

Mexican auto worker: 'I would like to help the GM workers win'

Carlos Rivera
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Over half the 72,000 workers employed by Delphi auto parts in Mexico have been laid off as a result of the seven-week-old strike against General Motors. In Ciudad Juarez, Rio Bravo Eléctricos II, III and IV and the Sistemas Eléctricos y Componentes plants, all associated with Delphi-Packard, have closed, affecting 3,980 workers. Elsewhere in the states of Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Coahuila and Zacatecas 36,386 workers have been laid off.

Delphi has placed laid-off workers on reduced pay furloughs. A spokeswoman for the firm, Xochil D'az, assured workers that as soon as the strike is settled in the United States the plants will be operating on overtime, to catch up with the lost days of work.

In the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez metropolitan area, Delphi has been expanding. It will soon open a very large technical and design center, on the Mexican side for the engineering of its auto parts. On the US side, three large new warehouses serve as transfer points for auto parts to General Motors plants.

Delphi manufactures parts for Isuzu and Ford as well, but most of its production is used in GM vehicles.

In Ciudad Juarez there are 360 *maquiladora* plants (plants that produce mostly for the export market), which employ 189,000 workers. Eight thousand commute from El Paso every day. Another 181,000 live in Ciudad Juarez itself, 20,000 of whom work at the Delphi plants.

Working conditions vary little from plant to plant. 'Whenever one plant tries to introduce more benefits or increase wages, it is matched by the rest,' said Isabel, a management employee at the financial office of Sistemas Eléctricos y Componentes. Furthermore, a tight labor market in Ciudad Juarez has created a paternalistic combination of bonuses as well as housing, educational and food subsidies that discourage

workers from changing jobs.

Two workers gave interviews to the WSWWS, describing their working conditions and their feelings about the General Motors strike. Both workers asked that their real names not be used.

For purposes of comparison, it should be noted that as of July 18 the exchange rate was 8.70 pesos to the US dollar. Inflation in Mexico is 12 percent. At the current exchange rate prices for foodstuffs are generally cheaper in Mexico, as are housing and consumer durables. Clothing, shoes, fuel and electronic goods cost more than in El Paso.

'Hector Lopez' works at Rio Bravo Eléctricos:

'I get paid 168 pesos per day. I work in the Quality Department. I also study humanities at a junior college. I am 30 years old and began at Delphi 11 years ago as a production worker. I am married and have two young daughters. My plant employs some 2,000 workers. Most of them are young, under 30. About half the workers are women.

'My plant manufactures electric harnesses for automobiles. There are 2,000 workers there. In addition, there are about 12 or 15 more Delphi plants in Juarez. Each employs 1,000 or 2,000 workers.

'In addition to the 168 pesos, Delphi has a system of bonuses, tied to attendance and punctuality. This increases our pay a little more. They also give us medical and educational benefits. Together with the government, Delphi makes it easy to buy a house. I am buying a three-bedroom house for my family for 180,000 pesos. The mortgage is discounted from my check, 274 pesos a week.

'To live, both the husband and wife must work. One of my daughters is only 11 months old. My wife is staying home but she plans to work as soon as she can.

'The production here is connected to warehouses in El

Paso. I am sometimes sent there to work. From El Paso our products are distributed.

'Production workers earn very little. They are split into three categories: A, B, and C. A workers are entry-level and are paid 30 pesos daily. C workers are the highest paid; they earn 80 pesos per day. It is very difficult to live on that.

'The GM strike is affecting us. Many were laid off last Thursday and Friday. Those that are laid off are paid a portion of their wages, with full benefits, so that they will not go to another *maquiladora*. Delphi told us that the issue in the strike is that General Motors and Delphi not transfer any more jobs to Mexico. I think that US workers have to keep on fighting. If they don't struggle they will lose all their jobs.

'Recently, there were elections in this state, Chihuahua. The PRI [Revolutionary Institutional Party] replaced the PAN [National Action Party]. In Juarez City, the PAN is still in power. During the campaign all the parties make promises to the working class. They forget about them when they do take over.'

'Pedro Garcia' also spoke to reporters for the *WSWS*:

'I am a production worker. In my plant we manufacture solenoids used in automatic transmissions and also to control the flow of fuel in engines. I am 23 years old. I have been working in this plant for a year.

'My wage is 41 pesos a day, plus bonuses. The bonuses are substantial. There are weeks in which I take home 400 pesos. That is enough for me because I am single and live with my grandparents. I don't pay rent. The truth is that it is impossible to raise a family on what Delphi pays. The cheapest rent for one person is 300 or 400 pesos a month. I would like to become lead man, eventually get married and buy a used car. I can't afford that right now.

'Delphi gave us a handout that said that Delphi and General Motors workers in the US earn 22 dollars an hour. The leaflet did not explain why they are on strike.

'They are laying us off at half pay, with full benefits. This is going to affect all those that want to stick with Delphi.

'I support the US workers, and don't wish them ill. We all have to work and eat. I am Mexican. I know that many Mexican workers work in the US. If I were one of those workers I would also join in with them in the strike. It is not fair that jobs are being destroyed. It is not good that they are moving the entire operation to

Mexico. It is not fair, because we are all human beings who have to eat. I really would like to help the GM workers win, but I do not know how.'

Twenty-eight years ago there were no *maquiladoras* in Ciudad Juarez. Today, the confidence and class solidarity of a new generation of young workers is expressed in the remarks of these Delphi employees, who are beginning to see in the struggle of the GM strikers a fight to defend the right to a job for all workers, the world over. This contrasts with the nationalism of the UAW leadership that for years has divided auto workers in the United States from their Canadian and Mexican brothers and sisters.

Wall Street demands GM victory in strike
[25 July 1998]

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[23 July 1998]



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