." (Bourgois, 1989: 181)

Rica before 1918 and many Costa Ricans believe that there has *never* been significant participation of West Indians in labor actions. Many descendants of the West Indians are among those who accept this myth. These beliefs have been echoed and spread by various scholars who were unable to take advantage of recent research. Kepner, writing in the mid-thirties, makes only passing reference to a strike influenced by Marcus Garvey in the 1920s and implies that it was the first collective action by West Africans. (1936: 180) Bell writes that banana workers were "unorganized until the great strike of 1934." (1971: 24) Seligson, in his widely cited book, *Peasants of Costa Rica*, writes that,

The first major strike did not hit Costa Rica until the Great Depression. In 1930, . . . shoemakers [in Central Highland urban areas] went on strike . . . Disputes between Keith and the workers were common, but the blacks were unorganized and therefore did not have the power to oppose his will. This lack of organization was to change gradually with the introduction of larger and larger numbers of Costa Ricans.¹⁸ (1980: 66-67)

With deeper delving into primary sources, Philippe Bourgois (1989), Vladimir de la Cruz (1984), and Trevor Purcell (1993) are among those who are dispelling this myth. They have both uncovered obscure journalistic accounts. Bourgois has uncovered a very rich and tragic history of work and oppression through intensive anthropological and historical research in the

¹⁸Seligson says 400 shoemakers struck. (1980: 66-67) Miller says over 1,000 walked out in San José and that additional shoemakers went on strike in Cartago and Guadalupe. (1992: 104) In addition to the banana worker strikes, Seligson was apparently also unaware, at the time of his research, of a general strike in 1920 that included cabinet makers, carpenters, bakers, printers, trolley workers, and others. (LaWare, 1996: 52-53)

southern Atlantic lowlands and via unprecedented review of archival records belonging to United Fruit. Not all of the events uncovered are illustrative of formal organization, but there are many accounts of collective action, including both spontaneous and planned strikes before the 1934 *gran huelga*. The 1874 riot and 1888 strike, involving Chinese and Italian workers respectively, have already been noted above. Turning specifically to events involving West Indians, Bourgois has turned up records of violent confrontations between black workers and white Company managers in 1879 and 1887. In the latter, some blacks are alleged to have attacked two foremen with machetes, who defended themselves with revolvers. After two blacks were wounded, a riot ensued. (1989: 53)

Local newspapers in the banana zones of both Panama and Costa Rica "abound with stories of work stoppages" in the years previous to and following World War I (Ibid.: 55) De la Cruz has documented strike activity by West Indians in 1913 and 1920. (1984: 114-17; and 1979 paper cited in Bourgois, 1989: 54) Bourgois has expanded on this work, drawing on both Costa Rican and Jamaican press accounts. (1989: 54-55) An Artisans and Labourers Union, consisting mostly of West Indians, was formed in 1910, at the time of highest banana production in Limón. The Company summarily fired all West Indian foremen who were members of the union. A general strike was declared and violence soon followed. When strikers confronted 700 strikebreakers brought over from St. Kitts, Costa Rican police opened fire, wounding 48 strikers. (Ibid.)

As spontaneous and short strikes continued throughout the early part of the decade, police repression was constant and typically produced injuries.

(Ibid.: 54) The most violent of the early strikes transpired in the Sixaola and Talamanca districts on the Panamanian border in 1913. Although located in Costa Rica, these districts were administered by United Fruit from its Bocas division in Panama. In an effort to outpace the spreading Panama disease, the division had crossed northward across the Costa Rican border in 1908.

(Ibid.: 7, 54) The only access from Costa Rica was by boat.¹⁹

A riot erupted when the company attempted to break the strike by importing 200 Nicaraguan Hispanic laborers. The Costa Rican government sent troops to protect the strikebreakers but when the first group of 150 soldiers were disembarking from the company boats transporting them to the plantation, a mass of angry West Indian workers stormed the docks. At the company's request 50 Panamanian soldiers were mobilized along the border on the Panamanian side of the division to keep the strike from spreading. By the end of the strike (one and a half months later) one West Indian had been killed, two had been wounded, and dozens beaten. (Ibid.: 54-55)

All of the leaders of the strike were fired. (Ibid.)

In early December of 1918, another strike of note began, again in the southern border district of Sixaola. It would be twice as long as the 1913 stoppage, lasting through February of 1919. It would also be more violent. It had been preceded by a continuing stream of short and impromptu work stoppages. Many of these workers were doing the hardest and most dangerous work with the least infrastructure, clearing virgin jungle for new plantings. Their chief demand was an increase of salary. The cost of living, owing

¹⁹The access problem has no doubt contributed to confusion about which country the strike took place in. Kepner reports the strike as erupting in Panama. (1936: 180-81)

to the World War, had risen more than 100 percent since 1914. Wages, however, had remained stagnant even though the Company had profited handsomely during the same period. United Fruit refused to negotiate and instead, again, brought in strikebreakers. Again they were Hispanics, principally Nicaraguans. Both Costa Rica and Panama were requested to provide police protection for the strikebreakers.

Not only were strikers arrested *en masse* and ejected from company housing, but even those workers who had fled into the jungle and constructed shelters on government land contiguous to company property were searched out and arrested or had their huts burned. In most cases the victims were unable to evacuate their possessions, and a long list of lost valuables was presented to a British consular commission sent to investigate.²⁰ The company even went so far as to "root up and burn" the plots of vegetables and fruits that most workers had planted in order to supplement their meager wages during the war period. Ninety percent of the workers "were driven to take refuge in the foothills or bush where they suffered privations." (Bourgois, 1989: 56)

One veteran of the strike, at age 114 in the early 1980s, told Bourgois that evacuees had died of hunger while hiding in the jungle. (Ibid.) As had become standard practice, all leaders of the strike were jailed. Although the strike occurred in Costa Rica, it is not always clear from Bourgois' report which country's police forces carried out which abuses. An investigation by a British legation, however, clearly held Costa Rican police and officials accountable. Citing yet more atrocities, including two "murders" by police

²⁰Most of the West Indians were British colonial subjects at the time.

and an overseer, the legation reported "ruthless and recriminatory actions [carried out by] the Company's employees and Costa Rican police officials." Dozens were wounded. (Ibid.: 56-57)

The strikers were also guilty of initiating violence. They carried out infrastructure damage and endangered the lives of strikebreakers and Company managers. One strike leader is reported to have encouraged "the shooting of white men with buck shot from behind, the beating of foremen, the chopping down of the Company's young cacao trees, the burning down of the Commissary and camp, the opening of railroad switches, etc., etc." (Ibid.: 57) Corroborating other reports, the 114 year old strike veteran recounted to Bourgois, "as if it were the most natural, logical thing to have done, how they used to shoot and beat up strikebreakers." (Ibid.)

As is often the case when evaluating strike outcomes, it is debatable as to whether these strikers ultimately won or lost when one looks at the strikes cumulatively. The strikes were arduous and even deadly. Yet, gains were also attained. Before the World War, the workers won wage hikes. And following the 1918-1919 strike, another wage hike of fifteen percent was granted. The Company also agreed to transfer two top administrators of the Sixaola district to another country. Ninety percent of the workers were reinstated, although this obviously means that ten percent lost their jobs. A significant response by the company to all of the labor agitation was an earnest effort to bring in other workers to carry out the most difficult tasks -- digging drains, clearing virgin jungle, and laying track. Of course this only passed on the suffering to others who might, sooner or later, rise up in their

own turn. It was to this end that Nicaraguans (besides strikebreakers) were recruited. (Ibid.: 57-58)

Wage differentials also were meant to appease the black workers. As early as 1912, West Indian dock workers were receiving wages 12.5 percent higher than Hispanic dock workers. (Ibid.: 74) It is probable that this differential prevailed in other areas as well. All of these count as significant improvements for the West Indian workers. But clearly, a very high price was paid and conditions remained very difficult at best. Strike leaders had to leave the country to find employment. Company oversight following the 1918-1919 strike was more repressive than before and all visible cinders of labor organization were temporarily extinguished.

The newly arriving Nicaraguans carried out largely separate protests in the 1910s that did not really qualify as labor disputes. Their public complaints were different from those of the West Indians. The Nicaraguans' protests were primarily connected to the political turmoil of their homeland and were anti-imperialist in nature. In one case, Nicaraguans demonstrated against the United States' occupation of Nicaragua, which Marines had invaded in 1909.²¹ In another instance, dock workers protested the hoisting of a United States flag on a Company ship. (Ibid.: 54)

Another group that did carry out strikes in the 1910s consisted of North American railroad conductors and enginemen. They too carried out repeated strikes and were ultimately replaced with West Indians in 1918. A company official referred disparagingly in a company memo to the fired workers as "booze fighting Tropical Tramps." (Ibid.: 75) The Company was

²¹The Marines remained until 1925. They returned in 1927 for another six years of occupation until January 1933.

willing to alter its racial hierarchy in the interest of controlling its labor force and promoting steady production. Thus, not only were West Indians allowed to move out from the bottom of the hierarchy, but by the end of the decade, they were also able to begin a move up to some levels previously reserved for the lowest ranking whites, a movement that would continue in the next few decades.

A brief alliance of West Indian banana workers with San José union organizers had an odd conclusion. De la Cruz reports of resumed union organizing in Limón beginning at least by August, 1920. Although led by West Indians, the movement sought help from Hispanic unionists with communist orientations in San José. In early January, 1921, the *Federación de Trabajadores de Limón* signed a pact of alliance "of the two races and of mutual help" with its parent organization, the *Federación de Trabajadores de San José*.²² (De la Cruz, 1984: 115) At the time, the Company was shrinking its expenses on the plantations, which presumably affected work conditions and remuneration. In addition to reduced production owing to Panama disease, the Company cited a black fly (*mosca prieta*) infestation and a leaf infection, sigatoka, that had brought about a serious drop in the price obtained for Costa Rican bananas. Shortly after allying, the linked *Federaciones* declared a strike, protesting the poverty of the workers and demanding a 30 percent wage increase. "The city of Limón took on a party atmosphere. Twenty-five hundred workers had suspended their duties." (Ibid.)

²²De la Cruz reports that the *Federación de Trabajadores de Limón* was founded between 1910 and 1920, but it is not clear how much, if at all, it played a role in the strikes of that period. (1984: 278, n. 2)

Responding to the Company's request, the government dispatched three "sections" of police. On the second day, the Governor of Limón ordered the detention of the strike leaders. In response, the strike grew larger. Trains were unable to deliver fruit to the docks. On February 8, the company fired all of the strikers. Then, near the end of February, a border war broke out with Panama. The union leaders in San José called off the strike, declaring that defense of the country was a higher priority. (Ibid.: 114-117) Most of the workers apparently were allowed to resume employment. But one must wonder at how the West Indians felt about abandoning a strike in the interest of supporting the sovereignty of the government that had so willingly repressed them and would not even grant them citizenship.

A significant ideological influence in the West Indian labor actions of the 1910s and early 1920s was Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Although he was living in the United States, Garvey had been born in Jamaica in 1887 and had, at one point, briefly worked for the Company in Costa Rica. He had been a timekeeper, one of the jobs reserved for "educated" Jamaicans. (Purcell, 1993: 32-33)

The UNIA movement swept through virtually the entire black diaspora in the early twentieth century but it was particularly strong on the Atlantic Coast of Central America. The organization's goal was framed in strictly ethnic terms: the promotion of black dignity and unity throughout the world. The acute form of class/ethnic oppression weighing upon West Indian banana workers in the 1910s and 1920s rendered them particularly susceptible to Marcus Garvey's message. He offered black laborers the opportunity for a spiritual metamor-

phosis. From being the lowest, most despised self-hating peons, they could become the exalted leaders of a noble race, equal, if not superior, to that of their white oppressors. . . . Even though the UNIA made no specific mention of labor organizing in its proselytizing, the banana workers (without the knowledge of UNIA headquarters in Harlem, New York) spontaneously assigned the organization a central role in labor organizing (Bourgeois, 1989: 98-99)

United Fruit infiltrators made alarming reports, causing managers to justifiably fear very bloody confrontations. Indeed, rhetoric and actions of the workers at times suggested a brewing insurrection. Members talked of chasing the whites away and putting blacks in control. Some crafted uniforms and practiced military formations with wooden rifles. This spreading ideology contributed significantly to the militancy of West Indians. (Ibid.: 100)

The militancy came to an abrupt end when Garvey, himself, visited the Limón workers in April 1921. While the Company feared that his visit would spark great violence, everyone was surprised to hear his pacifist message. A Company infiltrator listening to Garvey talk to the workers reported that, "Garvey was the most conservative man of any attending the meetings. He told them that they should not fight the United Fruit Company. . . . They must have money and that in order to get money they had to work." (Ibid.: 101) In talks with the workers and with the Company, he made it clear that he was opposed to labor unions.

The workers had seemed on the brink of new unrest. Garvey's personally delivered advocacy of hard work and pacifism, however, immediately doused the flames of militancy that were licking at the black workers' feet.

The power of Garvey's own presence and words should not be underestimated, but his message might also have come at a time of particular receptivity. It had been less than two months since the *Federación de Trabajadores* had abandoned these workers at the height of their last strike. The *Federación* attempted to hold meetings in competition with Garvey, but they were poorly attended. When the *Federación* organized a labor action a short time later, the UNIA "was solid for the United Fruit Company and very much against the Union." (Ibid.) Most blacks had adopted a pacifist posture that would become part of the Afro-Costa Rican culture that would prevail throughout the remainder of the century.

North American whites had always been at the top of the Company's hierarchy, holding all of the managerial slots. Initially, all other ethnic groups held a roughly common status. By the 1910s, a more complex ethnic and class hierarchy was developing among the workers. As already noted, newly arriving Hispanics were given the more difficult tasks, such as the clearing of virgin forest. They also seldom were employed by the Company, but rather worked for Hispanic subcontractors. Blacks, typically employed directly by United Fruit, were given less strenuous tasks such as harvesting and pruning cacao or bananas. Hispanics were more numerous in the railroad jobs, but blacks held all of the more prestigious jobs and earned higher wages. Production and economic setbacks in the 1920s and 1930s ironically proved beneficial to many blacks. The company began promoting them into some skilled jobs previously held by higher paid white North Americans. The Company saved money but the blacks moved up to a new pay scale. (Ibid.: 74-75; Purcell, 1993: 33-40)

Racial prejudices and stereotypes grew strong and deep between the Hispanics and blacks, to the advantage of the Company. The promotions of the blacks may have been motivated by an effort to divide them from the Hispanic workers and that was clearly one outcome. The fact that Hispanics were often employed by Hispanic subcontractors also served to keep the two races from working together and building any solidarity. But there were also other reasons, from the Company's perspective, to promote blacks in lieu of Hispanics. The West Indian community was more established and experienced; it knew the business well. Further, most blacks spoke English and were far more literate than the Hispanics. The administrators from the United States seldom bothered to learn Spanish. (Bourgois, 1989: 74-75; Purcell, 1993: 31-40) The Company could have recruited educated Costa Ricans for administrative work, but it quite consciously avoided this because it worried about "their divided allegiance in disputes with the national government." (Kepner, 1936: 177)

By the time of the 1927 census, people of West Indian origins or descent still dominated the population of Limón province, making up 55.8 percent. Costa Ricans made up 31 percent of the population. As the West Indian men had established families by this time and few Costa Ricans had families in Limón, one can deduce that the number of Hispanics in the banana plantation workforce was probably exceeding the number of blacks. Hispanics from the *meseta central*, at 15.5 percent of the Limón population, now exceeded the numbers from Nicaragua at 13 percent and Guanacaste Province at 3.9 percent. (DGEC, 1927) Costa Rican migration to Limón would increase further in the early 1930s when the government began to put

pressure on the Company to hire more Costa Ricans and to include them in management positions. (Kepner, 1936: 176-78)

As Nicaraguans, Guanacastecans, and those from the *meseta central* transitioned from subsistence or coffee farming at home to banana wage-work on the Atlantic coast, many blacks were moving from wage-work to small-scale farming. This was facilitated by the advance of Panama disease. It took its name from its discovery in 1903 on the Panama side of United's Bocas division. From there it spread into Costa Rica. The root fungus did not usually kill the trees, but it significantly lessened the crop. By the mid-1920s, banana production had been significantly curtailed. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 36) The company tried to plant other crops where banana production dropped. Pineapples looked promising but succumbed to another fungus. Cacao trees, grown since pre-colonial times, were the most successful, but competition from exporters in Africa with very cheap labor minimized the profits. (Ibid.: 33)

Capitalist concerns typically try to pass on the cost of production to their workers. Trevor Purcell observes that United Fruit did in Costa Rica what monopolistic capital was able to do in colonial plantations in parts of Asia and Africa: "shift the rising cost of production to the primary producer, while the Company monopolized marketing." (1993: 41) It did this by leasing its less productive lands to former workers. It then bought bananas and cacao from these newly 'independent' farmers. This was actually an extension of policy that the Company had carried out from shortly after its founding. Typically, the Company preferred to exploit its own lands if the soil and trees were in prime condition. After a decade of intense cultivation,

however, the soil would become exhausted and plant, animal, and insect pests were common.

When a territory begins to produce larger quantities of poor quality fruit and the total exports begin to decline, the company is delighted to purchase rather than produce most of the fruit exported from that field; but it is very careful not to show that delight. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 272)

On especially poor soil, the Company sometimes even encouraged squatters to establish themselves on land from which United could make profitable purchases. (Bourgois, 1989: 67) As Panama disease continued its spread, the Company increased its leasing and purchasing agreements.

Rigid racial discrimination practices prevented blacks from moving to other parts of Costa Rica. (Seligson, 1980: 65; Purcell, 1993: 43-44) Some emigrated to other countries. But some blacks had roots in Limón going back a half century or more by the mid-1920s. Families and communities had established themselves. Leasing land was a reasonable option for many, allowing them to escape the direct supervision of an overseer. Small farmers are often known for their ability to maximize their self-exploitation and these farmers did so. They took pride in their putative independence. But becoming a supplier for United Fruit did not necessarily provide either independence or a good living. Leases included clauses for exclusive purchase of fruit by United. Further, the Company had the power to decide if the fruit presented by the farmer was acceptable or not, a decision that might depend on the market demands of the moment more than the actual quality of the product. (Fallas, 1957: 209-210) And the farmers periodically found themselves back

in the direct employ of the Company to make ends meet. (Bourgois, 1989: 66) Of course, just as smallholders in the *meseta central* have done in hard times, these Atlantic coast farmers also survived with subsistence crops and bartering.

The more successful black farmers, however, employed small numbers of Hispanic laborers, a practice continued to this day. "The Atlantic Zone [is] one of the few places in the world where bourgeois Blacks exploit an under-privileged white minority." (Charles Koch quoted in Bourgois, 1989: 66) Other contracted land owners were Hispanics or North Americans, but these tended to be absentee owners of medium sized lands, essentially running mini-plantations. By the early 1930s, the Company would be buying at least 75 percent of its bananas from contracted farmers.²³ (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 331; Bourgois, 1989: 77)

Even as production decreased throughout the 1920s, blacks were apparently leaving the fields at a sufficient rate that many newly arriving Hispanics found employment with United Fruit and the contract farmers. Many were also finding work on the plantation railroads.²⁴ The influx accelerated in the 1930s with the onset of the Depression. Critical elements in addition to the economic variables were the significant advancement in the control of malaria and a more established infrastructure, making the region more hospitable. (Morgan, 1993: 25)

Even as relatively high wages and improved conditions drew these workers in, the Atlantic coast was still not considered an overly inviting area

²³Figures range from 75 percent (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 331) to almost 100 percent (Seligson, 1980: 68)

²⁴"By 1928 approximately 45 percent of railroad employees were of Hispanic extraction (having Hispanic names)." (Purcell, 1993: 43)

by those in the central highlands. In the mid-1920s and early 1930s, Costa Rican officials began exiling criminals from the *meseta central* to Limón. Among these were organizers from the urban labor movement who were becoming increasingly militant with the onset of the Depression. (Bourgeois, 1989: 183-184) Some of these, perhaps ironically, would come to employ their organizing skills in the banana fields. Given a growing awareness of those in the highlands to the conditions of the workers in Limón, and given the often testy relations between the Fruit Company and the government, *it is possible* that some in the government felt that these exiled labor activists could use their organizing energies more productively on the coast -- now that Costa Rican labor was being exploited.

In the urban areas, the state had established a pattern of intervening and mediating in disputes between workers and employers. Rather than repress the workers, the state had sought to work out compromises in the workplaces. (LaWare, 1996: 46-47, 62) On the Atlantic coast, however, the government had done little to better the lives of those who labored in the jungles, plantations, docks, and railroads over the first sixty years of banana production. The exception was in 1888 when fellow Europeans -- the Italian strikers -- sought help. In most cases, the state facilitated the oppression and served as the armed partner of the Fruit Company.

Just as Keith and then United had reaped their rewards at the expense of others' sufferings and even lives, so had Costa Ricans in general. Tax moneys were earned for the state, the Atlantic coast and a port were made accessible, the railroad was built giving Costa Ricans their claim to modernity, and national territory was opened for perceived progress and anticipated

development. It was not in the interest of the state or its citizens to challenge the Company. United Fruit was making large profits, but the state was getting its contractual return. Humans were harshly exploited and lives were spent achieving these goals. But those paying these prices, with rare exception, had not been Costa Ricans. This was now changing. And as Costa Ricans took work in the banana groves, the Costa Rican state would come to take an interest in the conditions of their employment.

In 1913, Costa Rica had exported almost 9.4 million stems of bananas. By 1929, this number had dropped to under 5.8 million, and by 1933 to less than 4 million. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 37, 331) Layoffs by the Fruit Company assumed dramatic proportions and wages for those still employed were cut by up to 30 percent. (Kepner, 1936: 136-37) Workers continued to suffer other, ongoing, hardships as well, including a lack of medical services in most areas of the plantations. Company scientists had developed an effective snake antivenin and an ambitious, even coercive, company medical program had reduced malarial infections in the region from 29 percent of the local population in 1926 to 12 percent in 1929. (Ibid.: 32; Morgan, 1993: 25) But many workers still had difficulty accessing these and other medicines and workers had to pay for their own dosages.

Mud from the constant rains destroyed leather shoes and workers exposed themselves to hazards by working barefoot. (Fallas, 1957: 208, 216) Workers continued to suffer from a wide range of other maladies, including sexually transmitted diseases and malnutrition. Workers on the docks sometimes had to work around the clock, missing sleep and working in the driving tropical rain. Much of the work involved heavy equipment, sharp

machetes, improvised planks over ravines, and other elements that led to frequent accidents. When employees missed work due to illness or injury, however, their salaries were suspended. (Morgan, 1993: 24-25; Fallas, 1957: 211) United Fruit had built a hospital in 1921. But the rates for the "first-class" doctors required high fees and the white, foreign, managers received preferential treatment. (Morgan, 1993: 23) Contractors and their hired laborers were prohibited from using any medical services under United's charge. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 324)

Company commissaries charged monopoly prices in the outlying areas. Even where the commissaries had potential competition, workers sometimes had no choice but to use the former because they received some of their compensation in scrip instead of cash. The high prices were all the more unconscionable among workers who knew that the Company still operated under agreements allowing it to import goods, including those for the commissaries, without paying import duties. Potable water was in short supply. Workers also had many grievances with the contracted independent farmers, who generally paid even less than United Fruit. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 331; Morgan, 1993: 27; Fallas, 1957: 208)

Pervading all of these conditions was racism and the racial hierarchy. While a class system existed in the *meseta central* amongst *beneficiarios*, coffee estate owners, small farmers, and estate workers, almost all of these people had descended from European racial stock. While most were of Spanish heritage, Germans and other Europeans had managed to integrate

somewhat easily.²⁵ There also existed a history of patron-client relations and minimal class tensions on the coffee estates. In the banana zone, although class and race lines were slowly shifting, they were very explicit.

