

2-20-1991

Labor, Environmental, & Religious Groups In U.S. And Mexico Organize Against Maquiladoras

Steven Ranieri

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

Ranieri, Steven. "Labor, Environmental, & Religious Groups In U.S. And Mexico Organize Against Maquiladoras." (1991).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/306>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Labor, Environmental, & Religious Groups In U.S. And Mexico Organize Against Maquiladoras

by Steven Ranieri

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, February 20, 1991

On Feb. 12, 62 environmental, labor and religious groups announced the formation of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. The group will press US firms to end abuses of workers' rights and environmental pollution at their assembly plants in Mexico. Calling the maquiladora industry a "disaster" for both Mexican and US workers, the American Federation of Labor- Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) came out in support of the Coalition and its demands for the imposition of more rigorous regulations on maquiladoras. Spurred in part by the prospect of a free trade agreement between Mexico, the US and Canada, organized labor has spearheaded the attack against the low-wage factories located primarily along the US-Mexico border. According to AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer Thomas R. Donahue, "Tens of thousands of US jobs have vanished as our multinational companies move their production to Mexico. These companies want to turn the terrible poverty of Mexico to their advantage" by paying Mexican workers "a despicably low average wage of between 60 and 80 cents an hour." He added that the industry is "a moral scandal." Representatives of the bilateral Coalition said they wanted a code of conduct to be made part of any free trade agreement that is negotiated between the US and Mexico. The Coalition said that a trade pact would prompt US firms to open additional maquiladoras because of Mexico's low wages and lax anti-pollution laws. "Fair employment practices" is listed as one of the standards of conduct the Coalition seeks to impose on maquiladoras. AFL-CIO economist Mark Anderson said, "US manufacturers could double the wages they pay Mexican workers and still be making armfuls of money." US employers would have to pay Mexican workers more, Anderson said, if they adhered to Mexican laws requiring companies to share a certain percentage of their profits with employees. They get around the law with accounting tricks that make their Mexican operations appear unprofitable, he added. The AFL-CIO has also supported the other "standards of conduct" proposed by the Coalition, including stricter health and safety regulations in maquiladora companies and tighter controls on hazardous waste disposal. Susan Mika, president of the Order of Benedictine Sisters and one of the directors of the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility said that the problems of the maquiladora industry are "enormous," and cited environmental pollution, lack of job security and exploitation of workers. Mika said that US firms in Mexico save \$25,000 per worker per year through their maquiladora operations. Thus, she said, with 135,000 workers in Ciudad Juarez alone, producing a surplus of \$3 billion, there are sufficient funds available to improve working conditions. According to John O'Conner, director of the US National Toxics Campaign Fund, when economists and industry officials talk of the maquiladora miracle "they forget to mention how these are poisoning drinking water and the rivers with toxic waste...how they expose women to solvents and lead that cause birth defects and mental retardation." O'Conner said that his organization is conducting a study of the maquiladoras, and the initial results are worse than expected, showing the highest levels of toxic wastes that have ever been encountered in Mexico. According to the initial results, the worst polluter is the General Motors plant in Matamoros, which was releasing a concentration of xylene, which causes respiratory irritation, amnesia, brain

hemorrhaging, and damage to the lungs, liver and kidneys. (Sources: The Mexico City News, El Financiero, 02/13/91; La Jornada, 02/14/91)

-- End --