



**Sobre pasando la línea**

# Study and Discussion Guide

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“Crossing the Line”.

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## VIEWING AND STUDYING OPTIONS

The DVD offers many options for viewing and study. These are divided into topic options and language options.

### *Topic options*

These options make it possible to tailor viewing of the documentary to available time slots and relevant topics. These options include:

- Viewing the entire 80 minute documentary
- Viewing any of the seven sections or chapters
- Viewing any of 6 alternate “stories” made up of related or contrasting sections
- Viewing “extra” sections not included in the 80 minute documentary

If you have a long enough period of time, **viewing the entire documentary** is ideal. This way you get a complex argument that involves an introduction to NAFTA, the NAO and Mexican labor practices

followed by sections on health risks to workers, on attempts to use NAO procedures to help workers in the U.S., on a case study of a labor struggle with participation from Mexico, Canada and the U.S. and on the perceived failure of the NAO process and what may lie in the future.



**Viewing one or more chapters** can provide a great stimulus for discussion in a class or discussion group. Detailed descriptions and lengths of each chapter and suggestions for their use

are given below in the Synopsis and the Chapter and Story Sections.

You can also **view alternate “stories”** which consist of two or more chapters automatically shown in a new sequence in order to highlight particular issues. These six “stories” make it possible to follow a more complex interweaving of narratives and topics, but still leave time for discussion. Lengths and descriptions of these stories are given in the Chapters and Stories section below.

Finally, there is an **“extra” section** that you may view which looks at worker aid organizations in Piedras Negras and in Juarez. This section shows that the situation for workers in the middle of the border is perhaps even more difficult than on the two coasts.



## Language Options

These options include:

- Viewing with no subtitles
- Viewing with Spanish subtitled in English
- Viewing with English subtitled in Spanish
- Viewing with both English and Spanish subtitles (“Esperanto” when using remote)

The first option (no subtitles) is useful for advanced language classes in Spanish or in English as Second Language. It is particularly useful for advanced language students wishing to master the vocabulary of labor and trade issues.

Viewing with the Spanish subtitled in English is appropriate for audiences and classes of English speakers, be they labor groups, or classes in Latin American Studies or in Economics or Political Science. In this mode, the documentary has been found to be of great interest to students of international law. It will also be useful for beginning and intermediate students of Spanish, particularly those with interests in labor or trade issues.

Viewing with the English sections subtitled in Spanish will have exactly the same benefits for Spanish speakers.

Viewing with both English subtitled in Spanish and Spanish subtitled in English is appropriate for mixed audiences where there are some Spanish speaking and some English speaking members.

### ***Note on Subtitle Selection***

*The subtitle selection window will not function on all players and it will be necessary to use the subtitle selection button on your remote.*

*In this case, be aware that the option for dual language subtitles will come up as “esperanto” or “EO” because there is no dvd code for dual language selection.*



## **SYNOPSIS OF THE DOCUMENTARY**

(see Guide to Organizations and Acronyms for explanations of abbreviations)

### **I. Opening**

- montage of images of workers, their homes and workplaces on both sides of the border

**NAFTA National Administrative Office (NAO) Hearings** in Washington, D.C. into **allegations that Mexico failed to enforce labor laws** in regard to

**Echlin ITAPSA** plant in State of Mexico when the FAT (independent Mexican union) tried to organize there.

- Dan LaBotz, Mexican Labor Historian, on corrupt “official unions”
- Testimony of ITAPSA workers
- Interviews with reps. of FAT (Mexican independent union) and UE (U.S. independent union) on their strategic alliance

**May Day labor demonstrations in Mexico City** to show “official unions” and emergence of new more independent confederation, the UNT. Fired ITAPSA workers in demonstration provide transition to:

**Tijuana, Baja California** and San Diego to explore the **parallel struggle at Han Young**, a Hyundai subsidiary, and to show a **different type of alliance**, that between an emerging independent Mexican labor group and a solidarity NGO (SCMW) in the U.S.A.

- finding of NAO in both Echlin and Han Young cases that there is merit in the complaints

**II.** Geographic transition to the other coast of the Mexican border where we examine the **role of Mexican NGOs and the issue of worker exposure to toxins**. We interview workers, mostly from Auto Trim (Breed) where workers, aided by a local Mexican NGO, the PJO, and by the CJM, claim that unprotected exposure to chemical solvents has caused their children to be born with birth defects.

- followed by expert opinion of Mexican researcher



- followed by tour of a new workers colonia, created by a “land invasion”, where residents are exposed to many health risks

**III . Conceptual transition to a **complaint before the Mexican NGO about U.S. failure to protect workers****, in this case apple industry workers in the Yakima Valley of Washington State. To show that complaints go in both directions.

- interview with one of Mexican organizations that filed complaint on behalf of workers in U.S.
- interviews and demonstrations in Washington State with workers and UFW representatives on conditions of workers
- testimony by company and worker reps at a forum held in Yakima after Mexican NGO found that there was merit in the complaint
- Interviews with workers from Canada and Brazil there to show solidarity

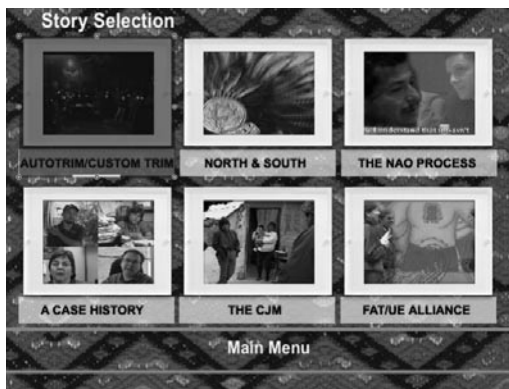
**IV. Transition to Custom Trim (Breed) in Valle Hermosa, Tamaulipas, to show a **complete case study of a struggle from multinational points of view**** of workers in Valle Hermosa, workers in the original Canadian location of the company, a supporting religious labor organization in New York State and a tri-national support NGO (The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras) based in San Antonio. Shot in Valle Hermosa, Toronto, Albany and San Antonio.

