

Reform, Resentment, and Revolution: The Administration of Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia and Its Causal Effects on the 1948 Civil War in Costa Rica

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In 1948, revolution, armed conflict, and democratic turmoil enveloped one of the most historically stable and “exceptional” nations in the Western Hemisphere: Costa Rica. While the events which led directly to the annulment of the 1948 presidential election by Congress and the following armed conflicts have drawn much attention, this article argues that the change of direction and widespread reforms attempted during the administration of President Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia (1940-1944), along with his missteps, shortcomings, and the reactions which they garnered had more of a causal impact on the ensuing conflict than any other single actor or event. While Calderón would play a direct role in the events of 1948 and beyond, the author finds that his most influential actions came during his one term in office. By laying the groundwork to which nearly all future players reacted and (sometimes) rebelled against, the administration of Calderón significantly influenced the uncharacteristic events of the late 1940s and profoundly altered the course of this Central American nation.

‘Exceptional’ Costa Rica at a Turning Point

The nation of Costa Rica has always been the exception in Central America. Often labeled as the “Switzerland of the Americas” because of its relative size, stability, and “cantons,” Costa Rica developed in a more isolated fashion during colonial times than its neighbors (Bird 1987, 36-37). The nation also avoided many of the region’s detrimental economic, social, and political practices (Booth, Wade and Walker 2006, 54). Those who settled Costa Rica were more often concerned with establishing an agrarian lifestyle than getting rich quickly. This mentality of hard work and individualism as well as the development of a more economically and racially homogeneous society, (though disparities were not lacking all together,) allowed Costa Rica to evade many of the traumatic upheavals which plagued the Central American region after independence (Bird 1987, 37; Booth, Wade and Walker 2006, 54). Costa Rica also never developed an financial system of dependency despite its export-driven, monoculture economy (Booth, Wade and Walker 2006, 54-5).

The 1940s in Costa Rica, as seen through the lens of this previous stability, are an exception to the exception. A civil war erupted in a nation which prided itself on high literacy rates (as compared to others in the region,) democratic institutions, and peaceful transfers of political power (Bird 1987, 36). After a rearguard attempt to retain the status quo under the presidency of Leon Cortés

Castro, an era of change and reform was ushered in by President Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia. Calderón’s political gaffes and handling of World War II along with Costa Rica’s mounting financial and policy problems were compounded by his divisive reforms, prompting the most violent and out of character event in Costa Rican history. While some historians have focused on the ensuing events which made the civil war of 1948 nearly inevitable, Calderón’s reforms and the opposition which solidified against them were, in fact, the causes most central to the upheaval.

The Legacy of Cortés and the Winds of Change

Many historians have assessed the presidency of Leon Cortés Castro (1936-40), Calderón’s predecessor, as the oligarchic coffee elite’s final attempt at retaining their dominance in the social and political realms (Creedman 1971, 55). The last Costa Rican president born in the 19th century and an alleged Nazi sympathizer, Cortés’ main support came from these elites in his bid for the presidency under the National Republican Party banner in 1936 (Ameringer 1982, 27). The minister of development under the previous Jiménez administration, Cortés helped to restore the oligarchy’s grip on power which it so desperately wanted after their growing antagonism toward the previous “liberal patriarchs” (Ameringer 1982, 27). Cortés, a vehement and some-

what paranoid anti-Communist, refused to allow Manuel Mora Valverde, the leader of Costa Rica's Communist Party, to take his duly-elected seat in the Congress as a deputy for San José (Ameringer 1982, 27; Creedman 1971, 62). Cortés even alleged that his predecessor from his own party, Jiménez, likely had communist associations (Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 89; Bird 1987, 37-38).

Cortés' term in office has often been characterized as one founded on "cement and iron," as the leader attempted to reduce growing unemployment with large-scale public works projects (Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 86). Like many of his National Republican predecessors, Cortés promoted "laissez-faire capitalism and systematically repressed labor organizations" (Chalker 1995, 112). Nevertheless, some small-scale reforms did emerge from his time in office. In 1936, banking reforms were enacted which gave the state more control over the nation's money supply, a move which angered his elite supporters (Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 86). His most "controversial" ideas were comparatively benign and included obligatory voting measures and the establishment of new agricultural schools (Creedman 1971, 64). Even some of Cortés' moderate proposals for change voiced during his electoral campaign were later cast aside as too unpopular with the oligarchy (Creedman 1971, 64). In 1939, Cortés launched the National Housing Committee with the assistance of the National Bank. This significant reform used returns from United Fruit Company-loans to pay for low-income housing, though a mere 50 such structures were erected by the end of Cortés' term in office (Creedman 1971, 68; Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 86-87).

