

Postrevolutionary Pioneer: Anarchist María Luisa Marín and the Veracruz Renters's Movement¹

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Compañeros: ¡Viva el amor Universal! ¡Viva la emancipación de la mujer! ¡Arriba el Comunismo! ¡Viva la humanidad libre! ¡Mujeres? ¡A la lucha!

María Luisa Marín, 1923

When female prostitutes in the Veracruz working class neighborhood of La Huaca quit paying rent to their landlords in February of 1922, they sparked a social protest that would soon involve more than half the city's population. Fed up with bad housing conditions, excessive rents and constant harassment by rent collectors, residents of some of port's poorest neighborhoods along with local anarchists and members of the Mexican Communist Party founded the Revolutionary Syndicate of Tenants (*Sindicato Revolucionario de Inquilinos*) directed by local agitator Herón Proal. As the mobilization grew, protesters first called for specific housing reforms but then added a number of other demands influenced by the internationalist ideals of the time: the abolition of private property, the emancipation of workers and the eventual elimination of the state.

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Demonstrations involved hundreds of men, women and children. By the end of May, approximately 30,000 had stopped paying rent. At this time, the occupants of more than 100 tenements (*patios de vecindad*)—consisting of a collection of rooms situated around a central courtyard where residents shared cooking and bathing facilities—displayed red banners and signs which read: “I am on strike and not paying rent” (*Estoy en huelga y no pago renta!*). Once the protest was underway, regular confrontations between landlords, tenement administrators, uncooperative renters, market salespeople, police and politicians helped create a tumultuous social climate that persisted for much of the 1920s.

With the help of populist governor Adalberto Tejeda, protesters established what they called the “communist” settlement (*colonia comunista*) on the edge of town and also began organizing among rural workers throughout the state.² Adding to the vibrant oppositional culture in the port that included militant action by organized labor, some radical tenants contributed articles to the local communist paper *El Frente Unico*, while also producing a radical publication called *Guillotina*.

Inspired by events in the port, rent protests took shape in several other cities in the state of Veracruz including Orizaba, Córdoba, and Jalapa. At the same time activists launched full-scale strikes in Mexico City and Guadalajara while others in Mérida, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Mazatlán, Monterrey, Tampico, Aguascalientes, Torreón and Ciudad Juárez also began tenant organizing efforts. Though lacking any central coordination, the many women and men who

² On Tejeda see Andrew Grant Wood, “Adalberto Tejeda: Radicalism and Reaction in Revolutionary Veracruz,” (in Jurgen Buchenau and William H. Beezley (ed.), *Governors of the Mexican Revolution*. Forthcoming.

joined in these collective actions essentially constituted a pioneering urban social movement dedicated to the cause of housing reform in postrevolutionary Mexico.³

Interestingly, it was the strong presence of women in the Veracruz protest during these years that attracted the attention of many outside observers. The fact that so many participated in the movement during these years led one male participant to refer to the movement later as a "women's rebellion."⁴ Occasionally, some critics argued that the tenant leader Proal had cast a seductive spell over the female strikers, "conquering them with his strange theories." Contrary to such claims, however, the historical sources suggest that women were to a great extent acting as autonomous agents in the tenant movement, even if nearly all of them remained largely anonymous. Prominent among these activist women, though only occasionally mentioned in the

3 Andrew Grant Wood: *Revolution in The Street: Women, Workers and Urban Protest in Veracruz, 1870-1927*. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001). For an earlier history of the Veracruz rent strike see: Octavio García Mundo, *El movimiento inquilinario de Veracruz, 1922*. (Mexico, Septentent. 1976). Discussion of the protest by one of the main participants can be found in: Arturo Bolio Trejo, *La rebelión de mujeres: Versión histórica de la revolución inquilinaria de Veracruz*. (Veracruz: Editorial "Kada." 1959). See also the work of Erica Berra-Stoppa comparing the Veracruz and Mexico City strikes. See: Erica Berra Stoppa, "Estoy en huelga y no pago renta!," *Habitacion*, vol 1, no. 1, (January-March 1981), p. 35. On the rent protest in Mexico City see: Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Bolsheviks: historia narrativa de los orígenes del comunismo en Mexico, 1919-1925*. (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1986), pp. 155-197. On the strike in Guadalajara see Jaime Tamayo, "El sindicato revolucionario de inquilinos y la huelga de rentas de 1922," (in) *Jalisco desde la revolución*, vol. iv. (Los movimientos sociales, 1917-1929). (Guadalajara: Estado de Jalisco/Universidad de Guadalajara, 1988), pp. 129-140 and Jorge Durand Arp-Nisen, "El movimiento inquilinario de Guadalajara, 1922," *Encuentro*, 1983. pp. 7-28. For discussion of popular politics in Veracruz during the 1920s see: Olivia Domínguez Pérez, *Política y movimientos sociales en el tejedismo*. (Jalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1986). On the related peasant movement in Veracruz see: Heather Fowler Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz, 1920-1938*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971) and Romana Falcón, *El agrarismo en Veracruz: La etapa radical, 1928-1935*. (Mexico City: Colegio de Mexico, 1977). For a wonderful photographic history of the city of Veracruz see: Bernardo García Díaz, *El Puerto de Veracruz*. (Jalapa, Universidad Veracruzana, 1992). A novel which deals with the rent strike is José Mancisidor *La ciudad roja: Novela proletaria*. (Jalapa: Editorial Integrales, 1932). In addition to my *Revolution in the Street* see other recent work including a study of labor and politics in the central Veracruz area by Benedikt Behrens, *Ein laboratorium der revolution: Stadtische soziale Bewegungen und radikale reformpolitik im mexikanischen bundesstaat veracruz, 1918-1932*. (Bern and Berlin: Peter Lang, 2002) , esp. pp. 282-318 Rogelio de la Mora V. *Sociedad en crisis: Veracruz 1922*. Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 2002.

⁴Arturo Bolio Trejo, *Rebelión de mujeres: versión histórica de la revolución inquilinaria de Veracruz*. (Veracruz: Editorial "Kada" 1959).

sources available to a historian of these times, was a militant recently arrived from Mexico City. Her name was María Luisa Marín.