V. NAO hearing and aftermath in San Antonio which **brings together the worker groups of Auto Trim (Breed) Matamoros and Custom Trim (Breed) Valle Hermosa** in a complaint coordinated by the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM). This is a **landmark case based solely on issues of health and safety enforcement**, the only NAFTA Labor Side Agreement which theoretically can result in a substantial monetary penalty to the offending government

- role of the CJM
- worker claims of harassment in time leading up to hearings
- testimony at hearings
- finding of merit in the complaints
- workers frustration that the consultations of the labor departments of the two countries results only in further bureaucratic delays or diversions.

VI. **Looking ahead to Extension of NAFTA-like agreements** in Plan Puebla Panama and the Free trade Area of the Americas.

VII. **Conclusions** that workers find no real protection under the Labor Side Agreement of NAFTA and that workers' rights and incomes will continue to erode under any future free trade agreements that lack independent juridical bodies with the will to enforce real penalties against countries which fail to protect the rights and health of workers.



## Using Chapters and Stories

For a description of each **chapter**, see the synopsis of the documentary above. The **chapter lengths**, using the shorthand names, are:

I. Echlin/Han Young	21 mins. 30 secs.
II. Matamoros	14 mins. 30 secs.
III. Washinton Apples	12 mins.
IV. Custom Trim	14 mins. 30 secs.
V. NAO Autotrim Custom Trim	10 mins. 30 secs.
VI. The Future	3 mins.
VII. Conclusion	1 min. 30 secs.

## Alternate stories

can be selected from the DVD menu "Story Selection". The linked chapters will play automatically when a story is selected. The alternate stories and their lengths and chapter sources are:



## **Auto Trim/Custom Trim**

**36 mins.**

**Chapters 2, 4 & 5**

This story combines the closely related chapters on Autotrim and Custom Trim. The two companies do the same sort of work, are currently owned by the same corporation and are in nearby communities.

First we look at the reproductive damage to workers at Autotrim and their argument that the cause is toxins they handle without adequate protections. Then we look at the case history of Custom Trim from a multi-national perspective as the workers there strike over similar issues. Finally we witness some of the NAO hearings into the workers' allegations and hear about the results and the workers' continuing frustration.



## **North & South**

**27 mins.**

**Chapters 1 and 3**

This story allows us to compare complaints filed in the U.S. against Mexico and complaints filed in Mexico against the U.S. We follow the U.S. NAO's hearings on a complaint against Echlin's Mexico plant. Then we go to a forum on the treatment of Washington State apple workers. The

forum is a follow up agreed on by the U.S. and Mexican Secretaries of State after the Mexican NAO concluded there was merit in a complaint filed there.



### **The NAO Process**

**32 mins.**

**Chapters 1 and 5**

A story which may be of special interest to those in the legal field, this puts the focus on the NAO process itself. It looks at the hearings in the Echlin case and the Autotrim/Custom Trim cases and the results in those two cases and the Han Young case.



### **A Case History**

**25 mins.**

**Chapters 4 and 5**

We follow the struggle of the Mexican Custom trim workers through their linkage with Canadian Custom Trim Workers and with the CJM and other organizations. Finally we see their vindication in the NAO process, but their frustration with the ability of this victory to produce tangible results.



**The CJM**  
**36 mins.**  
**Chapters 4, 2 and 5**

This uses the same materials as the Autotrim/ Custom Trim story, but rearranged to give more prominence to the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras and its role in the two related struggles. The CJM advised the workers, gathered and provided all kinds of international support and was central in filing the NAO complaint and preparing the workers to testify.



**The FAT/UE Alliance**  
**18 mins.**  
**Parts of Chapt. 1**  
**and Bonus Chapter**

Tells the story of a very tenacious and exemplary alliance between a Mexican labor federation and a U.S. union. This is shown in the context of two of their collaborative efforts: the Echlin NAO complaint and the CETLAC workers center in Ciudad Juarez.

*For resources and suggested discussion topics relating to these stories see the suggestions below for their component chapters.*

**NOTE: Where chapters are rearranged there may be brief visual and narrative disjunctions at the joints.**



## **BACKGROUND TO THE DOCUMENTARY**

(or the things that there isn't time to say, in a documentary and which are more appropriate for print anyway)

The **maquiladoras** came into existence long before NAFTA in the mid sixties after the U.S. closed down the Bracero program which gave legal temporary admission to Mexican farm workers. Companies in the U.S. were looking to lower labor costs and avoid strong unions. Mexico was looking for other sources of employment for Bracero types of workers and thus evolved the idea of a sort of free trade zone along the border (later extended into the Mexican interior) where U.S. and other manufacturers for the U.S. market could import parts without duties, use cheap Mexican labor to assemble, and then export the product back to the U.S., paying taxation only on value added figured at deflated rates.. This was supposed to encourage “twin plants” on the two sides of the border, but the U.S. plants never materialized. The maquiladora sector grew slowly until the eve of NAFTA when it began to take off in view of a permanent trade agreement

which would further encourage foreign companies to buy their labor in Mexico. From the early 90s growth was strong until 2000 when maquiladora employment peaked at near a million and a half. The U.S. economic slump post 9/11 contributed strongly to the erosion of 300,000 or more of these jobs (“When the U.S. sneezes, Mexico catches pneumonia.”), but other factors probably included the movement of jobs to China or further south, looking for still cheaper or more party disciplined labor. There has been a partial recovery of employment in the maquiladoras. No other source of cheap labor is located so close to the U.S. market.

