Female labor struggle in the textile industry: the case of 'La Corona' workers, Puebla, 1900–1910

Denisse Muñoz Asseff[1]

Abstract

This article analyzes the experience of the female workers of the La Corona factory in Puebla during the first decade of the 20th century, with particular attention to the 1912 strike. The central objective is to demonstrate that the history of Puebla's women workers cannot be understood in isolation, but rather as part of a global process of female inclusion in the working class. From this perspective, it highlights that woman not only participated in factory dynamics but also became decisive agents in the transformation of labor and social relations. The research is framed within social and labor history, using a qualitative and documentary approach. The analysis was based on primary sources located in the National General Archive, specifically within the Labor Department Collection, which made it possible to recover testimonies and records documenting wage demands, labor conflicts, and complaints regarding the inequalities faced by women. Techniques of documentary criticism and triangulation with recent historiographical studies enabled the reconstruction of the context in which the protest emerged and situated female agency within the workers' struggles of the period. The findings show that, although the La Corona strike did not immediately achieve improvements, it marked a turning point in making women's demands visible. Female workers, defying employer paternalism and gender expectations, collectively voiced claims about wages, working hours, and workplace mistreatment.

Palabras clave:

Gender, Hosiery Industry, Union Organization, Strikes, Labor History.

1. Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México, México.
carmencarmenmunoz@hotmail.com / https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2897-7334

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Luta operária feminina na indústria têxtil: o caso das trabalhadoras da “La Corona”, Puebla, 1900–1910

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a experiência das trabalhadoras da fábrica La Corona em Puebla durante a primeira década do século XX, com atenção especial à greve de 1912. O objetivo central é demonstrar que a história das operárias poblanas não pode ser compreendida de forma isolada, mas como parte de um processo global de inclusão feminina na classe trabalhadora. Sob essa perspectiva, destaca-se que as mulheres não apenas participaram das dinâmicas fabris, mas também se constituíram em agentes decisivas na transformação das relações laborais e sociais. A pesquisa se insere no campo da história social e do trabalho, utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa e documental. A análise baseou-se em fontes primárias localizadas no Arquivo Geral da Nação, especificamente na Coleção do Departamento do Trabalho, o que permitiu recuperar depoimentos e documentos que registram demandas salariais, conflitos entre trabalhadores e patrões, bem como denúncias sobre as condições de desigualdade enfrentadas pelas mulheres. Técnicas de crítica documental e triangulação com estudos historiográficos recentes possibilitaram reconstruir o contexto em que surgiu a protesto e situar a agência feminina dentro das lutas operárias do período. Os resultados mostram que, embora a greve de La Corona não tenha conquistado melhorias imediatas, representou um marco na visibilização das demandas femininas. As trabalhadoras, desafiando o paternalismo patronal e as expectativas de gênero, expressaram coletivamente reivindicações sobre salários, jornada de trabalho e maus-tratos laborais.

Palavras-chave: Gênero, Indústria de Meias, Organização Sindical, Greves, História do Trabalho.

Lucha Obrera Femenina en la Industria Textil: El Caso de las Trabajadoras de “La Corona”, Puebla, 1900-1910

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la experiencia de las trabajadoras de la fábrica La Corona en Puebla durante la primera década del siglo XX, con especial atención a la huelga de 1912. El objetivo central es demostrar que la historia de las obreras poblanas no puede entenderse de manera aislada, sino como parte de un proceso global de inclusión femenina en la clase trabajadora. A través de esta perspectiva, se destaca que las mujeres no solo participaron en las dinámicas fabriles, sino que se constituyeron en agentes decisivas en la transformación de las relaciones laborales y sociales. La investigación se enmarca en la historia social y del trabajo, bajo un enfoque cualitativo y documental. El análisis se sustentó en fuentes primarias localizadas en el Archivo General de la Nación, específicamente en el Fondo Departamento del Trabajo, lo que permitió recuperar testimonios y expedientes que registran tanto demandas salariales y conflictos obrero-patronales como denuncias sobre las condiciones de desigualdad que enfrentaban las mujeres. Las técnicas de crítica documental y la triangulación con estudios historiográficos recientes posibilitaron reconstruir el contexto en el que emergió la protesta y situar la agencia femenina dentro de las luchas obreras del periodo. Los resultados muestran que, aunque la huelga de La Corona no logró conquistar mejoras inmediatas, sí constituyó un parteaguas en la visibilización de las demandas femeninas. Las trabajadoras, desafiando el paternalismo patronal y las expectativas de género, expresaron de manera colectiva reclamos sobre salarios, horarios y maltrato laboral.

Keywords: Género, Industria Bonetera, organización sindical; huelgas; historia obrera.

Introduction

This article aims to demonstrate that the history of female workers in Puebla cannot be understood in isolation; rather, it must be viewed as part of a global process of female integration into the working class. In this process, women were not merely participants but decisive agents in the transformation of labor and social relations.

The 'La Corona' factory, in particular, serves as an emblematic case study. In this setting, women not only confronted exploitative conditions—such as grueling workdays, diminished wages, and a lack of labor protections—but were also compelled to fight for recognition within a working class historically conceptualized in masculine terms. The experience of these workers constitutes a fundamental chapter in understanding how women were not passive recipients of industrial capitalism's impositions, but active agents in the construction of collective identities and the transformation of their own reality. Studies such as Muñoz (2020) on hosiery workers in Puebla demonstrate that, within this context, women successfully articulated forms of protest and negotiation that challenged both employers and male hegemony within trade unionism.

William O. Jenkins: Arrival in Puebla and Influence on the Regional Economy.

William O. Jenkins was born on May 18, 1878, in Shelbyville, Tennessee, into a farming family. He arrived in Mexico in 1901, working as a wage laborer for four years in the northern part of the country. By 1905, he relocated to Puebla, bringing with him 13,000 pesos in savings. By 1939, at the age of 61, he had resided in his native country for only 23 years, compared to 38 years in Mexico (Bonilla, 2004).

During his early years in Puebla, between 1905 and 1910, Jenkins sought to integrate into local society by forging ties with regional entrepreneurs, which granted him visibility and eventually a role as a diplomatic representative for the United States in the city. Another source of his wealth accumulation was his activity as a money lender. In a letter addressed to Jack M. Stanford, Jenkins recounted the beginnings of the La Corona hosiery mill:

> In Puebla, I established a small textile factory for the manufacture of inexpensive cotton hosiery. Since I brought in an automatic knitting machine—and at that time only manual machines existed in the country—I was able to expand the factory's capacity. I added a spinning mill and established other factories in Mexico City and Querétaro; by 1910, I practically controlled the economy hosiery market throughout the entire country. The great Mexican Revolution did not seriously affect life or business in my section of the country until 1913, allowing me to operate with substantial profits (Bonilla, 2004).

Jenkins' success, however, was not confined to the textile sector. He also consolidated his presence in sugar production, secured a monopoly over the film industry, and ventured into banking. His figure gained further notoriety following his high-profile kidnapping in 1919, an episode that triggered diplomatic tensions and the risk of a U.S. armed intervention in Mexico. These elements established Jenkins as one of the most influential figures with the greatest economic and political power in Puebla during the first half of the 20th century (Bonilla, 2004).

