AN INTERACTIVE REVOLUTIONARY FEMINIST ZINE HIGHLIGHTING THE REALITIES OF IMMIGRANTS FIGHTING BACK AGAINST WAGE THEFT, ABUSIVE CONDITIONS, AND LACK OF UNION REPRESENTATION THROUGH SHORT STORIES.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE 3  Story #1 "La libertad de las mujeres es el signo de la libertad social"

PAGE 9  Story #2 "Ni de aquí ni de allá"

PAGE 15 Story #3 Youth Against Sweatshops Worker's Profile: Octaviano Vasquez
STORY #1
Erica was born in Veracruz Mexico in the late 1980s. She migrated a few years ago from Veracruz in southern Mexico to Ciudad Juarez, a Mexican border town, to find a better paying job after NAFTA was enacted. Her family were farmers who raised crops with other members of their community on an ejido, a piece of land communally managed. Her upbringing was humble, but filled with quality food, dignified work and a tight knit social structure.

With the signing of NAFTA in 1994, all this began to change. Her ejido, formally protected from private ownership by the Mexican constitution, could now be privatized. Erica’s family had no desire to claim ownership of their plot. However, large farms bought plots in their ejido, and housing developers bought land in their community, both of which chipped away their community. Erica’s family formerly survived by exchanging goods and services with their neighbors, a mode of subsistence which required very little cash. After NAFTA, cash became increasingly vital to their substance because their village, much of which was now owned by large agricultural businesses and housing speculators, did not produce enough for all the members of the community to survive.

Instead, these companies produced luxury food crops for metropolitan markets and did not engage in exchange with Erica and her family. In order for Erica’s family to procure the necessities of life which they did not produce, they now needed cash. They tried selling the crops they produced, however; there was no one in their village with enough cash to buy them. Furthermore, the carcinogenic pesticides the agricultural companies sprayed penetrated the soil and water which Erica’s family farmed on, which ultimately destroyed the nutritional quality of the food and endangered her life.

"LA LIBERTAD DE LAS MUJERES ES EL SIGNO DE LA LIBERTAD SOCIAL"  
("Women's freedom is the sign of social freedom")  
-ROMA LUXEMBURG
Erica was able to get an interview at a maquila called Eagle Ottawa, where they make luxury interiors for cars. She was paid 105 pesos per day. After working for a few years, Erica asked for a raise for 20 more pesos. Her supervisor made sexual advances on her and said if she went out with him, she could get a raise. She found out about CTM, the Confederation of Mexican Workers, and registered herself there. The only workers that received raises were the ones registered with the CTM, the Confederation of Mexican Workers. The CTM, or “white unions”, are labor unions that are run by the maquila to maintain their interests. Erica found that many of the employed women there dealt with the same abuse.

Upon speaking with other women in the maquiladora and sharing their labor conditions, Erica realized that they are all suffering from the same high levels of exploitation and discrimination. She learned that Celina and Karla were asked to take a pregnancy test as a condition for their hiring. Some women shared that they work 14-hour shifts with only two short breaks. Others shared the permanent symptoms of deteriorating joints. Erica understood that the white union was not going to help alleviate the women’s poor working conditions, so she started pondering the idea of starting a collective to fight for labor dignity. She began to agitate at her workplace with one worker at a time. Eventually, she started to agitate groups of workers and many came to her to share their testimonies. While the seed to organize in Ciudad Juárez was planted, Erica recognized their collective would be enduring a long battle due to the fact that workers’ labor rights groups are absent in town.

So it began, the Colectiva Rosa Luxemburgo led by Erica, Celina and Karla would fight discriminatory practices that they and their coworkers face in the maquiladoras. They began to organize coordinated responses to the labor human rights violations shared by workers. They tried to get registered as an independent union at the commission office, but backlash followed. Mass firings happened, and many were left unemployed and even backed out of their organization. But, they still continued their fight. They camped in front of the factory and demonstrated peaceful protests in the streets. The Colectiva Rosa Luxemburgo persisted, even with hardships. Power in the people!
The Colectiva Rosa Luxemburgo from the first short story was inspired by a real struggle happening in Ciudad Juárez.