María Luisa was a young woman inspired by the revolutionary ideas of those times. In a rare 1923 photograph of twenty-eight women affiliated with the Revolutionary Syndicate of Tenants, one finds María Luisa at the center of the group. Standing along with twenty seven other female collaborators in the only known photograph that identifies female tenant protesters by name, María Luisa appears a *mestiza* in her mid-twenties with braided, long dark hair, of medium build and a slightly mischievous yet determined look which suggests she played an important role in organizing the women of Veracruz.



(1923) Inquilina group—Courtesy ARCHIVO GENERAL DE LA NACION, MEXICO

Marín, along with her brothers Lucio and Esteban, had come to Veracruz with the purpose of helping organize workers. While we know next to nothing about her life before that time it is clear that she must have acquired prior experience in the anarcho-syndicalist trade union movement. Soon after arriving in Veracruz in the spring of 1922 she quickly emerged as a propulsive force for the protest, gathering several female residents into a powerful anarchist group known as the Federation of Libertarian Women (*Federación de Mujeres Libertarias*).⁵ They agreed to a mutual pact that stipulated that if any renter were in danger of being evicted, a general alarm would be sounded to call other tenants to their defense. Armed with police whistles and a strong commitment to social justice, these women regularly challenged housing administrators, police and other renters unfriendly to the union. They also canvassed the local markets where they encouraged domestic servants to organize a union and strike for higher wages. Generally, these anarchist women acted out a popular politics that was staged in the streets, parks, plazas, cantinas, auditoriums, union halls, government offices, the state legislature and even the Veracruz city jail.

Newspaper accounts occasionally referred to María Luisa as the “partner of Proal.” Rumored to be the anarchist’s lover, she was more than just the influential tenant leader’s sidekick. María Luisa coordinated many of the Revolutionary Syndicate’s activities. Over the course of the protest, she borrowed liberally from anarchist, communist, Mexican nationalist and, to a degree, early feminist thought to challenge elites. Her speeches, prison dispatches and participation in the rent strike consistently demanded radical solutions to social problems. Through anarchist direct actions, public meetings, petitions and propaganda, she established herself as a truly vital element in the Mexican tenant movement. Though largely forgotten,

⁵ The term “libertarian” at that time was closely affiliated with anarchist ideals at the time.

María Luisa Marín represents for us a generation of Mexican women inspired by revolutionary ideas and passionately dedicated to the cause of human rights, fair housing practices and economic justice. Central to explaining the rise of tenant protest in Mexican cities are two fundamental issues: (1) rapid urbanization after the turn of the twentieth century and (2) institutional and political change in Mexico in the decade immediately after the Revolution of 1910.

Background to Urban Popular Protest

In 1907, a visitor commented on the changing condition and status of the nation's capital:

The city of Mexico represents progressive Mexico. In it is concentrated the wealth, culture and refinement of the republic. It is the political, the educational, the social and the commercial center of the whole country. It is to Mexico what Paris is to France...The same glare and glitter of a pleasure-loving metropolis are to be found here.⁶

Similar to North American and European cities of the time, urban planners in Mexico City transformed the metropolitan area into a new and improved site for consumption and state power. Important modifications included the establishment of electrical service, improved water supply, drainage, roads and telephone service⁷

⁶Nevin Winter, *Mexico and Her People Today*. (Boston: 1907). Quoted in John Lear, "Mexico City: Space and Class in the Porfirian Capital, 1884-1910," *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (May 1996), p. 455.

⁷José Luis Lezama, "Mexico," (in) *Latin American Urbanization: Historical Profiles of Major Cities*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 393. On this process elsewhere see David Harvey, "Paris,

Beginning with the widening, paving, illuminating and embellishment of the *Paseo de la Reforma* in the 1860s, Mexico City residents increasingly saw an accelerated transformation of urban space. In 1857, tramways articulated new connections between the city center and the new suburban districts of Tacubaya, La Villa, Tlalpan and San Angel. Gradually, new colonias (*Cuauhtémoc, Juárez, Roma, Condesa*) rose up on the higher lands to the west. Still, the majority of the population remained in the city center. Behind a thin veneer of advancing modernity, growing numbers lived in grinding poverty.⁸

In fact, nearly one quarter of the residents of Mexico City lived in run-down tenements around the turn of the century. Then, as the city population increased by 59 percent between 1900 and 1920, problems associated with popular housing grew worse.⁹ Known as *vecindades*, many inner-city buildings had been fashioned out of Colonial era structures which had once served as residences for single families and their servants.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, many landlords took advantage of the situation. At the time, the newspaper *El País* described popular neighborhoods in the city “centers of sickness and death” as sometimes more than seven people were known to share a rented room. Estimates figure that nearly sixteen percent of the city’s

1850-1870,” (in) *Consciousness and the urban experience: studies in the history and theory of capitalist urbanization*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

⁸For a general overview of Mexico City growth see Peter Ward, *The Production and Reproduction of an Urban Environment*. (London: Belhaven Press, 1990), Martha Scheingart, *Los productores del espacio habitable: estado, empresora y sociedad en la Ciudad de México*. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1989) and Michael Johns, *Mexico City in The Age of Díaz*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

⁹María Dolores Morales, “La expansion de la Ciudad de México en el siglo XIX: el caso de los fraccionamientos.” (in) Alejandra Moreno Toscano (ed.), *Ciudad de México: ensayo de construccion de una historia*. (Mexico City: I.N.A.H., 1978), pp. 189-200.

¹⁰Gisela von Wobeser, “La vivienda de nivel socioeconómico bajo en la Ciudad de México entre 1750-1850.” Paper presented at the 9th Meeting of Canadian, Mexican and United States historians in Mexico City, October 27-29, 1994.

population was homeless. If they could afford the fee of a few *centavos*, some stayed in public lodging houses or *mesones*.¹¹

In part it was urban renewal—or the “demolishers’ pickaxe” as one observer termed it—that had contributed to a growing housing crisis. Displaced residents from the central city moved to areas to the east and north of the main plaza where thousands crowded into high-density tenements. Districts one and two (to the east of the *Zócalo*) saw the highest levels of crowding. There, tenants lacked basic water and sewage facilities. These areas registered the highest mortality rates in the city around 1900. At the same time, other, illegal settlements on the periphery of the city such as *La Bolsa*, *Valle Gómez*, *Cuartelito* (later *Obrero*) also saw little or no connection to municipal services.

