

La Lucha Sigue:

Stories from the People of the Kukdong Factory



“The future of democracy in Mexico is in the unionization of workers in maquiladoras.”

— Marcela Muñoz, Kukdong Worker

Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador
Collegiate Apparel Research Initiative – Mexico

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Dear Reader,

This publication is a collection of interviews on the life, work and struggle of workers in the Kukdong garment production facility in Mexico. The workers who were interviewed represent a diverse cross-section of the population at Kukdong. Some see themselves as active players in the current struggle, others do not; some are young, some are older. But all of their lives are currently marked by a fight for respect and to meet the economic needs of their families and themselves.

This is not the first time “sweatshop” stories have been told. Unlike the traditional stories of helpless women and children being subject to tremendous hardships, these stories are about uncommon resilience and courage. The workers are like you and me. They are not all “exceptional people” or “leaders.” Yet, they are unique individuals and make choices in their lives that demonstrate tremendous leadership.

This collection of stories and interviews is an attempt to re-humanize people who work in export garment factories (“sweatshops”). Many employers see them as objects, as a means to earn money. Many people who disagree with these abuses and excesses also see them as objects, as victims to be helped. But they are simply people.

Aside from the interviews, we thought it was important to include a chronology of the most relevant or illustrative events at Kukdong. We only included facts that can be corroborated directly or through credible witnesses. Also, we felt the need to give a special space to the darkest hour of this struggle, the violent eviction of peaceful workers demanding their rights by riot police. Though we personally witnessed it, we felt that the twisted logic that provoked this event comes forth more clearly in the testimony of different parties involved – government officials, workers, neighbors, parents and factory staff.

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Introduction: A “Model” Factory

Marcos Santiago Pérez Meza

Santiago is a former Kukdong worker who was fired for fighting for workers' rights and is now a staffperson at Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador.

It has been more than a year and a half since Kukdong opened. The apparel factory is the largest employer and the largest example of foreign investment in the southwestern part of the state of Puebla, according to the regional media.

The factory started business on November 22, 1999. Company publicity stated that personnel was needed and would receive benefits above what the Mexican law mandates. Workers would enjoy Christmas pay, vacations, social security, paid training, pay above minimum wage, good workplace treatment, medical service within the factory and other perks such as breakfast, lunch and transportation. Right here in Atlixco, within our reach, was the “model factory,” in which it would be an honor to work.

On May 8, 2000, during a monthly ceremony where we saluted the Mexican flag and the best employees were rewarded, the Head of Human Resources Hugo de la Peña announced to us that Manuel Avila Camacho of the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC) already controlled the collective bargaining contract. We were told to sign an affiliation to the union or be fired.

After signing, the company never fulfilled the promised benefits. Wages were not increased every three months as promised. Despite long work hours and enormous pressure to meet the company's production quotas, we received one small wage increase (5 pesos) in 12 months and it was not for all workers. The cafeteria food was unhygienic, worm-infested, rotten, the meat was often raw and bloody and sometimes there was human hair cooked in or it was served on dirty plates. Many workers became sick and some had to be hospitalized. Workers were fired unfairly or absences were fabricated in order to fire them. Security personnel arbitrarily frisked workers and, above all, they didn't know how to carry out their responsibilities.

This pushed all 20 shop-floor supervisors and some workers to meet and discuss the deplorable working conditions. We, as supervisors, had complained to the union representative individually but never received a positive response or saw interest in our problems. We started organizing ourselves in order to get the company to listen to our demands and we accomplished this. When the CROC representative became aware of the organizing, he tried to win the trust of our group. He proposed an action to improve the condition of the food. We thought that it was a good idea and the workers agreed to implement the idea.

On December 15 in protest of the poor quality food, no one entered the dining hall. When the company noticed all the food prepared for that day had been wasted, they asked the union representative what was going on. He told them he had nothing to do with it and blamed the group of supervisors for the action. At this point, the supervisors and most of the workers became aware that the CROC representative was not there to protect us, but rather interested only in our union dues and maintaining a good relationship with the company.

Kukdong had promised vacations from December 18 to January 2, but an order from Reebok delayed it until December 23. And on December 18 the volcano Popocatepetl, which is 12 miles from Atlixco, erupted. Employees working overtime were not informed of the eruption. Many lived in the area that was evacuated and only found out about the disaster when they could not find their families in their homes. Supervisors were able to negotiate a day off for all the workers in light of the situation.

When I returned from vacation on January 3, I was busy making production samples that had to be sent to Korea. At approximately 4 p.m., Alberto Sedano, head of security, informed me that I had to go to the Human Resources office. I paid no attention to this because I had to finish the samples. However, he kept pressing until I went to the office. When I arrived, Hugo de la Peña told me, mockingly, that I should sign my resignation or else all the workers in inspection would be fired. They said I was being fired because "they did not need another leader." "Either we do this the easy way or the hard way," he said. I signed my resignation but wrote on it, "forced resignation." Then I went to my supervisor and I told him I had just been forced to resign. He was surprised because he had no knowledge of this and neither did the production and packing managers. Upset, they asked the general manager for an explanation.

