



Are These Our Neighbours?

People who work in maquiladoras

“What does it profit a person if in gaining the whole world the soul is lost?”

Proverbs 16:8

Background

In 1966, an agreement was signed between the United States and Mexico for the introduction of a zone in Mexico just south of its border with the United States. Its purpose was to enable U.S. companies to assemble or manufacture goods in Mexico for export into the United States without paying the usual duties.

Intended side effects were to provide employment for Mexicans, lower costs and cheap, docile labour for U. S. manufacturers.

Maquiladoras are in effect duty free zones whereby goods produced there are exempt from duties and with very low labour costs. Such zones are found in many parts of the world.

Since 1966 and with NAFTA in 1994, the number of operations in Mexico has risen to over 4,000 employing over one million people.

Operations are owned for most part by American, European and Japanese corporations. Some of the companies involved include Ford, Hyundai, General Electric, Sara Lee, Sony, Walmart and Zenith.

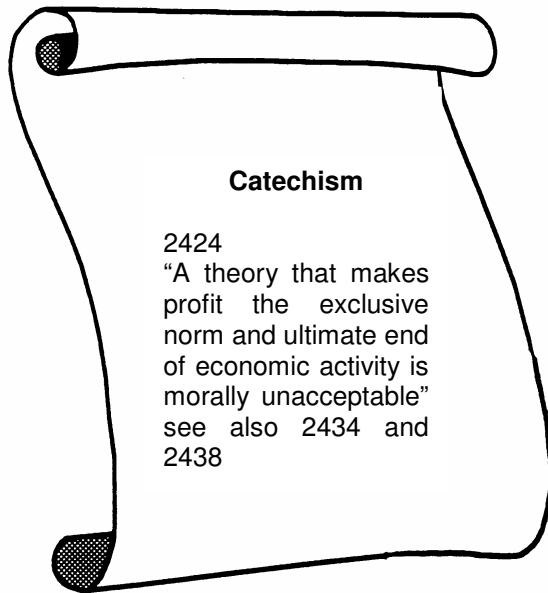
Problems

1. Although Mexican labour laws are officially strict they are not enforced.
2. Labour unions are strongly discouraged (union activists have been murdered on company orders), while government inspectors are few and poorly paid.
3. Most of the workers in Mexico are young girls. Working conditions include sexual harassment, pregnancy examinations, long working hours in unsafe areas.
4. Maquiladoras can best be described as “sweat shops”.
5. Although factory areas may themselves be pleasing to the eye most workers live in abysmal and dangerous slums. Girls employed are not only subject to harassment at work but are also in danger from gangs of unemployed males.
6. This type of operation has the effect of multinational corporations closing factories north of the border, thus negating the supposed positive effects of NAFTA. If displaced workers in North America do find replacement employment it is often at a lower wage.
7. Meanwhile, any action to improve wage and working conditions in any Maquiladora zone (and there are many in countries such as Costa Rica, Honduras, Indonesia, Philippines, Zimbabwe) usually means that the transnational merely moves its operation to a country where they can produce at lower wage costs.
 - The GAP has over 2000 factories under contract throughout the world and has proudly stated that its recent inspections have closed 70 of them.
 - China is the present duty free zone of choice. Ironically, this country's government using the tenets of Communism treats its factory workers as slaves.

Definition:

Maquiladora is the Mexican word for factory. The word has been extended to mean all factories or regions which operate under certain trade regulations. These regulations allow the duty free importation of machinery parts etc for use in factories which export their production (often back to the suppliers of the duty free production machinery).





The wage scale must be related to the economic welfare of the whole people” Pius XI (1931

References

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Maquiladoras Downfall for Mexico John Dougherty New Times Inc 1998
American Friends Service Committee A Fair Deal November 1998.
Health and Safety in the Maquiladoras Geroge Kourous Borderlines 47, volume 6 #6 August 1998.
Globalization of the Maquiladoras Jen Soriano November 24, 1999
Houston Catholic Worker newspaper.
Rerum Novarum Leo XIII 1891 sections 17 to 25 social teachings of the church
Quadragesimo Anno Pius XI 1931 sections 105 —109 social teachings of the church.
Internet: there are over 86,000 web sites on this one free trade zone.

Speakers

The move to use maquiladoras or duty free zones has had a direct effect on the lives of two groups of people in this country. One group is made up of those who have lost their job on the factory floor through companies taking advantage of NAFTA to relocate production. Another group comprises immigrants from countries where maquiladoras operate. Both groups have personal stories. Workers' groups may also be willing to speak to this issue. Kairos Saskatoon and Catholic Development and Peace have background information and speakers.



Questions

1. What is and should be the role of government in controlling trade?
2. What are and should be the duties of a country's government concerning basic rights for a living wage gained from work in healthy conditions?
3. Should a person consider other factors in purchasing items besides quality and usefulness? Why?
4. What environmental safeguards are the responsibility of the plant owner?
5. What can we do about the inequities caused by the drive of major corporations to locate anywhere in the world where "maquiladora" conditions are more favourable to higher profits and lower protection for workers.

Actions

1. Study the church's social teachings as noted above and become involved with a) Canada's trade officials b) corporate owners who need to accept responsibility for workers' livelihood.
2. Become a discerning shopper in studying labels. What difference is there in origin- place of assembly, of manufacture, and of products used?