Regarding La Corona, the hosiery mill became the largest in the city since its founding in 1905. It employed between 200 and 300 young women in hosiery production, while a smaller number of men were responsible for the spinning process. The factory was located on the grounds of Rancho Toledo, covering an area of 8,184 square meters. It was bordered to the north by four city blocks, to the south by the remainder of the ranch, to the west by the road to the La Piedad cemetery, and to the east by 3 Sur Street—a space that would later become part of 21 Poniente Avenue (Bonilla, 2004).

The Strike at the "La Corona" Factory in Puebla, 1912.

It was at the La Corona factory where female workers engaged in a direct confrontation with Jenkins by going on strike in 1912. The conflict originated when the men, members of the local labor union (Unión de Obreros), initiated a strike in late March of that year, demanding that Jenkins implement a ten-hour workday. Approximately twelve to fifteen women from the ironing department joined this movement. Fearing that the strike would spread to the rest of the female workforce, Jenkins decided to dismiss the strikers.

The situation at La Corona reached the attention of the federal government, which, through Antonio Ramos Pedrueza, director of the Labor Department, attempted to mediate the conflict. The correspondence between Jenkins and Ramos Pedrueza reflects the entrepreneur's perspective on female participation in the protest:

> For a long time, the officers of the Unión de Obreros have sought to interfere in this factory because they know that the women earn a fair amount; now, with the concessions they have obtained through you and your

> department, they have deceived some of the girls in this factory, making them believe they are discontented. There are three of these girls who claim to be dissatisfied with the forewoman's treatment, and indeed, yesterday they lodged a complaint against her.
> I tried to persuade them to continue working while I could investigate whether they were right or not; however, supported by the advice of the [male] workers, they refused to stay and left. Those who walked out number about twelve or fifteen, all assistants in the ironing department. I wish to reiterate to you that these girls have no genuine grievance; they are merely being deceived by the men (General Archive of the Nation [AGN], 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 4a).

These words revealed a dual discourse regarding women. On the one hand, they were considered incapable—due to their perceived feminine nature—of generating conflict or intervening in political discussions without male influence. Yet, at the same time, they were not perceived as harmless, a fact evidenced by Jenkins' refusal to reinstate the striking workers, whom he viewed as a threat. In his explanation of the problem, which he termed "a matter of such minor importance for your government," Jenkins added:

> ...several years ago, I established a hosiery factory in this city, very small at first, but which I have gradually expanded until today I possess a fairly good factory, employing two hundred to three hundred female operators. As you already know, I added a yarn mill with male workers to this hosiery factory; however, for reasons already explained to you in previous letters, I wish to replace the men with women. You, better than anyone, know the difficulties we face with the male operators of the cotton mills in this district (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 4a).

The intention to substitute male workers with women was driven by a desire to eradicate the root of labor conflicts in the state. While male workers were members of various trade union associations, Jenkins operated under the assumption that, without their influence, women would remain docile and submissive.

Within this context, female workers were perceived as incapable of demanding civic rights; they were labeled as "weak" and lacking the autonomy to intervene in political affairs, held in a status nearly equivalent to that of minors. This is reflected in the paternalistic manner in which Jenkins referred to them as "my girls," which also suggests that many of the hired workers were very young. The preference for employing women was not only a response to this imaginary but also to a clear economic interest: female wages were considerably lower than those of men. Thus, hiring women served as a cost-cutting measure through the utilization of cheap labor.

As Joan Scott points out, this wage gap stemmed from the expectation that daughters would work and contribute to household expenses only until marriage. Their labor status was conceived as transitory rather than a lasting identity (Scott, 1998). Furthermore, employers preferred hiring single women, whom they considered more compliant, free from a husband's influence, and unburdened by the responsibilities of childcare.

The incorporation of women into factory labor also represented cost savings for employers. In the words of Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto:

> "The less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labor, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed [...] the more is the labor of men superseded by that of women and children" (Scott, 1998).

In the case of the La Corona strike, the discontent originated from the demand to reduce the workday to ten hours. Although the female workers arrived at nine in the morning and left at seven in the evening, Jenkins contended that they did not have fixed schedules because they worked on a piecework basis: the more pieces they produced, the more they earned. However, this justification was contradictory; he simultaneously asserted that they followed a 9-to-7 schedule, which implies a workday exceeding ten hours.

The reduction of the workday was not consolidated until 1914, when the Department of Labor consulted the nation's industrialists regarding the possibility of decreasing it from ten hours to nine. Jenkins' response was categorical:

> I take the liberty of telling you that I do not agree with the 9-hour workday for the following reason: the La Corona spinning mill is small and its production is contracted to several hosiery factories—or rather, we have a contract to deliver a certain amount of yarn to said factories. By working nine hours, it is impossible to complete that amount. By granting permission to the workers who spin more, paying overtime, etc., we have been able to comply while working 10 hours. But now, not only do the workers refuse to work more than nine hours, they also work very poorly; they have no interest in maintaining good production and, in short, have lost all interest in the factory. They do not wish to earn much because, as I understand it, they expect to receive a large salary increase and want their current wages to appear meager.

> For my part, I prefer to work eight hours rather than nine, as that allows me to set three shifts of operators at eight hours each, but this division does not work well with nine hours. According to the rates and regulations agreed upon on July 31, 1912, I have noted better work and interest in the factories than ever before; I do not believe that 10 hours of work are a detriment to the workers.
>
> It is possible that with fewer hours this interest might increase, but I repeat that since the nine-hour day was established here in Puebla, I have noticed a complete lack of interest in the work and the payroll; many do not come to work and, in short, the factory's operations have nearly paralyzed (AGN, 1914 a, Labor Dept., box 89, exp. 11, f. 5-6a).

These statements demonstrate that Jenkins never accepted the reduction of the workday, neither in 1912 nor in 1914. Furthermore, he insisted that the "discontented girls," led by the male labor leader, numbered only about fifteen, thus minimizing their significance. Nevertheless, this was untrue, as the remaining 200 female workers clarified that said leader lacked the authority to represent them:

> Everyone here knows that the girls in this factory are better treated and earn more than anywhere else in the Republic; and to tell you that the same girls who began working with me years ago are still with me, and that my gate is crowded every Monday with girls wanting to be apprentices, you can judge that what I am telling you has some basis in truth." (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 5a).

It cannot be denied that, due to precarious economic conditions and the limited supply of female employment, many women were forced to accept poorly remunerated jobs under difficult conditions. In this context, La Corona represented a viable means of subsistence for them and their families.

The long-term tenure of these workers also responded to the scarcity of opportunities in other sectors, as well as the limited possibilities for promotion within the factory, given that technical and maintenance positions were reserved for men.

The 1912 strike concluded with the dismissal of the striking workers—an event Jenkins attempted to downplay by attributing it to the poor economic climate and political unrest. However, in a letter to Jack M. Stanford, he admitted: "The great Mexican Revolution did not seriously affect life or business in my section of the country until 1913, and I was able to work with great profits" (Bonilla, 2004).

From this, it can be inferred that, far from suffering losses, La Corona yielded considerable profits during 1912. Therefore, the dismissal of the female workers was not due to economic hardship, but rather to the entrepreneur's fear of female organization and their capacity for resistance.

