

# WORKERS SOLIDARITY

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## One Million March for Choice in Washington DC!

Up to one million supporters of reproductive freedom marched on the U.S. capitol on April 5th. Observers noted that this was one of the largest demonstrations ever seen in the U.S.

Dozens of opportunistic politicians were on hand to urge the crowd to support their various candidacies, but the message we received was clear: one million people in the street **don't need** politicians! Reliance on the promises of politicians has allowed things to deteriorate to the point where the overturn of Roe vs. Wade will be an anti-climax. Anti-choice forces have already triumphed in various regions. Women are already dying from botched home abortions. Freedom cannot be gained at the ballot box. The reversal of the current drift toward slavery will require direct action.

The National Organization of Women, representing the political ambitions of the middle class, is lost in dreams of electoral success and third party politics. Like the labor leaders of the AFL-CIO, they dream of high office as the answer to all problems. And like the bureaucrats of the AFL-CIO, they are cursed with a conservative, hierarchical structure which can only operate within the political rubric of their enemies! They

aren't getting the answers they like because they are asking the wrong questions. The question shouldn't be: How can we stop the overturn of Roe vs. Wade? The question is: How can we allow a few old men to decide the fate of millions of women? **Why** should they have this power?

All the politicians in the world could never give women more power than they already have in their own heads and hands.

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## Autoworkers Meet in Mexico

Sixty autoworkers from the United States, Mexico, Canada and Brazil met over the weekend of November 15-17 in Oaxtapec, Mexico in a conference which may prove to be an historic watershed in the evolution of industrial unionism in the North American auto industry. The conference was sponsored by the Amsterdam-based Transnational Information Exchange (TIE) network and focused on two closely related subjects. One was the restructuring of the North American auto industry in light of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The other focus of the event was on flexibility, the reorganization of work and levels of automation in North America's auto industry.

Kim Moody of **Labor Notes** set the tone for the discussion of both subjects. According to him, "the idea of the North American Free Trade Agreement is to clear the field for the free flow of capital by extending deregulation to the entire continent". Moody also linked the drive for an extended Free Trade agreement to the reorganization of work (implementation of the Toyota System) in the auto industry. He argued that

the goal of the transnational auto corporations is to "set up an integrated management-by-stress production system that spans the whole continent".

In effect, this means autoworkers face the emergence of a system in which deregulation and "flexibility" both prevail on the shop floor and extend throughout a continental free trade zone. The goal of such an arrangement, if it is achieved, is to guarantee that North American automakers and other corporations can compete successfully in the global economy. In the process autoworkers will face unending pressure to produce more and accept less in return for what they produce. In other words, a "level playing field" will be established across the industry which will be constantly eroded downwards.

The goal of the conference was to bring Mexican, Canadian and U.S. autoworkers together to start a process of cooperation and solidarity designed to meet this challenge. To this end, most of the conference's deliberations involved having autoworkers from each of the countries, but with the same employer, meet in workshops

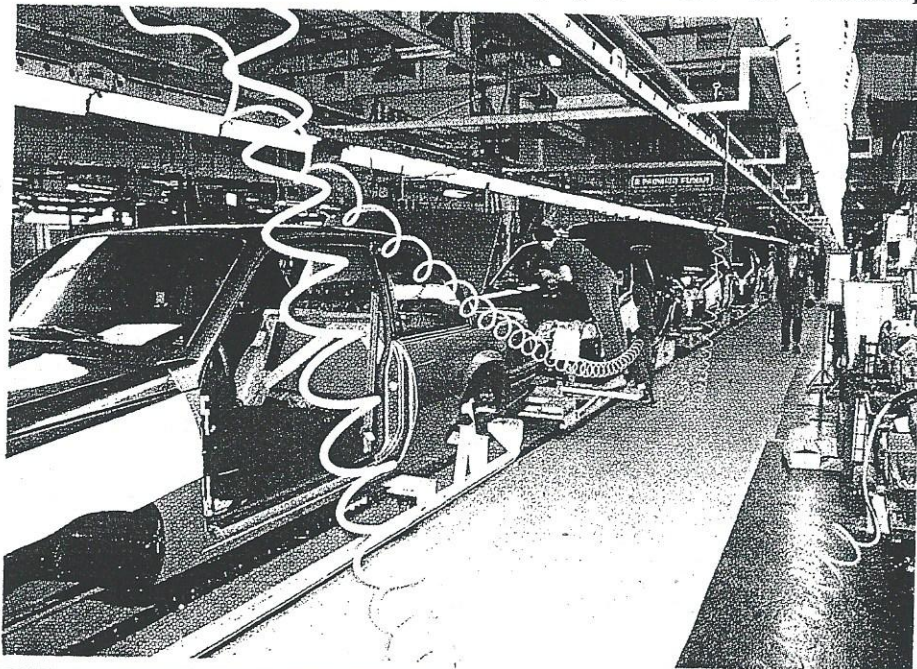
where we could share notes and begin the process of networking.