There is evidence that blacks and whites often worked well together and that white overseers knew their black employees well. (Jay Soothill in Kepner, 1936: 170-71) But there is no available evidence of patron-client relations on the United Fruit plantations. Bourgois and Purcell both well illustrate that blacks, in general, were victims of internalized racism. (Bourgois, 1989: 79, 96-97; Purcell, 1993: 38-40) Even so, as the pages above reveal, hatred for whites by blacks did periodically burst out. There is no evidence that such internalized racism existed among the Hispanic workers. Costa Ricans resented the racist attitudes of Company managers. Costa Rican Hispanics also resented the Company for hiring so many foreigners, especially blacks, for jobs that Costa Ricans could hold. And among the Nicaraguans, many of whom were supporters of Augusto Sandino, the rebel nationalist leader who was fighting against the United States Marines in the 1920s and early 1930s, racial antagonism was augmented by emotions of anti-imperialism towards the United States-based United Fruit Company. (Bourgois, 1989: 86, 89; Kepner, 1936: 170, 176-77; Fallas, 1957: 222) The racial antagonisms, the anti-imperialism, the harsh conditions, and the wage cuts all combined to stir the pot of agitation. Conditions in the early 1930s were ripe for a strike.

²⁵The exception was during World War II, when some German and Italian landowners were dispossessed of their properties and businesses of Germans, Italians, and even some Spanish were looted.

Meanwhile, in San José, the *Partido Comunista de Costa Rica* was formally organized in June, 1931. The founders were influenced by the revolutions in Mexico and the Soviet Union, and sought to better the workers' place in the socio-economic sphere. Although calling themselves communists, they would largely work to pursue policies within a social democratic framework. The Party was active in numerous labor disturbances in the capital, including a Mayday demonstration in 1933 that led to a riot two weeks later. (Seligson, 1980: 70) It also participated in elections and succeeded in putting two of its members in Congress.²⁶

In Limón Province, the workers, including exiled labor organizers, formed an affiliate union, the *Sindicato de Trabajadores del Atlantico*. In mid-1934, the *Sindicato* presented a list of demands to United Fruit, to the independent growers, and to the national Congress. A top demand was a pay increase, with the provision that United Fruit pay all wages in cash, not scrip. Regulation of daily hours was demanded, providing for six and eight hour days, according to the type of work. Health issues were also at the top of the list. The *Sindicato* demanded that Company freely dispense quinine and snake antivenin. It was also demanded that United Fruit establish medical dispensaries on any plantation having more than ten workers, and that all workers be guaranteed hospital treatment if sick. (*New York Times*, 8/13/34: 5; 8/24/34: 5; 8/27/34: 7; Morgan, 1993: 27; Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 333)

²⁶The party was loosely organized for two years before its official founding. Participating in elections for the first time in 1932, the party ran under the name, *Bloque de Obreros y Campesinos*. In 1934, the *Partido Comunista de Costa Rica* officially changed its name to the *Partido Vanguardia Popular* (PVP). Founder Manuel Mora, until his death, referred to himself as a communist. Most press and academic accounts have continued to refer to the party, generically, as communist, or use the pronoun Communist Party. For the sake of consistency and clarity, this practice will be employed in this work.

Because wages were lower yet on the contract farms, another demand was that prices paid by United to the small farmers be raised such that they would be able to pay the higher wages demanded. Related to this was a demand that the government regulate the buying of fruit such that United could not arbitrarily reject fruit grown by the contract farmers. (Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 333) On these points, there was room for support by the small farmers for the striking workers. This was all the more so for small farmers who found themselves still needing to work periodically for the Company. The small farmers and United Fruit had a relationship not unlike that of the small coffee farmers and the *beneficiadores* in the highlands, who were in the midst of their own clashes at the same time.

The government was aware of the appalling conditions. The Minister of Public Health had, in 1931, denounced the Company for its health and housing practices in a report that cited United Fruit for failing to live up to an agreement with the government. United had promised the government that it would build an emergency hospital in the town of Siquirres, inland from Puerto Limón, and open medical dispensaries in railroad cars convenient to the workers.

We visited what they call the Siquirres Hospital, and saw that it was nothing of the sort. It consists of an examining room without any hygienic precautions, with three army cots; and in one dark room there are some medicines and a few surgical instruments under the care of an untrained practitioner. . . . He informed us that he acted as doctor, surgeon, and pharmacist. . . . We did not succeed in finding a *single dispensary*, even though we covered vast expanses of land within

the United plantations . . . We did visit the company camps in a section of Guácimo, and sorrowfully observed the miserable state in which those poor peons live. Crowded into forty poorly-built huts, worse than those the indigenous people lived in and with deplorable hygiene; there is not one dispensary there, even though the area is malarious. (Morgan, 1993: 26-27; emphasis in original)

In spite of the government's awareness of the conditions, it failed to give the *Sindicato* an encouraging response. The Company and the contract planters rejected the union's demands.

A strike was declared on August 8th. It is still remembered as *la gran huelga*, or the great strike, that defined the labor movement for the banana workers as well, to a great extent, for the rest of the country, for decades. It was the only strike to shut down plantations through the entire province of Limón, with at least 7,000 workers striking both the Company and its contract planters. (*New York Times*: 8/21/34: 11) It was the first banana strike in which the strikers were predominantly Hispanic. It would be ultimately be a month longer than the three month strike of 1918-19 and twice as long as the last significant strike, thirteen years previous in early 1921.²⁷ It was also the first strike in the banana zone led by the Communist Party and it would solidify the Party's dominance in banana labor organizations for the next fifty years. Also of significance, it set the precedent for an important state role in mediation between the workers and the Company. For all of these reasons, it is important to examine this strike in some detail.

²⁷The press, however, was contributing early in the strike to the myth that previous strikes had not been very serious. The *New York Times*, drawing heavily on San José news sources, reported in a cable on only the nineteenth day that, "This has been the greatest and longest strike in the history of Costa Rica." (8/29/34: 11)

Within three days, one report estimated that \$25,000 worth of bananas had already been lost by planters. (Ibid., 8/12/34: 15) Railroad track was torn up and bridges were dynamited. Ships arriving in Puerto Limón were leaving again with empty holds. By August 19, police reportedly had arrested 100 people for the destruction of property. The press put the blame for the strike on foreign workers. Nicaraguans, Spaniards, and Colombians were identified as the troublemakers. Among the 100 arrested, forty-six Nicaraguans were deported. (Ibid., 8/13/34: 5; 8/20/34: 20; 8/21/34: 11)

The charge of foreigner agitation actually had a lot of truth to it, even though the *Sindicato* leadership was Costa Rican.

The militancy of the Nicaraguan workers actually emerged as a serious problem for the Costa Rican strike leadership. Arnoldo Ferreto, a Communist Party senator [sic] and one of the leaders of the 1934 movement, wrote in a pamphlet of how he misjudged the "spirit" of the banana workers at a rally and accidentally aroused them to the point of insurrection. He attributed the fervor of the crowd to the high proportion of Nicaraguans present: "There was a subjective factor pushing us toward violence. At that time, a high percentage of the workers were Nicaraguans and many had military experience: some in the civil wars between liberals and conservatives, others as soldiers or even officers in the Sandinista army. A majority of those who raised their machetes to demand that we take over the main villages in the zone were Nicaraguans . . ." (Bourgeois, 1989: 203)

One of the Costa Rican strike leaders, Carlos Luis Fallas, recalled years later that the police would taunt the strikers with calls such as "Nicaraguan faggots! (*¡Nicas maricones!*) Why can't you do it like the men?" (Fallas: 216)

This example notwithstanding, in comparison to earlier repression, the Costa Rican police were more restrained this time and refrained from initiating violence, especially in the first two months of the strike. One contributing reason probably was the public support that the strikers had aroused. In the *meseta central*, labor unions, teachers, students "and various organizations" held sympathy strikes and adopted resolutions demanding the release of the prisoners and the withdrawal of the police. (*New York Times*, 8/20/34: 20; 8/21/34: 11)

There had always been some level of concern about the degree of power held by the foreign "octopus" on the Atlantic coast. The coffee oligarchy, itself a victim of United's monopolistic pricing on the Northern Railway, had long viewed the Company with suspicion. But resentment of foreign influence in Costa Rica had been increasing generally since 1927 when United States capital gained control of the *Compañía Nacional de Fuerza y Luz*, which controlled electric power, telephones, and the urban trolley lines.²⁸ (LaWare, 1996: 42) The government was also probably hesitant to act harshly in the international spotlight. Following press accounts in the United States, President Ricardo Jiménez (1910-14, 1924-28, 1932-36) and United Fruit were receiving telegrams in support of the strikers from North American unionists. (Miller, 1992: 170 *n* 47)

²⁸Foreign control of the electric utility would continue until the 1960s.

By August 22, the government was attempting mediation, but United Fruit was unbending. The Company asked the government to declare martial law in Limón Province and some advisors to President Jiménez echoed the request. The President declined to do so and the government instead succeeded in negotiating an initial agreement on August 28, nineteen days into the strike. The agreement was signed by the Minister of Labor, a committee representing the workers, Communist Congressman and strike leader Manuel Mora, and representatives of the small growers. But United Fruit would not sign, declaring, against the evidence, that it had been carrying out the essential terms of the agreement for a long time and had no reason to submit to others' unnecessary demands. (*New York Times*, 8/29/34: 11; 9/8/34: 16)

The agreement largely met the workers' demands and the wording of United's response led union leaders and others to believe, mistakenly, that the company was reluctantly agreeing to the terms even if it would not formally sign the agreement. Workers initially returned to their duties with both the Company and the contract planters. But many contract planters soon declared they could not pay the higher wages as United was not paying them the higher rates demanded. And United soon made it clear that it would not honor the terms of the agreement with its directly employed workers either. (Fallas, 1957: 221) The resumption of work was brief. Shipments on United's boats would soon be halted again, causing work to once more stop everywhere.

While the standoff with United continued, President Jiménez took the bold step of defending the rights of the workers and of the Communist Party

to protest and to strike. Some had already accused him of surrendering to the Communists with the initial agreement. In an interview with the *Diario de Costa Rica*, he defended his government's actions.

I cannot stop their propaganda. That would be against my convictions and my support of liberty. Exactly because of my love of liberty, I am no Communist . . . [But] I cannot use force against ideas. I treated with the Communists because they represented the workers on strike. Nothing is lost by treating with them. The Communists have treated with us. . . . England, France, and Spain treat with Communists. I, as the President and as a citizen loving justice, cannot silence the Communists. I cannot ignore the laborers -- the forgotten man, overlooked in the shadow of humility. It is my first duty to hear and examine his complaints with justice. (*New York Times*, 9/1/34: 6)

He added that the presence of Communists could not be changed either by "imagination or bullets." (*Ibid.*) For its part, United Fruit used the issue of communism as part of its justification for continuing its refusal to sign the agreement. Company spokesmen forcefully stated that United Fruit would not permit Communist Party interference as a matter of principle. (*Ibid.*, 9/8/34: 16)

The strike continued and in early September, an airplane carrying G. P. Chittenden, a United vice president was shot at by strikers. President Jiménez declared that violence would not be tolerated and sent 150 soldiers to the to the strike zone on September 6. Another 400 were reportedly being

readied to follow.²⁹ On September 7, Congressman and strike leader Mora threatened that if United did not sign and observe the agreement, workers would burn its plantations. Police and strikers exchanged gunfire on September 8 following the burning of 20 acres of bananas and the destruction of some railroad bridges. There were no apparent casualties. By September 11, small bands of strikers were cutting telephone wires, destroying track, and at least one commissary was looted. Police arrested 18 "looters," mostly Nicaraguans according to press accounts. On September 17, a reported strike leader was shot and wounded. (Ibid., 9/8/34: 16; 9/9/34: 2; 9/10/34: 6; 9/12/34: 11; 9/18/34: 10)

In San José meanwhile, the President called Congress into special session. The abolition of the Communist Party was taken into consideration as the Communists declared that they planned to present a full ticket in the next Presidential and Congressional elections. As discussed in Chapter Three, fears were growing that Communist influence and strikes would spread to the coffee fields, where wages were lower. Jiménez's government, losing any tone of sympathy for the Communists, also filed charges of sedition against Congressman Mora and three other Communist strike leaders.³⁰ (Ibid., 9/18/34: 10; 9/20/34: 12; 9/30/34: IV 2)

The government managed to pursue further negotiations with United Fruit, entwined with ongoing discussions over new land concessions the

²⁹These numbers may well have added up to all of the regular members of the army, as the President would sign a bill at the end of the month officially limiting the army to 500 full-time members. (*New York Times*, 9/30/34: IV 8)

³⁰Mora's fellow Communist member of Congress, Efraín Jiménez Gururero, was sentenced to ten days in jail and ten days suspension from Congress in January 1935, on charges relating to the publication of the Communist newspaper *Trabajo* during the strike. Jiménez was the paper's editor. (*New York Times*, 1/20/35: 9)

Company wanted from Costa Rica. The two parties ultimately reached an agreement that workers were willing to endorse. For its part, United received significant land concessions from the government on the Pacific coast, lands not yet infected with Panama disease or sigatoka. After initial opposition by the Congress (see below), President Jiménez signed legislation that codified the new contract and the government's concessions on December 15, 1934, four months and one week after the strike began. (Ibid., 11/27/34: 4; 12/16/34: II 18; Kepner, 1936: 51)

The strike had largely been carried out by Hispanic workers. The non-confrontational ideology of Marcus Garvey was no doubt a factor in restraining black participation. But the structural conditions of the new black economy were those that would typically make its participants more conservative. Many, as discussed earlier, had moved into farming. They grew subsistence crops in addition to their bananas and cacao cash crops. The farmers tended to be older men who now had family responsibilities. If the Company should blacklist them for agitation, they had no one else to sell their product to. These blacks tended to support the strike, but they were logically more cautious than when they were younger. United Fruit had power over them and they had more to lose if they challenged the Company. Also, blacks who worked for the Company generally made higher wages than Hispanics and were slowly moving into yet higher ranks. By 1930, blacks were replacing white overseers in the fields for the first time. Thus, regardless of whether one was a small farmer or a company employee, blacks at this time typically had more to risk than did Hispanics.

Caution was all the more called for as these workers and farmers were still not recognized as citizens of Costa Rica. They could be deported and lose everything they had invested in. Deportation was now a higher likelihood since more Hispanics were willing, and able, to live on the Atlantic coast. (Bourgeois, 1989: 70, 93, 102; Kepner and Soothill, 1935: 93) Adding to all of this was the racial antagonism that separated the blacks and Hispanics. Solidarity among the workers would be very difficult to achieve with such tension and, largely, it wasn't achieved. This was the Hispanics' strike.

The reasons that the Hispanic workers struck in 1934 are not complex. They had reached a level of exploitation that was beyond their tolerance and they judged the potential gains to outweigh the risks. When the workers were unhappy, few had alternative sources of income. Coffee workers in *meseta central* had escape valves. They could usually get other work if they did not like their employers. Coffee workers also had subsistence crops and barter networks to help them get by. Patron-client relations with their employers served both to cushion the economic hardship of the Depression and to personalize the relationship. The work was not anywhere near as arduous as that of the banana sector.

Most banana workers had no where else to go, however. Even though pay was double that of coffee zone and especially lucrative for those who came from areas such as Guanacaste Province and Nicaragua, working and living conditions were very difficult. Patron-client relations did not exist. The fact that Nicaraguans were the most militant is also indicative of how bad conditions were. The most militant were those who had fled their own country for political reasons and yet they struck knowing they could be deported.

The same factors can be used to evaluate the conditions and reasoning of black strikers previous to 1934. By 1934, the roles of the blacks in the relations of production had changed. So had their social roles. The potential gains did not outweigh the risks. But just as Hispanics had suffered when blacks had won concessions in earlier strikes, the blacks would now be the most adversely affected by the settlement won by Hispanics. Congress had hesitated to approve the agreement, in part, because many feared the approval of United's expansion into the Pacific coast areas would spread the black population beyond its confines on the Atlantic. (Kepner, 1936: 51, 168) The following excerpt is an example of the racist passions expressed in the Congress: "We must not permit the doors of the Pacific Zone to be opened to an avalanche of the races of color. I detest them . . . They reproduce two to three times as fast as the white race." (Bourgeois, 1989: 89) Congress gave its approval only when the legislation prohibited the employment of blacks in banana production outside of Limón. (Kepner, 1936: 51)

Two years later, the Congress would empower the office of the president to take actions necessary to insure "the preferential treatment due Costa Rican workers in the banana industry of this country." (*Archivo Nacional, Congreso No. 17726, Document No. 1, 1936, cited by Purcell, 1993: 43*) Apparently using this legislation as his authority, President León Cortés (1936-40) also banned the passage of blacks past Turrialba.³¹ There would be

³¹Researchers have been unable to find any specific legal power allowing the President to carry out the travel ban, but oral accounts obtained by Purcell and others confirm the presidential order. It is not clear when travel was allowed again, but Purcell cites instances of travel to San José in the 1940s. (Purcell, 1993: 170 n 2, 102) Black train crews coming from Limón had always been replaced with Hispanic crews in Turrialba before the trains continued into the *meseta central*. (Ibid. 43-44) The 1927 census reports that 1,133 of the 19,136 blacks living in Costa Rica were at that time living in provinces

periodic roundups of blacks outside of Limón. Those caught were transported back to the Atlantic region. (Ibid.: 43-44) These constraints were extensions of earlier restrictions. (Kepner, 1936: 178-79; Bourgois, 1989: 97)

The Afro-Costa Rican community would be restricted in a spent land and most would sink into poverty. United's new Pacific coast plantations were producing fruit by the late 1930s.³² As the Atlantic divisions continued to wither, Hispanics would be able to migrate to the newer plantations. Banana exports from the Atlantic completely halted on July 4, 1942 when United Fruit's last Atlantic banana boat was sunk, probably by a German U-boat. As the Company moved out, it would disassemble and remove most of its infrastructure, including the railroad tracks over which farmers had shipped their produce. As is typical of depressed rural areas, families would be divided as females gained employment as domestics for low wages in faraway San José. (Purcell, 1993: 102) Other families would separate as large numbers of blacks escaped by emigrating to other countries, principally Panama and the United States. It would be the 1950s, when world prices for cacao rose, before black Atlantic farmers would emerge from their economic morass. (Bourgois, 1989: 76-79; Purcell, 1993: 44)

The short-term gains for Hispanics might not have seemed great either, as the contracts won only applied to the dying banana fields of the Atlantic coast. As United Fruit pulled out of the area and established itself on the Pacific coast, new contracts would have to be fought for again. How-

other than Limón; 740 were in the two *meseta central* provinces of San José and Cartago. (DGEC, 1927)

³²Some small independent banana groves were first established on the Pacific Coast in 1923 and were shipping bananas to California by 1927. When United moved to the Pacific, it purchased some existing farms in addition to carving out new plantations. (Sandner, 1962: 80-81)

ever, as already discussed in Chapter Four, the Costa Rican Congress also took additional action on behalf of workers in response to this strike, as well as to the smaller strikes of the sugar and coffee estates in Turrialba, and to the growing popularity and influence of the Communist Party. In December 1934, the Congress passed the country's first ever minimum wage law. At a minimum of ¢.50 per hour, banana and cacao workers were legally entitled to twice the minimum wage of coffee, sugar, and tobacco workers. (Miller, 1992: 132-33) Further, as discussed in Chapters Four and Six, the growing political influence of both workers and the Communist Party, very active as well in the urban areas, would lead to the passage of very progressive social legislation benefiting both workers and Hispanic Costa Rican society at large.

The solidification of the Communist Party as the center of banana worker organization was, itself, a most significant outcome. For this reason alone, the 1934 strike stands out as a turning point. The influence of the Communist Party would be powerful in virtually all of the many banana strikes that would follow over the next fifty years -- even through a twenty-two year period in which it would be officially outlawed. The Communist Party in Costa Rica was a product of its time and so was the successful outcome of the strike.

Of even greater significance than the solidification of the Communist Party was the precedent of the state acting as a mediator. In the coffee sector, the state had finally interfered in the *laissez-faire* relations of production. Here, it had finally asserted itself as more than a willing accomplice in the harsh exploitation of laborers carried out by United Fruit. In both cases, it had asserted itself as a mediator and had altered the power rela-

tionship. The President ultimately offered sympathy for the strikers and the state negotiated on their behalf. Even after the state responded to the violence of the strikers with security forces, it still showed restraint and once again came to negotiate on the strikers' behalf. It further enacted minimum wage legislation to limit the Company's power over the workers. The Company was left with great control over workers. But, as in the coffee sector, some power had shifted to the state.

The state had always been an actor in the relations of production. It had enforced the Company's will. United Fruit had been the archetypal foreign enclave. United Fruit had, in many ways, been the government of Limón province. The state's police were its police. The state had moved now to mediate between the workers and the United Fruit. It had finally asserted itself as the government of Costa Rica in Limón Province.

The outcome of the strike had much to do with the prevailing economic conditions. The workers and the Communist Party won sympathy and support because the Costa Rican population in general was suffering from the Great Depression. The growing resentment of foreign influence was another factor. However, it does not seem likely that the state would have intervened as a mediator if the strikers had not been Hispanic and the union leaders Hispanic-Costa Ricans. The state had been mediating various labor disputes in the urban areas since the turn of the century. (LaWare, 1996: 46) The only previous time the largely white population of the *meseta central* had responded sympathetically to strikers of the banana zone was in 1888, when others of European stock were the oppressed. Hispanic Costa Ricans had paid no attention to the plight of banana workers when blacks had dominated

the labor force and the state had facilitated their exploitation with its army. Even in 1934, those opposed to the strikers invoked xenophobic charges against the Nicaraguan and other foreign workers. Nonetheless, Costa Ricans maintained control of the union and the political leaders treated the strike as an affair involving the lives of Costa Ricans -- white, Hispanic, Costa Ricans.

All of these factors had combined to change the role of the state in the banana sector. It would not quickly retreat from its new powers. Over the next four and a half decades, the state would often, although not always, intervene in labor disputes on behalf of the banana workers. Before the century ended, however, the state would take a dramatically different course. This will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

EMBRACE AND ABANDONMENT BY THE STATE: HOW "OUR" BANANA WORKERS BECAME "THE OTHER"

Banana exports, and the concomitant need for labor, remained low for the rest of the 1930s Depression. Should banana workers strike again, they knew that they could easily be replaced by others in need of employment. Nonetheless, there was yet another instance before the decade closed in which conditions were viewed as sufficiently intolerable that banana workers struck. This 1939 strike was in the Parrita area, northeast of Quepos in the new plantations on the Pacific coast. It was significant in that it was the first to achieve a labor contract through collective bargaining. (Seligson, 1980: 73)

As noted in Chapter Four, the 1940s was a time of further economic hardship as well as a period of social turmoil and great reform. Banana workers would be given some economic insulation (see below) and would keep a relatively low profile until 1948. Although less involved than urban workers in most of the political turmoil, the banana workers were nonetheless intimately linked with the former via their common union ties, especially via the Communist Party. In addition to the reforms cited in Chapter Four, the governments of Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia (1940-44) and his successor, Teodoro Picado (1944-48), would take many further actions to ameliorate the economic suffering, including passage of a rent control law and the implemen-

tation of public works projects including the construction of the Pan American Highway. These measures all found significant support among the masses. Of the many reforms, the constitutional amendments creating the Social Security system, providing health and pension benefits, would make the greatest contribution to workers' lives across economic sectors over time. But the effort to pass the 1943 Labor Code would engage workers most fervently.

Provisions codified by the legislation, among many others, were collective bargaining, legal recognition of unions, requirements for legal strikes, protections for those who strike, job related disability insurance, stronger minimum wage protections, required severance pay for dismissed workers, and the classification of Sunday as a day of rest. It also created a series of labor courts and a new government office, the *Inspección General de Trabajo*, to enforce the laws. (*Código de Trabajo*, 1984) It is often cited as a landmark enactment on behalf of workers, giving them new and unprecedented powers and protections in their workplaces. John Patrick Bell, for example, describes it as "a direct blow to what the elite considered its sacrosanct prerogatives." (31) In practice, while the Labor Code has unquestionably benefited workers in many specific instances, it is fraught with limitations and has been used as often, or more, to hinder workers in their disputes with their employers. This will be discussed further below, and illustrated with some of the strikes examined in this chapter.

