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U.S.-Mexico Free Trade From the Bottom: A Postcard From the Border

Frances Lee Ansley*

Beneath the iron sky

Mexican children kick their soccer ball across,
run after it, entering the U.S.

I press my hand to the steel curtain —
chainlink fence crowned with rolled barbed wire —
rippling from the sea where Tijuana touches San Diego
unrolling over mountains
and plains
and deserts,
this "Tortilla Curtain" turning into *el rio Grande*
flowing down to the flatlands
of the Magic Valley of South Texas
its mouth emptying into the Gulf.

1,950 mile-long open wound
dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence rods in my flesh,
splits me splits me
me raja me raja

* Associate Professor of Law, University of Tennessee College of Law; A.B. Harvard-Radcliffe, 1969; J.D., University of Tennessee, 1979; LL.M., Harvard Law School, 1988. This postcard and the experiences it reflects are part of a larger project on deindustrialization and the effects of global economic integration on workers, especially women workers, in this country and the third world. Thanks are due to many people who helped plan or support the trip (Beth Bingham, Elaine Burns, Mary Day, Ed Feigen, Doug Gamble, Linda Garmon, John Gaventa, Domingo Gonzales, Bingham Graves, Shelley Greene, Ed Kreuger, Helen Lewis, Juliet Merrifield, Susan Mika, Rosemary Miranda, Ernesto Mora, Mark Pitt, Jim Sessions and Bill Troy) and to several organizations that helped make it possible (Almagamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, the Commission on Religion in Appalachia, Highlander Research and Education Center, Presbyterian Women and, United Methodist Women). Greatest thanks are due to workers on both sides of the border who are bearing the brunt of rapid economic change and who opened themselves up to the mutual understanding that is indispensable for obtaining cross-border solidarity.

This is my home
this thin edge of
barbwire.¹

In July of 1991, a group of women from East Tennessee made an extraordinary trek to the U.S.-Mexico border. The trip was sponsored by the Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network (TIRN), a coalition of labor, religious, and community organizations orme d in 1989 to prevent and respond to plant closings in Tennessee.² The primary participants on the trip were women factory workers, some unemployed as a result of plant closings, others at risk of losing their jobs. All were painfully conscious of the threat posed by deindustrialization and the movement of capital from the U.S. to low-wage destinations in the third world.³ Two other women accompanied the trip in addition to the seven factory workers: myself (a TIRN board member and law professor with a research interest in plant closings) and an organizer with the Highlander Research and Education Center.⁴ The trip was designed to allow

1. GLORIA ANZALDUA, *BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA: THE NEW MESTIZA* 2-3 (1987).

2. Because I am hopeful that some of my readers will want to learn and do more about the problems and issues discussed in this piece, I will use footnotes to provide tips on access to organizational and non-print resources, in addition to more traditional sources. TIRN can be reached at 1515 Magnolia Ave, Suite 408, Knoxville, TN 37917, (615) 637-1576. It is part of a growing network of plant closing organizations around the country. Many of these groups are affiliated with the Federation for Industrial Retention and Renewal (FIRR), a national umbrella organization. For more information, contact FIRR, 3411 W. Diversity Avenue, #10, Chicago, IL 60647, (312) 252-7676.

Lawyers and law students have played important supporting roles in many of the particular fights mounted by these organizations. A new law center in Detroit recently announced that it will focus a large portion of its efforts on monitoring and participating in litigation under the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN). The WARN Act, passed after heated debate and over a presidential veto, took the exceedingly mild step of requiring employers to give 60-day notice of plant closings in certain circumstances. For more information, contact the Maurice and Jane Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice, 2915 Cadillac Tower, Detroit, MI 48226, (313) 962-6540.

The literature on the subject of plant closings and deindustrialization is vast. See generally GILDA HAAS, *PLANT CLOSURES: MYTHS, REALITIES AND RESPONSES* (1985) (providing a pro-labor introduction to the subject of plant closings); ERIC MANN, *TAKING ON GENERAL MOTORS: A CASE STUDY OF THE UAW CAMPAIGN TO KEEP GM-VAN NUYS OPEN* (1987) (examining one particular struggle to prevent a plant closing); sources cited *infra* note 3.

3. For different points of view on this trend, see generally BARRY BLUESTONE & BENNETT HARRISON, *THE DEINDUSTRIALIZATION OF AMERICA* (1982) (discussing the basics of deindustrialization); COMMUNITIES IN ECONOMIC CRISIS: APPALACHIA AND THE SOUTH, (John Gaventa et al. eds., 1990) (arguing that many of the economic problems of the South are rooted in deindustrialization); RICHARD MCKENZIE, *FUGITIVE INDUSTRY: THE ECONOMICS AND POLITICS OF DEINDUSTRIALIZATION* (1984) (arguing that unrestrained capital mobility is the path to healthy economic development); ROGER AND ME (Warner Brothers 1989) (giving a hilarious and terrifying tour of Flint, Michigan and the auto industry compliments of sardonic filmmaker Michael Moore); sources cited *supra* note 2.

4. Highlander can be reached at 1959 Highlander Way, New Market, TN 37820, (615) 933-3443. See generally JOHN GLENN, *HIGHLANDER: NO ORDINARY SCHOOL* (1988) (chronicling the history of the organization and its leaders as well as Highlander's approach to the economic, political, and racial problems of the South);

U.S. women factory workers to visit the eastern border of Mexico and to meet with Mexican women employed in the maquiladora factories there.⁵

All along Mexico's northern border, these U.S.-owned factories have sprouted like mushrooms, hiring Mexican workers to perform labor-intensive segments of the production process, then shipping the finished or partly finished goods back across the border for eventual sale in U.S. markets.⁶ A dovetailed set of legal provisions in the laws of the U.S. and Mexico, in place since the 1960's, has made such arrangements attractive to U.S. investors.⁷ The industries most commonly represented in the maquiladoras include apparel, furniture, electronics, sub-assembly, and transportation components. The factories hire young women ranging from sixteen to twenty-five years old, and typically pay them about thirty to forty dollars per week.⁸

MYLES HORTON, *THE LONG HAUL* (Herb Kohl & Judy Kohl eds., 1990) (telling the story of Highlander founder Myles Horton); *YOU GOT TO MOVE* (First Run/Icarus Films 1985) (tracing the history of Highlander through interviews with a diverse collection of people).

5. Parts of the trip will be reflected in a series of television programs produced by *Now* on the subject of industrial competitiveness. The programs will air in May 1992 on PBS.

6. The maquiladora industry is part of a much broader globalization process with particular significance for women. See generally *WOMEN WORKERS AND GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING* (Kathryn Ward, ed. 1990) (examining the participation of women in the workforce as well as their impact on the global economy); Barbara Ehrenreich & Annette Fuentes, *Life on the Global Assembly Line*, in *FEMINIST FRAMEWORKS* 279 (Alison M. Jaggar & Paula S. Rothenberg eds., 2d ed. 1984) (discussing the experiences of female industrial laborers in the Third World); John Burgess, *Global Offices on Rise as Firms Shift Service Jobs Abroad*, *WASHINGTON POST*, Apr. 20, 1989, at E1 (explaining that advancing communications technology aid in the relocation of white-collar jobs to foreign markets). See also *THE GLOBAL ASSEMBLY LINE* (New Day Films 1986) (examining the treatment of women workers in low-wage export industries in Mexico and the Philippines).

7. The maquiladora program was intended as a response to the unemployment problems anticipated in northern Mexico as a result of the ending of the *bracero* program, which had allowed agricultural workers from Mexico to work in the United States. On the U.S. side, the maquiladora arrangement includes provisions for allowing products to cross the border from Mexico into the United States, with duties imposed only on the "value added," rather than on the entire product.

For instance, a U.S. company could ship a partially-finished product to Mexico, have Mexican workers perform operations, ship the product back into the U.S., and pay duties only on the rock-bottom wages paid to the workers during the product's brief stay south of the border. See U.S. Int'l Trade Commission, *Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States* 98 §9802.00.60, §9802.0080 (1990). Although, these tariff provisions are not by their terms restricted to a particular country, they are used primarily by U.S.-owned manufacturing businesses with Canadian or Mexican subsidiaries.

On the Mexican side, the program called for the lifting of tariffs (originally much higher than they are today) and the relaxation of restrictions on foreign direct investment (originally much stricter than they are today). See U.S. INT'L TRADE COMMISSION, *REVIEW OF TRADE AND INVESTMENT LIBERALIZATION MEASURES BY MEXICO AND PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE U.S.-MEXICAN RELATIONS, PHASE I: RECENT TRADE AND INVESTMENT REFORMS UNDERTAKEN BY MEXICO AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S.* (April 1990) (summarizing the views of experts on the prospects of future U.S.-Mexico trade relations); Jorge Camil, *Mexico's 1989 Foreign Investment Regulations: The Cornerstone of a New Economic Model*, 12 *HOUSTON J. OF INT'L L.* 1 (1989) (providing a description of the breakneck trade liberalization the Mexican executive branch has pursued in recent years).

8. See RACHEL KAMEL, *THE GLOBAL FACTORY* 35-45 (1990) (examining the conditions of workers in various third world countries, including Mexico).

The maquiladoras share their gender structure and their pay scale with other third world locations such as Malaysia and the Philippines, where thousands of women toil in "Export Processing Zones."⁹ However, now that Mexico's debt problem has reached crisis proportions, the price of oil has dropped, and the peso has been devalued, the plummeting wages make that country particularly attractive for foreign investors.¹⁰

In addition to bargain basement wages, Mexico offers advantages to U.S. industrial producers not available in the Pacific Rim and similar locations. Transportation and communication costs to and from U.S. centers are lower, and cultural and language barriers between Mexico and the United States prove less formidable. Furthermore, the troubled two thousand mile border between Mexico and the U.S. presents another unique investment incentive: a company can send American managers to run maquiladora plants in Mexico without requiring them to leave the United States at all. They can live in Texas, enroll their children in U.S. schools, and ensconce their families in suburban neighborhoods. They may have to endure occasional traffic jams on some bridge going to or from work, but on most days they can be poolside by evening, home again in the U.S.A.¹¹ And all this time, most of the people they supervise are making less than one dollar an hour.

Because of these factors, the maquiladora industry is booming. Meanwhile, local infrastructures have become unable to handle the increase in population, waste products, and human needs. Basic services like water, electricity, waste disposal, and transportation are often inadequate or altogether absent. Thousands of people live in neighborhoods that are essentially squatter camps, enduring conditions difficult for many Americans to imagine. The contrast between the homes of the workers and the new factories in which they work is stark.¹²

9. *Id.*

10. See generally Richard Rothstein, *Third World Debtors and a Cure for Reaganomics: Give Them a Break*, NEW REPUBLIC, Feb. 1, 1988, at 20 (supporting the partial cancellation of the third world's debt to the United States); Richard Rothstein, *The Human Cost of Misguided Policy: IMF Conditions Have Hurt Third World, U.S. Workers as Well*, LOS ANGELES TIMES, Oct. 5, 1987, at 7 (examining how U.S. economic policy decisions affect third world countries).

11. Interview with Rosemary Miranda, attorney and staff member of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, in McAllen, TX (June 1990).

12. It is important to recognize that on both the U.S. and Mexican sides of the border, observers draw radically different conclusions about the maquiladora program. Some see it as a bright promise for Mexico's future, allowing that country to step into the first world with its U.S. and Canadian neighbors by rejecting its old

TIRN members had been hearing about maquiladoras for several years. A number of factories in East Tennessee had closed down certain lines of production (or entire plants), terminated employees, and moved the production to Mexico. Tennessee workers began learning the names of strange-sounding places such as Nogales, Agua Prieta, Juarez, and Matamoros. Sometimes individual supervisors or workers would be recruited to spend several weeks or months living in Texas or Arizona or southern California and working in Mexico, training the Mexican workers who would begin doing the jobs previously done by U.S. workers. One TIRN member recalled a friend who had accepted such an invitation and returned to Tennessee profoundly disturbed. He told her stories of children working, of supervisors who gave out pieces of hard candy as a bonus to workers on pay day, and of wages that were unspeakably low. Workers in East Tennessee typically reacted to these developments with feelings of resentment toward workers in Mexico. Many perceived that Mexican workers were stealing U.S. jobs. Some viewed Mexicans as stupid or spineless to be willing to work for nothing. Union-sponsored "Buy America" campaigns had done little over the years to encourage U.S. workers to understand more deeply the complex process of globalization.

But by 1990 it was evident that economic changes were underway, and that old approaches lacked the power even to explain those changes, much less to alter them. One TIRN member with teenage children looked around her plant and realized that even with twenty years seniority, she was the most junior employee on her shop floor. What kinds of jobs were her children going to get? Another told of her plant manager coming to the production workers at her plant after the bulk of their work was transferred to Mexico. The manager told the workers that they had one more year to convince management of the importance of the Tennessee plant in the company's plans. Of course, at the union's next contract

backward-looking nationalistic, import-substitution strategy for the more enlightened, forward-looking export-led strategy that has proven so successful for the so called Asian Tigers. Others see it as a disaster for both Mexican and U.S. workers and a boon primarily for transnational elites. My own highly critical views should be evident from the text. Readers who want to learn more should, of course, consult conflicting views. Of the resources cited in the Appendix, Bergsman, Middleton, Stephenson, and Valdez are examples of a more celebratory mode, while Fernandez-Kelly, Dubose, Kamel, Kelly, Kochan, and Rothstein are more critical. See generally U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, BUREAU OF INT'L LABOR AFFAIRS, LABOR STANDARDS AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY (Stephen Herzenberg & Jorge Perez-Lopez eds., 1990) (debating the best routes to economic development in a much larger context than the maquiladora program).

negotiation the workers were seriously weakened by the knowledge of this threat. They found themselves discussing concessions rather than gains. Some workers began to call it economic blackmail, but they had little idea of what to do to resist it.

