

TENSE COSTA RICA VOTES TOMORROW

Public Meetings Prohibited —Close Election Forecast

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SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, Feb. 4—Horns flare, flags fly, loudspeakers blast and leaflets fall from the sky as this tiny democratic oasis in Central America prepares to elect a new President and Legislative Assembly Sunday.

A carnival atmosphere has surrounded this latest exercise in democratic freedom for which Costa Rica is distinguished in Latin America.

At the same time partisan feeling is running high as the country's incumbent party, the National Liberation Movement, under the leadership of former President José Figueres, attempts to fend off an assault by a coalition of conservatives and reformists whose only cement appears to be the hope of power.

The National Liberation candidate for the presidency is Daniel Oduber Quiros, an aggressive 44-year-old associate of Mr. Figueres who resigned as Minister of Foreign Affairs in January last year to start preparations for the present campaign.

His opponent is José Joaquin Trejos Fernandez, a mild-mannered professor of mathematics and economics who has had no previous experience in active politics.

Both sides profess confidence but neutral observers find the race too close to predict the outcome.

Public Meetings Banned

As election time approached, nervous authorities decided to ward off any incidents that might tarnish the country's reputation for order by banning public meetings. The ban started yesterday.

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal, an independent body with exclusive jurisdiction over elections, found its caution justified Wednesday night when a parked car was blown up near the Trejos headquarters. The car belonged to Miguel Ruiz Herrero, an opponent of the National Liberation Movement. Several persons were taken to police headquarters for questioning, but the circumstances of the bombing remain unclear.

That is the only serious incident thus far and Costa Ricans, eager to show the world how democratically and peacefully they can order their affairs, are ashamed of it. The Electoral Tribunal invited a three man observer team from the Organization of American States. The team, after inspecting the tribunal's carefully worked-out procedures for insuring an honest election acknowledges that its presence is mainly symbolic.

The National Liberation Movement, which began a series of social, political and economic reforms after staging a revolution against fraud in 1948, is running on its record. The reform movement, which Mr. Figueres says is influenced by the United States sponsored Alliance for Progress plus the country's tradition of peaceful transfer of power, leads him to remark to visitors:

"This is not a country. It is a pilot project."

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