

MEXICAN WOMEN WORKING 14 HOURS

By LINN A. E. GALE.

"We work from 7 o'clock in the morning until 8 or 9 o'clock at night all of the time. We cannot go out for dinner but have to take a little lunch with us and eat it when the boss is not looking. We hardly ever work less than 13 hours a day and more often it is 14 hours or even more."

The speaker was a thin, poorly-clad young woman of about 30 years. Her wan, drawn face told her story better than the words she uttered. She was one of the secretaries of the "Union de Tostadores de Cafe del Molino de la Fortaleza", which in English is "Union of Toasters of Coffee of the La Fortaleza Factory."

On Tuesday afternoon November 16, about 50 of the wretched employes of this little industrial hell, marched over to the I. W. W. hall at Plazuela del Salto del Agua No. 17, Mexico City, and told Carmen and Catalina Frias, two I. W. W. girls who live in the hall at night and act as janitors and reception committee in the daytime, the sordid story of their miserable servitude. All but 7 or 8 of the 50 were girls and women. Some got as low as 25 centavos (12½ American cents) a day for the 13 or 14 hours of toil. The average was 50 centavos (25 cents) daily and a few received the munificent salaries of a peso (\$1.00).

The coffee workers had been reading of the strikes all over Mexico, of the rapid growth of Bolshevist ideas and of the formation of the One Big Union in various mills and factories. They decided they would have a One Big Union too. A meeting, was held and officers were elected and it was voted to make an immediate demand on the wealthy owners of the coffee factory for a raise in wages. No sooner had a committee visited the proprietors than the whole union, en masse, was fired. Labor is still cheap in Mexico and there is plenty of human raw material to convert into profits. If some balk, there are always others to take their places.

The discharged workers had heard about the I. W. W. and knew where its hall was. Without further ado they marched scheduled for that very evening. At night they returned, scheduled for that very evening. It night they returned, participated in a meeting of the general recruiting local of Mexico City, voted unanimously to join the Mexican Administration of the I. W. W., and were promptly accepted by the General Executive Board as a branch of the Department of Production.

It was voted that all the discharged workers should present themselves at the factory as usual the next morning. If as was expected, they were promptly ordered out and reminded that they had been fired, they were to go to the I. W. W. hall where General Secretary-Treasurer Ciro Esquivel would accompany them to the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration office and they would all put in a demand for 3-months' wages as indemnification for being discharged without just cause, in conformity with the famous labor article of the Mexican constitution. It was considered better to do this than to declare a strike, for in a strike there would be no legal claim to the 3-months' wages. Meanwhile, unless the workers were taken back and unless increases of 200 percent and 300 percent in pay were granted at once, a boycott was to be declared against the owners of the "La Fortaleza" factory and their product, the factory was to be picketed to keep new slaves from coming there to work, and sabotage was to be used to reinforce the demands of the new I. W. W. union.

As with hundreds of other factories in Mexico, this is the first time the "La Fortaleza" coffee makers ever had a union. And this original union of theirs is an industrial, not a craft union. It is a little thing in the Mexican class struggle but a straw that shows how the wind blows.