

legislative body called the University Council routinely approved the rector's reform package, and the new rules appeared to be a *fait accompli*.

A small but vocal group of leftist student leaders attacked the reforms as "elitist"—and then founded the University Student Council (CEU) in order to fight them. The new organization got immediate, strong support from many students. In mid-November a one-day boycott of classes shut down about a third of the university's 36 schools and faculties. Administration officials agreed to meet with CEU leaders, but 10 rounds of talks went nowhere and the CEU called its 20-day strike.

Student protesters are quick to say that they share Carpizo's commitment to halting their school's decline. But the administration, they charge, tried to impose the reforms without proper consultation of faculty members and students. According to CEU leader Ordorika, the students wanted to "retake the initiative in transforming the university." The CEU also insisted that the government protect each Mexican citizen's constitutionally guaranteed right to a free education. Many editorial writers in Mexico scorned the CEU as apolitical rabble-rousers. The ruling PRI and even some left-wing politicians also turned their backs on the strikers. Only one political party, the leftist Revolutionary Workers' Party, publicly backed the students; for the most part they had to go it alone.

Three key areas: The strength of the movement caught even its leaders by surprise. While 10,000 cops stood by, more than 100,000 demonstrators surged through the streets of downtown Mexico City in mid-January in the first of two huge, CEU-sponsored protest marches. Two weeks into the strike, the administration agreed to suspend reform proposals affecting the three key areas of tuition, tests and admissions, and it granted another long-sought concession: the creation of a democratically elected university congress that would take up the suspended reforms as well as discuss the overall future of the university. "We never imagined the magnitude of the response," confesses Antonio Santos, a 25-year-old Latin American studies major who cofounded the CEU.



Despite the new calm, signs of recent turmoil: Graffiti left over from the campus revolt

SERGIO DORANTES—SYGMA

"We thought it might be possible to defeat the new rules, but we never thought we could organize marches that would fill the Zócalo or build such a large student movement."

The long-term future of the UNAM student movement is difficult to predict. Having made a success of the strike, student leaders now seem content to avoid any protest action until the convening of the university congress, which is not expected to begin deliberations until next September at the earliest. That body will decide the ultimate fate of Carpizo's reforms, and it remains quite possible that the congress will choose to override the CEU's position and adopt the reforms anyway. But the UNAM student leaders have indisputably won an important battle in their showdown with the university administration. And the example they have set could inspire other opposition forces in Mexico to press demands for greater democracy and social justice with new vigor and self-confidence in coming months and years.

JOSEPH CONTRERAS in Mexico City



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