While I was gathering my belongings, three security members sent by Sedano harassed me and would not leave me alone until I left the factory. Only criminals are treated this way. While I was leaving the factory, three supervisors, Mario Nicanor Zetina, ironing, Marcela Muñoz, at that time in sewing line 11, and Eduardo Sanchez Vasquez, packing, as well as, Josefina Hernández Ponce, an employee who had been isolated from other workers, were called in to see management and fired by Hugo de la Peña and the CROC. When workers learned about the firings, they met, and demanded a logical explanation. They gave the company a deadline to answer or they would not work in protest. The deadline passed and there was no answer so a work stoppage, considered illegal by the company, began. At least 600 of the 850 employees gathered in the yard and remained there for three days, waiting for a legitimate company response.

The workers presented three demands. One, the cafeteria food must be improved. Two, the company must replace the CROC because of its inefficiency and because it only protects its own interests. Three, the fired supervisors must be reinstated.

Workers formed a negotiating committee. However, there was no negotiation due to the arrogance and ineptness of the Head of Human Resources and the CROC union representative, as well as the partiality of the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board of the State of Puebla (Labor Board). The workers remained in the yard until the night of January 11, when the state police raided the Kukdong facility and violently evicted close to 400 workers, mostly young women. The company sued four of the fired workers, including myself, for instigating a crime and kidnapping.

As a result of these events, an independent union for the workers and created by workers, Independent Union of the Workers of Kukdong (SITEKIM), was formed in March. Thanks to the international support, most of the striking workers and two out of the five fired leaders were reinstated. I, on the other hand, have not been allowed back to the factory, due to pressures from the Head of Human Resources and CROC.

I continue to support my brothers and sisters and SITEKIM in their struggle to bargain their own collective contract. I am working for an NGO called Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador, where we advise SITEKIM, visit towns to train workers on labor rights and, above all, support workers who have been unfairly punished or fired.

SITEKIM is working to attain legal recognition from the Labor Board, even though it is opposed to independent unions. But despite this, SITEKIM is enforcing the rights of all the workers in Kukdong.

Juana Hernandez

Sewing Line 1

San Juan Calmecca

At 16 Juana is the only breadwinner in her family of eleven. She lives in Calmecca, a town with a reputation for being dangerous and violent. Few houses there have running water or a telephone. Her family was originally campesinos, cultivating and living off the land. Now, most of the land has been sold off. She attended primary school on a scholarship, but out of necessity to support her family, Juana did not continue on to secondary school. At 14 she began working at a maquiladora. Now at Kukdong, she says it is time to fight for better working conditions through supporting SITEKIM.

What are your family and town like?

Juana: I live here with my mother, grandfather, sister, cousin, sister-in-law and five nieces. My mother came to live with my grandfather after my father left. My grandfather, who is 95, used to be a campesino working his own land after the Mexican Revolution. However, since then we had to sell most of our land to survive.

My nephew died just a few weeks ago. My brother was killed when he was 25. One day he left to play football with some friends. When he didn't return, we went out searching for him. We found him on the side of the highway, close to here, beaten to death. We don't know who killed him, but from what we have been told he was killed out of revenge.

The story is that after a party, a young man was killed and his death was blamed on my brother, even though he was not even there. So they killed my brother out of revenge. At that time Calmecca was dangerous. There was a feud between two families in the town and there were many beatings and murders in the name of revenge, especially if they didn't like you, you were considered an enemy. However, now things are calmer because those two families have moved away.

Why are you the only person working in your family?

My sister, Cira, used to work with me at Kukdong. However, she had to stop working because she is ill. Since having her daughter, she has been having a lot of health problems that prevent her from working. My sister-in-law helps sometimes by washing clothes for other people. However, most of the time she works in the campo with her parents in Puebla. My mom can't work because she takes care of my grandfather and her grandchildren.



Why did you start working?

I started working at Matamoros Garment when I was 14 because the work there is easier than in the campo. In the campo I would have to work long hours in the sun and it's very physically straining. I only finished elementary school so no other jobs were available to me. When I started working at Matamoros Garment I worked in cutting for 29 pesos per day for eight months. We had quotas to meet everyday. We were not allowed to leave until we met the weekly quota and we weren't even paid for the overtime.

The legal age for work in Mexico is 14, with parental permission and only for daytime, non-dangerous jobs, for a maximum of six hours a day. After 16, there are no restrictions.

Then one day in the town center in Matamoros, I met up with a group of Koreans that told us to work at Kukdong. They said the salary at Kukdong was better, there was free transportation to and from work, and we would receive free breakfast and lunch. So I decided to move to Kukdong because I was spending a lot of money on transportation and food. I was 15 when I started working at Kukdong. I was working in sewing and made 315 pesos per week. I was there for three months but I was fired because I had to be 16 to work there. So I went back to Matamoros Garment and when I turned 16, I went back to Kukdong. Now I make 379 pesos per week.

How did you find out about SITEKIM?

