



Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s CFO

**For the labor rights and all human
rights of the maquiladora workers**



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Spanish Version

Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s, for www.cfomaquiladoras.org

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Macoelmex: 22 Firings and 74 Written Warnings for Resisting Severe Benefit Cutbacks

This past Friday, February 18, 2005, 22 workers were fired from the maquiladora Manufacturera de Componentes Eléctricos de México (Macoelmex), owned by Alcoa, in the city of Piedras Negras, Coahuila.

Another 74 workers that Alcoa particularly wanted to identify were made to sign individual, written reprimands. According to management, these 74 workers refused to return to work, though they did not "instigate" the protest. The written reprimands say that these workers violated Article 13, Fraction r) of the Internal Work Rules that prohibits "hindering the production".

Several workers did not sign these papers because they did not agree with the accusation. On the contrary, they responded saying that, in any case, management should have given the written reprimands to all workers in general.

17 of the 22 fired workers did not sign their resignations and are preparing to file legal demands with the Conciliation and Arbitration Board. It seems that many of them do not want to return to Alcoa and instead will only ask for financial compensation.

On February 9, 2005, approximately 1,500 workers from these three plants held a protest that, on some lines, lasted up to seven hours as a show of rejection for the benefit cutbacks that the company and the CTM union are trying to impose on the workers. The protest held up the company's operations. Following the protest, workers held a collective work slowdown for at least two days that lowered the production by perhaps 50%. Worker surveillance increased dramatically with cameras and harassment of the rank-and-file.

The negotiation of the benefit cutbacks was conducted behind the workers' backs by Leocadio Hernández, the same Secretary-General of the CTM in Piedras Negras who has always attacked workers' independent unionism and collaborated with the company to destroy the collective bargaining agreement.

What was offered the workers was basically a small wage increase of 4% on the condition that several bonuses and benefits were drastically reduced. The details of this proposal can be found at <http://www.cfomaquiladoras.org/parodeundia.en.html>.

The fired workers are from Plants #1, #2 and the Subaru Plant. Several of them showed up to the factory on Monday morning, February 21, since 17 of them had not signed their resignations. The majority were not allowed to enter, except Juan Manuel Sepúlveda. He entered the plant just as usual, but within minutes was removed by security guards and, at the gate, handed over to the local police who transferred him to the public security. He remained in custody for more than six hours. It was mentioned that Alcoa wanted him arrested for forced entry. Finally he was let free because Alcoa did not presented a formal charge.

It is illogical to fire a few workers when it was evident that more than 1,000 people participated in the February 9 protest, that which became a sort of labor tsunami. This same day the union delegates began to walk line to line in Plant #1 letting workers know about the negotiated "agreement". As soon as the delegates left one line the workers began to stop working. The word spread from Plant #1 to the Subaru Plant and later to Plant #2.

The company wants to silence the workers' movement and continue pushing its proposals to weaken the collective bargaining agreement. Instead of recognizing its error at having provoked the workers' reaction with an insulting proposal, Alcoa took advantage of the 9 th's events to get rid of all the workers that were a nuisance.

Macoelmex workers, both within and outside the factories, refuse to recognize Leocadio Hernández or his few supporters, and are showing lots of solidarity among themselves. The majority are very united and are not letting themselves be intimidated by the company. Furthermore, Alcoa has pushed Leocadio Hernández to one side because of his inability to control the rank-and-file and reach agreements with them. Nevertheless, as he still has ownership rights to the collective bargaining agreement, he is still the formal link between management and the rank-and-file.

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