The Workers and Lear

Low wages "because it's a new company"

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The Lear Plant in Piedras Negras began operations in January of 2006. Ten months later it had more than 260 employees. Currently, the workers are assembling the rails that support the movement of automatic seats (for Mazda, among other brands), and installing the motors that move the seats. It seems the company is planning for this plant to also incorporate the welding of all the seat parts, the painting the rails, and the sewing of the seat covers.

To reduce costs, Lear has designed what they call, "Lear Flexible Seat Architecture", a front-seat system that allows the sharing of the same components and manufacturing processes between distinctive cars. This thus allows them to reduce costs.

And of course, Lear always wants to reduce labor costs. In Piedras Negras, one worker who began at Lear in July of 2006 with 30 other new workers noticed that by September only 10 of the 30 workers were still working with the company.

This is because an operator's weekly wage is more or less $500 pesos (a little more than $46 dollars) for a 50-hour work week, and this does not include mandatory overtime. Furthermore, the workers are only paid for "real time", which means that they are not paid for their breaks. "Real time" only accounts for 46.65 paid hours. Lear says the wages are low because the company is "new."

Collective bargaining agreement and union imposed by Lear

It seems the company is planning to employ more than 1,000 workers in the coming months. Lear is hiring applicants through the Mexican Confederation of Workers (CTM) in the city.

Lear agreed in advance with the CTM on a "protection contract," which means that the workers automatically become members of said union even before they are accepted for employment in Lear. Workers never had the opportunity to choose a union, to negotiate a contract, or to elect their union representative. In fact, the CTM imposed a "provisional" union delegate to the new hires.

Lear says it will increase wages after one year of operation in Piedras Negras. However, the workers do not trust that the conditions will change in January 2007, when the company has to "renegotiate" its contract with the corrupt leaders of the CTM. Many workers think they will resign in January if there are no real changes.

They can't even drink water

On top of low wages, some of Lear's practices violate The Mexican Federal Labor Law. For example, Lear took away the night-shift workers' 10 minute break because the supervisors were complaining that the workers were not returning to their lines on time.

Other workers have had their lunch time reduced; and the worst part is that the supervisors want the workers to return to their operations 3 minutes before the end of their break, under the threat that they will be given a written warning. In total, the company has taken away 19 minutes of break from the workers.

Nor does Lear allow workers to have drinking water near them so that they could quench their thirst while working and they are only permitted one water "break" during a 10-hour shift. The workers complain that they become very thirsty. Some workers have hidden water bottles under their clothing to drink in secret.

The work of the line workers is extremely heavy. There are workers that complain of back aches and pains, and they have asked to change operations, but both the union and the company say that they can only make changes based on medical instructions. However, it is known that no Social Security doctor will give a written medical excuse.

The workers say that apart from the supervisors and managers that can bother them for any little thing, the company guards give them orders as if they were police. If the workers do not obey them, they can also be written up.

Without a doubt, like other "world class companies" established in Mexico, the Lear Corporation has the means to offer its workers just wages and working conditions. The company has reported "sales growth from $160 million in 1983 to $17.1 billion in annual sales for 2005."

One year from the installation of its new plant in Piedras Negras, Lear is following a pattern of abuse and violation of labor rights of its workers.

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