The final significant event of the 1940s would be the Civil War of 1948. Communists and banana workers were prominent among those who took up arms to defend the ruling coalition that had brought about the reforms. They

would fight for the losing side and this, too, would have consequences for them. Government animosity towards the Communists after the war would be long lasting and would be accompanied by recriminations. The events of the 1940s would affect banana workers for a long time to come.

Journalistic and other accounts often make reference to the strange alliance during this period of President Calderón, the Catholic Church, and the Communist Party. The new Catholic Archbishop Victor Sanabria Martínez, in contrast to his predecessors, expressed the belief that it was important to minister to the physical needs of the population as well as to the spiritual. Calderón, a devout Catholic, was strongly influenced by Sanabria's progressive thoughts. What must be made clear, however, is that Calderón and the Church allied with the Communists out of necessity rather than from kindred feelings, even if some of their goals were the same.

In the 1940 election, Calderón was elected president by an overwhelming majority. He polled 93,000 votes while his nearest rival won only 13,000. He did this even though he was an unquestioned member of the nation's oligarchy and, under his party, the country had limped through the Depression for the previous eight years.¹ Although the electoral competition was weak, it is significant that the losing rival was Manuel Mora. That Mora the Communist came in even as a distant second raised alarm bells with Calderón and with Archbishop Sanabria. The Depression showed no signs of ending in 1940 and they feared that the Communist movement would continue to grow and gain a broader legitimacy. These were legitimate fears. (LaWare, 1996: 71) Leaders such as Calderón and Archbishop Sanabria also

¹Calderón Guardia's membership in the oligarchy was well established, but he was not a coffee grower. Like his father before him, he was a physician.

viewed the Communist Party for what it was. It was essentially a social democratic organization with leadership rooted in Costa Rica. Ties to Moscow were very weak.

The results of the 1934 banana strike significantly contributed to the rising popularity of the Communist Party with workers. Even greater numbers of workers were under its umbrella in the urban areas. Crushing the growing movement was not an option, whether it was considered or not. Costa Rica still did not have a large army. In times of war it had always relied heavily on volunteers. A peacetime limit of 500 troops had been established in 1934, although the limit could be raised in the event of a "civil revolt." Anti-communists were not comforted by the recruitment clause in the law because, they argued, it would be very difficult to screen out Communists among the volunteers. (*New York Times*, 9/30/34: IV 8; 11/11/34: IV 8) Calderón Guardia and Sanabria thus attempted to coopt the Communists and their labor movement supporters. It was with this motivation, combined with the sober recognition that citizens were suffering, that the ambitious reforms were passed, ushering in an era of unprecedented state intervention in the affairs of society.

Economic conditions would worsen dramatically after 1941. When Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, Costa Rica preceded even the United States in declaring war on the Japanese empire, followed quickly by declarations against Germany and Italy. (Figueres, 1987: 71) Goods that Costa Rica normally imported became unavailable or in short supply. Costa Rica would also contribute its own products to the war effort, creating further shortages and dramatic price increases. Although the national economy was

in bad shape throughout the the Depression, inflation had been negligible in the later years, even dropping 2 percent in 1940. But in 1942 overall inflation rocketed to 21 percent and foodstuffs increased 25 percent. Clothing and rent were also among the items that rose the most. In 1943, it was worse, with prices rising overall by another 28% and clothing rising by an additional 45%. (LaWare, 1996: 72-74)

Via an unusual agreement between Calderón and United Fruit, banana workers were insulated from these inflationary forces. United held its commissary prices for basic goods and staple foods at pre-inflation prices throughout World War II and continued the practice until 1949. (LaWare, 1996: 225-26) In response to the inflation and shortages of goods in the urban areas, strike activity and other labor agitation there was very frequent throughout the 1940s. By subsidizing the goods and foods of the banana workers, however, both the Fruit Company and the Calderón government succeeded, largely, in calming the workers considered the most radical in Costa Rica.

Nonetheless, proving that they were not to be taken for granted, banana workers did strike in February 1943. There are only very brief references to this strike in the available literature. The limited accounts indicate that the Company failed to give a pay increase it had promised. The strike appears to have resulted in a wage increase. (LaWare, 1996: 88; Seligson, 1980: 73) In 1945, dock workers employed by United Fruit threatened to strike in an effort to raise their salaries. Local officials prepared for the threatened action but "the issue was resolved without recourse to the courts or violence." (LaWare, 1996: 146)

As noted, the Labor Code drew widespread labor support prior to its enactment in 1943. The Communist Party expressed few reservations about the legislation as proposed by the Calderón administration in spite of many worker restrictions. Manuel Mora gave numerous radio addresses in support of the legislation. The Communist paper, *Trabajo*, published a series of articles by lawyer Enrique Benavides noting various weaknesses of the law but stating, "we believe that the Labor Code is a conquest . . . which should be defended and sustained by the Costa Rican labor movement." (LaWare, 1996: 106-07) The Church and labor unions under its wing also heartily endorsed it. Workers clearly were influenced by these exhortations from both the Communists and the Church. Workers held mass demonstrations to support the bill and held a general work stoppage so that workers could demonstrate before the National Assembly when the legislation came up for a vote in August 1943. The bill was approved by a 39 to 0 vote with six abstentions. (LaWare, 1996: 108-09) When the bill was promulgated on September 15, a celebratory parade was jointly headed by Calderón, Mora, and Sanabria. (Aguilar Bulgarelli, 1974: 63)

Worker radicalism was rising in the period leading up to the enactment of the Labor Code. Strikes and other labor actions in the urban areas grew increasingly frequent. Jobs were threatened due to supply shortages. Shoe makers lacked leather. Bakers faced a wheat shortage. When such shortages and lost sales led to lower profits, employers cut wages. Tensions were high in workplaces as union organization grew and employers sacked known unionists. Violence was not uncommon. (LaWare, 1996: 74-113)

Workers and the Communists perceived the Labor Code as a significant advance over the previous situation where labor laws were few and also difficult to administer because they were scattered throughout the country's legal codes. Of the new provisions, perhaps the most fundamental was the government's legal recognition of unions. Built on this recognition were others such as the rights to collective bargaining and to strike. A strike carried out legally under the law would be entitled to various protections. Most notably, the employer would be generally prohibited from firing workers and from hiring replacement workers during a strike.²

But the Code was also fraught with limitations and weaknesses. These are consistent with the goal of Calderón and the Church of seeking to limit the radicalism of workers. It reflected what David LaWare calls "the conservative reformism of President Calderón." (1996: 98) While collective bargaining was made a right, it was also made a burden, because workers and unions were required to first pass through lengthy processes in the labor courts designed to delay or deflate agreements. Legal strikes would receive certain protections, but workers had to prove, again complying with time-consuming procedures, that sixty percent of the employees endorsed the strike. The state had encoded its role as arbiter of labor disagreements. It was not clear that this was to the advantage of the workers.

Worse yet for workers, they would find that the state typically did not have enough resources to properly monitor abuses of the Labor Code. Often too, the labor courts seemed predisposed to favor employers over the employed. (LaWare, 1996: 98-105, 196) Most significant for the study at hand,

²A striker could still be fired if he/she engaged in violence or destruction of property.

as noted in Chapter Four, workers in the banana and coffee sectors, as well as public employees, were completely prohibited from striking. Serious disputes were mandated to labor courts for resolution. (Ibid.: 99-100) It would be 1954 before this prohibition was lifted for most banana workers.³ (*Código de Trabajo*, 1984: 172-73) It is no wonder that executives of United Fruit were among the signatories of an open letter, published in the *Diario de Costa Rica* in 1944, praising the Labor Code. (LaWare, 1996: 159-60) Urban workers would quickly and often experience the pain of the Labor Code's limitations. Banana workers, would also experience these frustrations, but less frequently. Until the final two decades of the twentieth century, the state would often take exceptional action to circumvent the labor code and to intervene on behalf of striking banana workers.

While the motivations of Calderón and the Church are clear, those of the Communists seem muddled. LaWare concludes that the Communists used the labor reforms as an avenue to political legitimacy. (1996: 65) In this they largely, if only briefly, succeeded. Until the end of the Civil War, the Communists would have a place at the table in the administrations of both Calderón and Picado, although relations were often, and increasingly, strained. Workers, too, felt that they had attained an influential role in the course of the nation's politics and business. But one must question the judgement of the Communists if their goal was to represent the workers. It appears that the well educated leaders and lawyers of the Communist Party made a conscious decision to endorse a Labor Code that was seriously flawed.

³After gaining the "right" to strike, banana workers would still face the same multitude of legal hurdles faced by other workers in attempting to carry out such an action. Consequently, most banana strikes after 1954 would still be illegal.

While workers did make some concrete gains, such as mandatory severance pay, they quickly learned that the Code gave them far fewer rights and protections than they had been led to expect. The passage of the Code at first encouraged a wave of worker optimism, unionization, and strikes. But most employers succeeded, with impunity, in firing unionists. And as with strikes before the passage of the Code, the great majority of strikes after 1943 were also failures. (Ibid.: 64-199, 220)

When Calderón and Picado needed additional recruits for the government Army in the 1948 Civil War, there was little support to be found amongst most workers. Only the banana workers, along with the strongest urban supporters of the Communists, signed up in significant numbers. This may seem ironic given that the Labor Code had especially done so little for banana workers. The banana workers were grateful, however, for other reasons. It was with Calderón's influence that the banana workers had been the only sector of Costa Ricans to escape the devastating inflation after 1941. And while many workers had taken pay cuts and most strikes had been lost, the banana workers had actually won a pay increase in their 1943 strike. Other negotiations with United Fruit from 1943 to 1948 had gone well under Communist guidance. (Ibid.: 198) Given the circumstances of the World War, banana workers apparently felt that they could be thankful for their lot.

The specific spark that ignited the Civil War was the electoral farce of 1948. The government's opposition had many grievances, though, including electoral irregularities in 1944 and 1946 as well. Charges were made that the government used authoritarian measures to silence some of its opponents.

The basis for this was the exiling of but one person, José Figueres, for two years after Figueres harshly attacked Calderón in a radio address.⁴ Germans, Italians, and even some Spanish had their properties confiscated and blacklists were drawn up of Costa Ricans who had business connections with Axis powers. There were accusations that the Calderón and his top lieutenants were enriching themselves through some of these actions. Outside of these wartime actions, however, freedom of the press and of organization and assembly were respected. Strong attacks were made in the press and in public against both Calderón and Picado, including speeches by Figueres after his return in which he openly advocated insurrection. (*Tico Times*, 2/2/90: 21; Bell, 1971: 114)

In 1948, Calderón sought the presidency again, following the term of his handpicked successor, Picado. Calderón lost the election to a newspaper publisher, Otilio Ulate. But Picado's government annulled the results, declared Calderón the victor, and arrested Ulate, killing one of his aides in the process. Before Calderón could take office, a tiny army under the leadership of José Figueres, partly composed of foreign mercenaries, began an insurrection. Many others quickly joined his forces. Manuel Mora was head of the government's Army, although because of tense relations with President Picado, the troops were refused sufficient arms. The War began on March 12 and was over 40 days later with the surrender of the Picado government. The defeat of the government forces would change the fortunes of the Com-

⁴Among other things, Figueres attacked Calderón for stirring up wartime hatred against immigrants from Germany, Italy, and Spain. Figueres' parents had immigrated from Spain. He also attacked Calderón's alliance with the Communist Party. Figueres was exiled from July 1942 to May 1944.

munist Party for many years to come and would similarly have an immediate impact on the union movement in the banana fields and elsewhere.

The victorious Figueres headed a post-war junta for 18 months. He kept a promise made to Mora, during negotiations to end the War, not to undo the social and labor reforms. The reforms were consistent with his ideological orientation anyway.⁵ But he outlawed the Communist Party in 1949 on the basis that it had sought to subvert the constitutional order of the government. This, too, was consistent as he had attacked the Calderón government for its ties to the Communists. Mora and other Communist leaders were exiled and repression extended to the labor movement. In some cases, meetings of small unions with no affiliation with the Communists were broken up by police and members were jailed. (Bell, 1971: 37; LaWare, 1996.: 236)

While the union and Communist organizations lay in shambles, United Fruit finally, in August 1949, ended its price stabilization program in its commissaries. Prices for all goods sold to the workers were raised by 100 percent. Protests broke out in the division of Palma Sur and workers refused to report to work. The action appeared to be spontaneous with no obvious leadership. It was also contagious and within days had spread to the Quepos division further north on the Pacific coast. Almost all 6,000 workers of the

⁵Although his actions would not always be consistent with his stated ideology, Figueres would always state that he was a social democrat. In a 1987 interview, he stated, "You know, for [me] it is a religion -- socialism. I don't know why there is such a bad reaction to this word in your country [the United States]. I think you have had many socialist leaders, but they had to call themselves liberals . . . Franklin Roosevelt was the greatest socialist [leader] in the United States." Figueres claimed to be a "good friend" of Roosevelt. (Interview with author, 5/5/87 at Figueres' *La Lucha* home.)

divisions halted their work and the Minister of Public Security threatened to intervene with troops. (LaWare, 1996: 225-27)

Even though the banana workers had no legal basis for striking, the Minister of Labor, a priest by the name of Benjamin Nuñez Vargas, sent in labor inspectors and called for negotiations mediated by labor court officials. When no worker leadership was apparent, the Church sponsored *Rerum Novarum* union stepped forward.⁶ Its representative, Juan Rafael Solís, emphasized that *Rerum Novarum* was not in control of the strike and that he was merely transmitting the demands of the strikers. Given that Labor Minister Nuñez had founded *Rerum Novarum* earlier in the decade as an alternative to Communist unionism, this representation gave the workers added legitimacy before the government. Nonetheless, the labor courts ruled that the strike was illegal. Nuñez and Figueres then made personal visits to the plantations and promised to raise the legal minimum wages for the workers. Accepting this commitment, the workers resumed their employment. (Ibid.: 225-28)

On November 8, 1949, Figueres and his junta stepped aside and Otilio Ulate belatedly began a full four year term as President. Figueres and Ulate had many political differences. Figueres did not step aside out of any admiration for Ulate, but only because he had promised to do so when he had assumed power. Failure to step down at the appointed time would likely have prompted yet another civil war. Despite their many differences, Ulate's government largely treated unions in the abusive fashion of the preceding junta. Unions were still harrassed and the labor courts were largely unsym-

⁶*Rerum Novarum* is the commonly used, abbreviated, name for the *Confederación Costarricense de Trabajadores Rerum Novarum*.

pathetic to worker complaints. Figueres had failed to reform the Labor Code and Ulate followed suit. (Ibid.: 249-84)

In the banana plantations, *Rerum Novarum* stepped in to fill the void in the the union movement. Under its sponsorship, the *Unión de Trabajadores de Golfito* (UTG) and its parent organization, the *Federación de Trabajadores Bananeros y Anexos* (FETRABA) were formed. Although the Communist Party was itself outlawed, its followers were able to reorganize into new organizations that did not officially call themselves communist, even if leaders still adhered to the ideology. They formed the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria del Bananano y Similares* (STIBS) in 1950 and organized the *Confederación General de Trabajadores Costarricenses* (CGTC) in 1952. In some plantations, workers joined the latter's affiliate, the *Federación de Obreros Bananeros* (FOBA). (LaWare, 1996: 273-74; Seligson, 1980: 74) Relations were not necessarily hostile between the two movements. "Some organizers even switched back and forth between the two. . . . The workers themselves seemed willing to work with whichever union proved the most successful." (LaWare, 1996: 274) With this flexibility, workers showed that they were willing to assert themselves in negotiations with United throughout the 1950s.

The need for banana workers rose steadily during the first half of the 1950s. Consumers in the reviving post-war economies of the United States and Europe were buying bananas again and demand continually increased throughout this period. At the same time, Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz (1951-1954) had carried out a massive land reform which had expropriated some 70 percent of United Fruit's 550,000 acres in that country.

United's dependency on Costa Rican plantations increased dramatically. Further aggravating the need for labor was the fact that Panama disease had followed the bananas to the Pacific coast. United was forced to lessen its operations around Quepos and laboriously carve out new plantations in the Golfito area near the Panamanian border. (Ibid.: 324-25; Brockett, 1988: 101-03) While the labor movement was weakened by the political fallout of the Civil War, these several factors combined to put the Company in a vulnerable position as well.

In June of 1951, banana workers in the Savegre plantation of the Quepos division pursued aggressive negotiations with the Company. Workers affiliated with STIBS, the union organized by former Communists. The demands were broad and included calls for higher and more tightly regulated salaries, housing, medical care, and sanitary services. Further the workers demanded that the Company agree not to fire any union member without just cause and not to dismiss any union leader without the consent of a labor court judge. (LaWare, 1996: 274-79)

The Labor Code gave recognition to any bargaining group that represented one-third of a company's division. The workers had signed up over 46 percent of the 1,691 workers in the plantation. United defeated the workers in the Labor Court, however, by arguing that the workers did not represent two-thirds of the workers in the greater Quepos division. In October, the workers tried again, but under the representation of FETRABA, affiliated with *Rerum Novarum*. This time they succeeded in recruiting more broadly across the Quepos division, but still only organized ten of twenty-six plantations. The courts ruled against them again. The Ulate government,

associating the banana workers with the still despised Communists, gave no assistance. (Ibid.)

The anti-Communist sentiments of some local authorities led to various instances of union repression in the banana zones, but organizing activities continued. Local officials asked the Ulate administration to outlaw organizing meetings. The government did not take this action, but instead, in early 1953, issued an order requiring union organizers to submit lists of topics and speakers for approval by the local or state authorities before the meetings were held. Union organizing continued to increase in spite of this restriction. (Ibid.: 325-26)

In the Spring of 1953, officials of the FOBA secured permission from the Ulate administration for May Day activities. The permit was granted on the condition that no part of the celebration would threaten the government. The Fruit Company, however, refused to permit workers to leave work to attend. When some workers went anyway, 46 were fired. When FOBA leaders protested, there were more dismissals. On June 1, the tensions in the banana zones erupted into a strike, beginning with four *fincas* in the southern district of Palmar Sur. It quickly spread to twenty *fincas* and included over 300 workers. Strikers spoke of the same issues that had been unresolved in the Quepos negotiations two years earlier and complained of other defeats in the local labor court. (Ibid.: 327-30)

Ulate was not necessarily sympathetic to the workers, but he also did not want to appear to support a foreign corporation over Costa Rican workers. By June 9, his administration intervened as a mediator. The Company eventually agreed to rehire the dismissed workers and not to take

action against the strikers. It also agreed to begin negotiations over salaries and other worker grievances. Work resumed on July 12. The state, responding to public sentiment, had again used its expanded powers to assist the banana workers, however grudgingly. But the Company did not keep its end of the bargain. Strikers were fired. A United Fruit official stated that the government had not actually had the authority to negotiate the terms ending the strike. (Ibid.: 327-30)

Tensions simmered another ten months before a new strike started on June 1 1954, this time in the area of Puerto González Viquez on the Panamanian border. The local labor office had turned away workers who tried to file complaints and 1,500 workers struck in protest. Workers in San José organized in support of the strikers. Meanwhile, Figueres had taken control of the government again, this time as the elected President.⁷ His administration initiated mediation talks and pressured the Company for significant concessions. The government was itself negotiating a new contract between itself and United Fruit over its land concessions. *La Republica*, a newspaper affiliated with the PLN, published articles critical of the Company. In his November 8 inaugural address, Figueres had taken a strong stance against Communists but also against foreign companies. He had proposed that one-half of the profits of a foreign company be left in Costa Rica and that special tax breaks for foreign corporations be done away with. (*New York Times*, 11/9/53: 15)

When the Company did not make any concessions, Figueres resorted to his successful approach of August 1949 and traveled through the banana

⁷He was inaugurated November 9, 1953 and served until May 8, 1958.

zone. The workers, as before, ended the strike when Figueres promised that the government would further pursue their cause. The Company made the concession that it would not fire the strikers and it agreed to advance the strikers some carryover funds. The strike had lasted 24 days. (LaWare, 1996: 315)

Because of the land expropriations in Guatemala, United Fruit was not in a position to aggravate the government. Because of this, the government this time had real power to negotiate on behalf of the banana workers and it kept its promise to do so. When a new land concession contract was signed shortly thereafter, United ceded to the government increased power to regulate wages. Responding to complaints from railway workers employed by United, and represented by both union movements, the government also elevated wages to match those of railway workers elsewhere in the country. (Ibid.: 315, 330-34)

It is not clear from the available materials whether the legal right to strike was discussed in the land concession talks. It is obvious, however, that this had become, at least under the Figueres administrations, a *de facto* right. By December, it was also a legal right, albeit one still burdened by the many other restrictions that hindered the ability to strike for workers in other sectors. The government amended the Labor Code, granting the right to strike to agricultural workers "of companies that have signed contracts with the state," a clear reference to foreign banana companys. (*Código de Trabajo*, 1984: 172-73)

The workers had clearly benefited from the fact that United Fruit was a foreign corporation. Even though the citizenry and the government gen-

erally held very warm feelings for the United States, nationalist feelings were stirred when any foreign company appeared to be exploiting Costa Ricans. The only strikers supported by the previous Ulate administration had been those striking against a subsidiary of the foreign owned TACA airline and the foreign owned United Fruit. (LaWare, 1996: 265-70) Figueres similarly needed to stand tough with United Fruit, even as he continued efforts to strengthen the *Rerum Novarum* unions at the expense of those affiliated with the former Communists. He, like Ulate before him, gave no support to Communist affiliated union efforts outside of the banana zone. (Ibid.: 302,334) The government support for the banana workers was clearly an exception, made because United Fruit was a powerful foreign entity.

In September 1955, workers in the Puerto González Víquez area voted by a three-to-one margin to strike again and leaders threatend to extend the action throughout United Fruit's main division further north in Golfito. The strike lasted three weeks and was ended when the Figueres administration again intervened. The workers, under the CGTC, won wage hikes of six and twelve percent and various medical, housing, vacation, and other substantial benefits to be implemented over the life of three year contract. The Company avoided a strike in the main Golfito division by then extending the same contract to these workers in November. (*New York Times*, 8/26/55: 2; 9/21/55: 10; 11/3/55: 15; LaWare, 1996: 334)

The Communists used these actions in 1955 as a platform to seek renewed legal status as a political party and, in addition to issuing strike demands, publicized a complete political program. (*New York Times*, 8/26/55: 2) The successes and boldness of the Communist Party alarmed officials in

the United States. Not only was the Red Scare at its height in Washington, D.C., but the United States had only a year earlier succeeded in engineering the overthrow of the reformist Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz. Arbenz, in addition to his massive expropriation of land from United Fruit, had also had the audacity, in the view of United States officials, to place Communists in his cabinet and to support peasant unions that had Communist leaders. (Brockett, 1988: 101-03)

Fears in the United States that the repressed Communists had been vanquished only to reappear in Costa Rica were sufficient enough that Figueres took pains to assure the great power to the north that he was not coddling the Party. He did not, however, institute repressive actions. Figueres stressed that Guatemala had actively aided Communist unions. In contrast, he argued, in Costa Rica he was working to dislodge Communist union leaders while still recognizing the legitimate interests of the workers. (*New York Times*, 9/21/55: 10) Figueres' reputation as the general who had defeated and banned the Communists, and as a strong friend of the United States, lent credibility to his arguments.⁸ It also no doubt allowed him the leeway to let the unions pursue their legal actions without some form of retaliation towards Costa Rica by the United States. But the fears of the United States also played some role in ensuring that the Communists would have no early return to legal status.