The 1912 strike at La Corona cannot be understood in isolation; rather, it must be viewed as part of a broader process of female organization within the textile industry on an international scale. Throughout the first decades of the 20th century, female workers faced similar conditions of exploitation: grueling workdays, low wages, and a lack of political and union recognition. In this sense, the case in Puebla is linked to contemporary experiences in other geographies, where female laborers began to challenge both employer structures and the social representations that reduced them to passive subjects or dependents of men.

In Mexico, a direct antecedent is found in the Río Blanco strike in Veracruz (1907), where women played a central role in the mobilization—supporting work stoppages, sheltering strikers, and even confronting military repression. These workers demanded not only better living and working conditions but also visibility within the public sphere, questioning their exclusion from the political and trade union worlds (Muñoz, 2020). As occurred in Puebla, their participation was systematically downplayed by the press and employers, who insisted on labeling them as "docile" or "deceived" by men.

A similar phenomenon occurred in the United States, particularly during the Little Falls textile strike in New York in 1912. There, immigrant women played a fundamental role in organizing the strike, facing both employers and the police. Much like in Puebla, the management sought to discredit them by arguing they were manipulated by union leaders, aiming to undermine the legitimacy of their demands. The coincidence of dates and contexts reveals the existence of a transnational female labor movement that was beginning to forge its own forms of struggle.

In the Southern United States, studies on female textile workers highlight that between 1900 and 1930, women not only represented an essential part of the factory workforce but also organized into unions and mobilizations, despite resistance from employers and discrimination within labor organizations themselves. These struggles demonstrate that female incorporation into industrial labor did not merely signify "cheap labor," as employers claimed, but rather the emergence of a new political subject contesting spaces of power in the workplace.

Thus, the La Corona strike is part of a broader genealogy of female textile struggles that, from Veracruz to New York, exhibit the same pattern: the devaluation of female laborers as full workers, the attempts by employers to minimize their

collective action, and, simultaneously, the emergence of these women as protagonists in the configuration of the working class. Consequently, the 1912 conflict in Puebla did not only mark a local milestone but is part of a global process of female inclusion in trade unionism and labor history.

The 1913 Hosiery Convention: Problems and Deficiencies in the Knitting Industry.

In mid-February 1913, following the assassination of President Francisco I. Madero and Vice President Pino Suárez, Victoriano Huerta seized power. In Puebla, many Maderistas, such as Governor Juan B. Carrasco, opted to collaborate with the Huerta government, which also received support from pro-Porfirian groups.

In what could be considered a maneuver to appease Maderistas and pacify the state, Huerta allowed Carrasco's administration to continue. This decision, combined with the initial weakness of the anti-Huerta movement, maintained relative calm during the early months of 1913. However, as the struggle against Huerta gained momentum with reinforcements from Venustiano Carranza and Emiliano Zapata's forces, the civil war intensified in the state by mid-1913 (Gómez, 1989).

Huerta sought not only to continue Madero's labor policies regarding the textile sector but also attempted to rectify their inherent flaws. Consequently, he submitted a bill to Congress to reform the Law of December 18, 1912, aiming to compel employers to adhere to the labor regulations approved in the 1912 Textile Convention. This initiative sought to legislate labor matters covering: "working hours, industrial accidents, professional unions, savings funds, insurance, relief funds, affordable housing, factory hygiene and safety, and the protection of women and children" (Gómez, 1989).

These measures, though never fully implemented—perhaps due to the brevity of the regime—have led several authors to suggest that Huerta's labor policy was more progressive than even that of the Constitutionalists. It remains unclear whether this responded to a comprehensive political ideology or merely to Huerta's political expediency in seeking labor movement support to prolong his rule. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Huerta's policy exceeded Madero's in both scope and depth. Generally, the years of the Huerta government saw a decline in labor movement activity. Esperanza Tuñón notes that between February 1913 and June 1914, 25 strikes were recorded, in which textile workers remained the most prominent participants (Gómez, 1989).

Despite the limited impact of previous activism, hosiery workers continued their strikes, presenting demands throughout 1912 and 1913. Many of these strikes were responses to lockouts imposed by employers. Owners justified these temporary closures by citing difficulties in obtaining raw materials due to the Revolution; they also sought to avoid paying workers for goods that were accumulating in warehouses, allegedly due to disruptions in the transport system.

In early 1913, hosiery workers belonging to the Sociedad Mutualista y Modernizadora in the State of Mexico filed complaints with the Department of Labor. In July of that year, more than two hundred workers from the El Carmen factory denounced their working conditions to the press and brought their case before the Department of Labor. Workers from the El Cisne and María factories showed solidarity with them, but the complainants were unsuccessful. José Abdó, the owner of El Carmen, refused to raise wages, and the workers refused to return to work for such a meager pittance. When the owner of El Carmen locked the workers out, the María and El Cisne factories offered to relocate them.

Although the workers of El Carmen lost their jobs, the pressure they exerted on the industry at large prompted hosiery industrialists to express interest to the Department of Labor in convening a convention similar to the one held by textile manufacturers the previous year, with the aim of establishing a minimum wage (Muñoz, 2020). This resulted in the Department of Labor issuing a formal call to the hosiery factories:

> Following the outcome of the 1912 Convention, in which representatives of the cotton branch factories adopted a unified wage tariff that now governs most manufacturing establishments—implemented without significant obstacles and yielding, on the contrary, notable benefits for the prompt settlement of disputes arising between owners and workers.
>
> This outcome, coupled with the frequent conflicts that have so often arisen in hosiery workshops—due to the fact that these businesses, in order to sustain competition among themselves, resort to the tactic of lowering their female operators' wages—has encouraged this Department to convene, in accordance with the initiative of four of the principal manufacturers and two others from this capital, all manufacturers in the Republic to a Convention to be held in Mexico City. The purpose shall be to study and discuss the feasibility of establishing a uniform minimum wage tariff and labor regulations, as well as to determine any other points that may be proposed for the benefit of both capitalists and workers (AGN, 1913, Department of Labor, box 47, file 24, f 1-2 a).

This reflects the aspiration to determine the feasibility of a uniform wage tariff for all hosiery industries nationwide. This goal assumed that the 1912 Convention had been a success—an assumption that, as shown in the previous section, was far from the truth. It should be noted that this convention was viewed as necessary primarily due to the activism of

female workers, who were by then openly fighting for their labor rights. Consequently, the Department of Labor convened a preliminary meeting for hosiery industrialists, held in Mexico City at the Department's offices on 2nd Tacuba Street on August 12, 1913. The purpose was to establish the conditions and date for the convention, providing a forum where all attendees could freely present their individual ideas, projects, observations, and advice to harmonize the interests of industrialists and workers:

> ...and to remove all obstacles that might, in the future, oppose the harmony between both parties. Given your upright and enlightened judgment, your legitimate desire for the progress of the business you lead—so closely linked to the welfare of the working class that serves within it—and your general longing for the Republic's progress, I venture to hope that on this occasion, as always, the government may count on your valuable assistance in this endeavor for peace and justice; I trust, therefore, that you will deign to attend the aforementioned meeting or designate a duly authorized representative." (AGN, 1913, Department of Labor, box 47, file 24, f 1-2 a).