At the end of his administration, Cortés hand-selected Calderón as the party's successor. Oddly, the somewhat-paranoid Cortés never fully trusted Calderón, though his close relationship with the extended Cortés family and Cortés' wife, doña Julia, allowed Calderón to obtain the President's blessing (Ameringer 1982, 27-28; Creedman 1971, 97). Calderón's popularity with Costa Ricans, acquired from his career as a pediatrician, likely influenced Cortés' eventual selection (Creedman 1971, 97). Cortés believed that Calderón would make the perfect "puppet" and continue his elite-friendly policies without a great deal of personal interference (Ameringer 1982, 27-28). Cortés left the office of president holding a myth-like quality. His honesty as well as his stringent financial oversight during a time of economic and governmental expansion (he lowered the national debt

all the while increasing expenditures) gave Cortés the label of the perfect manager (Creedman 1971, 66). Calderón's critics would take advantage of this exaggerated image in order to paint his administration as corrupt and wasteful by comparison to Cortés' (Creedman 1971, 66).

The Rise of Calderón: From 'Puppet' to Progressive

The first Costa Rican president born in the 20th century, Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia and his administration took a sharp turn from the traditional Costa Rican presidency. Born into an aristocratic family, Calderón was foreign-educated, having studied in Belgium at the University of Louvain (Leuven) (Ameringer 1982, 28; Creedman 1971, 88; Wilson 1998, 31). At Louvain, he was exposed to the ideas of Social Christianity and the teachings of Pius XI, Leo XIII, and *Rerum Novarum* from scholars like Cardinal Mercier (Creedman 1971, 89-90; Ameringer 1982, 28). After returning to his native land, Calderón quickly gained a popular reputation through his humanitarian pediatric work. Exaggerated stories circulated around the countryside and urban areas, one of which described a Calderón who not only provided his services free of charge, but also left *colonos* with needy patients to assist them with medication costs and other expenses (Creedman 1971, 90-91). Riding this goodwill, he was first elected as city councilman in 1932 and later as Congressman in 1934, where he gained effective control of the body by 1938 (Creedman 1971, 91-92).

By 1940, Costa Ricans, especially members of the elite, had increasing apprehensions about the electoral system and democratic means of governance (Bird 1987, 39). The oligarchy feared the growing Communist Party under Mora and their newfound ability to incite strikes (especially by banana and coffee workers) and capture votes at the ballot box (Bird 1987, 39). After much of the pre-election wrangling ended, Calderón and Mora were the only two main candidates standing for the presidency; a choice which disappointed some and contributed to the elite's heightened fears for their way of life (Creedman 1971, 104-105; Bird 1987, 39). Calderón campaigned "as the young man for modern times," and in doing so, captured support from almost all sectors of Costa Rican society and over 91 percent of the popular vote (Bird 1987, 37-38; Creedman 1971, 88). Calderón's stump speeches, though lacking substance due to the noncompetitive nature of

the election, foreshadowed portions of his agenda for reform (Creedman 1971, 108). Calderón proposed the creation of more hospitals and clinics, a limited social security program, and a forced increase in the number of citizens who held land. His philosophy of government included the social teachings learned in Europe as well as a remarkable and distinctly 20th century compassion for the poor (Creedman 1971, 108-109). On election eve, Calderón made the profound statement that government had a role in protecting the social and economic lives of its people (Rosenberg 1981, 279; Creedman 1971, 109).

Calderón's inner circle was dominated by conservative Catholics, yet many of these same officials were social and economic progressives who were disliked by previous administrations (Creedman 1971, 119). The new President allied himself with the Catholic Church in Costa Rica, fostering a close relationship with Archbishop Victor Sanabria Martinez (who would later encourage his social reform-agenda) (Ameringer 1982, 28). It would soon become clear that Calderón was willing to break with his social and political class and use his alliances with the Church, and later with the Communists, to "dominate the government" (Booth, Wade and Walker 2006, 56; Woodward 1999, 224).