In my work on the legal aspects of plant closings, I had been increasingly forced to acknowledge the international stage on which the drama of U.S. deindustrialization was playing itself out. Accordingly, in the summer of 1990, I decided to travel to the border. I had earlier learned of a project sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).¹³ With a few U.S. staff workers based in the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas, the AFSC, through its Border Project sought to encourage and support a group of women workers from maquiladora plants in a region stretching from Matamoros (a city near the Gulf of Mexico and across the border from Brownsville Texas) to Ciudad Acuna, several hundred miles inland. The Mexican group was called the *Comite Fronterizo de Obreras* (CFO) or the Border Committee of Women Workers. When I decided to go to the border, I contacted the Border Project staff, who were kind enough to show me around the maquiladoras and introduce me to the CFO.

On that first brief visit, I interviewed a number of people and visited unforgettable places. I was shown a world whose complexity and turmoil seem particularly irreducible to text. I attempted to absorb what I could. But the more I learned, the more keenly I believed that there were others who needed a similar opportunity. Displaced and economically vulnerable industrial workers have a personal stake in the transfer of U.S. industrial capacity south of the border, a stake I could only imagine. It seemed that if U.S. workers came to the maquiladoras they would broaden their understanding of economic relations between the U.S. and Mexico and of what these relations mean for workers in both countries. And so I asked my hosts if they would be willing to receive a visit from Tennessee workers in the summer of 1991. They said yes.

Nine months of planning and organizing by TIRN members back in Tennessee ensued. In February, TIRN hosted two women workers from Mexico, Olga Jimenez and Teresa Hernandez. These women traveled around the state, showing slides and speaking

13. The American Friends Service Committee can be reached at 1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102, (215) 241-7000.

through an interpreter to groups of U.S. workers and other interested people. For many who met them, the powerful words and startling pictures of the two maquiladora veterans represented an important challenge, a brand new way of thinking, a compelling experience in seeing briefly through another's eyes.

After the visit from CFO members, enthusiasm for the summer trip ran high, and TIRN found itself with more applicants than it could accept. During the course of orientation meetings in the spring and early summer, members of the delegation shared stories, learned some basic facts about the maquiladora program, and began planning their itinerary for the trip.

There was much to organize. We decided that on the way we would visit other U.S. workers affected by deindustrialization. In Tyler, Texas, we planned to meet with garment workers who were struggling to run Colt Enterprises, a worker-owned business they had formed in the wake of a Levi Strauss plant closing.¹⁴ In San Antonio, we would meet with Fuerza Unida, a group that had come together to fight the closing of another Levi Strauss plant which management had decided to move to Costa Rica.¹⁵

We also planned for our time at the border. We wanted to tour some of the new industrial parks and visit some of the *colonias* (neighborhoods) where maquiladora workers and their families live. We arranged for guided tours with the CFO, as well as the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, an alliance of labor, religious, environmental, and community groups devoted to publicizing conditions in the maquiladora areas.¹⁶ We had been invited to attend and observe part of the CFO's semi-annual meeting of its *coordinadoras* and *promotoras*. Our schedule would be full.

As we got further into our plans, we became concerned about finding ways to communicate across language barriers. We knew that few CFO members could speak English and none of the workers on our trip could speak Spanish. Finally, we decided that a skit

14. Colt Enterprises, 500 Bois d'Arc North, Tyler, TX 75702, (903) 593-8261.

15. As of July 1991, fifteen months after the Levi Strauss plant closed, only 23 of the 1150 workers who had lost their jobs were able to find new full-time work. The remaining workers were still actively struggling to invent resistance and survival strategies. Fuerza Unida recently opened an office in San Antonio. They can be reached at the Dislocated Worker Alliance, 1305 North Flores, San Antonio, TX 78212 (512) 229-1318.

16. The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras has recently called upon U.S. corporations doing business in the maquiladoras to adopt their proposed Standards of Conduct, which cover labor rights, environmental practices, and similar concerns. The Coalition can be reached c/o Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, Room 566, 475 Riverside Drive, N.Y., N.Y. 10115-0050, (212) 870-2295.

would best communicate the purpose of our trip and our organization. We spent about an hour one afternoon sketching out a structure, thinking about the tone we wanted to take, envisioning scenes, and brainstorming about props. The skit that follows is the final outcome of a collaborative process that began with that meeting. It includes strands of stories from the various members of the delegation, as well as stories we had already heard about the maquiladoras. It was rehearsed in pieces on a Burger King patio in northern Alabama, a Days Inn motel room in Jackson, Mississippi, and a Motel 6 with the world's most erratic air conditioner in Brownsville, Texas. The skit was rewritten at various points on the road in between. Cast members supplied props from their homes and workplaces.

The skit premiered under a spreading shade tree on the grounds of a motel in Ciudad Miguel Aleman, across the border from Roma, Texas, before a circle of Mexican women workers and their supporters. Our play was warmly received. Although we had worried about whether our halting attempts to render *Solidarity Forever* into Spanish would be intelligible, we need not have hesitated. We found that America's most famous labor hymn was already in the CFO's song book. The final chorus with which we ended our play thus turned out to be a rousing one, strengthened with the additional voices we had hoped for.

The women of the CFO were not content with simply hearing from us and they reciprocated with a play of their own. Their presentation was unscripted, improvised, and riveting. The format was a "sociodrama," a device the CFO often uses in organizing women workers, where the cast begins with only assigned roles and a situation. The rest is up to them. Discussion follows.

The workers chose to focus on a situation involving a maquiladora worker who had decided to protest the lead-based solder she was being told to use on her job. Other characters were a manager, an ambivalent union representative, and a supportive fellow worker. After their enactment, the workers showed us an actual spool from one of the factories where they worked. The spool carried lead-containing solder wire and displayed a prominent (and dire) warning label—in English. CFO members reported that women using the solder had been assured by maquiladora supervisors that it was harmless.

During the afternoon session a CFO member rose to speak. It

was a woman who came to the border region from further south when she was twelve years old. With her mother, she crossed to *otro lado*, the other side, and lived in the U.S. for several years, while her mother worked as a housekeeper. When U.S. companies began opening subsidiaries in Matamoros, she was happy. She wanted to return to her home and preferred working in her own country. She soon had a job with a Union Carbide subsidiary and worked there for eighteen years. Today, she is one of the senior members and leaders of the CFO. When she speaks, you know you are in the presence of a person of stature. I will call her Esperanza.¹⁷

Esperanza thanked us for our play which she said had made "a great impact" on her by helping her to understand the plight of workers in the United States. She thanked us for our support of the CFO, and pressed upon us the importance of supporting the maquiladora workers and fighting for better working conditions. The next morning, at the closing session of the CFO meeting, Esperanza picked up where she had left off the day before. She described the difficulties confronting people who work in the maquiladoras; the social, cultural, and environmental chaos in which they find themselves; and the tens of thousands of people who are trying to support their families under conditions of extreme hardship. She spoke in bewilderment and anger about the apparent willingness of maquiladora employers to tolerate and distance themselves from the brutal conditions that accompany the low wages paid to Mexican workers.

Finally, she spoke about how small and alone she often feels trying to stand up to the social and economic forces now battering both our countries, especially Mexico. She said that all of us had to keep fighting anyway, keep reaching out to others. Her courage and the fact that at times she could not continue speaking for her tears, moved us all. Sometimes, translation had to wait while the translator composed herself. But Esperanza's message was not a sentimental one. These emotions were good, she said, but we had to turn them into action. She moved and challenged and comforted us all at once, both throwing down a gauntlet and wiping away our tears.

Our trip, our encounters, and our exchanged performances were

17. In Spanish, *esperanza* means "hope".

rich and complicated, filled with ironies and ambiguities. We saw and heard many things that each of us will have to struggle to communicate to our many constituencies in the future.

My own decision, here at the end of the summer, to send this skit to a law journal seems to me like a probably silly and certainly inadequate gesture. It is like sending a postcard to fellow Americans from my summer vacation in an exotic clime ("Wish you were here"), when what is needed is not a postcard, but a resounding manifesto that could reach the hearts of millions; or a North American free trade agreement founded on the notion of just and sustainable development rather than multinational short-term gain, or better yet, a democratic, internationalist movement capable of fighting for and winning those things.¹⁸ But for now I guess a postcard will have to do. And I do wish a lot of you had been there. I wish that many more people from the United States could be the guests of community and worker organizations such as the CFO and others, could see first hand the chasms that separate and the ties that bind the First World and the Third World, the planet's north and south. I wish many more trade unionists could look into Esperanza's eyes and face her gentle, searing challenge.

Global injustice is certainly nothing new. Nevertheless, low and middle-income Americans have for generations both enjoyed and suffered from a kind of insularity about what their counterparts in other parts of the world have been experiencing. As the planet shrinks, as global co-production spreads like a wild fire, as multinational companies deploy and redeploy, locate and relocate resources with ever-increasing velocity and freedom, working people in the United States face new threats, but also new opportunities. The actions of the multinationals themselves are making increasingly

18. The subject of the North American Free Trade Agreement is well beyond the scope of this postcard, though hopefully I will be addressing it elsewhere in the future. Some basic written materials on this important topic are listed in the Appendix of this postcard. Testimony was taken at several Congressional hearings on the free trade agreement leading up to the debate on fast track. A section of the Omnibus Trade Act of 1988 gave the President authority to negotiate trade agreements between June 1, 1991 and June 1, 1993 pursuant to fast track procedures unless either house passed a resolution disapproving the extension. 19 U.S.C. § 2903(b)(1)(B). In May of 1991, Congress extended the President's authority to negotiate with Mexico pursuant to fast track procedures when both houses defeated measures that disapproved the extension. When a final agreement is brought back to Congress, it will be subject to limited and expedited review, with Congress essentially voting it up or down. See the Appendix for a list of Congressional hearings on the subject.

clear the fact that the fates of U.S. workers and the fates of Third World workers are intimately intertwined. Whether the future holds more competition or more solidarity is an open question.

So.

Having a wonderful and terrible time. Wish you were here. Take care. Here's the play. More later.

FROM TENNESSEE TO TAMAULIPAS

A play in one act

by Fran Ansley and the Members of the Summer 1991 TIRN Delegation to the Maquiladoras: Debbie Beeler, Barbara Bishop, Luvernel Clark, June Hargis, Susie Hickey, Dianna Petty, Shirley Reinhardt, and Susan Williams.

CHARACTERS: (in order of appearance)

NARRATOR. A friendly guide to the skit.

SALLY. A worker in a U.S. factory. Sally always tries to be reasonable. She is a little shy.

MARY. A worker in a U.S. factory. Mary has had a tough life and doesn't intend to take any lip from anybody unless she has to.

LINDA. A worker in a U.S. factory. Linda has carpal tunnel syndrome.

LOCAL BOSS ("L.B." for short). The plant manager at the U.S. factory.

BIG BOSS. An executive at company headquarters.

TEX. American plant manager of new maquiladora plant.

ESPERANZA. A worker who has just come to the maquiladora region.

MARIA. An experienced maquiladora worker.

PROPS:

| | | |
|----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Alarm clock | Telephone | Legal pad |
| Box of tissues | Easter basket | Pink slips |
| T-shirts | \$1 bills | Hard candy |
| \$100 bills | Face mask | Two CFO buttons |
| Stop watch | Wrist brace | Three TIRN buttons |

Cardboard box labeled "Completed Garments" on one side, and "Profits" on the other.

Severance "packages" (tiny little boxes with bows on them).

Picket signs for plant closing protest:

"Zinger Treats Workers Like Trash"

"Save Our Jobs"

"We Helped Build Zinger: We Deserve a Voice"

Hiring sign for ZG de Mexico:

"Solicitamos Personal Femenino"

Picket signs for organizing drive:

"Vote for the Union"

"We Want Safety & Respect"

"We Are Human Beings Too"

(As the play opens, we see three workers standing at a production line that is set up stage left. They are workers in the Zinger Garment factory.)

NARRATOR. Once long ago in a land far away, some workers were struggling to make a living for themselves and their families. Each morning they came to work at the Zinger Garment Company, and began to do their jobs.

(A loud alarm clock rings, and the workers begin to work. Each woman performs one exaggerated repetitive motion on the garment-to-be and then passes it on to her neighbor. Because this is a pretty silly skit, she also explains to the audience what she is doing as she does it.)

SALLY. I cut the cloth.

MARY. I serge the seams.

LINDA. I sew in the tag, and then the shirt is done!

(When Linda finishes sewing in the tag, she holds up the completed shirt and then plunks it into a box that is on the floor at the end of the

line, labelled "Completed Garments." The trio goes through this routine a few more times, as long as it seems funny. They are growing noticeably more tired.)

NARRATOR. It was not always an easy life, cutting cloth, serging seams and sewing in tags Sometimes the workers were not treated with dignity or respect by their supervisors and managers.

(L.B. enters from stage right. He walks like he thinks he is cock of the roost.)

LOCAL BOSS. *(to Sally)* Hey, honey, how about coming back to my house after work. *(winking)* I got some excess inventory I need you to help me with.

(Sally attempts to ignore the boss without offending him. She keeps on working, eyes glued to her task, really embarrassed and angry, but she doesn't know what to do.)