Notable among the workshops was one involving GM workers meeting to discuss GM's drive to achieve flexibility and work reorganization. The discussions revealed that variants of the Toyota production system have not been uniformly applied in any of the three countries. Furthermore, it became clear that the forms it has taken have also varied.

The latest adaptation is called "Synchronous Manufacturing". One of the first places it was implemented was a Delco Electronics plant in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Three women workers from that plant were present and they made it clear that they had no use for the Synchronous Manufacturing system. They declared that GM Management's commitment to "open communication" within a synchronous system is a lie. Notably, these workers stated that whenever one of the Quality Circles formed in their synchronous plant became troublesome for the boss he would shut it down.

Union leaders from two Mexican GM plants which are organized by legitimate, independent unions told the workshop that they found such information particularly useful because GM is currently trying to introduce the Toyota system in their workplaces. To the applause of the other GM workers present, one of them stated that he and his counterparts had just decided to block its introduction into their plants.

The latter part of the second day of the conference and the final day focused on "Perspectives and Proposals for Action in the 1990's". Initially, this portion of the conference accomplished little. Discussion centered on the desirability of coordinated information



sharing and having a directory of contacts, but no credible projects were agreed upon.

However, as the conference drew to a close specific proposals did emerge and were acted upon. One initiative was to make January 8th an international day of autoworkers solidarity. This would involve building upon the achievements of Ford Workers Justice Day, which was marked by Ford workers at plants in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Ford Workers Justice Day commemorated the anniversary of the January 8th, 1990 massacre of striking Mexican Ford workers by persons known to be in collusion with the Ford Motor Company.

A second initiative will involve holding a larger follow-up conference in Mexico in late 1992. This event will hopefully be held right in the Maquiladora Zone near the

U.S. border so that workers employed in the many auto plants there can take part. A six person coordinating committee composed of two Mexican, two Canadian and two U.S. autoworkers was set up to work on this.

The coordinating committee was also mandated to assume responsibility for initiating a third project. This consists of drafting an international autoworkers declaration of rights.

In retrospect, the mere fact that the TIE network managed to bring autoworkers from three countries together at this historic juncture made the conference a success. The fact that the event also raised the delegates' determination to close ranks in the face of continental free trade and the automakers' drive to implement the Toyota system simply added to the inherent value of the event.

The conference also led to the forging of an array of contacts and personal bonds between Mexican, Canadian and U.S. autoworkers. These are certain to add momentum to the broader efforts underway to unite workers from all three countries in opposition to what is a global corporate agenda.

The challenge which remains for both those of us who attended the conference, and those who were unable to attend yet also see the vital importance of such meetings, is to insure that this conference becomes a catalyst for even more ambitious actions. If this happens, there is every reason to believe that together we can effectively halt, and then reverse, the steady erosion of North American autoworkers collective power.

Bruce Allen

Canadian Auto Workers, Local 199

## Independent Farm Workers Union Expands Activity

The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), an independent union based primarily in Michigan and Ohio, has broadened its organizing efforts to include African-American farmers and farm workers in Mississippi and North Carolina.