1941-1942: Early Reforms and Early Opposition

Soon after taking office in May, 1940, President Calderón set out to implement social reforms which he described as long overdue. Yet, some of these reform policies were not original to Calderón's administration: not only were they addressed somewhat vaguely in Calderón's campaign messages, but they also mirror Octavio Beeche Aguero's Communist platform for president in 1936 (Creedman 1971, 62). Beeche's policy agenda called for public works projects to alleviate unemployment (which were implemented by Cortés and continued under Calderón,) more capital investment, forced land redistribution, and a pacifist policy based on Social Christianity (Creedman 1971, 62-63). Calderón's deeply held social and religious beliefs dominated his justification for progressive reforms, stating in 1942 that his policies fit under the "banner . . . of Jesus Christ" (Creedman 1971, 125). Along with these beliefs, Calderón believed that progressive social and economic reforms were the "only formula to harmonize the conflicting interests of capital

and labor" and prevent potential class conflict (Calderón in Wilson 1998, 31). In the President's mind, the affluent and impoverished in Costa Rica were divided by an ever-widening crevasse, mainly because "the producers of 'gold' [coffee] for export controlled everything for their own advantage . . . [resulting in a] semi-colonial economy" (Calderón in Creedman 1971, 121-122). Calderón attempted to stem Communist criticisms while contemporaneously convincing the coffee oligarchy that social issues could no longer be ignored by the government (Bird 1987, 40). Yet, Calderón systematically overestimated elite support for his programs, believing that "men of wealth and power in poor nations . . . must lead the fight for those basic reforms which alone can preserve the fabric of their own societies" (Calderón in Bird 1987, 43). Some scholars maintain that Calderón's reforms were mainly political in motivation and only veiled in religious justice, claiming that the President needed to replace his traditional elite base with growing labor unions and lower classes (Wilson 1998, 31-32). Others maintain that the reforms which would have accomplished this shift were implemented only after the disastrous 1942 midterm elections and were not "methodically conceived" (Rosenberg 1981, 280; Wilson 1998, 31-32). Whatever the motivation, Calderón's reform agenda would have profound consequences.

In Calderón's inaugural address of 1940, he stressed that poverty in Costa Rica, though at lower levels than neighboring nations, could not be ignored and proposed that his government would aid social, economic and cultural development by introducing tax reforms, rural credits, land redistribution, an increase in low-cost housing, and the establishment of a university system (Bird 1987, 40). Moreover, Calderón pledged to implement a national social security system. An office of Social Security was established in 1941 and expanded in 1942 after Congressional adjustment (Rosenberg 1981, 286; Bird 1987, 43). The system, based on a Chilean model, included accident, sickness, disability, old age, and unemployment benefits (Ameringer 1982, 28; Rosenberg 1981, 284-286; Creedman 1971, 139). The system was mandatory for nearly all workers under the age of 60 with equal contributions paid into the office of Social Security from the employee, the state, and the employer (Bird 1987, 43; Creedman 1971, 139). Opposition grew quickly to this progressive policy. The widely respected Leon Cortés, in anger over Calderón's betrayal of his planter class, broke away from the National Republicans in 1941 and established the Democratic Party

(which later merged with the Democratic Action Party and became the Social Democratic Party) (Bird 1987, 38-39; Ameringer 1982, 30-31). As a result, the 1942 midterms, which were the first test of these early policies, saw the National Republicans face deep cuts into their Congressional base of representation. The Communist Party, under Mora's leadership, increased its vote share by over 50 percent from two years prior, though opposition to Calderón was still largely fractured at this stage (Bird 1987, 45; Creedman 1971, 197). Future social reforms now had to serve another purpose: the restoration of National Republican's lost support (Creedman 1971, 197).

Calderón, World War II, and the Communists

Calderón made many attempts to distance his reforms from Communist labels, stating in August of 1941 that his agenda "is not communist doctrine, nor socialist doctrine, but simply humanitarian doctrine" (Calderón in Creedman 1971, 125). Yet, this became increasingly difficult as Calderón attempted to foster a working relationship with Mora and his party, something which Cortés would have found unfathomable. The 1940 Communist Party platform attempted to move away from the party's revolutionary past and, in the process, foreshadowed many of Calderón's later reform programs (Creedman 1971, 105-106). The platform promoted the redistribution of wealth, further land reform, diversification of agriculture, and various labor protections like the right to strike and organize (Creedman 1971, 105-106). Calderón believed that an alliance would strengthen his electoral and congressional base as well as further his reformist agenda. Such a partnership was made possible by Soviet involvement with the Allies in World War II, the side which Calderón himself embraced (Ameringer 1982, 29). Mora and Archbishop Sanabria engaged in a public exchange of letters, a process which resulted in Sanabria's acceptance of Mora's goals and social agenda (Ameringer 1982, 29). After the Archbishop's approval, Calderón formally merged the Communist Party (then under the name Popular Vanguard) into the National Republicans in 1942 to create the Victory Bloc alliance for the 1944 elections (Ameringer 1982, 29; Bird 1987, 41-42; Creedman 1971, 234).