LOCAL BOSS. Hey, you! I *said*, how about meeting me after work? I really like the way you're built, you cute little thing. You and me could get along fine if you are smart and treat me right. You know what's good for you don't you? I could make you mighty happy, girl.

SALLY. *(fighting to keep her composure)* Please leave me alone. I'm not interested.

LOCAL BOSS. Aw, what's the matter? I know you don't have a boyfriend

MARY. Hey, L.B. Lay off it, okay? Let Sally do her job.

(L.B. glares at Mary, then strolls away, trying to look as though he feels no rejection. He shakes his head, muttering to himself.)

LOCAL BOSS. These people. They are so dumb they don't even know how to better themselves. And most of them are lazy too. They're not interested in working.

(L.B. works his way over to the box labelled "Completed Garments" and picks it up. He turns slowly and obviously so the audience can see that the other side of the box says "Profits." He carries the box over to Big Boss who is sitting upstage center, at a small desk with a telephone.)

LOCAL BOSS. Well, boss, we had a pretty good month, I think!

BIG BOSS. I'm glad to hear it. Very glad to hear it. Let's see how things are going down there in Tennessee

(The two men start reaching into the box and pulling out \$100 bills. They place them in stacks on Big Boss's desk. They look happy. The narrator now begins to speak, drawing our attention to the factory again. As she does, Local Boss returns the box to the end of the production line, with the side reading "Completed Garments" facing toward the audience.)

NARRATOR. Getting respect on the job was not the only problem for the workers at the Zinger Garment factory. Sometimes the factory was actually a dangerous place to be.

(The workers continue their routine.)

SALLY. I cut the cloth.

MARY. I serge the seams.

LINDA. I sew in the tag, and then the garment's done.

MARY. You know, we need more ventilation in here. This stuff they are treating the fabric with smells awful, and it makes me feel dizzy. I'm putting on this mask, but I'm not really sure it will help with these fumes. And anyway I hate the darned thing, it drives you crazy to wear it for eight hours. *(Mary pulls on a face mask and continues working.)*

LINDA. Ever since they started running this new heavy duty cloth, my hand has been killing me. I went to the company doctor last week. He gave me a pain pill and told me to come on back to work. When it kept hurting, he gave me this thing to wear. *(She points at a brace she wears on her hand and arm.)* But I can feel that it's getting worse every day. I'm afraid if I say too much about it, they'll tell me that I can't do the job anymore, and they'll let me go.

SALLY. The new law says we have a right to know the chemicals we work with, and I know there's a whole bunch of toxic stuff they are using over in the dye room, but the company never really explains the dangers or what to do. And my brother-in-law told me they buried some of these chemicals in the ground out in back of the factory after they got through with them. Do you think that is that safe? It makes me nervous.

(L.B. picks up the garment box as he did before, and he and the Big Boss once again count the profits. As the narrator resumes, L.B. returns the box to the end of the line.)

NARRATOR. And another thing. Often the wages the workers earned were not enough to provide the kind of life they wanted for themselves and their families.

(L.B. enters with a basket over his arm. He reaches delicately into the basket and pulls out single dollar bills. He passes out a one-dollar bill to each of the workers.)

LOCAL BOSS. *(to Sally, leaning unnecessarily close to her)* Here's one for you, you little sweetheart. *(When he sees Mary, his face falls, but grudgingly he gives her a bill too.)* And here's one for you, prune pit. And *(to Linda)* here's one for you. You all go live it up over the weekend, now.

(The women all take their dollar bills. They carefully put them in their pockets, but they are not impressed.)

LINDA. I want my daughter to go to college when the time comes so she can make something of her life, but I don't believe we can afford it. I know the boss's kid went to a fancy private school and he sends her to Europe every summer. I'm sure she'll go to the finest college that money can buy.

SALLY. I am worried about my old age. We have such a terrible retirement plan at Zinger, I don't know how I'll make it when I get too old to work.

MARY. I just wish I could afford to buy a house, but the payments are too high. I guess I'll just rent forever.

LINDA. We *are* buying a little house. My parents helped us with the down payment, and we're doing half the work on it ourselves, but it seems like our two pay checks just barely cover the bills. There is never any left over for savings. If one of us lost our job, we would lose our house and our car both within a month, I bet. We just couldn't keep up the payments.

MARY. What worries me about losing my job is I wouldn't have any health insurance. I can't afford to pay a doctor or a hospital on what I can save. That scares me to death. What if I got really sick and needed an operation, and I couldn't afford it?

(L.B. goes to pick up his profits box again. This time when he gets back to Big Boss they are both somewhat subdued.)

BIG BOSS. We're still making money, L.B. But are you sure we're getting as *much* as we really can? Make sure you are making

those girls work for their pay checks. Productivity is the name of the game, you know.

(As L.B. heads back to replace the box, the narrator begins talking again.)

NARRATOR. Often the workers felt exhausted and ready to break, because they were constantly being pressured to produce faster.

(L.B. arrives back on the shop floor and takes a stop watch from behind his back, examining it with an air of brisk efficiency.)

LOCAL BOSS. Hurry up, girls, we've got to get this work out. Our customers are waiting. Linda, if you can't handle the pace here, we may just have to let you go. It may be that at your age this just isn't the place for you any more. We are not running a charity here, you know. It's a business.

(SALLY, MARY, and LINDA continue their work. Now they attempt to go faster and faster. MARY finally tears off her mask in frustration. They make mistakes. Sometimes LINDA looks at a defective shirt and just shrugs and plunks it in the box. They are really looking stressed out. Finally a bell rings, and they practically fall down with exhaustion.)

MARY. We can't keep this up. We'll all be dead or disabled. NO one can work at this pace and make a decent product.

SALLY. I'm beginning to think you're right, Mary. L.B. kept telling me you were a troublemaker, but this is just impossible.

LINDA. We've got to *do* something.

NARRATOR. And they *did* do something. They organized to demand their rights. They decided to try to form a union. It took a real fight. The union sent organizers to help them. They had house meetings and made hundreds of calls to other workers. They argued and talked and talked and argued. And all the time the company was working against them. People were fired. The company showed a movie about how terrible unions are: they steal the workers' dues, they kill people and throw them in the river!! But in spite of all this, most of the workers signed cards that they wanted to have a union at the plant. A day was set for an election, where every worker in the plant would vote yes or no for the union. In the days before the election, the company fought them all the way.

(MARY, SALLY, and LINDA are lined up on one side of the stage,

and L.B. is positioned between them and Big Boss. The workers have picket signs that say "Vote for the Union" and "We Want Safety and Respect" and "We Are Human Beings Too.")

MARY, SALLY, and LINDA. *(In unison, aiming their energy toward L.B.)* We want our rights!

(L.B. looks agitated. Big Boss whispers in his ear, and L.B. turns and shouts back at the women.)

LOCAL BOSS. All this union stuff is just caused by a bunch of outside agitators. That's the problem. You girls simmer down.

MARY, SALLY, and LINDA. *(They look at each other, but are undaunted.)* We want respect on the shop floor!

(L.B. turns questioningly to Big Boss, who once more whispers loudly in his ear.)

LOCAL BOSS. *(nodding and smiling at Big Boss)* Now, girls, we have been in this community for fifty years. We are part of the fabric of your lives. We *know* each other, you and Zinger Garment. Some of your parents spent most of their work lives with us. Don't you know that this is just one big happy family here? The Zinger Garment Family. We don't want some nasty union in here intruding on our happy home.

MARY, SALLY, and LINDA. *(after short consultation)* We want safe working conditions!

LOCAL BOSS. *(again turning and taking instructions from Big Boss)* Shut up, and listen here. If you girls vote for a union, we might just close this plant down. We don't need the headache that comes with a bunch of complainers.

MARY, SALLY, and LINDA. *(Now they are mad.)* And we want a raise to keep up with inflation!

(L.B. is growing more and more agitated, as is Big Boss, who continues to advise him through whispered commands.)

LOCAL BOSS. If you vote for a union, you're just buying a lot of trouble. You'll be striking all the time. The days of peaceful cooperation will be over.

MARY. Yes, but we need an organization that can represent us together. Otherwise you always pick us off one by one. A real union isn't something that comes from outside anyway. If it's going to be any

good, it's going to be us: standing up for ourselves and sticking together. If we DO decide to strike, it will be our own decision.

NARRATOR. On election day, it was a close vote. Many people were afraid to vote for change. Some of them actually believed all that talk about One Big Happy Zinger Garment Family. Some of them just didn't have any faith that anything could be different. But when the votes were all counted, the majority had voted for the union! That meant that the union could represent the workers. It had the legal right to negotiate with the employer for better wages and conditions.

(MARY, SALLY, and LINDA hug each other and jump up and down. They form a line across the stage with their placards, and sing "Solidarity Forever.")

Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever.
Solidarity forever,
For the union makes us strong.

When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood
shall run,
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun,
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength
of one?

But the union makes us strong.

Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever.
Solidarity forever,
For the union makes us strong.

NARRATOR. Having a union was a real improvement. The workers were able to elect their own union officers. They negotiated a contract with the company. *(As the narrator speaks, the workers resume their places at their machines.)* The pace of the line slowed down some. The wages went up a little. The company actually put in a new ventilation system. *(Mary takes off her mask and draws a deep, happy breath.)* And workers at the plant had a way of getting together to try to improve conditions and to talk things over. But having a union was not the same as going to heaven. Many problems continued. The union was not so strong. *(After all, the government was against unions. And the laws were slanted toward management, not toward the workers.)* Life and work went on. The workers did the best they could to stick up for their rights. But then one day, something new was in the air.

BIG BOSS. (*looking up as L.B. comes to deliver the profits*)

Listen, L.B. I've got news. There's something big happening down on the border.

LOCAL BOSS. The border? What do you mean "the border?"

BIG BOSS. The border between us and Mexico, you dummy. It seems like a lot of our competitors are moving down there and opening up new plants on the other side.

LOCAL BOSS. Why would they bother to go way off down *there*? I mean that's a foreign *country*, for goodness sake.

BIG BOSS. (*sarcastically*) Oh, I don't know, L.B. Just take a wild guess.

LOCAL BOSS. Well, I suppose it must have something to do with money.

BIG BOSS. Brilliant. I always knew you had the stuff to be a big corporate success. Do you have any idea what they are paying those people they're hiring down there?

LOCAL BOSS. No. What?

BIG BOSS. Fifty-nine cents, seventy-nine cents, a dollar an hour, that's what!

LOCAL BOSS. (*Staring off with a kind of awe-struck expression, as though he might be able to see all the way to this amazing border with these amazing wages*) Wow

BIG BOSS. Yes. And I hear those people work like crazy. They are desperate for jobs, they say. Not greedy and spoiled like our American workers. They are grateful just to have a job. (*Realizing how harsh this sounds, Big Boss sort of shakes himself and clears his throat.*) And they *should* be grateful, of course. We're giving them a helping hand since their country is so poor. I guess they just didn't have what it takes to do the job themselves. So we're going to help them along.

LOCAL BOSS. What do you mean "we," boss? You're not thinking that Zinger Garments is going to go all the way down there are you?

BIG BOSS. (*evasively*) Well, I don't know. It's a long way. But anyhow, even if we don't go, it won't hurt a thing for those uppity women to know that we *might* go. I want you to put out the word right away that we are thinking of moving. Tell them they'll have to work faster if they want to hang on to old Zinger Garments. Oh, and that pension plan the union has been whining about for next year? Tell them they can forget it.

LOCAL BOSS. Okay, boss, but I don't know how this is going to go over

(L.B. walks over to the workers and drops the garment box back in its place. He sidles over and whispers in Sally's ear. She shrinks away from him, but then realizes what he is saying. She looks alarmed, and whispers in Mary's ear. Mary, too, looks upset, and whispers in Linda's ear. Linda looks up and drops the shirt she has just finished.)

LINDA. What!?!? Move to *Mexico* if we don't work faster!?!? If we work any faster we'll hurt ourselves or the product or both.

LOCAL BOSS. *(He is back over near Big Boss, where he can receive instructions. He shouts over at the workers.)* Faster, girls, faster! We already closed our factories in Kentucky and Virginia. This one will go too if you don't hurry. We have to compete in the global market now, you know.

(The women try to work faster. There is worry in their eyes.)

SALLY. My friend over at the telephone company told me that half their work went down to Mexico. She's out of a job, and her husband's disabled. I don't know what they'll do.

LOCAL BOSS. *(getting out his watch again)* Faster, faster.

MARY. Hey, L.B., we need a new guard on this machine. It is old and dangerous.

LOCAL BOSS. We can't afford new guards. What in the world are you thinking of? We've got to compete in the global market now, you know.

LINDA. And another thing: we need a raise this year just to keep from falling behind.

LOCAL BOSS. We can't afford a raise. What in the world are you thinking of? We've got to compete in the global market now, you know.

(Local Boss picks up the garments box and returns to Big Boss.)

LOCAL BOSS. Well, Boss, we're still making money. It's amazing how productivity has increased. And those women kept saying they couldn't work any faster! I always knew they were lazy.

BIG BOSS. I know we are still making money. But we could be making *more*. That's the genius of the free enterprise system. And besides, we don't really have a choice. Our competition is underpricing us. Well, L.B., I've got news. I guess you'd better start getting ready to move this baby. It's all planned. We'll be ready to start up down there next month.

LOCAL BOSS. "Start up down there"? "It's all planned"? Are

we going to Mexico?!? I thought you hadn't made up your mind yet.

BIG BOSS. Well, I didn't want to upset you. You can go too, you know. Or you can stay here. We'll still be sewing in the tags right here in the good old U.S.A.

