

EXCURSUS 1

Richard A. Nuccio on AN OUTPOST OF DEMOCRACY

The road to the town of Liberia is a pleasant one that winds its way through Costa Rica's lush central highlands, then drops down to the flat plains of this country's "Wild West." A trip through the verdant countryside tells one a great deal about Costa Rica. Modest homes of wood and cement dot the landscape. There is poverty to be sure, but little of the squalor that dominates much of rural Latin America. Schools appear at roadside in population centers of any size, and brilliant white clinics with neat red crosses are visible from time to time.

The metaphor for what makes Costa Rica different from the rest of Central America may well be contained in the passing lanes on the country's major highways. Driving an automobile in Latin America is usually intimately connected with asserting one's manhood; risks are taken routinely to demonstrate that death can be challenged and beaten. How "un-Latin," then, of the Costa Ricans to provide safe passing on hills. Absent is the joy of pulling out from behind a belching bus to encounter another driver closing in at breakneck speed from the opposite direction. In Costa Rica, one is reduced to calmly motoring around the offending vehicle at the next appropriate passing zone.

Costa Rican politics has for decades provided a passing lane for political passions. Since 1948, free and open elections have offered a highly literate population a voice in national life. In that same year, a generation's worth of progressive social legislation was passed, a standing army

abolished, and a civic culture favoring the pacific settlement of disputes instituted. In the context of Central America, Costa Rica is not merely unique, it is virtually miraculous.

A drive to Liberia inevitably raises the question of whether Costa Rica can remain an island of peace in a region at war. A few kilometers outside the town lies the third-rate airport of Llano Grande. Here in the late '70s, at the only suitable site close to the Nicaraguan border, the Sandinistas flew in supplies for their war against Somoza. In the mid-'80s the United States proposed to expand the runway to accommodate jet planes—ostensibly to bring in tourists for the nearby beaches. And if the site was also an excellent base for raids on Managua by anti-Sandinista rebels or for surveillance aircraft, that was just so much coincidence.

Whatever Washington's intentions in making its offer, the Costa Rican Government decided to decline it. But there are still other offers, most recently one by the United States Information Agency to a private Costa Rican station to set up a powerful transmitter on the Nicaraguan border. Whether it will become the equivalent of Radio Free Nicaragua or merely convey the Costa Rican brand of *salsa* to the Nicaraguans is not yet clear. José Figueres, the hero of 1948, says the government must nationalize the station should it become a propaganda weapon against the Nicaraguans. President Monge, trying to tread a fine line between the Left and Right in his country, inaugurated the new facility, denying it will violate Costa Rica's neutrality. Perhaps Costa Rica will once again decline to enter the thicket of Central American politics. But those same Sandinistas who operated out of Llano Grande six years ago have denounced the station as part of the "imperialist plot" against Nicaragua.

The pressure continues on Costa Rica to get off the fence and sign up on the U.S. side in Central America's wars. The people of Costa Rica seem divided about which path to take. They want most of all to be left alone. The current



"Negotiate? What is there to negotiate?"

government thinks the best way to do that is to choose not to choose. On November 17, 1983, it proclaimed Costa Rica's "perpetual, active, and unarmed neutrality." Since then it has been engaged in a domestic and international campaign to gain support for its position of neutrality, directing its attentions at such European neutrals as Austria, Switzerland, Finland, and Sweden. These, in classic Teutonic fashion, patiently explain to the Costa Ricans that, in their experience, an army of some kind is necessary for convincing others that one's neutrality is to be taken seriously. The Costa Ricans reply that in Latin America, where armies are rarely content to stay in the barracks, this is not the moment to be reestablishing one.