By the time the Mexican Labor Department issued its report on popular housing in 1920, conditions had deteriorated further. As the study revealed:

Within a few meters of the *Zócalo* and *5 de Mayo* Street can be found houses in ruins where dozens of families sleep exposed to the weather or among hundreds of rats or decomposing vegetables...[T]he majority of these ruins and centers of sickness are owned by wealthy and well-known people.¹²

Authorities found many tenements in the capital lay in a “pathetic” and “ruinous” state. They also stated that since 1914, many rents in Mexico City had as much as tripled and “now absorbed as much as thirty percent of a worker’s salary.”¹³ Subsequently, a December 1922 report by the

¹¹Rodney Anderson, *Outcasts in Their Own Land: Mexican Industrial Workers, 1906-1911*. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 43-4.

¹²Quoted in Lear 477.

¹³Quoted in Ignacio Taibo II, “Inquilinos del D.F...” pp. 103-6. Ignacio Taibo II offers detailed description of several *viviendas* based on the 1920 report.

Department of Labor stated that rents in the eight different districts in Mexico City had again risen significantly after 1917. Similarly, the cost of popular housing had increased at comparable rates in other Mexican cities such as Guadalajara and the port of Veracruz.

Railroad development helped secure Guadalajara's place as the focus of a regional market which extended to the states of Colima, Nayarit, Sinaloa and Sonora. At the time, Mexico's second city hosted a growing number of two story houses and as well as the introduction of electrical lighting, a trolley system, improved water supply and other urban services in key areas. Workers constructed new schools, hospitals and markets while elites founded a state university. In the 1880s, the city became the state capital.¹⁴

As waves of rural migrants moved to the city during the late nineteenth century, many of Guadalajara's working classes established popular neighborhoods to the east and north of the central district. Soon, new areas also rose up to the west. In 1880, observers counted 812 city blocks compared to the 334 city blocks enumerated in 1800. In the coming decades, urbanization would continue apace, eventually straining existing infrastructure, urban services and housing. An uneven distribution of urban services in Guadalajara resulted in the shaping of what one scholar has called a "divided city:"

[T]he location of [urban] services favored and reinforced the pattern of class segregation. Transportation systems in the central zone were designed to improve access to commercial establishments and elegant new avenues led to the upper class residential areas. Basic services such as water, paved streets, and sewage were long in coming to the poor neighborhoods, despite their great need. In short, rather than attempting to

¹⁴Lezama, "Mexico" 363-4.

counteract the trend toward a divided city that began in [the early decades of the twentieth century] the state joined hands with the privileged classes by providing them the public resources necessary for their convenience.¹⁵

Similarly, this trend toward favoring elite areas at the expense of others proved to be true not only in Mexico City and Guadalajara but in the smaller Gulf Coast city of Veracruz as well.

Between 1873 and 1902 Veracruz had seen the completion of new railroad, harbor and associated urban facilities.¹⁶ And while many believed a “new era of civilization” had begun in the port, not everyone benefited equally from economic growth. In fact, most residents lived either in haphazard constructions on the city’s periphery or crowded into cramped tenements whose design featured individual rooms located off a central courtyard (*patio de vecindad*).

In early November 1920, the Veracruz newspaper *El Dictamen* printed an editorial which offered an intimate portrait of living conditions in the city’s popular neighborhoods. “The patios,” the author began, “primarily found in the neighborhoods [just south and east of] the city center leave much to be desired.”¹⁷ A similar exposé asserted that “the sanitation of the tenements is the most important issue of public health in the city.”¹⁸ Responsibility for the problem, the article suggested, lay with landlords who “charged inflated rents and did little to maintain their properties while tenants only seemed to make deplorable conditions worse.”¹⁹

¹⁵ John Walton, “Guadalajara: Creating The Divided City,” (in) Wayne Cornelius and Robert Kemper (eds.) *Latin American Urban Research. Volume 6, Metropolitan Change in Latin America: The Challenge and The Response*. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978): 33.

¹⁶ Bronze statues of English businessman and engineer Weetman Pearson, Porfirio Díaz and various workers who completed the harbor front works recently appeared on the Veracruz malecón.

¹⁷“Los patios de vecindad ‘en su tinta,’” *El Dictamen*, November 4, 1920.

¹⁸“Los patios de vecindad y el departamento de ingeniería sanitaria,” *El Dictamen*, November 5, 1920.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

Comparing housing rates between the three cities, observers asserted that rents in Veracruz exceeded those recorded in Mexico City and Guadalajara.²⁰ Indeed, the cost of housing in the port had jumped considerably after the revolution. A room priced at 10 *pesos* in 1910 rented for 30 to 35 in 1922.²¹ Many agreed that the cost of rental housing “had risen terribly, to the point where it (was) almost impossible for any employee of an average business to find adequate shelter.”²² One Mexico City newspaper wrote that “housing [in Veracruz] as well as the cost of living in general, has always been higher than many other places in Mexico, but now rents are simply out of control.”²³

A report to the federal Department of Labor in the summer of 1922 summed up the housing situation:

This office has reliable sources which suggest that renters (*inquilinos*) have a legitimate reason to protest against landlords in the port, many of whom own property constructed with the intent of collecting as much rent as possible yet left, for some time, in a complete state of abandonment. This situation is a threat to the health and well-being of a great number of the population in the port. (P)igsties that in 1910 rented for ten pesos

²⁰Berra-Stoppa, p. 37. For reports on worker housing and cost of living in Mexico City see “El trabajo de sastrería y sus asimilares en México D.F.; labor a domicilio.” *Boletín mensual del departamento de trabajo*, January 1922 and “Higiene de la habitación; la habitación obrera en México, D.F.” *Boletín mensual...*, February 1922.

²¹Berra-Stoppa, “Estoy en huelga...,” p. 37. Historian Robert Quirk notes that during the North American invasion, “(t)he thorniest problem dealt with by the legal department was that of rent disputes. During the period of anarchy which accompanied the revolutions against Díaz and Madero and now against Huerta, many of the Mexican tenants had deferred paying their rents as long as possible, and they were now months or even years in arrears. Nearly six thousand cases involving nonpayment of rent were brought before the informal American courts.” Robert Quirk, *An Affair of Honor: Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Veracruz*. New York: Norton Press, 1967): 142.

²²Ibid.