LOCAL BOSS. All the way to Mexico? I don't know. I think maybe I'll stay here.

BIG BOSS. That's fine. There's plenty of young guys ready to go. After all, it's not like they have to move to *Mexico*, you know. They can live on the Texas side, and keep their kids in American schools. Well, give my regards to the girls in Tennessee. Here's some announcements and messages for you to deliver.

LOCAL BOSS. Why don't *you* come tell them yourself?

BIG BOSS. Not possible, L.B., not possible. (*chuckling, with an exaggerated Spanish accent*) "No es possible," as they say. I'm too damn busy, what with this move and all.

(He hands L.B. a stack of pink slips, and gets back on his telephone. Local Boss starts back across the stage apprehensively).

LOCAL BOSS. May I have your attention, please!! Attention please!! (*The women are working as hard as they can, and apparently do not hear him.*) Turn off that infernal machinery! (*The women look up in a daze.*) Your attention please! Now I have a very important announcement. Part of the Zinger Garment Co. will be closing down and moving to Mexico. It's a business emergency.

(SALLY, LINDA, and MARY are thunderstruck. They start babbling to each other "What's going on?" "But sales of our shirts are UP!" "Yes, and profits are up!" "I thought we had a YEAR before they were going to make any firm decisions!")

LOCAL BOSS. SHHHHHHHH!!!!!! Quiet!! We must do this in an orderly way now, girls. Really. Line up please. (*Keeping his eyes on his pad, he walks down the assembly line.*) Okay, Sally, (*handing her a pink slip*) you're out of here. The cloth will be cut in Mexico. Mary, (*handing her a pink slip also*) you're gone too. The serging goes to Mexico as well. Linda, you stay. We're going to keep sewing in the tags up here. And you'll get a brand new machine that can do twice as many tags in a day. Sally and Mary, get your things together and report to the cafeteria. You're going to get all kinds of counseling, and they'll explain your severance package to you.

SALLY AND MARY. (*still in a state of shock*) Our severance package?

LOCAL BOSS. Yes. Oh, here it is. You're quite welcome. *(He hands each worker a tiny little box tied up with a bow. Sally gets a tissue and dabs her eyes as she and Mary exit. Mary looks mad.)*

LOCAL BOSS. *(to Linda)* What are you staring at? You'd better be damn grateful you've still got a job. Get to work. Your new and faster and better machine will be here next week. *(He picks up the garment box and heads back to B.B.)*

NARRATOR. Now you might have thought that was that. But the workers didn't take it lying down. At first they couldn't believe it was really happening. Then they believed it and they cried. Eventually they fought back. They tried all kinds of things.

They wrote to the newspaper.

They circulated petitions.

They tried to talk the company out of moving the work.

They even agreed to wage cuts.

They tried to raise the money to buy the factory themselves.

They complained to their Congressman.

They found out about the toxic waste the company had buried behind the factory and raised a stink about it.

They organized protests.

They filed a lawsuit.

They had a mock funeral.

(The workers start walking around in a picket line and singing "We Shall Not Be Moved.")

We shall not, we shall not be moved.

We shall not, we shall not be moved.

Just like a tree that's planted by the water,

We shall not be moved.

Our union is behind us, we shall not be moved.

Our union is behind us, we shall not be moved.

Just like a tree that's planted by the water,

We shall not be moved.

You use us, then discard us, we shall not be moved.

You use us, then discard us, we shall not be moved.

Just like a tree that's planted by the water,

We shall not be moved.

But finally it was clear, the company was not going to change its mind. And so the workers fought for the best severance package they could get. It was better than what the company first tried to get away

with, but it was not enough to pay them back for the years they had spent with the Zinger Garment Company. It was not enough to help them find a new way to earn a living.

(As the narrator says these last words, the workers lay down their picket signs. Sally and Mary sit down dejectedly. Linda returns to work on the line.)

NARRATOR. Meanwhile, Zinger Garments was getting cranked up south of the border. A brand new factory, "Zinger Garments de Mexico," sprouted up almost overnight, with a brand new American manager. His name was Tex.

(Tex enters. He is carrying a big placard that says "Solicitamos Personal Femenino." He proudly places it on the stage, and looks around with a big expectant smile. Two women enter stage right, talking to each other.)

ESPERANZA. I just came from Veracruz. I need a job really bad.

MARIA. Yes, I need one too. There are ten of us at home and my sister's baby is sick.

ESPERANZA. I heard these are good jobs here in the maquiladoras. I am going to save my money, and in a few years I will go home to Veracruz and start my own small business. Maybe a restaurant. I am a very good cook.

MARIA. *(looking sympathetic but dubious)* Yes, maybe so. But after you are here awhile you are going to find out it is harder to save money than you think.

TEX. Come right in, ladies. Welcome to the Zinger Garment factory. We are going to be like one big happy family here. The Zinger Garment Family. Zinger Garments de Mexico. *(to Esperanza)* Okay, little lady, you just stand right here. You are going to cut the cloth. And you over there *(gesturing to Maria)*, you come stand here. Your job is going to be to serge the seams. There. Now try it out.

ESPERANZA. I cut the cloth.

MARIA. I serge the seams.

TEX. *(patronizingly)* Good. You're catching on. You're still a little slow yet, but of course you'll improve.

(Tex now grabs the half-done shirt and hurries across the stage to L.B. He hands it to L.B. who hands it to Linda, who of course already knows what to do.)

LINDA. And I sew in the tag. Then the garment's done.

(She drops the completed shirt in the garment box. This process repeats itself a few times. Then L.B. picks up the box and takes it back to B.B., who is still at his desk. They count out \$100 bills.)

BIG BOSS. Even with the trucking costs, and even with a small drop in the final price to the retailers, we are *still* making better money than we used to. This is great. *(He picks up the phone and calls Tex.)* Hello, Tex? This is the Boss. You're doing a great job! Keep it up! Let's keep those T-shirts coming! Hooray for the maquiladoras!!!

TEX. Hooray for the maquiladoras!!

LOCAL BOSS. *(a little dubious)* Hooray for the maquiladoras. . .

NARRATOR. But a very strange thing happened. Although Big Boss and Tex and L.B. seemed so very happy about the bright new world of the maquiladoras, the Mexican workers did not seem so happy. They were glad to have jobs, of course. They needed them. And many of them thought it was right for the United States to help out Mexico. After all, the United States had profited from Mexico and from Mexican workers many times in the past. But there were many things not right in the maquiladoras. . . Often the workers were not treated with dignity and respect by their supervisors and managers.

TEX. *(to Esperanza)* Hey, honey, how about meeting me after work? I hear that you Mexican girls are real hot tamales.

(Esperanza attempts to ignore Tex without offending him. She keeps on working, eyes glued to her task, really embarrassed and mad, but she doesn't know what to do.)

TEX. Hey, you! I said how about meeting me after work?

MARIA. Please. Just let Esperanza do her work. She's not that kind of girl.

(Tex strolls away from Esperanza, trying to look as though he feels no rejection. He shakes his head, muttering to himself.)

TEX. These Mexicans. They are so dumb they don't even know how to better themselves.

NARRATOR. Getting respect on the job was not the only problem for the workers at Zinger Garments de Mexico. Sometimes the factory was actually a dangerous place to be.

ESPERANZA. You know, we need more ventilation in here. This stuff they use to treat the cloth smells awful, and it makes me feel dizzy. **MARIA.** Ever since they started using this heavy gauge cloth, my hand has been killing me.

ESPERANZA. There are words on the labels of those chemicals they use in the dye house. But they are in English! I don't know what they say. Someone told me that in the United States the workers can't use these chemicals without special protection. But Mr. Tex says it is perfectly safe and not to worry. I don't know what to do. I'm afraid if I complain I will lose my job. You remember what happened to Lupita when she protested.

NARRATOR. And another thing. Often the wages the workers earned were not enough to provide the kind of life they wanted for themselves and their families.

(Tex enters with a basket over his arm. He reaches into the basket and passes out single pennies to each of the workers.)

TEX. *(to Esperanza, leaning unnecessarily close to her)* Here's one for you, you little hot muchacha. *(When he sees Maria, his face falls, but grudgingly he gives her a penny, too.)* And here's one for you, even though you're always whining. You all go live it up on the weekend, now. Oh, and here's a piece of candy.

(Tex reaches in his Easter basket and finds a piece of hard candy for each of the workers. The women take their pennies and carefully put them in their pockets, but they are not impressed. Maria throws her piece of candy on the floor.)

ESPERANZA. I want a decent place to live, where my family can be safe, where we can have running water and electricity. They came up from Veracruz a few months ago. We have been trying to make a place to live, but there is never enough left over to buy the things we need. We just have to buy a few cinderblocks whenever we can. When it rains, our whole neighborhood floods, and the water sometimes stays standing for weeks or even longer.

MARIA. I know, I know. It is the same in my colonia. And it is not just our house. Sometimes my parents can hardly manage to feed my brothers and sisters. I want to be able to help: every now and then some meat on the table, for a change! It is not right that I should work so hard, and still we cannot afford a decent meal.

NARRATOR. Often the workers felt exhausted and ready to break, because they were constantly being pressured to produce faster.

(Tex arrives on the shop floor and takes a stop watch from behind his back, examining it with an air of brisk efficiency.)

TEX. Hurry up, girls, we've got to get this work out.

BIG BOSS. Hey! Tex! We need more shirts over there in Tennessee! Hurry it up down there! We need you to be just in time. You know we're not stockpiling like we used to!

TEX. Hey! Girls! They need more shirts up there in Tennessee! Hurry it up!

(Esperanza and Maria continue their work. Now they attempt to go faster and faster. As they turn out part-done shirts, Tex passes them on to L.B. and Linda. All three workers look more and more stressed out. Finally a bell rings, and they practically fall down with exhaustion.)

ESPERANZA. We can't keep this up. We'll all be dead or disabled. No one can work at this pace and make a decent product.

MARIA. We've got to *do* something.

NARRATOR. *(pausing a moment for a knowing look at the audience)* Does all this sound a little bit familiar? Well, the maquila workers *did* do something. They already had a union, but it seldom seemed to do much for the members. Most of the time the union seemed more like part of the problem than part of the solution. It was not run in a democratic way. So the workers decided to do something on their own. They began reading and studying the law, in order to know their rights. They formed an organization. They would build it slowly. They would listen to their fellow workers to learn what they needed. They would stand by each other. They would try to figure out what to do to make a better life. They formed the Comite Fronterizo de Obreras, the CFO. *(Narrator walks over and pins CFO buttons onto Esperanza and Maria, who shake hands with each other and smile.)*

(Just now Sally comes up to where the narrator is standing. She knocks on a pretend door, politely, tap, tap, tap. The narrator is surprised and looks at Sally.)

NARRATOR. Oh, for a minute I forgot about you folks back in the United States.

SALLY. Hello? Is this the unemployment agency? I don't have a job. I *need* a job. I can cut cloth as fast as anybody in East Tennessee, and do a lot of other things too.

NARRATOR. *(taking on a fake and snobby voice)* We don't have any jobs for cloth cutters. Apparel is a dying industry, didn't you

know? You could go down and try at the temporary agency.

SALLY. The *temporary* agency!? But I want a *real* job, a permanent job. Something with fringe benefits and job security. I need health insurance and some kind of retirement plan. Temporary agencies are just for bums and people who don't really need to work.

NARRATOR. (*still in her agency voice*) No, dear, temporary agencies are for *everybody* now. Well, almost everybody

(Sally walks off looking really discouraged. Next Mary approaches the narrator and knocks impatiently on a pretend door, bang, bang, bang)

MARY. Hello! Is this the government retraining program? I heard you could help me get training so I can get a new job. I'm ready to try almost anything as long as it will pay a decent wage, and provide me with some health insurance.

NARRATOR. Yes, this is the retraining program. (*Again in a different voice, this time very cheerful and bureaucratic.*) Choose form A, B, C, or D. It is very important that you fill out the proper forms, and your application must be completed by this afternoon. Indicate which program you wish to join: trucking, computers or health care. Once you choose, we cannot allow you to change. One thing you must understand: the government is in no way guaranteeing you a job. This is a retraining facility, not a placement service. We are providing you with the opportunity to find your own success if you are willing to work hard and take advantage of all the wonderful programs available to you. (*finally with a deep breath and a big smile*) It's the American way!

MARY. (*dubiously*) Well, of course I understand there is no guarantee, but I'd like to know what jobs you believe are available. And I want to tell you what my skills and interests are, and understand my choices here. Is there a counselor I could speak with?

NARRATOR. (*still the helpful bureaucrat*) Oh, my dear, no. We are very busy here, and you know our federal funding has been cut, and we could not possibly provide individualized counseling to each person who seeks our assistance. We do not have personnel who can sit here and listen to your individual complaints. (*seeing that Mary is looking very upset*) You'll just have to pull yourself together now. Here, have a tissue. (*Mary throws the tissue back at the woman in frustration, and walks away. She runs into Sally.*)

MARY. How are you, Sally?

SALLY. Oh, fine, just fine. Nice to see you, Mary. (*Sally looks incredibly uncomfortable.*) Well, I've got to be going

MARY. Wait, why are you running off?

SALLY. (*hesitating for a moment, and then bursting into tears*)

SALLY. (*hesitating for a moment, and then bursting into tears*) I'm just afraid that you're going to ask me if I'm working, and I'm going to have to say NO, and—I know this is crazy, but I just feel so *ashamed*.

