

La Prensa: Daily Independent Newspaper **Thursday, April 12, 1923**

Mexicans Awaken the Jealousy of Pennsylvania Workers

- **A report claims Mexicans are in danger of possible threats, but its authenticity is not certain.**
- **The news appears to be propaganda aimed at diverting more workers from going to the great industrial factories of the East.**

A public dispatch yesterday by the news agency "Universal Service" provided the alarming news that Mexican workers contracted by the powerful Bethlehem Steel Corporation were in a critical situation. It said, for example, that Pennsylvania workers of the plant had gone on strike and considered the arrival of Mexican workers as an effort by the company to force those on strike to accept a salary reduction, and that this was provoking a strong response because the Mexicans were seen as strike-breakers. Finally, the dispatch reported that seventeen Mexicans were in the hospital in Bethlehem due to injuries "received after disputes arising among themselves had been resolved by recourse to the supreme arbiter of the knife."

Positive Reports Received

None of this, however, seems to be certain. Two telegraphs transmitted last night to *La Prensa* and the Mexican Consulate express categorically that no strike exists in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; that the Mexican workers who were properly hired and taken there find themselves satisfied with their condition; and that no dispute has arisen and no one has been the victim of any attack whatsoever. Regarding the individuals who are in the hospital, it is reported that they number not more than ten and that they were sent there by the company to be treated for colds suffered from the abrupt change in climate.

Attempt to Deter Mexicans

A telegraph transmitted last night to Consul Lubbert by Mr. Leo E. Vary, representative of Bethlehem Steel, says that no strike even exists there and that not one Mexican has been hurt. In his opinion, this is really propaganda aimed at deterring Mexicans from going to that site and in hopes of attracting them to other places. To further satisfy the General Consul, the Mexican Consulate in Philadelphia will be able to investigate the situation in order to confirm that the information reported by the news agency has been exaggerated.

Contents of the Alarming News

The news agency reported that the arrival of Mexican workers in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania—the principal seat of the United States metallurgy industry and home to the largest steel plant in this country—has caused deep agitation among local workers, especially those of the above-mentioned plant where a large number have declared a strike.

The workers at Bethlehem Steel Corporation (the company which runs the metallurgical industry in Pennsylvania as well as various other states) have become hostile toward the Mexican laborers, and the situation now looks as if disturbances could occur.

A Veritable Invasion

The main reason American workers at the metallurgy plant have become agitated is that the arrival of so many Mexican workers seems to constitute an invasion of the industrial center.

The nature of the situation in Pennsylvania was described in a public notice published yesterday in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania by the news agency "Universal Service":

"This peaceful Moravian city has been surprised overnight by a veritable invasion of Mexican and Indian workers, who in three long trains have come to this population and, with their traditional dress and broad palm sombreros, have aroused the curiosity of the people here "This invasion of so many Mexican laborers has created quite a stir and the local workers have are worried what this immigration might mean for the industrial future of the city, whose center of life is the giant metallurgy plant of Bethlehem Steel Corporation.

Alarmist Versions of the Story

"The harsh men from the other side of the Rio Grande," the article continues, "have been arriving here in the last few weeks in various groups and after a few days of traveling through the city in their picturesque hybrid clothing of Mexican and American origin, they are taken to the giant metallurgy plant to learn their various tasks related to the steel industry.

"It has been said among the local workers that these foreign laborers have been brought to Bethlehem to occupy the posts of those American workers who have refused to accept the pay scale of 30 cents per hour set by the company some time ago."

"This, however, has not been confirmed, but information received from other sources revealed that the Mexican workers will earn a salary of five dollars per day while learning the rudiments of the steel industry, even though the American workers who are their teachers earn only 30 cents per hour. Some Mexican workers who speak English have even reported coming here with promises that their daily salaries would continue to improve."

They are only going to learn

"Other versions of the story claim that the Mexicans are here as apprentices in order to have a school where they will learn to be butlers, foremen, and other important roles in the functioning of metallurgy plants so that they could then be sent to work in new plants planned by Bethlehem Steel in Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries."

They are considered Strike-Breakers

"The general opinion in the city regarding the arrival of these foreign workers is that they have been brought here as scabs or strike-breakers. This opinion is based on the fact that many American workers in the plant went on strike just days before the arrival of the Mexicans. Several hundred workers of the plant asked for a salary raise a few weeks ago, and since their request was denied, they went on strike by abandoning their posts and leaving the plant singing. Many prior requests for raises were sent to the management of the company, and even when such demands were not granted, the workers did not strike. Now, however, it seems appropriate that the threat of disturbance become a reality, especially in light of the recent 11 percent salary raise given to the workers of United States Steel and independents."

Disturbances Predicted

"Many labor union leaders are not denying in slightest that the situation is taking a serious turn, that danger of grave disturbances among the workers is growing, and that the importation of Mexican laborers might precipitate things here."

"The steel company has promised to settle the salary dispute by the 16th of this month, but in the meantime, Garret Roach, the head of private police for the company, left Tuesday night towards the south, according to reports, with the goal of bringing more trains of Mexican workers to Bethlehem for next week."

Precautions Taken

Such is the information reported in the news article from Universal Service. Now it seems, according to what is understood from the article, the situation is becoming quite serious for the Mexican workers in Pennsylvania, for certainly the American workers who have abandoned their posts aren't simply going to fold their arms and watch our compatriots take their jobs, because in all honesty and contrary to other versions that might be told in Bethlehem, the Mexican workers—the majority of these being contracted in this city through the Mexican General Consulate—were brought there to perform jobs in the previously cited metallurgy business.

Taking into consideration the importance of this case, the Mexican General Consulate in this city, as soon as it learned of the information referred to in the article by Universal Service, telegraphed the superintendent of Bethlehem Steel for details of the situation and at the same time communicated the matter to the General Consulate in New York, which has jurisdiction over the area where the steel plant is located.

Mr. Alejandro Lubbert, General Consul here, was interviewed yesterday by *La Prensa* about the matter, and he asserted that if the above news were true, and as a result of the hostility of American workers, the company cannot offer jobs to the Mexicans, these Mexicans—according to the contract signed on their behalf by the Consulate—must be returned to this city at the expense of Bethlehem Steel.

No Knowledge of Strike

Consul Lubbert also reported that in a conference yesterday with the head of the Immigration Department—which participated in the contracting of the Mexican workers—the said functionary showed surprise upon hearing the above-mentioned news, saying that he hadn't heard a word of any strike in the Bethlehem plant. Consul Lubbert added that the agent who took the Mexicans to Bethlehem sent news that the Mexican laborers had been treated perfectly well upon their arrival, and he offered to send photographs of the houses assigned to the Mexican workers in that industrial town.

An Exaggeration or a Trick

For all of these reasons, the General Consulate here believes that the news published by Universal Service is exaggerated or perhaps even a plot to divert more Mexicans from going to that place by propagating alarmist stories with the goal of terrorizing our compatriots.

Consul Lubbert believes that the disturbances predicted by the above-mentioned news story could not take place, for the simple reason that the Mexican workers were hired to perform jobs of little importance and which are not very desirable to the workers of that region, giving as the best support for this that these jobs have always been done by immigrants from other countries or men of color.

Finally, Consul Lubbert said that the only explanation he could give to these events is that the above-mentioned company made some declarations a few days ago, saying that it preferred Mexican workers over those of other nationalities because of the Mexicans work ethic and constancy on the job. The Consul is awaiting a response from the company in order to find out the truth of the matter.

-Translated By Andrew Coval