⁸Figueres had reinforced his friendship with the United States many times. In his 1953 inaugural speech, for example, he said, "In the present struggle that divides the world into two groups of rival states, we are on the side of the Western countries which uphold our democratic and Christian civilization, and we give our backing to the leadership of the United States of North America." (*New York Times*, 11/9/53: 15)

By the latter half of the 1950s, the breeding of the Cavendish banana, a variety resistant to Panama disease, led to the reintroduction of the bananas on the Atlantic coast. At the same time, an anti-trust settlement won by the United States against United Fruit in 1958 forced the Company to allow more competition in Costa Rica and elsewhere. As part of the agreement, United even agreed to sell large landholdings and other assets to competitors.⁹ (*New York Times*, 2/15/58: 1, 42) These events combined to allow a multitude of Costa Rican companies and several foreign corporations to establish new banana plantations on the Atlantic lands. Standard Fruit¹⁰, Del Monte, BANDECO, and Afreanische & Laeisz were among those who started new Atlantic operations. Because of its infrastructural investments on the Pacific, United Fruit did not initially replant bananas on the Atlantic coast, although it continued to harvest cacao there. (Bourgeois, 1989: 200; Seligson, 1980: 76)

United Fruit was threatened with a strike, in 1957, in these Atlantic cacao groves but avoided it by resorting to tactics of old. As Hispanics replaced superannuated blacks in in the groves, union militants moved in and targeted their old nemesis. The actualization of the strike was deflected when the Company used its method of old and quickly leased out most of its cacao lands to former administrators and foremen. (Bourgeois, 1989: 200)

⁹United Fruit, at the time, was "recognized as growing the major share of the world's marketable supply of bananas, mainly in the tropical lowlands of Central America," permitting the Company "to fix prices of bananas sold in the United States." The negotiations between the United States Justice Department and the Company were carried out over four years. United was ordered to sell 35 percent of its "banana import business." (*New York Times*, 2/15/58: 1, 42)

¹⁰Standard Fruit was then a subsidiary of Castle and Cooke which was later merged with Dole, the present corporate name.

In the election of 1958, the strident anti-Figueroes leader, Mario Echandi Jiménez won the presidency (to 1962), defeating the PLN candidate, Francisco Orlich.¹¹ Echandi took even more exceptional action on behalf of striking banana workers during a stoppage that carried over from late 1959 to early 1960. A law had gone into effect in 1959 which required all large businesses to pay out a Christmas bonus (*el aguinaldo*) worth one month's salary to all employees. United Fruit refused to comply with the mandate. Both the non-Communist FETRABA and the Communist linked FOBA unions joined forces and struck. As United remained entrenched in its refusal to pay, the government then directly paid the *aguinaldo* itself. The unions went to court to insure future *aguinaldos* by the Company, but United prevailed by citing provisions of contract law that supported its stance. (Seligson, 1980: 74-75) The state had once again intervened on behalf of the workers against the Fruit Company. But notably, when the workers lost in the courts, the government did not take further legislative action to counter the decision. The issue would, however be revisited.

While the Communist Party remained illegal, the government did not, in the 1950s, ally itself with the Fruit Company to put down the Communist labor movement. As illustrated above, the government and the Communists were, at least in one case, even on the same side. Whether this inhibited United Fruit and the other banana companies from provoking strikes is not clear. The Company and the government did, however, jointly single out one faction of workers for attack. Throughout the strikes in United's banana groves during the 1950s, "the massive deportation of Nicaraguan laborers

¹¹Orlich would win in 1962, defeating Rafael Calderón Guardia, who had returned from exile and was attempting a comeback.

was . . . a regular feature." (Bourgeois, 1989: 206-07) This the government could safely do. It was not defending a foreign corporation against Costa Rican nationals. But the government was taking what action it could to cleanse the banana work force of perceived radicals.

The available sources consulted for this research make almost no reference to any other strikes by banana workers in the 1960s. Theodore Creedman offers the following, very brief, account. "In 1966 workers in the Pacific zone went on strike demanding a full *aguinaldo*. It was settled by the government's paying one-half and the United Fruit Company paying the rest." (1977: 14) The next strike of significance was not until 1971, when workers in United's groves again walked out.

Figueres was in power, yet again, for a third and final time (1970-74) when the strike broke out. At the end of the previous administration of José Joaquín Trejos Fernández (1966-70), an ally of Calderón, the Communist Party had been allowed to legalize again.¹² Manuel Mora was also again elected to the Congress in the 1970 elections.¹³ By this time, the Communists had also taken control of the UTG, formerly affiliated with the *Rerum Novarum*. The man Figueres put in charge of the Ministry of Labor, Danilo Jiménez, had previously labored for United Fruit, had participated in the 1939 Parrita strike. He still held antagonistic feelings towards the Company. He held the Company tightly to the mediation and strike provisions of the Labor Code. (Email from Steve Marquardt, 7/16/97) At the same time, however, the government used tear-gas when strikers became violent and some 90 workers were arrested. Nonetheless, the strike was

¹²The National Assembly was controlled by the PLN.

¹³Mora served until 1974, when he stepped down to run for the presidency.

viewed as a large victory by the UTG. (Seligson, 1980: 75) The state was demonstrating that it could walk the tight line it had walked in 1934. It firmly put down worker violence, but refrained from using bullets. At the same time it had firmly intervened on behalf of workers' rights.

It was at about this same time that banana production on the Atlantic side of the country was exceeding that of United's Pacific coast harvests.¹⁴ (Seligson, 1980: 76) Strikes were coming to be commonplace once again in Limón Province and would increase dramatically by the late 1970s. The 1974 OPEC oil embargo, combined with a drop of coffee prices and a dramatic hike in interest rates, initiated a very difficult economic period for Costa Rica that would continue through the mid-1980s.¹⁵ Echoing the hardship of the 1940s, real income dropped by approximately 40 percent. (*Tico Times*, 4/26/91; Vega M., 1984: 12A) One source has documented at least 186 strikes and work stoppages during the period of 1972 to September 1984 in various trades and professions across the country. Lasting from one to seventy-two days, some 170,000 workers were involved in the stoppages. Of these, 61 were in the public sector and 125 were in the private sector, "with emphasis on the activities of the banana companies." (Vega M., 1984: 12A)

United Fruit, Standard Fruit, and the Banana Development Corporation (BANDECO) were among the most seriously affected by work stoppages. A significant majority, 118, of the 186 actions were in Limón Province. In only two cases did the strikers meet the stringent requirements of the Labor Code, requiring cooling off periods, signatures of 60 percent of the workers, approval by a court, and other steps, to qualify as legal strikes. This

¹⁴United Fruit changed its name to United Brands in 1971 following a merger.

¹⁵Press accounts of the period regularly referred to the economic difficulties as "la crisis."

means that in almost all cases, strikers acted while their employers had full legal rights to fire those participating and replace them with strikebreakers. The economic crisis also meant that there was a ready pool of workers available. Both of the legal strikes were carried out by banana workers against United Fruit, a 40 day strike in 1974 and the 72 day strike in 1984. (Vega M., 1984: 12A; *La Nación*, 9/18/84: 12A; *La Nación*, 9/20/84: 1A, 8A; *Código de Trabajo*, 1984; Bourgois, 1989: 201)

While the economic crisis was in progress, the *Frente Sandinista Liberación Nacional* in Nicaragua toppled the Somoza dictatorship in July 1979. The revolution in this neighboring state would have profound consequences for Costa Rica, including its banana workers. Under Manuel Mora's leadership, the Communist Party had always maintained a moderate posture. Mora believed that socialism could be integrated into the state via the representative electoral system. Following the *Sandinista* victory, a division rose in Costa Rica's Communist Party, with Mora and his moderate followers on one side, and, on the other, those who believed the revolutionary model of Nicaragua might be possible in Costa Rica. Arnoldo Ferretto, a deputy in the Legislative Assembly, was recognized as the leader of the new faction and he ultimately succeeded in displacing Mora as the Party's secretary-general in 1983.¹⁶ This split between moderates and radicals crippled the Party's ability to guide union workers. The Communist leadership's division led to fractured leadership in the banana unions, giving banana companies a stronger bargaining position. As radicals rose to positions of power in the Communist Party, unions were encouraged to take hard line

¹⁶Mora was able to win back his position through action in the courts, but returned only briefly before retiring.

positions leading to serious confrontations. The radicals pursued a strategy of promulgating repeated strikes, hoping to ignite a revolutionary fervor among the masses. (McPhaul, 1994c: 12; Jiménez: 6A; McPhaul, 1990: 10)

Anti-communism rose to new heights in response both to the *Sandinista* victory and to the actions and statements of the communist radicals. The dominant daily newspaper, *La Nación*, was among those leading the charge against the Communists, often advocating strong police action. A semi-fascist para-military organization, the *Movimiento Costa Rica Libre* (MCRL), was granted prominent full-page advertising spaces in *La Nación* to rant against the Communists and the *Sandinistas* and to advocate the use of violence to crush them.¹⁷ A weekly supplement, *Nicaragua Hoy*, was published by the paper. It was devoted to demonizing the Nicaraguan revolution. Its writers had little allegiance to facts. The paper was full of distortions and half-truths.¹⁸ The MCRL and a few other para-military groups carried out training maneuvers and claimed to have weapons cached outside of the cities. Governments under Presidents Rodrigo Carazo (1978-82) and Luis Alberto Monge (1982-86) were peopled with cabinet members who, on one side, subscribed to the red scare and those, on the other side, who advocated tolerance and calm. The results were actions and policies among state agencies that were often contradictory. Some police officials supported

¹⁷Typical of the wild, unfounded, charges made in these ads was an accusation that the Communists pulled out the fingernails of their enemies. (*La Nación*, 8/27/79: 16A)

¹⁸Such furor was whipped up in the press against the Sandinistas, particularly in *La Nación*, that when I visited Costa Rica in the middle and late 1980s, many Costa Ricans would express grave concern for me when I told them I was also travelling to Nicaragua. One warned me, with no basis in reality, but in all seriousness, "Don't go. They'll put you in front of a firing squad because you are a North American."

the para-military groups, sometimes covertly and sometimes openly, while others tried to restrict their activities.

In one dramatic event, during the tenure of Alberto Monge in 1985, some 300 followers of the MCRL attacked the Nicaraguan embassy, broke all of its windows, tore down the Nicaraguan flag and emblem, and fired shots into the building. The Costa Rican police remained a block away and failed to intervene. (National Public Radio, 6/16/85) Monge, while declaring "perpetual neutrality" in the face of United States pressure to confront the *Sandinistas*, nonetheless allowed the United States to outfit Costa Rica's "police" with military style olive drab and camouflage uniforms. Some were issued, and trained to use, M-16 rifles and other military weapons.¹⁹

The divisions within both the Communist Party and in the government would lead banana workers into strikes that were the most repressed since 1918, when two workers were killed and others may have died in the jungles, hiding from the authorities. A turning point was reached in August 1979, when a general strike was declared in the city of Puerto Limón, a month after the *Sandinista* victory in Nicaragua. It occurred in the midst of a plethora of strikes around the country.

The Limón strike was initiated by some 7,000 workers, with membership in six unions, representing dock workers, railway workers, oil refinery workers, hospital workers and the workers of a banana packing plant. The illegal stoppage would last ten days and would paralyze the city.

¹⁹Monge's successor and fellow member of the PLN, Oscar Arias (1986-90), expressed disgust over the militarization of the police and oversaw the reinstatement of more traditional blue uniforms and a more restricted use of the military weapons. He also abolished military style ranks such as colonel and lieutenant, replacing them with titles such as detective and inspector.

Because of the participation of the state oil refinery workers, gasoline deliveries stopped and filling stations throughout the country shut down. Although banana plantation workers made no demands of their own, they joined the strike in sympathy. Up to 12,000 banana workers on both coasts quit working, causing massive losses. Emphasizing that this strike was not directed at the banana companies, representatives of some of the banana workers stated that workers were on shifts around the clock to protect plantations and their equipment. The government refused to negotiate, maintaining that the strike was not about legitimate labor demands, but actually about a larger -- communist -- political agenda. (*Latin America Economic Report*, 8/24/79: 261; *La Nación*, 8/21/79: 6A; 8/22/79: 6A)

Violence erupted in the city. When pickets stoned a bus full of strike-breakers, 200 police dispersed the pickets with tear-gas. A seven-month old baby affected by the gas was among those taken to a hospital. The baby died. The (*La Nación*, 8/18/79: 1A, 4A; 8/20/79: 4A; 8/21/79: 4A) The violence greatly escalated the next day. Strikers made barricades with automobiles and ignited them. News reports state that strikers attempted to set fire to various buildings, including the port administration building and a bank. Police were stoned and strikers were gassed. Gunfire was sporadic and nearly a hundred were wounded, including twenty police. The battles continued throughout the night, throughout the city. (*Ibid.*, 8/20/79: 4A; 8/24/79: 2A)

The government finally agreed to negotiate and, after 50 hours of meetings, the strike ended. Wage increases were not immediately secured, but the government agreed to continue negotiating the issue. Key to the

settlement was the resignation of Labor Minister Estela Quesada Hernández. The government also agreed to withdraw the police. The struck companies, private and public, and including the banana companies, agreed to take no retaliatory actions against the strikers. (Ibid., 8/22/79: 4A; 8/24/79: 4A) The strike was significant because of its level of violence, both by the strikers and by the state. It was a pattern that would continue.

In 1980, violence erupted on an Atlantic coast plantation during another strike. Police arrested 142 strikers. (R. Williams, 1986: 186) On the Pacific coast later that same year, police killed a striker in the midst of another violent banana plantation strike in United's Golfito division. (Email from Steve Marquardt, 5/1/97) It was the first such death of a worker during a banana strike in sixty-two years.

In January 1982, another strike in the southern Atlantic border area of Sixaola was "one of the most heavily repressed" of the 1980s. (Bourgois, 1989: 97) Bananas had only recently been reestablished in the area again by United Fruit and expansion was under way. Among other complaints, workers were upset over the extremely harsh conditions of reopening the jungle again. The new workers were also attempting to establish a union and United resisted the effort. (Ibid.; Email from Steve Marquardt, 2/15/98) Bourgois reveals internal United Fruit correspondence where an administrator explained why employee turnover was so high. "'The people who come here in search of work do not like the place because they expect to encounter in this isolated region at least minimal facilities such as housing, transport, stores.'" (1989: 97) Because of the high turnover, the Company briefly resorted to illegally hiring many indigenous Guayamí from nearby

Panama. (Ibid.) The Company was only able to bring in greater numbers of Costa Ricans when a currency devaluation in mid-1981 allowed the Company to offer them higher wages without raising costs. The strike erupted rather spontaneously with the influx of new workers who could not abide by the conditions. (Ibid.: 200)

The Company refused negotiations and the Carazo administration sent in the Rural Guard police. They fired into crowds of protesters and onlookers numerous times. Yet again a striker was killed and two people were wounded, including the five-year old daughter of the slain man. Strikers were "brutally evicted" from their living quarters. Some 75% of the 600 strikers were fired and replaced with others hungry for work. The fired workers had no recourse, as the strike was illegal. Over 100 were arrested and many were "beaten severely." (Ibid.: 200-01)

The press again emphasized the role of foreigners in the strike even though they made up only 4.2% of the workforce and 5% of the strike participants. The press, and others, were reluctant to admit that most of the radical leaders were Costa Ricans. The Company clearly shared the attitude, however, that foreigners were trouble. It "expelled" every foreigner in the first week of the stoppage, regardless of whether they were participating in the strike or not. (Ibid.: 207)

Later in 1982, as the Monge administration was getting under way, another strike broke out in the inland Atlantic area of Siquirres against the BANDECO corporation. At 63 days, it was a few days longer than the earlier Sixaola strike and the second longest strike in the county of the 1970s and

80s. It remained free of fatalities, however. (*La Nación*, 9/3/84: 12A; Email from Steve Marquardt, 2/15/98)

The longest strike of this period also took place during the Monge administration in 1984. It spread throughout the southern Pacific regions of Palmar Sur, Golfito, and Valle de Coto -- the entirety of United Fruit's banana plantations at the time. It would ultimately, as well, be the most disastrous for the banana workers. It began on July 9 and continued for 72 days, although most of the 3,000 strikers abandoned the effort in the final few weeks. Eight months of negotiations had failed to produce agreement. The strike was the first in ten years to qualify as legal. Some 300 Rural Guard police were sent in to control the strikers. In August, two workers were killed by police fire. Four workers had thus been killed since 1980. Only three other such deaths over the rest of the century have been confirmed by this research.²⁰ The actions of the state had shifted dramatically. (See Figure 6.1, p. 213) Another four were wounded. Thirty-seven were detained. The Company legally fired 87 strikers for committing sabotage and other acts of violence. (*COPAN Semanario*, 8/6-12/84: 5 and 10/15-21/84: 5-6; *La Nación*, 9/21/84: 1A, 8A)

Workers had taken a great risk in striking and a further, significant, price was yet to be paid. The Company was in no mood to make concessions. It had claimed that it was already losing US\$6 million a year on the plantations due to low prices on the world market. It had threatened, should the workers strike, to permanently close down all of its banana operations in

²⁰There may be other unconfirmed, such as those who reportedly died hiding in the jungle in 1918. These figures are for the period through February 1998. See Figure 6.1.

Costa Rica. They would be replaced with the production of oil producing palms, a crop that required little manual labor. The Company was further

1874, Atlantic coast: Chinese railroad workers riot over contract violations. Thirty-five troops called in. Uncertain numbers of workers wounded, killed, and imprisoned.

1910, Limón Province: General strike. Forty-eight wounded.

1913, Sixaola/Talamanca, Southern Limón Province: One killed, two wounded, dozens beaten.

1918, Sixaola, Southern Limón Province: Two killed, dozens wounded, others possibly died hiding in jungle.

1934, Atlantic coast: One strike leader shot and wounded.

1979, Atlantic and Pacific coasts: Up to 12,000 banana workers strike in solidarity with 7,000 urban strikers in Limón (including banana packing plant and dock workers). Nearly one hundred wounded. Seven-month old baby died from tear-gas inhalation.

1980, Golfito, Southern Pacific coast: One killed. (Other details not available.)

1982, Sixaola, Southern Limón Province: One killed, two wounded, including the slain striker's five year old daughter. Over 100 jailed and many severely beaten.

1984, Golfito, Southern Pacific coast: Two killed, four wounded.

1994, Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí, Heredia Province (Inland, northern Atlantic lowlands): M-16s fired into crowd of 200-500 strikers who were stoning police. Sixteen police injured. Sixteen strikers wounded.

Figure 6.1: Significant Instances of Violence During Railroad-Banana Strikes/Work Stoppages

motivated to do so as some 65% of its bananas were afflicted with a new strain of sigatoka.²¹ (Omang, 1985: A15; *La Nación*, 9/21/84: 1A and 8A; Jiménez, 1984: 6A; Hall, 1985: 167-69)

The government was greatly motivated, as well, to see the Company prevail in the labor dispute, as it could ill afford to lose the dominant employer of the region. As many as 50,000 Costa Ricans were directly or indirectly dependent on the Pacific coast plantations, which included schools, housing, a railroad, a port, and ships. Scenarios of coming land invasions were painted in the press. Even anti-Company government officials such as Danilo Jiménez, who was at this time Minister of the Presidency, were convinced that the survival of the banana operations was a high priority. (Jiménez, 1984: 6A; Omang, 1985: A15)

Workers, however, already angered by hardship and unsatisfactory wages, agreed with union leaders that a showdown was necessary. Throughout the long strike, the Company was immovable. The workers gained nothing beyond the contract originally offered and lost much. Communist leaders acknowledged that "the defeat wounded the whole labor movement." (*La Nación*, 9/21/84: 1A, 8A) Workers' short-term losses were great. But worse yet, United soon carried through with its threat to shut down its Pacific coast banana operations. On the Atlantic coast, all Company operations had already been transferred to independent

²¹The strain previously prevalent was yellow sigatoka, controllable with aerial fumigation of petroleum based fungicides. In the mid-1980s, only experimental and costly treatments were being attempted to control black sigatoka, the new strain. (Hall, 1985: 167-69)

contractors. Over one hundred years after Minor Keith had planted his first bananas, United Fruit had, at least for the time, ceased growing the fruit.²²

By 1987, the Company ceased the use of its subsidiary name for its Pacific operations, the *Compañía Bananera de Costa Rica*, and adopted the new name, *Compañía Palma Tica*. The state leased some of land and briefly facilitated the development of some banana producer coops for a small number of former United Fruit workers.²³ These coops have not done very well. (Barry and Preusch, 1986: 194; Email from Steve Marquardt, 2/15/98) It also legislated initiatives, successfully, to entice banana expansion on the Atlantic coast. (See below.) The dire predictions of economic disaster for the region would come true quite quickly, however. As discussed in Chapter Seven, land invasions, as predicted, would become both common and violent.

Banana production on the other side of the country would continue however, and, by the late 1980s, even expand, among existing and new entrepreneurs. But the disastrous outcomes of the recent strikes, including the killings and many injuries, had dealt a tremendous blow to the labor movement. Workers were very disillusioned with the fractured Communist labor leadership. The state was disinclined to support workers led by those advocating the overthrow of the constitutional order. Taking advantage of this opening, the banana companies began a purge of union officials.

(McPhaul, 1990: 10)

²²Under the names Chiquita Brands International, *Compañía Bananera del Atlantico* (COBAL), and Chiriquí Land Company, the Company would grow its own fruit on Atlantic coast lands again in a few years.

²³"Because the company had broken the [State land concession] contract, the government could have expropriated the land. However, under the provisions of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, expropriation of U.S. property would have resulted in the loss of U.S. aid. This placed the government in the ironic position of having to lease back its own land from a TNC that had just broken its contract." (Barry and Preusch, 1986: 194)

While the unions were in chaos, banana workers were offered another approach at labor relations called *solidarismo*. The *solidarista* movement was incubated in Costa Rica in the late 1940s and had been slowly expanding through various trades, with a majority of members in manufacturing. (Blanco and Navarro, 1984: 108-13) It was conceived by Alberto Martén Chavarría, a *centrista* and a founder of the *Partido Social Demócrata* in the 1940s. He was also one of José Figueres' oldest friends and his first Minister of Economy in the junta before disagreements permanently ended their friendship in 1948. Quitting the government, Martén developed and refined a labor relations concept that would, he hoped, give workers and management a shared stake in a company, and thus, a shared interest in working together. Martén believed that workers, like their employers, had a right to build up equity in a company.

To accomplish this, both worker and employer would contribute to a fund which would be managed by an employee association. This fund would then invest in [company] enterprises such as research, small businesses, new crop developments or, in fact, any constructive project; and in turn these new ventures would create more jobs, better wages, increased amounts of money to be paid into the fund, providing more money for more new businesses, etc. A proportion of the fund would be held back in each worker's name. In that way, the employees could draw a given amount for educational purposes, or to finance the purchase of a house, or to start a small business on the side. And when the worker retired at 65, he could draw out in a lump sum the

balance of the funds which he had built up in his name. (Longstreet Boggs, 1988: 15)

Other programs or activities supported by various *solidarista* associations included dances, company cafes, cooperative stores, sports teams, and housing projects. (Blanco and Navarro, 1984: 122)

By the 1980s, some associations were instituting employee purchases of company stock. (Longstreet Boggs, 1988: 15) If managed properly, *solidarista* associations can improve the quality of life for employees, providing them with new and significant benefits. But the employer gains as well, ostensibly being freed from the costs of labor strife. A 1988 report by the United States Embassy summed up the trade-offs: "*Solidarismo* offers workers such material benefits as credit unions in exchange for which members renounce their right to strike or to bargain collectively." (Hough, 1989: 20)

The Catholic Church has been at Martén's side, very actively promoting and facilitating the growth of *solidarismo*. When many government officials were casting about in the early 1980s for alternatives to the Communist dominated labor movement, they too finally became cheerleaders. Legislation was passed that made it easier to organize a *solidarista* association than to organize a union. The former, for example, only required 12 members to legally incorporate while a union required a minimum of 20. *Solidarista* associations were allowed to carry out profit making activities and to organize pension funds, activities legally prohibited for unions. (*Tico Times*, 7/14/91: 4)

Martén had visualized *solidarismo* as an antidote to the labor strife such as that of the banana plantations in 1934, but until the 1980s, it had been adopted only in other sectors. By 1981, less than 17 percent of the members in *solidarismo* associations were engaged in agriculture. But as union failures mounted, some banana workers began to think that *solidarismo* might be a good alternative and responded to entreaties by employers. Atlantic coast banana workers and banana company representatives held a preliminary organizational meeting in November 1980. (Blanco and Navarro, 1984: 207-08) Membership rolls expanded with explosive speed. By July 1987, every banana workers' union in the country had been displaced by *solidarismo* associations. (*Tico Times*, 8/7/87: 23)

The sudden strength and growth of *solidarismo* was paralleled in other sectors throughout the country as the Communist dominated labor movement collapsed. In late 1981, there were some 220 companies with *solidarista* associations. By mid-1990, there were over 1,300. (Blanco and Navarro, 1984: 108; Daly, 1990: 5) By mid-1989, one report indicated that about 15 percent of the workforce belonged to *solidarista* association while an equal percentage still belonged to unions. (Hough, 1989: 18) Multinational corporations have been especially drawn to the movement. By 1989, about 90 percent of the foreign corporations in Costa Rica had established *solidarista* associations. (Ibid.)

