

CLASS, ETHNICITY, AND GENDER IN BRAZIL:

The Negotiation of Workers' Identities in Porto Alegre's 1906 Strike*

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Abstract: This article examines one formative moment in the making of a working class in Brazil to show how workers refashioned multiple identities in response to interlocking structural transformations from artisanal to factory production, from homogeneous to heterogeneous ethnic communities, and from a male labor force to one that was increasingly female. Anarchist labor organizers contested the myth of the happy artisan and conflated the exploitation of artisans and factory workers to advance class consciousness. Ethnic ties that had initially fostered organization began to hamper class solidarity, now strained under new ideological conflicts, and facilitated effective resistance from employers. As appeals to ethnicity became problematic, appeals to gender emerged: women workers made themselves visible and audible and played an important role in the evolution of the movement. The ways in which they were seen and heard in the streets, however, contrasted with their representations in elite discourse, which sought to use gender to manipulate divisions within the emerging working class.

In recent years, labor historians have become fully aware that the formation of class identity cannot be understood in isolation from interwoven identities of gender, race, and ethnicity. This study focuses on the early years of industrial growth in Brazil to explore how one critical juncture in class formation called multiple identities into question and how workers' responses interacted with those of elites. The absence of oral histories for this early period precludes the richness of insight that recent research has begun to provide for later years, but the analysis should help in a more modest way to address the current need in Latin American labor history for

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carefully contextualized studies of the evolution of workers' identities under various conditions and at various points in their history.¹

In October 1906, urban workers in the southern state capital of Porto Alegre staged one of the earliest general strikes in Brazil.² These workers were confronting for the first time the factories' challenge to their sense of who they were and where they stood in a fast-changing social order. For twenty-one days, some three thousand men and women abandoned the new industrial factories and myriad small workshops in the city. Production ground to a halt as they crowded the streets demanding an eight-hour day. For many, strong ethnic identities conditioned these first tentative steps in class formation. As women workers made themselves visible, gender also began to figure notably in strike discourse.

Contemporary observers from the urban middle and upper classes were stunned by the strike's impact on the city. One called it "stupefying": "No one has talked of anything else for three days." To some, it seemed to come out of nowhere, as if it just "exploded in a peaceful city like dynamite."³ But this was no revolutionary general strike. What exploded was not violence—no "riots, broken heads or attacks on property—just noise, no damage." In the first three days as the strike spread, the normal hubbub of the factories died out, leaving "entire neighborhoods dead on weekdays, like a necropolis because factories closed, machines stopped, no smoke issued from the chimneys." Unfamiliar noises broke the silence: strikers at the gates of furniture and textile factories blocking co-workers from entering; "crowds of honest workers walking idly on the streets where they usually work"; hundreds of workers cheering at mass meetings—two simultaneous meetings at one point—at the Café Estrada de Ferro and the headquarters of the União dos Operários on Morro São Pedro in the Praça da Alfandega; and some five hundred clamoring workers marching down the main street bearing red badges and a big red strike banner. The work-

1. *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*, edited by John D. French and Daniel James (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997). See also Marc W. Steinberg, "'The Labour of the Country Is the Wealth of the Country': Class Identity, Consciousness, and the Role of Discourse in the Making of the English Working Class," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 49 (Spring 1996):1–25.

2. Porto Alegre was the chief industrial city in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. At this early stage of Brazil's development, Rio Grande do Sul produced 15 percent of the nation's manufactured products, ranking third after the Federal District (33 percent) and São Paulo (17 percent). More than a quarter of Brazil's one hundred largest factories were operating in Rio Grande do Sul. See Edgar Carone, *A República Velha (instituições e classes sociais)*, 2d ed. (São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1972), 77; and Sandra Jatayh Pesavento, *República Velha gaúcha: Charqueadas-frigoríficos-criadores* (Porto Alegre: Movimento, 1980), 50.

3. These and the following quotations are from *Correio do Povo* (Porto Alegre), 7 Oct. 1906, p. 2. See also 4 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 5 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 6 Oct. 1906, p. 2; and 7 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

ers in the city were making strategic use of public space to proclaim the power and aspirations of labor.

So widespread was the strike that local humorists speculated as to who would join next. One wag predicted it would soon be the public employees, who would demand a two-hour day, and state deputies, who were already leaving the capital. Another jest had it that city prostitutes had announced their own strike, declaring they would work only until 10 p.m. Still another held that priests were planning to strike and would no longer work on Sundays.⁴

The “Greve dos 21 Dias” was not the first one in the region. At least twenty-four had occurred in Rio Grande do Sul previously, but all were small strikes at single worksites, and only three had taken place in Porto Alegre.⁵ In scope, duration, and impact, the 1906 strike represented an unprecedented experience for the region and the city.

In comparative perspective, the 1906 general strike is significant in revealing how workers responded to three major structural changes that were transforming their lives. One was the introduction of new industrial modes of production that were disrupting the familiar commonalities of artisanal work. Another was the transformation of largely hermetic ethnic communities into more heterogeneous communities with multiple ethnic groups and the complications of emerging class identities. A third was the change from an overwhelmingly male paid labor force into an increasingly female workforce. All three transformations challenged customary social relations in fundamental ways. As workers struggled to make sense of these changes, they refashioned their identities of class, ethnicity, and gender. Workers adapted the old and integrated the new as best they could.

IDENTITIES AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE: ARTISANS AND FACTORY WORKERS

The Backdrop for the Strike

No sooner did the political instability that had rocked Brazil in the initial decade of the First Republic (1889–1930) end than another kind of instability appeared, a hallmark of the new century. Between 1903 and 1907, Brazil experienced a first wave of general strikes. They erupted in rapid succession: in Rio de Janeiro in 1903, in the coffee port city of Santos in 1905,

4. *Petit Journal* (Porto Alegre), 13 Oct. 1906, p. 1; and 18 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

5. Sílvia R. Ferraz Petersen, “As greves no Rio Grande do Sul (1890–1919),” in *RS: Economia e política*, edited by José Hildebrando Dacanal and Sergius Gonzaga (Porto Alegre: Mercado Aberto, 1979), 277–327; Sandra Jatahy Pesavento, *A burguesia gaúcha: Dominação do capital e disciplina do trabalho, Rio Grande do Sul, 1889–1930* (Porto Alegre: Mercado Aberto, 1988); and Beatriz Ana Loner, “Operários e participação no início da República: O caso de Pelotas e Rio Grande,” *Estudos Ibero-Americanos* 22, no. 2 (Dec. 1996):71–89 (published by PUCRS).

in São Paulo and Porto Alegre in 1906, and another in São Paulo in 1907. Their timing reflected in part the passing of the economic recession that had closed factories and cut jobs under the presidency of Manuel Ferraz de Campos Salles (1898–1902) and the start of recovery under President Francisco de Paula Rodrigues Alves (1902–1906). The first of these general strikes began among textile workers in Rio in August 1903 and spread to an estimated forty thousand workers, many of them artisans and stevedores. Although some newspapers were sympathetic to the strikers, demands for an eight-hour day and increased pay met with strong resistance from employers (some of whom were already organized) and with violent repression by police. Arrests, intimidation, and attacks on unions ensued. Workers achieved only slight concessions, including a small cut in working hours, and many were fired. When economic recovery created more favorable conditions in 1905, Santos stevedores began the second general strike. The third, in May of 1906, grew out of reactions against modernization by railroad workers of the Companhia Paulista, joined by some four thousand workers in the city of São Paulo. Concessions were promised but were accompanied by brutal police repression, numerous arrests, persecution of labor leaders, and a state of siege.⁶ The 1906 general strike in Porto Alegre unfolded amid more limited repression than had greeted earlier strikes.

The timing and character of this first wave of general strikes reflected an improving economy but also labor leaders' focus on the eight-hour day. Both socialists and anarcho-syndicalists made this goal their top priority. It was the primary demand of the Segunda Conferência Socialista Nacional that convened in São Paulo in 1902, attended by representatives from Rio Grande do Sul, and the Primeiro Congresso Operário held in Rio in April 1906, which was not. At the later congress, where anarcho-syndicalists dominated, delegates debated whether the labor movement should concentrate on better pay or shorter hours and then decided in favor of shorter hours. Anarcho-syndicalists reasoned that an eight-hour day would help reduce unemployment and free workers to study and organize,

6. June E. Hahner, *Poverty and Politics: The Urban Poor in Brazil, 1870–1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 256–59; Michael M. Hall and Hobart A. Spalding Jr., "Urban Labour Movements," in *Latin America: Economy and Society, 1870–1930*, edited by Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 206–7; Edgar Rodrigues, *Socialismo e sindicalismo no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Laemmert, 1969), 99; Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro and Michael M. Hall, *A classe operária no Brasil, 1889–1930: Documentos* (São Paulo: Alfa Omega, 1979), 1:41–42; Margaret Marchiori Bakos, "A habitação em Porto Alegre: Problemas e projetos administrativos (1897–1937)," *Cadernos de Estudo do Curso de Pós-Graduação em História da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*, no. 1 (Nov. 1988):8; Ronald M. Schneider, "Order and Progress": *A Political History of Brazil* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991), 87; Boris Fausto, *Trabalho urbano e conflito social (1890–1920)* (Rio de Janeiro: DIFEL, 1976), 135–46; and Dulce Maria Pompêo de Camargo Leme, *Trabalhadores ferroviários em greve* (Campinas, S.P.: Editora da UNICAMP, 1986).

enabling them to raise their class consciousness. Throughout the rest of 1906, organizing centered on the eight-hour day. This focus helps explain why the eight-hour day became the central demand of the general strike in Porto Alegre in 1906 when even advanced industrial economies (except France) had not yet limited the workday.⁷

In Porto Alegre in 1906, many workers were still accustomed to working in small workshops of skilled artisans, with their human scale, the possibility of advancement from worker to master, and often paternalistic social relations. But some workers were encountering large factories for the first time, with machine production, the substitution of unskilled workers, and their more disciplined and hierarchical social relations. The first significant growth in manufacturing in the region had occurred in the 1890s, as food-producing small farms of German and Italian immigrants in the city's hinterland began to mature into a source of capital accumulation for immigrant entrepreneurs and a market for industrial goods. Although blacks and mulattos made up about a third of the urban population in the 1890s, most of the estimated five thousand workers in factories and workshops were skilled white male artisans, largely European immigrants or their descendants.⁸ Regional political leaders viewed them approvingly, not as a dangerous underclass in need of repression but as hard-working and virtuous independent artisans from "good European racial stock" who had much to contribute to regional development.⁹ As in São Paulo, racial prejudice and the association of blacks with urban crime and disorder helped relegate most nonwhites to low-paid menial labor while filling manufacturing jobs with preferred whites. Nor were Porto Alegrenses unaware of the process at the time. Some employers openly declared that they were hiring only "Europeans," although they and their defenders claimed superior skills rather than superior race as their rationale.¹⁰

Many artisans aspired to become owners of their own establishments, and some succeeded. But by the early 1900s, dreams of upward social mobility were dimming as some workshops expanded beyond the range of traditional personalistic relations and large factories began to loom. In the late 1890s, some artisans blamed machines for displacing them

7. Sylvia Magnani, "A classe operária vai à luta: A greve de 1907 em São Paulo," *Cara a Cara* 1, no. 1 (1978):106, 109–10, 115; and Hahner, *Poverty and Politics*, 226.

8. Sandra Jatahy Pesavento, *Emergência dos subalternos* (Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 1989), 69–70.

9. Nelson Boeira, "O Rio Grande de Augusto Comte," in Décio Freitas et al., *RS: Cultura e Ideologia* (Porto Alegre: Mercado Aberto, 1980), 36–37. The 1906 strike apparently did nothing to challenge this racial appraisal of workers. A 1907 May Day editorial in the official party paper claimed Riograndense workers were exceptional in Brazil because they were free from the stigma of former slavery. See *A Federação*, 1 May 1907, p. 1.