MARY. That *is* crazy. It's plain nuts. It is not your fault that Zinger Garments decided to move out on us. It's not your fault that it seems just about impossible to find a good job at decent pay any more. But I know what you mean. I'm not working again yet either, and I feel the same way. The finance company came and repossessed my furniture last week and I feel about an inch tall. Actually somebody told me that two people laid off from Zinger tried to commit suicide last month. Suicide!

SALLY. Yeah. I heard the same thing. And I heard that Angie Hooper has been living in a *tent* for two weeks. Did you ever hear of such a thing?

MARY. It seems like things are just coming apart. Listen, did you go over there to that retraining meeting?

SALLY. Yes, but it was stupid. They are really disorganized, and the main thing is they don't have any jobs for people once they get out. Or anyway, they don't have any jobs that pay anything.

MARY. I know it. There are people who have gone all through the training, and now they are working in a laundry or a nursing home for half of what they earned before!

SALLY. Did you try the unemployment office?

MARY. Yes, but they just sent me to a temporary agency. And you know what *those* are like.

SALLY. The same exact thing happened to me! You know, I'm actually getting scared for our children. What's life going to be like for them? It seems like the only jobs you can get any more are flipping hamburgers or emptying bed pans or making up beds in a motel.

SALLY and MARY. We've got to *do* something!

NARRATOR. And eventually they did. They ended up joining the Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network—TIRN. (*She walks over and puts TIRN buttons on their shirts. They look pleased, then see that the Narrator is pinning a button on Linda's shirt too.*)

MARY. Linda! What are you doing here? Did you get laid off too?

LINDA. No. At least not yet. But I figure we all have to do something, or none of us will have any decent jobs. TIRN is trying to help us figure out what to do about all the factory jobs that are disappearing.

NARRATOR. TIRN had members that were employed and unemployed. It had people from churches and community

retraining programs, to keep industrial jobs alive in the United States.

MARY. Hey, at the last TIRN meeting there were two women there from Mexico. They actually work at some of those plants that have moved down there. What do they call them? I keep forgetting that word.

SALLY. The maquiladoras?

MARY. Yeah. That's it. It's hard for me to say. (*slowly and carefully*) Ma-qui-la-do-ra. Anyway, they were *nice*. I mean it. I don't know what I expected, but they're just people like you and me. And the companies are treating them really bad.

LINDA. What do you mean?

MARY. Well, they pay them practically nothing. And they say the health and safety conditions are terrible for the workers in the plants and for the people who live nearby. And it sounds like they pressure them to work even faster than they used to pressure us.

SALLY. You know, that makes me feel funny. I never thought about it that way before. It just seemed to me like those people were stealing our jobs away from us. I didn't really ask what things were like for them.

MARY. I know. I didn't look any farther than my own self.

LINDA. Me too. I just thought we should hang onto what we had.

SALLY. I wonder what things are like for them in Mexico.

LINDA. Yeah, I wonder too. In fact, I'm beginning to think we'll be sorry if we don't start wondering a lot.

MARY. Well, do you all wonder what it's like in Mexico enough to go down there and see for yourself?

SALLY. Get out of here, woman. What do you mean go down and see for myself? I'm just an unemployed factory worker.

MARY. Well, TIRN is sponsoring a trip to the maquiladoras this summer. They want women workers to go. They're taking two vans full of folks.

LINDA. All the way to *Mexico*?

MARY. All the way to Mexico.

SALLY. Where they speak *Spanish*?

MARY. Where they speak Spanish.

LINDA. You mean a bunch of women driving off down there over a thousand miles away from home, who don't speak Spanish, who are not experts, who have to leave their friends and husbands and kids and grandkids behind?

MARY. That's exactly what I mean.

LINDA and SALLY. (*grinning*) Let's do it.

MARY. All *right!*

NARRATOR. And you know what? They *did* it. They made the trip. One day at a meeting, one of them said she looked at it this way. She said, after all, the companies are learning all about the new global economy. They are getting together with Mexican owners and managers to decide what will be good for the U.S. and Mexico, or at least for U.S. and Mexican business.

And the governments are learning all about the new global economy. President Bush and President Salinas are getting together to figure out what *they* think will be good for the U.S. and Mexico, or at least for the people who run them.

Isn't it time *we* started learning about the global economy too? Isn't it time we got together with some other workers to talk about what we think might be good for the U.S. and Mexico from *our* point of view?

(Sally, Mary, and Linda first move across the stage to Maria and Esperanza. They shake hands, embrace, etc. Then the members of the cast begin to move out into the audience, and take the hands of the participants. Forming a circle they sing:)

Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
Hands across the border.

Solidaridad pa' siempre,
Solidaridad pa' siempre,
Solidaridad pa' siempre
Atravesando las fronteras.

DE TENNESSEE A TAMAULIPAS

Obra teatral de un acto

por Fran Ansley y los miembros de la Delegación TIRN a las maquiladoras del verano de 1991: Debbie Beeler, Barabra Bishop, Luvernel Clark, June Hargis, Susie Hickey, Dianna Petty, Shirley Reinhardt, y Susan Williams. †

PERSONAJES:

(en orden de aparición)

NARRADORA. Una amable guía de la escena satírica.

SALLY. Una trabajadora de una fábrica estadounidense. Sally siempre trata de ser razonable. Es un poco tímida.

MARY. Una trabajadora de una fábrica estadounidense. Ha llevado una vida difícil, y no tiene la intención de tolerar nada de nadie a menos que sea necesario.

LINDA. Una trabajadora de una fábrica estadounidense. Linda tiene el síndrome del túnes carpiano.

JEFE LOCAL. ("*J.L.*" para más breve). El gerente de la planta de la fábrica estadounidense.

JEFE GRANDE. Un ejecutivo de la sede de la compañía.

TEX. Gerente americano de la nueva planta maquiladora.

ESPERANZA. Una trabajadora que acaba de llegar a la región maquiladora.

MARIA. Una hábil trabajadora de maquiladoras.

† Traducido por María de los Santos Onofre-Madrid. Profesora de español, Angelo State University; B.A., Angelo State University, 1976; M.A., The University of Texas at Arlington, 1978.

Muchas gracias por la ayuda de Adriana Renée Canales de McKendrick y Roberto Stephens.

ACCESORIOS:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Despertador. | Canasta de pascuas. | Dos distintivos de |
| Camisetas. | Billetes de \$1. | CFO. |
| Teléfono. | Máscara antigás. | Tres distintivos de |
| Billetes de \$100. | Libreta. | TIRN. |
| Cronómetro. | Dulce duro. | |

Una caja de pañuelos de papel.

Aparato ortopédico para la muñeca.

"Paquetes" de separación (*pequeñitas cajitas con moñitos*).

Manifestaciones para organizar la campaña:

"Vote por la unión"

"Queremos seguridad y respeto"

"Somos humanos también"

Manifestaciones para protestar el cierre de la planta:

"Zinger trata a sus trabajadores como basura"

"Salve nuestros trabajos"

"Nosotros ayudamos a construir Zinger; Nosotros merecemos tener voz"

Anuncio de empleo para Zinger de México: "Solicitamos personal femenino"

Caja de cartón rotulada "Prendas terminadas" a un lado y "Ganancias" al otro lado.

(Al empezar la obra, vemos tres trabajadores en una línea de producción que está al lado izquierdo del escenario. Son trabajadoras de la fábrica de Prendas Zinger.)

NARRADORA. Una vez, hace mucho tiempo, en una tierra lejana, unos trabajadores luchaban para hacer una vida para sí mismos y sus familias. Cada mañana iban a la Compañía Prendas de Zinger, y empezaban sus trabajos.

(Un ruidoso despertador suena, y los trabajadores empiezan a trabajar. Cada mujer hace un movimiento repetitivo exagerado en lo que va a ser una prenda, y luego se lo pasa a su vecina. Como esto es una tonta escena satírica, cada mujer también le explica al público lo que hace al hacerlo.)

SALLY. Corto la tela.

MARY. Yo le aplico el respunte a la costura.

LINDA. Yo le coso la etiqueta, y luego la camisa está hecha.

(Cuando Linda termina de coserle la etiqueta, levanta la camisa terminada, y luego la deja caer en una caja que está en el piso al final de la fila, rotulada "Prendas terminadas." El trío sigue esta rutina unas veces más, mientras parezca gracioso. Se están cansando notablemente.)

NARRADORA. No fue siempre una vida fácil cortar la tela, hacer pespuntos y coser etiquetas. Algunas veces a las trabajadoras no las trataban con dignidad ni respeto sus supervisores y jefes.

(J.L. sale a escena por la derecha. Camina como si fuera el gallo del gallinero.)

JEFE LOCAL. *(a Sally)* ¡Eh!, encanto, ¿qué tal si vas a mi casa después del trabajo? *(guiñando)* Tengo un exceso de inventario con el cual quiero que me ayudes.

(Sally trata de ignorar a su jefe sin ofenderlo. Sigue trabajando, con los ojos fijos en su tarea, en realidad avergonzada y enojada, pero ella no sabe que hacer.)

JEFE LOCAL. ¡Eh, tú! Yo dije, "¿qué tal si me encuentras después del trabajo?" De veras me gusta como estás formada, cosita chula. Tú y yo podríamos llevarnos bien si fueras lista y me trataras bien. ¿Sabes lo que es bueno para ti?, ¿no? Yo te podría hacer muy feliz, chfca.

SALLY. *(tratando de mantener la tranquilidad)* Por favor, déjeme sola. No me interesa.

JEFE LOCAL. ¡Ah!, ¿qué te pasa? Sé que no tienes novio. . . .

MARY. ¡Oiga!, J.L. Deje de molestar, ¿no? Deje a Sally que haga su trabajo.

(J.L. mira a Mary con rabia, y se va, tratando de aparentar que no siente el rechazo. Mueve la cabeza, murmurando solo.)

JEFE LOCAL. Esta gente. Es tan tonta, que ni sabe cómo mejorarse. Y casi toda es floja, también. No le interesa trabajar.

(J.L. va hacia la caja rotulada "Prendas terminadas," y la levanta. Se voltea despacio, evidentemente para que el público vea que el otro lado del rótulo de la caja dice "Ganancias.")

JEFE LOCAL. Bueno, jefe, tuvimos un buen mes, yo creo.

JEFE GRANDE. Me alegra oírlo. Me alegra mucho oírlo. Vamos a ver cómo van las cosas en Tennessee

(Los dos hombres empiezan a meter la mano en la caja y a sacar billetes de \$100. Los ponen en montones sobre el escritorio del Jefe Grande. Parecen estar contentos. La narradora ahora empieza a hablar, llamándonos la atención a la fábrica de nuevo. Al hacerlo, el Jefe Local devuelve la caja al final de la línea de producción, con el rótulo "Prendas terminadas" hacia el público.)

NARRADORA. Ser respetada en el trabajo no era el único problema de las trabajadoras de la Fábrica de Prendas Zinger. A veces la fábrica era en realidad un lugar peligroso.

(Las trabajadoras continúan su rutina.)

SALLY. Yo corto la tela.

MARY. Yo hago el respunte.

LINDA. Yo le coso la etiqueta, y luego la prenda está hecha.

MARY. Saben, necesitamos más ventilación aquí. Esta cosa con la que tratan la tela huele muy mal, y me mareo. Me voy a poner esta máscara, pero no estoy segura que ayude con estos vapores. Además, odio esta maldita cosa; te vuelve loca durante por ocho horas. *(Mary se pone una máscara antigás, y sigue trabajando.)*

LINDA. Desde que empezaron a pasar esta tela resistente, me duele la mano. La semana pasada fui a ver al doctor de la compañía. Me dio un calmante para el dolor, y me dijo que volviera al trabajo. Cuando me siguió doliendo, me dio esta cosa para ponerme. *(Apunta a un aparato ortopédico que usa en la mano y el brazo.)* Pero siento que está empeorando cada día. Temo que si hablo más sobre mis dolores me van a decir que no puedo hacer el trabajo y me despidan.

SALLY. La nueva ley dice que tenemos derecho a saber sobre los químicos con los que trabajamos, y yo sé que hay muchas cosas tóxicas que están usando en el cuarto de tintes, pero la compañía nunca explica los peligros ni que hacer. Y mi cuñado me dijo que habían enterrado a unos químicos detrás de la fábrica cuando terminaron con ellos. ¿Crees que eso sea seguro? Me pone nerviosa.

(J.L. levanta la caja de prendas como antes, y él y el Jefe Grande cuentan las ganancias de nuevo. Mientras la narradora continúa, el Jefe Local devuelve la caja al final de la línea.)

NARRADORA. Y otra cosa. A menudo los sueldos que las trabajadoras ganaban no eran suficiente para mantener el tipo de vida que ellas querían para sí mismas y sus familias.

(J.L. entra con una canasta en el brazo. Delicadamente, mete la mano en la canasta y saca billetes de \$1. Le dá un billete de \$1 a cada trabajadora.)

JEFE LOCAL. *(a Sally, inclinándose innecesariamente muy cerca de ella)* Aquí hay uno para ti, corazoncito. *(Cuando ve a Mary, se le cae la cara, pero de mala gana le da un billete también.)* Y aquí hay uno para ti, mal genio. Y *(a Linda)* aquí hay uno para ti. Vayan ahora ustedes y gocen de la vida este fin de semana.

(Las mujeres todas toman su billete de \$1. Se lo ponen cuidadosamente en la bolsa, pero no estan impresionadas.)

LINDA. Yo quiero que mi hija vaya a la universidad, para que pueda hacer algo con su vida, pero no creo que tengamos los recursos. Sé que la hija del jefe fue a una escuela particular lujosa, y la manda a Europa cada verano. Estoy segura que iré a la mejor universidad que el dinero pueda comprar.