Yet, the very event which facilitated this alliance proved difficult for Calderón to control and further alienated the oligarchy. By the end of the

Cortés administration, German immigration had skyrocketed. Germany had also surpassed Great Britain as Costa Rica's largest export partner, purchasing 80 percent of its cacao in 1938 and 40 percent of its coffee by 1939 (Creedman 1971, 78). With the beginning of World War II came an economic downturn: markets in Europe were closed off and the United States to the north could not absorb the large amounts of surplus coffee (which it purchased at a lower price-point than most European customers) and bananas (Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 80). Financial trouble deepened as the war continued: customs revenue and export taxes all declined dramatically (Bird 1987, 45). Moreover, Calderón's government expropriated German and Italian property and assets, an act seen as a direct attack on the coffee and business leaders by former party allies and other elites (Wilson 1998, 33; Bird 1987, 41). The result was further elite alienation from the National Republicans as well as the establishment of dummy companies, under non-German ownership, to circumvent confiscations (Ameringer 1982, 29; Wilson 1998, 32). Highway construction, price regulation and increased military activity also led opposition groups to criticize the wartime government's "extreme intrusions" (Bird 1987, 41).

1943-1944: More Reforms, More Resentment

Despite growing internal and external tensions, Calderón's determined attitude concerning his policies continued after the disastrous midterm elections. Efforts to diversify agriculture began in 1942 with a rural credits program and continued with the allotment of two million *colones* for cattle development, a pest control program, and the 1943-establishment of the Ministry of Agriculture (Creedman 1971, 136-137). The Calderón/Mora alliance sought further reforms in other sectors as well, which included rent freezes and tenant protections (Kendrick 1988, 241-242; Bird 1987, 42). Many scholars believe that Calderón's most significant reforms came in 1943. In that year, the President amended the Constitution to enshrine certain "social guarantees" like the "social function of property," the eight-hour work day, minimum wage, right to organize, strike, and collectively bargain, workplace safety, rural rights, equal payment rights, housing and poverty guarantees, and the autonomy of the social security system (Creedman 1971, 214; Ameringer 1982, 28-29; Bird 1987, 43).

While these guarantees had no real authority, many would be included in the Labor Code of 1943 (Bird 1987, 43). Although the legislation simply re-codified some existing laws, it also introduced the right of laborers to vacation time as well as “*prestaciones*,” or the right of a worker to collect a partial salary after dismissal (Creedman 1971, 222). Furious critics of the Labor Code believed that Calderón was now “indistinguishable from Mora” (Bird 1987, 43). Opponents also attempted to dull the Code’s effects in rural areas by attaching a provision to the code in Congress which made vacations nearly impossible to earn due to the seasonal calendar of rural labor (Creedman 1971, 217, 223). Despite this, the Labor Code made Calderón increasingly popular with unions and workers at the expense of his traditional base, who saw the erosion of their long-established sources of power (Creedman 1971, 209; Wilson 1998, 32).

Failed Reforms, Mistakes, and the Legacy of Change

Not all of Calderón’s proposed changes were successful. His administration made an attempt before the 1944 election at electoral reform, though it was withdrawn after critics claimed it gave too much power to the executive (Bird 1987, 44). A campaign for “free shoes and free breakfasts” for schoolchildren began with much fanfare but fell off of the radar screen after its initial implementation (Creedman 1971, 134-135). Calderón also attempted to counteract the “Liberal Laws” of 1884 which secularized school, cemeteries, and forced religious orders to withdraw from Costa Rica; a policy which resulted in many opposition leaders fearing the return of an all-powerful Church to the nation (Creedman 1971, 159-160). This reversal was also attempted at an inopportune time (just after the 1942 midterm elections) and only passed on its third reading in Congress (Creedman 1971, 159-160). All the while, Calderón refused to withdraw the legislation despite mounting opposition (Creedman 1971, 160). Calderón also made no attempts at taxing incomes, as much of the support for his reformist agenda had already eroded (Bird 1987, 45). A main result of Calderón’s reforms included the doubling of government expenditures from 1940 to 1943 as well as a skyrocketing public deficit at a time when revenues remained stagnant or fell (Wilson 1998, 33).