Tomás from inspection told me about SITEKIM. From what I see, the CROC works for the factory and the situation is only getting worse. I wasn't there for the work stoppage, but I could see why the workers did go on strike. The situation in Kukdong is bad. At first, they didn't give us enough food. Now, they give us 70 pesos a week for breakfast and lunch but it's still not enough. Inside the factory, the security guards sell candy and tortillas and food,

which is not allowed, but no one reports them because they are scared of them.

Also, before, the guards did not check us too thoroughly. However, now, they lift our shirts and touch us all over when we enter the factory, leave for lunch, return from lunch, go to use the bathroom, and when we leave for the day. One Sunday, I went to a SITEKIM meeting to learn more about it. Now I support it even more. The CROC is corrupt. SITEKIM can help the workers.

The Regional Federation of Workers and Peasants of the State of Puebla (FROC-CROC) belongs to the Revolutionary Federation of Workers and Peasants (CROC). The Puebla FROC-CROC is a family business that Rene, Constantino, and Jaime Sanchez Juarez inherited from their father, Constantino Sanchez Romano.

Rene Sanchez is currently the Secretary General of the state federation. Constantino Jr. is a representative in State Congress for the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI), and also Secretary General of some CROC affiliated unions. Jaime is the Secretary General of the union that owns the bargaining contract for Kukdong.

The CROC is becoming more and more notorious in Puebla. In December 1999, the CROC lost a contract to a worker led union at the Siemens autoparts plant in Puebla after a work stoppage. In November 2000, workers at Matamoros Garment were assaulted by riot police after staging a work stoppage demanding the ousting of CROC. In February of 2001, workers at IMO, another autoparts factory, learned that they had a collective contract managed by CROC only after the factory closed. After successfully organizing their own strike, they are on the way to winning severance payment. Finally, there is the ongoing dispute at Kukdong.

Marcela Muñoz

Sewing Supervisor Line 14
Chietla

From the beginning Marcela, a SITEKIM leader, has played an integral role in organizing fellow workers at Kukdong. When she is not working at the factory, she travels from town to town organizing workers in their homes.

Marcela is a 22-year-old single mother who hardly gets to see her 3-year-old son, Luis Eduardo. She lives two hours from Kukdong and leaves for work and arrives home while he is sleeping. Marcela's mother looks after him, but she worries about their safety especially after receiving threats from CROC employees targeting her and her family.

What is your family like?

Marcela: I live with my mother and my son. My sister lives with her husband and son in Florida. The father of my son is not involved in Luis' life. It's not because I wanted it that way but because he never took interest. He lives in Chietla but did not ask about him until Luis was already two.

My mother worries about me because I come home late from SITEKIM meetings and organizing, but she supports what I am doing, which helps me a lot. Once someone from church asked my mom how



she could let me go around organizing. My mom responded by saying that the Bible doesn't say it's wrong to organize people, especially if it is to help their situation.

How did you become a union organizer?

It first started because the conditions in Kukdong were bad. They were serving us spoiled and dirty food in the cafeteria. There was a day when the majority of the workers were sick with dysentery. So the supervisors from each sewing line got together and decided to address these problems. Some time after that, they called some of us in to the main office, the ones that the CROC representative said were the main troublemakers, and tried to force us to sign resignation letters that they had typed up for us, but we refused. Instead they fired us.

That's when the workers collectively decided to have a work stoppage in objection to our dismissal. During the work stoppage workers were beaten up and many were fired. However, because of the media and international attention to the situation, most of us were rehired. But the conditions in the factory have not improved.

A group of workers, through the help of Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador, decided that the way to bring real change to the factory is to have an

independent union represented by workers in the factory rather than CROC. Since then, that's what we have been trying to do.

Have you worked in any other maquilas?

Before working at Kukdong, I worked in Matamoros Garment. It was horrible there. The union that supposedly represented the workers was also CROC. We were never paid on time and we were forced to work overtime if we did not finish our daily quota. Even though sign out was at 6 p.m., we would have to work until after 11 p.m. I guess the reason why the workers in Matamoros Garment never had a work stoppage in protest of the work conditions is because, unlike in Kukdong, the workers were divided. The workers were either scared of losing their job or they were, in one way or another, affiliated with CROC. The conditions got so bad that I decided to leave and work at Kukdong.

What have you learned from your experience?

I realize that the future of democracy in Mexico is in the unionization of workers in maquiladoras. SITEKIM is an example of how a union can function by workers.

Alvaro Saavedra Anzures

Ironing
Atencingo

Alvaro is the 16-year-old son of a once active union worker at a sugar cane mill. Although Kukdong is his first place of employment, Alvaro says the situation there should be better. Unlike his father who used to earn 800 pesos per week he only receives 400 pesos per week.

Atencingo is a large town, home to one of the most important sugar cane mills in the country. A church and the local government buildings overlook the central square of most towns in Mexico but in Atencingo it is the sugar workers' union hall.

Because of privatization and trade liberalization, the sugar industry in Mexico has seen some hard times. The mill has not hired for years, and the young people in Atencingo are left with few options: leave for the United States or find work elsewhere.

Tell me about your family.

