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New FMLN Political Party Formed

by LADB Staff

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The reformist (renovador) faction of the Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) has announced it has established itself as a new political party and will seek a legislative alliance with one or more of the small parties in the Legislative Assembly and try to run candidates in the 2003 elections.

In early March, the renovadores made a formal break with the FMLN and declared themselves a new party to be called the Partido Movimiento Renovador (PMR) with a social-democrat orientation. Former presidential candidate Facundo Guardado is the provisional president of the party. Guardado and other leaders of the new party were recently expelled from the FMLN (see NotiCen, 2001-10-11). The PMR will have five seats in the Assembly.

In 1994, Joaquin Villalobos led four FMLN deputies out of the party to form the Partido Demócrata (PD). The PMR's leadership issued a manifesto saying the party would be a viable leftist alternative to the FMLN, which it said is no longer an electoral option on the left. The party's founding principles are "equality, liberty, responsibility, and solidarity," says the manifesto. The PMR begins life with a core of former FMLN deputies who lost their battle to reform the party after its most recent electoral defeat.

Last November, the renovadores lost to the FMLN left wing (orthodox faction) in internal elections. Again in December, the orthodox wing took almost total control of top posts despite credible reports of widespread electoral fraud (see NotiCen, 2001-12-06). Since then, Guardado, Francisco Jovel, and other renovador leaders have been exploring possible alliances with smaller parties and began voting independently and using the name Movimiento Renovador in the Assembly (see NotiCen, 2002-02-21).

In a written analysis of the left, called *The FMLN is Dead*, the PMR reviewed the history of FMLN purges that helped fuel the internal animosities. The analysis blames the FMLN orthodox faction for electoral defeats at the hands of the governing Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA). Some polls indicate the FMLN has less than half the public-approval rating that ARENA has. The analysis says the FMLN's decline since the mid-1990s is a result of its inability to reform itself and open the party to popular participation. PMR leaders are now hurrying to get the 35,000 signatures needed to register as a party with the Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE).

In case the party does not get official status from the TSE in time to compete in the 2003 elections, there is the possibility of running candidates under the banner of the Centro Democrático Unido (CDU). For legislative purposes in the Assembly, the PMR is moving toward an alliance with the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC), which holds four seats, and the Partido Social Demócrata (PSD) with one.

Changes expected in Assembly

Clearly, the defection of the former FMLN deputies changes the landscape in the 84-seat Assembly. ARENA has 28 seats and the FMLN has been reduced from 31 to 26 after the expulsions. PMR deputies began voting independently long before the final split, but the balance of forces could change further if the party links up with other deputies. President Flores said in mid-April that the PMR could affect the election of the next Assembly president, as ARENA Deputy Walter Araujo steps down from the post April 30. He also thinks that in Assembly voting the PMR could take with it some members of the smaller parties in the selection of committee chairs and other important posts.

The changed situation in the Assembly has FMLN leaders concerned that the party might lose committee chairs and staff in the next session. Araujo and other ARENA legislative leaders said the PMR deputies should have the positions they merit in accordance with their number, which means the FMLN could lose some.

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