The **PRI** (see acronym section) remained in power for 70 plus years by co-opting opposition and using force and rigged elections when that wasn't enough. This is the short view though. At its inception, the party had the task of holding together a country where the class conflicts that created the convulsion of the revolution remained unresolved and where the forces that had most represented the underclass had been defeated (Zapata and Villa) as more elite class forces gained control of the final outcome. For a long time the PRI secured the loyalty of Mexicans through a national mythology of the Revolution and the Aztec past that it disseminated through support of the mural movement, film and other forms of culture. There were times when it almost lived up to the revolutionary rhetoric, especially during the *sexano* (six year term) of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) when the foreign owned oil industry was nationalized, significant land redistribution took place and the pact was cemented



between the party, the workers and the *campesinos*, or peasant farmers.

What at first seemed a liberation for workers eventually turned into a bondage as that pact between the PRI and its loyal unions, such as the CTM became more and more a means of co-opting union leaders (often with legislative posts) and controlling the labor movement. PRI membership was required of CTM workers. Up until the 80s this pact did see some economic gains for the workers, though often dissenting labor movements were brutally and violently crushed. After economic crises in the 70s and 80s the economic policy of the PRI turned away from import substitution, a policy that encourages national industry through subsidy and through high tariffs on the imported versions. Instead it turned to neo-liberalism of the IMF model, involving among other things privatization of national industries, encouragement of foreign investment and opening the door to imports. This has resulted only in new economic crises, the worst occurring in 1994 as a consequence of outgoing President Salinas' refusing to devalue the peso because he feared it would influence the U.S. congress to balk on NAFTA. Under the new economy workers have seen their earnings in real terms erode very significantly. The maquiladora worker labors for 5 to 10 percent of what a union represented U.S. or Canadian worker makes for the



same task. And she does it with equal productivity.

The forces confronting a movement to start an independent union in Mexico are formidable. There is the individual company, often a division, subsidiary or proxy for a large foreign corporation. Then there is the organization of plant owners. Workers report that organizations like those of the maquiladora owners share blacklists and that someone who makes trouble for one company will never be hired by any of the others. Then there are successive layers of government, from the federal down to the municipal almost always all interested in bringing in the revenue from plants by keeping the workers low paid and in line. Finally, there is the power of the official unions themselves. Often a "trouble maker" at a plant is fired not by the company but by the CTM or other official union that "represents" the workers. The worker is expelled from the union and by law he can no longer work for the company that the union represents. The Federal Labor Law in Mexico is filled with mandates that many U.S. workers would love to have, like mandatory profit sharing and double or triple pay for overtime. Ask a group of maquiladora workers how many of them have ever received either these benefits, or the kinds of safety protections also mandated by the law. Most Mexican workers have no idea what a material safety data sheet is until they are supplied with Spanish versions, not by their government, their employer or their union, but by friendly U.S. or Canadian unions.

U.S. workers often point out that they face the

same abuses shown for Mexican workers in the documentary, so the differences are more of degree than of type. At least where unions are strong in the U.S. they often have won some significant health and safety protections. U.S. workers are still better paid than their southern counterparts, though the downward pressure on salaries continues. During the cold war, U.S. labor purged some of its most progressive unions and leaders and became a conduit for U.S. government money funded through the Endowment for Democracy to encourage the like purging of leftist figures in the Latin American labor movement. Post cold war it was not a sudden realization that they were sapping a good deal of the grass roots vitality of the labor movement in Latin America that started to turn things around. It was the realization that traditional industrial jobs from the U.S. were being transferred to foreign soil and that U.S. companies were using this situation to bargain down wage and benefit demands and to further their own demands of flexibility.

The initial reaction of U.S. workers was primarily guided by long time stereotypes that popular culture nurtured. Those lazy, incompetent Mexicans are taking my job! But worker delegations to Mexico began to put a face on the Mexican worker, people like Jesse Jackson added anti-racist impulses to the discussion, and the rhetoric in this country took a healthy turn towards "solidarity with exploited fellow workers in Mexico." There is certainly room for some unconscious ingenuousness or chauvinism in this, substituting

noble motives for what is really self interest. But the author saw moving and genuine empathy at the border.



There is the potential for poorer Mexican labor organizations to be dominated by organizations with more financial resources in the north, both now

and especially if cooperation ever moves beyond the strategic alliance stage. That is why agreements about areas of autonomy and the search for reciprocity are so important. There is much that independent unionists in Mexico bring to their northern counterparts, including a lot of fervor and grass roots organizing skills.

Although the tendency has been towards worker solidarity within the movement, there have been setbacks. Originally the Han Young workers allied with the FAT, but they eventually broke away when they became uncomfortable with what they interpreted as too much control from a distance. In another example, the NYSLRC originally supported an organizer in the PJO. That alliance also broke up over issues like reports which the NYSLRC saw as necessary to raise continued funding but the PJO saw as an effort to control. Recently some member organizations have split from the CJM. Let's hope that these are bumps in the road and not continuing examples of fragmentation of effort.