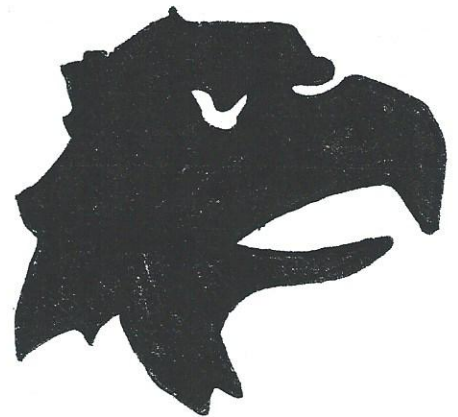
In July 1990, FLOC organizers went to Mississippi to meet with and organize workers and farmers who grow organic produce. Their efforts have centered on African-American farmers, most of which own their own land and use extended family labor to harvest production. In less than a year, 600 of the Mississippi farmers signed union cards with FLOC.

The primary strategic aim of the FLOC campaign has been to halt the corporate attempt to move cucumber production away from union organized areas. Cucumbers are a labor-intensive crop and the corporations are now trying to move production to North Carolina

and Mexico in search of lower wages.

FLOC has already organized cucumber pickers in Michigan and Ohio who work for the Vlasic Corporation. By extending their activities into the south they hope to bring southern workers wages up and cut-off the corporate attempts to keep those wages low. FLOC wants to go "everywhere they produce the crop to organize the farmers and the workers," says FLOC President Baldemar Velasquez.

In the south FLOC has established a working relationship with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, a group which during the 1960s civil rights movement organized sharecroppers and farm workers thrown off their land by plantation owners for attempting to register to vote. The Federation currently has 30,000 members in 11 states.



## Education Workers Network Forming

An initiative has been launched to form a national network of education workers. The idea is to link rank and file workers in all sectors of the education system (clerical-techs, maintenance and service workers, faculty and teaching assistants, etc.) to push for member control of existing unions and the creation of workers assemblies in unorganized workplaces.

The situation facing education workers is grim. A decade of public robbery by the New Right has created a crisis in public education. The business unions of the AFL-CIO are proving themselves as inept and irresponsible in dealing with this situation as the autoworkers and steelworkers unions have been when dealing

with a similar set of alternatives. The alternatives are: fight a militant and creative battle against cutbacks with a fully activated and empowered rank and file; or negotiate the particulars of your own destruction. The steelworkers and the autoworkers bureaucracies have chosen the latter, the purpose of the education workers network is to promote and agitate for the former.

In the private sector of the education system, restrictions on funding are also being felt in a period of general economic depression. Largely unorganized (especially at smaller schools) private sector education workers are being subjected to the same abuses as public sector workers, without

even the minimal protection of the conservative unions.

On March 1992 the first issue of **The General Assembly** education workers newsletter was published. A new issue will be appearing at approximately the same time as this issue of **WS**. The long-term goal of the network is to empower rank and file education workers through self-organization and direct democracy. We see the establishment of workers assemblies as the best way for this to occur.

### Education workers interested should write to:

The General Assembly c/o  
Workers Solidarity Alliance  
P.O. Box 40400  
San Francisco, CA 94140

## Clerical and Bank Workers Conference in San Francisco

On March 21st activists from the local labor community and representatives from clerical workers unions in Mexico and Japan met in San Francisco for the first International Clerical and Bank Workers Conference. Discussion included problems and organizing strategies in the clerical-technical field.

Approximately 50 people attended, a much lower turnout that organizers expected, which reflected two of the key problems facing organizers in the clerical-technical sector: first being a general mistrust of the idea of

union organization, and the second being the difficulty in reaching workers locked inside the isolated glass towers of the financial district. Of the 50 who attended the conference, less than a quarter were non-union office workers.

Despite the low turnout a lot of good contacts were made. Valuable presentations regarding office health hazards (VDTs and repetitive strain injury), the racist/nationalist roots of the "buy American" campaign, sexual harassment in the workplace, and labor-management cooperation scams, made the conference worth-

while.

Office Workers United and WSA distributed literature at the conference, and many of those in attendance signed up on the mailing list to receive more. Contacts were also established with sympathetic members of other labor organizations (NABET, CWA and the Newspaper Guild in particular), and there was much discussion of the need for rank and file control of the labor movement.