Calderón’s growing unpopularity during this period was coupled with allegations of corrupt dealings, wasteful spending on public works and

reform implementation, and graft. These allegations as well as reports of cronyism in government appointments alienated younger and white collar workers along with the growing middle sectors from the administration (Bird 1987, 44). Calderón also weakened his credibility by granting amnesty to supporters jailed on electoral violations in 1944 (a decision which was later reversed by the Supreme Court) (Bird 1987, 45). Many also found Calderón unable to compromise, as with his Liberal Laws-reversal legislation (Creedman 1971, 156). His alliance with Mora, coupled with the aforementioned electoral fraud, led to allegations of Calderón as a growing dictatorial threat and strongman (Ameringer 1982, 31).

The Opposition Grows: the Center, the Elites, and Ulate

Despite Calderón’s attempts to convince those who did not benefit from his reforms to support them, opposition groups to his administration quickly gained strength. In 1940, the Center for the Study of National Problems, a group of law school graduates, other well-to-do students, white collar workers, and members of the middle sectors, “began a dialogue about political and economic issues” (Chalker 1995, 110-111; Creedman 1971, 181; Ameringer 1982, 29). The group deeply resented the glass ceiling created by the oligarchy and the United Fruit Company as well as the coffee elites’ grip on political and economic power while still promoting some social reforms without sidelining democracy (Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 91-92; Ameringer 1982, 29-30; Wilson 1998, 32-33; Bird 1987, 38). Influenced by Peru’s Victor Raul Haya de la Torre’s *Arista* doctrine, the Center felt that old liberalism had passed its prime while communism was simply too extreme to be effective (Ameringer 1982, 29-30). These ideas were coupled with a fervently severe appraisal of the state, which the Center saw as “corrupt, antiquated, unjust, and incompetent” (Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 91-92). The Center opposed Calderón in his 1940 presidential bid, finding his pro-church and communist-friendly views unacceptable (Ameringer 1982, 30). The Center gave ambivalent approval to Calderón’s social security policy, though they critiqued its small investment, labeled the project excessively bureaucratic, and criticized the system’s Chilean model as consistently losing money (Creedman 1971, 179; Rosenberg 1981, 296). In the 1944 presidential election, the Center supported Cortés

running under the Democratic Party banner due to the fact that many in the group saw him as “a democrat,” yet they urged him to avoid unraveling Calderón’s early reforms (Ameringer 1982, 29; Creedman 1971, 180). Soon after the election, Cortés’ Democratic Party merged with the Center to create the Social Democratic Party, which some scholars have correctly labeled as “interventionist liberal” or “neo-liberal” party (Chalker 1995, 111; Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 92). Calderón’s reforms along with the missteps made during his term were the key elements in the crystallization of the opposition; a process which would lead directly to the upheaval of 1948.

Further opposition came from coffee barons, merchants, elites of German origin and elite politicians who all feared for a further loss of influence and resented Calderón’s social guarantees and his pandering toward the working classes (labeling him a traitor to his class). They also worried about his alliances with the Church and the Communists and resented his handling of World War II (Booth, Wade and Walker 2006, 56; Ameringer 1982, 31; Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 89; Wilson 1998, 32-33). To compound this growing opposition, peasant and lower classes were struggling under the economic downturn precipitated by the war; something which made this group more susceptible to opposition rhetoric (Wilson 1998, 32-33).