Alvaro: I live here with my mom and my little brother. My father, sister and three brothers migrated to the U.S. to find better employment opportunities. My father and sister live in Queens, New York. My brother Oscar is serving time at Coaskie Correctional Center in New York after he killed someone out of self-defense. He is serving a 9-year prison term. My other brother lives with his family in Los Angeles. My father and sister haven't been able to help out here much because they are only earning enough to survive right now.

Why did you decide to work at Kukdong?

I wanted to provide a stable income for my family. Through working I can help support my family and also buy things for myself. I decided to

work at Kukdong because I saw it as an opportunity to meet new people and make friends. Ultimately, I want to go to the US but I need to work more before that can happen.

How did you learn about SITEKIM?

I learned about SITEKIM through my friend Ivan. He told me that there was an independent union that will work for the workers, unlike the CROC, which doesn't do anything for workers. The CROC is a union in appearance only. They promise things but there are no results. The work stoppage (January 9, 2001) was due to CROC's ineffectiveness in resolving the problems in the factory, especially the rotten food they were serving us. I was sick for three days because of the food I ate there. I was vomiting and had massive stomach and throat pains. Yet, I had to go to work every morning because I couldn't take any sick days.

What is your work like?

I work in ironing. The work is hard and when you are sick it is almost impossible. I spend all day on my feet, working with hot vapors that usually burn my skin, and by the end of the day, my arms and shoulders are in pain. We have to meet the quota of 1,000 pieces per day. That translates to more than a piece every minute. The quota is so high that we cannot even go to the bathroom or drink water or anything for the whole day. Sometimes I work until 10 p.m. to finish the quota. Although overtime is voluntary, if you don't meet the quota for the week, you don't get paid as much.

How is the situation now?

Instead of the rotten food, we are given a 70-peso allowance each week to buy breakfast and lunch. However, you can't eat sufficiently with only 14 pesos

The Mexican Constitution mandates a minimum wage for the head of a household sufficient to meet the economic, social and cultural needs of a family. In the state of Puebla, the minimum wage is currently 35.85 pesos per day.

The average worker in Kukdong makes 43 pesos a day. Families in Kukdong range from 2 to 11 members. In several cases, the worker brings the only paycheck.

According to a study by Prof. Huberto Juarez from the Autonomous University of Puebla, in May 2001 a family of two adults, one child and a baby needs 158.47 pesos per day to purchase necessities. The bare minimum is 96.67 pesos daily.



a day. Things really haven't changed much since the work stoppage. That is why it is so important to have SITEKIM represent the workers because they are the workers. However, a lot of people are scared of going against CROC because they don't want to get beaten up or anything. I'm not afraid because I studied Tae Kwon Do when I was younger. Also, I'm not worried for my girlfriend, who also works at Kukdong, because she knows martial arts. However, the only way I see things changing in Kukdong is if CROC is ousted by SITEKIM.

Camelia, Elizabet and Benita Cazales Duarte

Sewing Lines 2 and 3
San Francisco Huilango

About an hour from the Kukdong factory there's a small village called Huilango that creeps up the side of a mountain and overlooks miles of fields of avocado, beans, corn and coffee. One phone serves the entire pueblo and the bus only comes every hour and a few times on Sunday.

Here the Cazales family has lived for generations. Now eleven people live in the family home. The four oldest children work at Kukdong during the week and help their father in the campo on the weekends. Camelia, 23, Elizabet, 19, and Benita, 16, work in sewing and their brother,

Arsenio, 21, works as a cutter. They rise early Monday morning to take the company bus to work and return late Monday evening only to do it again the next day.

Why did you decide to work in a maquila?

Camelia: After I finished middle school there were only two options for me, to work in the campo or in a maquila, and I didn't want to work in the campo. After four months at my first maquila job, the factory closed. I quickly found work at Kukdong through a bulletin soliciting employees.

Why did you participate in the work stoppage?

Camelia: We wanted things at Kukdong to change. We were protesting the working conditions, the treatment by supervisors, the low salary, and the

inedible food.

Do you support SITEKIM?

Benita: SITEKIM will make things better. They support us whereas the CROC doesn't. If I have a problem I go to Josefina (SITEKIM committee member) because I have confidence in her. She is able to explain the situation and tell me what I have to do. With the SITEKIM we will be able to raise our salaries and improve the food.

Elizabet: I think the majority of workers support SITEKIM, but many are afraid of losing their

jobs if they affiliate with the independent union. The CROC threatened that its supporters would throw hot water on independent union members. The CROC has also been scaring workers by circulating leaflets that say the factory will close if you support the SITEKIM. They pay people 100 pesos to support the CROC and they paid five of their supporters to beat up two SITEKIM members and in the end only the SITEKIM members were suspended from work.

How is the situation in the maquila now?

Elizabet: Right now there isn't a lot of work at the factory. The Korean supervisors treat us better. Before the work stoppage they would yell and scream and hit and kick us in front of all the workers when something went wrong. They still scream at us, but less than before.

