



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Women's textile strike in Barcelona, Spain, 1913

July
1913
to: September 15,
1913
Country: Spain
Location City/State/Province: *Barcelona*
Goals:
To secure a nine-hour working day and an eight-hour night shift; Constancy Union called for a 40 percent increase in piece rates and 25 percent increase in wages

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 174. Establishing new social patterns
- 180. Alternative communication system

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 015. Group lobbying
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 103. Craft strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 137. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 015. Group lobbying
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

- 048. Protest meetings
- 063. Social disobedience
- 103. Craft strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 107. Sympathy strike
- 116. Generalised strike
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 5th segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 103. Craft strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 107. Sympathy strike
- 116. Generalised strike
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 6th segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 103. Craft strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 107. Sympathy strike
- 116. Generalised strike
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- children
- home manufacturing workers
- textile workers
- working-class women

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Not Known

Partners:

Working-class women that didn't work in the textile industry; railroad workers; foundry workers

External allies:

Not Known

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Foundry workers
- Railroad workers

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 13 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Textile employers, Governor

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Strikers 'fighting police'

Repressive Violence:

Mounted police charged into marching strikers, repression of marchers

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

2 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

While the Royal Decree issued by the governor should have secured most of the strikers' goals, sources claim that employers refused to abide by its provisions, and that working conditions barely improved if at all. However, the textile strike of 1913 in Barcelona marks a development of women's political consciousness in Spain, with women securing political power within organized labor (in this case the Constancy Union). While details are not available, it is very likely that the networks of women formed during the campaign provided continual ways for the women to support each other, in the form of child care, kitchens,

etc., thus alleviating some economic oppression.

The growth of women's networks in neighborhoods around Barcelona was very significant. While not much is known about the women textile workers after the strike in 1913, sources celebrate the collective action during the textile strike as a founding moment that would influence female solidarity in further struggles involving organized labor in Spain

In 1913, sixteen to eighteen percent of all women over fourteen in and around Barcelona worked in textile factories and related industries. Spinning and weaving workshops usually employed fewer than 40 women and these women worked eleven to twelve hour days. In contrast, male workers usually worked only ten-hour days. Male wages varied between 3 and 3.75 pesetas while female wages were between 1.75 and 2.50 pesetas, with few women earning over 2. Some women worked from the home, manufacturing corsets, paper boxes, shoes, and garments for employers who provided them with piecework.

Additionally, conditions for working-class women and their families were often desperate in the first part of the twentieth century in Barcelona. Child and infant mortality was high and the rising price of living (for food, rent, fuel, blankets, soap) due to Spain's war against Moroccan guerrillas and bad harvests made it increasingly difficult to survive. Women helped care for each other's children, forming tight bonds and networks organized by neighborhood rather than by trade. While housewives often organized sections of strong political parties and supported men during strikes, little had been done to win better wages for female workers.

In October 1912, the Constasy Union was formed to organize unskilled men, women, and children in the textile industry. At a general meeting in February 1913 that two thousand people, mostly women, attended, only one woman was given time to speak. Speakers discussed the need to end the unbearable workdays women suffered in factories, but were slow to acknowledge piecework and the need to improve working conditions in the home.

In the summer of 1913, the price of living continued to rise. Women pushed for a strike of the textile industry, demanding a nine-hour working day and an eight-hour night shift. Constasy called for a 40 percent increase in piece rates and 25 percent increase in wages. Workers gave the employers one month to consider the demands before starting the strike.

In the meantime, women activated their networks in working-class communities. Previously, they had done support work for female strikers in the silk industry, setting up food kitchens and organizing demonstrations. Through these networks, the women spread news and strategy of the upcoming strike. They sent representatives to all major food markets to talk with women who gathered there daily.

On July 27, people gathered throughout Barcelona neighborhoods to discuss the employers' failure to meet Constasy's demands. More than a thousand women attended, leading the call to strike. On July 30, 20,000 workers, of whom 13,000 were women and children, went on strike in Barcelona.

