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## **El Salvador: On Democratic Convergence, "leftist Option" In March 1989 Elections**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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For the first time since 1972, a "leftist option" will be available to voters in the March 1989 presidential elections. On Aug. 23, the Democratic Convergence (CD) made official its decision to participate in the elections. The CD is an alliance of three leftist political parties: the Social Democratic Party (PSD) headed by Mario Reni Roldan, MD; National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) under Guillermo Ungo, and the Popular Social Christian Movement (MPSC), headed by Ruben Zamora. Ungo and Zamora are also leaders of the Democratic Revolutionary Movement (FDR), allied with the rebel umbrella organization, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). Zamora and Ungo fled the country in the early 1980s after several FDR leaders were assassinated. They returned to EL Salvador last November to explore possibilities for participating in the nation's political life following a political opening undertaken by the government of President Jose Napoleon Duarte. The opening resulted from the government's actions to comply with certain agreements contained in the regional peace accord signed in August 1987. According to Zamora, certain "political spaces" now exist, but El Salvador hardly qualifies as a democracy. He said, "In a democracy, the rules of the game are known and accepted by all participants, and they are generally implemented. In El Salvador, the rules are not known by all, nor accepted, nor implemented." CD leaders have refused to dismiss the possibility of withdrawing from the electoral process if existing political spaces are eventually closed off. The coalition has not yet announced its candidates for president and vice president. According to rumors, however, Dr. Roldan's name will appear on the ballot in March. Ungo, as president of the FDR and former member of the first governing junta after the 1979 coup, enjoys greater recognition inside El Salvador and outside the country than Roldan or Zamora. On the other hand, in recent months Zamora has traveled more extensively and addressed many more people than Ungo. Next, CD leaders say that their objective in participating in the elections is not to win the presidency. According to Hector Oqueli of the MNR, the real objective is to "organize, educate and expand people's consciousness" via the media and other communications channels. In Zamora's words, "We do not have electoral positions as such. Our participation is rather part of the broader organizing effort to achieve a negotiated political solution" to the war and the country's economic crisis. Hector Silva of the MPSC expects that the CD will become an "important third force or even second force" in the wake of the decline of Duarte's party, the Christian Democrats. Corruption scandals and infighting among party factions seems to have convinced Salvadorans that the Christian Democrats cannot possibly win the presidency in 1989. Under the Salvadoran constitution, the president must receive an absolute majority of all votes cast. If in the first balloting, no one of the candidates receives a majority of all ballots, a run-off is then scheduled between the two candidates receiving the greatest number of votes. In response to statements by government officials that the CD will establish an alliance with the Christian Democrats to prevent a victory by the rightwing ARENA, Zamora has said the CD will not lend its support to either of the candidates in the run-off. Some officials predict that in the end, the Christian Democrats will receive support from the left "because if ARENA wins, all political space will be closed off to the left." The Christian Democrats estimate that the CD could obtain about

300,000 votes in the March elections, from a total of approximately 1.8 million eligible voters. The Christian Democrat party, the US Embassy and some military officers point to the participation of the CD in the electoral process as evidence that the democratic project pushed by Washington via Duarte is bearing fruit. Meanwhile, FDR leaders are being pressured to break off their alliance with the FMLN. According to Zamora, such pressures are the greatest insurance that the alliance will continue, "because if we do that, everyone will believe we did so under pressure by the gringos." For its part, the FMLN has accepted the CD's decision to participate in the elections, but has also decided to continue actions dedicated to destabilizing the regime. The rebels, moreover, do not plan to urge their supporters to vote for the Convergence. According to FMLN commandante Nidia Diaz: "There are people who still believe that elections can be a solution, and for them the Democratic Convergence could be an option. But our supporters have a more sophisticated consciousness and therefore know that in this way we will not find a solution to the conflict." (Basic data from 09/16/88 report by Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research of Central America and the Caribbean-CRIES, Managua)

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