SALLY. Me preocupa cuando sea ansiana. Tenemos un terrible plan de retiro en Zinger, que no sé cómo voy a vivir cuando yo sea demasiada vieja para trabajar.

MARY. Yo sólo desearía tener bastante para comprar una casa, pero los pagos son muy altos. Creo que siempre alquilaré siempre.

LINDA. Nosotros *estamos* comprando una casa pequeña. Mis padres nos ayudaron con el enganche, y nosotros le estamos haciendo la mitad del trabajo, pero parece que el sueldo de ambos apenas cubre las cuentas. Nunca queda nada para los ahorros. Si uno de nosotros perdiera el trabajo, te apuesto a que en menos de un mes perderíamos nuestra casa y carro. No podríamos seguir con los pagos.

MARY. Lo que me preocupa más con perder mi trabajo es que no tendría ningún seguro de salud. No tengo para pagarle a un doctor o un hospital con lo que puedo ahorrar. Eso me da miedo de muerte. ¿Y que pasaría si me enfermase y me hiciera falta una operación sin poder pagarla?

(J.L. va a levantar su caja de ganancias otra vez. Esta vez cuando va con el Jefe Grande, ambos están un poco deprimidos.)

JEFE GRANDE. Todavía estamos ganando dinero, J.L. Pero, ¿estás seguro que estamos recibiendo *todo* lo que de veras podemos? Asegúrate de que esas muchachas estén trabajando por su sueldo. La productividad es de lo más importante, tú sabes.

(Al volver, J.L. pone la caja en su lugar. La narradora empieza a

hablar otra vez.)

NARRADORA. A menudo las trabajadoras se sentían exhaustas, y listas para darse por vencidas porque estaban constantemente presionadas para producir más rápidamente.

(J.L. vuelve al piso del taller y saca un cronómetro de detrás y lo examina con un aire de eficiencia energética.)

JEFE LOCAL. Apúrenle, muchachas, tenemos que terminar este trabajo. Nuestros clientes están esperando. Linda, si no puedes avanzar al mismo paso aquí, tal vez tengamos que despedirte. Tal vez a tu edad éste ya no sea el lugar para ti. No tenemos un lugar de caridad aquí, tú sabes. Esto es un negocio.

(Sally, Mary, y Linda continúan con su trabajo. Ahora tratan de hacerlo más y más rápidamente. MARY al fin se arranca la máscara antigás con la frustración. Cometan errores. A veces LINDA ve una camisa con defectos, y sólo mueve los hombros y la echa a la caja. De veras se ven agotadas. Finalmente, suena una campana, y prácticamente se caen del agotamiento.)

MARY. No podemos seguir así. Todas estaremos muertas o incapacitadas. Nadie puede trabajar a este paso y hacer un producto decente.

SALLY. Estoy pensando que tienes razón, Mary. J.L. me seguía diciendo que tú eras alborotadora, pero esto es simplemente imposible.

LINDA. Tenemos que hacer algo.

NARRADORA. Y efectivamente hicieron algo. Se organizaron para demandar sus derechos. Decidieron intentar la organización de un sindicato. Se tomó un gran esfuerzo. El sindicato mandó organizadores para ayudarles. Se reunieron en casas privadas e hicieron sientos de telefonemas a los otros trabajadores. Argumentaron y discutieron, discutieron y argumentaron. Mientras tanto la compañía labotaba contra ellos. Muchos fueron despedidos de su trabajo. La compañía pasó una película demostrando lo terrible de los sindicatos: se roban los quotassindicales, matan gente y las tiran al río. No obstante esto, la mayoría de los trabajadores prestaron su firma indicando que querían un sindicato en la fábrica. Se fijó la fecha de la elección en la cual cada trabajador tendría derecho de votar a favor o en contra del sindicato. Durante los días anteriores a dicho acontecimiento, la compañía presentó fuerte oposición.

(MARY, SALLY, Y LINDA hacen linea a un lado del foro, y J.L. se posiciona entre ellas y el Jefe Grande. Los trabajadores muestran manifestaciones diciendo "Votan por el sindicato," y "Queremos seguridad y repeto," y "Somos humanos también.")

MARY, SALLY, Y LINDA. *(al mismo tiempo, dirigiendo su energia a J.L.) ¡Queremos nuestros derechos!*

(El J.L. muestra agitación. El Jefe Grande le murmura, y el J.L., volteando la cabeza, les grita a las mujeres.)

JEFE LOCAL. Todo esto del sindicato se ha causado por agitadores de fuera. Ese es el problema. Ustedes tranquilícense.

MARY, SALLY, Y LINDA. *(Se ven una a la otra, pero persiguen.) ¡Queremos respeto en el piso!*

(El J.L. con mirada inquisitiva, volteo hacia el Jefe Grande, quien una vez mas le murmura al oído.)

JEFE LOCAL. *(sonriente e indicando que sí con la cabeza hacia el Jefe Grande)* Pues bien, muchachas, tenemos cincuenta años de estar en esta comunidad. Somos parte de la tela de sus vidas. Nos *conocemos*, ustedes y Prendas Zinger. Algunos de sus padres pasaron la mayor parte de sus vidas con nosotros. ¿Que acaso no saben que somos una familia, grande y feliz? La Familia de Prendas Zinger. No queremos un sindicato intruso molestando nuestro hogar feliz.

MARY, SALLY, Y LINDA. *(después de una corta discusión)* Queremos un ambiente seguro para trabajar.

JEFE LOCAL. *(volteando nuevamente hacia el Jefe Grande y recibiendo instrucciones de él)* Cállense, y escúchenme. Si ustedes eligen formar un sindicato, es posible que cerremos la fábrica. No necesitamos el dolor de cabeza que acompaña a una bola de llorones.

MARY, SALLY, Y LINDA. *(Ahora están enojadas.) ¡Y queremos un aumento para mantenernos al nivel con la inflación!*

(J.L. se está inquietando más y más, así como el Jefe Grande, que sigue aconsejándolo por medio de mandatos murmurados.)

JEFE LOCAL. Si votan por un sindicato, sólo están buscando problemas. Siempre estarán en huelga. Los días de la cooperación pacífica se terminarán.

MARY. Si, pero necesitamos una organización que nos represente a todos unidos. De otra manera nos arrancan uno por uno. Un sindicato no

es algo que viene de afuera, de todas maneras. Si va a ser algo bueno, va a ser nosotros: defendiéndonos y manteniéndonos unidos. Si nos declaramos en huelga, será nuestra propia decisión.

NARRADORA. El día de las elecciones, la votación fue muy cerca. Mucha de la gente tenía miedo de votar por cambios. Algunas hasta se creyeron todo lo de una Familia de Prendas Zinger grande y contenta. Algunas ni tuvieron la menor confianza en que algo podría ser diferente. Pero cuando contaron todos los votos, ¡la mayoría había votado por el sindicato! Eso quería decir que el sindicato podría representar a las trabajadoras. Tenía el derecho legal de negociar con el empleador por mejores sueldos y condiciones.

(MARY, SALLY, Y LINDA se abrazan y saltan. Forman una fila a través del escesario con sus carteles, y cantan "Solidaridad para siempre.")

Solidaridad para siempre,
Solidaridad para siempre.
Solidaridad para siempre,
Porque el sindicato nos hace fuertes.

Cuando la inspiración del sindicato corra por la sangre de los trabajadores,

No habrá ningún poder más grande en ningún lugar bajo el sol,
Sin embargo, ¿cuál fuerza de la tierra es más débil que la endeble
fuerza de uno?

Pero el sindicato nos hace fuertes.

Solidaridad para siempre,
Solidaridad para siempre.
Solidaridad para siempre,
Porque el sindicato nos hace fuertes.

NARRADORA. Tener un sindicato fue una gran mejora. Los trabajadores pudieron elegir a los oficiales de su propio sindicato. Negociaron un contrato con la compañía. *(Mientras habla la narradora, las trabajadoras vuelven a su lugar con sus máquinas.)* La velocidad de la línea disminuyó un poco. Los sueldos aumentaron un poco. La compañía instaló un sistema de ventilación. *(Mary se quita la máscara antigás y respira profundamente con alegría.)* Las trabajadoras de la planta tuvieron una manera de unirse para tratar de mejorar las condiciones y hablar de las cosas. Pero tener un sindicato no era lo mismo que ir al cielo. Continuaron habiendo problemas. El sindicato no era tan fuerte. *(Después de todo, el gobierno estaba en contra de los sindicatos, y las*

leyes se interpretaban gerencia, no de las trabajadoras.) La vida y el trabajo segufan. Las trabajadoras hicieron lo mejor que pudieron para defender sus derechos. Pero un día, había rumores.

JEFE GRANDE. (*Levantando la vista cuando J.L. llega a traer las ganancias.*) Escucha, J.L. Tengo noticias. Hay algo grande que está pasando en la frontera.

JEFE LOCAL. ¿La frontera? ¿Cómo que "la frontera"?

JEFE GRANDE. La frontera entre nosotros y México, tonto. Parece que mucha de nuestra competencia se muda para allá y van a abrir plantas nuevas en el otro lado.

JEFE LOCAL. ¿Por qué se molestarán para ir hasta *allá*? Quiero decir que es un *país* extraño, ¡por Dios!

JEFE GRANDE. (*sarcásticamente*) Oh, yo no sé, J.L. Sólo adivínale.

JEFE LOCAL. Bueno, yo supongo que tiene algo que ver con el dinero.

JEFE GRANDE. ¡Brillante! Yo siempre creía que tenías lo que se necesita para ser un gran éxito corporativo. ¿Tienes idea cuánto les están pagando a las personas que están ocupando allá?

JEFE LOCAL. No. ¿Cuánto?

JEFE GRANDE. ¡Cincuenta y nueve centavos, setenta y nueve centavos, un dólar por hora, eso es!

JEFE LOCAL. (*Fijando la vista con una expresión anonadada, como si pudiera ver hasta esa frontera asombrosa con esos sueldos maravillosos*) Uuu. . . .

JEFE GRANDE. Sí. Y oigo que esa gente trabaja como loca. Están desesperados por trabajar, dicen. No son codiciosos ni consentidos como nuestros trabajadores americanos. Están muy agradecidos sólo por tener un trabajo. (*Dándose cuenta de lo cruel que suena esto, Jefe Grande se sacude y carraspea.*) Y *deben* estar agradecidos, por supuesto. Les estamos dando la mano ya que su país es muy pobre. Supongo que ellos no tenían lo que se necesita para hacer el trabajo ellos mismos. Así que nosotros vamos a ayudarlos.

JEFE LOCAL. ¿Qué quiere decir con "nosotros," jefe? ¿Usted no cree que Prendas Zinger va a ir hasta allá? ¿No?

JEFE GRANDE. (*evasivamente*) Bueno, yo no sé. Es muy lejos. Pero de todas maneras, aunque no vayamos, no hará ningún daño que esas mujeres presumidas sepan que *podríamos* irnos. Quiero que empieces a decir de inmediato que pensamos mudarnos. Diles que tendrán que trabajar más rápidamente si quieren seguir con Prendas Zinger. Oh, y del plan de pensión por el cual el sindicato ha estado chillando para el año próximo, diles que se pueden olvidar de él.

JEFE LOCAL. Está bien, jefe, pero no sé como van a tomar esto .

(J.L. camina hacia las trabajadoras y deja caer la caja de prendas en su lugar. Se mueve furtivamente hacia Sally, y le murmura al oído. Ella se retrae, pero luego se da cuenta de lo que le está diciendo. Se ve alarmada, y le murmura a Mary en el oído. Mary, también, se ve perturbada, y le murmura a Linda en el oído. Linda levanta la vista y deja caer la camisa que acaba de terminar.)

LINDA. ¿¿¿¿Qué!!?? ¿¿¿¿Mudarse a México si no trabajamos más rápidamente!!?? Si trabajamos más rápidamente nos lastimaremos o echaremos a perder el producto o ambas cosas.

JEFE LOCAL. *(Está cerca de Jefe Grande, donde puede recibir instrucciones. Les grita a las trabajadoras.)* ¡Más rápido, muchachas, más rápido! Ya cerramos nuestras fábricas de Kentucky y Virginia. Y ésta se irá también si no se apuran. Ustedes saben, tenemos que competir en el mercado mundial ahora.

(Las mujeres tratan de trabajar más rápido. Se les ve la preocupación en los ojos.)

SALLY. Mi amiga de la compañía de teléfonos me dijo que la mitad de su trabajo la mandaron a México. Ya no tiene trabajo, y su esposo está incapacitado. No sé qué van a hacer.

JEFE LOCAL. *(sacando su reloj de nuevo)* Más rápido, más rápido.

MARY. Oiga, J.L., necesitamos una nueva defensa en esta máquina. Está vieja y es peligrosa.

JEFE LOCAL. No tenemos los medios para comprar nuevas defensas. ¿Qué diablos están pensando? Ustedes saben, tenemos que competir en el mercado mundial ahora.

LINDA. Y otra cosa: necesitamos un aumento de sueldo este año sólo para no quedarnos atrás.

JEFE LOCAL. No tenemos para un aumento. ¿Qué diablos están pensando? Ustedes saben, tenemos que competir en el mercado mundial ahora.

(El jefe local levanta la caja de prendas y vuelve con Jefe Grande.)

JEFE LOCAL. Bueno, Jefe, todavía estamos ganando dinero. Es asombroso como ha aumentado la productividad. ¡Y esas mujeres decían que no podían trabajar más rápidamente! Yo siempre sabía que eran flojas.