## GUIDE TO THE ORGANIZATIONS AND ACRONYMS

**AFL-CIO** –The CIO was formed when John Lewis led a split from the AFL during the 30s over the trade oriented AFL’s reluctance to organize industrial workers. The two reunited in 1955 to form a huge confederation. The AFL-CIO’s presence in Latin America was dominated by its militant anti-communism. During the cold war it served as a conduit for U.S. government funds to fight perceived leftists and communists in the Latin American union movement, leading to marginalization of many progressive rank and file oriented forces. In 1973 U.S. unions played a part in the overthrow of Salvador Allende’s elected leftist government in Chile and the installation of the repressive Pinochet dictatorship. Changes have come since the mid 90s. During the debate leading up to NAFTA most U.S. unions opposed the agreement while the official unions in Mexico like the CTM toed the PRI line and supported the treaty. Subsequently the AFL-CIO has began to make contacts with the growing independent labor movement in Mexico, a fact signaled by John Sweeney’s meeting with the UNT.

**BREED TECHNOLOGIES, INC.** – A Florida based small multi-national (now part of Key Automotive Group) that recently emerged from bankruptcy and is undergoing restructuring. It acquired Custom Trim and Autotrim in the midst of the struggles going on in Matamoros and Valle Hermosa

**CANADIAN STEELWORKERS** (see USWA Canada, below)

**CUSTOM TRIM** – A former Canadian company that was in the automotive interior trim business. It was based in Waterloo, Ontario, but in the 90's increasingly moved its operations to Mexico before selling out to Breed (see above). No operation now exists in Waterloo. Canadian Custom Trim workers were organized by the Canadian Steelworkers (see "USWA Canada" below)

**CFO** – Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Women Workers Committee) This organization is no longer gender specific as more and more men have come to work in the maquiladoras. Preserves links with the American Friends Service Committee which was supportive in its founding. Organizes maquiladora workers through contacts and cultivation of small groups in the communities which eventually catalyze reforms in the workplace such as election of union representative who really represent the workers. Julia Quiñones is the current leader of the organization and is based in Piedras Negras, across the border from Eagle Pass, Texas

**CETLAC** -Centro de Estudios y Taller Laboral, AC (Study Center and Labor Workshop). Based in Ciudad Jaurez, the Center was created by the FAT with support from the UE and some other U.S. unions. After the FAT's failed attempts to organize General Electric in the area (the UE represents GE workers in the U.S.), a decision was made that the workforce, largely from rural settings, needed formation and education before organization attempts could be successful. CETLAC was created to carry out these functions. Beatriz Lujan is the Coordinator. She is the sister of Bertha Lujan (see FAT).

**CJM** –Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, San Antonio, TX. One of the oldest, most active and most broad based of the NGOs mentioned in the documentary. The CJM has a large board with representatives from worker based or oriented organizations in Mexico, the U.S. and Canada.



Most of the independent unions and NGOs mentioned in the documentary are or have been active on the CJM board. It attempts to coordinate the efforts of these organizations at the border and to coordinate worker struggles in Mexico (particularly the Northeast) and link the workers with helping organizations in all three countries. Recent campaigns have been the Autotrim/Custom

Trim struggle in Matamoros and Valle Hermosa and the Duro Bag struggle in Rio Bravo. It is based in San Antonio, TX. Martha Ojeda its director is herself a twenty year veteran of working and leading labor struggles in the maquiladoras.

**CLC** –The Canadian Labor Congress, the largest confederation of labor organizations in Canada. Many member unions have been on the advance edge of movements for solidarity with workers in Latin America and other parts of the world. Jean Claude Parrot is the Executive Vice President of the CLC.

**CROC** – (Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Farmers) Another “official” union like the CTM, though not as large and equally prone to “charro” leaders and protection contracts. The CROC, the CTM and other such unions are loosely federated. Han Young had a CROC ghost union at the time when the struggle began there.

**CTM** –Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (Confederation of Mexican Workers) The largest and most powerful of the “official” union confederations in Mexico. Brought to prominence under President Cárdenas in the 30s when he was working to forge an alliance between workers and the Revolutionary Party. the CTM helped assure hegemony for the PRI from the 30s until 2000. It was ruled with an iron fist for over 40 years by Fidel Velásquez until his death in 1997 at the age of 97. The CTM became increasingly corrupt and increasingly responsive to government and less



responsive to workers. Until recently members had to belong to the PRI (see below). During the cold war big labor in the U.S. supported the CTM and other “official” unions and served as a conduit of State department funds to support them. Valazquez was as actively “anti-communist” as his U.S. counterparts.

**CUT** –Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (Sole Workers’ Central) Brazil’s huge workers confederation encompassing 3500 unions. Lula, the President of Brazil was one of its founders. Militant in its origin, it now has left and centrist factions at odds over the issue of neo-liberal economic policies which have been adopted by Lula. Kjeld Jacobsen is the International Secretary of CUT

**ECHLIN** –The parent corporation for the ITAPSA brake manufacturing plant that the STIMACHS tried to organize in the Federal District of Mexico. This was done in alliance with the UE which had organized a



California Echlin plant, subsequently closed by the company. Echlin’s leadership has made no secret of its hostility to unionization of its plants. Echlin was acquired by DANA, another auto parts company, in 1998

**FAT** –Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (Authentic Workers Front) is a small Mexican independent confederation of

unions, mostly in heavy industry throughout Mexico. The organization emphasizes worker autonomy and democracy in decision making and is lead by a three member group rather than by a single charismatic leader. Benedicto Martinez is one of the three leaders and also the leader of STIMACHS (see below). Bertha Lujan was another of the three leaders until she accepted a position as comptroller with the PRD (see below) led government of the Federal District around Mexico City.

