

become a moribund nation that will soon die." The oil workers' congressmen persuaded the standing committee of the lower house, which is dominated by the ruling PRI party, to proclaim Jan. 4 that it would back a moratorium, since "the Mexican people have already exhausted their economic resources to comply with servicing the foreign debt."

In a New Year's press conference, Hernández Galicia urged that the \$15.9 billion to be saved by a one-year moratorium be productively invested in agriculture and small industry. It could also pay for finishing half-built highways, dams, hydroelectric power plants, and housing developments, and for renewed oil exploration. "That is the only way we could obtain the healthy structure to guarantee resuming payments. . . . Mexico is faithful to its obligations, but it is unjust when this takes up the entire budget, and we are left naked and exposed," Hernández said.

The oil workers union not only opposes the Salinas government's economic policies. They also formally brought charges of fraud last year against the former head of Pemex, Mario Ramón Beteta, now governor of the state of Mexico. Beteta and his family are part of the financial oligarchy, the key movers in Mexico of the vendetta against the union.

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## Documentation

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### 'I am innocent'

*Joaquín Hernández Galicia spoke for more than four hours before the Ninth District Court on Jan. 11; his statement was attended by more than 100 reporters, photographers, lawyers, and sympathizers who shouted, "We are with you, Joaquín."*

I am innocent. All this is a dirty trick prefabricated by Mario Ramón Beteta and some officials of the past and present government—Eduardo Pesqueira and Francisco Rojas—who are bothered by the criticisms of the government we have made, and because we are teaching other unions and social or political groups how to resolve the crisis, the foreign debt, and, above all, by declaring that the property and natural resources of the nation should be exclusively managed by the state to the benefit of the Mexican people. The property of the nation, as the Constitution determines, should always be administered by the state, to the benefit of the Mexican people.

This statement of my supposed declarations is not what I signed. The one I signed was not so compromising. But if I did sign it, it was because they threatened me. They told me that if I didn't confess, at least in part, they would make the oil workers work by force. They knew that the brothers were

### Why they fear 'La Quina'

The oil workers union, Revolutionary Union of Petroleum Workers of the Mexican Republic (SRTPRM), is unique not just in its wealth and power, but in the quality of life it has brought to its members and in its devotion to defending and developing the Mexican nation.

A foreign visitor to Ciudad Madero, the oil center on Mexico's Gulf coast where the union's headquarters are located, is struck by how different it is from other industrial centers. It is a tidy city. There is no sign of public drunkenness or of the rowdy bars that proliferate in Mexican towns and anywhere in the world where there are a lot of oil workers. When the visitor asks about it, he is told that the union chief Joaquín Hernández Galicia once berated the wives of his members for not keeping their husbands at home and out of trouble. The wives answered they had tried, but could not compete with the attractions of the red light district. Within a few months, the union had bought the district, bulldozed it, and built a church and a school. Today, it is hard to find a bar anywhere in the place.

On the streets and in the union-owned supermarkets and department stores, one sees whole families walking and shopping together. The union has invested heavily in services for its members and communities during the past 30 years. In its 36 supermarkets at work sites around the country, food costs 20-40% less than "market prices" for

stopping work.

They also told me that my family was kidnaped and that if I continued to refuse to authorize the prefabricated statement, I would never see them again. Those from the Attorney General's office treated me well, under the circumstances. They were even attentive, you might say. Not so my brothers. . . . I didn't want my union brothers to continue suffering. I heard them complaining, suffering. They told me that the inquiries were going to last many days. This didn't bother me. What bothered me was that they were going to kill my companions, male and female.

I signed . . . but this statement doesn't tell the truth. It is prefabricated.

I call on Don Fidel Velázquez [CTM union federation chief] not to stop helping us, because this is an action that wants to do away with the little autonomy that exists within the public sector unions. . . . This maneuver is not only an effort to disintegrate the oil workers union, but other unions.

members and the public in general. It has built numberless housing projects, health centers, and vacation centers for its members.