²³“Son muy altas las rentas de casas,” *El Universal*, August 1, 1920. For reports on worker housing and cost of living in Mexico City see various reports in *Boletín mensual del departamento de trabajo*. January-December 1922.

monthly in 1918 cost fifteen and now are priced at thirty to thirty five. Other (smaller rooms) in worse shape could be rented in 1910 for three pesos monthly, in 1914 for six now cost fifteen. In sum, the housing condition of the poor in a state of complete abandonment...many are without water...and most live with only the most rudimentary hygiene.²⁴

With government reports verifying tenant grievances, who did residents blame for such conditions? With the resurgence of Mexican nationalism during the revolution, tenants increasingly began to articulate their demands in politicized terms. Important precedent for this change of consciousness had come first in 1914 with the occupation of the port by U.S. forces and then the subsequent issuance of the 1917 Constitution by the administration of Venustiano Carranza.

Motivated by the desire to intercept a German arms shipment intended for counterrevolutionary General Victoriano Huerta, the North American invasion of Veracruz imposed a new sanitary discipline in Veracruz by forcing residents to clean up the city and to comply with a new set of public health regulations. While many in the port may have appreciated the fact that the city accumulated wastes had been disposed of, they deeply resented the means employed by the North Americans. As a result, the occupation helped transform local culture by both raising expectations about housing and public health conditions while also sparking a new wave of popular nationalism. Evidence of important changes in “citizen consciousness” sparked by resistance to foreign invasion can be seen in memorial statues to

²⁴“Las ultimas huelgas en el puerto de Veracruz,” *Boletín mensual del departamento del trabajo*, June, 1922. p. 81-82. AGN, ramo Trabajo, box 502, exp. 1.

heroic defenders of the city, newspaper cartoons, contemporary fiction, poetry and popular ballads (*corridos*) as well as an initial wave of organizing on the part of house renters soon after.

As the military phase of the Revolution gradually came to a close, the Constitution of 1917 subsequently issued an official discourse intended to legitimate the rule of revolutionary elites. At the same time, however, dissemination of the document also raised expectations and provided Mexican citizens with an effective language for demanding improved political, economic and social conditions.

As these changes soon gave rise to a period of political euphoria as well as increasingly fierce reaction from conservative elements in the state, *veracruzanos* elected Senator Adalberto Tejeda as governor in mid-1920. Over the course of his term, the state would become one of the “experimental laboratories” during the immediate postrevolutionary decade. As such, individual politicians such as Tejeda were afforded the autonomy necessary to build their own power base through the use of populist appeals articulated with the language of the Revolution. Thus, as revolutionary elites in Mexico City worked to consolidate the power of the federal government “from above,” regional leaders such as Tejeda ostensibly encouraged grassroots organizers—many of them affiliated with various labor, anarchist and communist organizations—to campaign throughout the state. In doing so, militants effectively tapped into a growing sense of moral outrage felt by houserenters—many of them women.

The Libertarian Women

On the afternoon of February 27, 1922 Herón Proal met with nearly eighty women in the courtyard of the de la Vega tenement. “Beloved *compañeras*,” he began, “the hour of social vindication is here and for you it is the time of liberation. You are great citizens,” he continued,

"and I am here, sisters, to say that you can burn down those filthy hovels where you are being miserably exploited by the bourgeoisie." Encouraged by their cheering response, he pressed on: "you need to burn these houses and destroy the bourgeoisie...All of you are energetic women, and you do not have to stand for this exploitation." After this, Proal finished his speech and departed. Just as the women returned to the street they ran into their hated rent collector, José "el Chato" Montero. Emboldened by Proal's incendiary discourse, they pelted the administrator with stones.²⁵ Soon, word of a fast growing movement of resistance to local landlords spread rapidly throughout the poorer neighborhoods of the port. By the time a group of prostitutes threw their mattresses into the street in early March 1922, most everyone in the city knew that a major confrontation was underway.

Subsequent action taken by the women of patio San Salvador on the night of March 6 provided the initial spark needed to start the Veracruz protest. The following day *El Dictamen* reported that "many of the prostitutes (had taken) their rented mattresses, chairs and other furniture into the street with the idea of starting a giant bonfire."²⁶ Although police had managed to restore order at the last minute, they could not prevent news of a growing collective action against local landlords from spreading across town. A few days later, *porteños* heard of several other tenements whose inhabitants had declared themselves on strike and joined Proal's union. By the end of the first week in March, the paper had registered the protests of tenants from patios El Perfume, La Hortaliza, El Aserradero, Vallejo, La Providencia, La Josefina, San Bruno, Ni me olvides, Paraíso, Liébano, La Conchita, and 21 de Abril.²⁷ Soon, representatives

²⁵*El Dictamen*, February 28, 1922.

²⁶*Ibid.*, March 7, 1922

²⁷*Ibid.*, March 8-9, 1922.

of the renters' union had established themselves in each of these tenements and were working to coordinate the strike. By mid-month, thousands of the city's tenants had joined the rent boycott, with well over one hundred patios on strike.

Women took an active part in all aspects of the protest and eventually took on leadership of the Revolutionary Syndicate itself. Female strikers engaged regularly in anarchist "direct actions," maintained strike committees and filled the ranks of innumerable demonstrations that animated the city streets. At their nightly rallies, demonstrators denounced those in Veracruz who they felt lived off the "misery of their renters." Often the people making these assertions were the outspoken anarchist women headed by María Luisa Marín. Armed with police whistles they challenged housing administrators, police and fellow tenement dwellers that were unfriendly to the union. They also applied direct action strategies in several of the city's markets with the hope of convincing the local women who worked as domestic workers for the city's middle and upper class residents to go on strike. Evidence of their revolutionary practice can be most clearly seen during the citywide protest that was staged by organized labor in mid-June 1922.