**FUTURA** (future) – this was the name of an organization in Valle Hermosa comprised of leaders of the struggle at Custom Trim. NYSLRC for several years supported an organizer there.

**NYS LRC** –New York State Labor/Religious Coalition in its international outreach has taken on the dual task of educating people from the U.S. about worker struggles in the maquiladoras and helping people in Mexican workplaces and communities. It organizes frequent delegations of gringos to the border to meet with Mexican workers and see the effects of our economic policies. Delegation members educate their communities and have financed Mexican labor organizers and school building projects at the request of Mexican workers. Maureen Casey coordinates the international solidarity.

**PAN** –A party of the right which traditionally was associated with the Catholic Church in its conservative manifestations and is strongly pro-business. The

PAN struggled for decades and began to win some municipal elections (Tijuana, for instance) and some governorships. Then in the 2000 elections Vicente Fox proved a very attractive presidential candidate and was elected the first non-PRI president since 1930. PAN economic policy is essentially the same as that of the PRI. Fox proved a stronger candidate than a president and has not been able to deliver his promised reforms.

**PJO** -Pastoral Juvenil Obrera (Young Workers Pastoral) Used here to refer to the Matamoros chapter of the Catholic affiliated organization. The PJO in Matamoros was a group of ex maquiladora workers who became concerned about conditions in the workplace in terms of health, pay and democracy in the unions. Some of them had personal experiences with health damage in the maquilas. Through the CJM and its affiliated organizations they became educated about workplace hazards (especially toxins and repeated motion injuries) and passed this information on to maquiladora workers. They assisted workers in some of the colonias, notably Fuerza y Unidad, shown in the documentary. For a time, their coordinator was funded by the NYSLRC. Again with the CJM, they helped coordinate the NAO complaint against Autotrim and Custom Trim (BREED) that was heard in San Antonio in 2000. As of 2004, after failed attempts to support the group by forming a craft co-op, they have decided to disband and find separate employment.

**PRD** –Partido Revolucionario Democrática (Democratic Revolutionary Party) Largely a break off from the PRI initially led by Cuauhtémic Cárdenas, son of the legendary president who in the late 30s nationalized the U.S. and British owned oil industry. The break was largely over the PRI's increasingly neo-liberal, U.S. oriented economic policy. Cárdenas probably won the 1988 presidential election, but there was massive fraud that put Carlos Salinas, the PRI candidate in office. In response, Cárdenas formed the PRD. The party has been plagued by dissension between left-centrist and left elements. It has maintained control over the important Federal District and gained a few governorships.

**PRI** – Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party) This party ruled Mexico for 70 years from about 1930, not only at the national level, but at the local. It started out as a process to contain the struggling forces that had fomented the bloody revolution of 1910-20 with



strongman leadership by former generals. It overcame the 6 year term limit by having presidents essentially name their successors, and it rigged the elections when necessary. It cultivated a national culture of revolutionary

rhetoric and idealization of the pre-Columbian past (also authoritarian) while progressively becoming a

vast bureaucracy and often a repressive force against workers, students and campesinos. However in its early years it carried out significant land reform and gave the workers a stronger voice. Since the 80s it has switched its economics from import substitution support of national initiatives to neo-liberal welcoming of foreign investment (partly by keeping wages low) and free trade, culminating in NAFTA. The first recognized non-PRI president was elected in 2000.

**SCMW** –Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers. This San Diego based organization became deeply involved as the coordinator of support and protest actions in favor of the Han Young workers in Tijuana. It organized protest actions in the U.S. against parent company Hyundai and channeled all kinds of support to the Mexican workers. Mary Tong was its Director. The organization has been inactive for a few years.

**STIMACHS** –The Independent Metalworkers Union, a member union of the FAT. Benedicto Martinez is its Secretary General. This is the union which tried to organize the Echlin/ITAPSA plant near Mexico City.

**UE** – The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America is now a relatively small union of about 35,000. It was once much larger before it was attacked during the McCarthy era. The UE has continued to be a progressive force in the labor movement. It has been a leader in international solidarity, particularly through its strategic alliance

with the FAT (see above). Many rank and file members of the union have gone to Mexico and met with their counterparts, often people who work for the same companies that they do. The FAT and UE have many joint projects and these are celebrated by striking murals in the FAT Mexico City office and the UE Erie, Pennsylvania union hall. Robin Alexander is the UE Director of International Labor Affairs.



**UFW** –United Farm Workers, the union originally led by César Chavez to organize migrant farm workers in the western United States. Federal legal protection of workers does not extend to farmworkers, but the UFW was instrumental in getting laws to protect them passed in California and some other states through boycotts and aggressive organizing of workers who had been quiescent out of fear of deportation. Arturo Arias is the current leader of the union and Lupe Gamboa is a Vice President and has carried forward the work of organizing in Washington State. Tomás Villanueva is the founding ex-leader of the movement in Washington State. Agriculture in Washington State is dominated by apples and hops.