The call for the convention revealed a profound lack of understanding regarding the hosiery industry; by inviting industrialists to freely express their ideas, the Department essentially expected the employers themselves to offer the solution to the workers' conflicts. The following hosiery directors were summoned to the preparatory meeting:

Table 1. .
Directors of the Hosiery Mills

DIRECTOR	FACTORY NAME	LOCATION	ADDRESS
Olegario Ordeig	"El Cisne"	México D.F.	----------
Rafael Gómez	"María"	México D.F.	
Henrique Meyer	"La Aurora"	Guadalajara, Jal.	----------
William O. Jenkins	"La Corona"	Puebla, Pue.	Reforma 106
----------	"La India"	México, D.F.	3ª del Doctor Lavista, nº60
----------	"La Monserrat"	México, D.F.	1ra de Revillagigedo numero noventa y cuatro.
José Adbò		México D.F.	9ª Cuauhtemotzín nº 273
Leopoldo Hurtado			
Espinosa (sic)	"San Pedro"	Uruapan, Mich.	----------
Ignacio Inca Sues	"La Unión"	México, D. F.	Segunda de Lecumberri Nº 14
----------	"La Europea"	México D.F.	15 va Bolívar
----------	"La Perfeccionada"	México D.F.	8va Barragán, Col. Hidalgo
Julio F. Lezama	"La Abeja"	México D.F.	Cuarta de San Agustín Nº 90
----------	"Cía. Bonetera de Querétaro"	Querétaro, Qro.	----------
----------	"La Europea"	México D.F.	15ª Bolívar
Alatorre's Brothers	"Fábrica de Bonetería"	Guadalajara Jal.	----------
Fortoul Bec y Cía.	"Las Fábricas de		
Francia" (Bonetería y Colchas)	Guadalajara, Jal.	----------	
Max			
Chauvet's sons	El Fénix	----------	Arquitectos Nº 65

Note: Prepared by Denisse Muñoz Asseff, based on records from the General Archive of the Nation (AGN, 1913, Department of Labor, box 47, file 24, f. 1-2 a).

The proposal to implement a unified wage tariff was met with reluctance by several industrialists. One of those who expressed his grievances with the greatest vehemence was Enrique Meyer, director of the La Aurora hosiery mill in Guadalajara. He responded to the Department of Labor, stating that he was unable to travel to the capital; however, he took the liberty of addressing the requirements of the sent missive by explaining why he considered a unified wage tariff to be impossible. He argued that if it were already difficult to fix wages for a manta (coarse cotton) factory—which produces only a single article in four to ten different qualities—it would be far more challenging for a hosiery workshop, which produces an immense variety of different classes, styles, and new designs.

> The director of a manta factory, after having settled with his operators what they are to be paid—whether for a ten-hour workday or per piece of fabric delivered, depending on whether the weave is coarse or fine and the yield each loom of each class can produce—can rest easy, for everything is neatly arranged.
>
> Not so for one who wishes to make a hosiery workshop prosper. I, gentlemen, manufacture about two hundred different kinds of styles, designs, sizes, and so forth; it is a vast variety involving different machines, some driven by mechanical power, others by the operator's hand. All these styles require different levels of labor, and consequently, different prices must be paid to the operator, depending on whether the product is coarse or fine, whether it is made with automatic machines—where the operator need only ensure the machines do not break down—or made with machines moved by the operator's hand, according to the attention and skill (arte) that the worker must employ to create something perfect and beautiful. The operator who merely ensures her machine runs regularly cannot be equated with the one who, with a single machine that she herself operates, produces a novelty stocking or sock whose craftsmanship requires constant and assiduous attention and thus represents a work of art." (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, file 24, f. 31 a).

In these paragraphs, Enrique Meyer establishes from the outset that the labor in a spinning and weaving factory cannot be compared to that of a hosiery mill. While the former produced only one type of article, a hosiery workshop utilized disparate technologies within the same facility—ranging from hand-operated machines, where the work was practically artisanal, to mechanically driven machines—capable of producing up to two hundred different classes of products. Furthermore, he emphasizes that a woman's labor in operating a hand-driven machine was nearly a "work of art," due to the ingenuity the female worker had to employ to complete her task.

The aforementioned confirms that women were hired in the hosiery industry for three primary reasons. First, because the industry was not as technologically advanced as the spinning and weaving sector, thus allowing for the hiring of unskilled labor. Second, because hosiery production could be viewed as an extension of domestic female chores, given that it was framed as a matter of aesthetics and art rather than strength and precision. And third, by denying women the formal instruction needed to become skilled workers, they remained "unskilled" and, consequently, cheap labor.

Despite this, some industrialists like Enrique Meyer refused to implement a unified wage tariff, as this would mean standardizing their workers' wages so that all earned equally—in other words, increasing wages.

> Paying female operators, a uniform wage for a ten-hour workday would be the ruin of the business. I need not explain to those so deeply invested in the trade that, if an operator receives the same wage regardless of whether she works well or poorly, she would deliver only a meager and very substandard output. Therefore, the only practicable system for industrial establishments such as mine is to pay the worker for each well-made dozen she delivers.
>
> Now, I have operators who tend to one, two, or even six automatic machines, delivering—depending on the complexity and the fine or coarse nature of the work—anywhere from one to thirty or forty dozen daily. It is easily understood, then, that one class must be paid at 50, 55, 60 cents or more per dozen, versus another paid only five cents per dozen, so that the practical outcome for all remains more or less the same, provided they work with diligence and dedication.
>
> I have operators who work on novelty styles on a single hand-operated machine; given the complexity of their work, they cannot produce more than half a dozen in ten hours. I must pay them a much higher price than the operator who, using another hand machine, works a style in which she can produce two dozen in ten hours.
>
> It is, therefore, evident that the prices to be paid to the operator for each well-made dozen delivered must be a conventional [negotiated] matter for each distinct style between the workshop director and the operator. Therein lies the skill of the director, who must know how to knit himself in order to understand how much time and attention each new style he invents requires (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, file 24, f. 31 a).

Here we can observe a significant problem within the hosiery industry: while it is true that the labor required for a manual machine could not be compared to that of an automatic one, it is also true that, given the vast array of designs and sizes in knitwear products, the wages paid to female workers depended almost exclusively on the owner's subjective assessment of what he believed he should pay, since he was the sole arbiter of the effort required for each design. This likely contributed to a greater exploitation of the female workers, as their wage amounts should not have depended on the appraisal of a single individual. This was further compounded by the fact that most hosiery factories did not have a defined workday; instead, work was conducted on a piecework basis or by dozens produced per day. This deepened the poor labor conditions of the workers, which the Department of Labor was attempting to rectify. In this same correspondence, Enrique Meyer also presented several dissertations on why increasing wages in Mexico was ill-advised. His words carried an implicit message: the employer's reluctance toward a wage increase that might adversely affect his interests.