That month, hundreds of workers in the city of Veracruz launched a general strike. Taking advantage of the situation, María Luisa and members of the Libertarian Women organized to stop the sale of meat in the Fabela market while inviting domestic workers to join their struggle. Early on the morning of Tuesday June 13, several small groups positioned themselves at the market entrances in an attempt to prevent anyone from entering or leaving the building. As more and more shoppers began to gather outside the market, the anarchists were eventually unable to prevent the crowd from breaking through. A noisy exchange of insults, yelling and shoving ensued following which the female organizers walked over to another

market where they again encouraged domestic servants shopping there to organize and go on strike.²⁸

Hearing of the commotion, city officials called Proal and advised him that such "scandals" as were being provoked by these women would have to stop. The tenant leader disagreed and backed up the claims of the female militants by informing the municipal leaders that, given their miserable working conditions, it should not be surprising that maids and cooks had in fact asked for the help of the Tenant Syndicate. Proal added that it remained the right of every Mexican citizen to organize, bargain collectively and strike when necessary.

Shortly thereafter, the police received orders to position themselves outside each of the two markets on the following day. Worried that not only tenant but other labor organizing activities might result in major civil disorder, officials sent in four hundred soldiers from the 27th regiment of the state headquarters in Jalapa to help maintain the peace. Soon, federal forces were patrolling the city regularly. Having heard rumors that female agitator, with the support of the tenant union, might again attempt direct actions, the authorities ordered several troops to reinforce the police stationed at the entrances to both Fabela markets. Twenty mounted police were also sent to stand guard outside the city meat market.

On June 16, *El Dictamen* reported that port workers had decided to return to their jobs. Many others, however, including bakers, restaurant employees, barbers, tailors, various terminal and dockworkers remained on strike.²⁹ At the same time, residents received word of a telegram from President Obregón urging workers and members of the Tenant Syndicate in the city to

²⁸Ibid., June 14, 1922.

²⁹Ibid., June 16, 1922.

“avoid acts of violence.”³⁰ Clearly, the strategies of Marín and other tenant strikers had raised the ire not only of local citizens but of the President as well.

During the first months of the protest María Luisa Marín was never identified by the press as part of the "crowd" gathered in Juárez park, marching in the streets of the port or assembling strike committees in the city's many tenements. Then, after a violent confrontation between members of the Revolutionary Syndicate of Tenants and federal forces left several dead in the streets of Veracruz on the night of July 5, María Luisa rose from anonymity to become a dynamic local leader in her own right. Accused of homicide and sedition along with Proal and approximately ninety men and fifty women, Marín began what would eventually be an eleven-month incarceration inside the Veracruz Allende jail.³¹

Two days after their arrest, striking tenants wrote directly to President Obregón demanding the release of Proal, Marín and other Revolutionary Syndicate members. In justifying their request, they asserted that:

The tenant strike...has proved a blessing because, if for no other reason, it has alerted workers to the fact that behind the words and “advanced posturing” of public officials...lay an abuse of power...The “revolutionary liberalism” of government officials has fallen like a miserable house of cards. (A)nd in its place they ostentatiously have shown us how they are “friends” of the “people” by shoving the barrel of a gun down our throats. In “respecting the [worker’s] right to strike,” they have sent in a military force to protect the squirrels and guarantee the “rights of workers and industrialists.” ...We

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., July 7, 1922.

lament the fact that bayonets continue to sustain the bourgeoisie of the country [while] they miserably exploit the sweat of the Indian in the countryside and the blood of the proletariat in the cities.³²

The petition revealed the deep frustration and anger felt towards military and government officials as well as the newly critical ideological perspective that had now been assumed by many Veracruz residents. Denouncing the revolutionary populism of state agents, strikers grounded their frustration in the framework of class struggle to argue that the Mexican government was operating with only the interests of national "bourgeois" elites in mind. Like anarcho-syndicalists elsewhere in the Americas and Europe, the Veracruz tenants identified themselves--at least on paper--as part of a larger urban "proletariat" on the front lines of a international war being waged by a exploitative bourgeois class against common people everywhere. Interestingly, their communication also suggested a hard to demonstrate solidarity between Mexico's "Indian" *campesinos* and laborers in the nation's cities. As the news of what many saw as the massacre of innocent citizens spread throughout Mexico, petitions from sympathetic groups similarly expressed similarly strong objections about what had happened in the port.³³

On July 10, members of the Tenant Syndicate recorded their account of the bloody confrontation and wrote to Minister of the Interior Plutarco Elías Calles in Mexico City. Registering their grievance they claimed that members of the military had disregarded "the most

³²Petition signed by approximately 190 residents (many of them women) from patios San Francisco and Consuelo to Obregón, July 8, 1922. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter AGN), gobernación, vol. 24, file 107. A note attached to the back of the petition states that "there are many more from other vecindades who wish to sign but are afraid."

³³See examples in AGN, gobernación, box 26, C.2.51. 258.

rudimentary principles of justice.”³⁴ To begin to rectify this situation, tenants demanded the immediate release of Herón Proal, María Luisa Marín and other Tenant Syndicate members as well as a full investigation. More than one hundred sympathizers signed the letter.³⁵ Despite countless efforts calling for the release of the Veracruz tenants, however, it would not be until the following May that they were released from Allende jail. In the meantime, Proal and Marín established a lively presence in the prison by singing "The International" and other Communist songs while also taunting prison officials with their red and black banners.

A Red Dance and the Strike of the Tortilla Makers

Despite their incarceration, the two tenant leaders continued to organize tirelessly from inside the jail. There, they encouraged renters to agitate against prison staff as well as uncooperative detainees. Proal and Marín also maintained a spirited defense of their revolutionary ideology. On September 18, for example, tenants gained permission to hold what outsiders later referred to as a “red dance.” Appropriately, the event coincided with the national celebration of Mexico’s Independence Day. According to *El Dictamen*, prison director Andrés Andrade even lent the inmates his phonograph for the occasion.

For the occasion, Proal and Marín ordered the inside of the jail decorated with red banners and pictures of Russian revolutionary leaders to express their solidarity with the growing international Communist movement. That night prisoners gathered to sing and dance in the women’s department. The next day, *El Dictamen* reported that the tenants had sung the praises

³⁴Letter from Revolutionary Syndicate to Calles, July 10, 1922. AGN, gobernación, vol. 24, file 107.