Camelia: The food is also better and cleaner. Before a lot of our friends were sick with dysentery. Now they

give us 70 pesos a week to buy food, but that's only enough to buy a little bit of lunch for the week. Maybe it's because we are from the campo and are used to eating more, but we are always still hungry after lunch.

Elizabet: The CROC is still robbing four pesos from us every week for our dues. We were forced to affiliate with CROC when we started working at Kukdong, but my brother never affiliated yet they still take four pesos from his paycheck every week.

Benita: None of us like the security guards. We hope that Alberto Sedano, the head of security, gets fired because he demands that the guards thoroughly check the women workers the four times we enter



and leave the factory. It's humiliating. They lift our shirts, look inside our bras and touch our butts. All they do is pat the men down.

Camelia: There are still many discrepancies in workers salaries. My sister Benita and I make the same, 48 pesos every day, but she started working almost a year after me. Other people in our line make 10 pesos more than us and we don't know why. Also my paycheck is 363 pesos after taxes including a 37 peso bonus for meeting the quota for the week. But at the bottom of my paycheck 37 pesos are subtracted in pencil so I earn 326 pesos per week. I don't understand why this happens, but there is no one to ask.

Tomás Calderon Gómez

Inspection

Izúcar de Matamoros

Tomás, 29, lives with his sister and niece in the city of Izúcar de Matamoros. As one of the oldest employees in the inspection department, Tomás is well known and respected by many workers.

How did you cross into the US and what kind of work did you do?

Tomás: The first time I went to the US, my sister in Houston sponsored me with US\$600. The second time a group of workers and I snuck under the fence along the border in broad daylight and made our way past the highway while the Border Patrol was not watching.

I worked in a restaurant in Houston as a chef and earned US\$380 a week. My sister arranged the job before I came. I was paid in checks, because the owner of the restaurant subcontracted work so as to protect himself from immigration. I also worked in Tijuana for a while in a jewelry store.

Is Kukdong your first time working in a maquiladora?

I worked in a maquila in Izúcar de Matamoros, where I live, called Matamoros Garment for a year. We were supposed to be paid every two weeks, but the owners sometimes would not pay us on time. Also the managers would yell at us, but after a couple months of working there, new management was brought in, but we weren't fooled.



Before I left, the CROC union was fighting with another union, CTM, to bargain the contract. About half of the factory supported CTM and the other half supported the CROC. There was a lot of infighting in the factory. After I left, the CROC won with the help of police, who violently broke up the CTM faction at the factory.

In early November 2000, after repeated instances of delays in payment, approximately half of the workers of the Matamoros Garment plant staged a work stoppage demanding that the CROC be ousted and the CTM become their bargaining representative. Riot police evicted the workers. Many reported being wounded. Several workers who participated in the stoppage also report being blacklisted by the CROC. Most of the strikers are still owed their wages for the week before the stoppage, in addition to severance pay.

When did you start working at Kukdong?

I entered Kukdong in February 2000 a few months after the factory opened. When you entered, you had to sign affiliation with CROC before you could work, but it wasn't until three months later at a company ceremony did CROC present itself to the workers. Most people didn't know that there was a union up until that point.

A few months after I started at Kukdong, workers began having problems with the rotten, worm infested and raw cafeteria food. Though I never got sick, I decided to help organize a cafeteria boycott, which was successful in some ways, though the food didn't change until after the work stoppage. The cafeteria boycott was a few weeks before the strike in January 2001.

Currently what is your role with SITEKIM?

Well, I am more active inside the factory signing people up for the union. People still come to me and ask, "What is SITEKIM?" The union is still unknown to many workers, but I think we will win because workers don't want to be robbed anymore by CROC and SITEKIM is a union of the workers.



Martha Sanchez Hernandez
Cutting Team Leader
Soto y Gama

Soto y Gama is littered with empty homes newly constructed or being constructed with US-earned money. The future occupants are still working in the US, the majority in New York. Martha Sanchez Hernandez, 33, and the oldest of seven daughters, helped construct the Sanchez home with the money she earned in a Los Angeles packing plant and later working as a nanny.

She was 20 when she left for the US to live and work with her aunt at the Packing Corporation of America in Los Angeles. For two years she worked packing bottles making US\$3.75 per hour with false working papers. She spent the next three years caring for children for US\$100 a week, all the while sending money to Mexico to build the house that she now lives in with her family.

Why did you start working at Kukdong?

Martha: I started working at Kukdong about a year and a half ago. Before that, I didn't have to work because I had saved enough money in the US to support my family and build this house. However, we started having economic problems so my sister Yeni and I started working at Kukdong. I would like to go back to the US but I don't want to leave my family. If everyone went, I would go too, but it hurts to think of leaving them because the US is so far away.

What is your view of CROC?

CROC has never done anything for us. When

the managers asked me to be supervisor of cutting, they didn't give me a pay increase. I had to bypass CROC and directly ask the factory for a raise, which I got. Now I make 53 pesos a day.

I participated in the work stoppage because nothing was being done about the problems in the factory. After the work stoppage I didn't want to return to a factory that let its workers be beaten up. However, I returned because the other factory in the area doesn't pay as much. Now I see that CROC pays my supervisors 100 pesos per week to keep their support and 500 pesos if they are able to convince others to support them.