10. Pesavento, *Subalternos*, 71, 75–79; and George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888–1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

from their old jobs. They complained that they were working more and earning less.¹¹ When the general strike broke out in 1906, Porto Alegre contained a half-dozen factories with more than 100 workers. The shoe factory of the Companhia Progresso Industrial, for example, employed some 250 men, women, and children; the stocking plant of the Companhia Fábril, 320; and the Fiateci textile mill, 400. A more accurate measure of the city's growing pains was the proliferation of manufacturing establishments employing more than 50 workers, although still fewer than 100. Clustered in metalworking and production of clothing, furniture, and food, these establishments became a primary battleground for conflict over changes in the social relations of production.¹²

Industrial growth fueled urban discontents. At the turn of the century, Porto Alegre was experiencing its most rapid urban growth. The 1890 population of 52,000 doubled by 1910. The region's traditional export economy based on pastoral products grew steadily from 1904 to 1912. In 1906 the state's total exports exceeded the previous high of 1898.¹³ Entire new urban districts took shape in Porto Alegre. North and east of the center of the city, German artisans opened workshops along the rail line north to the German colonies, and from these beginnings, Navegantes emerged as the city's premier industrial district. There and in adjacent São João, workers and artisans created working-class neighborhoods, causing the population of the city's fourth district to balloon. In 1906 many streets in Navegantes had no identifying signs because orders for them could not keep pace with growth. The city still lacked public water and a sewer system, and electric lights had yet to replace gas except downtown.¹⁴

As the city grew, so did the ranks of the indigent. During the fifteen years preceding the strike, the number of *cortiços* (beehive-like tenements of the poor opening off a center court) more than quadrupled, from three hundred in 1890 to over twelve hundred by 1904. Municipal officials de-

11. *O Proletário* (Porto Alegre), 26 July 1896, p. 1.

12. Sérgio da Costa Franco, *Porto Alegre: Guia histórico*, 2d ed. (Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 1992), 221; Rio Grande do Sul, *O Rio Grande industrial* (Porto Alegre: Echenique Irmãos, 1907), 26; Rio Grande do Sul, *Descriptive Memorial of the State of Rio Grande do Sul Organized . . . for the International Exhibition of São Luiz, 1904* (Porto Alegre: Commercial Library, 1904); and Alfredo F. Rodrigues, *Notícia histórica e descritiva do estado do Rio Grande do Sul* (Rio Grande: Livraria Americana, 1896).

13. Rio Grande do Sul, *Anuário do Estado, 1893* (Porto Alegre: n.p., 1894), 156; Rio Grande do Sul, "Repatrição de Estatística," *Relatório 1913* (Porto Alegre: A Federação, 1914), 24; and Florencio C. de Abreu e Silva, "Retrospecto econômico e financeiro do Rio Grande do Sul, 1822–1922," *Revista do Arquivo Público do Rio Grande do Sul*, no. 8 (Dec. 1922), graph following p. 261, see also p. 325.

14. Francisco Riopardense de Macedo, *Porto Alegre: Origem e crescimento* (Porto Alegre: Livraria Sulina, 1968), 103; *A Federação* (Porto Alegre), 27 Sept. 1906, p. 2; and Joseph L. Love, *Rio Grande do Sul and Brazilian Regionalism, 1882–1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1971), p. 20.

scribed them as “pestilential buldings, without air or light.” Yet critics charged that even their rents were beyond the reach of many workers due to the high municipal buildings tax levied on the cortiços to discourage their growth and landlords who charged high rents for lodgings near places of work.¹⁵ In the weeks preceding the general strike, the city Diretoria da Higiene launched a high-profile campaign to clean up the cortiços. Hygiene inspectors moved through the city street by street, distributing rat poison to reduce the hordes of rodents and issuing citations to the poor to clean up courtyards and repair dilapidated dwellings. In September alone, the city incinerated almost five thousand rats.¹⁶ In Porto Alegre (as in Rio de Janeiro at that time), efforts to sanitize the city generated resentment among the poor. The local labor press decried them as intrusive and discriminatory because they focused on the dwellings of the poor, where they “always find something wrong, while [they] hardly look at the rich.” Rather than blame the poor for the unsanitary conditions in which they were forced to live, one reporter protested, “what the government should do is make sure the poor don’t have to live in houses lacking sanitary conditions.”¹⁷

With the growing numbers of indigents came public concern over the increasing potential for urban disorder. One horrified observer described inhabitants of the cortiços as living “for the most part without family” in “repugnant promiscuity.”¹⁸ Journalists and intellectuals reacted to the visibility of the urban poor by condemning their conduct as a corrupting influence on the city’s progress. Gangs of boys had begun to roam the city streets, they reported, increasing juvenile crime and drawing public indignation. At the public market by the quays, stevedores, day laborers, rowdies, and the unemployed shouted obscenities and jostled alarmed passersby while fencing with knives and crowding around animated contests of *capoeiragem* (a melding of martial art and dance that originated with slaves), posting a lookout to warn of the approach of the sole policeman patrolling the area.¹⁹

15. Rio Grande do Sul, *Anuário 1893*, 156; and Bakos, “Habitação em Porto Alegre,” 5–10, quotation on p. 5.

16. *A Federação*, 18 Sept. 1906, p. 2; 19 Sept. 1906, p. 2; 27 Sept. 1906, p. 2; 28 Sept. 1906, p. 2; and 1 Oct. 1906, p. 2. Just the preceding year, young Getúlio Vargas, then a student living in a boardinghouse in downtown Porto Alegre, had contracted the bubonic plague carried by the rats in the city. See Leandro da Silva Telles, *Crônicas das ruas de Porto Alegre* (Porto Alegre: Prefeitura Municipal, 1971), 75.

17. *Avante* (Porto Alegre), 17 July 1908, p. 1; and Jeffrey D. Needell, “The Revolt against Modernization in Belle-Epoque Rio de Janeiro,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 67, no. 2 (1987):233–69.

18. *Exhibition of 1904*, 31.

19. *O Independente* (Porto Alegre), 11 Nov. 1906, p. 1; and 22 Nov. 1906, p. 1. On the conservative authoritarian ideology of the writers for *O Independente*, see Anderson Zalewski Vargas, “Moralidade, autoritarismo e controle social em Porto Alegre na virada do século 19,” in

To make matters worse, urban poverty in 1906 hit unprecedented levels as the rural interior of Rio Grande do Sul reeled under successive natural disasters. According to *O Independente*, "Drought scorched the countryside, then clouds of grasshoppers devoured what little drought had left; fertile fields dried up; pastures no longer supported their herds; *lavradores* abandoned the countryside for the cities."²⁰ All over Porto Alegre, hunger made itself felt and beggars proliferated. They went from door to door downtown and from seat to seat in the trams. They haunted the entrances of cafés.²¹ Beggars thus took their places on the urban stage as the strike was about to begin.

The Coming of the General Strike

In September 1906, a handful of marble workers wrote the prologue to the October general strike. Although a few socialists had tried to build a constituency for electoral politics among city workers since the advent of the republic, the marble workers took up anarchist tactics of direct action. Anarchist ideas, introduced in the mid-1890s when families from the failed anarchist colony of Cecília in Paraná settled in Porto Alegre, gained appeal as the authoritarian politics of the republic solidified.²² The marble workers, like many of their fellow artisans, owned their own tools, possessed skills that made them hard to replace, and expected to be treated with a minimum of dignity. Yet they labored eleven hours a day.²³ Hence the workers' chief objective was not higher pay but a shorter workday.

The marble workers set out to bargain directly with their employer, the owner of the Casa Aloys Friedrichs. In a letter dated 26 August, they identified themselves as working-class, justifying their demand for an eight-hour day on the grounds that it would give them "some time for the moral and intellectual development of the working class." They made it clear that they understood the working class as transcending their small city in the far south of Brazil. In fact, they proclaimed themselves participants in the recent trend toward shorter hours "in almost all parts of the civilized world." Their cordial, respectful letter evinced no open hostility or revolutionary ardor, appealing to Friedrichs as "an honest man," "hard-

Claudia Mauch et al., *Porto Alegre na virada do século 19: Cultura e sociedade* (Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 1994), 25–42.

20. *O Independente*, 25 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

21. *O Independente*, 18 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

22. Stella Borges, *Italianos: Porto Alegre e trabalho* (Porto Alegre: EST Edições, 1993), 77, 79; Newton Stadler da Sousa, *O anarquismo da Colônia Cecília* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1970); and Edgar Rodrigues, *Nacionalismo e cultura social, 1913–1922* (Rio de Janeiro: Laemmert, 1972), 34–48.

23. João Batista Marçal, *Primeiras lutas operárias no Rio Grande do Sul: Origens do sindicalismo rio-grandense* (Porto Alegre: Globo, 1985), 79.

working and open to all that is just," one "who has always treated us well."²⁴ Such phrases catered to the paternalistic image cultivated by many employers in Porto Alegre.²⁵ The workers showed their determination nonetheless. The letter warned that without a favorable response, they would "need to take a different resolution." Friedrichs chose not to play benevolent father to his workers. Yielding nothing, he left them to take that path.

During the strike, the marble workers asserted their solidarity, dignity, and identity as propertied artisans, while Friedrichs displayed little of the employer who had always treated his workers well. Intransigent for the first week, he then declared a nine-hour workday with a stern ultimatum: if workers rejected his schedule, they could come one by one to pick up their tools. Although a nine-hour day represented a substantial gain for the strikers, they held out for eight and judged their boss to be peremptory and unyielding when he refused to budge. Relations were further embittered when workers were assaulted, not by the police but by their employer's *capangas* (hired thugs). Fearful of more violence but determined to hold out, the strikers went in a body to retrieve their tools. Apprehensive, Friedrichs denied them entry and tools and summoned police protection. The workers convinced the police that they were only reclaiming what rightfully belonged to them, and when the police withdrew, they calmly picked up their property and left.²⁶ When the strike was three weeks old, "workers from all classes" joined representatives of various workers' associations in a waterfront demonstration of sympathy with ten strikers leaving to work in Rio. The rest maintained solidarity through most of September.²⁷

The marble workers' strike provided the first glimpse of interaction between class formation and ethnic identities. The new *sindicato* was led by Italian immigrant anarchist Henrique Faccini, a member of one of the families from the failed Cecília colony.²⁸ His opposition to an employer of German origin added a dimension of ethnic friction to the strike. Nor was Aloys Friedrichs just any German-speaking employer: he was a prominent leader of the German ethnic community. Born in Germany, Friedrichs had adopted Brazilian citizenship soon after arriving in Brazil and considered himself deeply Brazilian even as he continued to take pride in his German heritage. Since 1893 he had served as president of the city's leading gymnastic society, which brought the German practice of gymnastics to Rio

24. Lygia Ketzer Fagundes, Lizete Kummer, Maria Stephanou, and Sandra Jatayh Pesavento, *Memória da indústria gaúcha, das origens a 1930: Documentos* (Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 1987), 271–72.

25. Pesavento, *A burguesia gaúcha*.

26. "Movimento operário," *A Luta* (Porto Alegre), 13 Sept. 1906, p. 2.

27. "Movimento operário," *A Luta*, 13 Sept. 1906, p. 2; 29 Sept. 1906, p. 2; and Marçal, *Primeiras lutas*, 19.