**UNT** –Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (National Workers Union) A new labor confederation in Mexico that brings together many of the unions who reject

neo-liberal economics and NAFTA, who reject privatization of state owned industries like oil and electricity, and who are pledged to work towards greater democracy in the unions. It was spearheaded

by the leader of the telephone workers union who had earlier presided over company friendly changes like workplace flexibility and had been a rising star in the PRI. But



he seems to have taken a new direction and there seems to be genuine power sharing in the UNT. The FAT is a member of the UNT and Benedicto Martinez has been part of its governing body. The UNT is the strongest challenge to the hegemony of the “official” unions that has been seen in recent history.

**USWA CANADA**, aka, **CANADIAN STEELWORKERS** Cross border in orientation since its inception, the Canadian Steelworkers are still united in an international with their U.S. counterparts. The Canadian Steelworkers have been particularly active in international solidarity. Many of their contracts stipulate a company contribution to the Humanitarian Fund, which is used to support workers movements abroad. At the time of his interview Gerry Barr was in charge of this Fund.

**ZAPATISTAS** – The EZLN or Zapatista Army of National Liberation rose up in indigenous Chiapas on January 1, 1994, the day that the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement went into effect. Chiapas is one of the states least effected by reforms after the revolution, and campesinos and indigenous people there have long been exploited.

As a precondition to NAFTA, changes were made to the Mexican Constitution that left indigenous campesinos increasingly vulnerable. One change allowed the break up of ejidos, communally owned



lands where each farmer passed down his allotted parcel, but could not sell it to outsiders. Farmers saw an especial thre at in the influx of cheap, abundant, duty free corn from the U.S. which killed the domestic market for their corn. The armed rebellion transformed into negotiations which failed and continual low intensity struggle with paramilitary groups carrying out most the dirty work against the Zapatistas and their sympathizers, as in the massacre at Acteal. Subcomandante Marcos who serves as a non-indigenous sometimes spokesman for the revolutionary leaders has carried on a very effective war of ideas via internet and other means.



Trim/Breed Mexicana in

and Custom Trim/E  
representatives with  
compensation starti  
by workers at Cus



## BIBLIOGRAPHIES & ONLINE RESOURCES

### Overall Resources

The most complete record of labor struggles in Mexico during the last dozen or so years is in the *Mexican Labor News and Analysis* published on line by Dan LaBotz and archived at the UE site <http://www.ueinternational.org/>

Dan laBotz also has a very well annotated bibliography on Mexican labor which is available on line at [http://www.ueinternational.org/Mexico\\_info/Mexico\\_bibliography.html](http://www.ueinternational.org/Mexico_info/Mexico_bibliography.html)

Some publications of the NAO are listed in the chapter bibliographies, but many other documents are available on line at <http://www.dol.gov/ILAB/media/reports/nao/main.htm>

A few complete transcripts of recent U.S. NAO hearings are available at this site and all others are available through written request to the NAO at National Administrative Office  
U.S. Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Room S-5205  
Washington, D.C. 20210  
Phone: 202-693-4900  
Fax: 202-693-4910  
Email: USNAO@dol.gov

Also available are some documents relating to Mexican NAO hearings and reports.

## Books

La Botz, Dan (1992) *Mask of Democracy: Labor Suppression in Mexico Today*. Boston: South End Press. A great introduction to the mechanisms and history of labor suppression in Mexico, filled with detailed case histories.

Middlebrook, Kevin J. (1995). *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, The State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. A book with recognized academic authority (and written in academic prose) that takes a statistical approach that relies largely on Mexican Government statistics.

**Section I** *FAT/UE , Echlin, Han Young, SCMW, CTM, UNT*

Frente Autentico del Trabajo (FAT) (1998). *Los trabajadores del Mexico de hoy frente al nuevo milenio*. Mexico: Servicios Informativos Procesados, A.C. (Sipro).

La Botz, Dan (1992) *Mask of Democracy: Labor Suppression in Mexico Today*. Boston: South End Press. (described above)

Bacon, David (2004) *Children of Nafta: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border*. Berkeley and L.A., U of California Press



(Excellent chapter on Han Young with much more detail than given in the documentary; also a good chapter on the UE/FAT alliance with some pages on the Echlin struggle)

A complete public review for both the Echlin and Han Young hearings is available on line from the <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/nao/pubrep9703.htm> for Echlin and at <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/nao/pubrep9702.htm>

And at <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/nao/9702partII.htm> for Han Young. The transcripts of the hearings are available through requests to the NAO office at ILAB in the Labor Department in Washington, D.C.

## *Section II      Autotrim, Toxins*

Wise, Salazar and Carlsen, ed.(2003) *Confronting Globalization*. Bloomfield, CT :

Kumarian Press

Contains the article “The Struggle for Justice in the Maquiladoras: The Experience of the Autotrim Workers” written by members of the Pastoral Juvenil Obrera.

Baum, Dan, “The Man Who Took My Job” originally published in Rolling Stone in 2000. Available on line at <http://www.knoxandbaum.com/> Dan talks to some of the same people interviewed in the documentary in his quest to find the Mexican worker who wound up with David Quinn’s former job working for Breed Technologies in Indiana.