> To seek to secure higher wages for workers in general than those previously granted in this country is a very humanitarian intention; however, it will not yield the desired result until the worker is first elevated to a higher state of education and culture. My experiences over thirty-eight years in this country have consistently taught me the same: the more workers are paid, the less they work. Once their urgent life necessities are satisfied, they cease working and squander whatever money remains in their pockets, not returning to work until forced by hunger.
>
> Therefore, I have always tried to improve the lives of my female operators, yet all my efforts in this regard have invariably proven fruitless. They all request advances on their earnings, and all subsequently repay in partial installments; but as for saving from each weekly paycheck—even if only a single peseta—to have a small fund to draw upon in case of illness, never. This is why I say it is futile to attempt to improve the lot of such people. They themselves do not understand this and do not wish to improve their condition; they only wish not to work, or to work as little as possible." (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, file 24, f. 36 a).

Meyer concluded that the result of high wages would be disorder committed by intoxicated workers and continuous stoppages of factory operations. In his assessment, what was needed for the workers' welfare was a workload that was not excessive but constant—one that allowed them to live without deprivation but did not permit them to be idle or carouse, as "idleness is the beginning of all vices."

One cannot deny that Meyer touched upon a certain reality, such as the fact that the Mexican worker required education above all else; however, his words also expressed the disdain and stereotypes with which many foreign entrepreneurs branded the Mexican labor sector. These stereotypes included being lazy or prone to drunkenness, as well as viewing women as superficial compulsive buyers who lived in perpetual debt. According to this reasoning, the worker was not given what they desired "for their own good"; providing only the bare minimum was sufficient to prevent starvation, but never enough to allow them to aspire to a better life.

Nevertheless, he never addressed the fact that the Mexican worker was caught in a historical dynamic inherent to a system where the tienda de raya (company store) forced them into debt. Consequently, the practice of saving was naturally unknown to the worker. Even after the abolition of the tienda de raya, wages were only sufficient to cover basic needs—and sometimes not even that—meaning that indebtedness remained a common practice.

Naturally, Meyer was not alone in his opposition to a unified wage tariff; William Jenkins also disagreed, citing nearly the same reasons as Enrique Meyer. He also failed to attend the summoned meeting; however, he wrote a letter expressing his opinion, assuming that the Department of Labor did not intimately understand the inner workings of a hosiery factory.

> It will certainly not be easy for us to fix a price for knitting socks when there is such a difference in the production of different machines. Many factories adopt a system of delivering the stocking to the linkers directly from the knitters, leaving the former to cut and fix it in addition to linking it. Others have a system of cutting, arranging, and sewing the stocking before delivering it to the linker in that form; naturally, it would not be fair to set a one price for two such different operations.
>
> Many factories iron stockings by hand, others dry them in the sun, and others use steam machines. It will be very difficult to equalize prices for this work when some must pay up to 12 cents per dozen, others five or six, and others only one or two cents—noting that operators receiving two cents on steam machines likely earn much more than those receiving five or twelve cents for handwork. Furthermore, each hosiery factory has its distinct classes of stockings, and each class represents a different factory operation." (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, exp. 24, f. 36-37 a).

Here Jenkins outlines additional technical issues: while some factories performed every function—knitting, sewing, and linking (joining pieces with a perfect finish)—others delegated cutting and knitting to different operators, which, according to Jenkins, implied less effort for the workers. Similarly, sun-drying stockings was not seen as equivalent to hand-ironing or steam-pressing. Jenkins argued that production varied wildly—from fifteen dozen per machine down to three—depending on the operation and the quality of the goods. Whether producing undershirts, fine hosiery, or "coarse" (common) stockings, Jenkins believed prices had to be fixed for each specific class and operation. He warned that changing the payment system (piecework vs. daily wage) would likely prejudice one party or the other.

> Speaking specifically of this, our house, we tell you with all due frankness that we do not believe an arrangement is necessary to guarantee the welfare of our operators; we would gladly receive an inspection visit from you or your representative to inform yourselves of the conditions. Here we have had no difficulties, nor do we expect to, as we are more interested than anyone in ensuring they are always content and well-paid. We still employ the same operators we had when we installed our factory years ago; with one single exception, we have not had the slightest difficulty with our workers." (AGN 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, exp. 24, f. 31 a).

It is worth remembering that the only "difficulty" Jenkins mentioned ended in the dismissal of the striking women, aided by the political chief's inspections. By 1913, the political context was more strained than during the 1912 La Corona strike:

> We cannot conclude without warning you that current business conditions for hosiery factories are exceptionally abnormal. Consequently, all factories, unable to ship their goods to distant points, must sell in Mexico City, resulting in naturally fierce competition. Furthermore, some factories cannot afford to hold their stock and sell at ruinous discounts." (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, exp. 24, f. 38 a).

The Department of Labor was attempting to organize a hosiery convention and pointed out to Meyer that he had likely given little reflection when claiming that the wage issue in hosiery factories could not be settled by agreement due to the great variety of classes, styles, and patterns—a situation he claimed did not occur in manta (coarse cotton) factories. This suggested that, in the absence of any agreement among manufacturers and with them having absolute freedom to set their payments, unscrupulous or inexperienced manufacturers were recklessly lowering daily wages. This resulted not only in harm to their workers but also to other manufacturers.

> This is very easily proven: in the year 1900, common socks manufactured on automatic machines were sold at $2.50 per dozen, whereas in the current year, large quantities of the same item have been sold for as little as $0.80 per dozen. This is not due to a decrease in demand, as consumption continues to increase year after year. Nor can it be attributed to a drop in the price of cotton; therefore, the reduction in sales price is only possible through a decrease in industrial profits and in the workers' wages.
>
> By following this freedom of action, the moment will come (and I believe it has already arrived) when many good-faith manufacturers, who do not seek to sacrifice their workers, will find themselves forced to close their establishments.
>
> I do not believe you can be satisfied with many manufacturers and many thousands of workers being harmed by the whim, bad faith, or ineptitude of a few who might excuse themselves by saying: 'wages obey the law of supply and demand; I obtain sufficient workers for the wages I pay, and I am at liberty to continue paying them whatever I see fit.' One must consider, Mr. Meyer, that low wages are not always the cause of misery, but rather, misery is often the cause of low wages." (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, exp. 24, f. 56 a).

Here, the Director of the Department of Labor highlights the primary problem facing the hosiery industry: manufacturers possessed absolute freedom to set wages. Consequently, by drastically reducing daily pay, they contributed not only to the misery of female workers but also to unrestrained competition among the hosiery industrialists themselves, who felt compelled to lower wages to remain competitive. Thus, it can be concluded that hosiery was the lowest-paid branch of the textile industry; therefore, it is unsurprising that its primary workforce consisted of women, as they had always been regarded as cheap labor.

Nevertheless, it is observed that Victoriano Huerta's government was aware of the workers' needs. For taht, it sought to make women visible as workers and as a vulnerable labor force, as the Department of Labor pointed out to Meyer:

> You are perfectly aware that in certain regions of the country, there is an abundance of poor women whose miserable condition forces them to accept any wage. Faced with this necessity, we must not be deterred by the consideration that some female workers might misuse or squander their wages; we must earnestly address the general need and seek to correct such vices later.

> Furthermore, the aim is not for all poor female workers to become wealthy by the grace of a tariff; it is simply desired that miserable wages—those insufficient for the vital needs of the workers—disappear. We wish to prevent hunger and cold from being felt in many homes; we wish to steer away from corruption many women who can be useful to society." (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, exp. 24, f. 56 r).