28. Borges, *Italianos*, 77–79.

Grande do Sul and also organized concerts, plays, and festivities of all kinds for the German-speaking community.²⁹

The eventual settlement of the marble strike resulted from the strikers' solidarity, their employer's inability to replace their skills in the limited local labor market, and negotiations by the city's longtime socialist labor leader, mulatto printer Francisco Xavier da Costa, who enjoyed close ties to the German-speaking community.³⁰ Strikers won the eight-hour day they sought and a pledge that none would be fired. But the reduction in hours came with a reduction in pay for some workers. Marble polishers won a 10 percent pay raise, but workers paid at an hourly rate based on ten hours a day were left with a cut. Because the original strike demands had ruled out this trade-off, the workers' victory proved to be a qualified one at best. Nor did Friedrichs waste time in trying to renege on his agreement. After the settlement, he attempted to get rid of the troublemakers by going to Buenos Aires to hire replacement workers. His efforts were stymied when workers there took a stance of solidarity with the strikers.³¹ However qualified the victory, the marble workers' strike presaged two key features of the general strike to follow: competition between anarchists and socialists for leadership of labor organizations, and tensions between German and Italian ethnic communities. Once the settlement was achieved, the anarchist newspaper *A Luta* hailed the marble workers as heroes for taking the first step in the eventual "liberation" of Porto Alegre.³²

The marble strike played a catalytic role in local class formation in 1906. Marble strikers called on the workers in the city to take up the struggle, and they set an example by organizing a *sindicato*. Their lead inspired a surge of solidarity, spurred a round of organization culminating in the general strike, and heightened competition between anarchist and socialist labor organizers. When *A Luta* began publication in mid-September, it called the marble workers' strike "an alarm sounding to awaken others."³³ On 9 September, stoneworkers and hatmakers responded to the call by organizing *sindicatos* of their own. Instrumental in founding the stoneworkers' union were socialist Xavier da Costa, his close friend and Italian socialist José Macchi, and Italian syndicalist militant Luiz Derivi. Hatmakers were led by one Italian and two German workers.³⁴ Efforts also began to organize weavers and tailors and to spur the *União dos Metalúrgicos* into action.

The most significant organizational response was the founding in late September of the *Federação Operária do Rio Grande do Sul* (FORGS)

29. Jean Roche, *La colonisation allemande et le Rio Grande do Sul* (Paris: Institut des Hautes Etudes de l'Amérique Latine, 1959), 484.

30. "Ecos das oficinas," *A Luta*, 15 Dec. 1906, p. 2.

31. *A Luta*, 10 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

32. *A Luta*, 10 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

33. *A Luta*, 29 Sept. 1906, p. 2.

34. Borges, *Italianos*, 78; and Marçal, *Primeiras lutas*, 93, 99.

under Xavier da Costa. In addition to the waterfront demonstration of support for the departing marble strikers, two other public events mobilized workers for creating FORGS. The first used the 20 September celebrations of the 1835 Revolução Farroupilha, an important regional civic commemoration. On that day in 1906, "the working class" held its own celebrations. Joining Xavier da Costa were two other leaders in the subsequent general strike, José Zeller-Rethaler and Carlos Cavaco.

Metalworker Zeller-Rethaler was close to Xavier da Costa as a long-time socialist activist and a founder of the city's German workers' Allgemeiner Arbeiter Verein (AAV, the General Workers' Association) in 1892, the Partido Socialista do Rio Grande do Sul in 1897, and the Partido Operária and the União dos Metalúrgicos both in 1905. By the time of the general strike, he had been selected as president of the AAV.³⁵

Cavaco (Custódio Carlos de Araújo) was no worker. Born in the town of Livramento on the Uruguayan border in 1878, he fought in the state civil war in the 1890s, attended the Escola Militar do Realengo in Rio, and moved to Porto Alegre in 1905 at age twenty-seven to launch his colorful career as a lawyer, writer, poet, and socialist champion of the working class. Cavaco soon became the friend and constant companion of Xavier da Costa, working as a journalist first for his socialist weekly *A Democracia* and the *Gazeta do Comércio* and in 1906 as co-editor, along with a dissident Republican, of the *Petit Journal*.³⁶

On 23 September, a Sunday afternoon, Xavier da Costa and Cavaco spoke again before what was billed as a public meeting of the working class, one that overflowed the Praça da Alfândega. Cavaco denounced the established order for the workers' suffering and confirmed his reputation as a fiery orator. Brought from his residence by eight workers, Cavaco stood atop a bench to give "a strong revolutionary speech" that *A Luta* reported as "continually interrupted by the applause of the multitude." Pointing to examples set by the German and French workers' movements, he rejected failed local attempts to elect a socialist deputy and called instead for immediate founding of a regional workers' federation. Workers should go to the barricades if necessary, he urged, and "go to their bosses with an olive branch in their left hand and dynamite in their right."³⁷ After the speeches, Xavier da Costa and Cavaco led a crowd through the main street shouting "vivas" to social revolution and the working class. At the end of the march, both spoke at a local labor headquarters to an audience of students, military cadets, families, journalists, and government authorities—all in "perfect order."³⁸

35. *Petit Journal*, 21 Sept. 1906, p. 1.

36. Ivo Caggiani, *Carlos Cavaco: A vida quixotesca do tribuno popular de Porto Alegre* (Porto Alegre: Martins, 1986), 20, 43, 62–67, 185–87.

37. *A Luta*, 29 Sept. 1906, p. 2.

38. *Petit Journal*, 24 Sept. 1906, p. 2; 15 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 16 Oct. 1906, p. 1; and 30 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

The founding of FORGS duly followed. It rested on the organizational base already established among German-speaking workers and socialists, which made it to some extent a successor to the Liga Operária Internacional, founded by Xavier da Costa and other socialists in 1895 and active for some five years. Whether anarchists were pushed aside in the founding of FORGS or chose not to participate is a point of dispute. They had their own organizational base in the União Operário Internacional, founded in 1905, and thus formation of FORGS was partly a move in opposition to them. Subsequent anarchist charges that Xavier da Costa and Cavaco played no substantive role in the general strike are not borne out by the evidence. Both spoke at mass meetings to organize workers more than a week before the general strike began, and both met with strikers from five factories on the first day of the strike. Committees of workers came to them during the strike seeking directions. Xavier da Costa and Cavaco also spoke separately to stoneworkers, metalworkers, woodworkers, bakers, stevedores, and boatmen. They were cheered by different groups of workers and by riders on passing trams. On one occasion, a crowd hoisted Cavaco on its shoulders. Both were clearly instrumental in giving the strike movement a centralized organizational structure, with a general directory, central committees, and representative committees. They also tried to expel anarchists from the labor movement.³⁹

By the end of September, FORGS had joined the labor organizations existing in Porte Alegre. In addition to the anarchist União Operária and the new unions of marble workers, stoneworkers, and hatters, there were now two ethnic workers' organizations—one German and one Polish—as well as trade-based organizations of printers, metalworkers, bakers, and woodworkers.⁴⁰ On these scant organizational foundations, the general strike was built.

Various motives influenced the thousands of workers who idled the factories and workshops of Porto Alegre during the Greve dos 21 Dias in October 1906. The activist few were inspired by the recent strike wave in the center-south of Brazil and the Primeiro Congresso Operário held in Rio the preceding April, and they were galvanized by the local marble workers' strike. The first to strike discovered widespread enthusiasm for the eight-hour day, given long local working hours and propitious economic conditions. Some strikers even expressed a sense of security regarding serious repression, claiming that the police were afraid of them and that workers represented "a respectable electoral force that the government has an interest in not displeasing."⁴¹ Strike critics, for their part, charged that many workers

39. *Petit Journal*, 14 Sept. 1906, p. 2; 21 Sept. 1906, p. 1; 1 Oct. 1906, p. 1; 2 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 4 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 5 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 8 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 9 Oct. 1906, p. 2; and 15 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

40. *A Luta*, 13 Sept. 1906, p. 3.

41. *Correio do Povo*, 11 Oct. 1906, p. 1. For praise of restraint on the part of the police, the

remained off the job due only to fear and intimidation by strikers. Deeper and more complicated motives could also be found in the city's changing structures of class, ethnicity, and gender and in the ways that workers responded to them.

Who Participated in the General Strike? Reality and Representation

Skilled artisans began the general strike, spread it, and sustained it. Few of the city's many workshops functioned during the strike. Even in the factories, many workers were in reality artisans or highly skilled workers rather than members of an industrial proletariat. At the Kappel and Arnt furniture factory, for example, many of the 120 workers who joined the strike were skilled woodworkers who used their own tools and allegedly had savings set aside. Workers in the biggest shoe factory were skilled shoemakers who were paid by the pair rather than by the hour or the day. Many workers striking at a lard factory were skilled tinsmiths, whose employer lamented that he could replace only them with workers from the United States or Europe.⁴² The heavy participation by skilled workers who knew that they could not easily be replaced in the limited local labor market is a major explanation of their determination to sustain the general strike. The *Correio do Povo* recognized this factor in noting that the highly skilled weavers on strike "know their value perfectly well and know that employers can replace them only by sending for others from Europe."⁴³ Even the largest metallurgical factory in the city, the symbol of modernity and progress, used inside contracting to employ skilled metalworkers who could bring their assistants to work in the factory to complete a designated job at a pre-agreed price—with the contractor setting the pay rate for his assistants.⁴⁴ Yet the peremptory treatment and abysmal working conditions to which artisans increasingly found themselves subjected were a far cry from the paternalistic small workshops of their memories. At stake for those caught up in the wrenching shift from workshop to factory were autonomy and independence, control over their work, customary social relations, and cherished hopes of social mobility.

The spread of the general strike from artisans to unskilled factory

state government, and the state Brigada Militar during the strike from a paper that strongly supported the strike, see *Petit Journal*, 6 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 8 Oct. 1906, p. 1; 13 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 15 Oct. 1906, p. 1; and 20 Oct. 1906, p. 2. On the early involvement of workers in the politics of the region's major parties, see Adhemar Lourenço da Silva Jr., "A bipolaridade política rio-grandense e o movimento operário (1887-1925)," *Estudos Ibero-Americanos* 22, no. 2 (Dec. 1996):5–12.

42. *Correio do Povo*, 18 Oct. 1906, p. 1; 20 Oct. 1906, p. 2; *A Gazetinha* (Porto Alegre), 7 Apr. 1898, p. 1; *A Luta*, 7 Sept. 1907, p. 3; and 15 Nov. 1906, p. 1.

43. *Correio do Povo*, 18 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

44. "Ecos das oficinas," *A Luta*, 1 July 1907, p. 2.

workers was paradoxically a key to its success as well as a source of weakness. The further the strike spread, the more heterogeneous the pool of strikers became.⁴⁵ While *A Luta* later defended the strike as a labor victory, it ruefully admitted that many of the workers who took part felt little solidarity and were drawn in only “by the magic current of bombastic words from opportunists.”⁴⁶ At this initial stage of industrial growth, class consciousness was low or nonexistent. As one textile worker responded bluntly to the marble workers’ call for solidarity, “What do I have to do with marble workers?”⁴⁷

In the images that defenders of capital and property created to discredit the general strike, the unskilled factory workers vanished—and along with them, the city’s entire unsettling introduction to factory production. The mainstream press identified strikers as strictly artisans and artisans as prosperous and propertied individuals who could have no valid grounds for complaint. The *Correio do Povo* assured readers that Porto Alegre had “very few workers [*operários*], properly speaking.” The strikers were instead “individuals with resources, [who] live in houses, own land, and can hold out for a month or two.”⁴⁸ As the strike lengthened, this argument developed a comforting circular logic: we have no misery here in Porto Alegre because the strikers could never sustain their protest if their misery were real. This myth of the well-off worker was not new. Almost a decade earlier, Porto Alegre’s *Deutsche Zeitung* had dismissed workers’ complaints by asserting that while socialism was justifiable in Germany, it was “inopportune” in Rio Grande do Sul, where workers “actually often live better than their employer.”⁴⁹ The myth acquired irony as many artisans felt that what little they had possessed in the day of the small workshop was rapidly disappearing.