Alfie, Miriam, “Globalización y medio ambiente en la frontera norte: el caso de Matamoros” in COTIDIANA #92, Azcapotzalco: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana

To read an English version of the complete transcript go to of the NAO hearing on Autotrim/ Custom Trim (Breed)

<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/nao/submissions/autotrimhearing.htm>

for the NAO’s official review go to:

<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/nao/pubrep2000-1.htm>

### *Section III*

### *Washington Apple, UFW*



The english translation of the public report of the Mexican NAO is at

<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/nao/mxnao9802.htm>

The Spanish version is at

<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/nao/mex9802spanish.htm>

The U.S. NAO status report on the Mexican complaint is on line at

<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/programs/nao/status.htm#iib3>

### *Section IV.*

### *Custom Trim Case Study*

A great source for information about health and safety hazards in the maquiladoras is The maquiladora Health and Safety Network run by Garrett Brown and online at

<http://mhssn.igc.org/index.htm>

Also see section II

## ***Section V. Autotrim/Custom Trim NAO Process***

See the entries for Sections II and IV, above.

Extensive links to online resources relating to the Autotrim/Custom Trim case can be found at the MHSSN site at:

<http://mhssn.igc.org/index.htm#hea>

Letter of CJM to labor secretaries of U.S. and Mexico after ministerial consultation:

<http://mhssn.igc.org/nafta13.htm>

“The North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (aka The Labor Side Agreement) is available from the NAO at the address given at the beginning of the bibliography. David Bacon’s book (above) has a good section on the CJM with some pages on this struggle.

## ***Sections VI and VII. Future and Conclusions***

UCLA’s Center for Labor Research and Education has an excellent evaluation of the (in)effectiveness of the NAFTA Side Agreement at

<http://www.labor.ucla.edu/publications/index.html#nafta>

The Carnegie Report on Ten years of NAFTA is available at

[http://www.ceip.org/files/publications/NAFTA\\_Report\\_full.asp](http://www.ceip.org/files/publications/NAFTA_Report_full.asp)

For links to articles with other points of view see

<http://mhssn.igc.org/news.htm#key>

Brooks and Fox, *Ten Years of Cross-Border Solidarity*, <http://www.americaspolicy.org/reports/2004/0403nafta.html>

The literature critical of the proposed FTAA is immense. See articles on line at:

<http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/ftaa/>

The official FTAA web site is at <http://www.ftaa-alca.org/>



### **Study questions and topics**

The questions and issues fall into several categories. Broad issues about globalization, human rights, relationships between labor and government, etc. may be raised by the materials. On the other hand critical questions may be raised about the specific issues developed in the documentary, which can be pursued through internal criticism or by consulting other sources. Cultural stereotypes may also come into play and some suggestions are directed towards holding our commonly held stereotypes up to different kinds of evidence. Hopefully viewers will be motivated to care about the issues and so questions will be raised about how viewers might get involved and take action.

Finally, questions will be addressed having to do with the nature of documentary, its degree of “truth value” and about the particular kind of documentary practice carried on here.

These questions and issue will be organized on a chapter by chapter basis to facilitate their use for both total and partial viewings of the documentary.

## PART ONE

Echlin/Han young

1. Who is free in free trade? Are workers as free to organize across borders as companies are? Should they be?
2. By what arguments does the documentary assert that “ghost unions” or company unions are widespread in Mexico? How could you check this assertion out?
3. What’s the problem with low pay in Mexico? Isn’t it cheap to live there? After you frame your own answer, checkout this or simailar web sites: [http://www.americas.org/item\\_79](http://www.americas.org/item_79)
4. This section portrays two companies at which Mexican workers were fired for trying to organize an independent union. What tactics are used against organizing in the United States?
5. What are some of the difficulties that might come into play in an alliance between an independent Mexican union like the FAT and a U.S. one like the UE? Why do you think many people claim to see such labor alliances



as threatening to national sovereignty while not raising the same objections towards business alliances or even foreign ownership of businesses?

6. Is there really anything significant about the AFL-CIO, the Canadian Labor Congress and the Mexican Unión Nacional de Trabajadores coming together in an alliance, at least briefly, in the context of the Echlin/ITAPSA case?
7. This section of the documentary gives very little of the company side of the cases, pointing out that they chose not to testify at the NAO hearings. What does this tell you about the companies in regard to the NAO process?
8. Make a list of the obstacles that workers have to overcome in attempting to organize in the U.S. or Canada. Make a similar list for Mexico, and compare the two lists.
9. Dan LaBotz mentions the Juntas de Arbitraje y Conciliación, the Mexican Labor Boards. These boards are made up of representatives of the government, the company and the union (most often the CTM or the CROC). How would this be likely to effect an independent union's chance of being declared the legal representative of the workers or winning a dispute with the company?
10. To get more involved, visit the UE web pages cited above.

## PART TWO            Matamoros/ Autotrim

1. In a documentary, what are the advantages

and disadvantages of this sort of testimonial approach to a problem like toxins in the workplace as compared to other possible approaches, such as a graphically illustrated essay format?

2. What do you know about the kinds of protections that U.S. or Canadian workers are supposed to get under the law compared to the kinds of protections that



these workers say they get? In actuality, many laws about workplace toxins in Mexico are similar to laws in the U.S. How do you think enforcement differs, if at all?

3. A number of epidemiological studies have exposed clusters of often lethal birth defects in the region of Matamoros and of the Rio Grande Valley on the U.S. side. If you go on line you can find some of the references on this issue and some of the research that has gone on. The workers in this section of the documentary, though, assert that an unusually frequent occurrence is localized in their factory at Autotrim and that it is related to breathing of and handling of solvents. What can you find out about the effects of Benzine, Trichloroethane and compounds like Varsol and Loctite on those who are exposed to them

and to their offspring?

