

---

## Interview: Cecilia Soto González

---

# 'The maquiladora system is suicidal'

*Cecilia Soto González is a candidate from the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) for federal deputy from the third congressional district. Mrs. Soto was interviewed by Hugo López Ochoa in Sonora on July 29, about her experience working "under cover" at the Tetakawi maquiladora for a week.*

**EIR:** Tell me about the workers' fight for better wages and conditions at the Empalme *maquiladora*, for example, the fact that hundreds of workers surrounded the CTM leader's house and forced him to call a strike.

**Soto:** When I held my press conference after working for a week at the *maquiladora*, I reported that I hadn't seen mistreatment of the workers—at least, I didn't see people getting beaten, or anything like that. But then a tall young man who was at the press conference interrupted me and said, "I have seen that." He was Sergio Villa, the one who organized everything. He asked for a wage increase, and the company threw him out and sent him to jail. When his friends saw that he wasn't coming back, they left, one by one, and held a four-hour strike. The union had never acted. . . . The incredible thing was that they didn't even know whether what they were doing was really a strike. The work stoppage finally lasted 12 hours. The company didn't let him back into the plant, and told other workers to stay out. . . .

No one went to work, and they all went out to march—1,000 of them—to surround the house of the CTM leader, to demand that he call a strike. The labor leader, Juan Salas de la Paz, decided to do that, rather than lose his credibility. He had been the CTM leader in Empalme for three years; not only had he done nothing, but he looked the other way and allowed all sorts of irregularities. . . .

**EIR:** Why are they called the Tetakawi *maquiladoras*? Are there several of them?

**Soto:** Yes, they mainly belong to National Industries of Alabama. The other one is Wilson, a clothing *maquiladora*. Tetakawi is the Mexican firm which services the *maquiladoras*. One of them hires the workers, so the gringos won't have any labor problems. They hire for all the others. . . . It's

one company which offers one wage for all of Hermosillo's *maquiladoras*. . . .

**EIR:** How long did the strike last?

**Soto:** It lasted 10 days, but they stopped working every day for four hours. . . . Before the strike began, the company decided to increase wages "on their own initiative," so terrified were they that a precedent might be set, and not wanting to have to deal with the union. But the workers replied, "We won't accept this. . . . We want to have a union," so they went ahead, in order to get more benefits.

Incentives are so poor, that instead of improving production, they sabotage it. For example, if you have "perfect attendance," you don't arrive late, don't get sick, etc. for a month, they give you a 15,000 peso bonus for the month. The problem is that for women with children, it's hard not to miss work for a whole month. So the workers got the company to make this a weekly, rather than a monthly bonus. Moreover, the company increased the wage from 11,800 pesos daily to 18,000-19,000 pesos, although they demand more production in exchange for that.

**EIR:** What did you conclude from all this?

**Soto:** The important thing was that the union was revived. Within eight months, the workers can alter their contract when it comes up for renewal. Another important thing is that the company committed itself not to force workers to sign a resignation letter when they are hired, and they will also demand a birth certificate, so as not to hire under-aged workers. By the way, in a radio interview I did in Guaymas on this issue, I said I would send copies of the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Centesimus Annus* to the owner of Tetakawi, Luis Felipe Seldner Tonella, so that he can deal with his workers in a more Christian manner.

I also noticed that the president of the Hermosillo *maquiladoras*, Armando Lugo, told me in Guaymas that wages are low because there is no competition, and that there's not a wage problem, but it's just that the workers don't want to work. I said to myself, "They're dying of hunger and don't want to work? They must be Martians, so I'm going to look into this."

**EIR:** What else can you say about your work in the *maquiladora*?

**Soto:** I saw a real sense of dignity. There are many under-aged workers, working because they have to; but they don't let themselves be so worn down by accepting non-existent wage incentives. Sure, there's a certain cynicism that develops. But the point is that the *maquiladora* strategy is suicidal from the standpoint of real productivity. Where I worked, every day they hired 50 to 100 new workers; it was a revolving door. They all have job applications at three other places, to get out as soon as they can. You'll never achieve labor productivity that way.