The final banana union displacements in 1987 took place on Standard Fruit plantations at Río Frío and Valle del la Estrella in the Atlantic lowlands. The ousted unions accused Standard of massively purging unionists while simultaneously delaying the start of collective bargaining. At the same time,

solidarismo representatives succeeded in winning approval of 80 percent of the remaining workers. The *Confederación de Trabajadores de Costa Rica* (CTCR) appealed the validity of the accords, but the Labor Ministry under President Oscar Arias (1986-90) ruled that they were fair.²⁴ The government's sentiments were unambiguous. Ministry statements praised the new *solidarismo* contracts for "bettering labor conditions" and for "maintaining labor peace." (*Tico Times*, 8/7/87: 22)

The unions went to court, charging the government with failing to intervene while employers violated their rights as stipulated in the Labor Code. The unions won their case. But on appeal, the Supreme Court, in 1989, overturned the decision on the grounds that the unions had not included the companies and the *solidarista* associations in the suit. (McPhaul, 1990: 10) The unions tried an international approach, filing suit before the Union Freedom Committees of the International Labor Organization (ILO). The ILO issued a resolution in 1991 that criticized the legal preferences that *solidarismo* had over the union movement, but refrained from overtly condemning the *solidarista* movement. (*Tico Times*, 6/14/91: 4)

By 1990, reports of labor abuses in *solidarista* companies, including continued anti-unionist activity, were becoming common. Workers who joined unions were doing so clandestinely, for fear of losing their jobs. Charges of low wages, physical, verbal, and sexual harassment, long work days and weeks, and illegal firings for union activity were made in the courts and a few cases were won. An investigator for the Ministry of Labor admitted that union members were routinely fired, but said such cases were hard to prove. (*Ibid.*,

²⁴Arias belongs to the *Partido Liberación Nacional* .

5/11/90: 17) Even when proved, fines as specified in the Labor Code were antiquated and amounted to no more than a few dollars. (Ibid., 6/14/91: 4)

A report in late 1992 mentioned five unions that were attempting organizational efforts in Atlantic banana plantations. One, the *Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores Agriculturas y Ganaderías de Heredia* (SITAGAH) claimed to have signed on 370 new members at Standard Fruit's Río Frío plantation between June and October of that year and called the recruitment effort successful. Of some 19,000 or more workers on plantations, this was really a very small number.²⁵ At the time of the report, twenty-two SITAGAH organizers had just been fired by Standard Fruit for their efforts. Some were long time employees. (*Tico Times*, 10/9/92: 4)

In other instances, workers claimed that when they withdrew their savings from *solidarista* investments, they discovered that employers had failed to make agreed upon matching contributions. In some cases, it was charged, association officers fled with the money under their supervision. Rodrigo Jiménez, the executive director of the *solidarista* umbrella organization, *Unión de Solidarismo*, admitted with regret that abuses occurred but argued that they were carried out largely by foreigners who did not share Costa Rican cultural values. "Some businesses, the foreign-owned ones mostly, may come down here with an adventurous spirit, and are really not committed to even a minimum responsibility to the workers or to the concept (of Solidarismo)." (Daly, 1990: 5)

Banana corporations were not exempt from the charges of abuse, particularly those who were opening new banana plantations on the Atlantic

²⁵The number of banana workers was reported as nearly 19,000 and growing in late 1991. (*Tico Times*, 12/13/91: 4)

lowlands and mountains. Following United Fruit's shut-down, the government legislated incentives to bring new companies to Costa Rica. Despite wages that were the highest in the region, the incentives worked.²⁶ Employment on banana plantations increased from 13,690 in 1985 to 18,845 in 1990 helping Costa Rica recover from the economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Land planted in bananas steadily grew from 20,535 hectares in 1985 to around 32,000 in 1991, including some new plantings in the southern Pacific coast lands again. (*Tico Times*, 12/13/91: 1, 4; 5/3/91: 22) Taxed at US\$4.79 per box in 1990, the Costa Rican state collected US\$22 million from banana exports. In 1991, the tax was raised to \$5.79. (*Ibid.*, 12/6/91: 1; 5/3/91: 22)

The new companies were the most prone to commit labor abuses. Clearing jungle for new plantations, they were found by government inspectors of providing only hovels for living quarters and not maintaining sanitary kitchens or proper toilets. Some banana companies avoided having to pay social security taxes by hiring workers only on a part-time basis, leaving workers without health care and other state benefits. (*Ibid.*, 10/9/92: 4; McPhaul, 1990: 10) Although the Catholic Church was very actively promoting *solidarismo*, in 1989 Limón Archbishop Alfonso Coto delivered a pastoral letter condemning banana companies for not providing decent housing and other basic amenities. Even as some conditions improved on the

²⁶"Costa Rica is already one of the most expensive places in the world to grow bananas. Standard pays its workers an average of ¢2,200 daily (\$14) . . . Workers here earn twice what their counterparts in Honduras earn and four times that of workers in Ecuador." (*Tico Times*, 9/9/94: 14) Some employers did, however, find ways to lower wages. See the discussion in the below text regarding the 1994 strike.

more established plantations, purges of union members continued there as well. (*Tico Times*, 9/9/94: 14; 10/9/92: 4)

While unions remained shut down on the plantations, workers and unionists continued pursuing their cause in international forums, successfully acquiring foreign allies. The outcomes ranged from poor to moderately successful. In addition to the ILO appeal discussed above, unionists from a range of export sectors convinced the large AFL-CIO union in the United States to file a protest with the United States Office of Trade. The AFL-CIO charged that Costa Rican laws were preventing free union development, and, thus were giving Costa Rica an unfair trading advantage.

Investigations by the Office of Trade led to negotiations aimed at Labor Code changes which the Costa Rican government rebuffed. Threats, however, by the United States to stiffen tariffs on Costa Rican products, resulted, in October 1993, in passage of Labor Code reforms. The new changes included protection for labor leaders from being fired until six months after leaving a union post, stiffer fines for employers violating labor laws, and permission to form unions with only 12 employees. (*Tico Times*, 10/22/93: 25) While the legislation satisfied the United States, a Costa Rican union lawyer, Jorge Regidor, complained that the wording of the new legislation could possibly give employers five additional justifications for firing workers. One provision open to broad interpretation, for example, stated that a worker could be fired for any action that caused a company's product to lose value. (Ibid.)

Banana workers have made another move into the international arena and another departure from strikes and others standard labor actions.

Workers filed suit in Texas against Standard Fruit and three pesticide companies in the United States seeking compensation for sterilization and other maladies caused by use of the pesticide dibromochloropropane (DBCP).²⁷ Unions have largely been interested observers while lawyers have recruited and represented the plaintiffs. Used to control nematodes -- tiny worms that burrow into banana roots -- DBCP was widely used in the 1960s and 70s. It was banned in the United States in 1977 and in Costa Rica in 1978. (Ibid., 2/7/97: 22-23; 8/14/92: 1,8)

The companies were charged with knowingly exposing workers and others to the substance even though they understood that it was extremely toxic. Workers were made to apply the pesticide without benefit of protection and it was also applied from the air, exposing workers in the groves and even in their adjacent homes. Long term effects of DBCP exposure include cancer. Some of those affected suffered divorce, alcoholism, and even suicide. Standard Fruit allegedly made a deal with Dow Chemical Company to continue supplying DBCP after its production was made illegal in the United States, with Standard agreeing to pay for any future damage claims, should they arise. After the product was banned in Costa Rica, Standard moved its stock to its Honduran plantations for continued use. (Ibid.)

The plaintiffs had been encouraged because workers in the United States were winning settlements of between US\$100,000 to US\$2 million. After several years of litigation, an out of court settlement for the Costa Rican workers was made in August 1992. The 981 workers who received payments have been largely unhappy with the outcome. The plaintiffs and

²⁷The pesticide companies were Shell Oil, Dow Chemical, and Occidental Chemical.

their lawyers were prohibited from reporting the amounts of their awards, but analyses reported in the press calculated that the majority of the awards were about \$7,000 or under, going as low as \$1,500 while a handful received about \$40,000. From these awards, 40 percent was deducted for lawyers fees and another \$800 for other litigation costs. Spouses and children of the workers, many also affected, were excluded from the suit.²⁸ Many plaintiffs accused the lawyers of poor representation. Another 50 workers settled a claim in 1994 for undisclosed sums. In spite of the disappointing results, as of February 1997 some 8,000 additional Costa Rican workers were pursuing new cases in the United States in conjunction with other workers from the Philippines, Honduras, and the Ivory Coast.²⁹ (*Tico Times*, 2/7/97: 22-23; 8/14/92: 1,8; 2/21/97: 9)

DBCP was only one of the environmental problems of growing bananas and these problems all, suddenly, came to light in the early 1990s.

"Ecotourism" exploded as a new industry in Costa Rica beginning in the late 1980s and the hazards and wastes of banana production came to the attention of many groups. New plantations were destroying rainforests adjacent to, and in some cases even in, national parks and biological refuges. The natural plant life was replaced with neat rows of banana trees.

Pesticides killed not only nematodes, but frogs, pigs, and birds. Declining fish

²⁸Women and children are exposed to plantation pesticides in a multitude of ways. They sell coffee and snacks to the largely male workforce. They pass through the groves during fumigation to leave housing sites that are surrounded by bananas. Residents of these housing sites have used well water contaminated by chemicals. Women wash the pesticide laden clothes of their husbands. Some women also are employed in jobs such as working in storerooms where the pesticides are prepared, but it is not clear if any female workers were litigants. (*Tico Times*: 4/8/94: 17)

²⁹DBCP usage in other countries continued to 1981 in Africa and Ecuador and until 1986 in the Philippines. (Schemo)

runs were blamed on pesticide runoff. While natural rainforests are extreme examples of extreme biodiversity, banana plantations have been called biological wastelands. (Ibid., 12/6/91: 1, 14; Schemo, 1995)

Silt from erosion in the groves was washing down the Río Estrella into the Caribbean and was being blamed for the slow death of the Cahuita Reef, the largest in the country and widely visited by tourists. Pesticide laden plastic bags discarded from banana stems were found around dead coral formations in the Cahuita National Park, 12 kilometers south of the Estrella's mouth. A statement by an owner of an ecotourism company summed up why these problems were suddenly acute: "The banana industry is in direct opposition to our industry right now. It is destroying the attractions that our customers come to see: the forests, the rivers, the coral reefs." (*Tico Times*, 12/6/91: 1, 14)

Unions in the 1990s have joined forces with environmental, pastoral, and community groups in coalitions to fight both environmental problems and labor abuses. In mid-1992, one such coalition called for a complete halt of the banana expansion. Environmental groups outside of Costa Rica have played a significant role in this movement. Tourism joined bananas as the other top earner of foreign currency in the 1990s. The threat of international boycotts of *both* industries was raised. In response, the government, and most banana companies, very quickly paid attention to the environmental concerns raised, if not so much to the labor abuses. (*Tico Times*, 7/3/92: 12-13)

The Environment Ministry in 1991 commissioned a report by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) evaluating the environmental impact of banana plantations. The report was produced in a

matter of several months. Among its many findings, the report declared that 2.14 tons of waste was created for every ton of bananas produced. Three-quarters of a ton of the waste, it concluded, was non-biodegradable and was dumped haphazardly or in open-air sites, often carried away by water runoff, or was burned, releasing toxic fumes. The *Corporación Bananera Nacional (CORBANA)*, the state-backed organization representing banana companies moved quickly, in response, to form the Banana Ecological Commission with the six major banana producers, the National Chamber of Banana Producers, and significantly, the EARTH School. The latter is a small private Costa Rican university, founded in 1989, devoted to training in environmental protection and awareness. The Commission is experimenting with environmental solutions and advising the banana companies on clean-up methods. (*Tico Times*, 7/3/92: 12, 27; 3/21/97: 5)

Banana companies were also quick to report, within several months of the IUCN findings, cleaned up operations, arguing that some of the changes were in progress even before the environmental problems were made so public.³⁰ New systems were quickly devised at various plantations to collect the discarded plastic bags. Experimental sedimentation tanks were filtering water, used in processing the bananas, before it was returned to waterways. The *Corporación Bananera del Atlantico (COBAL)*, a subsidiary of United, had built a greenhouse for 15,000 indigenous trees and was beginning to reforest riverbanks to retard erosion. (*Ibid.*, 7/3/92: 12)

³⁰Much of the environmental damage will likely be long-term, even if current operations are substantially improved. DBCP, for example, "is likely to have permeated the water system around the Atlantic Coast, where it was used most extensively. It has an active shelf life of up to 50 years," according to Costa Rican toxicologist Roberto Chavez. (*Tico Times*, 12/6/91: 15)

The banana companies also generated public relations campaigns, touting economic and other contributions to Costa Rica. Full page ads and inserts in the daily newspapers were published under titles such as "Standard Fruit Collaborates with the Ministry of Public Health to Control Cholera," and "The Banana Expansion is Not a Factor in Deforestation." (Carlson, 1991: 16) In perhaps an effort to co-opt some of their critics, banana companies began giving contributions to some environmental groups.³¹

While many or most of these improvements appear oriented more towards appeasing the environmental groups than labor, these changes, to whatever extent they are taken, seem likely to improve the health of the workers. One environmental problem that most specifically affects the workers and their families is that of housing siting. Housing has traditionally been built adjacent to, or within, the banana groves and residents are sometimes exposed to aerial fumigation. Children play in the groves and are exposed to discarded toxic materials. Some companies have started building green belts between the housing and the groves. One example is Geest Caribbean, a British corporation that planted its first 1,200 hectares of bananas in Costa Rica in the early 1990s. Geest was praised in the press at that time because it was building a 32 hectare, 250 house, workers' community separated from the groves by a green belt. The project included recreational areas, a gymnasium, a medical clinic, and day-care facilities. (*Tico Times*, 7/3/92: 12)

³¹For example, the December 1996 newsletter for the Costa Rican based *Amigos de las Aves* (Friends of the Birds) reported a donation by Chiquita Brands "for the Great Green Macaw Breeding and Research Program."

Seven years after the last banana union was dismantled, a violent strike broke out in 1994 at Geest's four plantations, located in the inland northern Atlantic coast area of Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí. Investigations following the strike would make public the fact that Geest's housing development was reserved for one privileged class of workers while another, larger class, was relegated to living in slum conditions. The latter were mostly those hired by subcontractors. The subcontractors had been, in turn, hired by Geest to carry out the hardest work such as clearing forests and digging drains. The practice had been used at times at least as far back as the 1910s when newly arriving Hispanics were employed for similar work under such subcontractors and kept separate from black workers. (See Chapter Five)

In the 1990s, these laborers were mostly foreigners and mostly Nicaraguans. The subcontractors kept workers no longer than three months at a time and thus legally evaded the payment of Social Security taxes and severance pay. Workers found that they could rotate, with little interruption, from one subcontractor to another, effectively working full-time on the Geest plantations, but without employee benefits. Another reason to subcontract the labor, according to union representatives, was to inhibit union organizing. The salaries paid by the subcontractors were low, but even salaries for many on the Geest payroll were about 40 percent less than the industry norm.³² Geest justified this on the basis that, as the newest banana grower in the

³²One Geest employee, for example, was reported to have earned ₡33,000 (US\$208) monthly. With this salary, he was reported to have been barely able to pay ₡8,000 (US\$51) for the "rent on his two-room hovel." A company official said he was not sure why the employee did not have company housing but suggested that he was probably on a waiting list. (*Tico Times*, 8/19/94: 7)

country, it had to rely extensively on inexperienced laborers. (McPhaul, 1994a: 7 and 1994b: 6-7; *Tico Times*, 8/19/94: 7)

According to Miguel Hernández, a lawyer for the private Costa Rican Human Rights Commission, subcontractors working for banana corporations in the 1990s ranged from those who were very scrupulous in following the law and paying Social Security taxes to those whose only purpose appeared to be to provide "off-the-books" employees to the companies. The Director of Labor Relations for the Labor Ministry in 1994, Eugenio Solano, lamented that the government lacked sufficient funding to police the abuses. (McPhaul, 1994b: 6-7)

Exacerbating conditions, malaria had made a significant comeback. It was thought to have been under control since the 1960s due to widespread spraying of insecticides and improved medical treatments. In 1982, there were 110 cases in the country. In 1990, the number jumped to 1,551. By 1992, there were almost 7,000 cases and in the mid-1990s, the number of cases was hovering between four and five thousand. The vast majority of the cases were in the Atlantic zone and the outbreak was attributed to deforestation and the rapid development of new banana plantations, both of which created mosquito breeding grounds in standing pools of water and drainage ditches. (*Tico Times*, 12/29/95: 6)

Following a small outbreak of cholera on one plantation in 1992, the Vice-Minister of Health, Uriel Badilla, noted that as banana companies were developing so rapidly, they weren't building proper facilities for their workers. In 1990, about twenty-seven percent of the banana labor force was employed on new plantations and the percentage was growing. In a news article about

a medical evacuation at the affected plantation, Finca Bana 2000, the reporter described the housing as "run-down barracks." (Ibid., 10/9/92: 4; 12/13/91: 4)

The 1994 strike took place in May as a protest against a cut in wages and the illegal firing of workers who had joined SITAGAH, one of the unions that were attempting to regain a toe hold in the banana sector. The strike broke out just three days before President Rafael Angel Calderón Fournier (1990-94) would leave office. On May 8, this son of former President Calderón Guardia handed the presidential sash to the son of former President Figueres Ferrar. Only five days after the inauguration of José María Figueres (1994-98), strike violence would mar his political honeymoon.

Most of the strikers were Nicaraguans. Copying a practice used widely during the Nicaraguan Revolution, strikers built barricades with river rocks on the roads leading to the plantations.³³ The mayor of Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí signed an order authorizing police to open the roads. On May 13, Security Minister Juan Diego Castro sent some 200 men to confront the strikers, estimated to number from 200 to 500 at a principal barricade. (*Tico Times*, 5/20/94: 4; McPhaul, 1994a: 7 and 1994b: 7)

Police dispersed the crowd with tear gas. As the strikers fled, many hurled rocks, injuring some 16 officers. Police then fired M-16 rifles into the crowd. Some of the fleeing strikers were then hit with shotgun pellets fired by Geest's private guards. Altogether, 16 to 18 strikers were wounded. Those hit by the pellets claimed that they were merely escaping the tear gas and other shooting. The company asserted that the shotguns were fired against

³³In Nicaragua, revolutionaries typically had used paving stones from streets. The practice actually goes back at least to colonial times.

men attacking the company's buildings. The police followed those who fled to their homes, broke down the doors, and forcibly removed them. Thirty-three were arrested. The next day, workers reported, police and armed guards went door-to-door at a worker housing site, ordering people to work. In 1995, Amnesty International cited Costa Rica as a human rights violator for its actions. Amnesty International also complained that Costa Rican officials failed to respond to requests for information about the case. (*Tico Times*, 5/20/94: 4 and 7/14/95: 4; McPhaul, 1994a: 7)

The day after the May 13 shootings and 9 days after the strike began, a labor agreement, personally mediated by Minister of Labor Farid Ayales, was reached between the SITAGAH and Geest. Union officials called the agreement a victory but it is unclear how much was gained. One significant achievement was simply the fact that unions had conducted their first organized action in the banana plantations in ten years. Geest agreed to recognize the union's right to organize, but this is something that was already required by law. Geest Caribbean American president, Eduardo de la Espriella, in fact, bragged that the company had made no concessions, stating, "The agreement doesn't commit us to anything." (*Tico Times*, 5/20/94: 4)

De la Espriella asserted that only 48 of the company's 900 workers were union members and that most strikers were not Geest employees, but rather were "outside elements" brought in by the union. SITAGAH maintained that at least 500 workers were members. The labor agreement also provided that a special commission composed of labor, Geest, and government representatives would determine which workers were union

members. Wage negotiations would follow the determination. Geest also agreed not to hire subcontracted labor except under exceptional circumstances. (Ibid.; McPhaul, 1994a: 7) The Labor Ministry no doubt has an inadequate budget to supervise this provision and it is unclear if it has been adhered to.

The state had responded quite forcefully on the side of the banana company. Only after the shootings did the Ministry of Labor enter as a mediator, although it did so rather quickly at that point. The concessions from the company negotiated by the government, however, do not seem substantial. The government does not seem prepared to readily facilitate the reemergence of unions.

It is important to note that representatives of SITAGAH and its parent union, the *Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Agriculturas y Plantaciones* (FENTRAP), emphasize that they are not affiliated with the Communists. Luis Pablo Zuñiga, legal affairs secretary for FENTRAP, stated in 1992, "We are founding a totally new, more professional, unionism, freed from all political and ideological connections as we transform to face the twenty-first century." (*Tico Times*, 10/9/92:4) Zuñiga also said that unions acknowledged their "past errors" and were forging a more democratic management style. (Ibid.)

Looking at the long term, unions gained a toe hold in the banana industry with the 1994 strike agreement, but it remains no more than that. The gains, for now, remain uncertain. Workers for no banana company have succeeded at the time of this writing in obtaining a union contract. The violence of the 1994 strike no doubt rekindled old fears for many, including

workers, that union activity was dangerous. For others, it probably reaffirmed feelings that unions were subversive or violent. *Solidarista* associations still dominate completely. The only significant work stoppage since the 1994 strike was a general strike in late August 1996 in the port city of Limón, but it incorporated a broad cross-section of the community and was not a banana worker strike, *per se*, even though stevedores who load bananas played a significant role. More significantly, banana plantation workers did not have an important role.³⁴ (*Tico Times*, 8/30/96:1,3; 9/6/96: 3; 12/20/96: 19)

In analyzing unrest and relations of production in the banana sector of Costa Rica over the final six decades of the twentieth century, we should look at the roles of the four primary actors, or categories of actors. They are the employers, the workers, employee organizations, and the state. The corporate structure of the employers changed dramatically during this period. United Fruit's complete domination of the banana sector began to give way in the 1950s and by the late 1960s, other companies, collectively, had matched its production. While it is producing on the Atlantic coast again, now under the corporate name of Chiquita Brands, it is but one of a multitude of companies that compete to produce bananas in Costa Rica. The banana

³⁴Fifty unions and community groups participated in the strike under the umbrella organization, *Limón en Lucha*. Demands included the creation of new jobs in the economically depressed area, more investment in medical services, road improvements, and the establishment of a landfill and of a cemetery. The issue that set off the strike, however, was a government decision to liberalize the stevedore industry. The government's actions, granting loading and unloading rights to 11 new companies, brought down wages at the docks and created layoffs. Reminiscent of the 1979 general strike, rioting and looting were met with tear-gas and bullets. Three died and significant material damages were incurred. The government made very significant concessions to the dockworkers, granting them increased minimum wages and half-ownership, with the Del Monte banana company, of a docking company. The dock workers ownership was to be organized through a *solidarista* association. (*Tico Times*, 12/20/96: 19)

industry is no longer a monolith. But as when United Fruit was the only significant corporation in the sector, all of the many companies that now operate seek to make returns on capitalistic investments. In a capitalistic system, one typically must minimize costs to maximize profits. As recent events have shown, there are companies that will try to cut costs by recategorizing labor, shifting work to subcontractors. This is consistent with the pattern that has been practiced by United Fruit since the time of its founding a century ago, when it has shifted its unproductive lands to independent farmers. Both tactics have also proved useful in hindering union organization and there is good evidence that this, indeed, has been a motivation for contracting out work and lands.