Meanwhile, the opposition in Costa Rica, much of the country's free but conservative press, and, of course, some insistent voices in the United States are saying that neutrality is morally reprehensible at a time when a struggle between democracy and communism is being waged on the doorstep. Costa Ricans receive a rather unblemished image of the United States directly via Ted Turner's Cable News Network. They have never suffered occupation or invasion by the U.S., have not digested the Vietnam experience, and find it difficult to believe that the United States would ever turn its back on its own backyard. They would be willing to join with the U.S. to protect themselves from the scary developments in nearby Nicaragua. Like the Mexicans, the Costa Ricans were bitterly disillusioned when they found that a revolution they once supported was taking a direction so different from their own democratic one.

Political leaders of all persuasions expect to have future problems with the "Nicas," as they call them. The differences are over how best to protect Costa Rica against such neighbors. Those who favor neutrality argue for preserving the tradition of detachment from the region's disputes. They contend that too close an alliance with the United States can only make Costa Rica the target of Nicaraguan reprisals as hostility mounts between the U.S. and the Sandinistas. Witness Honduras, they say—a nation that has prostituted itself to U.S. interests, offering itself cheaply and receiving few benefits.

The Costa Rican opposition, on the other hand, does not see a wall of neutrality as sufficient to restrain the Sandinistas in the future. Lacking all but a poorly equipped constabulary force, will Costa Rica be able to defend itself from a Marxist-Leninist state that feels it must export revolution to maintain its own security? Perhaps Nicaragua will not invade directly but undermine Costa Rica by further fueling the unrest caused by the country's current economic crisis. The opposition's greatest fear is that the United States will cut a deal with the Sandinistas, one that leaves the revolutionaries in power in return for assurances of good behavior that are not worth the paper they're printed on. The recent suspension of the Manzanillo talks between Nicaragua and the United States seems designed in part to allay this fear.

In "peaceful" Costa Rica the atmosphere is tense. That tension was readily apparent in recent days when word came that the Sandinistas had allegedly violated the Costa Rican embassy in Managua, which had granted asylum to a Nicaraguan "draft dodger." A chorus of protest assailed the government, urging actions that ranged from invocation of the Rio Treaty of mutual defense to the break off of diplomatic relations. Costa Rica brought the matter before

the Organization of American States, which referred it to the Contadora Group—Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela—for negotiation. The dispute led to cancellation of an important meeting of the Central American countries under Contadora auspices and threatened to poison already difficult relations between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The asylum-seeker was eventually released, but there will be other incidents.

Back in San José a Honduran and a North American visitor watch as President Monge and other politicians address a mildly enthusiastic crowd of school children who have been given the day off to celebrate Costa Rica's proclamation of neutrality. The speeches, although florid in the Latin style, are amazingly short. The entire rally lasts little more than an hour. As President Monge slowly descends from the podium, a boy and girl stand at his side guiding his steps. The president then walks among the crowd, virtually without security. The Honduran wonders aloud when his country will be able to achieve the political maturity of these Costa Ricans. The North American ponders his country's policies. Are they helping to preserve this precious outpost of democracy or, in the interest of broader regional objectives, do they risk sacrificing it to the chaos that consumes so much of Central America?

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EXCURSUS 2

Stephen Brockmann on THE ALLIED VICTORY & GERMAN AMBIVALENCE

Germany loves anniversaries. Three years ago it celebrated the Goethe anniversary; the next year it observed the Martin Luther and Schiller anniversaries, the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler's rise to power, and three hundred years of German immigration to America. Last year the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) celebrated its thirty-five years of existence, and this year both Germanies are celebrating three hundred years of Bach and Handel. All these events were and are celebrated in the two German states without causing much of a political flap, but the same cannot be said of this year's most important event: the fortieth anniversary of the German defeat Allied victory on March 8, 1945.

Since the beginning of the year the anniversary has been discussed almost incessantly in both Germanies. The major newspapers, magazines, and television networks have been observing it for months, commemorating the bombings of Dresden, Madgeburg, and Hamburg and countless other military events. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—coming to terms with the past—has become the order of the day as never before in a country that for many years did not even want to think about the past and viewed 1945 as a zero point (a *Nullpunkt*) from which an absolutely new Germany