Mass activity was centered in the Sans area on the edge of the old city. Women of the Sans factories were demanding that a 1900 law about night work be enforced. On August 5, hundreds of women began what was to become a daily community ritual, which included a march from the Plaza of Catalonia on to the governor's office at the Plaza of the Palace. The community of women went to the governor to voice grievances rather than to the employers, a decision that put them in contention with Constasy Union.

The organization is noted as inciting new levels of women's consciousness among working-class women. One journalist reported, "The spirit of women has spoken with enough eloquence to launch the entire working population..."

For four days they continued the procession to the governor's office. Undercover police increased presence as the government became nervous about 'street agitation.' On August 8, police attempted to block the marchers, ordering them to disperse. In order to avoid repressive violence, the women sent home the men that were accompanying them. The women defied police orders and regrouped along the marching path. 200 women made it to the governor's office that day. The governor sent word that he had

presented their union representative with a proposal to end the strike.

Constancy called an assembly to discuss the proposal on August 10. The women, instead of meeting at the Plaza of Catalonia for their march, gathered early at the assembly. Women gathered from throughout the city, not just textile workers. The chair of the assembly announced the meeting as an assembly of the community rather than a union meeting, meaning that all were welcome and could speak as equals. Railroad workers, and foundry workers in attendance became sympathetic to the strike. By the night of August 10, a generalized strike had begun.

In street demonstrations, women's consciousness about the relationship between social life and economic reforms was activated. Some male leaders of Constancy asked them to stop their street actions, but the women refused.

On August 11, a massive demonstration of about 1,500 women and 800 men gathered in the Plaza of Catalonia planning to march to the governor's office. They sent a sixteen-woman committee ahead to meet the governor and explain that they would not be returning to work. As they approached the office, a group of police charged in an attempt to disperse the marchers. Some strikers regrouped. Others fought the police. At the end of the day, all had reassembled at the Plaza of Catalonia. On August 12, women began the march an hour earlier. Again, mounted police impeded the marchers' path. Meanwhile railroad workers officially voted to join the struggle and extend the strike.

Throughout the strike, the women continued to hold their demonstrations every day. They also held daily meetings in the streets and markets of the old city. The main focus of the women's demonstrations shifted to the Plaza of Spain, where the old city meets Sans.

During most of the textile strike, the working class was not united. The women and the union strike committee were in conflict. Even dedicated labor leaders disapproved of the women's demonstrations and some of their methods (one of which was to cut the hair of female strikebreakers, selling the hair to wig makers to support women's food kitchens). Constancy denounced the woman as a 'mob' and continually asked them to stop demonstrating.

On August 20, women marched to declare that they would not abide by agreements made by the strike committee. They marched to the strike committee offices where they informed the male leaders that the women, and not the strike leadership, spoke for the community and that it was the women with whom the governor had to negotiate.

Ultimately, the governor announced the Royal Decree, which mandated a sixty-hour week, or a maximum of three thousand hours of work per year in the textile industry, and allowed women to arrange their workday.

The strike ended on September 15, 1913, because the workers could no longer survive without their wages. In the end, it is said that the Decree accomplished little for the strikers because employers simply refused to abide by the law. However, the strike, especially the street demonstrations, provided concrete evidence of women's political consciousness and culture. The women's actions highlighted the relationship of working women to the preservation of the community and brought forward the political presence of women in city affairs.

Research Notes

Sources:

"Collective Action: Barcelona, 1913." UC Press E-Books Collection, 1982-2004. University of California Press, Web. <<http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft9q2nb672&chunk.id=d0e2303&toc.depth=1&toc.id=d0e2193&brand=eschol>>.

Kaplan, Temma, Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918, *Signs*, 7:3 (1982:Spring) p.545-566. Web. <http://libcom.org/files/Barcelona%20Women's%20Protests_0.pdf>.

Additional Notes:

Edited by Max Rennebohm (07/06/2011)

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