It is true that the union has built an "economic empire." Union leaders live modestly in houses comparable to those of the average permanently employed U.S. oil worker. The union makes far more productive use of its income than any Mexican capitalist or the government. It has used its money and its members' skills to build all sorts of industries in the oil zones, including factories making furniture, small appliances, and other products to supply its stores.

"La Quina," as Hernández Galicia is known, travels constantly to agricultural development projects the union sponsors and finances to improve the productive capacities of the peasants in the oil-producing states. One factory in Ciudad Madero specializes in farm implements for these peasant communities. Most of those working there are oil workers doing the voluntary labor, which is required in lieu of union dues. The members seem quite willing to do that for a union which has given them security, even in the midst of the depression foreign creditors have foisted on Mexico.

All over the oil zone, there are signs saying things like "Oil workers, You Are Responsible for the Country." The quotes come from the speech President Lázaro Cárdenas made in 1938 when he nationalized Mexico's oil. Cárdenas expropriated the industry because the British and U.S. oil companies were sucking out all its capital, destroying the wells, creating dangerous working conditions, and provoking strikes.

Cárdenas's courageous act was the most important assertion of national sovereignty in this hemisphere in this

century. The oil cartel thought it could collapse Mexico's output by pulling out all the foreign technicians. But the Mexican oil workers found in themselves the talents to keep the wells functioning, then to expand output, and later to develop a modern petrochemical industry.

Some of Cárdenas's aides suggested sending troops to the oil wells to protect them from the anticipated sabotage of the enraged former owners, but he wisely endowed the oil workers' union with stewardship over the national patrimony. It is out of that patriotic loyalty that the union asked its workers not to strike, even when its leader was framed and jailed. It is also why La Quina threatened Jan. 3 to strike if a "millimeter" of the oil industry were sold off by the government.

General Cárdenas, in appreciation for the union's attitude, made it the policy of the state oil monopoly, Pemex, that the union be given priority for any contract for which it could provide equal or better terms than other bidders. That, and not any alleged corruption, is the source of the union's wealth. La Quina has been ruthless against union officials who use their positions to enrich themselves. And, for the past few years, he has been at war with managers like Mario Ramón Beteta who line their pockets while eliminating work safety investments.

A union leader told the tens of thousands rallying in support of La Quina in Mexico City Jan. 11, "He used the union's money to build houses, stores, and hospitals. Do you think he robbed the oil workers' money?" The response was a resounding, "No," *La Jornada* reported.

While good management and strong motivation have made the union's enterprises flourish, Pemex has been decapitalized to pay Mexico's foreign debts.

—Mark Sonnenblick

[Unionists should] continue working as they always have, with patriotism and efficiency, not abandon their labors. . . . I also call on [my colleagues] not to leave the CTM, and in regard to myself, I repeat that I am innocent. We will legally defend our innocence. . . .

They want us permanently in jail, because we have always wanted a clean Pemex, not just an honest union, but also an honest Pemex. We have realized that our accusations of fraud regarding the ships belonging to Isidoro Rodríguez, the accusations against this great fraud committed in Somex by Mario Ramón Beteta in financially authorizing a company called Maizoro whose product did not exist on the market, hurt and affected them a great deal.

I see a maneuver against us for defending Pemex, the workers, and the people in general. For our policy of never forgetting—and we never will forget—the great Gen. Lázaro Cárdenas. We hope that the authorities do not lend themselves to continue this infamy adorned with prefabricated

legal trappings.

Of my friends who care for me, I ask that they care for my family who must be filled with worry, that they not abandon those who love me, that no matter what is said, I declare here and now that I, Joaquín Hernández Galicia, am innocent, as are Salvador Barragán Camacho and Pepe Sosa Martínez.

Let it be clear that we are not against the government, much less against the people. . . . This, in our opinion, is the fight of the true Mexicans who love Mexico, against those who do not love her. Against those who would continue selling her to the Mexican financial community which, tired of earning money through stock market deals, through the banks, the devaluations, the inflation, allied with the foreign financial leadership want to see the oil workers union and all of us who are friends of the truth, of the government, and of the people, on our knees or prisoners like myself. . . .

I will be a physical prisoner, but my conscience is free.