



SEBASTIÁN TORRES—SYGMA

Trying to rise above Third World poverty: *Strolling across UNAM's sprawling campus*

his troops off the campuses and out of the fray. The students were allowed to strike. They organized two massive rallies in the capital's Zócalo (central square)—and, without suffering one arrest or injury, they forced UNAM rector Jorge Carpizo to suspend indefinitely his proposed reforms. "This was a great success for the student movement," says Imanol Ordorika, a 28-year-old physics student, "above all, because we students had suffered 15 years of consecutive defeats in the universities."

It began as a rather parochial, ivory-tower dispute between university bureaucrats and defiant students. From its founding in 1551 until the late 1960s, the national university had been regarded as the country's pre-eminent institution of higher education, a sort of Harvard, Caltech and MIT rolled into one. Five of the last seven Mexican presidents (de la Madrid included) graduated from the UNAM, and most of de la Madrid's cabinet ministers are fellow alumni. During a 40-year span that began in the early 1930s, the UNAM evolved into a kind of academic factory cranking out the

legions of managers, technicians, professionals and bureaucrats Mexico needed to modernize its economy and pull itself out of Third World poverty.

When the 80-building UNAM campus opened in the mid-1950s, the student body stood at 33,400. Including students who attend 14 UNAM-chartered high schools in Mexico City, the university's enrollment now hovers around 340,000. Many of the UNAM's current problems can be blamed on its bloated size. The university's budget has failed to keep pace with the school's growth. Government subsidies underwrite 95 percent of the budget, and skidding oil prices in recent years have forced sharp cuts in public-sector spending. Successive UNAM budgets have felt the ax.

No money: That has translated into outdated textbooks and a decaying physical plant; the school's central library was closed for nearly a year because there was no money for repairs. Meager faculty salaries of between \$250 and \$400 a month force most tenured professors to moonlight. Once a ticket to a rewarding and well-paying job, a UNAM diploma has lost much of its value

amid the country's worst economic crisis in 50 years, so most Mexican families who can afford to now send their children to expensive, privately run universities instead. UNAM's current student body is largely drawn from lower-middle-class families.

Named to the UNAM's top post in January 1985, law professor Jorge Carpizo soon realized that something had to be done about the once proud university. Last year Carpizo submitted an unflinching "diagnosis" that shocked prominent alumni. The rector disclosed, among other findings, that fewer than half of the undergraduates who entered the UNAM between 1972 and 1981 completed their courses of study and that nine out of 10 graduate students were flunking out. Though the cost to the school of educating a graduate student for one year totaled \$310, that student was liable for a tuition payment of less than 25 cents. So last fall, Carpizo proposed a sweeping package of reforms that would have hiked fees for graduate students, standardized exams and eliminated automatic admission for graduates of the 14 UNAM-chartered high schools. A quasi-

Activists Abroad

Whether they were fighting to block tuition hikes or for freedom of the national press, students around the world made their voices heard this year. (From left) Antigovernment students rioted in Seoul; in Paris, marchers were peaceful; rallies led by leftists in Madrid turned violent; Chinese demonstrators sparked a repressive backlash.



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