The sharpest and most interesting exchange of the conference took place when Chris Carlsson of the magazine *Processed World* gave his opinions of the conference and unions in general. Unfortunately, by refusing to distinguish between bureaucratic business unions and member-controlled formations, and by ignoring the need for basic improvements **now**, Carlsson lost the sympathy of most of his listeners. Carlsson worked as a clerical-temp briefly, and his magazine now only shows a

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limited interest in the condition of clerical-technical workers, choosing instead to focus on the "uselessness of office work". Such assertions, which are valid in only a limited abstract-futuristic sense, ignore the fact that currently office work is extremely important to the capitalist system, and is certainly important to the people who make their living in the clerical-technical field. If it is the goal of workplace organization to empower workers, telling them their jobs are useless is a pretty sorry way to do it.

As a syndicalist organization, Office Workers United also demands the elimination of useless tasks in the form of a shorter work week for the same pay. We are fighting for a society where work is transformed from Tayloristic drudgery into creative and fulfilling activity. But we also recognize the need for improved conditions and power **now**, and in that we probably have more in common with activists in other unions than we do with the anti-office work position of *Processed World*. A radical re-thinking of what we do and how we do it is

required, but demanding this before we have the organizational power to control the workplace is putting the wagon before the pony. The first thing we must demand is control. Once we have that we can change things to suit our needs.

The question of how to reach office workers in small offices in glass towers was unfortunately not discussed. Neither was the growing dependence on transitional workers (office temps) on the part of business. These two areas are where most private sector clerical-techs are employed.

## Ford Demands Mexican Autoworkers Cut Ties With U.S. and Canadian Workers

Workers at Ford's plant in Cuautitlan, Mexico have rejected a management demand that they stop efforts to build solidarity with autoworkers in the U.S. and Canada. The demand was made by company representatives, who said they were acting under orders from Ford headquarters in Michigan. Negotiations are currently underway at the plant to end a four-year-old conflict.

The negotiations were mediated by a representative of Mexican President Carlos Salinas, who told leaders of the militant Ford Workers Democratic Movement (FWDM) that the conflict was damaging the government's reputation outside the country.

The long struggle over contract violations, poor working conditions and the refusal to recognize the workers democratically elected representatives escalated in January 1990 when gun thugs killed one worker, Cleto Nigmo, and wounded nine others inside the plant.

The workers later obtained payroll records showing that Ford had hired the gunmen just two days before the attack. The hired guns admitted that they had been

recruited by the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the labor arm of Mexico's ruling political party.

About 800 of the most active FWDM supporters were fired in the weeks following the murder. Protests within Mexico and in the U.S. and Canada forced the government to let workers decide whether they wanted to switch from the CTM to another union federation. The CTM "won" the election when workers were required to vote out loud in front of company officials and hundreds of FWDM supporters were not allowed to vote at all.

Faced with the reality that the government would not order a new, fair election, FWDM decided to negotiate an orderly retreat. They obtained severance pay above the what Mexican law requires for those workers who were fired. They also received assurances that the company would not retaliate against the 1100 workers who voted against the CTM.

When the company and government negotiators demanded that the FWDM sever all contact with U.S. and Canadian workers before

any deals could be made, Cuautitlan workers compromised, agreeing that they would not ask their international allies to protest the terms of the settlement, but they reserved the right to call for international protests should the company or the government fail to keep up their end of the bargain.

To date, two government promises have not been kept. One was to bring to justice those who directed the armed attack on January 8th. A second was to provide government grants to set up new cooperative businesses that would create jobs for the fired workers.

The Ford Workers Democratic Movement has asked that supporters write letters demanding that those responsible for the murder of Cleto Nigmo be brought to justice.

### Letters should be sent to:

President Carlos Salinas Gotari  
Palacio Nacional, Mexico  
D.F., Mexico

### For more information on how to get involved with solidarity efforts, write:

Hector de la Cueva, CILAS, Dr.  
Liceaga 180 A-S Desp. 1001, Col.  
Doctores, Mexico, D.F., Mexico  
From *Labor Notes*

## Iranian Workers Imprisoned and Executed International Solidarity Needed

During the past 13 years of theocratic rule, the Islamic Republic of Iran has continually violated the rights of workers, continuing the tradition of oppression under the Shah. The Iranian regime has arrested, tortured and executed hundreds of labor activists. Last year the government passed a labor law which treats workers as little more than slaves. The right to strike or form independent unions has been

denied, and the regime has regularly suppressed strikes and protest actions. Most of the activists arrested and executed were taking part in strikes and demonstrations to protest their poor living and working conditions.

