



## Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s CFO

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



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## Solidarity Beyond Borders

### AFSC TAO Newsletter

March, 2004

*By Tane Ward*

The contrast in the standard of living between the United States and Mexico is accentuated in the extreme poverty lining the border. Here, people live between two worlds: one of comfort and economic security, the other rooted in a constant struggle to improve their condition. On both sides of the border there are people who live in third-world conditions, in colonias (shanties), with no electricity or clean water. To learn this leaves many Americans asking, "What can we do about it?" Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera ( ATCF) or Austin So Close to the Border addresses this question with cross-border delegations. Four times a year, ATCF sends a group of 12 people to learn from and build solidarity with the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO), a group of dedicated women workers organizing to improve working conditions in the maquiladoras.

This year's first delegation was to the town of Nuevo Laredo in Tamaulipas MX. Here, 60 percent of the workforce earns poverty wages in process assembly plants known as maquiladoras, many of which are owned by US companies. In what has been called the trenches of the war on corporate globalization, the CFO provides the kind of vision and leadership necessary to instill social change here. Working on the most basic level of grassroots organizing, with few supplies, no offices in various cities, and little money, the CFO is teaching people their rights and showing them how to use them. They speak to people in the workplace, in the streets and in workers' own homes, educating them and letting them know that change is possible. The CFO calls for higher wages and safer working conditions, and also works to ensure a more equal workplace for women.

Where there is hope, however, there is also call for concern. An organized and educated workforce is a threat to company profits; so many factories are being moved out of the Americas to Asia, where working conditions are worse and wages are lower. This causes negative effects for the US worker. Fewer jobs in Mexico increase cross-border inequalities and also drive immigration from Mexico. As Americans, we need to understand how we are all affected by the growing dominance of multinational corporations in global trade. While we resist "free trade" agreements that are the cause of the growing inequalities here in America and also around the world, it is equally important that we support groups like the CFO who are taking direct action on the other side of the border.

As ATCF states in its name, we are close to the border. Close doesn't mean only a five-hour drive; it means that across all borders we are bound by a single economic system. ATCF is working to change this economic bond to give equal footing to both sides. To do this they are building a larger bond, one based on people. As borders become obsolete for multinational corporations, it is more important than ever that they do likewise for those working for social justice. We will achieve global equality by building solidarity across all borders and a lasting relationship among people.

Tane is a student and an AFSC-TAO volunteer in the local School of the Americas Watch. He has recently contributed articles and poems to this newsletter. You can reach him at [tane@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:tane@mail.utexas.edu).

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www.cfomaquiladoras.org is produced in cooperation with the  
**Mexico-U.S Border Program**  
of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)



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