The circumstances of the city’s artisans were rendered differently in the anarchist *A Luta*. To counter the perceived misrepresentation of workers’ lives by bourgeois interests, *A Luta* set out to document the miserable conditions in which workers in the city actually labored and lived. The paper scoffed at “the joke of our bourgeoisie that our area does not yet have the conditions for the labor struggles of other centers more industrially advanced—we have the same misery, the same sad and emaciated faces . . . , weak children, and young workers in the darkness of workshops, sick but forced to work.”⁵⁰ *A Luta* located most of the inhumanity and injustice suffered by the workers in the unfamiliar world of the new industrial factories.

45. *Correio do Povo*, 18 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

46. “Movimento operário,” *A Luta*, 28 Oct. 1906, p. 2; and 22 Feb. 1907, p. 1.

47. “Movimento operário,” *A Luta*, 13 Sept. 1906, p. 2.

48. *Correio do Povo*, 18 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

49. *A Gazetinha*, 16 May 1897, p. 2.

50. “Movimento operário,” *A Luta*, 13 Sept. 1906, p. 2.

In contrast to the small workshop where the owner frequently worked alongside his craftsmen, the new and often hostile figure of the foreman interposed himself between owner and worker while the owner withdrew into the shadows. This change loomed all the more threatening when compounded by the introduction of modern machinery. In the city's largest shoe factory, with a workforce of 250, workers charged that their foreman and his assistant refused to maintain equipment in safe working condition, denied workers permission to make essential repairs themselves, and bore responsibility for serious injuries that three workers sustained when poorly maintained machinery fell on them. Such cases highlighted the meaning of workers' loss of control over their tools. Another factor separating workers from the myth of the happy artisan was the widening chasm between the earnings of owners and workers. *A Luta* cited one owner whose yearly earnings were fifty-six times those of some of his workers.⁵¹

A Luta's editors also challenged the conventional portrait of benevolent paternalistic relations between the city's bosses and workers. In reporting on relief efforts for two workers who lost their jobs following injuries in separate accidents in a furniture factory, *A Luta* noted sarcastically that the plant manager called himself "the father of the workers," but "that most generous father paid them nothing toward their injuries."⁵² If local relations between bosses and workers mirrored those between parent and child in any way, it was to belittle and demean the worker. One tramworker described the humiliation that he and his co-workers suffered, "Some supervisors berate us in front of the passengers as if we were children, when they aren't sacrificing us economically at their pleasure."⁵³ The lesson seemed to be that workers accepting treatment as children could expect little economic protection in return.

The unskilled factory workers missing from elite accounts of the strike materialized in the pages of *A Luta*, which argued that skilled craftsmen were being reduced to the same level as new unskilled proletarians. Depicting the two categories as bound by shared misery served anarchists in calling for a common struggle to better workers' lives. The two groups were experiencing some of the same objective circumstances: a workplace with inhuman and unjust conditions, a far cry from the harmonious near-equality of what might be called a "remembered workshop."⁵⁴ Both groups suffered long, exhausting workdays of eleven and twelve hours (tram workers toiled as many as eighteen). Interminable workdays left them physically depleted, depressed, and prone to alcoholism while depriving

51. "Eterna crise," *A Luta*, 2 Jan. 1907, p. 2; and "Ecos das oficinas," 1 July 1907, p. 2.

52. *A Luta*, 15 Dec. 1906, p. 3.

53. *A Luta*, 13 Sept. 1906, p. 1.

54. I am using the language of James C. Scott in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

them of time needed to study and the comfort of their families. Some skilled artisans fared even worse than factory workers: printers were forced to start work at 8 a.m. and did not finish until 2, 3, or 4 the next morning. Workshops could be as unhealthy as factories in being dark, humid, and airless. Moreover, Porto Alegre had factories and workshops where workers complained that they had no access to basic human essentials such as clean drinking water.⁵⁵

Such representations sharply delineated the widening class divisions in Porto Alegre at the time of the general strike. But as more workers began to develop some sense of membership in an economic class, many somehow had to reconcile incipient class identity with preexisting identities strongly rooted in ethnicity.

ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL CLASSES

Patterns of Class and Ethnicity in Porto Alegre

Observers of the general strike were struck by “the foreign quality” of the workers in the city as well as by the diversity of cultures among the participants. A majority of the workers in Porto Alegre were foreign-born or had parents who were immigrants.⁵⁶ One commentator marveled at how the strikers of “the populous new neighborhoods” were “mixed, motley,” and how their “diverse tongues, costumes, and ideas clashed, yet all wanted one and the same thing.”⁵⁷ This observation recognized the degree to which the workers in the city were paradoxically divided yet united. The strike captured them at a moment of rapid transformation from the self-conscious and densely woven ethnic communities of the past to a more heterogeneous community of mixed class and ethnic identities. The strike experience accelerated that change. The 1906 general strike thus provides an opportunity to examine the way these workers tried to make sense of the changing meanings of ethnicity during their common struggle for an eight-hour day.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Rio Grande do Sul had become home to thousands of immigrants from Germany and Italy, with smaller numbers arriving from other European countries. Many had settled on small farms in the *colono* zone of the state, north and west of the capital. Many others settled in Porto Alegre or migrated there later from the *colono* zone or sent some of their numerous descendants to the city in later generations. The leading industrial district of Navegantes, for example, grew as artisans migrated from the German colony of São Leopoldo to join the other

55. *A Luta*, 29 Sept. 1906, pp. 2, 3; and 15 Dec. 1906, p. 2.

56. Stefan Michalski, “Os farçantes,” *A Luta*, 22 Feb. 1907, p. 3.

57. *Correio do Povo*, 7 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

German artisans who had originally settled the area. Observers of the early factories were struck by the workers' and owners' blonde hair and blue eyes. In the 1890s, an estimated six thousand Italians accounted for some 10 percent of the population of Porto Alegre, among them shoemakers and tailors, carpenters and cabinetmakers, tinsmiths and ironworkers, butchers and bakers, carters, stonecutters, and construction workers.⁵⁸

Many immigrants and their descendants clung to their original languages and customs in maintaining strong ethnic communities. In 1897, for example, a judge complained that ethnic solidarity garbled the evidence on a minor street conflict with police. After one of a group of Spanish workers was arrested for fighting with a police agent in front of a local Spanish tavern, the rest reportedly shouted "*vivas*" to Spain and "*morrás*" to Brazil. After hearing anti-Spanish testimony from Brazilian witnesses, no fewer than eleven Spaniards gave contradictory accounts that made plain their utter inability to "see" or "hear" anything that would incriminate their countryman.⁵⁹ Many immigrants from recently unified Italy spoke regional dialects rather than the official national language and maintained strong ethnic identities based on their local areas of origin. In 1904 a group of patriotic Italian workers in Porto Alegre wrote to the king of Italy to ask support for Italian-language schools.⁶⁰ Ethnic exclusivity had long been pronounced among German Protestants, whose faith was closely tied to German culture and set them apart from predominately Catholic Brazilians. The Protestants defended their ethnocultural heritage fiercely, while German Catholics tended to put religious ties above those of ethnicity and establish closer ties with Portuguese-speaking Catholics than with their German-speaking Protestant neighbors. In the early twentieth century, Protestants made up almost two-thirds of Porto Alegre's German-speaking community, and some regarded their culture and institutions as superior to those of Brazilians. One extreme German Protestant leader, Dr. Wilhelm Rotermund, had for some years been preaching German racial superiority and racial purity. He claimed in 1897, "We Germans are an elite and can fulfill our cultural mission only when we do not mix with Latin people."⁶¹

58. Borges, *Italianos*, 66, 70, 80; Riopardense de Macedo, *Porto Alegre*, 103; Roche, *Colonisation allemande*, 160; and Núncia Santoro de Constantino, *O Italiano da esquina: Imigrantes na sociedade porto-alegrense* (Porto Alegre: Escola Superior de Teologia e Espiritualidade Franciscana, 1991), 58, 60–61, 97, 118.

59. See Réu Salvador Garcia, Juri 36–2-29, Cartório de Crime, Porto Alegre, 1897, p. 13, Arquivo Público de Porto Alegre.

60. Constantino, *O italiano*, 17, 138, 151; and *O Proletário*, 18 Aug. 1904, p. 3.

61. Frederick C. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil: A Comparative History of Cultural Conflict during World War I* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 36, 39, 43, quote from 72; Roche, *Colonisation allemande*; and Thales de Azevedo, *Materiaes para o estudo da aculturação de italianos no Rio Grande do Sul* (Bahia: n.p., 1957).

These immigrant communities created numerous ethnic associations that helped maintain ethnic bonds. The sense of ethnic identity led predictably to friction between ethnic groups. In 1895, for example, an incensed Italian mob attacked the newspaper office of a German editor who had condemned their patriotic celebration of the anniversary of Italian unification. On other occasions, violent fights broke out with clubs, knives, and guns between Luso youths who drank and danced at the Hotel da Europa and Germans who danced and sang at the Casthauzum Grünenbaum. In June of 1906, a young Russian-born day laborer, angry over his treatment at the hands of some Italians, robbed one offender and stabbed another to death.⁶²

Politics reinforced ethnic solidarity in significant ways. In the German-speaking community, the politics of the early republic led the state's ruling party to support the maintenance of German culture. In the last years of the Brazilian Empire, after a campaign urging German speakers to adopt Brazilian citizenship, vote, and organize as a political force, four ethnic Germans had been elected to the provincial assembly. With the advent of the republic, the authoritarian leader of the Partido Republicano Riograndense (PRR), Júlio de Castilhos, demanded unquestioning political support from the region's ethnic Germans and ensured them cultural autonomy in exchange. Although Castilhos consolidated control of the state under the PRR by 1897, enduring federalist opposition had jelled over the course of the region's civil war (1893–1895). With German speakers accounting for a quarter of the state's registered voters, Castilhos shrewdly split them among three different electoral districts.⁶³ This tactic prevented their coalescing into a homogeneous bloc and exploited their docile vote to sustain the PRR's authoritarian political machine. Thus maintenance of the politically submissive and electorally useful German-speaking community became a key component of the distinctive and enduring Castilhista political system. Years later, sociologist Gilberto Freyre recognized and condemned the political purpose that underwrote a separate German ethnic culture: "descendants of Germans were allowed liberties or privileges entirely incompatible with Brazilian cultural basic unity . . . by politicians who needed German votes in order to dominate or control their particular state."⁶⁴

This exchange of political acquiescence for ethnic cultural autonomy was called into question at the turn of the century when Pan-Germanism and

62. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil*, 63; *A Gazetinha*, 30 Jan. 1899, p. 2; and Réu Jacob Gerbauer, *Juri 144–7-29*, no. 872, Cartório do Crime, Porto Alegre, 1906, Arquivo Público de Porto Alegre.

63. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil*, 66–67; and Roche, *Colonisation allemande*, 556.

64. Gilberto Freyre, *New World in the Tropics: The Culture of Modern Brazil* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 102.

fear of “the German peril” struck Brazil. In 1904 samples of Pan-German rhetoric from newspapers in Germany appeared in Porto Alegre’s main daily, the *Correio do Povo*, claiming that the Reich’s sphere of influence extended over Rio Grande do Sul. The furor was fed by news of two diplomatic incidents: Germany’s 1904 intervention in the Venezuelan debt crisis and the alleged violation of Brazilian sovereignty by sailors from the German gunship *Panther* in Santa Catarina in 1905. The PRR’s official party organ, *A Federação*, printed some Pan-German rhetoric in 1905. Some leaders within Porto Alegre’s German-speaking community took pains to counter anti-German feeling and affirm their loyalty to Brazil. In 1904 they established a new weekly, the *Rio Grandenser Vaterland* (Rio Grande Fatherland), whose name proclaimed the loyalty of Teuto-Brazilians (Brazilians of German descent) to the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Local politicians backed the paper and its opposition to Pan-German aims.⁶⁵

In July 1904, a number of Porto Alegre’s German societies hosted a gala reception for a visiting representative of German emigration associations from Hamburg, who sought to defuse Brazilian fears of the German peril. Dismissing that “peril” as a chimera, he exhorted the local German-speaking community to reject exclusivism by uniting with Brazilians in general and with Riograndenses in particular while preserving their language and customs. Governor Antônio Augusto Borges de Medeiros, in attendance with a full contingent of state and federal officials, affirmed in response that he had no fear of the German peril, a creation of prejudiced minds. He assured the gathering that he did not ask those of German descent to renounce the land of their fathers, their traditions, or their language. They should honor the land of their origins because in so doing they would honor Rio Grande do Sul as well.⁶⁶ Fears of Pan-Germanism put supporters of accommodation between the ruling party and the German ethnic community on the defensive at the time when German-speaking workers were about to take a central role in the 1906 general strike.

