

**Testimony to the Canadian National Administrative Office (NAO) – Public
Communication CAN 2003-1 (Puebla)**

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My name is Marisol Enyart. I am a sophomore at the University of New Mexico. I spent last summer on the United Students Against Sweatshops Summer Internship Program in Puebla, Mexico, interning with the Centro Apoyo al Trabajador (Workers Support Center, CAT). While there, I worked with workers from the Tarrant Ajalpan factory, assisting in giving workshops to them about their entitled rights under Mexican Federal Labor Law. I interviewed workers from the Matamoros factory during my stay in Puebla.

On July 2, 2003, I interviewed Augustina Reyes Garcia, 42 years old, who worked Line 1 in the Matamoros factory. I interviewed her in her house and was with two members from the CAT, Pedro Vasquez and Shaila Toledo. She told us in the interview that she earned 39 pesos a day and did not receive overtime wages. She stated that she was “always paid late.” She stated that there were times when she didn’t receive her check until Tuesday when they were supposed to get paid on Friday. “They never paid us what they said they would. We would all lack money in our paycheck...in the house, we wouldn’t be able to go to the store or buy things for school. We couldn’t buy milk, and we didn’t have money for transportation.” She said that in order to cover all the expenses in her household; she needed to be paid at least 100 pesos a day.

Garcia stated that she worked 7am to 5pm Monday thru Friday and Saturday’s from 8am to 4pm. She stated that she would receive nothing more than a 30-minute break for lunch. She received punishments for being sick, missing work and not bringing a note from the doctor. “If workers didn’t bring note, management would send them home and those days missed would go towards them getting fired.”

Inside the factory, the temperature was, “very hot because there wasn’t any ventilation.” The bathrooms “were not clean and sometimes there wasn’t water for drinking. There were times that the conditions in the bathroom were disgusting.” The management allowed children as young as 13 years old to work in the factory. The management knew their ages, they would just ask the children to “bring them a paper with the signature from the mother to allow them to work. [The children] would do the same work that all the other workers would do.”

The management was abusive to the workers. “They would begin with saying, ‘we don’t have to keep you, we can kick you out and there is a lot of people to take your place.’ They yell at us with a lot of things, but since I don’t speak English, I didn’t know what they were saying. It would happen when we wanted to work overtime or if one line slowed down and our line had already met the goal, they would have to keep working

until they would meet the goal because the transporters had to take them home at the same time.”

After the workers tried to form a union, the management would not allow the union members to, “talk with other workers. [The union members] would get extra pressure from supervisors to do work. [The management was] just looking for excuses to fire them.” The labor ministry responded by, “agree[ing] with the management. Once [workers] wanted to form the independent union, that’s when the corrupt union showed up and said, “here we are, you already have a union, you don’t need an independent union.”

On July 16, 2003, I interviewed Jaime Ayala Sanchez. Shaila Toledo and Pedro Vasquez again accompanied me. We went to Sanchez’s house and that is where the interview took place. At the time, Sanchez was 23 years old and had worked at Matamoros for three and a half years. Sanchez received between 450-500 pesos a week and would work from 7am to 5pm Monday thru Friday. Sanchez concurred about the tardiness of payments. Stating that they received their payments late “almost always, and I lacked money for food and for things in the house. I also lacked money for utilities.” As far as overtime payments, Sanchez stated that, “there was no controlled wage; it just depended on what the company decided to give us. Sometimes I would get 10 pesos and sometimes I would get less.”

As far as social security was concerned, Sanchez stated, “The factory would have to pay social security. Our factory would not pay for social security. We would prefer to go to places other than social security to pay for our medical needs. It would usually cost about 200 pesos when I got sick.” When Sanchez would get sick, by missing work, management would, “dock [his] pay.”

Sanchez stated that there were 8 bathrooms in the factory and that that was not sufficient for the amount of workers. Sanchez stated that the factory was always hot in the summertime because there was so much plastic in the factory. Sanchez stated that management would force workers to stay and work until they had completed their quotas.

As far as abuse, Sanchez stated, “[The management] would say, “you’re stupid, you’re slow.” The manager’s names were: Jose Luis, Yolanda, Raul, Gisela would say those things—they were all supervisors. We would also receive insults from the owners [of the factory]. They would yell obscenities at us.”

I also interviewed Ricarda Vasquez Martinez in mid-July. Pedro Vasquez and Shaila Toledo accompanied me. Ricarda was 22 at the time and had been working at Matamoros for two years. She received about 42 pesos daily and approximately 500 pesos a week. She recalled getting paid late regularly, remembering in December 2002 getting paid two weeks late. She worked Monday thru Friday from 7am to 5pm and very rarely worked on the weekends, because she was told that she was not need then. When she did work on the weekends, she would get paid a flat rate of 100 pesos for working from 8am to 1pm.

Martinez recalls that if she took time off of work for being sick, she “needed a doctor’s note. If [she] took time off for medical reasons they would dock [her] pay and move [her] to a different area.” Martinez, too, recalls that the factory was, “really hot, too hot and there was no ventilation.” She recalls that there were “ten bathrooms for women. They were very dirty and they stank.” When asked about underage people working in the factory, Martinez said, “Yes, there were minors working in the factory and management knew. The jobs they did were like pulling threads. There were a few that had authorization, but about 90% of the minors that worked in the factory did not have authorization from a parent. They were paid the same wages we were and they were in between the ages of 14-15.”

Martinez worked and often did not get compensated for the hours of work she put in: “In September of 2003 I would stay to reach my goal and I would not get paid.” Martinez also recalls verbal abuse from the managers: “We were told that we would be fired if we formed an independent union. In January of 2003 a supervisor by the name of Eduardo went up to a worker who was distracted for a moment and yelled at her, he said “Did you come here to work or just to warm up the seat?” His administrative assistant Olivia sent him. Larry, another manager, yelled at another worker for being idle—she was waiting for some production to come down the line—and he would also throw the pieces of cloth at the workers in May of 2002.”

Martinez also recalled an instance of feeling uncomfortable because of a male manager: “Once the manager of production, Juan Carlos, made pass at me. He asked me out in February or March of 2001.” Finally, Martinez recalls unfair and at times abusive treatment of union members: “[The union members] would be harassed inside and outside the maquila. Union members followed to their homes.”

Through my experience in interviewing these workers, I believe that there were violations both of Mexican Federal Labor law and of corporations own Codes of Conduct. The workers I interviewed shared many of the same experiences and complaints.

If there are any further questions, you can reach me at lindsaymarisol@yahoo.com or by phone at 505.400.4815. Thank you for your time.