JEFE GRANDE. Yo sé que todavía estamos ganando dinero. Pero podríamos estar ganando *más*. Eso es el genio del sistema de empresa

libre. Además, en realidad no tenemos otra alternativa. Nuestra competencia nos está ganando con rebajas. Bueno, J.L., tengo buenas noticias. Creo que deberías prepararte para mover esta fábrica. Ya está todo planeado. Estaremos listos para empezar todo allá el mes próximo.

JEFE LOCAL. "¿Empezar allá?" "¿Ya está todo planeado?"
 ¿¡Vamos a ir a México!?! Yo creía que todavía no te decidías.

JEFE GRANDE. Bueno, no te quería molestar. Tu también te puedes ir, tú sabes. O te puedes quedar aquí. Todavía estaremos cosiendo etiquetas aquí en los y buenos Estados Unidos.

JEFE LOCAL. ¿Hasta México? Yo no sé. Yo creo que me quedaré aquí.

JEFE GRANDE. Está bien. Hay bastantes jóvenes listos para irse. Después de todo, no es como si se tuvieron que mudar a *México*, tú sabes. Pueden vivir en el lado de Tejas, y dejar a sus hijos en las escuelas americanas. Bueno, dales mis saludos a las muchachas de Tennessee. Aquí hay algunos anuncios y mensajes para que repartir.

JEFE LOCAL. ¿Por qué no sé lo dice *usted* a ellas?

JEFE GRANDE. No es posible, J.L., no es posible. (*riéndose entre dientes con un acento hispano exagerado*) "No es posible," como dicen. Estoy muy ocupado, con esta mudanza y todo.

(Le dá a J.L. un montón de papeletas rosadas, y se va al teléfono. Jefe Local vuelve a cruzar el escenario perspicazmente.)

JEFE LOCAL. ¿Me pueden prestar atención, por favor? ¡¡Atención, por favor!! (*Las mujeres están trabajando tan diligente como les es posible, y aparentemente no lo oyen.*) ¡Apaguen esa maquinaria infernal! (*Las mujeres levantan la vista aturcidas.*) ¡Su atención por favor! Ahora tengo un aviso muy importante. Parte de la Compañía de Prendas de Zinger se va a cerrar y se mueve a México. Es una emergencia de negocios.

(SALLY, LINDA, Y MARY están atónitas. Empiezan a balbucear una con otra: "Qué está pasando?" " ¡Pero la compra de nuestras camisas ha subido!" "Sí, ¡y han subido las ganancias!" " ¡Yo creía que teníamos un año antes de que ellos decidieran algo con firmeza!")

JEFE LOCAL. ¡¡¡¡Chitón!!!! ¡Silencio! Debemos hacer esto de una manera ordenada, ya muchachas. De veras. Pónganse en fila. (*Manteniéndole el oja a su libreta, camina por la línea de montaje.*) Está bien, Sally, (*dándole una papeleta rosada*) tú sales de aquí. La tela será cortada en México. Mary, (*dándole una papeleta rosada, también*) tú te vas, también. Lo del respunte va a México también. Linda, tú te quedas.

Seguiremos poniendo las etiquetas aquí. Y te darán una máquina nueva que podrá poner el doble de etiquetas al día. Sally y Mary, recojan sus cosas y preséntense en la cafetería. Van a recibir todo tipo de consejos, y les explicarán su indemnización por cese de empleo.

SALLY Y MARY. *(todavía sobresaltadas)* ¿Nuestra indemnización?

JEFE LOCAL. Sí. Oh, aquí está. No hay de qué. *(Le da a cada trabajadora una cajita pequeña amarrada con un moño. Sally toma un pañuelo y se retoca los ojos mientras ella y Mary salen. Mary se ve enojada.)*

JEFE LOCAL. *(a Linda)* ¿Qué estás mirando? Deberías estar muy agradecida que aún tienes trabajo. Ponte a trabajar. Tu nueva máquina que más rápida estará aquí la próxima semana. *(Levanta la caja de prendas y va hacia J.G.)*

NARRADORA. Usted habrá pensado que eso era todo. Pero las trabajadoras no lo tomaron acostadas. Al principio no podían creer lo que había pasando. Luego lo creyeron y lloraron. Finalmente lo pelearon. Probaron todo tipo de cosas.

Escribieron al periódico.

Hicieron circular peticiones.

Trataron de convencer a la compañía de que no movieran el trabajo.

Hasta accedieron a sueldos más bajos.

Trataron de juntar dinero para comprar la fábrica ellas mismas.

Se quejaron a su congresista.

Se dieron cuenta del desecho tóxico que la compañía había enterrado detrás de la fábrica y armaron un alboroto sobre eso.

Organizaron manifestaciones.

Entablaron un juicio.

Tuvieron un funeral de burla.

(Las trabajadoras empiezan a caminar en manifestaciones y a cantar "No nos moverán.")

A nosotras no, no nos moverán.

A nosotras no, no nos moverán.

Así como a un árbol que está plantado junto al agua,

A nosotras no nos moverán.

Nuestro sindicato nos apoya, no nos moverán.

Nuestro sindicato nos apoya, no nos moverán.

Así como a un árbol que está plantado junto al agua,

A nosotras no nos moverán.

Ustedes nos usan, luego nos desechan, no nos moverán.
 Ustedes nos usan, luego nos desechan, no nos moverán.
 Así como a un árbol que está plantado junto al agua,
 A nosotras no nos moverán.

Pero al final todo estaba claro, la compañía no iba a cambiar sus planes. Así que las trabajadoras pelearon por la mejor indemnización que pudieran recibir. Era mejor de lo que la compañía deseaba, pero no era suficiente para pagarles los años que habían pasado con la Compañía de Prendas Zinger. No era bastante para ayudarles a encontrar una nueva manera de ganarse la vida.

(Mientras la narradora dice estas últimas palabras, las trabajadoras ponen sus piquetes en el suelo. Sally y Mary se sientan abatidamente. Linda vuelve a la línea a trabajar.)

NARRADORA. Mientras tanto, Prendas Zinger se estaba arrancando en el sur de la frontera. Una fábrica nueva, "Prendas Zinger de México," retoñó casi de la noche a la mañana, con un nuevo gerente americano. Se llamaba Tex.

(Tex entra. Lleva un cartel grande que dice "Solicitamos Personal Femenino." Orgullosamente lo pone en el escenario, y mira a su alrededor con una gran sonrisa expectativa. Dos mujeres entran a la derecha del escenario, hablando la una con la otra.)

ESPERANZA. Acabo de llegar de Veracruz. De veras necesito un trabajo.

MARIA. Sí, yo también necesito uno. Hay diez de nosotros en casa y el niño de mi hermana está enfermo.

ESPERANZA. Oí que éstos son buenos trabajos, los de las maquiladoras. Voy a ahorrar mi dinero, y en unos años volveré a Veracruz y abriré mi propio negocio pequeño. Tal vez un restaurante. Soy una cocinera muy buena.

MARIA. *(parecía simpatizante pero dudosa)* Sí, tal vez sí. Pero después de estar aquí un rato vas a darte cuenta de que es más difícil ahorrar dinero de lo que tú crees.

TEX. Pasen, damas. Bienvenidas a la fábrica Prendas Zinger. Aquí vamos a ser como una gran familia feliz. La Familia Prendas Zinger. Prendas Zinger de México. *(a Esperanza)* Bueno, damita, usted nada más párese aquí. Usted va a cortar la tela. Y usted que está allá *(señalando a María)*, usted venga y párese aquí. Su trabajo va a ser el de hacer el pespunte de las costuras. Ya. Ahora pruébelo.

ESPERANZA. Yo corto la tela.

MARIA. Yo hago el respunte.

TEX. *(con aire condescendiente)* Bien. Están aprendiendo. Todavía son un poco lentas, pero por supuesto van a mejorar.

(Tex toma una camisa hecha a medias y se apura a cruzar el escenario hacia Jefe Local. Se la da a J.L. que se la pasa a Linda, que por supuesto ya sabe qué hacer con ella.)

LINDA. Y yo le coso la etiqueta. Luego la prenda esta hecha.

(Ella deja caer la camisa terminada en la caja de prendas. Este proceso se repite unas veces más. Luego J.L. levanta la caja y se la lleva a J.G., que todavía está en su escritorio. Cuentan los billetes de \$100.)

JEFE GRANDE. Aun con el costo de transportación y hasta con una rebaja en el precio final para los revendedores, *todavía* estamos ganando más dinero que antes. Esto está muy bueno. *(Levanta el teléfono y le llama a Tex.)* Hola, ¿Tex? Este es el Jefe. ¡Estás haciendo un gran trabajo! ¡Sigue adelante! ¡Sigamos con esas camisetas! ¡¡¡Arriba las maquiladoras!!!

TEX. ¡¡Arriba las maquiladoras!!

JEFE LOCAL. *(un poco dudoso)* Arriba las maquiladoras. . . .

NARRADORA. Pero una cosa rara pasó. Aunque Jefe Grande, Tex y J.L. parecían muy felices con el brillante nuevo mundo de las maquiladoras, las trabajadoras mexicanas no parecían tan felices. Por supuesto que les alegraba tener trabajo, lo necesitaban. Y muchas de ellas creían que estaba bien que los Estados Unidos ayudara a México. Después de todo, en el pasado los Estados Unidos había sacado provecho de México y de los trabajadores mexicanos muchas veces. Pero había muchas cosas que no estaban bien en las maquiladoras. . . . A menudo los supervisores y gerentes no las trataban con dignidad y respeto.

TEX. *(a Esperanza)* Oye, mamacita, ¿qué tal sí me encuentras después del trabajo? He oído que ustedes mexicanas están muy buenas.

(Esperanza trata de ignorar a Tex sin ofenderlo. Sigue trabajando, con la vista pegada en su trabajo, de veras avergonzada y enojada, pero no sabe qué hacer.)

TEX. ¡Oye, tú! Te dije, ¿qué tal si me encuentras después del trabajo?

MARIA. Por favor. Deje a Esperanza que haga su trabajo. Ella no es ese tipo de muchacha.

(Tex se aleja de Esperanza, aparentando no sentir el rechazo. Mueve la cabeza, murmurando a sí mismo.)

TEX. Estas mexicanas. Son tan tontas que no saben cómo mejorar.

NARRADORA. Ganarse el respeto en el trabajo no era el único problema de las trabajadoras en Prendas Zinger de México. A veces era peligroso estar en la fábrica.

ESPERANZA. Saben, nosotras necesitamos más ventilación aquí. Esto que usan para tratar la tela huele mal y me marea.

MARIA. Desde que empezaron a usar esta tela resistente, me mata el dolor de la mano.

ESPERANZA. Hay unas palabras en las etiquetas de esos químicos que usan en la casa de tintes. Pero están en inglés. No sé lo que dicen. Alguien me dijo que en los Estados Unidos las trabajadoras no pueden usar estos químicos sin protección especial. Pero el señor Tex dice que es perfectamente seguro y que no nos preocupemos. Yo no sé qué hacer. Si me quejo temo perder mi trabajo. Recuerdan lo que pasó a Lupita cuando protestó...

NARRADORA. Y otra cosa. A menudo, los sueldos que ganaban las trabajadoras no eran suficiente para proveer el tipo de vida que querían para sí mismas y sus familias.

(Tex entra con una canasta en el brazo. De a uno saca centavos de la canasta, y se los reparte a cada trabajadora.)

TEX. *(a Esperanza, inclinándose sin necesidad muy cerca de ella)* Aquí hay uno para ti, tú buenota. *(Cuando ve a María, se le pone la cara larga, pero de mala gana le da un centavo también.)* Y aquí hay uno para ti, aunque siempre estás chillando. Vayan y disfruten del fin de semana ahora. Oh, y aquí tienen un dulce.

(De su canasta de Pascua saca un dulce para cada trabajadora. Las mujeres toman sus centavos y se los echan con cuidado a la bolsa, pero no están impresionadas. María tira su dulce al suelo.)

ESPERANZA. Yo quiero un lugar decente para vivir, donde mi familia pueda estar segura, donde podamos tener agua potable y electricidad. Vinieron de Veracruz hace unos meses. Hemos estado tratando de crear un lugar decente donde vivir, pero nunca queda bastante para comprar las cosas que necesitamos. Sólo tenemos suficiente para comprar unos ladrillos de cenizas cuando podamos. Cuando llueve, todo nuestro barrio se inunda, y queda encharcado durante semanas o más tiempo.

MARIA. Yo sé, yo sé. es igual en mi colonia. Y no es sólo nuestra casa. A veces mis padres apenas pueden alimentar a mis hermanos y hermanas. Quiero ayudar: ¡de vez en cuando tener carne en la mesa, para variar! No es bueno que yo tenga que trabajar tan duro, y que todavía no podamos tener una comida adecuada.

NARRADORA. A menudo las trabajadoras se sentían exhaustas y a punto de caer porque constantemente las presionaban para producir más rápidamente.

(Tex llega al piso del taller y se saca su cronómetro de atrás, examinándolo con un aire de eficiencia.)

TEX. Apúrenle, muchachas. Tenemos que hacer este trabajo.

JEFE GRANDE. ¡Oye! ¡Tex! ¡Necesitamos más camisas allá en Tennessee! ¡Apúrenle allá abajo! Es necesario que ustedes terminen a tiempo. ¡Sabes que no estamos almacenando como antes!

TEX. ¡Oigan! ¡Muchachas! ¡Necesitan más camisas allá en Tennessee! ¡Apúrenle!