What has changed most for the companies in the relations of production is that, since the mid-1980s, they have had to deal only minimally with organized union membership. The banana corporations have been very successful in keeping the level of membership very low or virtually absent. It is impossible to say if wages have remained lower for banana workers than if unions had not been replaced by *solidarista* associations. It is also difficult to calculate the costs expended by companies for the many *solidarista* benefits such as stock options, housing programs, etc. But it is clear after strikes became a constant feature of the banana sector in the 1970s and through 1984, only one banana company has had but one strike episode to deal with in the years since.

Conditions for workers, in general, have improved over time. With the establishment of *la Caja* -- the Social Security system -- in 1942, workers' access to health care steadily increased and they have had the security of

knowing they will have pensions. Until a recent reverse, malaria had decreased and was very minimal from the 1960s onward. Wages in the Costa Rican banana plantations have remained the highest in Central America. Housing has improved for many workers. It is common now on established plantations for workers and their families to live together. Their children go to nearby schools and the residential compounds have recreational facilities and other amenities. Of late, the success of ecotourism in the 1990s has pressured the banana companies to create healthier environments for their workers. In such ways, the lives of most banana workers have steadily improved and are far superior to the lives of those who worked in the 1930s and before.

Yet, the work in the steamy jungles has remained difficult, especially relative to the improved lives and comforts that banana workers have been able to see in areas such as San José. Worthy of note for the comparative study at hand, the labor of planting and harvesting bananas is still, as always, much more arduous than that of planting and harvesting coffee. Abuses of many workers have continued. The hardest work, as always, is that of carving new plantations out of the jungle. This has intensified in recent years, but it is a constant feature in the shifting cultivation of bananas.

Quality of life is always relative and in many ways intangible. What is clear is that throughout this period, and before, workers have many times judged that their employers were responsible to some extent for a less than desirable quality of life. And it is clear that workers have felt strongly enough about this to strike. What's more, they have usually done so with the

knowledge that their strikes did not meet the state's legal definition and that they were risking the loss of their jobs. From 1979 onward, as the state showed that it would not mediate on their behalf, banana workers were also willing to escalate the violence. Further, they knew that they were risking their lives.

In the last two decades, that which has changed most for banana workers in their relations of production has been, first, the replacement of the unions with the *solidarista* associations and, second, the virtual abandonment of the state as a mediator to help balance the power of the banana companies. *Solidarista* associations have provided many benefits for the workers. Workers, as well as the banana companies, sought the establishment of the associations. Their existence in the banana sector is still relatively new. Have *solidarista* associations in the banana sector met the idealistic goals of founder Alberto Martén? It is obvious that the companies prefer *solidarista* associations over unions. There is insufficient evidence, based on the materials available at the time of this writing, to evaluate whether banana workers, overall, are happy with the establishment of *solidarismo* and the replacement of the unions. It is impossible, without extensive field interviews or sophisticated sampling of the workers, to gauge what percentages might feel that their lives have either improved or worsened since the demise of the unions.

The banana companies are actively and persistently repressing incipient unionization. Clearly, *some* workers are unhappy. The evidence presented in these pages shows that conditions for *many* workers remain awful. When workers *are* unhappy now, they no longer have the traditional

tool of unions for organizing work stoppages. They can still strike, of course. But even most wildcat strikes require leadership of some type and the companies have been persistent in dismissing potential leaders. In other sectors, the evidence shows that potential labor leaders are fearful of organizing lest they be fired. Can workers effectively communicate grievances under the *solidarista* system without fear of being identified as trouble makers and then losing their jobs? If so, is there a system to resolve the grievances? The answers are not yet clear. If sufficient numbers of workers feel that the answers to these questions are no, then it is probably only a matter of time before unions successfully reemerge.

The Communist dominated unions of the banana sector demonstrated both brilliant organizing skills and incredibly poor judgment over the course of the last six decades. The Communist Party rose to success partly by judging well and articulating well the emotions and needs of workers in both the banana and urban sectors. It also succeeded because the state often facilitated the negotiations with United Fruit. The state also refrained from carrying out repressive actions in the manner of those carried out prior to the 1930s -- until 1979. From the 1940s until 1979, the risks of participating in a strike included loss of pay and employment. Workers often took these risks. Since 1979, the state has demonstrated again that it is willing to use lethal force to put down a strike. By that time, government officials were probably already fatigued from the incessant strikes of the period. But what clearly motivated the state into a repressive role was the anti-communist hysteria that was gripping the country, including many in government.

Unfortunately for banana workers, one wing of their divided leadership was provoking the state with insurrectional rhetoric. Worse, it appears that part of the motivation for the strikes was to push the destabilization agenda of this faction. It was using its power and prestige as the dominant force in labor unions, both in the banana sector and elsewhere, to assert a very radical and, to most, a threatening agenda. It is not clear how many workers supported this new faction of the Communist Party. What is clear is that as the Communist Party self-destructed, it took the banana labor movement down with it. Current labor leaders seem to understand that they must disassociate themselves from the old labor movement of the Communist Party -- at least the Party of the 1980s -- if they are to have a serious role in the banana sector again.

The emergence of *solidarismo* seems to have facilitated the workers abandonment of the Communist union movement. But this does not necessarily lessen the Communist Party's responsibility for its own demise. LaWare notes that when urban workers were disappointed by the Communist unions in the late 1940s and in the 1950s, they organized their own independent unions and achieved greater successes. (1996: 12-13) As discussed in the above text, banana workers in the 1950s alternately aligned with the Catholic affiliated unions and the Communist unions, depending on who could best represent their issues *as workers* at any given time. Banana workers were not ideologically bound to the Communist Party. They supported it because it well articulated and represented their needs and emotions. Had not *solidarismo* presented a convenient alternative to the Communist Party, it is likely that banana workers would have sought out a

new union movement. The Communist unions could not effectively represent the banana workers any longer and the workers were bound to leave.

At the same time, a few lawyers have also filled the void left by the unions. A new precedent is being set in that agrarian workers from developing countries are suing foreign corporations in the United States, where the corporations are based. Whether this precedent is significant or not will depend on the outcome of cases still in litigation or yet to come. The record of the cases already resolved for Costa Rican banana workers is less than impressive. The lawyers do not seem to be winning the hearts and minds of the banana workers.

For forty-five years, from 1934 to 1979, the state had inserted itself as a mediator in banana worker labor disputes while largely refraining from repression. The state helped counter some of the power that the banana companies held over their workers. It did this even as it used its legal tools and courts to stymie many labor actions in other sectors. The banana sector was different, however. While urban industries were operated with a large percentage of domestic ownership and capital, United Fruit was entirely a foreign operation. Although it provided employment and brought important tax revenues to the country, it represented a battle of "our" Costa Rican workers versus "their" foreign corporation.

The historic Labor Code provided many protections to workers. But in its regulations of collective bargaining and strikes, it was more often a deterrent, not a help, to labor activists. Employers, not unions, found these provisions to their liking. But the government leaders took exceptional actions in the banana sector, often ignoring the restrictions of the Labor Code

and carrying on negotiations, on behalf of banana workers to shift some of the power away from United Fruit, and later, other banana companies. The state did not care to lose the tax revenues or jobs of the banana exports. But the state always had leverage over United, and the other banana companies as well, in the form of land concession contracts. It also had the power to legislate over labor issues such as wages and it did so. Government leaders, for the most part, negotiated, pressured, or legislated concessions from United Fruit and other banana companies without effecting decreases in production.

What changed in 1979 was that the unions, too, became "the Other."³⁵ The battle became framed as "our" country versus "their" foreign, subversive, ideology. Many Costa Ricans were appalled by the hysteria. They thought it absurd that so many Costa Ricans believed an insurrection was possible. Many were appalled by the fascist tendencies of many opposed to the Communists and many were appalled by the violence, both advocated and real. But in the anti-communist fervor, amid the rabid, irresponsible, propaganda of the press against both the *Sandinistas* and the local Communists, many others both in and out of government were prepared to take forceful, even lethal, action, against the unions. The repression that occurred in the banana sector was the result of both the hysteria and those in the Communist Party who helped to fuel it.

Even if one can still find arch anti-communists in corporate boardrooms and among the editorial staff of *La Nación*, the hysteria of the 1980s has faded away. Unions now assert that they are not political. But

³⁵This term is borrowed from Edward Said. An analysis of this concept will be expanded upon in Chapter Seven.

the old paradigm of "our" Costa Rican workers versus "their" foreign corporations has not been effectively reestablished in the minds of enough Costa Ricans to facilitate the rehabilitation of the union movement. Those who struck in 1994 were largely Nicaraguan. They do not fit the old paradigm any more than the Communist Party does now. Nicaraguan refugees have filled large numbers of the new jobs. They are especially filling the most arduous jobs and are the most likely to create unrest. But they, too, are "the Other." If and when the old paradigm is reestablished in the minds of Costa Ricans, it is likely that the state will resume its role as a mediator helping the banana workers in the power struggle with their employers. It is not likely that the state will provide substantial assistance to banana workers or banana unions soon.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

The stories of the two export sectors that have unfolded in the preceding chapters reveal dramatically different relations of production, social organization, and what we might call the emotional states of those who toil in the fields. It has been 166 years since the first significant shipment of coffee was exported from Costa Rica. Although there have been tensions, a few brief strikes, and at least one small, but documented, riot, it is not an exaggeration to claim that relations in the coffee sector have been overwhelmingly calm throughout this long period. The few strikes have been insignificant. Workers do not burn or own the houses of large landowners. State police are a small and infrequent presence. The large landowners certainly do not employ private armies to keep workers in line. When smallholders have been upset with *beneficiadores*, they have not poisoned their wells or sacked their mills. The smallholders have carried out peaceful campaigns in the press and in the capital and have persuaded the state to intervene. In recent years, coffee wage-workers have actually *joined* many of their employers in unionizing and carrying out protests against policies of the state. These protests, too, have been non-violent.

In the banana sector, however, tension and strikes have been fairly constant features since even before Minor C. Keith shipped out his first 350 stems 118 years ago. Troops have been brought in numerous times and

there have been beatings, arrests, and deaths. Rocks have been thrown at police. A vice-president of United Fruit was shot at in 1934. Strikebreakers have been assaulted, and perhaps shot at, by strikers. In some strikes, railway track and other infrastructure have been destroyed by strikers. In recent times, police have quelled strikers with tear gas and automatic weapons.

It is not hard to see why these differences exist. For most of Costa Rica's history as a state, those in the coffee sector have lived relatively good lives. In the early days, when the crop first met with success, the lives of the peasants were good relative to their lives previously led. Glass windows and metal stoves started to become common in many homes. The poorest could replace dirt floors with wood. As Costa Rica established itself as the dominant grower and exporter of coffee, lives for those in the sector were good relative to those in other economic sectors and also good relative to those who labored in the coffee fields of neighboring states. Wages have been high. Landowners have striven to maintain good patron-client relations with those they have employed. Leslie Anderson's research demonstrates that coffee wage-workers have power to successfully negotiate for improved benefits or working conditions. There has always been abundant work.

There have always been other economic alternatives as well if circumstances forced one out of a job. Smallholders and permanent wage-workers have both supplemented their income with vegetable plots, a few poultry, and bartering. These supplements have helped keep many coffee cultivators from feeling desperate during economic slumps. Many have even found much of the work in the coffee fields to be satisfying. Small farmers

and wage-workers alike can often work side-by-side with friends and family. The temperatures are moderate and comfortable and the scenery is serene and even spectacular. When farmers have relied on urban labor to supplement their harvest labor forces, an appeal to the patriotic duty to bring in the national crop has no doubt contributed to a quiescent workforce.

In the banana plantations, life has always been hard. The climate of the coastal lowlands is sweaty and damp, particularly on the Atlantic side of the country. Malaria has brought torment and death. The physical work has often been dangerous, especially when carving out new plantations or laying railway tracks. It has always required endurance and strength. Hefting stems of bananas is backbreaking work. Living conditions have historically been deplorable and remain so for many. Housing has often consisted of open-air shacks. Men have toiled far away from their families. Many have come from other countries and many, especially in the early days, were never able to return to their homelands.

Even for those who live in the better housing and who have their families, they have nonetheless been subject to aerial sprayings of pesticides. What has drawn many men, and a few women, to this work has been the high wages that continue to the present. The wages have slipped at times, as in the late 1920s and early 1930s. But even when the pay has remained high, as it typically has, workers have often judged it insufficient to compensate them for their hardships. As often as strikes have occurred, it is quite possible that they would have been even more frequent had not United Fruit and the other banana corporations used so many tactics to divide workers and diminish solidarity.

These two export sectors have also shared some similarities. For most of the time since the late nineteenth century, the two have been the dominant exports of Costa Rica. And although manufactured goods now compete for export earnings, along with a wide variety of new specialty crops, bananas and coffee remain, by significant margins, the dominant agrarian exports. In both sectors, the state has found itself compelled at times to intervene in the relations of production and, in each case, has appropriated unto itself some of the power held by the dominant economic forces of each sector. But these similarities are few. Why are the differences so great?

Many variables account for the peaceful relations in the coffee sector. The overarching variable is the fact that pre-Colombian Costa Rica was sparsely settled. In the one region where a moderately substantial population existed, the Nicoyan peninsula, the *conquistadores* depopulated it by shipping its people as slaves to other parts of the colonial empire, leaving this area sparsely populated as well before most Spanish settlers arrived. Diseases brought by the conquerors decimated the remaining populations. This sparse indigenous population produced two, interrelated, demographic consequences of significance that have held true since the conquest. First, there has been a historical shortage of labor. Second, the colonial Costa Rican population was overwhelmingly of Spanish-European racial stock. Extending this second point, the *meseta central*, where most of the population has historically resided and which remains the economic and political heart of the country, has continued to remain fairly homogenous in its European racial heritage. The importance of these variables will be seen as the coffee and banana sectors are examined, in turn and together, in this chapter.

In the coffee sector, there are two types of cultivators, to borrow Jeffery Paige's term. They are smallholders and wage-workers. The relationship of smallholders and the labor shortage will be addressed first. When independence was handed to Costa Ricans in 1821, the labor shortage was not a factor in the decision of local administrators to cultivate and promote coffee. Coffee can be efficiently grown on large plantations as it is in many other countries and as it later came to be in Costa Rica as well. Coffee was selected because it grew well in the volcanic soil and temperate climate of the *meseta central*, because it was transportable to distant markets, and because officials sensed, correctly it turned out, a good market for the product.

The labor shortage very much *did* influence the decision to promote smallholdings. Coffee trees require five to eight years of maturity before they produce. Large landholders had no immediate means with which either to pay for labor or to coerce it. Even if the trees could have produced in a year or two, it is quite unlikely that the large landholders could have found the capital with which to entice laborers. Neither had they the money with which to organize a large, repressive, army. Land was abundant for the meager population of citizens. When land for subsistence farming was abundant, why would anyone accept inadequate wages to work either on someone else's farm or for an army, whether private or public? The options for the new officials were not between promoting smallholding or large estates. The choice, really, was between promoting smallholding or allowing the country to wallow in continued economic stagnation. The decision taken was definitely fortuitous and perhaps brilliant, but it was made within a very constrained set of alternatives.

The smallholding class was thus established. Even as technological, economic, and labor conditions allowed for the later development of large coffee estates and the consolidation of many farms, smallholdings persist. Over 32,000 coffee smallholders survive. (*Tico Times*, 6/25/93: 22) Many, indeed, prosper even as larger landholders have now captured 60 percent of the market. (Ibid.) Lest the picture of the coffee sector painted above seem too romantic, not all has been good for smallholders. They have known exploitation by *beneficiadores* and they have fought it. They have felt unjustly taxed and regulated by the state and they have fought on these fronts as well. But they have been remarkably restrained in their protests. Why haven't they burned down *beneficios*? Why haven't they rioted in front of, or in, the National Assembly? Why, as larger landholders have captured so much of the market, have smallholders refrained from demanding radical actions such as land reform that would break up the large estates?

It is with these questions that we turn to the theories of Jeffery Paige. The capital-land income combination component of his theories of agrarian social movements and unrest very accurately explains the behavior of these smallholders, and as well, holders of medium-sized farms as well. As outlined in Chapter One, Paige argues that the very act of landholding makes smallholders conservative by nature. His definition of "smallholders" could perhaps be more precise, but it seems to include what would be described as medium-sized landholders in Costa Rica, those who employ a handful or two of wage-workers. (Paige, 1975: 45-48) When smallholders have formed social movements, they have typically done so jointly with the medium-sized land-

holders. The use, below, of the term "smallholders" will be used for convenience, but should be interpreted as including medium-sized landholders.

Paige writes that "cultivating classes dependent on land are politically conservative and unable to form strong political organizations based on class solidarity." (1975: 45) They do not want to stir up the pot in such a way that they may find their own property in jeopardy. They eschew radical movements that may advocate a collectivization of landholdings. Even during the 1930s and through the 1970s, when the Communists of Costa Rica clearly pursued a social democratic agenda, the coffee smallholders found them too radical and avoided their organizing campaigns.

Paige argues that smallholders will pursue reforms that boost or protect the profits of their commodities. Because they are in competition with each other, Paige argues, smallholders will largely resist organizing even for these motives except during especially difficult economic periods. When the crisis passes, their organizational efforts will usually dissipate, unless the organization provides some ongoing business purpose such as the providing of insurance or bulk discount purchases. The history of Costa Rica's coffee smallholders fits well with this description.

When smallholders organize, the targets of a commodity reform movement should, according to Paige, be "an upperclass consisting of middlemen and moneylenders." (1975: 47) In the coffee sector, these have traditionally been the *benefidiadores*. Their coffee mills were first established in the latter half of the nineteenth century. By the last few decades, the mills had greatly facilitated the concentration of land and capital and the *beneficiadores* solidified their status as an economic elite. The early twentieth century saw

increased class tensions between *beneficiadores* and smallholders. The former were using their oligopolistic powers to unfair advantage. Organizational efforts by the smallholders to fight this exploitation were scattered and weak. As the Great Depression exacerbated the smallholders' conditions, they resorted to public protests. Although the protests never escalated to anything more radical than rallies in the Capital, a sympathetic press and a national romantic vision of the smallholders brought about state intervention, diffusing the crisis for the time.

When their incomes and livelihoods are at stake, smallholders have shown that they will protest against whoever they feel is responsible. The most significant protests of the smallholders have been directed not at the *beneficiadores*, but at the state, itself. When the state attempted a substantial tax bite from the smallholders' incomes in the early 1950s, the smallholders felt betrayed and again protested. Taking their own romantic image seriously, they again played on the sympathies of the public and won their case. Paige does not define the state as a non-cultivator in the capital-land income combination, but in Costa Rica the state has significantly supplanted the *beneficiadores'* power over the smallholders. It is now primarily the state that regulates and issues credit to small farmers. The state's power to tax is the power to affect the commodity profits of the smallholders. The power of the *beneficiadores* over the smallholders has been largely transferred to the state. When the smallholders organize to protest, it is logically the state that is the target of the protest. On the surface, this does not fit with the definition given by Paige for the capital-land income

combination, but the relationship of power is consistent with what is defined. The frequency and the objectives of the protests are similarly consistent.

When, by the 1950s and 60s, many *beneficiarios* had learned how to circumvent the reforms initiated by the state in the 1930s, the coffee *beneficio* cooperative movement was instituted, for smallholders, to remedy the problem. The smallholders themselves played only a small role in the creation of the facilitating legislation. They did not orchestrate a grand political movement. The state itself took the initiative to further, and significantly, change the balance of power between the *beneficiarios* and the smallholders. Although effected incrementally, the state sponsored cooperative movement pre-empted any protest movement over the unjust treatment of the smallholders by the *beneficiarios* that might have eventually emerged.

Perhaps ironically, the coops created under the state initiative, have themselves become a vehicle for smallholder protest against the state. FEDECOOP, the overarching federation of coffee *beneficio* cooperatives, has challenged the government in court over taxes. Importantly, coffee smallholders have remained organized in the coops first and foremost for business reasons. All of this is quite consistent with Paige's predictions regarding the behavior of smallholders in the capital-land income combination. In Paige's words, "political organization usually forms around some organizational structure introduced from outside the agrarian community or developed for some other economic purpose." (1975: 46) He cites the development of the American Farm Bureau in the United States, "the strongest and most persistent of all American farmer's movements, [which]

was largely the result of the direct efforts of the United States government." (Ibid.)

World economic conditions, including depressed coffee prices, sent smallholder incomes downward in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The smallholders again relied on their image as the cultural icons of the country and asked the state to rescue them. When the state ignored the polite requests and protests, the smallholders, in alliance with others, nearly shut down the country by blockading highways and preventing agricultural products from reaching the urban areas. The blockades might be classified by some as rather radical, but it is important to recount that the smallholders repeatedly tried much more conservative actions first. They led up to the blockades quite incrementally and then, still, refrained from violence or radical demands. They sought rather minimal economic assistance and achieved it.

Whether protesting against *beneficiadores* or against the state, the demands of the smallholders have not been radical or destabilizing. Both the *beneficiadores* and the state have had the resources to make concessions and have done so. One reason that smallholder protests do not escalate, Paige argues, is that they are not-zero sum. The *beneficiadores* and the state, both, have made concessions while continuing to make profits from the smallholders.

Historical conditions explain the origin of the coffee smallholders. Unfair exploitation and threats to their profits make obvious why they might protest. The theories associated with the capital-wages income combination, as proffered by Paige, explain when they organize and how they will act. The

one discovered instance of unrest that contradicts the pattern is that of the 1992 riot and looting by smallholders who targeted the failed *beneficio* coop. This incident clearly does not fit within the expectations proffered by Paige's theories. But over the long history of relations of production of smallholders with *beneficiadores* and the state, this is clearly an isolated incident and an exception to the pattern.¹ Overall, Paige's set of theories effectively and persuasively explain the actions of coffee smallholders in Costa Rica.

Coffee wage-workers have shared the conservatism of coffee smallholders. They too have resisted organizing efforts by the Communists. They too have refrained from carrying out significant or ongoing protests. They have carried out a few weak, brief strikes in the 1930s and apparently in the late 1970s as well. In the 1980s, some wage-workers of medium sized estates joined their employers in a common organization and together blockaded highways in the episodes noted above. How do these social movements fit with what is expected according to the theories of Paige?

To answer this question, we must first note that not all coffee wage-workers fit into Paige's income combination types. This is because they work for two categories of employers. Some work for large landowners who are also *beneficiadores*. By virtue of the capital investment made in the *beneficios*, these land and mill owners meet the definition of "non-cultivators" in the capital-wages income combination type as defined by Paige. All other coffee wage-workers would fit into a "land-wage" income combination. In Paige's definition of the land-wage income combination, however, wage-workers earn low salaries. Further, such low wage work is enforced by repressive police or

¹There may very well be other obscure cases of similar collective violence on the part of coffee smallholders. If they exist, the fact that they are obscure is indicative of their rarity.

armies. These conditions do not apply in the Costa Rican coffee sector and these workers, thus, fail to fit into the land-wages income combination as defined by Paige. Further, they fail to fit into any of his other three income combination types.

Some 60,000 persons are employed as permanent wage-workers in the coffee sector. (*Tico Times*, 6/25/93: 22) The number of wage-workers can swell to 200,000 during the three to four month harvest season stretching over November through February. (*Ibid.*, 11/20/87: 23) It is not clear how many would fit in the capital-wages income combination, but it is clear that the number would be substantial. Some wage-workers are employed on the approximately 2,100 medium sized coffee farms that produce 23 percent of the crop. Most coffee wage-workers are employed on the approximately 700 largest estates that range in size from 20 hectares to more than 200 hectares and which produce 37 percent of the harvest. (*Ibid.*, 6/25/93: 22; Hall, 1985: 161) There were 69 private *beneficios* in 1979 and their ownership would be found among the largest landholders. (Reventos Vorst, 1983: 11) The capital-wages income combination would apply only to the relations of production on the estates of these 69 *beneficio* owners. While the exact numbers of permanent employees on these estates are not known, we can deduce that the numbers would be quite large, perhaps one half or more of the 60,000 permanent wage-workers in the sector.

