

Carolina Muzzilli, "Inhumane Work in the Laundries," (1912)

When speaking of mechanical laundries, in all of which labor conditions are indistinguishably desperate, it is impossible to remain silent in the face of the inhumane form in which women laborers work in the "La Higiénica" laundry.

In 1912 a large group of women workers on strike against "La Higiénica" met in the hall of the "Buenos Aires Graphical Federation." Poor and squalid women, all were marked with the stigma of deprivation and excessive work. Their age varied between twelve and fifty years. They named Dr. Julieta Lanteri Renshaw, Enrique Barca, and this writer to advise them in their negotiations with the establishment's management.

We heard from the strikers' lips the story of conditions under which they work... which were really horrible. And they were not lying, inasmuch as we have been able to verify it. Employees in the washing section were forced to work on wet floors, shivering cold in the winter and unbearable in the summer because of steam from the cylinders. Under constant pressure from inspectors, they are frequently pushed around and endure a work day of 9 to 11 hours!

They are not permitted the two hours prescribed by law for lunch. But there is even more: employees in the ironing section frequently faint, due to high temperatures in summer, and, far from helping them, the inspector, clock in hand, verifies the duration of the fainting spell so that the worker will make up the lost time in her work day.

The commentaries are especially striking, if we consider that, among the members of management that most oppose the just claims of workers, the majority were militant Catholics, accustomed to wearing the papal cloak in processions."

I call dilettante feminism that which is only interested in the preoccupations and enlightenment of women intellectuals. Now is the hour for this sporting feminism to transform itself into true feminism that must enlist in the class struggle. Otherwise, it will be "an elitist" movement called to protect all those women whose submission forfeits their right to a better life. I detest submissiveness for the simple reason that I support those who demand the goods necessary simply to live in a country where the common refrain is that "all are equal before the law."

Source: José Armagno Cosentino, *Carolina Muzzilli* (Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1984), 106-107.