This quotation reveals a government expecting female workers to receive wages sufficient to save them from misery. They were to be "steered away from corruption"—meaning the priority remained the protection of their honor, but never placing them on equal footing with men regarding their rights.

Ultimately, despite the resistance of certain industrialists, a preparatory meeting for the Hosiery Industrialists' Convention was held on August 12, 1913, with the manufacturers who supported the initiative. It is noteworthy that no representative from La Corona attended.

The Director of the Department of Labor stated the purpose of the meeting: to establish a uniform wage tariff for female hosiery workers, similar to what had been achieved in the cotton spinning and weaving industry. This was to be done without undermining the interests of the industrialists. To this end, he posed two questions: whether the hosiery convention proposed by the Department was feasible, and what fiscal measures the manufacturers would wish to see implemented to favor them and allow for an increase in the wages they paid.

Mr. Luis Magallón, representing the Compañía Bonetera Queretana, expressed his willingness to raise wages only if the Department of Labor assisted manufacturers in increasing product prices; otherwise, if only wages were raised, he would be forced to close his firm. He stated that he had approximately 50,000 dozen pairs of stockings and socks in storage, yet his sales over the past three months had not even reached $20,000. He added that the Puebla factory (La Corona) had begun to undercut prices. Meanwhile, Mr. Rafael Gómez, director of La María, challenged the perceived prosperity of manufacturers in the states and their supposed ease in dominating foreign markets, noting that all merchants demanded the same prices quoted in the nation's capital (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, exp. 24, f. 60-62 a).

Factories in the interior of the Republic faced a dual problem: they not only had to compete with one another, but buyers also demanded the prices set in the capital, which were logically lower. This forced industrialists to undersell their products and, consequently, reduce the female workers' wages.

Mr. Luis Magallón also noted that in his factory, knitting was paid at 3 cents and "pointing" (finishing) at 7 cents. He added that a female worker tending seven machines and producing 38 to 40 dozen earned one peso per day; if he were forced to pay higher wages, he would be the first to shut down his factory.

The Deputy Director of the Department of Labor intervened, stating that while some spinning and weaving factories were initially reluctant to join the 1912 Convention—fearing that a uniform wage would lead to ruin—experience proved otherwise. Following the convention, ten new factories had opened, all of which spontaneously adopted the approved tariff and regulations. He provided figures: "Seven years ago (1906), a pound of manta was worth 45 cents, and today it is worth 70, with the worker now earning a higher daily wage" (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, exp. 24, f. 63 a). However, he failed to mention that many industrialists either never implemented the regulations or did so only partially.

Mr. Maximiliano del Rosal, representative of La Perfeccionada, spoke in favor of a unified wage tariff and proposed that national production be protected against similar foreign imports through fiscal measures. Referring to Mr. Magallón's earlier statement regarding the 50,000 pairs of socks in storage, he argued that such drawbacks could be remedied by lowering production. To achieve this, he suggested that no factory be permitted to work at night and that, through an agreement among all manufacturers, a reduction in working hours be made mandatory, effectively limiting the workday to a fixed number of hours.

He asserted that through these means, the value of certain hosiery items could be increased; without overproduction, manufacturers would not have to approach large commercial houses, such as Palacio de Hierro, offering goods at low prices to secure immediate funds—an act that drove down the product's overall price. He also argued that no one would lose from a wage increase if that increase were applied across all factories. Given that the majority of hosiery workers were women, he insisted that all factories abolish night shifts, stating that "it is not humane to force women to work at night." (AGN, 1913, Labor Dept., box 47, exp. 24, f. 64 a).

This illustrates the futility of the 1912 Convention. While it had excluded women from night work, it was well known a year later that the night shift still existed for them, contributing to overproduction and the subsequent cheapening of products. This created a vicious cycle of wage reductions for female workers, who accepted night shifts in a desperate attempt to earn slightly more money.

The Deputy Director finally offered some considerations and submitted the following proposal for the assembly's resolution: to summon a convention to reach an agreement on the regulation of hosiery factories and to adopt a uniform minimum wage tariff for those articles that allowed for it.

In view of the outcome, the appointment of a commission was proposed to draft a work program. The commission was composed of Messrs. Maximiliano del Rosal, Rafael Gómez, G. Oliver, Olegario Ordeig, and Luis Magallón, who were authorized to set the date for the convention. The entrepreneurs cared little whether it was 'decent' or not for women to work night shifts. The underlying reason several industrialists agreed to hold the convention was their interest in imposing a national tariff to level the competition with producers from other regions of the country, thereby allowing them to standardize [lower] daily wages. Additionally, they were interested in discussing taxes they deemed detrimental. Even after the convention, workers continued to negotiate contracts with employers on an establishment-by-establishment basis rather than for the entire industrial branch—a practice that would continue well into the 1930s.

Since no industry-wide agreements were reached for knitwear, female workers continued to face hardships; by mid-1914, more than two thousand women were threatened with job losses. In June of that year, several factories closed their doors.

Between 1911 and 1914, female workers in the garment, textile, and knitwear industries engaged in large-scale demonstrations and strikes. Many allied themselves with the Casa del Obrero Mundial; however, their success varied by industry and depended largely on the workers' ability to forge national links and the relative strength of the entrepreneurs they confronted.

Methodology

This research is situated within the field of social and labor history, adopting a qualitative and historical-documentary approach. Its purpose was to recover, systematize, and analyze primary sources to understand the experiences of female textile workers at the La Corona factory in Puebla during the first decade of the 20th century, particularly in the context of the labor conflict recorded in 1912. The methodological design was non-experimental, descriptive, and analytical, oriented toward the reconstruction of events from archival documents and the interpretation of the structural processes that shaped women's labor conditions in the textile industry of Puebla.

The selection of documents was based on precise criteria to ensure their relevance to the study. First, thematic relevance was prioritized, favoring files that detailed labor conflicts, strikes, and workers' petitions in the textile sector. Second, the analysis period was delimited between 1905 and 1915, with an emphasis on 1912, the year of the La Corona strike. Furthermore, centrality was given to records showing the participation of female workers, whether directly through testimonies and petitions or indirectly through official reports documenting their role in the labor life of the era. Finally, the reliability of the sources was ensured by exclusively utilizing documents from official archives, particularly the General Archive of the Nation (AGN, 1912), Department of Labor Fund, thereby guaranteeing historical validity.

The analysis of the sources was carried out through a process of critical reading and classification of files according to their themes, such as wage demands, worker-employer conflicts, and complaints about labor conditions. Techniques of internal and external documentary criticism were applied to assess authenticity, the context of production, and potential institutional interests in their drafting. Subsequently, analytical categories were constructed to organize findings around themes such as gender, union organization, working conditions, and forms of protest. This procedure was complemented by historical triangulation, contrasting the data obtained with secondary historiographical studies, which enriched the interpretation and situated the events within a broader framework of labor and gender history in Mexico. Overall, the methodological strategy was based on a rigorous documentary approach that, by articulating the analytical tools of social history with gender perspectives, enabled the reconstruction of the role of the La Corona workers as protagonists in an emblematic episode of early 20th-century labor struggles.

