



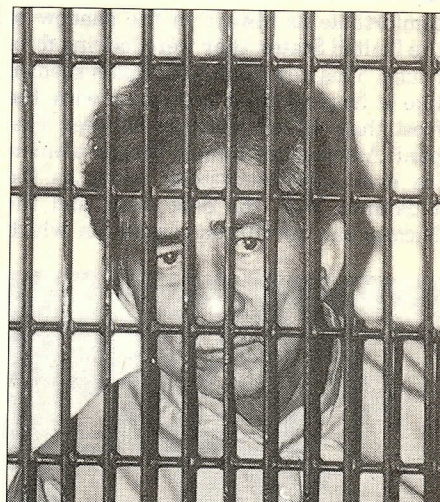
CASTILLO—AP

Display of muscle: Mexican soldiers ride behind trucks to ensure distribution of gasoline

heart attack the day after the roundup.

Though not as flashy as some of his sidekicks, Hernández made an inviting target. In the boom and bust of the oil years, no union was more ripe for corruption than his. It grew immensely wealthy in the boom—benefiting under its sweetheart contract deal from almost every dollar Pemex spent. In the post-1982 bust, the union's lock on the industry that provides 40 percent of Mexico's export earnings kept its political influence strong and sheltered its 170,000 members from the country's overall economic decline. Barragán, the second in command, was renowned as a big-time gambler in Las Vegas—and had medals from casinos there to prove it. Mexican *federales* said they confiscated 32 watches from the trunk of his armored car, including one valued at over \$150,000.

Union busting? Typically for Salinas, there was a strong economic rationale behind the crackdown on La Quina. According to Fausto Alzati, a professor of international economics at the Colegio de México, Pemex was headed for trouble. If Salinas gets the economy growing, the oil company will be unable both to meet domestic demand and to service the export market that provides Mexico with crucial foreign currency. The short-term solution is to increase production, which means tackling Pemex's legendary inefficiency. To the Salinas team, the only course was to oust La



SERGIO DORANTES—SYGMA

The target: 'La Quina' behind bars

Quina. In some circles, this looked like union busting. Salinas went out of his way last week to reaffirm his "indestructible" alliance with labor. Others weren't so sure. Said Lorenzo Meyer, a historian at the Colegio de México: "The unions are boulders on the road to Salinas's 'modern economy.'"

Clearly Salinas had scored a short-term victory, but there was considerable disagreement over the long-term significance of the confrontation. A U.S. drug-enforcement official in the region perceived a mes-

sage to Mexican narcotics traffickers: "The word is out: the man wants to pop heads." Some believed Salinas wanted Mexico's creditors to realize he can be tough. Even the political opposition had no kind words for La Quina. But critics, mostly on the left, questioned whether the government would use the same *mano dura*, or hard hand, against shady business potentates, such as the rumored profiteers who are suspected of manipulating the 1987 Mexican stock-market crash. "Corruption in Mexico is organized crime," said Samuel del Villar, now an opposition theoretician who once headed the "moral renovation" campaign of Salinas's predecessor, President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado. "And if you want to move against organized crime, you have to move against all the families."

Mixed signals: Cynical Mexicans saw little reason to believe that La Quina's arrest was the beginning of a serious, protracted campaign against corruption. "It's pure demagog-

uery—a way of distracting public opinion," said Jeanette Soto de Torres, a suburban Mexico City housewife. And for the time being, the signals coming from the Salinas administration were mixed. Last week two Acapulco judges were unseated by the Supreme Court because, the court found, they had improperly released a rich young man convicted of abducting, raping and then murdering a seven-year-old neighbor; the judges were accused of accepting bribes. But at the same time, government officials were standing by the appointment of Miguel Nazar Haro to a top police-intelligence post; he is under indictment in California for allegedly masterminding a huge international auto-theft ring.

For Salinas to move against La Quina at all was impressive—as del Villar knows only too well. Early in de la Madrid's six-year term, del Villar singled out La Quina as the first and principal target of the "moral renovation" drive. He sent the president a memorandum to that effect, and in it he outlined his strategy. In less than a week La Quina was showing the memo around to his cronies. Presumably, says del Villar, the union chief was slipped a copy by a member of de la Madrid's inner circle. Del Villar's attack on La Quina fizzled. By doing what other presidents hadn't, Salinas last week seized some of the initiative he squandered in last year's elections. For the time being, it's his to lose.

STRYKER MCGUIRE in Mexico City