Mireya, Betty, Erika and Perla and the rest of the Colectiva wish to receive training on Mexican Labor Rights.

Please consider donating here: prodesc.org.mx/donaciones/
Maquiladoras, or maquilas, are factories placed along the Mexico-U.S. border that are known for manufacturing textiles but also create electronics, furniture, and even automobiles. These manufacturing plants are located in Mexican border towns in order to easily export the goods to the United States. Maquiladoras were established under the Reagan administration in the 1980s and were legislatively congealed when the North American Free Trade Agreement passed in 1994 under the Clinton administration and permitted a huge rise in “foreign investment” in exchange for cheap labor. Like sweatshops in the United States, workers in maquilas work under extremely inhumane conditions.
The neoliberal project, rooted in low-cost migrant labor, created a devastating obstruction to Mexico’s agricultural production. The same day the agreement was inaugurated, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation, EZLN, led an Indigenous uprising in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. NAFTA is known for having created economic hardship among the indigenous communities of southern states such as Oaxaca, Chiapas, Puebla and Veracruz. A huge influx of migrant workers from these rural communities subsequently migrated to Northern Mexico to find work in maquiladoras.
STORY #2
Mia grew up in the same community as Erica. When NAFTA was signed her family faced the same struggles Erica’s did. She held out as long as she could, but ten years into NAFTA she moved from her village to Mexico City. She was employed as a housekeeper by a couple who worked as professors. She worked long hours, frequently more than half the day despite the fact she was being paid to just work 8 hours a day. She had trouble building community in Mexico City because she rarely had free time and spoke very different Spanish than those born in the city. After several years of domestic work she had saved enough money to go to the United states where she hoped for a job with more dignity and higher wages.

She crossed the Mexican border to the United States without documents, meaning it was illegal for her to be in the United States. This undocumented status meant that her calling the police or the department of labor if her employer was breaking the law could result in those authorities reporting her to ICE which could detain and deport her. Employers frequently took advantage of this status by not paying their undocumented workers, not giving them legally mandated breaks and sexually harassing them. She first worked construction in El Paso, but after being stiffed by her employers and some of her coworkers being detained by ICE she started looking for different work environments.

NI DE AQUÍ NI DE ALLÁ
Mia heard of an opportunity to work at a poultry processing plant in Mississippi. She took a chance and departed for Mississippi where she found the working conditions as unbearable as they were in Texas. Her shifts were frequently more than 13 hours and she was paid extremely poorly. She was relegated to living in housing that amounted to little more than shanty. She was unable to call municipal code enforcement on her landlord for fear he would report her to ICE, or that the county employees themselves would report her.

Not only are Mia and her coworkers underpaid, they are denied breaks, not given health insurance or workers compensation if they are injured on the job. Mia spoke to the foreman about some of these issues, but none of her requests were made and her hours were cut after she complained. After some of her coworkers complained to no avail, they talked among themselves about ways they can better their working conditions. Through word of mouth in the plant and meetings outside of work, they formed an organization for collective action in order to better their working conditions, the beginnings of a union. After writing a list of demands, they present them to the supervisor of the factory.
The next couple weeks are tense, as the organization members take breaks they are legally guaranteed, but denied by the foramen. Because enough workers are organized, the company is unable to cut the members’ hours, or fire them. Though they are not officially given by the company, breaks are regularly taken by workers including many who were not part of the organizing process. Coworkers who were initially skeptical of the organization began to meet with Mia and her co-organizers after experiencing the improved working conditions the union had won. Despite these successes, many coworkers, including those without documents, still shied away from the organization for fear of retaliation.