Heavy foreign migration patterned the region’s early industrialization in ways similar and dissimilar to other Brazilian regions. Factory owners in Porto Alegre resembled those in other industrializing cities of Brazil in their preference for hiring workers from immigrant stock. The German owner of the large stocking factory in the city would not hire native Brazilians at all. In another case, an employer discussing replacements for striking workers at his factory considered the only possible sources to be the immigrant farming zone and European countries. Unlike the situation in São Paulo, where industrial workers at the turn of the century were almost all Italian but employers were often Brazilian, in Porto Alegre many of the

65. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil*, 71–72, 74.

66. Sílvio Romero, “O alemanismo no sul do Brasil,” in Romero, *Realidades e ilusões no Brasil* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1979), 250–52.

owners of workshops and factories were German immigrants and their descendants, along with a few Italians.⁶⁷ Employers often hired their own countrymen, thereby dividing the local labor market along ethnic lines to the benefit of capital by accentuating ethnic solidarity and camouflaging class differences. Language barriers that insulated immigrant workers from the Portuguese-speaking population reinforced cultural commonalities between owners and workers. For instance, in 1898 local police with a grudge against a German ethnic worker burst into the Navegantes factory of German confectioners Max and Ernesto Neugebauer. Encountering first a baker who spoke no Portuguese and then the German wife of one of the owners, the police insulted Germans in general and threatened to arrest all the factory's workers. A German subforeman who spoke Portuguese finally intervened. But for the next two days, workers were too scared to go to work, while the owner appealed to the German consul to secure protection of his interests and his countrymen.⁶⁸

Clear fault lines thus divided the city's native and foreign workers. The native-born were well aware of employer preferences for immigrant workers, and at least some were resentful. At the turn of the century, one native worker complained that Brazilians could be seen in Porto Alegre "wandering the streets for days, weeks, and months seeking work they cannot find," while employers call them vagabonds, and foreigners "jeer and taunt" them when they ask for jobs. He charged that foreigners, particularly Italians, were given unfair preference on public works and private construction: foreigners "enjoy all the privileges while the national worker is treated with indifference and scorn by Brazilians and foreigners alike." He explicitly blamed the state government for failing either to restrict immigrants to the farms or to send them back to Europe and warned native workers to resist the false election promises of politicians responsible for their loss of jobs.⁶⁹ Socialist leader Xavier da Costa tried to counter this view, which he attributed to a mean "spirit of race": "We must all abolish this ridiculous prejudice of nationality within ourselves," he wrote, "we're all the same . . . in being workers. . . . What special right can anyone claim for the worker born here?"⁷⁰

The high proportion of non-Luso employers and workers created a relationship between class and ethnicity in Porto Alegre somewhat atypical of Brazil. This relationship fragmented the labor force along multiple ethnic lines and encouraged some workers to view employers as countrymen

67. *A Luta*, 28 Oct. 1906, p. 3; and Pinheiro and Hall, *A classe operária*, 1:30–31.

68. Becker [temporary German consul] to Borges de Medeiros, 31 Jan. 1898, Porto Alegre, Consulate Collection, Arquivo Histórico do Rio Grande do Sul.

69. Norberto Jacques da Silva, "Sobre a necessidade de união dos operários nacionais," *A Gazetinha*, 22 Dec. 1899, p. 2.

70. "Avante," *A Gazetinha*, 23 Dec. 1899, p. 2.

whose services as patron could include protection from authorities who were ethnic outsiders. On one hand, the willingness of large numbers of workers to participate in the general strike showed that by 1906 this tendency was being eroded by spreading factory production and increasing class differentiation. For example, the Italian consul lamented that by this time, many well-off Italians “lived in a separate milieu” and no longer “were part of the collective life of their compatriots.”⁷¹ Similarly, in the city’s hotels, cafés, *chalés*, and open-air *bosques* (wooded beer gardens), prosperous German immigrants and their descendants increasingly mixed with middle- and upper-class Brazilians, as their shared appreciation of good beer promoted camaraderie and mutual understanding.⁷² On the other hand, the strike was significant in forcing ethnic employers to demonstrate unequivocally and publicly the extent to which their class interests overrode whatever cross-class ethnic solidarity their workers thought existed.

Ethnicity and Labor Organization

Given the strong ethnic communities in Porto Alegre, it is not surprising that ethnicity patterned workers’ first attempts at organization. After a meeting of some two hundred workers of various nationalities in the Teatro São Pedro in March 1892, two important early workers’ organizations formed: the Allgemeiner Arbeiter Verein, founded by and for German-speaking workers; and the Liga Operária Internacional, formed by Italians in agreement with members of the AAV. Both met in the house of an old German immigrant. Activists viewed the two as complementary socialist centers and called on workers to join one or the other.⁷³ By the 1890s, Porto Alegre’s Polish population had grown alongside the thousands of Germans and Italians, and in 1895, weavers on strike against the Companhia Fiação e Tecidos Porto-Alegrense split into distinct Italian and Polish groups. In 1896 a Polish workers’ association and a Swedish one were founded. The ethnic contours of this initial organization helped to compensate for the problems created by language barriers in the multi-ethnic city. In 1896, for instance, the Liga Operária Internacional had a heterogeneous membership of speakers of Portuguese, German, and Italian who could not understand each other. Liga leaders decided that interpreters

71. Constantino, *O italiano*, 51.

72. Athos Damasceno Ferreira, *Colóquios com a minha cidade* (Porto Alegre: Globo, 1974), 189–99.

73. Relatório da Allgemeiner Arbeiter Verein, 30 Aug. 1913, in Inventário: II Congresso Operário Brasileiro (1913), v. 2, n. 175, 41–2-22A, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro; *O Diário* (Porto Alegre), 29 Oct. 1911, p. 9; Marçal, *Primeiras lutas*, 89; Borges, *Italianos*, 73; and *A Gazetinha*, 1 May 1897, p. 3.

were required for all to follow its proceedings.⁷⁴ After the Primeiro Congresso Operário Sul Rio-Grandense convened in Porto Alegre in January 1898, activists continued to address workers by their specific ethnic identities, as in a characteristic appeal to organize a party and vote “whether you be German, Pole, Italian, or Portuguese.”⁷⁵ Being Brazilian seems not to have been one of the possibilities. In 1896 a labor editor complained that a meeting had been called for workers to which no one came, noting that “the meeting was of Brazilians only, because if it were of foreigners, that would not happen.”⁷⁶

Ethnicity began to function differently in the first years of the twentieth century, when anarcho-syndicalists started organizing sindicatos by occupation. Immigrants and their descendants made up the majority of those who joined worker associations. Specific ethnic groups often clustered in particular occupations and were identified with them. Italians dominated the ranks of shoemakers, as did Germans among metalworkers, hatmakers, and woodworkers. Consequently, as sindicatos formed, some came under control of a single ethnic group. The only early occupational association in which Italians predominated was the Associação dos Sapateiros, founded in 1901. The União dos Metalúrgicos, founded the year before the general strike, had only German members until 1910, was headed by a founder of the AAV, and met in AAV headquarters. The two organizations later merged. The União dos Chapeleiros, formed during the marble workers’ strike, reflected the largely German character of the city’s hatters and had only one non-German officer.⁷⁷ In occupations that tended toward ethnic homogeneity, ethnic bonds could reinforce solidarity within the sindicato because ethnic identity and incipient class identity could co-exist and complement each other. In addition, ethnic ties could counterbalance divisions between artisans and factory workers.

But ideological differences soon began to divide workers who shared ethnic and occupational bonds. In the early 1890s, the only voices to challenge a capitalist order in the city had come from a few socialists mostly of German origin who drew inspiration from German labor history. When the Partido Socialista Riograndense formed in 1897, almost half its founders bore German names. Socialist leader Xavier da Costa had been educated by German social democrats, and his ability to read and write German enabled him to act as bridge between German-speaking and Portuguese-speaking socialists. The socialist labor journal he edited ran a Ger-

74. *Gazeta da Tarde* (Porto Alegre), 9 July 1895, p. 2; Costa Franco, *Porto Alegre*, 321; Jorge Luiz Pastoriza Jardim, “Comunicação e militância: A imprensa operária no RS (1892–1923),” M.A. thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, 1990, 185.

75. “Conferência,” *A Gazetinha*, 9 Jan. 1898, p. 2.

76. *O Proletário*, 26 July 1896, p. 2.

77. “Contra os estrangeiros,” *A Luta*, 15 Mar. 1907, p. 1; Marçal, *Primeiras lutas*, 45, 63, 93; and Borges, *Italianos*, 77–78.

man section that catered to German-speaking readers.⁷⁸ Even as Riograndense socialism assimilated other ethnicities, it retained a distinctly German cast. At the founding of the Partido Socialista do Rio Grande do Sul in 1897, socialist hymns were sung in three languages—Portuguese, German, and Italian—for the three dominant ethnic groups present, and a leadership triumvirate was elected to represent all three ethnicities. Columns on the founding of the party appeared in the local press in German and Italian, and the party manifesto was printed in split-page format, half the page in Portuguese, half in German. In 1905, when the city's socialists founded the Partido Operário do Rio Grande do Sul, they modeled it on German antecedents.⁷⁹

In contrast, anarchism in Porto Alegre drew initial leadership from Italian immigrants. As one anarchist leader testified, the Italian families who came from the Colônia Cecília in 1894 and 1895 “immediately made their influence felt in the local workers’ movement.” They acted as a group at the Primeiro Congresso Operário Sul Rio-Grandense (over which Xavier da Costa presided), introducing the tactics of boycotts and sabotage and founding the Grupo de Estudos Sociais and the Grupo dos Homens Livres just before 1900.⁸⁰ These anarchists included one of the printers who organized the União Tipográfica and the leader of the Sindicato dos Marmoristas (marble workers). The anarchists drew on French models and attracted many Italian immigrants. When they began publishing *A Luta* in September 1906, the abundance of subscribers of Italian origin indicated that anarchism still had a footing in the Italian community as well as elsewhere.⁸¹

Socialists and anarchists who had worked together in the late 1890s clashed increasingly after 1900, and their competition for control over labor organization influenced the dynamics of the 1906 general strike. Anarchist printers, for example, split off from the existing socialist printers’ association to form their own organization during the strike.⁸² Given the ethnic diversity of the local working classes, conflict between socialists and anarchists over control of the city’s labor organizations inevitably called ethnic bonds into question.

Anarchists first attacked ethnic bonds in September 1906 at a meeting that included many German-speaking workers. A sharp difference of

78. João Batista Marçal, *Memória histórica dos socialistas gaúchos* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 11–12; Borges, *Italianos*, 74; “Avante,” *A Gazetinha*, 24 Nov. 1898, p. 2; and Jardim, “Imprensa operária,” 46, 95.

