

## President Arias of Costa Rica

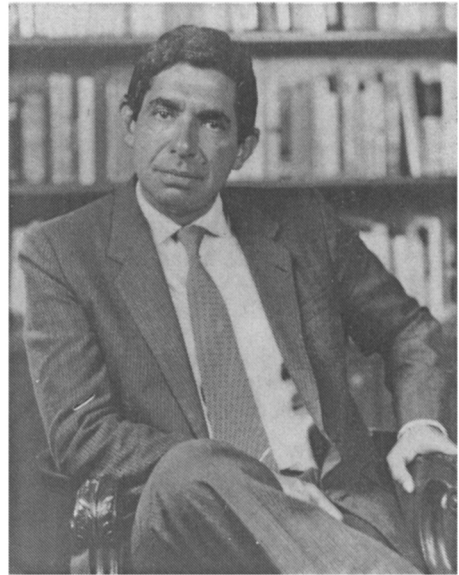
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**T**he recipient of the 1987 Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. Oscar Arias, is of interest to political scientists for at least three reasons: in addition to being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, he is the head of state and a political scientist - a rare combination among statesmen and, for political scientists, an equally rare opportunity to see how one of us has managed to integrate the insights of our discipline into top level political action.

Particularly significant is the regional context in which Dr. Arias was elected president of Costa Rica in 1986, for Central America is one of the areas of greatest political tension in the world.

After his election, political prudence should have told him to listen to those who advised him to concentrate on domestic affairs and to avoid more than anything else taking independent initiatives on Central American issues. But, against all the odds, he embarked instead on a project on which he had set his mind long ago and he launched a new peace initiative for Central America. He knew it was a difficult task, and one likely to win him more enemies than friends. But he thought that he could and should do it for, in the troubled climate of Central America, Costa Rica is a special case, a country in which politics is used to reach peaceful solutions to conflicts. Proud of the democratic achievements of his own country, President Arias would like to see democracy and social justice become the norm all over Central America, but he also knows that the long-term stability of democracy



OSCAR ARIAS

in Costa Rica is closely related to the peace issue in Central America. Nobody could fault the accuracy of his political analysis in this matter. He is no utopian and he does not think that sectarian vested interests will be easily convinced that dialogue and tolerance are better than violence and dogmatism. But he believes that "peace must be given a chance" and, for this, some conditions have to be met. Chief among them, all foreign intervention should be removed from the area, so that a dialogue can start between the different regional political forces in conflict. "There is no simple solution to the chaos of contemporary Central America, where the political turmoil of today is the inevitable outcome of a long history of refusal to give up privileges and redress social inequalities. This is why



## IPSA Awards for Outstanding Papers Presented by New Scholars at the XIV World Congress Washington, D.C., 1988

### ● Purpose

Two papers will be selected from those presented by new scholars at the IPSA Congress to receive an award.

The purpose of the awards is to encourage new, young scholars to write and present excellent papers at the Congress.

### ● Eligibility

The awards are restricted to new scholars -- those who are not more than five years after completion of a Ph.D., or the beginning of an equivalent active academic career, at the time of presenting the paper.

Any new scholar who has prepared a written, original paper for the Congress, and has presented it personally, may be recommended for the Awards by the Convenor of his/her panel.

### ● Criteria

Convenors (or Co-Convenors) of Congress panels may nominate one outstanding paper presented by a new scholar in their panels which in his/her judgement deserves to be given an award.

Convenors will recommend only outstanding papers which are worthy of publication in a leading political science publication.

Only original papers written especially for the IPSA Congress (and not published/presented elsewhere previously) will be considered.

The decision of the Award Committee will be announced within one year after the closing day of the Congress. The announcement will be published in *Participation*.

### ● Awards

First outstanding IPSA paper by a new scholar: A citation plus free return ticket to the next IPSA Congress and a free three-year IPSA membership.

Second outstanding IPSA paper by a new scholar: A citation plus a free three-year IPSA membership.

The Awards will be presented to the authors at the opening session of the 1991 IPSA World Congress in Buenos Aires.

peace in Central America is so closely related to social justice.

Dr. Arias's initiative for peace led him to be accused of personal ambitions and of playing the other side's game; but the Nobel Peace Prize Committee was better informed when it decided to give its full official recognition to his courage and moral stand. This award has strengthened his position and contributed to silence those who now find it more difficult to criticize him openly. His moral authority has been enhanced, but it does not mean that his task has been made easier. As political scientists, we can only hope that our discipline holds resources which, somehow, will help him.

He readily admits some debt to political science already, ever since he came to the University of Essex in the late 1960s as a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Government doctoral programme. I first met him in 1968, when I began to supervise his research on "A Study of Formal Leadership in Costa Rica." He fitted in very well here, obviously enjoying both the rigorous demands of research - his eventual doctoral dissertation was a good example of it - and the long seminar and other, more informal, discussions in which the past, present and future of Latin America were frequently debated by many of us, historians and sociologists as well as political scientists. His concern for social justice and democracy was what one might expect from a Latin American student of politics. But his intention to do something concrete about it has already inspired him to favour political action and

to fix his hopes of achieving the highest political office of his country. What was also less usual about him was a certain sense of belonging to Latin America and a real concern for Central America. Those scholars who, like me, have seen several generations of students from Latin America will know that, if an awareness of the continental dimension has made some progress among them today, this was not the case in the 1960s.

Oscar Arias stayed at Essex for two years and in 1969 he returned to Costa Rica where he continued his research and taught political science at the University before winning a seat in Congress for the National Liberation Party (PLN). In 1972, President Jose Figueres appointed him Minister of Planning; in 1979 he was elected Secretary General of the PLN which, in 1985, chose him as its presidential candidate for the 1986 elections. He won those elections with a larger majority than many observers had predicted. For the new president, the time for action that he had been expecting since his student days had finally come, and the challenge was daunting. He took it on with the same determination that was his fifteen years earlier but also - and refreshingly - with the same modesty and lack of dogmatism that were his in those days too. He has also kept a deep sense of loyalty to his friends, including those whose support he does not in any way need in his present political endeavours. The more one thinks about it, the more it appears that he is decidedly a most unusual politician.