Other workers with documents stayed away because since the introduction of undocumented workers into the labor force, their working conditions and pay had decreased. Because undocumented workers were coerced into working in terrible conditions for fear that if they reported their bosses they would be reported to ICE, workers with documents previously employed at the factory had to accept these working conditions as well. If they did not, they would be fired in favor of an undocumented worker who the company could exploit more intensely. Instead of blaming the state who created the undocumented status, or the employer who used this status to erode working conditions and pay, some documented workers blamed their undocumented coworkers.
The union started a campaign to eliminate unpaid overtime which gained momentum at a rapid pace across the factory. Just as this campaign was getting off the ground, ICE raided the factory detaining Mia and tens of her coworkers including some who were not involved with the union. The next day, union members who were not detained organized many of their coworkers to not show up to work. The next week was tumultuous for those who walked out, and the company. Due to the severe lack of workers, there was hope the company would concede to the unions demands.

However, many of the strikers had to go back to work, as they needed money to pay their bills. In a week, the strike was broken and all those not detained went back to work. Though the company said they would not punish those who walked out, in the next couple months, as the company found new workers to mitigate their labor crisis, they fabricated excuses to fire the known union organizers. Meanwhile, Mia sat in a detention facility with abysmal conditions awaiting her day in immigration court where she would most likely be deported.
1. In what ways is the US state responsible for the creation of Mia’s condition?

2. Does the state protect Mia? Or does it protect her moraless landlords and greedy employers?

3. How is documentation used in order to keep working conditions abysmal?

4. Why does it benefit the employer to pay their workers less, have them not take breaks, and not pay them for overtime?

5. How did the actions of the state and employer paint the union responsible for the detention of Mia and the termination of her co-organizers?

6. Who is truly responsible for these acts of violence?

7. What structures could be built that might have made the strike successful?
STORY #3

DOMESTIC WORKERS RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS
#PASSWEATNOW!

**WORKER'S PROFILE**

**OCTAVIANO VAZQUEZ**

Has worked at Flor de Mayo as a restaurant delivery worker since 2003. Working years for less than $5/hour, Octaviano is owed more than $200,000.

sweatnys.org
WHEN HE AND HIS COWORKERS ORGANIZED TO GET THEIR STOLEN WAGES, THE EMPLOYER FIRED THE REMAINING WORKERS IN THE CASE AND CLOSED THE RESTAURANT.

sweatnys.org
THE EMPLOYER STILL REFUSES TO PAY THE WORKERS CLAIMING HE HAS NO MONEY. RECENTLY HE FILED BANKRUPTCY EVEN THOUGH HE DID SIGNIFICANT RENOVATION OF THE RESTAURANT.

sweatnys.org
That is why Octaviano says workers need the Sweat Bill, A766/S2762.
#PASSSWEATNOW!

The bill will allow workers to freeze the employer’s assets when wage theft occurs, so that they can collect the wages they were owed.

sweatnys.org
GLOSSARY

Wage theft: the practice of failing to pay wages, provide employee benefits or underpaying workers

Exploitation: the action or fact of treating someone unfairly and taking advantage of them in order to benefit from their work

SWEAT: a bill that would allow workers to collect their stolen wages if passed
QUESTIONS

1. What connections do you see between these workers conditions?

2. As a worker, in what ways, do you identify with the themes of wage theft and displacement that were raised in these stories?

3. What can you learn from stories of workers coming together and standing up against wage theft and exploitation?

4. Thinking about your own life, have you ever experienced wage theft and/or displacement?

5. From these stories and your personal experiences, who do you think benefits from wage theft and displacement?
Together, we can pressure Senate Leader Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Heastie to put the Securing Wages Earned Against Theft (SWEAT) bill to a vote.

If the bill has enough votes to pass, it will help workers advocate to get back stolen tips, withheld wages, minimum wages, and uncompensated overtime.

Visit sweatnys.org to take direct action to end wage theft!

@youthagainstsweatshops