### PART THREE Washington Apple Workers

1. Most people associate the UFW with grapes and California. Here we see the UFW organizing apple workers in the State of Washington. Does this modify our perception of the UFW?
2. What do you know about the rights or lack of rights for farmworkers in your State? You might be surprised to learn, for instance, that in New York State, another apple growing region, they have many fewer rights than workers in Washington.
3. What do you know about the national and cultural origins of the migrant farm workers in your area? Have many of these workers become permanent residents and taken up other work, for instance, meat packing?
4. Analyze the statement by Lupe Gamboa that workers rights cannot be upheld unless they have the right to organize and bargain collectively. Why are these rights held to be so fundamental to the other rights?
5. The original Washington Apple complaint involved not only UFW farm workers but also Teamster represented fruit packers. The Teamsters were not particularly visible at this forum or at the demonstration in Yakima. Can you explore recent labor history to account for this?
6. Does your state have laws to protect the rights of migrant workers? How can you support

passage of such laws?

#### PART FOUR Custom Trim

1. This section raises the enormous difference in pay that Mexican and Canadian (or U.S.) workers get for performing the same work. Many Americans shrug "Well it's cheaper to live there?" But is it? Can you research cost of living for Mexican workers on the internet?
2. There is a lot of debate as to how many jobs have been lost in the U.S. and Canada due to free trade and specifically to NAFTA. But few people dispute that free trade and NAFTA have contributed to lowering of wages in the U.S. (See, for instance the Carnegie Report on 10 Years of NAFTA) Why do you think free trade exerts a downward pressure on workers salaries?

#### PART FIVE NOA on Autotrim/Custom Trim

1. The Autotrim/Custom Trim complaint to the NAO was based entirely on issues of failure to enforce laws protecting worker health and safety. Other complaints, such as Echlin/ITAPSA had been partly based on this and partly based on denial of freedom to organize. Under the Side Agreement, child labor issues and worker health and safety issues are the only ones that can result in a substantial monetary penalty to the offending government. In some ways the Autotrim/Custom Trim complaint was designed to see if these sanctions would ever actually be applied.

- Discuss the outcome in terms of this strategy.
2. While the documentary focussed exclusively on worker exposure to toxins, the hearing included expert and worker testimony on damage to workers through repetitive motion. The complete transcript of the hearings is available at <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/nao/submissions/autotrimhearing.htm> Read some of the testimony about repetitive motion starting on page 215. Have you heard stories like these in your own country? How are these injuries related to work speedups and to required overtime? What do you think about the documentaries decision to focus on the exposure to toxins?

## PARTS SIX & SEVEN

1. If you were a CEO of a large corporation, from the standpoint of profits only, what might be the pros and cons of moving your manufacturing operation from a maquiladora at the Mexican border to China or Indonesia. Try this with different types of products and services.
2. Are indigenous cultures particularly vulnerable to erosion due to globalization? Discuss why you think this is or is not so.

## OVERALL QUESTIONS AND QUESTION RELATING TO THE CONCLUSION

Free trade advocates say that you always have winners and losers when free trade goes into effect. Who usually wins and who usually loses? Why is this the case?

Do you believe that it is possible to have global free trade without a lowering of the salaries, benefits and living standards of workers? What would have to happen for this to take place?

What is the difference between this kind of documentary and the “balanced” type of documentary often provided by broadcast journalism? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each type?

### WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

*Perhaps there is an anti-sweatshop movement at your school or in your locality that you can join. Or you can go on a delegation to the border such as those offered by the NYSLRC and other organizations. There may be a Latin American Solidarity group or a labor/religion coalition in your locality. Your union may have an international solidarity task force, or perhaps you can initiate one. Or you can start a study group and bring in guest speakers.*

## Contact Information

Bill Jungels  
745 W. Delavan Ave.  
Buffalo, NY 14222  
(716) 886-2083  
bjungels@adelphia.net

Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM)  
Martha Ojeda  
4207 Willowbrook  
San Antonio, TX 78228  
(210) 732-8957

New York State Labor Religion Coalition (NYSLRC)  
Maureen Casey  
800 Troy- Schenectady Road  
Latham, NY 12110  
(518) 213-6000  
[www.labor-religion.org](http://www.labor-religion.org)

Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT)  
Benedicto Martinez  
Godard No. 20  
Col. Guadalupe Victoria  
México, D.F. 07790  
(5) 556-9314

Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO)  
Julia Quiñones  
Ocampo 509B altos  
Piedras Negras, Coahuila 26000  
(878) 782-3845  
[www.cfomaquiladoras.org/index.html](http://www.cfomaquiladoras.org/index.html)

UE  
Robin Alexander  
One Gateway Center  
Suite 1400  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-1416  
[www.ranknfile-ue.org/index.html](http://www.ranknfile-ue.org/index.html)  
[www.ueinternational.org/](http://www.ueinternational.org/)

Centro de Estudios y Taller Laboral (CETLAC)  
Bertha Lujan  
Av. Vicente Guerrero 5038  
Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua 32080  
(16) 19-54-45  
U.S. Mailing address

United Steelworkers of America • Canada  
234 Eglinton Ave. E., 7th Floor  
Toronto, Ont. M4P 1K7

United Farm Workers (UFW)  
Lupe Gamboa  
Northwest Regional Office  
SUNNYSIDE:  
P.O. Box 1056  
Sunnyside, WA  
Office: (509) 839-4903  
Fax: (509) 839-3870  
[www.ufw.org/](http://www.ufw.org/)