

## Transcribed Excerpt from Mario Ruiz Ronquillo Interview about Mexican Immigration and Workplace Culture in the Midwest, December 4, 2015 (53:58-1:00:35)

[53:58]

**John W. McKerley:** How did you go from being a steward there in Beardstown... because the way that I knew you – initially met you – you were working for the union out of Davenport. How did you go from being a steward in Beardstown to moving up the ladder?

**Mario Ruiz Ronquillo:** ... Seven years later, we were in the negotiations committee for the contract and (Jerry Messer, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 431) came down and asked me again (to join the union office in Davenport). 2005, 2006, somewhere in there. And I told him again, I'm almost there. By this time, I was divorced, I lived alone but I told him, look, give me a couple of years. I think I am getting very close, but I need at least two years. Within these two years, I need education and that is what I am asking you for. And he said ok. So, he sent me to a labor college and other organizing drives and stuff like that so I can learn how actually a union is formed. I attended labor college twice in Baltimore, Maryland. I went to some organizing drives in Sioux City, Omaha and West Liberty, Iowa.

JM: When you say labor college, do you mean the labor college in Maryland?

MRR: Yes.

JM: Ok, interesting. Did you get certifications for that experience?

MRR: You get a certificate from the labor college.

JM: So no degrees, but a certification.

MRR: It's just a short course, that's what they call it. I think it's a week or two weeks from the time they send you.

JM: It sounds like you had moved on from being a department steward to doing negotiations as well.

MRR: Yes. I was on the negotiations committee twice for an Excel-Cargill contract.

JM: Let me quickly ask you about that. What were the years then that you were on the negotiations?

MRR: I believe it was the 2004 negotiations and 2007. Cause right after that was when I left.

JM: What were the main issues that locally people wanted to get taken care of?

MRR: You know, every negotiations is about money. I know we had one issue where one time where the insurance, the coverage wasn't as good, so we wanted to move it to a better coverage. All the other is about money. We want money. Especially at those times where they just cut their wages in half so the American worker wanted more money. And we advanced pretty quick.

JM: So is the sense that this is sort of dirty and dangerous work, and the main thing that most workers want is more money for doing that work.

MRR: Yes, more money. Cause they know the work is steady. You're going to get 40 hours a week. So they want those 40 hours to be well paid. And if there is a little overtime, the more the merrier.

JM: So issues that you would often hear about like breaks or line speed or safety, these are mostly secondary issues?

MRR: You know, I was in the safety committee for the union and that plan, and we did a lot of observations and talked to people and addressed the issues with the company, so we were involved. And we made sure to let the members know that let's be safe, because as you have family, I have family. He's got family. If you have a problem with somebody, let somebody know. Let's take care of each other.

*[1:00:35]*