³⁵*Ibid.*

of the international workers movement by offering renditions of various “Communist hymns.” To the chagrin of many outsiders, the dance marked the first time such a “red” gathering had taken place within a Mexican jail. For their part, the editors of *El Dictamen* charged that tenants had been given too much freedom in being allowed to continue their “red” organizing.³⁶

A few days later, María Luisa Marín organized a work stoppage among the tortilla makers in the jail to protest insufficient supply of drinking water and poor treatment by prison staff. At first, the tortilla makers’ strike seemed to unify the women. Soon, however, some grew disillusioned with the effort. A week later, *El Dictamen* characterized María Luisa as a “boss” (*cacique*), suggesting she had ordered prisoners to “commit abuses” within the jail:

María Luisa Marín, the *inquilina* leader has turned into a boss who demands everyone answer to her. Already there is a sizable group of women who are not willing to cooperate with her desire to continue the tortilla-makers strike.³⁷

Later in the month, several women sent a letter to Governor Tejeda, saying that they “had no interest in taking part in the altercations in the *Allende* jail.” Their only wish, they said, “was to regain their sacred liberty in order to return to their homes and children who now live in a frightening state of abandonment.”³⁸

Disagreements within the women's department exploded shortly thereafter when, on October 5, a three-hour battle broke out. According to one account, María Luisa had challenged a group of women prisoners who intended to break the tortilla strike. The confrontation reached a high point when Marín and her followers, after first shouting insults at the women as well as

³⁶*El Dictamen*, September 18, 1922.

³⁷*Ibid.*, September 27, 1922.

³⁸Concepción Pérez and over 20 others to Tejeda, September 29, 1922. Archivo General del Estado de Veracruz, Jalapa, Veracruz (hereafter AGEV), gobernación, 1922.

members of their families who had been visiting, then took up sticks and stones to attack them. During a period of intense fighting, one woman broke away and managed to call for help. Soon, ten members of the prison staff were obliged to intervene and restore order. Following this, officials put María Luisa and two other women in special confinement for fifteen days. The next morning, female prisoners returned to the business of tortilla making.³⁹

Despite the controversy generated by renters inside the prison, labor organizers in the city maintained their support for the jailed tenants. On October 11, a group of workers wrote to Governor Tejeda requesting that Proal and the others be released. They stated that further imprisonment of the protesters “represented a great injustice because many of the tenants have small children who need to be cared for.” The real crime, the letter read, was the robbery carried out by “unscrupulous landlords in the port.” The committee suggested that the governor take three days to consider the matter. If the governor did not use his “intelligent powers” to reply after that point, they warned “there would be negative consequences.”⁴⁰ On October 23, labor leader José Mancisidor wrote to Tejeda informing him that the Pro-Prisoner committee intended to continue to work for the release of Proal and Marín as well as “other workers and women held in Allende jail...even if it meant launching a general strike.” Mancisidor advised the governor that “if matters are left unresolved for some time things will only get worse and [possibly] more dangerous.”⁴¹

Conflict within the prison escalated again during the fall of 1922 and early months of 1923. With Proal heading up the group in the men's section, Marín continued to lead in the

³⁹*El Dictamen*, October 6-7, 1922.

⁴⁰El Comité Pro-presos to Tejeda, October 11, 1922. AGEV, gobernación, 1922.

⁴¹José Mancisidor to Tejeda, October 23, 1922. AGEV, Archivo Tejeda volume 68.

women's department. Each contingent complained that prison officials were mistreating the renters. Outside the jail, *El Dictamen* reminded readers about the "inappropriate behavior" of the tenants and suggested that Proal, María Luisa and the others represented a corrosive element in Veracruz society.⁴²

Events leading to the eventual release of Proal and Marín began in mid-January 1923 when a lawyer helped prisoners write and file a petition asking for political amnesty. As word spread throughout the tenements regarding the possible release of the jailed tenants for some time still, the *porteños* sympathetic to the Syndicate cause set off firecrackers, decorated the front of their houses with banners and organized dances to celebrate.⁴³ While amnesty for the militants would have to wait, residents prepared to commemorate the first year anniversary of their strike.

For the occasion, organizers printed a special edition of the local communist paper *El Frente Unico*. Writing from jail, María Luisa contributed two articles. The first, simply entitled "The Fifth of March," celebrated the "ideal of communism" and the founding of the Tenant Syndicate the year before. The other expressed her commitment to female emancipation, arguing "women are the owners of the world...because of their caring, limitless self-denial and incredible generosity." She wrote that her enthusiasm for the tenant cause stemmed from her tremendous love of humanity and admiration for Proal who she saw as the "liberator of the people of Veracruz. I admire the man...and for him I would gladly offer my life." Marín ended with a call to her readers:

Compañeros, Long live Universal Love!

⁴²*El Dictamen*, November-December, 1922.

⁴³*Ibid.*, January 16, 1923.

Hooray for the emancipation of women!

Up with Communism!

Long live free humanity!

Women, to the struggle!⁴⁴

Her article, while endorsing a somewhat romanticized notion of women as self-sacrificing caregivers, advanced a radical mixture of communist and feminist ideas as well. María Luisa's demand for female emancipation also embraced aspects of an incipient women's movement emerging in Europe and the Americas at the time. Although she would remain in jail for another two months, her contribution to *El Frente Unico* certainly distinguished her in the eyes of the Veracruz public as one of the movement's visionaries. The editors of *El Dictamen*, as always, saw things differently. Anticipating a potential amnesty for the tenants, their columnists commented that the union represented a "seditious force" in Veracruz politics. With Proal, Marín and the others soon to be released, they figured that the character of tenant action could only become more "odious."⁴⁵

On May 11, 1923, when Governor Tejeda allowed the tenants to walk free, they marked the occasion in their usual flamboyant manner. In groups of ten, the men left first, followed by María Luisa and the other women who dressed in cream colored dresses and straw hats with red ribbons. Then Proal, with a group of his most intimate *compañeros*, came out last. As the prisoners made their exit, their supporters jubilantly set off firecrackers, applauded their peers, sang songs and shouted slogans to celebrate the occasion. Once the nearly one hundred and fifty tenants had walked out of Allende, the crowd paraded through several of the city's main streets

⁴⁴*El Frente Unico*, March 5, 1923.

⁴⁵*El Dictamen*, January, 17, 1923.

and eventually ended up at the offices of the renters union. In an interview given shortly after leaving the jail, Proal promised the "street activities" of the union would continue as they had before. "We will restart our open air cultural conferences, demonstrations and public meetings," he told reporters, "and of course, our commitment to direct action."⁴⁶

Street Fighting Women and Men

As Proal had foreseen, events during the spring and summer of 1923 testified to a new level of militancy among union members. In the city, the deployment of anarchist tactics proved especially controversial. Just four days after marking the first anniversary of the July 6 confrontation, for example, protesters staged assaults on two boarding houses where, they claimed, the Spanish landlords lived off the misery of their tenants. While not always identified by newspaper sources, it is reasonable to say that María Luisa Marín probably played an important role in these actions.