Results

The results of this research bring to light the ways in which the female workers of the La Corona factory in Puebla confronted conditions of exploitation and labor inequality during the first decade of the 20th century. Through the analysis of documents from the General Archive of the Nation (AGN), we identify not only concrete demands related to wages, hours, and employer treatment but also the strategies of organization and resistance deployed within a context marked by gender subordination and tensions between unions, entrepreneurs, and authorities. These findings demonstrate that female participation in the 1912 strike was not an isolated event but part of a broader process of labor struggle within the textile sector of Puebla and the nation, allowing for a reinterpretation of their role in labor history from a perspective that recognizes their agency and protagonism.

In correspondence found at the General Archive of the Nation, Jenkins mentions that he invited the Director of the Department of Labor, Antonio Ramos Pedrueza, to his hosiery mill to conduct inquiries. Continuing the narrative, the Political Chief arrived for a visit at La Corona, where he "was able to corroborate that the complaints were merely one girl against another." Although, in Jenkins' own words, some "girls" in the knitting department expressed a desire to earn more, he immediately objected to this by stating they were apprentices and that no master knitter had complained about wages. Consequently, it can be inferred that, naturally, an apprentice could not earn what the master knitters did.

> The Political Chief himself, unaware that they were apprentices, pointed out to them that these were not the times to ask for higher wages, given that the firm was operating these days for the sole purpose of providing them with work; [Jenkins stated] 'truly I have no business at all, and I am only working so that the girls do not go hungry.' When he was informed that the knitters themselves earned from six pesos a week, he told them he considered it a good source of income for the girls, as 'many, many men would like to earn as much.' (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 24, f. 8a).

EThe previous citation clarifies that the dissatisfaction was not limited to the fifteen women who officially joined the strike. Many more sought the "Political Chief's" visit as an opportunity to demand better wages, though fear of dismissal prevented them from striking. However, their demands found no resonance in the public figure invited to observe their conditions.

> Now, if a few girls, who can be counted on one hand, let men deceive them with false promises, I do not believe the other workers in my factory should suffer, when there are three or four on one side and nearly three hundred on the other. Isn't that so? I must also tell you that the president of the Workers' Union told me that if I did not settle this matter with the girls, he would have to shut down my house. Today, after the meeting with the Political Chief, I explained to this man—the Union president—that the girls themselves positively refused his representation, to the point of telling me that if I readmitted the troublemakers, they (the 300 who did not strike) would leave my factory." (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 24, f. 8a).

In this manner, Jenkins manipulated information to his advantage; he informed the president of the Workers' Union that it was the female workers themselves who rejected union representation, claiming they disagreed with the demands of the dismissed strikers. However, other workers were indeed dissatisfied with their wages and might have been interested in union representation, yet they did not dare join the strike like their colleagues for fear of being fired.

It is important to note that the strike at the La Corona hosiery factory was part of a wave of labor claims that began in 1911 and continued into early 1912. This movement paralyzed the majority of the country's textile factories and eventually led to the formation of the Casa del Obrero Mundial (COM), the labor organization with the greatest influence over other such associations throughout the Mexican interior.

In the case of La Corona, paternalism and the fear of losing one's livelihood proved stronger, which prevented the factory from coming to a complete standstill. Nevertheless, it served as a turning point for the fifteen strikers mentioned in the documents—though there may have been more—to raise their voices and demand better working conditions.

Those who did not join the strike took advantage of Ramos Pedrueza's visit. They brought to light another issue in the knitting department, where several workers complained of mistreatment by a mechanic. Jenkins minimized the problem, claiming it was merely a conflict between "the girls" and the mechanic, arguing that the latter was busy with one machine while the women demanded he repair theirs; in this way, the entrepreneur dismissed the situation entirely.

Despite Jenkins' explanations, the Director of the Department of Labor, Antonio Ramos Pedrueza, intervened on behalf of the striking workers, urging Jenkins to reinstate them. However, he made it clear where his loyalties lay, as he appealed to Mr. Jenkins' "benevolence" to return their jobs while simultaneously applauding the punishment already inflicted upon the workers. Pedrueza reprimanded the women, stating that under no circumstances should they voice their demands in a "violent" manner and that they should instead embody moderation and prudence. With these words, Ramos Pedrueza condemned conduct deemed improper for women—such as expressing demands publicly—and instead posited that they should maintain the prudence and moderation essentially associated with feminine nature.

> Since, as you inform me, the dismissal of those dissatisfied workers occurred without justified cause—and was carried out despite your recommendation that they retain their jobs while you conducted the necessary investigations—your determination to punish the aforementioned young ladies is very correct. Nevertheless, I shall take the liberty of imploring you to once again manifest your benevolence and consideration for your workers and forgive the fault committed by these female employees, who I am certain acted in such a manner due to their inexperience. For my part, I am already addressing the striking workers, making them see the impropriety of their conduct and advising them toward moderation and prudence; for even in the event they were to have

well-founded complaints to voice, they must not proceed in the violent manner in which they have done." (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 9a).

Thus, the ideal of femininity that the authorities sought to disseminate was exposed. This was a rigorous ideal encompassing all aspects of women's lives: they did not have to become murderers or infanticides, nor even fall into drunkenness, to be considered transgressors of these models. Simply going out to work for a low wage alongside men, or expressing dissatisfaction at any level and by any means, equally rendered them transgressors (Hernández, 2010).

The Director of the Department of Labor also expressed the view that, through Jenkins' "benevolence," the striking workers would be reinstated, framing it almost as a personal favor from the owner. Women were consistently presented—by others and by themselves—as morally weak beings in need of protection from any male figure. Yet, it is clear that returning to work meant returning to the very same conditions that originally triggered the strike. Nevertheless, the most compelling aspect of this case is hearing the demands directly from the dismissed workers themselves. While they may have joined the petitions of the men represented by the Workers' Union, they possessed their own specific grievances. It was not merely a matter of the workday, as previously mentioned; they had also gone on strike due to the mistreatment by their superiors. In their own words:

> Due to the mistreatment, we receive from Mrs. María Álvarez, who serves as the overseer [celadora] in the department where we work (the ironing department), and adding this grievance to the violent separation of our colleagues Isabel Hernández, Dolores Pineda, Rosa Pineda, and María Romero, who were expelled from work without justified cause; furthermore, yesterday (April 1st), colleagues Ms. Luisa Reyes, María Moscoso, María López, and Raquel López were separated in the same manner." (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 10a).

Because of the dismissals and seeing how little could be done for them, they sought the support of union leader Samuel Chazari. This increased Jenkins' irritation, as explained in the document from the General Archive of the Nation (AGN).

> We sought support from Mr. Samuel Chazari, vice president of the Sociedad de Obreros Libres de 'La Constancia Mexicana', as we are aware that he provides support to the Gran Liga de Obreros del Ramo de Algodón. So that, through his valuable influence, he might notify his representatives in the capital, where the Honorable Committee resides, by telegram; they, in turn, were to inform the Department of which you are the esteemed Director. He immediately took us under his protection, for he does nothing more than fulfill his duty. This caused displeasure to the owner of said establishment, who told him that he did not recognize him as our representative." (1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 10a).