The wage-workers involved in the peasant union movement (together with smallholders) of the 1980s worked on medium sized farms. They should not fit the capital-wages income combination as defined by Paige. The sketchy data available regarding the coffee strikes of the 1930s and late

1970s does not indicate whether the farms involved were large or smaller or whether the owners were *beneficiadores* or not. It is also not even clear if the workers who struck were permanent workers or seasonal workers. What is known is that the strikes were weakly organized and brief. The data thus offers little with which to engage the strength of Paige's theories as regards the capital-wages income combination. But since, as argued in Chapter One, his theories only predict what types of social movements or unrest should transpire *if* such transpire, the lack of clear evidence of unrest in this sector can neither infirm the theory.

Is it a failure of Paige's theory that most coffee wage-workers (when one includes the seasonal workers) do not fit into any of his income combinations? The answer can be "no," as his objective is to identify the classes of workers prone to carry out social movements and unrest and to identify what type of unrest they would participate in. It seems that *these* wage-workers are not prone to much unrest, given the conditions of their employment.

Further, while it is true that these coffee wage-workers who work for land dependent employers do not meet the definition of Paige's land-wages income combination, one could argue that *perhaps* they approximate workers as defined in Paige's capital-wages combination. In the capital-wages income combination, the non-cultivators have room to make concessions and will typically do so. Landed farmers dependent solely on profits from harvested coffee typically have smaller profit margins than *beneficiadores*. They do not,

thus, parallel the non-cultivators of the capital-wages combination.² But because wages in the sector are high, workers might perceive that their employers have the ability, correctly or not, to make wage or benefit increases.

If one can accept this leap, then one can conflate all wage-workers of the coffee sector into "cultivators" of the capital-wages income combination. Doing so, one could then look at the strikes that have occurred and find at least some thin support, within this sector, for the capital-wages income combination component of Paige's theories. One could even look further to the evidence provided by Anderson wherein small groups or individual coffee wage-workers withhold services until or unless working conditions improve. Such actions approximate strikes. The workers are seeking labor reforms, as Paige predicts "cultivators" of the capital-wage income combination would do.

How then does one explain the actions of these wage-workers of medium sized coffee farms when they joined the *UPANacional* union together with their employers? Is not the social movement associated with this a commodity reform movement? The answer is affirmative and this is consistent with what Paige would predict for small landholders. Consistent with this, it is largely small and medium sized landholders who are active in the movement. But the wage-earners clearly see this as a way to enhance the ability of their employers to pay them higher wages, or to prevent the disappearance of their jobs. The goals of the wage-workers, then, are labor

²Of course, the non-cultivators of the capital-wages income combination may not always have the room to make concessions. The disastrous 1984 banana workers' strike is a case in point.

reforms consistent with what Paige predicts for wage-worker "cultivators" in the capital-wages income combination.

If one stretches the capital-wages income combination definition as suggested, one can find support for this component of Paige's theory. It can only, of course, be seen as very qualified support. These workers are far from radical. They have resisted the recruitment efforts of the Communists. They have resisted unionizing. They do, however, strike -- even if seldom and in quite limited fashion. Paige theorizes that cultivators of the capital-wages income combination *would* be enticed by radicals and would unionize as well as strike. But, importantly, he posits that this is their expected behavior only *if* conditions induce them to form a social movement. Conditions in Costa Rica do not strongly induce coffee wage-workers to form such social movements. Support for the capital-wages income component of the theory can be found here but only weakly. For strong support, we must turn to the banana sector.

The capital-wages and capital-land income combinations, found in the coffee sector, are both found in the banana sector as well. We will see below that Paige's theories also explain the actions of the cultivators in this sector, even though they act with different scales of intensity. As in the coffee sector, the banana sector also has farmers who do not have capital investments in processing equipment but who also employ some wage-workers. Again, the landowners and wage-workers fit an apparent "land-wages" income combination, but do not meet Paige's specific definition for this combination because there are not low salaries enforced by repressive forces. We find a fourth apparent income combination type in the banana sector

that, at first glance, does not parallel relations of production in the coffee sector and can not be found among any of the four income combination types found by Paige. This last combination is that of landless subcontractors who hire wage-workers. It might be called a wages-wages income combination. These four types, or apparent types, of income combinations will be examined below, beginning with the last and proceeding in reverse order to the first.

What may appear to be a distinct wages-wages income type is actually the capital-wages income combination. The use of landless subcontractors to employ wage-workers, typically for the hard work of establishing new plantations, is a long established phenomenon in the banana sector. The evidence demonstrates that it is a creative tool employed by banana corporations and intended, at a minimum, to hinder unionization by dispersing workers among different "employers." Some banana companies are further using this tactic to deny workers full wages and benefits.

The strike in Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí in 1994 (Chapter Six) exemplifies this situation. Most of the striking wage-workers apparently were employed by such subcontractors. Although these workers had received paychecks from various subcontractors, however, they clearly understood that the Geest Caribbean corporation was their employer. Striking together with some workers whose paychecks were signed by Geest directly, the contract workers were demanding improved working conditions, pay, and benefits not from the subcontractors, but from Geest. The Labor Ministry negotiated with Geest, not with the sub-contractors. The capital-wages income combination clearly applies here and the striking banana worker

"cultivators" were seeking labor reforms precisely as Paige predicts they would.

Very little has been discovered in the literature or press accounts available for this study about the wage-workers who work for the landed, "independent" banana farmers and we can only draw tentative conclusions about how, when, and why these wage-workers participate in social movements in Costa Rica. The only illustration in this study that makes a moderate reference to them is that of the 1934 *gran huelga* -- the great strike. Demands made by the strike leadership included increased wages for these workers. The strikers also demanded changes on the part of United Fruit that would facilitate the increased wages. It seems apparent that the strikers understood that the "independent" farmers who employed these wage-workers were not really independent, but very much under the power of United Fruit.

In essence, even though these farmers were landed, from the perspective of their employees, the farmers were not very different from the subcontractors just discussed. The wage-workers employed by these farmers understood that a wage increase was impossible unless United Fruit, which had immense power over the landed farmers, gave greater payments to the farmers. In this sense, the wage-workers saw the conditions of their employment to be significantly dependent on the policies of United Fruit. Once again, the apparent income combination category -- land-wages -- seems incorrect.³ The "real" income combination, *from the perspective of the wage-*

³It is also incorrect because, as with the apparent land-wages income combination in the coffee sector, the workers here too were not receiving low wages nor were low wages enforced by a repressive army or police presence.

workers, in this instance at least, is once again that of capital-wages. And again, consistent with what Paige predicts for this category, the workers pursued labor reforms and participated in a strike.

In arguing that the capital-wages income combination applies in this case, it is stressed that it applies because it is the income combination *perceived* by the wage-workers. It is their *perception* of the relationship, after all, that determines their actions. They perceived, in the 1934 strike, that United Fruit was responsible, in great measure, for their wages and they struck against United Fruit. The evidence indicates that this perception was correct. This is consistent with the findings above where it is argued that coffee wage-workers employed on smaller estates or farms without processing equipment *perceive* their employers to have the ability to negotiate wages and benefits. From the perspective of the coffee wage-workers, the relationship is akin to that described by Paige in the capital-wages income combination, and the workers act accordingly when wages and benefits are judged to be less than adequate or fair.

The employers of these wage-workers, the landed farmers, are cultivators as defined by the capital-land income combination. But they also correctly perceived themselves as dependent on United Fruit. The 1934 strike is also the case where the most detail about these small and medium sized farmers is available. While also dependent on the Fruit Company, the landholders acted differently than did their employees. The evidence indicates that the landholders passively supported the goals of the strike that would improve their lot. They supported the demands that United pay them more and that arbitrary purchasing measures be eliminated through state regu-

lation. These are the types of commodity reforms Paige predicts of smallholders in the capital-land income combination. In spite of their passive support for these demands, *in action* they were conservative. The landed farmers did not actively support the strike. Just as Paige argues is true for smallholders in the capital-land income combination, these small to medium landholders had too much to risk by participation. Their farms would go under if United refused to buy their fruit any longer. They also had established families and could face the disastrous consequences of deportation should they rock the boat. This seems to lend further, if limited, support to Paige's theories regarding the capital-land income combination.

Other factors influenced the conservative stance of these farmers as well, however. These Afro-Costa Rican farmers were influenced by the conservative ideology of Marcus Garvey. Racial animosity also prevented a strong solidarity between these black farmers and the largely Hispanic strikers and union leadership. Thus, although their action was consistent with what Paige might predict based on their status as landholders, one cannot readily attribute their action (or lack of action) solely or even primarily to this variable. However, neither does the evidence weaken Paige's theories regarding the capital-land income combination. Further, when one looks at the banana sector over its entire history, the smallholders, of which there have been many, have been notably absent from the very many reports of banana strikes uncovered in this research. This has held true even as Hispanics have made up an increasing share of the banana smallholders since the 1950s. In 1957, United administrators demonstrated that they understood the conservatizing power of landholding. They used this under-

standing to their advantage when they quieted strike rumblings in United's Atlantic cacao farms by quickly leasing out the lands to newly "independent" growers.

Already touched on above, the relations of production that have involved the most workers over the history of the banana export sector have been those that fit neatly into Paige's capital-wages income combination. The wage-workers of this combination have been radical as Paige predicts they would be. In fact, they have long been considered the most radical workers in Costa Rica. Why, then, did they abandon the Communist Party when it advocated insurrection? Why did not the banana workers follow, *en masse*, the revolutionary example of neighboring Nicaragua? While Paige asserts that wage-workers in the capital-wages income combination are likely to follow radical leadership, he writes that "the movement's goals are limited to questions of wages and working conditions, and it demands neither the radical redistribution of property nor the seizure of state power." (1975: 49) Further, when this income combination prevails, "the industrial upper classes [are] willing [and able] to deploy their considerable economic power to subvert radical leadership and to divert revolutionary movements into reformist channels." (Ibid.) The long general history of the banana sector as well as the details of the 1980s fit these descriptions.

Revolutionary movements, according to Paige, are fueled when the battle is zero-sum, when the upper class is unable or unwilling to make concessions sufficient to diffuse the crisis. The Somoza regime and its economic cronies of Nicaragua were unwilling to make sufficient concessions to the various groups that joined to carry the revolution forward. In Costa

Rica, banana wage-workers have repeatedly sought labor reforms as Paige predicts they would. And they have repeatedly resorted to strikes, as Paige predicts that they would. United Fruit, the other banana corporations, and the Costa Rican government often expressed their dislike for the Communist Party, but to use the words of President Jiménez in 1934, the state and the corporations were, collectively, willing to "treat with Communists" while they represented labor demands regarding wages, benefits, and working conditions.

When, however, some in the Communist Party advocated insurrection in the 1980s, the state and the industry together offered an organizational alternative, *solidarismo*, to the radical unions. The workers took the opportunity. The state and the corporations sought to crush the Communist Party. Even as workers suffered, and some cases died, in the process, the state and the industry offered concessions to the workers. In addition to facilitating *solidarismo* associations, the state leased some of United Fruit's banana plantations on the Pacific coast after the corporation shut down production. And it offered initiatives to corporations that successfully and dramatically expanded the areas devoted to bananas on the Atlantic coast. Banana workers suffered. And the evidence strongly suggests that *solidarismo* will not sufficiently replace the representation of unions. But the concessions made were sufficient to "divert" workers away from an incipient revolutionary movement.

In the last decade, workers, represented by attorneys, have pursued an unusual strategy of suing chemical companies and Standard Fruit in the United States for health problems resulting from exposure to dibromochloropropane (DBCP). Unions claiming to represent banana workers have joined

coalitions with environmental groups, ecotourism businesses, and others, to successfully bring about environmental improvements on banana plantations. Neither of these tactics fits traditional forms of protest as described by Paige. But these actions are nonetheless consistent with the goals of social movements the Paige argues wage-workers will pursue in the capital-wages income combination. Consistent with the goals of other protests in the banana sector, these efforts seek labor reforms in the form of compensation and improved working conditions. Paige's theories very well explain the nature of unrest carried out by the banana workers over time. In every respect, the examination of the banana wage-workers' history offers very strong support for Paige's theories for the capital-wages income combination.

The cases examined in Costa Rica by this study collectively provide support for the theories put forth by Paige in *Agrarian Revolution*. The theories associated with the capital-land income combination are strongly supported by the examination of the coffee smallholders with weaker support offered by the case of smallholders in the banana sector. The theories associated with the capital-wages income combination are strongly supported by the evidence and analysis of the wage-workers in the banana sector and additional weak support can be found by examining the wage-workers of the coffee sector. Even where the evidence is weak, it is significant that the cumulative evidence does not contravene the theories.

This analysis also makes manifest the importance of the longitudinal component of this study. Paige asserts that "cultivators" in the capital-wages income combination are prone to radicalism. If one looked at the banana sector only over the last ten years, one would find almost no union

membership and anti-communist feelings among many wage-workers. Only a longer historical examination places these facts in perspective, uncovers the reasons for these facts, and reveals that they do not fit the overall historical pattern. When Leslie Anderson and Mitchell Seligson evaluate the attitudes of Costa Rican cultivators they imply that an advantage of their study is that they 'test the Paige thesis with data collected at a time very close to that in which Paige published his theory.' (1994: 945) *Agrarian Revolution* was published in 1975, just prior to the coffee strikes of the late 1970s. It was the calm before the storm and Anderson and Seligson seem to have missed the storm. For this reason (among others) their snapshot failed to identify the real patterns of social movement organization that this long historical study has been able to capture.

Again, it is important to stress that Paige explains how "cultivators" will organize and act *when other variables incite and allow them to act*. Put in social science terminology, the income combinations are 'necessary but not sufficient' variables in explaining four types of agrarian social movements. A close reading of Paige's text makes this implicit. Paige can be faulted for not making it explicit, but those who fail to understand this can be faulted too for not reading the text closely enough. The other variables may be absent for long periods. Only a historically long study can sufficiently identify the patterns in some cases. Further, where the evidence is weak, the very fact that it holds up or is not contradicted over such a long historical examination makes it stronger. The banana smallholders, for example, have been even more conservative than have been the coffee smallholders. This is still consistent with what Paige predicts and the evidence lends strength to

Paige's theories because this pattern of conservative restraint has apparently prevailed over the entirety of the century now ending.

The value of case study research as a compliment to quantitative research is also made manifest. This detailed examination reveals clearly that real world relations of production do not always fit neatly into idealized typologies. Cultivators who might appear to fall under the land-wages income combination in both the coffee and banana sectors were shown to more accurately fit under the capital-wages income combination. This demonstrates how difficult it can be to convert real world relations of production into ideal types. It demonstrates that Paige's typologies are far more complex than can be conveyed in a simplistic summary, such as presented in Table 1.2 in Chapter One, or more simply yet in the widely referred to matrix that Paige offers, himself, early in *Agrarian Revolution*. (1975: 11) Some of the relations of production examined in this study strongly fit the idealized typologies proffered by Paige. Through the historical case study method, other relations of production were shown to roughly fit the idealized typologies even though they superficially appeared to be otherwise.⁴ Collectively, the conclusions reached here demonstrate the complexity of Paige's set of theories, but they have, ultimately, also confirmed the usefulness of these theories as explanatory tools.

Not all of the four income-combination types are present in Costa Rica. This study also does not cover all of the agrarian sectors in Costa Rica. In these respects, it can not completely test the theories postulated in

⁴Gary Hawes (1990), analyzing export sectors in the Philippines, provides another test of Paige's theories that also demonstrate that real world relations of production must be thoroughly analyzed before one can understand how they might or might not fit into Paige's typologies.

Agrarian Revolution. But while many have engaged and debated the book's theories, there have been very few actual tests of the theories using independent evidence. Of the small number of tests, two have used Costa Rica as case studies and have arrived at conclusions opposite of those reached here. (Anderson, 1993; Anderson and Seligson, 1994) In Chapter One, the methodological problems of these previous efforts were discussed. The additional evidence and analysis provided in the chapters that have followed should be sufficient to thoroughly refute the conclusions of these two previous studies in regards to the Costa Rican case.

When evaluating the intensity of unrest, the actions of the state become part of the equation. Actions taken by plantation strikers in different countries, or in the same country at different times, may be very similar. But the responses of the states can vary dramatically to these similar worker manifestations. Why will one state mediate while another resorts to repression? Why will the same state, faced with a similar type of protest, resort to repression one time and not another? Paige primarily seeks to explain the forms that agrarian social movements take. He also contributes some insight as to when a state will resort to repression. For example, a state is likely to use repression in the land-wages combination because battles between non-cultivators and cultivators are zero-sum and because the non-cultivators typically have power, or control, over the states' repressive forces. A state is less likely to use repression in the capital-wages income combination because there is room for the non-cultivator to make concessions. Paige does not explain well, however, why a state will respond to similar forms of unrest by the same type of "cultivators" in differing forms at

different times. In Costa Rica, why, for example, has the state responded to banana strikes with repression at times and with mediation and support of the strikers at other times?

State repression in Costa Rica fits a pattern that was previewed at the end of Chapter Six. Examining the histories of the two export sectors examined in this study, one sees that repression has occurred in two waves in the banana sector and not at all in the coffee sector. As argued in Chapter Six, the state has used repression against banana workers when they have been perceived as "the Other." As used by Edward Said in his acclaimed book, *Orientalism* (1979), the Other is a concept employed by those with power over others to facilitate the domination of them. In *Orientalism*, it is used to describe colonial and post-colonial Arabs and Islam *as perceived by* the British, French, and Americans. The Other, in Said's work, is the less than equal, and sometimes to be feared, "Oriental." Imperialism has been justified, in part, by ignoring the suffering of others because they are not quite as human as 'we' are. Racism is a strong component. Said writes of the views held by the colonizers:

Oriental or Arabs are . . . shown to be gullible, "devoid of energy and initiative," much given to "fulsome flattery," intrigue, cunning and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are "lethargic and

suspicious," and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race."⁵ (1979: 38-39)

This vision of the Other allowed the conquerors to rationalize their domination and exploitation of humans. Said adds that the conquered inhabitants were "analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or -- as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory -- taken over." (Ibid.: 207) Said uses the concept of the Other to explain imperialism and colonialism.

In Said's usage, the Other is a concept "premised upon exteriority," a construct created by those of the conquering powers, exterior to the land, people, and ideas that become the Other. (Ibid.: 20) The application of the concept will be different here, although there will be some similarities. As used in the present analysis the definition is less complex. At its most simple, it can be seen as a concept of 'they who are not us.' The Other changes over time in Costa Rica as does the basis for its otherness. But what is consistent is that the relative quality of otherness can either encourage or discourage the state to carry out repression.

The first wave of repression in the banana sector is that from the initiation of the railroad construction and banana production in the Atlantic lowlands through the early 1920s. The concept of the Other well explains the absence of Costa Rican concern as 4,000 workers, almost all foreign, died while laying the first twenty miles of the Atlantic railway. There was no humanitarian movement to *halt* the project. The government simply

⁵Said is quoting from Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, Britain's chief administrator in Colonial Egypt, from 1882 when England occupied Egypt and put down a nationalist rebellion, to 1907.

prohibited Costa Ricans from working in Limón Province because it was too dangerous. Countless others succumbed under the hardships over the years. There was no outcry of concern among 'white' Costa Ricans for the foreigners, mostly of other races, who were suffering and perishing.

Costa Rican troops supervised and helped maintain order among the immigrant workers in the emerging banana plantations. Troops killed unknown numbers of exploited Chinese 'Others' in 1874 so that the grand railroad scheme could continue. Troops wounded 48 West Indian 'Others' in 1910. In 1913, one West Indian banana worker was killed, two were wounded, and dozens beaten. In 1918, after wounding dozens and killing two, troops chased fleeing black strikers into the jungle where more possibly died in hiding. These are notable cases, but unrest and repression were somewhat regular features of the banana zone through the early 1920s. The only strikers in the sector during this period who were notably exempt from repression were 'fellow whites.' They were the Italians in 1888 and North Americans in the 1920s, all railroad workers. Not only did the state refrain from repressing the Italian strikers, but the Costa Rican public in the highlands rallied for their cause and the government mediated a solution.

The *gran huelga* of 1934 is notable, among other reasons, because the state used considerable restraint, relative to its previous repression of strikes in the sector, in spite of serious violence and provocation on the part of strikers. The Costa Rican population, for the first time since 1888, again rallied behind strikers of the banana zone. The strikers in 1934, of course, were largely Hispanic 'whites' and largely Costa Rican. In lieu of repression, the state intervened as a mediator on behalf of the banana workers. It was

the beginning of what would become a pattern of state mediation in banana labor disputes that would continue until 1979.

The concept of the Other can be used to understand the justification of repression. But it can also be used to help define 'ourselves.' In 1934, United Fruit became the Other. This target of the strike was a foreign corporation earning large profits on Costa Rican soil while exploiting Costa Rican citizens and paying low taxes. The striking banana workers were included in the circle of 'we Costa Ricans,' even though the strikers were led by radical Communists. The black, foreign, banana workers had been a greater Other than the Fruit Company.⁶ The Fruit Company was now a greater Other than the Hispanic Costa Rican workers. Laws were passed to contain the blacks in the Atlantic zone as banana production moved to the Pacific. The workers would continue to be 'our Costa Ricans.' This framework structured the state's relationship with the workers and the banana companies until 1979, when a second wave of repression began. At that time, as argued in Chapter Six the intensified radicalism of the Communist Party transformed the union movement into a greater Other than the foreign banana corporations. Exaggerated emphasis on the role of foreigners in the strikes further helped to transform strike organizers into the Other.

The concept of the Other helps explain when state repression is used, but it doesn't explain its intensity. State repression of banana workers in Costa Rica has brought about tragic consequences for many, but why has it, nonetheless, remained so restrained in comparison to that of other states?

⁶Descendants of West Indian blacks, born in Costa Rica, were denied citizenship until after the 1948 civil war. Figueres facilitated their naturalization, partly as a reward for their support during the Civil War, and partly in the hopes of securing their 19,000 plus votes. (Purcell, 1993: 82-83)

The political culture of Costa Rica is probably part of the answer. The political divisions within Costa Rica and within the presidential administrations during the 1980s indicate that at least some Costa Ricans thought that repression was not the Costa Rican way. These sentiments were shared with me by many Costa Ricans I talked to during the period, including the then elder statesman, José Figueres Ferrer.⁷ There was sufficient support within the administrations of that time, however, that repression was carried out. It seems likely that political culture played a role in the restraint. In the hysteria of the time, there was a popular sense that the Communists were destabilizing Costa Rica and needed to be stopped. While those in the paramilitary organizations would have supported serious repression, most Costa Ricans probably would not have.

Costa Ricans take pains to stress their differences from the other Central American states. They cite, among many other distinctions, the histories of repressive dictatorships in the other states. Repression is not a part of the Costa Rican history, they believe, and they are proud of that. Their recounting of history is, of course, incorrect. Even unionists who deplore the repression of 1979 and after have a collective absence of memory regarding the state repression in the banana zone prior to 1934. Beyond those killed or beaten by state forces, the very conditions of the labor were repressive and thousands died. Three centuries earlier, the colony of Costa Rica was established via the conquest, and near elimination, of the indigenous population.

⁷Interview with author, 5/5/87 at Figueres' *La Lucha* home.

Repression is a part of Costa Rican history. Nonetheless, it is also true that the repression on which the country was founded was of a small scale *relative to* that elsewhere in the Spanish Empire. The relative scale of the conquest and the fact that present day descendants of the pre-colonial population are almost invisible helps Costa Ricans forget that that violence is part of their history. The ignorance of repression in the banana sector prior to 1934, and the fact that most Afro-Costa Rican descendents of these oppressed workers continue to live distant from most of the Hispanic population helps Costa Ricans forget that violence is part of their history.

The fact that all state repression since that time has been very restrained by regional standards helps contribute to the belief that repression is not the Costa Rican way. In fact, owing to the relative historical scale, there is some degree of truth to this belief. Further, it does not matter that the smaller scale of repression of the indigenous population is due to the fact that there was simply less opportunity. Its smallness and early passing has allowed Costa Ricans to live without its ongoing presence. Large indigenous populations and ongoing tensions in Chiapas in Mexico, Huehuetenango in Guatemala, and Chalatenango in El Salvador keep the memories of the repression alive because the oppression of the indigenous peoples is both alive and visible.