On the night of July 10, 1923 some seventy tenants, armed with sticks, clubs, rocks, knives and a few guns first approached the hotel Santo Domingo, property of Jesus Castañón. Soon they had the place surrounded. With red banners, they formed a semi-circle in the middle of Aquilles Serdan Street, stopping traffic, and then sent a commission inside to demand the room keys from the owner. "Our intention," they shouted, "is to take over this *posada* in order to find lodging for some of our *compañeros* and to unionize those who are already living here! Houses, we want houses and rooms!" In response, the proprietor resisted briefly but had no choice but to give in to the protesters' demands. They quickly then found their way upstairs and

⁴⁶Ibid., May 12, 1922.

hung banners from the windows looking out onto the street. Soon, mounted police arrived just as the crowd was beginning to set off firecrackers in celebration of their momentary victory.

Not to be stopped, the tenants next moved down the street to another boarding house named El Cosmópolis, belonging to Bernardo Francisco Prida. By this point, the crowd had grown to nearly one hundred men and women marching under the union's red and black banners. Moving closer to the *pension*, they were soon confronted by a heavily armed unit of the police. Nevertheless, some of the protesters managed to get inside this second building and began breaking bottles, glasses, light fixtures, furniture and windows in the downstairs bar. A few even started a fire inside when a group of police broke in behind them. Eventually, police managed to disperse the crowd but not before considerable damage had been done to both establishments. In the evening, a group of tenants briefly returned to the scene and shouted the derogatory term for Spaniard "*gachupin*" and "*viva Proal*" from the street.⁴⁷ During the next few days, the authorities apprehended a number of tenants associated with the union, including the brothers of María Luisa, Lucio and Esteban.

Shortly thereafter, tenants and police tangled anew. This time, union members including María Luisa Marín, allegedly tore down a Mexican flag displayed by a landlord in the port.⁴⁸ This incident took place on July 18; the day Mexican citizens commemorate the death of their national hero Benito Juárez. Because of the strikers' disrespect for authority as well as their egregious demonstration of anti-patriotic sentiment, the action proved particularly controversial.

⁴⁷Ibid., July 11, 1922.

⁴⁸Ibid., July 18, 1923.

Even the New York Times saw fit to comment on the clash between tenants and police.⁴⁹ Three days later, a Mexico City paper sharply criticized the Veracruz militants:

The serious disorders committed in the unruly port as a result of the disrespectful attitude assumed by member of the Union of Renters against the authorities has obliged the latter to seek guarantees from the president. [In response] The First Magistrate [has] categorically reprimanded the renters, deploring the fact that they do not respect property or the authorities.⁵⁰

An exchange of telegrams then took place between members of the Tenant Syndicate and President Obregón. On July 18, Syndicate member Marcos Gutiérrez complained that the city had been invaded by police and requested that the President step in to restore the citizens' rights:

At this time the police are overrunning the city with guns and swords. Urge guarantees and immediate liberty, since already several compatriots of the city have been wounded, beaten and imprisoned.⁵¹

Unmoved, Obregón expressed only his disapproval of the tenants:

The Executive office under my charge sincerely regrets that the directors of that union recognize authorities and laws only in those cases in which they seek guarantees from the former granted by the latter: but do not equally recognize the one or the other when there is call for respect of their decisions and the rights of others granted by these same laws which you invoke on account of violations. The case under reference will be made

⁴⁹*New York Times*, July 20, 1923.

⁵⁰*El Demócrata*, July 23, 1923. Quoted in Summerlin to Secretary of State, July 27, 1923. Records of the United States Department of State (hereafter RDS), reel 161.

⁵¹Marcos Gutiérrez to Obregón, July 18, 1922. RDS, reel 161.

known to the respective authorities and they will decide the responsibility and impose the corresponding punishment.⁵²

In pointing out that the tenants wanted both to express their contempt for the government and to make claims that relied on the state's guarantees to citizens, the President showed little sympathy for members of the revolutionary union. In the end, the authorities arrested several female militants including María Luisa Marín. A few days later, city councilmen requested that army troops again be brought in to help support local police.⁵³

These two incidents, probably some of the more dramatic examples of direct action by tenants, shocked the "respectable" residents of Veracruz. In the months that followed, calls for federal intervention to "protect the city" and "establish law and order" again came from public officials who saw the contentious tenants as a potent social force. In December that year, the recently elected President Plutarco Elías Calles used a skirmish between rival factions of the tenant movement as a pretext for federal intervention. Soon, he called for the arrest and jailing once again of Herón Proal in mid-December 1924. In his place, María Luisa Marín assumed the position of Secretary General of the Revolutionary Syndicates of Tenants.

Madame Secretary

After assuming leadership of the Revolutionary Syndicate in late 1924, María Luisa intensified her appeal to the public. One of her first acts as Secretary General was to issue a

⁵²Obregón to Gutiérrez, July 19, 1923. Ibid.

⁵³*El Dictamen*, July 18, 1923. Proceedings concerning the incident continued during the rest of the month. See July 23, 27, 28, 1923.

passionate call to Veracruz residents urging them to demand the release of Proal and to “unite against the exploiters of the world:

We will do what we can so that our children will not denounce us as traitors and cowards...(W)e will prove that with Proal and without him, the Veracruz renters (*Pueblo Inquilinario*) will...defend their rights...In view of the danger that now threatens us...we issue an urgent call to the people. Don't wait for the powerful to help you...they will never appreciate the dignity and value of our solidarity which some day will triumph. The supreme hour of the people has arrived. People of Veracruz, wake up and join the struggle.⁵⁴

With Proal in jail, Marín argued the "struggle" was one that required the men and women of Veracruz to reaffirm their commitment to the ideal of an independent, egalitarian municipality. For María Luisa, "the supreme hour" had arrived. As she saw it, the eyes of future generations were upon them.