In addition, two strong personalities eventually rose atop the opposition movement. The more conservative members found their voice in Otilio Ulate Blanco, a newspaper publisher and strident anti-communist (Woodward 1999, 225; Creedman 1971, 157). Ulate posited that extreme *laissez-faire* economics coupled with completely open and free elections could solve the nation’s problems and opposed social reforms on the grounds that Costa Rica, a developing nation, was simply not ready for such an “opiate” (Creedman 1971, 183-184, 218). Ulate founded the conservative, anti-communist National Union Party in 1946 and his contested presidential victory in 1948 directly sparked the violent events of that year. The second of these men, Jose Figueres Ferrer, was an outspoken and wealthy coffee grower (Bird 1987, 38-39; Ameringer 1982, 30). Figueres first gained notoriety after a 1942 radio address in which he lampooned Calderón’s inability to put down a riot against German and Italian property, triggered by an Axis submarine torpedoing a United Fruit Company vessel in the Limón Harbor, and even accused him of being a communist and responsible for the riot (Ameringer 1982, 30). After a two-year exile, Figueres allied his faction with the

Center, Cortés, and the Democratic Party to form the Social Democratic Party in 1945 (Ameringer 1982, 30-31). Continued resentment at Calderón and Picado led him to help negotiate the “Pact of the Caribbean” in 1947, a document which pledged to assist the overthrow of regional dictatorships by exile groups (Kendrick 1988, 245; Ameringer 1982, 32). He remained adamant about economic reforms and social progression within a democratic context, something which he believed an increasingly powerful Calderón was ignoring (Ameringer 1982, 31). Figueres later used the annulment of Ulate’s election victory over Calderón in 1948 by the Calderón-friendly Congress to mount an armed insurrection and establish a governing junta. While both of these men had the ambition to assume leadership roles, it was Calderón and his reform agenda, above all other factors, which triggered their willingness and opportunity to openly and violently voice their opposition.

The Rise of Picado and the 1944 Elections

With Calderón restricted from running and opposition mounting to his reforms, the President played the key role in hand-selecting Teodoro Picado Michalski as the Victory Bloc candidate for his office in 1944 (Bird 1987, 48). Leon Cortés, running under the Democratic Party banner, challenged Picado with backing from opposition groups and those elites hurt by the Labor Code. Despite this, Picado sailed to victory in 1944. His administration was critical in tightening the political alliance with Mora, causing some to claim that communists infiltrated the government during his term in office at a time when the Cold War had already changed the international landscape (Kendrick 1988, 242; Creedman 1971, 236). Picado’s income tax initiative, a policy which Calderón lacked enough support to pass, further antagonized the opposition (Kendrick 1988, 242). Along with this came a growing mistrust of the government among the general population similar to that expressed by the Center during the Calderón administration. The economic recovery after the end of World War II fell short of resolving these differences; major cities were even plagued by opposition terrorist explosions during the Picado administration (Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 91). Throughout his term in office, Picado unsuccessfully faced the opposition created for the most part by his predecessor’s policies and missteps.

The Outcome: Civil Conflict and a Government 'Recast'

The conflict of 1948 “confirmed the rise of a number of transitional forces in Costa Rica since the early 1940s” as well as the long term significance of Calderón’s reforms (Ameringer 1982, 32). The pressures which began under the Calderón had boiled over; enemies of reform, communism, and the government banded together and took up arms in a nation where such actions were uncharacteristic. After the violence of 1948, the Figueres-led junta pushed for major reforms: a nationalization of banks, a 10 percent tax on assets over 50,000 *colones*, raising taxes on the United Fruit Company, a new constitution, and the creation of autonomous agencies to regulate Costa Rica’s economic and social sectors (Molina Jiménez and Palmer 2002, 96; Ameringer 1982, 33). In the process, traditional Costa Rican Democracy was re-established, but the government’s purpose was also “recast” (Ameringer 1982, 33). Though the elite supported Ulate throughout, the armed rebels used the situation to their own advantage: maintaining Calderón’s reforms while denying the restoration of elite power (Ameringer 1982, 32-33). The waves of Calderón’s missteps, policy choices, and reforms rippled into the tumultuous events later in the decade. Paradoxically, the very reformist agenda of Calderón which incited the civil conflict was entrenched (not eroded) by the ensuing events.

The role he played, above all others, was the most significant factor in the conflict of 1948 and its consequences. More so than the actions of Cortés, the administration of Picado, and the personalities of Figueres and Ulate, it was Calderón and, more specifically, his one term in office, which most directly shaped future events. Most of the main actors in the decade’s upheaval passionately reacted to Calderón and his policies above all others. If Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia and his administration had not come to power and changed the course of the nation, precipitating great tensions in the process, the spark of Congress annulling the 1948 election would not have set this stable democracy ablaze with revolution as it did. These events, though often overlooked, have altered “exceptional” Costa Rica to present day.

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