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Sandinista Dissidents Rejoin Party

by LADB Staff

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The Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) and the breakaway Movimiento de Renovacion Sandinista (MRS) have reunited in an electoral pact to face the governing Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) in the Nov. 4 presidential election. With the campaign in full swing, FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega is trying to expand his electoral coalition in which almost anyone is welcomed including former enemies. Ortega and MRS president Dora Maria Tellez signed the agreement Aug. 28.

The FSLN-led electoral alliance, known as the Convergencia Nacional, now includes many of the MRS dissidents who left the party in 1995 under the leadership of former vice president Sergio Ramirez (1985-1990), Tellez, and others (see NotiSur, 1995-02-17). The Convergencia also includes other small, unregistered parties such as the Movimiento Unidad Cristiana (MUC) and the Unidad Social Cristiana (UDC), the party of Ortega's running mate Agustin Jarquin. Ortega recruited the conservative Alianza Popular Conservadora (APC) into the Convergencia on Sept. 4.

APC president Miriam Arguello was jailed in the 1980s for her opposition to Sandinista policies. Ortega has promised her the post of attorney general if he wins the November election. Like these small parties, the MRS did not meet the requirements for recognition as a political party set by the Consejo Supremo Electoral (CSE). It has only one deputy in the National Assembly. The MRS has strongly condemned the FSLN for the political deals worked out between Ortega and President Arnoldo Aleman's PLC.

Those pacts led to controversial constitutional reforms that went into effect last year (see NotiCen, 1999-12-23). The reforms essentially divided power in the CSE and the Corte Suprema de Justicia (CSJ) between the two major parties and reduced competition from smaller parties. The reformed CSE set new standards for party recognition that were instrumental in disqualifying the MRS and other small parties from the November 2000 municipal elections (see NotiCen, 2000-11-09). Tellez said the decision to rejoin the FSLN had unanimous backing within her party, but Jorge Samper, the lone MRS deputy in the legislature, criticized the agreement and said not all party members supported it.

Ramirez also rejected the agreement. He said in a formal statement that he was retired from partisan politics and that, while he respected the decision of his MRS colleagues to rejoin the FSLN, he did not share in the decision or support it. In an interview with the daily La Prensa, Ramirez described the MRS-FSLN agreement as the dissolution of his party brought about by the electoral reforms and the resulting polarization of the political culture. He said the MRS had failed as a party because it could not compete with the FSLN for votes on the left.

In 1996, Ramirez ran against Ortega and Aleman for the presidency, but voters apparently decided that a vote for the MRS was a wasted vote that would throw the election to Aleman. Ramirez

regards the agreement as a vote-grabbing move without any ideological justification. For some time, he said, the FSLN had ceased to be a party of the left, which means that the MRS-FSLN pact is not an alliance of the left. The Aug. 28 pact, Ramirez said, was an "absorption disguised as an electoral alliance." The move of the MRS back to the FSLN ranks would mean nothing in the coming elections, he said.

Conservative Party replaces candidates

The FSLN's newly enlarged *Convergencia* mirrors realignments that took place among center-right groups. After a long legal battle regarding the nationality of Partido Conservador (PC) vice-presidential candidate Jose Antonio Alvarado, the CSE declared him ineligible to run. Carlos Tunnermann, president of the nongovernmental organization *Etica y Transparencia*, replaced him on the ticket (see *NotiCen*, 2001-06-28). Then in July, PC presidential candidate Noel Vidaurre dropped out of the race after he failed to put together a united center-right alliance to stop Ortega, who had a comfortable lead in the polls.

Vidaurre had courted the MRS, a move that apparently dissuaded many on the right from joining his coalition. The sudden elimination of a strong third-party candidate meant that center-right voters would be less likely to split their vote and allow Ortega to win. Vidaurre's replacement was attorney Alberto Saborio, and Consuelo Sequeira replaced Tunnermann on the PC ticket. Following Vidaurre's resignation, some PC militants moved into the FSLN's *Convergencia* while others decided to support PLC candidate Enrique Bolanos. Since the realignment, Bolanos has gradually gained in pre-election polls.

In a *Borge y Asociados* poll taken in May, Ortega was ahead with 36%, Vidaurre 28%, and Bolanos third with 23%. A later poll showed Ortega at 34%, Bolanos moving up to 28.8%, and Vidaurre dropping to 13.6%. But a poll taken in mid-August by *Borge y Asociados* showed Bolanos ahead for the first time with 38.9%, Ortega with 35.6%, and Saborio with just 4.5%. The poll, however, was commissioned by Bolanos' PLC.

Ortega seeks support on the right

Ortega's campaign has been marked by frequent centrist economic pronouncements and promises that a new Sandinista administration would avoid the "errors" of the first one. In recent months, Ortega has reached out for support from former *contras*, former members of the *Guardia Nacional*, and members of the Somoza family, which was ousted from power by the Sandinistas in 1979. "This is becoming a hodgepodge, with a place for everyone," Ramirez said. Ortega has sent running mate Jarquin to Guatemala to seek support from Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero.

Somoza Portocarrero was a *Guardia Nacional* colonel accused of numerous atrocities during the armed struggle with the FSLN in the 1970s. Though the FSLN is now courting him, last March, when Somoza Portocarrero planned a visit from his exile home in Guatemala, Ortega said he would be waiting for him with bullets. "He can enter the country but not leave it," Ortega said (see *NotiCen*, 2000-05-11). In June, Ortega asked the people of Nicaragua to forgive supporters of the Somoza dictatorship. Somoza Portocarrero said these were "words of a statesman." "I'm not pro-Sandinista,"

said Somoza Portocarrero, "but I think the former president [Ortega] has experience....He is a man who does not say things so candidly without thinking."

In May, Javier Somoza Rivas, grandson of family patriarch dictator Anastasio Somoza Garcia (1935-1956), said he voted for FSLN Managua mayoral candidate Herty Lewites last year and was considering voting for Ortega in November. While campaigning in Matagalpa in late August, Ortega announced that 1,000 former members of Somoza's disbanded Guardia Nacional now living in exile would join the Convergencia Nacional in an alliance of "reconciliation and love." He invited other "brothers" of the Guardia living in Nicaragua to join the alliance. "They are victims of that dictatorship, which used them to repress the people, but they are poor, and we have said that wherever the poor are, whether they be from the Resistencia [contras], or guardias, there will be the Frente Sandinista with the Convergencia," said Ortega.

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