



The massive protest dealt the administration a stinging defeat: Demonstrating against the proposed university reforms

PHOTOS BY SERGIO DORANTES—SYGMA

INTERNATIONAL

Mexico: The End of Apathy

A strike wins a voice for students

The red and black banners are gone, the makeshift barricades of desks and chairs were long ago dismantled, and most of the protest graffiti have been obliterated. Outwardly at least, a semblance of normality has settled over the sprawling, 750-acre campus of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) since mid-February, when student leaders ended their 20-day shutdown of Latin America's largest institution of higher education. Many students now seem more intent on studying for finals than debating the academic reforms that ignited the strike in the first place. But the appearance of calm this spring cannot overshadow the very real achievements of last winter: the leaders who organized the strike mustered the strongest student-protest movement Mexico has seen in two decades. In the ensuing showdown, they dealt the administration a stinging defeat.

The Mexican strike was only one of the many campus movements that has erupted abroad during this academic year. Student leaders in Europe and Asia also challenged their countries' governments—and often came away victorious. In France, Portugal and Spain—as well as in Mexico—students confronted university officials who, determined to reduce bloated enrollments, wanted to restrict admissions, toughen academic standards and raise tuition fees. In Asia, on the other hand, where student demonstrators focused less on campus issues than on national politics, lead-

ers reacted by clamping down hard on the protesters. Chinese authorities seem, for the moment, to have quelled their country's young activists; South Korean campuses—where the protests turned violent—are still simmering.

The sudden resurgence of student activism in Mexico was as bloodless as it was successful—and that may raise the hopes of other grass-roots protest movements in the country. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has ruled the country since 1929. Every president, every senator, every governor has come from the PRI, provoking heated charges of electoral fraud. So far, all opposition attempts to break the ruling party's stranglehold on power have failed. The students' victory certainly did not end the PRI's dominance, but it may give hope to leaders of other Mexican reform movements on both the left and the right.

The recent student activism marked the end of years of apathy on Mexican campuses. The country's last student movement of comparable strength had emerged in the summer of 1968 and had ended in tragedy when Army troops opened fire on demonstrators crowding a Mexico City plaza. Some 300 people were killed in what came to be known as the Tlatelolco Massacre. With that bloody precedent in mind, President Miguel de la Madrid this year kept

On the march: With banner depicting leftist icon Che Guevara

