

12-6-2001

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### Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Faction Holds Power in FMLN." (2001). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/8910>

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## Faction Holds Power in FMLN

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: El Salvador

Published: 2001-12-06

The Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) elected a preponderance of orthodox officers to head the party for the next three years. Leaders of the party's reform faction, decisively defeated for top posts, have not heeded the call for post-election unity. Internal disputes between reformers (renovadores) and traditionalists (ortodoxos) culminated in October with the expulsion of renovador leader and former presidential candidate Facundo Guardado by the party's disciplinary tribunal (see NotiCen, 2001-10-11).

After his ouster, Guardado told Inter Press Service the struggle was between "Stalinists" [ortodoxos] and "pluralists" [renovadores]. "My expulsion from the party is evidence of intolerance, of how far Stalinist practices can reach, even in the 21st century," he said. "What has happened is that the communist wing of the FMLN is not interested in governing; they want to remain in the opposition forever. The ortodoxos are only interested in obtaining a handful of political posts so they can say 'no' to everything, because they only practice the politics of 'no.'"

In its Nov. 25 internal elections, in which nearly 80,000 members were eligible to vote, reformist candidate Francisco Jovel, Salvador Sanchez Ceren of the orthodox faction, Gerson Martinez of the neutral or tercerista faction, and independent Angel Enriquez vied for the post of national coordinator of the FMLN. Before the elections, reformers accused orthodox leaders of preparing an electoral fraud. Jovel said the orthodox faction had violated party statutes, and he filed suit with the Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE) asking it to intervene. The petition alleged that the ortodoxos registered candidates after the deadline and manipulated the voter- registration list. Although there was some sentiment within the TSE to accept the request and postpone the elections, the vote went ahead on Nov. 25.

Lilian Coto, president of the party's electoral tribunal and an ortodoxo, said that the election process was transparent, that the reformers' request was "a campaign to discredit," and that they were not going to win anyway.

### *Orthodox leaders take top positions*

Sanchez Ceren, a former FMLN guerrilla commander and current leader of the FMLN Legislative Assembly delegation, won the election and will take over as national coordinator when the newly elected leadership takes office at the local and national levels for three-year terms on Dec. 16. Incomplete returns showed Sanchez Ceren won 54% of the vote in the four-way contest. But Jovel immediately called for an investigation into possible election fraud. He said unofficial results collected by his faction did not coincide with the party's official tally. Replacing Jovel as FMLN Assembly leader was Jorge Schafik Handal. The orthodox leader won the vote of the party's legislative deputies Nov. 28, but members of the other factions complained that the vote was held without enough debate and in their absence.

The daily Prensa Grafica reported Nov. 30 that at least one orthodox deputy agreed that Schafik Handal's election was flawed because of insufficient participation by the other factions. There were also complaints that Schafik Handal's attempt to impose an orthodox deputy as assistant national coordinator violated party rules. The dual victory gave the ortodoxos complete control of the party and ensured that the FMLN would go into the next national elections with its traditional socialist orientation intact. Sanchez Ceren said the result of the internal vote was that the party was confirmed as orthodox "socialist, democratic, and revolutionary."

Orthodox members also control the party's national council with more than an 85% majority. Gerson Martinez and the terceristas congratulated Sanchez Ceren and answered the orthodox call for all factions to work together. Jovel and the renovadores did not do so, and some continued to insist the elections were invalid. A new conflict is emerging as renovador Deputies Mauricio Estrada and Balmore Villalobos announced Dec. 4 that they would not give the customary 30% of their congressional salaries to the FMLN to finance the party. Estrada said the party had used the funds to finance the orthodox faction agenda. The two deputies promised to donate the money directly to their home departments to help cover expenses of local FMLN activities.

At least two terceristas are reportedly considering similar actions. Orthodox Deputy Rafael Benavides said Estrada and Villalobos should be cut from the party. The party will hold a convention on Dec. 16 at which time it will elect a new ethics tribunal. The orthodox faction is expected to have a majority on the tribunal, and some observers believe it will move to expel renovadores from the party.

### *New coordinator takes tough stand against factions*

In an interview with Prensa Grafica, Sanchez Ceren made no concessions to the renovadores and warned that "the rank and file will not forgive those who are not in this [orthodox] unifying faction." Asked if the party could win the next national election without renovador support, he did not answer the question but suggested it would be better to beat the ruling Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) with a unified, stripped-down party than to give in to what the orthodox faction calls the right wing. "We have to be a strong party, to have links with the party base, with the popular sector, and have alliances with other sectors," he said.

Prensa Grafica commented that Sanchez Ceren believes the time has come to begin "dismantling" the FMLN factions. In a Sept. 12 editorial, the weekly Proceso, published by the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), said the right-wing ARENA needed the kind of FMLN the ongoing internal wrangling appears to have produced. "The FMLN that the right wing wants for advertising purposes is, then, an FMLN that has not given up its socialist and communist purposes. Anything that takes this direction will be very useful. For its electoral calculations, nothing is better [for ARENA] than an internally rotten FMLN," said the editorial.

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