(Esperanza y María continúan su trabajo. Ahora tratan de apurarse. Al sacar las camisas aún no terminadas, Tex se las pasa a J.L. y a Linda. Las tres trabajadoras se ven más agotadas. Al fin suena una campana, y prácticamente se caen del cansancio.)

ESPERANZA. No podemos seguir así. Nos moriremos o quedaremos incapacitadas. Nadie puede trabajar a este paso y hacer un producto decente.

MARIA. Tenemos que hacer algo.

NARRADORA. *(Deteniéndose un momento para echarle una mirada perspicaz al público.)* ¿No les suena todo esto? Bueno, pues las trabajadoras de la maquila sí hicieron algo. Ya tenían un sindicato, pero raramente hacía algo para sus socios. No funcionaba de una manera democrática. Así que las trabajadoras decidieron hacer algo para sí mismas. La mayor parte del tiempo el sindicato parecía ser más problema que solución. Empezaron a leer y a estudiar las leyes, para conocer sus derechos. Formaron una organización. La construyeron lentamente. Escucharían a sus compañeras trabajadoras para saber qué necesitaban. Se unirían. Tratarían de estudiar la manera de crear una vida mejor. Organizaron el Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, el CFO. *(La narradora camina hacia Esperanza y María y les prende unos distintivos del CFO. Ellas se dan la mano y sonríen.)*

(Ahora Sally llega hasta donde está parada la narradora. Cortésmente toca una puerta simulada, tan, tan, tan. La narradora se sorprende y mira a Sally.)

NARRADORA. Oh, por un minuto me olvidé de ustedes en los Estados Unidos.

SALLY. ¿Hola? ¿Es ésta la agencia de desempleo? No tengo trabajo. Yo *necesito* trabajo. Yo puedo cortar la tela tan rápidamente como cualquiera al este de Tennessee, y hago muchas otras cosas también.

NARRADORA. *(cambiando a una voz falso y presumida)* No tenemos ningún trabajo para cortadoras de tela. La ropa es una industria muerta, que ¿no sabía? Usted podría ir a la agencia de colocación temporánea.

SALLY. ¡¿La agencia de colocación *temporánea*?! Pero yo quiero un *auténtico* trabajo, un trabajo permanente. Algo con beneficios suplementarios y seguridad de empleo. Necesito seguridad médico y plan de retiro. Las agencias de colocación temporánea son sólo para los vagabundos y para las personas que en realidad no necesitan trabajar.

NARRADORA. *(todavía con la voz de la agencia)* No, querida, las agencias de colocación temporánea ahora son para *todos*. Bueno, para casi todos. . . .

(Sally se va desanimada. Luego Mary se acerca a la narradora y toca impacientemente la puerta simulada, zas, zas, zas.)

MARY. ¡Hola! ¿Es éste el programa de reentrenamiento gubernamental? Oí que ustedes me podían ayudar a entrenarme para conseguir un nuevo trabajo. Estoy lista para probar cualquier cosa siempre que pague un sueldo decente, y que me provea un buen seguro de salud.

NARRADORA. Sí, éste es el programa de reentrenamiento. *(Otra vez con una voz diferente, esta vez muy alegre y burocrática. En realidad, hablan más rápidamente, como una máquina.)* Sí, seguro. Escoja de A, B, C o D. Es muy importante que llene las hojas apropiadas, y su solicitud tiene que estar completa para esta tarde. Indique cual programa desea: transportación, computadoras o cuidado de salud. Ya que escoja, no podemos dejar que cambie. Una cosa debe comprender: el gobierno de ninguna manera le garantiza un trabajo. Esto es un lugar de reentrenamiento, no un servicio de colocación. Le estamos proveyendo una oportunidad de tener éxito si está dispuesta a trabajar duro y aprovechar todos los maravillosos programas disponibles para usted. *(finalmente respirando profundamente y con una gran sonrisa)* ¿Es a la manera americana!

MARY. *(dudosa)* Bueno, claro que yo comprendo que no hay

ninguna garantía, pero a mí me gustaría saber cuáles trabajos cree usted que estén disponibles. Y yo quiero decirle cuáles son mis habilidades e intereses, y poder comprender las opciones. ¿Hay un consejero con quien hablar?

NARRADORA. (*todavía la servicial burócrata*) Oh, mi querida, no. Estamos muy ocupados aquí, y usted sabe que nuestros fondos federales han sido reducidos, y no nos sería posible proveerle asesoramiento individualizado a cada persona que buscara ayuda. No tenemos el personal que pueda sentarse aquí para escuchar sus quejas individuales. (*Viendo que Mary está muy molesta.*) Tendrá que tranquilizarse ahora. Tenga, tome un pañuelo. (*Frustrada, Mary se lo arroja a la mujer, y se aleja. Se topa con Sally.*)

MARY. ¿Cómo estás, Sally?

SALLY. Oh, bien, sólo bien. Es un placer verte, Mary. (*Sally parece estar increíblemente incómoda.*) Bueno, tengo que irme. . . .

MARY. Espera, ¿por qué corres?

SALLY. (*Vacilando un momento, y luego soltándose a llorar.*) Temo que me vayas a preguntar si estoy trabajando, y voy a tener que decirte que *no*, y—sé que esto es una locura, pero me siento muy avergonzada.

MARY. Eso *es* una locura. Es una simple tontería. No es culpa tuya que Prendas Zinger haya decidido moverse. No es culpa tuya que ya parezca casi imposible encontrar un buen trabajo con un sueldo decente. Pero comprendo lo que quieres decir. Yo todavía no estoy trabajando tampoco, y me siento igual. La sociedad financiera fue y se llevó mis muebles la semana pasada, y me siento pequeña. En efecto, alguien me dijo que dos de las personas despedidas de Zinger trataron de cometer suicidio el mes pasado. ¡Suicidio!

SALLY. Sí. Yo *of* lo mismo. Y *of* que Angie Hooper ha estado viviendo en una *tienda de campaña* por dos semanas. ¿Habías *oído* tal cosa?

MARY. Parece que todo se está viniendo abajo. Oye, ¿fuiste allá a esa junta de reentrenamiento?

SALLY. Sí, pero era una estupidez. De veras están desorganizados, y lo peor es que ni tienen trabajos para las personas cuando salgan. Oh, en todo caso, no tienen ningún trabajo que pague nada.

MARY. Yo lo sé. Hay personas que han terminado todo el entrenamiento, y ¡ahora están trabajando en una lavandería o en un hospital para ancianos por la mitad de lo que ganaban antes!

SALLY. ¿Fuiste a la oficina de desempleo?

MARY. Sí, pero sólo me mandaron a una agencia temporánea. Y tú sabes como son *éas*.

SALLY. ¡La mismita cosa me pasó a mí! Sabes, en verdad temo por

nuestros hijos. ¿Cómo va a ser la vida para ellos? Parece que ya los únicos trabajos que uno puede conseguir ahora son los de voltear hamburguesas o de vaciar basines o de tender camas en un motel.

SALLY Y MARY. ¡Tenemos que *hacer* algo!

NARRADORA. Y al fin hicieron algo. Terminaron uniéndose a Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network: TIRN - el Sistema de Renovación Industrial de Tennessee. (*Ella va hacia ellas y les pone unos distintivos de TIRN en las camisas. Parecen satisfechas, y ven que la narradora también le está poniendo un distintivo en la camisa a Linda.*)

MARY. ¡Linda! ¿Qué estás haciendo aquí? ¿Te despidieron a ti también?

LINDA. No. Por lo menos todavía no. Pero creo que todas tenemos que hacer algo, o ninguna de nosotras va a tener un trabajo decente. TIRN está tratando de decidir lo que hay que hacer en cuanto a todos los trabajos de fábricas que están desapareciendo.

NARRADORA. TIRN tenía socios que estaban empleados y desempleados. Tenía gente de iglesias y organizaciones de la comunidad. Trabajaba para impedir el cierre de plantas, para pedir mejores programmas de reentrenamiento, para mantener trabajos industriales en los Estados Unidos.

MARY. Oigan, en la última reunión de TIRN había dos mujeres de México. Ellas en efecto trabajaban en unas de esas plantas que se han trasladado a México. ¿Cómo les llaman? Me olvide de palabra.

SALLY. ¿Las maquiladoras?

MARY. Sí. Eso es. Me es difícil decirla. (*despacio y con cuidado*) Ma-qui-la-do-ra. De cualquier manera, eran *buenas*. Lo digo en serio. No sé qué esperaba yo, pero sólo son personas como tú y yo. Y las compañías las están tratando muy mal.

LINDA. ¿Qué quieres decir?

MARY. Pues no les pagan prácticamente nada. Y dicen que las condiciones de higiene y seguridad son terribles para las trabajadoras en las plantas y para la gente que vive cerca. Y parece que las presionan para que trabajen aun más rápidamente de lo que nos presionaban a nosotras.

SALLY. Sabes, eso me hace sentirme rara. Yo nunca lo pensé de esa manera antes. Sólo me parecía que esa gente únicamente nos estaba robando los trabajos. Nunca pensé cómo les iba a ellas.

MARY. Yo sé. Yo nunca vi más allá de mi.

LINDA. Yo también. Yo sólo pensé que debíamos conformarnos con lo que teníamos.

SALLY. ¿Cómo les irá a ellas en México?

LINDA. Sí, yo también me pregunto eso. De hecho, empiezo a pensar que nos va a pesar si no empezamos a tener mucha curiosidad.

MARY. Bueno, ¿Se preguntan ustedes cómo será en México tanto

como para ir allá y ver por sí mismas?

SALLY. Sonsácate, mujer. ¿Qué quieres decir con ir allá y ver por mí misma? Yo sólo soy una trabajadora desempleada de fábrica.

MARY. Pues, TIRN está patrocinando un viaje a las maquiladoras este verano. Quieren que vayan mujeres trabajadoras. Van a llevar dos camionetas llenas de gente.

LINDA. ¿Hasta México?

MARY. Hasta México.

SALLY. ¿Donde hablan *español*?

MARY. Donde hablan español.

LINDA. ¿Tú quieres decir que un grupo de mujeres manejando hasta allá, más de mil millas de casa, sin hablar español, que no son expertas, que tienen que dejar a sus amistades y esposos e hijos y nietos atrás?

MARY. Eso es exactamente lo que quiero decir.

LINDA Y SALLY. (*haciendo una mueca*) Hagámoslo.

MARY. Sí, *de acuerdo!*

NARRADORA. ¿Y saben qué? Lo *hicieron*. Hicieron el viaje. Un día en una reunión, una de ellas dijo que ella lo veía de esta manera. Ella dijo, que después de todo, las compañías están aprendiendo todo lo de la nueva economía mundial. Se están uniendo a los dueños y gerentes mexicanos para decidir lo que es bueno para los Estados Unidos y México, o por lo menos para el negocio estadounidense y mexicano.

Y los gobiernos están aprendiendo todo lo de la nueva economía mundial. El Presidente Bush y el Presidente Salinas se están reuniendo para decidir lo que *ellos* creen que será bueno para los Estados Unidos y México, o por lo menos para la gente que los maneja.

¿Que no es hora de que *nosotras* empecemos a aprender lo de la economía mundial también? ¿No es hora de que nosotras nos juntemos con otras trabajadoras para hablar sobre lo que creemos que puede ser bueno para los Estados Unidos y México desde *nuestro* punto de vista?

(*Sally, Mary, Y Linda primero caminan por la escena hacia María y Esperanza. Se dan la mano, se abrazan, etc. Luego los personajes empiezan a caminar hacia el público, y les toman las manos a los participantes. Formando un círculo cantan:*)

Solidaridad para siempre,
Solidaridad para siempre,
Solidaridad para siempre,
Atravesando las fronteras.

Solidaridad pa' siempre,
Solidaridad pa' siempre,
Solidaridad pa' siempre,
Atravesando las fronteras.

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Organizations Critical of the North American Free Trade Agreement

Action Canada Network, 251 Laurier Ave. West, Suite 904, Ottawa, Ontario K1P5J6, Canada

AFL-CIO, 815 16th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006; American Labor Education Center, 2000 P St. N.W., Suite 300, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 828-5170

American Association of Exporters and Importers, 11 W. 42nd St., New York, NY 10036, (212) 944-2230

Common Frontiers Project, P.O. Box 2207, Station P, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2T2, Canada

Consumer for World Trade, 1726 M Street N.W., Suite 1101, Washington D.C. 20036, (202) 785-4835

Council of the Americas, 680 Park Ave, New York, NY 10021, (212) 628-3200

Development Group for Alternative Policies, 1400 I Street N.W., Suite 520, Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 898-1566

Economic Policy Institute, 1730 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 775-8810

Fair Trade Campaign, P.O. Box 80068, Minneapolis, MN 55408, (612) 379-5965

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, 1313 5th St. S.E., Suite 303, Minneapolis, MN 55414-1546, (612) 339-0586

Labor Notes, 7435 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210, (313) 842-6262

Mobilization on Development, Trade, Labor and the Environment, Box 74, 100 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, (202) 544-7198

Mujer a Mujer, APDO 24-553, Col Roma, 06701 Mexico, D.F., Mexico

Public Citizen's Congress Watch, 215 Pennsylvania Ave. S.E., Washington D.C., (202) 546-4996

Retail Industry Trade Action Coalition, 1616 H St. N.W., Washington D.C. 20006, (202) 783-0922

Texas Center for Policy Studies, P.O. Box 2618, Austin, TX 78768 (512) 474-0811

Organizations Supportive of the Bush Approach to the North American Free Trade Agreement

Consortium for Inter-American Trade and Development,
Washington, D.C.

Council of the Americas, Washington, D.C.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 1615 H St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20062
(202) 659-6000.