79. *A Gazetinha*, 20 May 1897, p. 2; 1 May 1897, pp. 2–3; and *Antologia do movimento operário gaúcho (1870–1937)*, edited by Sílvia Regina Ferraz Petersen and Maria Elizabeth Lucas (Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 1992), 132.

80. Jardim, “Imprensa operária,” 85; and Marçal, *Memória*, 17.

81. *A Luta*, 13 Sept. 1906, pp. 1, 3; Borges, *Italianos*, 73, 77, 87; and Jardim, “Imprensa operária,” 47.

82. Marçal, *Primeiras lutas*, 19, 40.

opinion emerged over whether the organization's official language should be only Portuguese, or whether both Portuguese and German should be accepted. Anarchists argued that using two languages would waste time and energy and that the official language "must be the language of the country the workers live in."⁸³ Although some workers of German origin had already become anarchists, this position was anathema to many others who were determined to retain their German tongue. Socialists, in contrast, although ethnically heterogeneous by 1906, did not second the anarchists' Portuguese-only position, whether due to their traditional reliance on German workers or to pragmatic recognition of the many local workers who still depended on the German language. Consequently, when the woodworkers went on strike on 2 October, led by union officers of Brazilian, Italian, and German descent, speeches were made in both Portuguese and German.⁸⁴

If anarchists no longer found room for those intent on holding onto exclusive ethnic identities, there was no longer room for anarchists among the city's socialist militants. The conflict came to a head in the first week of the 1906 general strike, when the president of the new stoneworkers' sindicato, a socialist and close ally of Xavier da Costa, invited all the presidents of local workers' organizations to a joint meeting at his house. A socialist leader's attack on the anarchists set off a tumult of protests and threats culminating in the edict that there was "no place for anarchists" at the meeting. Angry anarchist leaders of six local organizations walked out, accompanied by their followers. Of those who walked out, two had Italian names, one German, one Polish, one Spanish, and two Luso-Brazilian.⁸⁵ Anarchist leaders were evidently no longer the homogeneous Italian group they had been a decade earlier. Anarchist leadership now reflected the ethnic spectrum of Porto Alegre's working classes.

Ethnicity continued to play an important role as the strike unfolded. Leaders took advantage of ethnic appeals to sustain and expand the strike and appealed to different ethnic constituencies in different ways. Socialists issued strike manifestos in Portuguese and German (not in Italian), but in at least one instance, they tailored the message to different audiences. Thus one German-language manifesto attacked industrialists directly, while its Portuguese-language counterpart attacked only press coverage of the strike. Rumors that the German Army was coming to aid the strikers were aimed only at German-speaking strikers.⁸⁶

83. "Movimento operário," *A Luta*, 13 Sept. 1906, p. 2.

84. Marçal, *Primeiras lutas*, 103; and *Petit Journal*, 3 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

85. *A Luta*, 10 Oct. 1906, p. 3.

86. *Correio do Povo*, 11 Oct. 1906, p. 1; 16 Oct. 1906, p. 1; and 19 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

Ethnicity in Representation and Reality

Employers and ethnicity / No one realized the importance and the implications of ethnicity in the October general strike more quickly or fully than the city's German-speaking factory owners. They perceived that the strike represented the first serious class split within the German ethnic community, one with potentially damaging economic and political consequences for their own class interests. Their prompt and effective response to the challenge largely determined the outcome of the strike.

Shared ethnicity was one commonality that initially enabled employers of German origin to move from individual responses to workers in a single establishment to a collective response by a united front of employers toward the entire strike movement. Porto Alegre had no organization of factory or workshop owners at the outbreak of the 1906 general strike. German-speaking owners were the first to join forces. They were called together on the second day of the strike by Alberto Bins, the foremost industrialist in the German-speaking ethnic community, owner of the city's leading metallurgical plant, and a man of formidable political and entrepreneurial talents who had entered the state Republican Party in 1901 and was rising steadily.⁸⁷ Bins presided over the meeting, while strikers marched outside the building shouting vivas to the working class and the eight-hour day. He proposed the position on which employers stood their ground for the duration of the strike: a nine-hour day, which to employers meant a 10 percent pay increase. This offer appeared to give the strikers something by shortening their hours, yet it preserved employers' authority by enabling them to set their own nine-hour day rather than accept the strikers' demand for eight. Just how important authority was to employers is clear in Bins's public statement that to yield to the workers' demand would "constitute a victory of such a nature as to put employers in the position of clerks to their workers."⁸⁸ At the same meeting, the employers reinforced their united front by agreeing that they would issue a joint announcement: all factories would resume production on 10 October, would refrain from hiring any striker who had worked for one of them before the strike without first checking with that employer, and would name a commission representing a cross-section of businesses from the German-speaking community to meet with police to secure protection for workers who chose to work in defiance of the strike. Bins even proposed founding a permanent establishment of industrialists that would provide for workers' medical and educational needs, but that proposal was too far ahead of its time to bear fruit.

87. He went on to become intendant of Porto Alegre in the 1920s. See Pesavento, *Burguesia gaúcha*, 240.

88. "Reunião dos proprietários," *Correio do Povo*, 7 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

Only after these joint actions had been taken did employers outside the German-speaking community adhere to the agreement, and even then only after the strike held firm for five more days. The first latecomer, owner of the city's largest textile factory and scion of a wealthy and powerful gaúcho family, showed himself attuned to the moment by sending an ethnic German employee as his representative to the allied employers.⁸⁹

German-speaking employers also sought to shame German-speaking workers for undermining the sense of ethnic community that had served owners' class interests in the past. Owners were stung when workers attacked them directly in a strike manifesto written in German and, as Alberto Bins indignantly protested, addressed their employers in an "indelicate way," using rude and discourteous language and "treating them like subordinates." To his ears, the strikers' language constituted a breach of the deference that employers expected of their workers, an important indicator of the way in which manners and mores defined class boundaries. Employers responded with appeals to ethnic pride and ethnic loyalties. Bins publicly charged the strikers with discrediting "the good name of the German colony, which always took pride in its reputation for being orderly and progressive."⁹⁰ In invoking the republic's watchwords of order and progress, Bins was articulating employers' recognition of two important realities in their world: that public perception of German-speaking workers' role in the strike would reflect badly on the entire ethnic community, and that the ruling party would hold the German-speaking elite accountable for controlling its own workers. Political reliability was the quid pro quo for cultural autonomy in Porto Alegre, and a disorderly working class endangered both economic progress and political order. In response, Bins was "reconstructing" in his discourse another remembered community—not the harmonious egalitarian workshop but a Teuto-Brazilian ethnic community, grounded in the shared history and mythology of the almost-century-old German immigrant experience in Rio Grande do Sul. This remembered ethnic community was by implication harmonious, egalitarian, and free of economic cleavages.⁹¹ Bins was calling on workers to subordinate incipient class identity, construed as new and alien, to an ethnic identity construed as traditional and constructed to serve elite interests.

Party and press / Like German-speaking employers, government officials and the ruling Republican party placed ethnicity at the center of their representations of the strikers. On one hand, they represented two so-called Germans as the driving force behind the strike. On the other hand,

89. Petersen and Lucas, *Antologia*, 150–52; *Correio do Povo*, 6 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 10 Oct. 1906, p. 1; and Costa Franco, *Porto Alegre*, 336.

90. *Correio do Povo*, 16 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

91. See Joan L. Bak, "Social Control and Social Transformation: Immigrants, the State, and

those in power took some care to distinguish them from German immigrants and their descendants. The police announced they had two “educated German subjects” under surveillance as “the main promoters of the strike.”⁹² This announcement labeled the strike leaders as foreigners, distinguished them from native-born ethnic Germans, and emphasized that the two were more foreign than true immigrants because they remained loyal subjects of the German Reich and thus could not be loyal Brazilians. Representing the troublemakers as German subjects distanced them from the politically submissive and electorally useful German-speaking community, whose acquiescence to the existing order the ruling party cultivated and preferred not to impugn. Identifying the two leaders as “educated” further distinguished them from most of the workers, who were uneducated.

Representations of the strikers in the mainstream press also evinced elite concern with the role that ethnicity was playing in the October general strike. The largest daily, the *Correio do Povo*, identified ethnicity with “foreignness” and used it to discredit the strikers. In the few cases in which the paper identified strikers who crossed the line between peaceful protest and violence, it labeled them as “of Italian origin” or “of German origin.”⁹³ These terms indicated that the strikers were not new immigrants but rather born in Brazil of immigrant descent. Identifying their ethnicity differentiated them from Brazilians of Luso origins and associated their lingering foreign taint with behavior that conservative readers would condemn as disorderly, hence dangerous. Fears of the German peril echoed when strike leaders were accused of assuring “German strikers or even those of German origin” that if violence were used against them, “the German government would send thousands of soldiers” to their defense. The *Correio do Povo* charged strikers with intimidating ethnic workers who were reluctant to strike by widely distributing “in diverse languages, leaflets and pamphlets recounting the horrors inflicted by strikers in Europe on co-workers who refused to strike: breasts slashed with knives, heads severed, eyes gouged out. . . .” As proof that many ethnic workers were staying home only out of fear of fellow workers, the paper quoted a credulous young female worker “of German origin.” Unconvinced by the reporter’s assurances of police protection, she exclaimed, “After they rip off my head, it won’t much matter to me whether or not they catch the ones who cut my throat!”⁹⁴ Her reference to the *degola*, the famous *gaúcho* practice of slitting the throats of enemies, suggests that intimidation played on immigrant

the Politics of Ethnicity in Rio Grande do Sul, 1824–1918,” paper presented to the Latin American Studies Association, 4–6 Dec. 1989, Miami.

92. *Correio do Povo*, 11 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

93. *Correio do Povo*, 13 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

94. *Correio do Povo*, 11 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

fears of atrocities by natives. The implication was that ethnic workers, particularly ethnic women, were especially vulnerable to propaganda and intimidation.

Finally, the *Correio do Povo* accused immigrant strikers of ingratitude and disloyalty for protesting in the country that had made possible their alleged prosperity and upward mobility. Striking weavers were condemned for using the very “savings and property obtained from wages earned here” to sustain them in a strike, and even for being “the most radical” of the strikers after arriving “poor and without resources.”⁹⁵ This accusation evoked the myth of the prosperous worker and projected an irreconcilable conflict between two distinct identities: identity as an immigrant, which dictated gratitude and loyalty, and identity as a member of the working class, which led to strikes and radicalism. The “proper identity” was that of grateful immigrant, not radical worker. According to this logic, ethnic identity became both an alternative and an antidote to class identity.

The two “educated German subjects” were actually local workers. Both José Zeller-Rethaller and Wilhelm Koch were metalworkers who had been leaders in the city’s socialist labor movement and the German ethnic community for a decade. They had helped found the AAV and the Liga Operária in 1892, the Partido Socialista in 1897, the Partido Operário and the União dos Metalúrgicos in 1905, and FORGS in 1906. By the general strike, Zeller-Rethaller was president of the AAV and Koch vice-president of FORGS. Employers who wanted to contact strikers went to them. Although the *Correio do Povo* criticized their role as behind-the-scenes directors of the German-speaking workers during the general strike, the paper conceded that they took no role in public meetings and counseled “peaceful resistance without insults or coercion.”⁹⁶

The only strike leader who publicly advocated violence was Cavaco, who was not in the least foreign. According to one account, his charismatic “*verbo pampeano*” (speech of the pampas), “like the breath of the *minuano*” (the dry wind of the gaúcho winter), afforded him a long and colorful career in gaúcho politics.⁹⁷ When Cavaco prepared to return to his home on the border at the end of the strike, he was seen off at the docks by a crowd of supporters who included students and military men as well as workers. After the strike, Cavaco became a prominent writer and agitator for workers and socialism in Rio Grande do Sul, took part in the Civilista campaign for Rui Barbosa, edited the *Correio da Tarde* with future labor minister Lindolfo Collor in 1910, and was eventually appointed to a series of national posts by Collor and Getúlio Vargas.⁹⁸

95. *Correio do Povo*, 16 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

96. *Correio do Povo*, 16 Oct. 1906, p. 1; and Marçal, *Primeiras lutas*, 19, 45, 62–63.

