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Nicaragua: Presidential Candidates Chosen By National Opposition Union, Movement For Revolutionary Unity

by Deborah Tyroler

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On the evening of Sept. 2, leaders of the 14-party National Opposition Union (UNO) selected Violeta Barrios Chamorro as presidential candidate in the February 1990 elections. Vice presidential candidate is Virgilio Godoy Reyes, a 55-year-old lawyer and head of the center-left Independent Liberal Party. Barrios Chamorro told the New York Times in a telephone interview on Sept. 3 that if elected, she would declare an amnesty for all prisoners convicted of anti-Sandinista offenses, end the military draft and "devote myself to humanizing this destroyed country." The presidential candidate belongs to no political party and has said on several occasions that she does not care for politics. Some UNO leaders would have preferred a candidate with experience in the political arena. However, public opinion surveys showed her as the most popular opposition candidate by a wide margin. Barrios Chamorro is a product of the Nicaraguan aristocracy. In a telephone interview with the Times on Sept. 3, Dominguez Sanchez Salgado, a "prominent Nicaraguan leftist," said: "She would be a great president, but not in a country that is going through a revolution. There is not the shred of a revolutionary in her. She is beloved, and of course she is completely honest, but she is from the bourgeoisie. I don't believe she understands how much this country has changed." Godoy is a lawyer and sociology professor who in 1956 tried to assassinate President Anastasio Somoza Garcia, father of the deposed dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle. He served as Labor Minister from 1980 to 1984. UNO had planned to announce its presidential ticket on Sept. 1. However, as a result of internal conflict surrounding the vice presidential choice, deliberations continued through late Saturday evening. The UNO coalition, comprised of 12 legally registered parties and two unregistered parties, runs the gamut from Conservatives, Liberals, and Christian Democrats, to Socialists and Communists. It is popularly known as the Tower of Babel. Party leaders agreed that in separate voting on the presidential and vice presidential candidates, a vote of 10 (parties) was necessary for selection. Business interests within the coalition had hoped to nominate former president of the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP), Enrique Bolanos Geyer, as vice presidential candidate. Gilberto Cuadra, current head of COSEP, said Godoy was a "marxist," and responsible for the creation of a national system of labor and wage guidelines. COSEP member Ramiro Guardia said Godoy was the cause of serious damage to both labor and the business sector during his tenure as labor minister. In addition, said Cuadra, Godoy has been accused by members of his own party of embezzling thousands of dollars donated by a West German foundation. Non-Sandinista labor unions have said that when Godoy was labor minister, he set up a system which favored Sandinista unions. Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy, which is contributing $3.5 million to opposition parties and other projects in Nicaragua this year, said the selection of Barrios Chamorro guaranteed that the vote would be "not only an election, but also a plebiscite on 10 years of Sandinista rule." The Endowment, a private nonprofit corporation, receives almost all its funding from the US government. For the last five years, it has helped purchase ink and printing equipment for the newspaper published by the Chamorro family, La Prensa. On Sept. 3, the dissident Movement for Revolutionary Unity (MUR) ratified the selection of Moises Hassan, 47, as its presidential candidate, and Francisco Samper for vice president. Hassan,
an engineer and physicist, was a member of the junta that took power in July 1979 and has held positions in the construction and interior ministries. Samper is an economist. The MUR is largely comprised of former members of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Its membership numbers less than 100. Hassan was mayor of Managua for one month before he resigned from the FSLN in April 1988. In an interview with AFP, Hassan said MUR is offering a "different alternative" to voters by taking an intermediate position between the FSLN's "bad management" and the National Opposition Union's (UNO) rightist positions. Despite its small following, MUR has "good possibilities" for success in the elections, Hassan said. (Basic data from Notimex, 09/01/89, 09/04/89; New York Times, 09/04/89; AFP, 09/05/89)

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