

LRR FOCUS: "We Need to Get Together More"

Luvernel Clark is shop steward of ACTWU Local 1742 in Knoxville, Tennessee and chairperson of the Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network's Maquiladora Committee which participated in a worker exchange to Mexico in the summer of 1991. She works at Allied Signal, in a plant that had 3000 employees in 1971, but today has less than 400. The jobs were sent by Allied first to a non-union "greenfield" location in Greenville, Alabama in 1982, and from there to Agua Prieta, Mexico. Fran Ansley, associate professor at the University of Tennessee College of Law and member of the TIRN delegation, interviewed Clark for *Labor Research Review*:



When we met with the women from the CFO, I felt like they were strong people, to have to deal with what they have to deal with, and to get out and try to organize the people out there.

They were really what a union ought to be—they were like grouped together. And they were pulling their strength from each other. A lot of times, I know we have our ups and downs where we all disagree, and I guess they do too, but it seemed to me that they were all working with one accord. Trying hard as they can to build these unions up in their shops. Really taking time and patience to listen to their workers, to the ones they were trying to help get organized.

They were taking this a slow step at a time, which I understood why. And I thought that was good, if that's the way it has to be worked. And I think they were doing a good job at it.

And listening to the workers, I don't know, it just felt like listening to us.

One girl was standing up for the people that didn't know their rights, was trying to teach them what their rights were, and trying to tell them what the company was going to do to them. . . . That whole meeting was just such a moving meeting, because they said it with so much feeling. I mean, you could tell it was coming from their hearts.

They are grateful to have jobs. But they want to be treated like human beings. Like human beings, they want to make a decent wage where they can have a decent living. I think they are proud to have jobs. And I think they kind of fear, too, that we have the attitude that they're taking our jobs away. And I guess most Americans do! I'd say the majority of them, to be honest. The Mexican workers have that fear. But all in all, I think they'd like

to unite and be a coalition, and do something about the standards.

I think Teresa and Olga really enjoyed coming here and seeing what the factories and stuff were all about. And that gave them a bright idea on things that they could go back and tell the people in Mexico.

I really think that they were, they could be, if they could get a lot more people involved, one of the strongest unions there is. Really. If they could get everyone taught. But you know, I never think that'll be possible. I really don't. Because of the way the government is, and these American companies. And then they hire these people like their supervisors and stuff to keep a threat over these people who need jobs so bad. And these people are so frightened of them, that things may never change. But I think it's our duty to try to help make that change.

The main thing, I think, that I got out of this whole trip, is seeing what I fight for right here in the U.S. day after day after day, trying to make things better for my kids and my grandkids, or *somebody's* children that have to work in these factories. And then go down there and think that the U.S. thinks that those people are not human. That's what gets me. It's the gall, that the stuff we fight to get out of our plants, they put somewhere else! With no standards whatsoever. I fought a long time and testified at that Right-to-Know hearing. And then to see that they're taking this stuff across the border to these people that they think are not human the same as we are. And let them work in it. That's what galls me.



ERNESTO MORA



The sight of where we went in Colonia Roma (a workers' neighborhood) will always stick in my head, if nothing else ever does. I see shacks, sitting in muddy water. No sewers. Trash. One person on our trip said that they should put up a sign in Colonia Roma which says "American Made."

We need to try to get the Free Trade Agreement right, where it would help both sides. Because there is going to be some trade. We can just forget it to say that there will not be. Cause there will. But make sure that they have the same rights on both sides, their wages are with our wages.

I mean, don't give the companies access to move here, yonder, and everywhere, because they hang the same threat over those Mexican worker's heads as they do our heads. "We're moving to Mexico." Well, they'll tell them they're moving somewhere else if they bring the union in, so it's just the same. There's no difference. There's not.

We need a chance for people from the U.S. and Mexico to get together more. (Laughing) Well, not Bush and Salinas. But rank and file union members, I think they should have more, closer relationships. And that way our voice will be stronger on both sides.

Another trip in the future where people who work for the same company, now that would be great. Because the worker exchange I think is going to be very important, that we keep this up. Because I believe if we let our guard down, then they'll just run away with it. They're going to anyway, if they can, but this way they know that we're right on top of them.