I think the majority of CROC supporters do so out of fear. CROC has the force and the employees are afraid of being fired. For many it's their only option for employment. The majority of the workers support SITEKIM. However, CROC has tried to infiltrate and divide the workers by placing CROC supporters on each line and spreading negative information about SITEKIM.

Why do you support the SITEKIM? What do you want from it?

They fight for our interests — they support us. When I have a problem I don't go to the CROC. They won't do anything for us. With the SITEKIM I think we will be able to improve transport. Right now the company bus stops about a 20-minute walk from the center. The roads aren't paved and when it rains it's very muddy and often people slip and fall and during the winter it's very cold and we are forced to stay outside. Also when there is a lot of work there is little time to go to the bathroom.

Right now we don't have a lot of work at the factory. I spend most of the day cleaning the floors and machines or just sitting with my arms crossed. I think Nike and Reebok don't want to sign contracts with Kukdong because they are having problems with the workers, but all the problems would be resolved if we could substitute SITEKIM for CROC.

SITEKIM bylaws include several progressive clauses. For example, sexual harassment, which is not contemplated by Federal and local law, is forbidden among union members. Members of SITEKIM have the right to "request and receive training" on Mexican labor law, the union bylaws, and the collective contract. Article 20 states that at least half of the elected positions will be held by women.

Josefina Morastitla Morales

Sewing Line 4

San Jerónimo Coyula

Josefina lives by herself in a new home on the outskirts of Coyula, a town backdropped by the active volcano. Migration has left its mark in the small town of Coyula, which boasts a New York-style pizzeria.

Josefina, 24, went to the US ten years ago to find work in the maquilas of New York City. There, she was involved in multiple organizing drives in the garment industry, but owners lashed out at her and she was deported after spending time in detention.

Before she started working at Kukdong about a year ago, Josefina worked in three other maquilas in Tehuacán, a city also in Puebla that hosts hundreds of maquiladoras.

Where did you work and under what type of working conditions did you labor while in the United States?

Josefina: I worked in different parts of the US, from California to Chicago, but I spent most of my time in New York City. I worked in five maquilas in Manhattan and I lived with my family in Brooklyn. At the maquilas I earned a salary of more or less US \$100 a week. We were paid in cash, and the factories were hidden away from the street, so they could not be seen easily. We worked from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and we were paid by the hour, though overtime began after 12 hours. I was 14 when I went to the US to work.

What are the conditions like inside Kukdong?

When Kukdong knows that somebody is coming to monitor or to look around at the factory, everything is clean and in its place. But when nobody is expected, everything is dirty and the bathrooms are unkempt. They have one roll of toilet paper for hundreds of workers, that isn't sufficient. They won't let me bring my own.

Were you involved in union drives before SITEKIM?

I worked with UNITE in New York City on campaigns in the five maquilas in which I worked. Unfortunately, four of the five maquilas shut down when we tried to organize them. Through my work with UNITE, I learned to speak English by participating in English classes that the union sponsored.

But also through my work with UNITE, I was targeted by Immigration to be deported. They destroyed my papers and I spent a month in a detention center. The majority of the workers in the



maquilas where I worked in New York were Mexican or other immigrants. Being deported is always a threat and many people work and live thinking about it. The maquila management uses the fear of deportation to keep people quiet.

What are some of the things you've experienced while at Kukdong?

During the work stoppage, I was roughed up by Alberto Sedano, the head security guard who is aligned with CROC. He grabbed me by the arm and pushed me, which left me bruised. After the strike, my parents did not permit me to return to the factory. I was not able to go back to Kukdong until April and I was only able to return with the help of international groups. Alberto Sedano continues to harass workers, though he leaves me alone.

The CROC has approached me wanting my support. They offered me money and I said I was interested, and that I wanted a new car or US\$30,000. They said 100 pesos was the going rate. CROC is cheap.

Migration to the United States has left its mark on the southwestern region of Puebla. One can find money-exchange houses, wire services and shipping services to "New Jersey, Queens, Brooklyn" in many small towns.

According to scholarly estimates, 75 percent of Mexicans in New York are from Puebla. Just like people from the state of Oaxaca refer to California as "Oaxacalifornia" given the volume of migration, people from Puebla call New York "Puebla York."

Close to 10 percent of the workforce at Kukdong had migrated to the United States between January and July 2001.

Testimonies of the Violent Eviction at Kukdong, January 11, 2001

“This action (the eviction of Kukdong workers on January 11) happened without incident, the repossession of the facility was witnessed by representatives of the Human Rights Commission.”

– Carlos Alberto Julian, Puebla State Minister of the Interior, in *Sintesis* newspaper, January 13, 2001

“I was in front of all my co-workers and they started hitting us with a plastic thing they had in their hands, and they started hitting me, they hit me in my breasts, and I fell down and fainted. An ambulance arrived and when I came to, I was in Metepec (the hospital). They hit me about four times because I could not move out of the way.”

