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Interview With Salvadoran Leftist Political Leader Hector Oqueli Colindres

by Deborah Tyroler

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Summarized below are highlights of an interview with Hector Oqueli Colindres, assistant general secretary of the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) a member party of the Democratic Convergence and of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR). He participated in the last round of talks between the FDR-FMLN and the Salvadoran government in October 1987 in San Salvador. Oqueli was interviewed in the capital city in May by Pensamiento Proprio, a publication of CRIES (Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research of Central America and the Caribbean, Managua) PP: Will the Democratic Convergence participate in the presidential elections in March 1989? Oqueli: It's too early to say, but there is a chance that the Democratic Convergence will participate, provided that certain conditions exist. [Ed. note: Since this interview, Democratic Convergence leaders have announced that they will participate in the elections.] If we do run, there are many potential candidates in our ranks: FDR president Guillermo Ungo, for example, or the general secretaries of the Popular Social Christian Movement and the Social Democrat Party. PP: Would participating in the elections give legitimacy to the electoral process (a part of the US counterinsurgency project)? Oqueli: For us that is not the main problem. We can use the elections as a type of combat. We do not believe we will win, and even if we won we would "lose" in the vote counting process. Our position is not to give legitimacy to the counterinsurgency project, but to try to destroy it and build up a national consensus for a negotiated political settlement. We want to organize the Salvadoran people and encourage a democratic solution and political settlement. We think elections are a small component of a more complicated solution badly needed in this country. PP: What is your analysis of the current political and economic situation? Oqueli: The Salvadoran government has lost all the support and confidence of the people. [President Jose Napoleon] Duarte took power promising to bring lasting peace to the country. He has done nothing and I think people cast a protest vote against him in the last elections. and underemployment (more than 60%) and the government has not reduced unemployment or carried out health, social, or housing programs. We are facing a very explosive situation, and social and economic conditions will deteriorate further if there is not a political solution to stop the war. I think there is sufficient support for a political solution. At present, there are four different initiatives to initiate the dialogue process: one by the FDR-FMLN, one by the president, a new one by the Catholic Church, and some right-wing parties are talking about presenting an initiative. PP: Is ARENA serious about being prepared to negotiate? Oqueli: ARENA represents a project that was defeated in 1979, and the party wants to turn back history. It has very close relations with the economic powers and some military officers. If ARENA were serious it could implement a negotiated settlement more easily than Duarte. The problem for any Christian Democrat or right-wing government is that it has to carry out orders issued in Washington. PP: Would ARENA be able to improve the economy? Oqueli: If there is no end to the war, they will not be able improve anything. PP: Will the repression continue to escalate in the next year? Oqueli: The situation has been deteriorating since the Esquipulas II peace plan was signed in Guatemala. More people are being killed or "disappeared" and there is a greater use of repressive measures by the Salvadoran government. The situation will continue to deteriorate because officers

linked to the death squads are still active, no one has been punished, and the war continues. PP: With an increase in human rights violations, will the US be prepared to support ARENA? Oqueli: It is a question of how far the US will allow ARENA to go in terms of human rights violations. ARENA is a new kind of right-wing party. In the past, we had political parties manipulated by rightist officers, but nothing like what we have with ARENA today. PP: What is the Democratic Convergence's political program? Oqueli: We support a negotiated political solution rather than a military one, and we want national sovereignty. This country is too dependent on Washington's orders. The budget is totally financed by the US. El Salvador receives a total of \$2 million a day from the US, an amount last year equal to 105% of the national budget. In other words, the amount of aid given this country by the US surpasses the the national budget. We need social and economic programs that favor the majority of the people, and a truly democratic system. PP: Could an insurrection occur in the next one or two years? Oqueli: I think with the deteriorating economic and social conditions, the war, and continuing US intervention, there could be an insurrection, but we would prefer a negotiated settlement. The US will definitely try to crush any insurrectional possibilities. But, that will also depend on how an insurrection is carried out and the US political situation. PP: Will there be policy changes with either Dukakis or Bush? Oqueli: If Dukakis wins, there are more chances for change in US policy. If Bush wins, he will have to make a choice between a political or a military solution. He will have to deal with the mess created by Reagan's policies in Central America. PP: Is there any US Congressional support for a negotiated solution to the conflict in El Salvador? Oqueli: There is some, but the problem is that the US administration has emphasized Nicaragua...as opposed to the early 1980s when we were the center of attention for US policymakers. PP: Will there be more international pressure on El Salvador to comply with the Esquipulas II peace accord? Oqueli: The problem with the Esquipulas peace agreement is that it was designed by the five Central American governments for one country only, although all agreed to comply. I think there is a chance now to demand that the international community force El Salvador to comply. El Salvador is in an even more difficult situation than Nicaragua was.

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