97. Marçal, *Socialistas*, 18.

98. Caggiani, *Cavaco*, 20, 43, 62–67, 185–87; and *Petit Journal*, 30 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

In short, the positions of public prominence in the strike were occupied not by German speakers but by two gaúchos, native sons of Rio Grande do Sul: Francisco Xavier da Costa and Carlos Cavaco. Xavier da Costa had long been close to Koch and Zeller-Rethaller. Xavier da Costa and Cavaco addressed the two public meetings held simultaneously in different parts of the city at the outbreak of the general strike. As president of FORGS, Xavier da Costa claimed overall leadership of the strike and the role of broker between workers and employers, and between workers and government.⁹⁹ Rankled rival anarchists belittled his role and that of FORGS, which they dismissed as “merely decorative.” They also attacked him for trying to take over after the strike had begun and scheming to use it to his own advantage.¹⁰⁰

Leadership of the general strike was complex and problematic in part because of the interplay between the multiple ethnic identities of Porto Alegre’s urban workers and crosscutting identities that were taking form according to class and ideology. Anarchists played a catalytic role in the making of the strike. The self-designated public leaders of the strike were two socialist gaúchos: one an upwardly mobile printer, the other not working-class at all. Behind the scenes, yet recognized by government and the mainstream press, stood two skilled metalworkers with long records as socialist activists and deep roots in the city’s German-speaking community. As a group, these various leaders possessed an array of qualities needed to appeal to various components of the city’s emerging working class. Working together for the common goal of an eight-hour day, they rallied the first large-scale mobilization of the city’s multiethnic working classes and sustained it.

The 1906 general strike thus marked a juncture at which the dynamics of ethnicity became complicated and problematic. While labor activists encountered limits to ethnic appeals, elites and officials did too. It is no accident that as appeals to ethnic identities proved inadequate, appeals to gender began to emerge.

THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN WORKERS AND GENDERED IDENTITIES

Women Workers, Women Strikers

As the city’s new factories appeared and expanded, they brought the widespread hiring of women. The general strike drew this new reality forcibly to public attention. When the strike rendered workers suddenly visible in the streets of Porto Alegre, observers were astonished to see the large proportion of women among them: the *Correio do Povo* called the

99. *Correio do Povo*, 7 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

100. Petersen and Lucas, *Antologia*, 165; and Marçal, *Primeiras lutas*, 19.

number of women workers “enormous.”¹⁰¹ Although statistical evidence on their ages is lacking, most references describe them as young or unmarried women (*moças* or *senhoritas*). Yet a few references to employment of whole families suggest that some of the women workers were also wives and mothers.

Women workers joined the strike early and as a group. The stoppage began with male metalworkers and woodworkers, followed the next day by male stonemasons and hatters. By then, labor leaders were eagerly predicting that “the female working class” was about to strike as well.¹⁰² The next day, 5 October, “the feminine element” from the city’s textile, clothing, and candy factories joined the movement. Only then did the general strike become a reality that led employers to meet and frame a united defense.¹⁰³

Women workers had ample cause for protest. In the stocking and corset factory of Companhia Fabril Porto Alegrense (one of the city’s largest and most mechanized), three-quarters of the workers were women, and they labored at low piecework rates under unhealthy conditions. Some complained because the cost of needles was deducted from their pay, reducing their earnings to 26 milréis a week—4 milréis (\$1.32 in U.S. dollars) a day for a six-day week. Others complained that women who inspected finished woolen stockings might earn as little as 3 milréis a week if there was no work, although they were required to report each day. Like all Companhia Fabril workers, women labored under strict work discipline. Confiscatory fines ranged from 100 to 500 milréis (one to five months’ pay) for such offenses as arriving late, talking on the job, bringing a book or paper to work, or climbing the stairs in wooden shoes.¹⁰⁴ Because women workers in Porto Alegre were employed in the factories rather than in the workshops, factory work discipline typified their work experience.

Another factor was the increasingly impersonal relations in factories between capital and labor. These relations gave rise to practices that cheated women out of pay for their work. One such practice required seamstress applicants to prepare two to three dozen “samples” of their work to leave for examination, only to be told on their return that the work was unsatisfactory and had been undone. Another practice at the largest textile factory was to hire young women for an unpaid one-month apprenticeship and then tell them at the end of the month that there was no work. The factory then hired other “apprentices” in their place.¹⁰⁵

Such treatment helps explain why women were willing to commit

101. *Correio do Povo*, 11 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

102. *Petit Journal*, 4 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

103. *O Independente*, 7 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

104. “Ecos das oficinas,” *A Luta*, 15 Dec. 1906, p. 2; and Porto Alegre, Intendência Municipal, *Cidade e município de Porto Alegre* (Porto Alegre: Intendência Municipal, 1904), 38.

105. *A Democracia* (Porto Alegre), 28 May 1905, p. 3; and *A Luta*, 1 Dec. 1906, p. 1.

themselves to the strike. At the Companhia Fiação e Tecidos Porto Alegrense, the city's largest factory and a heavy employer of women and children, fully two-thirds of the workforce remained out on strike at the end of the first week.¹⁰⁶ After almost two weeks on strike, one young woman worker professed at a strike meeting in the workers' Salão Primeiro de Maio that she would rather "eat soup made from grass" than go back to work without the improvements being demanded and continue to be exploited the way she had been before.¹⁰⁷

Women workers took a visible part in public strike demonstrations, contributing to the strike as street spectacle and theater. Young women workers dramatized their adherence to the strike movement by ripping up red dresses to make cockades (rosettes) that they wore proudly on their breasts as class symbols. They also heightened the general enthusiasm by marching together through the city's streets bearing a red standard calling for an eight-hour day. In the following weeks, women appeared repeatedly at rallies and meetings, individually, in delegations as large as fifty, and in mixed audiences. Some women workers spoke to assembled crowds. One "senhorita" gave a lecture on working-class victories in other countries. Others accepted the risks of public identification by appearing before large audiences to thank strike leaders for their efforts on behalf of workers and to present them with bouquets of flowers. Such presentations became a ritual during the strike and could have serious consequences. At least one woman striker was recognized after having presented flowers to a strike leader and was fired when she attempted to return to her job in the stocking factory at the end.¹⁰⁸ If the firing of a woman for her public commitment to the strike accorded her a kind of equality with fired male strikers, it was of dubious value and in sharp contrast with the subordination the woman had acted out in her gesture of gratitude to a male strike leader.

Not all women workers were enthusiastic and determined strike supporters, however. The *Correio do Povo* depicted the women workers of the Pabst tie factory as trying to continue working but vulnerable to pressure from strikers bent on coercing them into joining the strike movement. The paper reported that police had an armed guard at the factory on the fourth day because the "strikers wanted at all cost to force the young women [*moças*] to stop working."¹⁰⁹ What the *Correio do Povo* read as strikers' coercion and women's vulnerability to pressure reveals that these women did not rush to join the strike and that strikers recognized the

106. *O Independente*, 11 Oct. 1906, p. 2; and *O Rio Grande industrial*, 26.

107. *Petit Journal*, 19 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

108. *Petit Journal*, 6 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 8 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 9 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 10 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 13 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 15 Oct. 1906, p. 2; 17 Oct. 1906, p. 2; and 22 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

109. *Correio do Povo*, 7 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

strategic position of women workers in large industrial establishments and the importance of winning their adherence.

Women's subsequent conduct in the strike suggests what was specific to their position in the class structure and how they shaped the strike movement. When the women who worked in the tie factory took up the movement's generic demand for the eight-hour day, they quickly learned that such a demand could have different meanings for different categories of workers. Initially, they must have had little idea of how the strike might affect their lives. Their employer's response to their demand was blunt: they were welcome to work two hours a day if they wanted because they were paid at piecework rates.¹¹⁰ This response brought home to the women that their demand for an eight-hour day made little sense because it did not reflect the objective conditions of their own working lives. The citywide strike for an eight-hour day did not speak to their specific needs. These women learned abruptly that their position in the emerging class structure separated them from workers (male and female) who were paid by the hour or by the day. Accordingly, they abandoned the strike. Although some male workers were still paid at piecework rates, the artisans had skills to bargain with, while unskilled women workers did not. Within days, strike leaders amended their initial failure to take the situation of pieceworkers into account in collective strike demands. By the end of the first week, they were specifying that workers paid by the day should get an eight-hour day at the same pay that they had been earning for longer hours, while rates paid for piecework should be raised so that adoption of the eight-hour day would not leave pieceworkers earning less than before.¹¹¹

Strike organizers paid considerable attention to the participation of women and made concerted efforts from the beginning of the strike to assure that women workers did not remain outside the movement. Just a week before the general strike, the anarchist organ *A Luta* drew attention to the exploitation and repression of five young women forced to leave their jobs in a local brush factory, praising their courageous independence and their refusal to allow themselves to be degraded and prostituted by their bosses.¹¹² The *Correio do Povo* even charged that women workers were the group that strike leaders were "principally" trying to influence.¹¹³

In what may have been a conscious strategy to win women's support in order to help socialists wrest control of the labor movement from anarchists, socialist leaders made every effort to court female support and publicized their roles in the strike. As early as 1901, the local socialist labor press had taken the position that as "an integral part of society and a pro-

110. *Correio do Povo*, 9 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

111. *Petit Journal*, 11 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

112. *A Luta*, 29 Sept. 1906, p. 2.

113. *Correio do Povo*, 11 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

ductive member, a woman has the right to intervene in the public life of the country and to exercise all the professions." Calling women "the victim of immense injustices," socialists urged "the guarantee of all civil and political rights for women."¹¹⁴ During the general strike, Cavaco's sisters acted as links to women workers. On 8 October, he and Xavier da Costa arrived at the Salão Primeiro de Maio in Navegantes to address several thousand enthusiastic workers filling the surrounding streets. Three of his older sisters (probably in their thirties) appeared with red flowers on their breasts among the young women workers who greeted them. An hour later, according to one account, the young women workers said "a touching goodbye to the three sisters" as they joined their brother and Xavier da Costa on a departing train, to the cheers of a large crowd of strikers.¹¹⁵ In the wake of the strike, local anarchists stepped up their advocacy for women workers. *A Luta* published a long column denying any opposition to women's work. It urged that women should not allow capitalists to work them as hard as men for less pay, nor should men live in idleness and vice from exploiting women, nor should women allow themselves to be denied education or a voice in determining questions of direct concern to them.¹¹⁶

Uses of Gendered Imagery in the Strike

The press was quick to register the conspicuous new presence of women workers in the city's labor force and the strike movement. Well before 1906, commentators had begun to remark on women's changing roles in local urban life across the class spectrum. At the turn of the century, one lamented "the big difference between the woman of Porto Alegre and the free *gaúcha* of the countryside, where pretended smiles and vanity have not yet penetrated." In stark contrast to the "angelic rural woman" with her "holy language," "the city woman enslaves men, tyrannizes over them" because the city's middle- and upper-class life was "contaminated by ostentation, salons, balls and a false existence."¹¹⁷ At the other extreme of the social hierarchy, women drew criticism for their unwelcome visibility as prostitutes and their unfeminine part in street disorders. Prostitutes allegedly made the Rua do Arvoredo the scene of riotous nightly fights in which fierce women spouted foul language and fought men over hats, even throwing themselves "on the ground with a poor devil to continue fighting."¹¹⁸ Lower-class women, as multiethnic as their men, appeared in the press as participants in Rio Grande do Sul's violent weapon-toting regional

114. *Avante*, 24 Feb. 1901, p. 2.