– Rayito Colt, former Kukdong worker

“We gathered by the main entrance and there we waited for the police to arrive because they had surrounded us. We did not try to stop them because we knew there would be problems if we resisted. So we were all calm. We tried to talk to them, to dialogue with the commander of the riot police, but he had nothing to talk about with us. He just had orders to evict us. The police started pushing the women, kicking the women.”

– Benito Gallardo, former Kukdong worker.

“The riot police attacked our children and later when they were being evicted they were hitting them very badly. This is not possible – they are young women, some were pregnant. The only thing we could do is shelter them in our homes, we are indignant at what happened.”

– Kukdong neighbor in *Indice* newspaper, January 2001

“Unhappy because our children were mistreated on January 11, 2001 at 10:00 p.m. by the state riot police at the Kukdong factory in the city of Atlixco, we, parents and witnesses, request justice for these young people who were mostly women.”

– Petition to the local government authorities signed by 106 parents, neighbors and witnesses

“Eighty to 100 people were evicted, counting workers, their relatives and people who have absolutely nothing to do with the company. There was no excessive violence [sic] and certainly no wounded.”

– Raúl Hernández, Kukdong legal representative in *Indice* newspaper, January 2001

“...female patient, 19 years old, brought by her relatives who report that she does not respond to verbal stimuli or orders, in a hysterical state since she received contusions from security forces and apparently lost consciousness.”

– Medical report issued by the Mexican Institute for Social Security for Catalina Torres Martinez, former Kukdong worker.

“If I ever find out who directly hit my daughter I would be capable of killing him even if I risk my life, because it is not possible that things like this happen in our country and that (the workers) are suppressed with blows and by force for trying to defend their rights.”

– Anonymous parent in *Sintesis*, January 13, 2001.

“Things are back to normal, nothing happened here.”

– Kukdong staff member, responding to workers queries the morning after the eviction, in *Sintesis*, January 13, 2001.

Chronology of Events at Kukdong

1999

November 22 Kukdong International de Mexico S.A. de C.V. begins production.

December 19 The Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board of the State of Puebla (Labor Board) validates a bargaining contract between Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC) and Kukdong. Workers will not learn the content of the contract until after the work stoppage in January 2001. The CROC, the company and the Labor Board will later present different and conflicting versions about how Kukdong and the CROC entered into a collective bargaining relationship.

2000

May 8 At a company-organized event, workers are notified that the CROC is their union. Workers will henceforth be required and pressured to sign their affiliation to the CROC. Those who refuse will have the union dues taken from their paycheck anyway.

December 15 The vast majority of workers at Kukdong participate in a boycott of the cafeteria, which several allege was providing food that was rotting, raw or worm infested.

2001

January 3 Four supervisors and one worker are illegally fired from Kukdong, accused of being the leaders of the December 15 boycott. The fired leaders were known for their opposition to CROC.

January 8 Workers stage a two-hour work stoppage and demand the reinstatement of the fired leaders as well as the ousting of the CROC. They give the company 24 hours to comply with their demands.

January 9 After receiving no response from the company, at least 600 of the 850 workers of Kukdong occupy the yard of the Kukdong facility. During the occupation, workers repeatedly demand to negotiate conditions to return to work with the company. Instead, the company files charges against people they perceive as the leaders of the strike.

January 11 The local judge of Atlixco issues arrest warrants against five workers identified as leaders and one observer. In the testimony used as the basis for the warrants, the main witness reports being able to observe clearly the inside of the closed sewing facility from a distance of several blocks away while he allegedly ran from an angry mob of workers. In the factory, he claims, 600 workers including security personnel and managers are being held against their will by a crowd of 200 young women workers who were instigated into “euphoria” [sic] by a dozen individuals.

Later that evening, riot police surround the facility and charge the workers without ever ordering them to leave. According to witnesses, high-ranking CROC officials lead the raid and participate in the violence. Three workers are hospitalized, 14 are treated by the Red Cross for police-inflicted wounds, and neighbors of the factory report tending to several others. The Red Cross also reports that at least another 12 wounded remain in the facility, but that the riot police deny them access to treat these workers. Josefina Hernandez and Claudia Goiz, two strike leaders, are detained by the police without an arrest warrant. They will be threatened, questioned and released later that night.

January 13 The Local Conciliation Board of Atlixco brokers an agreement between Kukdong and a worker representative. The company commits to allowing all employees to go back to work without any retaliation or conditions.