While this letter demonstrates that the women were well aware of their demands—and that, contrary to being deceived by the men of the Sociedad de Obreros Libres de "La Constancia", they were the ones who sought the organization's support to ensure their petitions were heard. It is noteworthy that despite being able to draft their requests so clearly and precisely, they presented themselves as weak and vulnerable beings: individuals in need of male assistance and incapable of defending themselves. This was not because they truly were so, but because by demonstrating that—despite having left the domestic sphere to enter the public world of work (a space considered exclusively male)—they remained "feminine" along with the associated terms (weak, delicate, submissive, etc.), they hoped to encourage a positive response to their demands:

> As you will understand, Mr. Director, we who sign this document with our names are humble female workers of the 'La Corona' factory. Finding ourselves incapable of resisting the evil acts of our executioners or of defending ourselves, we believe we have the right to join the great mass of workers so that the aforementioned board may take us into account.
>
> It is up to you, Mr. Director, to bestow upon us your valuable influence and favor us in these critical moments, taking an active part so that our current situation may be favorably resolved. Please accept the sincerity of our respect. Fatherland, fraternity, and justice (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 10a).

The letter addressed by the workers to Ramos Pedrueza received a far from encouraging response; moreover, he demonized the workers' right to strike. He failed to specify what would constitute the "extreme cases of exceptional gravity" that might justify such an action. In his capacity as Director, he responded with the following:

> In order to respond accurately to your communication, I duly informed myself of the difficulties encountered at the 'La Corona' factory, and it is with regret that I state to you that I do not consider the course of action

> you took—abandoning work in the manner you did—to be correct. For although a strike is a general right recognized for workers, it is, on the other hand, a violent and dangerous condition due to its consequences; as such, it should only be used in extreme cases of exceptional gravity, after well-meditated consideration of the causes and effects, and only when attempts to settle the difficulties through all possible means of conciliation have proved unsuccessful (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 10a).

Ramos Pedrueza exhorted them to present their demands in a judicious and peaceful manner, for generally:

> ..in this way, more benefit is obtained than through violence, which often causes hardships, such as those you are currently suffering by being out of work. I am certain that in the future, you will conduct yourselves in the manner I am taking the liberty of advising you. I have already written to Mr. Jenkins, interceding so that he may return your jobs, which I hope to achieve (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 10a).

Ramos Pedrueza hoped that the dismissal of the female workers would serve as a deterrent to prevent them from ever attempting to strike again; in doing so, he would have fulfilled his role as a mediator of labor demands before the business class. His aim was for the Workers' Union to drop the matter; however, Jenkins had other plans for the workers, as he would not allow the "troublemakers" to re-enter his factory. Consequently, he provided a simple justification: he had hired others to replace them the very day the strikers were dismissed, and it would be an "injustice" on his part to fire the new workers to reinstate those who had left. He further diminished the importance of the matter by stating:

> I take the liberty of telling you that this minor disagreement in my factory was of no importance; it would be the same as if your house servant said he was going on strike. There were about twelve girls who left, and that same day I put others in their places. Some of these have already returned and I readmitted them, understanding well—as you yourself have understood—that the fault they committed was due to a lack of experience. I will admit the others as well once the workload allows me to add more workers, but at this moment, with the business absolutely dead, it will be difficult for me to continue providing work for those currently employed. Now many girls work only half a day, and thus we hold on until times are better. (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 13a)

By doing so, Jenkins avoided providing further explanations, stating that he would readmit them once the economic situation improved—though, in reality, he never intended to reinstate them. Furthermore, he moved forward with his plan to replace men with women in the spinning department. These female workers were to be brought from Guadalajara, as they were the only women skilled in operating ring spinning frames (tróciles). This strategy demonstrated not only his fear of the "influence" men might have in inciting women to fight for better working conditions but also his intent to reduce costs, as women could undoubtedly be paid much less than men.

> Women from Guadalajara have requested work from me, and I believe it is highly convenient for my interests to make the change. Since there are so few men, the change is of little consequence, and it would be much better for me to have women. My idea is to bring women from Guadalajara for a few months so they can teach the girls in Puebla how to work with spinning frames, because currently, these girls do not know how to work with yarn (AGN, 1912, Labor Dept., box 7, exp. 20, f. 14a)..

All of this occurred with the endorsement and approval of the Director of the Department of Labor, who, according to the AGN, expressed his intention to travel to the city of Guadalajara shortly to establish direct communication with the aforementioned women. He indicated that, prior to the conclusion of negotiations and the formalization of the contractual agreement, he would submit the document to Jenkins for his review, approval, and any corrections he deemed appropriate. Furthermore, he expressed his expectation of receiving guidance and suggestions from Jenkins that might prove advantageous for the successful development of his negotiations with the female workers.

From the aforementioned documents, it is evident that this strike resulted in a momentary defeat, insofar as the workers' demands remained unsatisfied. However, for the female workers, it served as a vital experience in fostering a consciousness of struggle that would bear fruit later on.

This is exemplified by Ángela Parra de Madrid, who began working at La Corona at the age of thirteen, where she started her labor as a unionist. In 1929, she became one of the founders of the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) in the state. During this period, her profound interest in political and union participation became clear as she witnessed and felt the needs and mistreatment of her fellow workers. This trajectory led to her election as General Secretary of the La Corona Union in 1930, representing three hundred and thirty organized women (Soto, 2009)

In sum, although the 1912 La Corona strike did not secure an immediate victory in terms of improved working conditions, it constituted a significant milestone in the history of female participation within the Mexican labor movement. The AGN documents reveal how these women, within a context marked by gender subordination and paternalistic corporate control, managed to articulate a collective voice that challenged established hierarchies and called the labor order of the era into question. Although they were marginalized and often silenced by authorities and factory owners, their capacity for organization reveals a deeper process of building a labor consciousness that transcends the isolated episode of the strike.

Contrasting this with recent studies reinforces this interpretation: as Muñoz (2020) points out, female workers were not mere passive recipients of labor policies, but women who influenced debates on rights, justice, and dignity at work. Their participation also compels a rethinking of traditional narratives in labor history, where women often appear only marginally. On the contrary, the La Corona strike shows that, even in adverse scenarios, female workers positioned themselves as protagonists of a struggle that combined economic demands with symbolic claims regarding the value of their labor and their place in society.

Beyond the immediate defeat, the experience of these workers must be understood as part of a longue durée process in the history of labor struggles in Mexico. Like other movements of the time—such as those linked to the Casa del Obrero Mundial (Ribera Carbó, 2024)—the Puebla strike helped lay the foundations for future mobilizations, providing not only organizational experience but also a repertoire of strategies and discourses that would be reclaimed in later decades. In this sense, the struggle of the La Corona women can be read as an early antecedent of female unionism in Mexico and as a concrete manifestation of how gender and class intertwined in disputes for better living and working conditions.

This final reflection, therefore, invites us to recognize the importance of studying these episodes not as isolated events, but as expressions of a collective memory that continues to challenge the present. The female labor struggles of the past engage in a dialogue with current debates on labor inequality and women's rights, reminding us that the history of work in Mexico cannot be fully understood if we set aside the voices of those who, from the factory floor and with limited resources, were capable of defying a deeply unequal system.

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