In April 1990 Jamal Cheragh-Vaissy, a utility worker, was executed. Jamal was a member of the Sanatgar union, which was subsequently crushed by the state. A short time later, Abdollah Seyvaseh, a bakery worker, was also executed by the regime. These workers were executed specifically because of their union activities.

Since the summer of 1991, the Iranian government has stepped up its persecution and arrest of worker activists in the city of Sanandaj in western Iran. The latest detainees include two workers, Saeed Saedi and Zahed Manouchehri. Saed is a welder and

he has been an activist in the Sanatgar union. Zahed is a garment worker and has been active in the Tailors Union. According to a report obtained in late December 1991, the detained workers are being held incommunicado, with no information being released about their condition.

The lives of these workers are being threatened and they need international support. Workers organizations from around the world are being asked to write protest letters to the Islamic Republic of Iran and send them to your local Iranian embassy or consulate. Resolution of support is also being asked of local and branch unions about the previously mentioned executions, and also to demand the release of Saeed Saedi and Zahed Manouchehri. To the workers of the world: Your urgent support and solidarity is needed!

### Submissions:

Your artwork, letters, articles and news items are needed. Submissions on floppy disc (DOS or Mac) are encouraged. Please enclose a SASE if you would like your submission returned if we can't use it.

## I.W.A. Conference of Healthcare Workers

On January 25th and 26th, 1992 the first IWA Conference of Healthcare Workers took place in Milan, Italy. The conference was organized by the Milan local of the USI (Unione Sindicale de Italia) the Italian Section of the IWA. The IWA Secretariat also participated in the organization of the event. Delegates from Spain, France, Norway, Germany, Switzerland and of course Italy took part. Two delegates from an independent healthcare workers union in Mongolia also attended the conference. Delegations from Russia and the Ukraine were unable to attend due to visa problems partly, and partly due to a strike among healthcare workers in Russia.

During the two days of the conference delegates exchanged information on the healthcare

sectors in their various countries, highlighting special problems faced by each region as well as common concerns. The main purpose of the conference was to compare international development and share experiences, including tactical ideas for winning the union struggle for better conditions as well as creating a more humane healthcare system. On invitation from one of the delegates from the Spanish CNT, the delegates from Mongolia went to Spain where they met with CNT healthcare workers in Valencia and Barcelona, as well as the CNT National Committee.

The exchange with the two comrades from Mongolia was of special interest, as they had just finished their first strike in Ulan

Bator only a few weeks before the conference. This had been a spontaneous strike which lasted one week, being totally managed by the workers themselves, with the participation of nearly 1000. The delegates from Mongolia were impressed to learn that there exists an international movement which embraces the same ideas that had come to them spontaneously.

It was decided at the conference that permanent contact and information exchange would be maintained among IWA healthcare workers in the various sections. Another international conference is planned in about one year.

### For more information contact:

CNT-AIT, Sindicato de Sanidad, Plaza Duque de Medinaceli, 6-pral 1, E-08002 Barcelona, SPAIN

## In China, Crackdown Continues on Independent Unions

China has renewed its crackdown on independent labor organizations, two and a half years after the Workers Autonomous Federation played a key role in the Democracy movement of 1989. In December of 1991, China's Ministry of State Security targeted 14 underground labor groups in Beijing, each with a membership of between 20 and 300 workers, this according to sources quoted in the

Hong Kong press. Of the workers groups, two are modeled on the Polish "Solidarity" union, the sources said.

The groups are believed to have been involved in several strikes in Beijing during 1991. A source close to the labor movement said agents from the State Security agencies may have infiltrated some of these underground unions.

Chinese authorities have also stepped up their control over the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), the state union body, by removing "disloyal" cadres, according to the same sources. This move is in line with ACFTU policy since early 1990 of only promoting what it calls "trustworthy Marxists" to responsible positions, the sources said.

**From Asian Labor Update**

## Bike Messengers Form Anarchist Labor Organization

Bike messengers are a regular fixture of the San Francisco financial district. Maybe "fixture" is the wrong term since most of the time they can be seen flying through traffic full-blast. It's dangerous work, and I've been unfortunate enough to have seen some pretty bad accidents (cars versus bikes).