- January 15** In violation of the January 13 agreement, Kukdong screens workers and does not allow many back. Three hundred workers gather in the town square of Atlixco to protest the events. An elected committee negotiates with the Labor Board agreements to give locked-out workers a small amount of severance. A few weeks later, they will be paid less than the amounts for which they settled. Many will then attempt to return to the factory.
- January 22** In the presence of a delegation of the Workers Rights Consortium for the Verification of Collegiate Codes of Conduct, several workers who had previously attempted to return are reinstated. After the departure of the delegation, however, harassment continues. Seventeen-year-old strike leader Ivan Díaz Xolo is allowed back to work, but given an office job, isolated from other employees and prohibited from entering the production facility unless escorted by two security guards.
- January 25** The WRC releases a preliminary report based on a visit to Atlixco. Among other things, the report finds substantial evidence that the right to freedom of association was and is continuing to be violated in Kukdong.
- January 31** Kukdong security and CROC officials continue to harass workers. In one of the most serious incidents, Dolores Diaz, a pregnant worker, is assaulted by security chief Alberto Sedano. As Ms. Diaz tries to return to work in the factory, Sedano and Jose Luis Ruiz, the CROC union representative at Kukdong, decide for Ms. Diaz that “she had come in to resign.” Sedano then pushes Diaz, and forcefully removes her from the factory.
- February 6** In the presence of Verité monitors, allegedly there to facilitate the return of workers, 70 returning workers are pressured to sign their loyalty to the CROC. They are told by company representatives that they would be contacted if they were readmitted. The company never contacts a single worker from this group.
- February 12** The workers who return without receiving any official notification are allowed back into the factory. As a response, CROC files notice of a strike, which is sent to the factory and the labor board. Nike will claim that this never happened, despite the existence of signed documents forwarded to Nike proving the contrary.
- February 19** Forty workers, among them Josefina Hernández and Marcela Muñoz (two of the leaders fired on January 3) return to the factory. For the first, and only time, Kukdong complies with the January 13 agreement to allow workers back in with no retaliation or conditions. After nearly a month of isolation, Ivan Díaz is allowed back to his position in the inspection department.
- February 28** International Labor Organization representative Guillermo Lopez Fisa arrives at the factory to give a training on the right to freedom of association. Workers are forced to attend amidst threats and yelling by CROC officials. Workers report that Mr. Lopez repeatedly endorses the CROC. When CROC opponents are given an opportunity to speak, they are interrupted and the PA system is shut down. Company security guards cheer the CROC.
- March 18** Workers hold a meeting to form a union and meet the legal requirements of Mexican labor law. The union will be called Sindicato de los Trabajadores de la Empresa Kukdong International de Mexico (SITEKIM).
- March 28** The company issues a public statement to the effect that all workers who participated in the work stoppage are being welcomed back unconditionally. The statement is sent internationally, but despite the company’s claims, no workers report ever hearing about it.

March 30

Kukdong begins attempts to take workers out of the bargaining unit by forcing line and team leaders to sign contracts as “confidential employees,” which prevent them from participating in unions. On the contrary, these employees pay union dues to the CROC. Later on, the Labor Board will use the presence of these employees to deny granting legal status to SITEKIM.

May 2

At least six SITEKIM members are offered money and are pressured to resign from the union by CROC representative Jose Luis Ruiz. One of the six workers later comes forward with this testimony. He reports that Alberto Alarcón Vélez and Israel Espinoza Corona, two of the CROC supporters who will assault Ivan Díaz Xolo later that month, received money from the CROC.

May 8

Kukdong Head of Security Alberto Sedano orders three workers strip searched after one reports losing her money. Two of the workers searched are sewing line supervisors known for their opposition to the CROC and their participation in the work stoppage. Both are members of SITEKIM. When one of the supervisors publicly denounces the incident, the company issues a written warning against her for “defaming the company.”

May 15

SITEKIM leader Ivan Díaz Xolo is assaulted on company property by three CROC supporters. According to eyewitnesses, Díaz never responds to the aggression. Nevertheless, Díaz and one of the assailants are suspended for three days with no pay. The other two aggressors will face no reprisal. Kukdong security observes the incident without intervening. A security employee will report that security chief Alberto Sedano suggested that if the assailants wanted to hit Díaz, he would protect them.

Later this month, the CROC will freely distribute a flyer in the factory requesting that workers throw boiling water on SITEKIM supporters. The flyer also attacks a Reebok human rights representative and members of United Students Against Sweatshops for their opposition to human rights violations at Kukdong.

June 5

After giving a day’s notice that never reaches the workers, representatives of the Labor Board arrive at Kukdong to verify that the 28 workers who filed for the legal recognition of SITEKIM were indeed members of SITEKIM. The Labor Board interprets the absence of three workers as a sign of their unwillingness to be a part of SITEKIM. The Labor Board uses the “confidential employee” contracts to disqualify SITEKIM members .

June 18

Based on the June 5 procedure, the Labor Board denies SITEKIM official recognition. The president of the Labor Board will speak to the press the following day and imply that workers were clearly being manipulated and even intimidated to participate in SITEKIM. The CROC will distribute this statement among workers.

June 26

SITEKIM leader Ivan Díaz Xolo is suspended for three days with no pay after leafletting during lunch hour. Previously, CROC supporters had leafletted during work hours with no repercussions.

July 19

In an announcement to the workers, Kukdong admits for the first time that there are two unions in the factory and that the company is going through a “major crisis. ” It states that the reason behind the lack of contracts in Kukdong is due to “rumors and false sayings on the Internet,” reaffirms its respect for the bargaining contract with the CROC union, and expresses that it will abide by Mexican law, ILO guidelines and Nike and Reebok codes of conduct in regards to freedom of association.