In Costa Rica, the small indigenous population continues to suffer, too, from ongoing inequality. Most indigenous peoples were only granted citizenship and rights to social security benefits in the 1990s. (*Tico Times*, 3/15/91: 5; 9/8/95: 1) Most live in poverty. But the indigenous population is also mostly invisible on remote "reserves" and makes little noise. The racism of

Hispanic Costa Ricans is no less than that of Hispanics elsewhere in Central America. But Costa Ricans can more easily forget what they have done. The *myth* of a peaceful past helps to contribute to the *reality* of a relatively non-violent present.

The political culture of non-violence, or at least of restrained violence, is apparent in Costa Rica. The roots of this aspect of the political culture are the same as those already identified above in the discussion of the coffee sector. The dominant variable that has moderated class relations in the coffee sector has been the historical shortage of labor. All other variables lead back to it. The labor shortage can be traced to the historically small population of Costa Rica. And this, as we saw in Chapter Two, is a direct result of the fact that there was little indigenous labor to exploit. There is nothing inherently peaceful in the relations of production of coffee. The *matanza* of 1930s El Salvador is but one example that makes this readily apparent.

State mediation is one factor that has contributed to the calmness of the sector in Costa Rica. But mediation can work where the non-cultivators of Jeffery Paige's typologies are able to make concessions. Both the capital-land and the capital-wages income combinations that Paige describes have a strong historical presence in the coffee sector. The smallholdings and the strong patron-client relations that help make these income combinations are largely a product of the historical labor shortage. We come to the beginning, again and again. Some in Costa Rica refer to the political culture of non-violence as the "coffee culture." There is legitimacy in this. The fact that, throughout its history, most of Costa Rica's population and political leader-

ship have come from the peaceful coffee-producing *meseta central* has contributed to the political culture. The roots of this coffee culture, however, pre-date the establishment of the coffee sector.

State mediation and the use of repression are but two of the ways that the state, since its founding, has influenced and intervened in the relations of production in the coffee and banana sectors. Numerous key actions such as these have influenced the extent of agrarian calm and unrest. Critical among these was the very early decision to promote coffee smallholdings when there was insufficient labor to work the large *haciendas*. As already argued, these decisions were largely the result of greater structural restraints derived from the historical shortage of indigenous labor.

Other important decisions of the state have also been due to such constraints. The establishment of the banana sector was an indirect consequence of the state's decision to build the Atlantic railroad. Development of the Atlantic lowlands was one of the goals of the state in deciding to build the railway. It was an important decision with important consequences. But the institutionalization of banana plantations and the concomitant relations of production were largely beyond the control of the state. The state acquiesced to Minor Keith's demands for land largely so that the state's goal of building the railway would be realized. The state prohibited its citizenry from working -- and dying -- in the steamy, malarial, lowlands. But it certainly did not have the power to force Costa Rican labor to work in the hazardous conditions either. The state's facilitation of the importation of foreign labor can be traced ultimately, again, to the lack of indigenous labor available.

The state's enactments of significant social welfare programs in the 1940s and afterwards can be seen as important state decisions that have lessened class differences, and thus class conflict, across economic sectors. The state was acquiescing to the demands of the citizenry. But what other options did it have? It had an insufficient army with which to repress the population that was growing increasingly restless. This too, has its roots in the labor shortage. When the colonial empire collapsed, it left no significant military structure in the new state of Costa Rica. There was no indigenous population to control, as in other colonies. When the coffee oligarchy later established a military, it learned that it was expensive and consumed too much of the scarce labor. It was pared it down to a small core again. It is also safe to say that a small military also fit well, by the 1940s, with the political culture.

And regardless of personal ideologies about the welfare state, politicians such as Rafael Calderón Guardia and Manuel Mora were thinking very much of future elections when they pursued these reforms. The very fact that elections held politicians accountable to this degree is a result of reforms enacted by the state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Why did Costa Rica, alone in Central America, enact such reforms? Demands for electoral reforms are common around the world wherever and whenever a middle class emerges. In some places, such as current day Indonesia or China, these demands are kept in check by strong militaries. Costa Rica's military was staffed mostly with temporary soldiers largely drawn from the same emergent middle class that was demanding reforms.

Again, the Costa Rican elite had little choice but to acquiesce to these demands.

In all that has been examined and revealed in this study, the enactment of the coffee *beneficio* cooperatives in the latter half of the twentieth century is one area where the state had great latitude to do otherwise. There was no significant movement from the coffee smallholders for the state sponsorship of these cooperatives. Idealists within the government initiated the program. Officials over a series of presidential administrations developed and strengthened the program. The cooperatives very significantly changed the balance of power between the traditional, private, *beneficiadores* and the small and medium coffee growers. The state very well could have enacted much more limited reforms, akin to those enacted in the 1930s, to curb the exploitative actions of the private *beneficiadores*.

Could the state enact similar reforms in the banana sector to change the relations of production there that continually cause such tension and unrest? Since the banana corporations operate largely with state concessions on state lands, could not the state unilaterally divide the land into smallholdings and, as well, foster banana processing cooperatives? Could the state replicate in the banana sector what has contributed to agrarian calm in the coffee sector? It would be difficult to do so. Banana smallholders have existed since at least the end of the nineteenth century and have never done well. In many, and perhaps most, cases, a factor contributing to poor production has been that banana corporations have fostered smallholding on lands that were no longer producing at their maximum efficiency, due to increased diseases, pests, and soil exhaustion. The corporations have been

able to transfer the costs of production to the smallholder and have been able to purchase the fruit for processing at costs that leave little room for large profits by the smallholders.

There is at least one example, however, of the state organizing ownership of land by former banana plantation workers. Following the pullout of United Fruit in the southern Pacific coast area in the late 1980s, the state leased lands to small banana growers and fostered the development of some cooperatives. Steve Marquardt, a researcher who has recently visited the region, reports that the coops "still exist, but are in awful shape." (Email, 2/15/98) The small growers have apparently had to depend on larger, foreign, processors. Exploitative relations have materialized. (*Tico Times*, 8/19/94: 20)

Banana production is shifting agriculture on a large scale and requires substantial capital investment. It is possible that the state could foster cooperative plantations on the scale of corporate operations now in existence. It is worthy of examination. If economically feasible, there are reasons that the state would find this an attractive option. First, there is continued resentment of foreign investment in Costa Rica, even though the state has strongly encouraged it in several economic sectors, including the banana sector. Secondly, officials in government no doubt understand the conservatizing influence of ownership. This would most likely lead to a calmer banana sector. Elected officials have encouraged foreign investment in order to stimulate the economy and to provide increased employment. The foreign corporations have, of course, brought the capital with them. And therein lies the difficulty for the state. It is unlikely that the state and the worker-

investors could come up with the necessary capital to develop the extensive processing infrastructure. Loans would be required, but where would they come from? The international lending community is supported, indirectly, and strongly influenced by, multinational corporate capital. Such loans would be against the interests of such corporate capital.

The International Monetary Fund, the Interamerican Development Bank, and other such lenders who have helped Costa Rica climb out of the economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s have put pressure on the state to dismantle the large array of state owned industries that have been established over the years following the 1948 Civil War. The state has complied. In addition to the pressure from lenders, legislators had to face the fact that the state companies were losing money. FERTICA, the state fertilizer company discussed in Chapter Four, was the last to be dismantled. Legislators begrudgedly carried out the reforms. They took small cheer from their inclusion of provisions preferencing investment from Costa Ricans in the newly privatized companies. A poll conducted in September 1996 showed very strong public support for the social welfare programs of the last half-century. Eighty-two percent supported the continuance of all past programs, even though 68 percent agreed with the statement that the social guarantees are too costly for employers. Ninety-five percent supported state subsidized credit for farmers. (*Tico Times*, 3/12/93: 28; 8/27/93: 26; 10/18/96: 16) To borrow money for a "socialist" enterprise such as large, worker owned plantations, would be inconsistent with the present policies of the international lenders. It is not likely that the state can either create workable smallholdings on the model of the coffee sector or create a new, alternative,

structure of relations of production that can lessen class tensions in the banana sector.

It would also be very difficult to transfer the Costa Rican 'model' to other states. As has been shown, the relatively calm agrarian class relations are largely a result of historical variables beyond the control of the state. In states where agrarian elites enforce brutal exploitation with repressive forces, change is not likely to happen without revolutions. Most revolutionary efforts fail amidst more violence. And successful revolutions must typically repress the oppressors. Revolutions may be necessary to overcome tyrannical powers. But even if the violence is a more just variety, it does not go away.

This study has only examined unrest in the two largest agrarian export sectors of Costa Rica. Others, including the cattle sector, which occupies the most territory, and which accounts for much inequality of land distribution, have been left out. It is likely that much of the analysis made in these pages can apply to the other sectors as well. There is a long history of tense relations of production between *hacendados* and small farmers, for example, in Guanacaste. Evictions, land invasions, protests, and violence are all part of the history, past and present, but so here too, is the state's history of restrained repression and mediation. (i.e., Gudmundson, 1983; Edelman, 1992) These stories all present questions for future research.

Land invasions have occurred, too, on abandoned banana lands on both coasts. Since the departure of United Fruit from the southern Pacific coast lands, violence has grown increasingly, particularly in the remote area of Pavones, near the Panamanian border. Landless peasants have squared off

against foreign land investors, including a few international drug dealers. The land remains largely unproductive although some of the investors have built vacation homes and some have established small herds of cattle.⁸ The circumstances offer variables that one would not traditionally associate with agrarian unrest, but it is a type of conflict that is growing in Costa Rica in areas where foreign investors have purchased large tracts of land. This is another area deserving of research.

Various forces are changing the coffee sector at this time and it is possible that the nature of relations of production in the sector will change. But it also appears that some of the changes may effectively cancel each other out. Increasing urbanization is consuming much of the best coffee lands, forcing producers to establish new farms in areas where quality is lower. (*Tico Times*, 1/24/97: 13) Lower quality means less profits and less ability to pay high wages. At the same time, consumers in the United States, the world's largest importer of coffee, are shifting their preference from robusta coffee, which is not grown in Costa Rica, to arabica coffee, which is. (Kenworthy, 1997: 24) This could serve to raise prices for Costa Rican coffee and facilitate the continuance of the higher wages. There is also a slowly growing trend to return to organic farming methods. Although fueled by demand in the consuming countries, it is proving to be more profitable for farmers than the chemical input-intensive production of the last several

⁸There have been extensive press accounts of these conflicts. See *La Nación*, 2/22-23/89 for a two part series that covers the issue. The *Tico Times*, catering to its large North American audience, has given the issue extensive coverage over the last decade. At the time of this writing, tensions have been very high again with a few recent fatalities incurred between squatters and landowners. Various issues of the *Tico Times* over the last several months of 1997 or the first months of 1998 have articles devoted to the Pavones land disputes.

decades. (Ibid.: 25) The higher profits may encourage more farmers to move in this direction. Intriguingly, however, the organic methods require higher labor input at a time when Costa Rican labor has become less available.

As Costa Ricans have begun to eschew the hugely labor intensive annual harvests, Nicaraguan refugees have moved into Costa Rica and have filled the gap. If economic conditions in Nicaragua improve and the refugees should return home, it is likely that Costa Rican farmers would have to import the labor for the harvests. Traditionally, harvest labor has been drawn from nearby communities. Patron-client relations have been strong, in small part, because of community ties. But, even as farmers grew to depend more on urban dwellers to supplement the rural labor, patron-client relations had to be maintained with *all good workers* to encourage their careful work and hoped for return in future seasons. As long as a skilled labor shortage exists, these patron-client relations should persist even as the workforce becomes increasingly migratory. Nicaraguans, of course, will not share the sense of patriotic duty, nor the culture of restrained violence, that many have felt in the past when turning out for coffee harvests. This leaves an opening for increased unrest in the future, although for the present, Nicaraguans are very happy to be obtaining the high wages available in Costa Rica.

In the banana sector, the *solidarista* movement is providing valuable benefits for many banana workers. But the harsh conditions continue to make life difficult for many workers and *solidarismo* does not seem to be fully addressing these issues. It is hard to measure how broad support is among banana workers for a return to unionization. Repression of union organization by the banana corporations is widespread. But it seems likely that

unions will reemerge, even if alongside *solidarismo*, and that the interlude from open conflict that is largely prevailing will end, sooner or later. Unions may successfully reemerge on the heels of wildcat strikes. The 1994 strike is surely a preview of more to come. The relations of production that have produced conflict in the banana sector for so long remain widespread. If Nicaraguans are taking up the hardest work, as suggested by the facts of the 1994 strike, they may play prominent roles in future strikes. Nicaraguans have always been the Other in Costa Rica. Should such strikes transpire, the evidence presented in these pages indicates that the state will employ violence to put them down.

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APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

aguinaldo -- A month's salary given as a bonus at Christmas. A 1959 law required the payment of *aguinaldos* by all large companies.

ayuntamiento -- Municipal council; the political body in charge of a district including and surrounding a city.

baldíos -- Untitled public lands in colonial period.

beneficiador -- Owner of a *beneficio*, generally used in reference to independent owners, the elite of the coffee industry, as opposed to the collective owners of cooperative *beneficios*. Most *beneficiadores* are also *cafetaleros* and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

beneficio -- Coffee processing mill.

caballería -- Colonial form of measurement for large tracts of land principally awarded to conquistadores, 45.2 hectares in some accounts, although interpretation of size varied and changed over time.

cafetalero -- Owner of a coffee estate/*hacienda*.

caficultore -- Grower of coffee.

Calderonistas -- Followers of Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia (president 1940-44). The losing side of the 1948 Civil War.

caja -- Common shorthand for the *Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social*, or the Social Security Fund that was established in 1943 to provide workers' pensions and health benefits.

Camara de Cafetaleros -- An organization representing the owners of large coffee estates and *beneficios*, or the coffee oligarchy.

campesino -- Peasant. Common term in Central America outside of Costa Rica.

cartagos -- Residents of and migrants from the *meseta central*, named for the principal city, Cartago, of the colonial era. Often used pejoratively by non-*cartagos*.

Centro para el Estudio de Problemas Nacionales -- Commonly known as *el Centro*, an organization founded in 1940 by young activists and intellectuals upset with the allegedly personalistic and corrupt practices of the Calderón government. José Figueres, who joined in 1944, was a prominent member. Figueres and others from *el Centro* would found the *Partido Social Demócrata* in 1945 and the *Partido Liberación Nacional* in 1951.

centristas -- Followers of the *Centro para el Estudio de Problemas Nacionales*.

cofradía -- A fraternal, lay, association under the tutelage of Franciscan missionaries during the colonial period.

costarricense -- Costa Rican.

DBCP -- Dibromochloropropane. A pesticide used to control nematodes, tiny worms that cause banana root damage.

encomienda -- Regions or districts of indigenous populations during the colonial period, administered by *encomenderos* who were supposed to ensure the well being and Christian training of the natives and, in turn, to collect tributes from them. *Encomienda* populations were also used, illegally, as forced labor by many Spanish colonists. The scarceness of the indigenous population ensured that *encomiendas* were not very successful in Costa Rica.

FEDECOOP -- *Federación de Cooperativas de Caficultores* (Federation of Coffee Grower Cooperatives). Umbrella organization for coffee *beneficio* cooperatives, founded in 1962.

Federación de Obreros Bananeros (FOBA), affiliated with national Communist led *Confederación General de Trabajadores Costarricenses (CGTC)*, founded in 1952.

FETRABA -- *Federación de Trabajadores Bananeros y Anexos*. An umbrella banana union affiliated with *Rerum Novarum*, founded in the late 1940s.

finca -- Farm, smaller than a *hacienda*. The term is also used to describe sections of banana plantations.

FOBA -- *Federación de Obreros Bananeros*, a banana workers' union founded in the early 1950s by affiliates of the then illegal Communist Party.

gran huelga -- The "great strike" of the Atlantic banana zone, August to December, 1934.

hacendado -- Owner of a *hacienda*.

hacienda -- As used in Costa Rica, a large farming or ranching estate. Can also include properties used primarily for timber harvesting. In colloquial usage, it sometimes refers to farms of any size.

hectare -- 10,000 sq. meters, 107,600 sq. ft., or 2.47 acres. A common, modern, unit of measure in Latin America and elsewhere.

IDECAFE -- *Instituto de Defensa del Café de Costa Rica*. Government organization established to regulate and facilitate coffee production and export. Established in 1933. Predecessor to *Oficina del Café*.

meseta central -- Costa Rica's Central Valley, or central highlands where most of the country's population is concentrated and where most of the coffee is grown.

mestizo -- Spanish and indigenous mixed race.

manzana -- A unit of land measurement equaling .69886 hectares or 1.73 acres.

nicaraguense -- Nicaraguan.

Oficina del Café -- Government organization established to regulate and facilitate coffee production and export. Successor to *Instituto de Defensa del Café de Costa Rica*.

Panama disease -- A root fungus that attacks banana trees and reduces production. Discovered in Panama, it crossed into Costa Rica in 1903.

patrón -- Patron.

peon -- In Costa Rica, peasant, small farmer, or agricultural wage worker. Derived from the name given to lesser *conquistadores*, the foot soldiers, of lesser status than the *caballeros*, or horsemen. Essentially equivalent to *campesino* in other parts of Central America. The term has had a pejorative connotation elsewhere in colonial Central America where it largely applied to indigenous labor.

PLN -- *Partido Liberación Nacional*, the political party founded in 1951 by former members of the *Centro para el Estudio de Problemas Nacionales*, including José Figueres Ferrer, for the 1952 elections. The party has been the dominant political party of the latter half of the twentieth century, capturing the presidency in slightly more than half (at least every other) of the elections held.

precarista -- Squatter.

principales -- Leaders of indigenous communities during colonial period, of lower rank than the *cacique*, or highest leader of a community.

reducciones -- In the colonial period, villages to where native populations were forcibly relocated, or "reduced" from greater, and thus less manageable, geographic areas.

repartamiento -- A system whereby indigenous communities were required to provide male labor for a given number of days per month to colonial agriculturists. (See MacLeod, 1973, pp. 207-210.)

Rerum Novarum -- Commonly used, abbreviated, name for the *Confederación Costarricense de Trabajadores Rerum Novarum*, the Catholic affiliated union movement founded as an alternative to the unions controlled by the Communist Party.

sabanero -- Cowboy; literally a dweller of the dry flatlands or *sabana*.

sembreras -- Plantings.

sigatoka -- A disease that afflicts banana leaves and reduces output. It first became a problem in Costa Rica in the mid-1920s.

sindicato -- Union.

SITAGAH -- *Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores Agriculturas y Ganaderías de Heredia*, a union active in the organization of banana workers in the 1990s in the inland, southern Atlantic coast area.

solidarismo -- A labor relations concept intended to replace unions and give workers and management a shared stake in a company, and thus, a shared interest in working together. Conceived by Alberto Martén Chavarría, a *centrista* and a founder of the *Partido Social Demócrata* in the 1940s. Martén believed that workers, like their employers, had a right to build up equity in a company. *Solidarismo* associations began to replace unions in the banana sector in the early 1980s and had succeeded in replacing every union by 1987. It is a concept particularly embraced by foreign corporations. Workers who have tried to reestablish unions have been summarily fired.

solidarista -- Person or things associated with *solidarismo*.

tico -- Colloquial term used by Costa Ricans to refer to themselves and things Costa Rican. Believed derived from old colloquial Spanish term for "little brother," *hemanitico*, in colonial Costa Rica.

UNIA -- Universal Negro Improvement Association; founded by Marcus Garvey and highly influential in the ideology of Atlantic coast blacks since the 1910s.

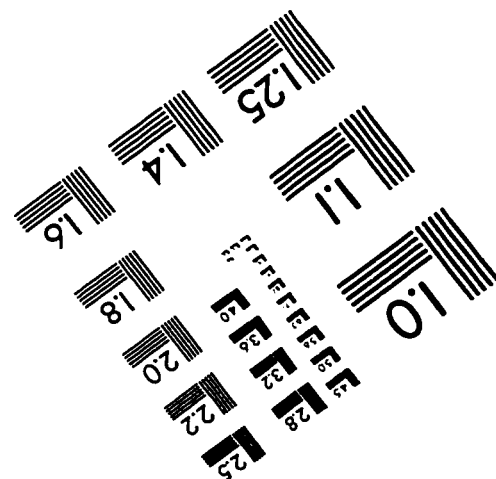
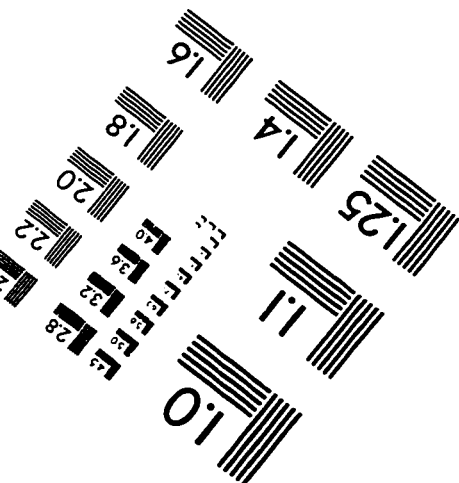
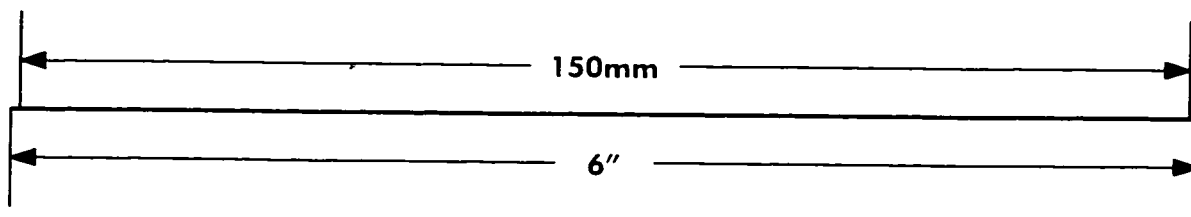
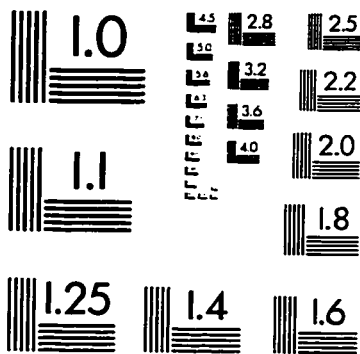
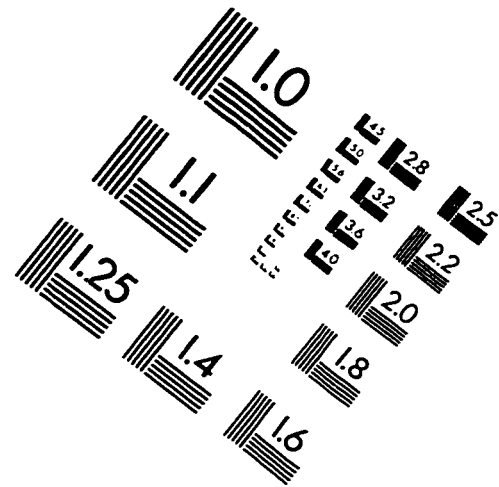
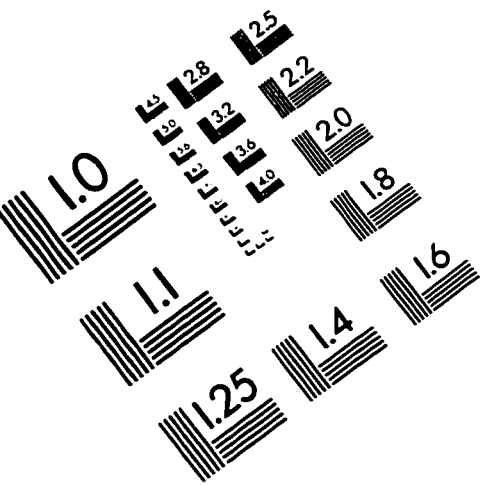
UPANacional -- Commonly known as UPA; the National Union of Small Agriculturists, founded in 1981 by coffee smallholders and other peasants. The largest peasants' union in Costa Rica.

UTG -- *Unión de Trabajadores de Golfito*, a banana workers union founded in the late 1940s and affiliated with *Rerum Novarum*. By the 1960s, it had affiliated with followers of the then illegal Communist Party.

VITA

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