



## Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s CFO

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



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### What workers do to make ends meet

Many maquiladora managers and the executives of their parent companies like to say that the standard of living of their employees has improved in recent years, because they see more automobiles in the parking lots of the factories. These managers imagine that their employees are earning enough to feed their families and buy a car on top of that.

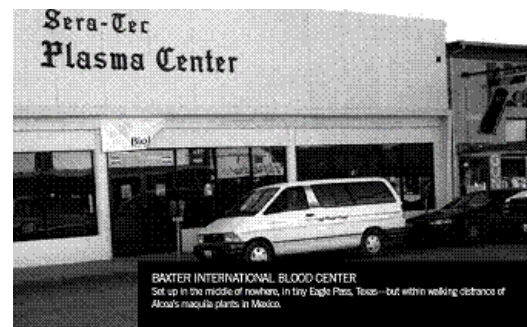
In reality, most maquiladora workers think of their jobs as a baseline - something they need to earn a small amount of money and to qualify for Social Security, a necessity for everyone. (Under the Mexican system, Social Security covers not only retirement and disability, but also health care.)

Maquiladora workers need to find other sources of income in order to be able to buy a car. This is a reality that the companies, and the government, prefer not to know about.

What are some of the strategies maquiladora workers use to come by a little cash?

- Thousands of maquiladora workers, men and women, sell their blood in U.S. border towns. Many of them cross the border as often as twice a week to be able to bring back \$15 for each trip.
- In many families, both husband and wife need to work to cover the minimum basic costs for a family of four. Usually they work different shifts so that they can take turns caring for their children.
- Thousands of workers spend their free hours selling whatever they can - Avon products, or trinkets and knickknacks that they buy on the U.S. side in order to sell them for a little more on the Mexican side.
- Thousands of workers double up with families of relatives from other towns, who pile into in their tiny homes so that the costs of maintaining a household can be shared among more people.
- Many young people are unable to finish high school - or even primary school - because they need to work from a very young age to help their parents maintain their households.
- Many families simply tighten their belts more and more so that they can spend less, and simply stop eating foods that are necessary for their health.
- Many families complement their wages with small contributions sent as remittances from relatives working as farm laborers or in service jobs, across the border in the United States .
- Many families buy their clothing and housewares second-hand, because they can't afford to buy these items new.
- Many families take on a mountain of debt that they will never be able to climb out from under, or pawn whatever they own, in order to be able to buy something they need.
- Many women are forced to turn to various types of prostitution - either open or hidden - in order to be able to feed their children.

*And the oh-so-comfortable maquiladora managers still believe that it is their salaries that allow their employees to buy a used pickup! Many of these vehicles are throwaways from the United States !*



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