Messengers are usually employed on a piecework/commission basis, meaning the more deliveries they make the more money they get. This naturally puts pressure on people to go like hell and toss normal traffic safety out the window. Dodging cars, dancing with buses and swerving at just the last minute seem to be integral parts of the job.

The idea of a bike messenger's organization has been kicking around this town for at least as long as I have. One of the messenger shops in town (Express Messenger) does have a union, the Teamsters. But most messengers seem to be an individualistic lot and the union idea doesn't seem to appeal to them. The traditional trade union structure does not meet their needs.

So, the San Francisco Bike Messengers Association was created to try and meet those needs. SFBMA is referred to by its

members as an anarchist labor organization. The unofficial publication of SFBMA is **Mercury Rising**, a newsletter for and by messengers. **MR** covers the messenger industry with articles on particularly foul employers, news on bike thefts and other items. Industry trends are also covered, as well as a wealth of other social and cultural material.

SFBMA is committed to taking a creative approach to labor organizing, a basic requirement in an industry like they're involved

with. Dangerous working conditions and low pay make for a highly unstable workforce. There's a lot of turnover in the messenger trade. The way the work is organized also tends to breed competition and individualism at the expense of solidarity.

For an in depth interview with members of SFBMA, see the next issue of *Processed World*.

**For a copy of Mercury Rising send a dollar to:**

Mercury Rising, 564 Mission St.  
#152, San Francisco, CA 94105



## Workers Solidarity Alliance

WSA is an Anarcho-Syndicalist organization with groups and contacts in all regions of the United States. We seek to build working class organizations based on the principles of direct democracy and direct action, both in the workplace and in the community. We place ourselves in opposition to the bureaucratic, authoritarian structures which have come to dominate our society and our daily lives. We seek to build living organizational forms

which are completely under the control of working people.

WSA activists are involved in a wide variety of projects (see contact list below) involving workplace organizing, inter-national solidarity, and addressing specific social concerns that effect us all as working people. If you are interested in joining with us in these efforts or would like more information, contact this newsletter or the WSA group nearest you.

### WSA Working Groups:

#### Eastern European Solidarity Working Group

c/o NY Area WSA  
339 Lafayette St. Rm 202  
New York, NY 10012

#### Latin American Solidarity Working Group

c/o WSA  
PO Box 1197  
San Antonio, TX 78294

#### Working Group on Sexism and Feminism-Mujeres Libres

c/o WSA  
347 W. Suttentfield St.  
Fort Wayne, IN 46807-1339

### WSA Industrial Contacts:

#### Education Workers

Network Project  
c/o SF Bay Area WSA  
PO Box 40400  
San Francisco, CA 94140  
(415) 241-1341

#### Office Workers United

c/o SF Bay Area WSA  
PO Box 40400  
San Francisco, CA 94140

#### Public Sector Industrial Network

c/o NY Area WSA Group  
339 Lafayette St. Rm 202  
New York, NY 10012

### National Office:

c/o PO Box 11386  
Knoxville, TN 37939-1838

### International Secretary:

c/o WSA NY Group  
339 Lafayette St. #202  
New York, NY 10012

### Local Contacts:

#### Alabama:

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PO Box 1153  
Russellville, AL 35653sdf

#### California:

WSA Bay Area Group  
PO Box 40400  
San Francisco, CA 94140

#### Indiana:

WSA c/o  
347 W. Suttentfield St.  
Fort Wayne, IN 46807-1339

#### Iowa:

Jake Edwards  
RR1  
Linn Grove, IA 51033

#### Maryland:

WSA  
PO Box 33528  
Baltimore, MD 21218

#### Massachusetts:

PO Box 1753  
Cambridge, MA 02238

#### New York:

WSA New York Area Group  
339 Lafayette St. Rm 202  
New York, NY 10012  
(212) 979-8353

#### Tennessee:

WSA East Tennessee  
c/o PO Box 11838  
Knoxville, TN 37939-1838

#### Texas:

WSA  
c/o PO Box 1197  
San Antonio, TX 78294

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