115. *Petit Journal*, 9 Oct. 1906, p. 2; and Caggiani, *Cavaco*, 11.

116. "A mulher," *A Luta*, 2 Jan. 1907, p. 2.

117. *A Gazetinha*, 3 Mar. 1899, p. 1.

118. *A Gazetinha*, 7 Mar. 1899, p. 1.

culture. In one conflict in “the notorious Becco do Poço,” two women rioters attacked a Spanish seamstress with a knife.¹¹⁹ One observer linked the proliferation of gangs of rude and rowdy children (allegedly mostly Italian) in the streets of Porto Alegre to the entry of mothers into the new factories: “these kids are in the streets because no one is home to educate them.”¹²⁰ The implication is familiar: women’s entry into the paid workforce has negative consequences for children, families, and the entire social order.

The Republican party’s official newspaper and the mainstream press made effective use of gendered imagery in efforts to inculcate their views of “good” and “bad” (approved and disapproved) roles in the general strike. Women stood at the center of three vivid public representations designed to discourage participation in the general strike. The first was a report of two young women textile workers assaulted by “militant strikers of German origin.”¹²¹ The reason for the attack was left unspecified, and readers were left to assume that the women were attacked for trying to work during the strike. The newspaper report did not identify the women’s ethnicity, even though it seems likely that they too were “of German origin.” Nor was the gender of their attackers specified. Thus in identifying those assaulted, gender took priority over ethnicity, while in identifying their attackers, ethnicity took priority over gender. The omissions left readers free to assume that the women were not German and their attackers were men. Thus women were associated with orderly behavior and men with the disorderly. Women attempting to work were cast as sympathetic victims vulnerable to aggressive attack from males engaged in violent roles as strikers. The overall effect of this representation was to darken the image of “militant strikers” by labeling them as “German” and adding the unmanliness and dishonor implied in assaulting the weaker sex.

The second representation appeared in the official paper of the ruling Republican party, *A Federação*. It elevated a young woman textile worker to the status of civic heroine for breaking her engagement with her boyfriend because of his support for the strike. Identified as Brazilian, the young woman was admired and praised because she never left work during the strike “despite all the threats” from strikers, steadfastly resisted her fiancé’s pressure to join the strike, and when he ignored her pleas to abandon the strikers, broke off their marriage plans.¹²² The label of heroine was applied first by the owner of the textile plant and was appropriated by a state newspaper that seconded his judgment. By presenting this account for the edification of the public, the official party organ held up a woman as the model of “a good worker” and in this sense sanctioned the new in-

119. *A Gazetinha*, 18 Mar. 1899, p. 2.

120. *A Gazetinha*, 16 Jan. 1899, p. 1.

121. *Correio do Povo*, 13 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

122. *A Federação*, 23 Oct. 1906, in Fagundes, *Documentos*, 276.

corporation of women in the city's industrial workforce. From the perspective of employers and the state, it was useful to have such women in the factories if (like this one) they stood fast against strike pressure from radical troublemakers and used their traditional moral influence over men to try to curb disorderly male behavior. This representation also brought women workers into the public sphere. This young textile worker became a model of civic virtue because she placed her duty to employer, job, and public order above her love for a man. Faced with the conflicting claims of personal and public loyalties, she chose not the personal loyalties traditionally mandated to come first for women but the "higher loyalties" inherent in her new position in the public realm of marketplace and civic duty. It is quite possible, however, that this young woman's decision was actually dictated by the need for her wages to help support her parents and siblings.

The third representation of women in the strike movement was visually arresting. Again, the "good woman" was depicted as "the good worker." In the second week of the strike, in a candy factory, two young women workers were reportedly calling out the windows to urge male co-workers gathered outside to return to work. The moral, according to the *Correio do Povo*, was that "the young women are giving the example of courage and of love of work to the strong sex."¹²³ Here again, the women were cast as the courageous ones, teaching "the strong sex" to overcome its fears of returning to work. While the women took on the traditionally male virtue of courage, their position remained traditionally "female," enclosed in the factory much as if in a home. The factory thus acted as safe haven from the dangers of the street. Traditional gender hierarchy was partially inverted by casting women in the roles of courageous and model factory workers and yet was partially upheld by equating them with virtue and order. The common image of the factory as hostile to women or as a sexually promiscuous setting was conspicuously absent.¹²⁴

These three representations of women workers were based on reports of real women who opposed the 1906 strike. Their opposition was publicized to serve the interests of employers, elites, and the state. Inevitably, the strike set such women against others who acted counter to socially approved images of order and duty. They too made their appearance in the strike coverage, though not their numbers. Some took part in self-organized bands of women who pressured other women workers to stay off the job. They posed enough of a problem that the police called some in for questioning and warned that they would be jailed the next time they

123. *Correio do Povo*, 13 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

124. See French and James, *Gendered Worlds*, 9.

were apprehended.¹²⁵ In the eyes of the strike's critics, these were militant women who were by definition disorderly, violent, and dangerous.

THE OUTCOME OF THE STRIKE

Although many strikers held out for almost three weeks, the strike ultimately weakened in the face of employer unity and intransigence backed by the government's measures to "maintain public order": barring strikers from grouping outside factories, patrolling streets with the state Brigada Militar, and arresting strikers involved in street clashes. Strikers finally accepted the employers' nine-hour day. Only some employers took them back on the nine-hour terms, however, and some only temporarily. All who returned to work did so on their employers' terms.¹²⁶

Employer retribution followed swiftly. Being female did not protect women who had participated in the general strike once it ended. At the Fiateci plant, women complained of mistreatment by their supervisor when they returned to work. Whole families who tried to return to their jobs were refused work, and so many men and women were fired in the days after the strike that talk was heard of restarting the entire protest.¹²⁷ A year later, *A Luta* bitterly recalled the disillusionment that set in as employers increased hours, cut wages, imposed fines, and "treated [workers] like dogs in the main factories." Meanwhile, the state government patrolled working-class neighborhoods and threatened anarchists with expulsion.¹²⁸

CONCLUSIONS

The 1906 general strike was a formative moment in the making of a working class in Porto Alegre. It broke out in reaction to the structural changes that introduced workers to factory modes of production and their wrenching effects on workers' lives. Many strike participants were skilled artisans, some were engaged in transitional forms of labor, and others were unskilled workers in the emerging industrial factories. Artisans who felt work discipline tightening, class divisions widening, and hopes of social mobility receding initiated and sustained the general strike, impelled by a small nucleus of anarchist militants bent on syndical organization in the city. Anarchists sought to advance class consciousness by conflating the exploitation of artisans and factory workers as they contested the myth of the happy artisan that dominated elite discourse on labor. The relatively limited repression during the three-week strike gave strikers the time and the space

125. *Correio do Povo*, 13 Oct. 1906, p. 1; and 14 Oct. 1906, p. 1.

126. Pesavento, *Burguesia gaúcha*, 155–61.

127. *Petit Journal*, 20 Oct. 1906, p. 2; and 22 Oct. 1906, p. 2.

128. *A Luta*, 26 Oct. 1907, p. 1.

to discover a heady sense of what their numbers and united action could do—to develop a first collective experience of working-class solidarity.

In 1906 class formation in Porto Alegre was strongly mediated by ethnicity. The multiethnic character of the local working class facilitated the development of class consciousness and solidarity in some ways but hampered it in others. To the extent that some occupations tended toward ethnic homogeneity, ethnic commonalities initially fostered labor organization. Yet workers' ethnic diversity created obstacles to activists, who had to take multiple ethnicities and languages into account in their meetings and in strike and press bulletins. What is more, by 1906 ethnic solidarities were being strained by ideological conflicts between socialists and anarchists, particularly in the large German community. Workers who had inhabited the relative simplicity of largely homogeneous ethnic communities were by 1906 encountering a more complicated social world in which ethnic heterogeneity and inter-ethnic conflict were inescapable. Thus the contest for strike leadership was not simply one of socialist versus anarchist militants but a more complicated response to the problem of how to mobilize local workers amidst this transformation in ethnic identities. For this reason, part of the strike leadership was ethnically German and the other Riograndense. This outcome shows the importance of approaching ethnicity not as an automatic obstacle to class formation in all places at all times but as one of several identifications that workers can draw on and reformulate in confronting changing historical conditions.

Workers found themselves in unfamiliar territory during this first general strike, with little experience to guide them, and so did employers, elites, and the state. The city's influential German-speaking employers had long taken advantage of ethnic bonds with workers to camouflage class differences. Now the strike created the first serious class split within the German ethnic community. Although employers sought to bring labor to heel by appealing to workers' sense of ethnic community, for the first time, employers were forced to demonstrate publicly that their class interests overrode ethnic loyalties to workers. At the same time, intra-class ethnic solidarity enabled employers to act collectively in the face of the strike. As German employers, they could meet quickly, frame a common position, and maintain a united front against the strikers. Without this ethnic solidarity, the strike would have taken a different course. The mainstream press, the government, and the police used ethnicity in ways common in other Brazilian regions: discrediting the strike by associating militance and violence with foreigners and reprimanding immigrant workers for their ingratitude for the economic opportunities offered by their new country. These practices were still mediated by local ethnic patterns, however, because the idiosyncrasies of the regional two-party competition made non-Luso voters vital to the ruling party and thus constrained elite power to link ethnicity with the alien and the dangerous.

As appeals to ethnic identity became increasingly problematic, appeals to gender appeared. An integral part of the process of class formation was the emergence of women workers from behind the walls of the new factories in numbers that astonished observers. Women workers were visible and audible in the movement and prominent in the public spectacle, marching as a group, wearing red cockades, carrying banners, appearing with male strike leaders, even speaking occasionally at public assemblies. Strike leaders treated them as a distinct group within the emerging working class and named them as one: "young women workers," "the female working class," or "the feminine element." Women workers organized and led their own strike groups and demonstrations, reflecting a distinct identity in formation. Some women workers voiced their objective experience of exploitation in the new factory workplace. Their key role in turning the initial movement into a general strike was readily recognized by all, not least by male anarchist and socialist labor organizers seeking women's support. In the course of the strike, women also showed themselves willing to defy employers, risk confrontation with police, assume public roles, and organize and lead strike actions, all measures of their experience of exploitation in the workplace. The conflict between the objective economic position of many women workers as pieceworkers and the strikers' initial generic demand for the eight-hour day helped sensitize labor militants to the importance of varying positions within the class structure, marking a step in their maturation and leading to their negotiation of more carefully calibrated demands.

As women too took sides for and against the strike, gender assumed a notable place in strike discourse. Elites sought to use gender to manipulate and widen divisions within the emerging working class. By equating women workers with order and civic virtue and portraying them as a force for curbing disorderly male behavior, elite discourse sought to make women workers an instrument of social control. But in the process, such discourse implicitly sanctioned women's incorporation into the paid labor force and the public sphere. One result was the noteworthy gap between the way women were seen and heard in elite discourse and the way they were seen and heard in the streets and public squares of Porto Alegre. Some women rejected the gendered representations of themselves as symbols of order and, like their male co-workers, took to the streets in the strike to identify themselves, however tentatively, as members of an incipient working class.

While elite discourse sought to create competition between gender and class identities, blanket repression by employers following the strike settlement created the opposite effect. Firings, ill-treatment, and reneging on agreements by employers only advanced the development of class consciousness already accelerated during the strike movement. The movement and its aftermath taught workers how much they had in common. As struc-

tural change from artisanal to factory production continued in subsequent years, bringing different ethnic groups into ever closer contact and incorporating more women into the paid labor force, the experience of the 1906 strike became part of the past experience shared by the city's emerging working class—ethnic and native, male and female. Thus it can be seen that comprehending evolving identities of ethnicity and gender and the multiple ways they can interact with emerging class identity is essential to understanding the complex process of class formation in Brazil.

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