Meantime, María Luisa was coordinating efforts asking federal officials for Proal's release. This included letters to President Calles as well as a petition sent in mid-January 1925 to the Mexican Supreme Court that was signed by nearly two-hundred women.⁵⁵ In addition to working to secure Proal's freedom, Marín continued to organize regular demonstrations, petitions to state officials and direct actions, as well as making plans to commemorate the third anniversary of the founding of the Veracruz renters' union.

⁵⁴“Boletín del Sindicato Revolucionario de Inquilinos,” December 24, 1924. AGN, gobernación, C-28.

⁵⁵Letter from María Luisa Marín to Calles, December 25, 1924. Petition from the Federación de Mujeres Libertarias to Presidente del Tribunal Superior de La Justicia de La Nación, January 14, 1925. AGN, Justicia, 2019-9, 1925.

On February 5, 1925, María Luisa Marín instructed tenants to decorate their patios with red banners to show their commitment to the continuing tenants' strike. Many, including residents of El Obrero, Tanitos and La Malinche tenements, soon arranged colorful displays. Expressing their loyalty to tenant leaders, renters hung two large red banners from the roof of Proal's house at Arista 33. Enthusiasts also decorated the union's headquarters on Landero y Cos street. Later in the afternoon, Marín and other leaders spoke to a crowd assembled before Hotel *Diligencias* which faced the city's main square. After demanding the release of Proal, María Luisa launched into a speech attacking property owners. Many women, who constituted the majority of those assembled, carried banners which read: "Women Of The Port Struggle For Progress," "In The Name Of Humanity We Ask For The Freeing Of Proal," "The Women Of The Port Protest The Unjust Imprisonment Of *Compañero* Proal and The Proletarian Women Will Make The Social Revolution."

After the rally, accompanied by a number of children playing tambourines and banging tin cans, María Luisa led a group of demonstrators over to the nearby newspaper offices of *El Dictamen*. Ignoring police orders to disperse, the protesters continued to mill about outside. Angered by the tenants' apparent lack of respect for the law, police then pushed their way into the crowd. A general panic ensued. As some took refuge outside the nearby Blanco y Negro cantina, the authorities closed in. Seeing the police approach, someone threw a rock that hit one of the officers in the shoulder. Screams, pistol shots and a tremendous noise followed before police eventually gained the upper hand. In response, municipal authorities ordered the city patrolled and tenant activities closely monitored to prevent any further disturbances.⁵⁶

⁵⁶*El Dictamen*, February 6, 1925.

The following day, *El Dictamen* commented on María Luisa Marín's recent assumption of the Tenant Syndicate's directorship. As was typical, they tried to discredit the way strikers had presented their demands by characterizing the protest as a virtual reign of terror imposed by an unruly mob. On this particular occasion, they also challenged the independence and integrity of the tenant leader by simply calling her "his woman:

Herón Proal... [has] sent his woman, María Luisa Marín [to take] his place. [Since then, Marín has] ...brought new energies and enthusiasms to the tenant cause. With equal vigor [she has] directed the [Syndicate's] business and, as in the past, collected dues that have made the protest such a prosperous enterprise for some time. María Luisa, as Proal has said, is an "intelligent" woman and one need only spend a short time here to become familiar with her activities: agitation in the patios, aggressive commentaries...against the authorities, firecrackers and a full range of other gestures that usually culminate in the tumultuous public demonstrations that are by now well known and recalled with horror by the long suffering residents of this city.⁵⁷

Failing to address any particulars in María Luisa's "aggressive commentaries," *El Dictamen's* editors tried to persuade the Veracruz public to see her simply as a menace to society. Not to be discouraged, she and members of the Libertarian Women coordinated much of the day-to-day demonstrations, direct actions and public relations of the Tenant Syndicate. Yet as María Luisa continued to organize locally while also lobbying officials for Proal's release in early 1925, her

⁵⁷Ibid., February 7, 1925.

efforts in the spring of that year soon led to the final showdown with unsympathetic local elites.⁵⁸

On April 1, 1925, delegates from various labor organizations under the auspices of the Mexican Federation of Labor (*Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana* or CROM) met in Veracruz to try to bring an end to the housing protest. Unhappy with these proceedings because of their refusal to recognize the Revolutionary Syndicate of Tenants, María Luisa Marín and several of her supporters attempted to block the opening of the convention by barricading the entrance to the stevedore's union hall. Unsuccessful in stopping the meeting, they entered the hall, interrupting the proceedings by insulting speakers, yelling "death to the exploiters of the people" and as always *viva Proal*. Later that night, militants assembled outside the Tenant Syndicate headquarters expressed their desire for the strike to continue. Then, after renters paraded through the streets for a time, police moved in to disperse the gathering. By the end of the evening, thirteen affiliated with Marín and her organization had been arrested.

The following day, the authorities formally charged María Luisa with attempting to burn down a local union headquarters. That morning, twenty-five police gathered to take her into custody. Talking to a group standing outside the renters' union office, they could gather no information as to the whereabouts of the tenant leader. A few hours later, María Luisa was seen walking down the city streets with some other union members, about to call a public meeting. As several tenants gathered around her, she told them that they should not abandon the strike because of the hostility of trade union leaders who had "betrayed the cause of the proletariat." As she continued, the police gradually closed in to arrest her. Telling her audience "the

⁵⁸See, for example, various communications from María Luisa Marín to Calles, February 1925. AGN, gobernación, C-28, 1925.

government had forgotten their responsibilities to the people and sold out to the bourgeoisie,” she ran into the union headquarters at the last minute to avoid the police. Several minutes of pushing and shoving followed on the street, leaving a policeman and several tenants injured. During the fray, María Luisa managed to escape.

Three days later, the police took her into custody.⁵⁹ Justice officials charged María Luisa with sedition. She denied the charges. While the authorities eventually dropped the case, they had nevertheless come to think of María Luisa as a dangerous and uncontrollable element on the Veracruz political scene. If they were ever to restore law and order, her power would have to be neutralized.

A few weeks later, the authorities released Herón Proal from prison. During the remainder of the year he returned to Veracruz and continued organizing. Nevertheless, on January 12, 1926, the veteran anarchist leader was arrested once again in his home on Arista Street. Taken before a local judge, he was charged with refusing to cooperate with an earlier ruling that demanded that renters remove the red banners of the Syndicate from their tenement doors and windows.⁶⁰ Orders sent down from Mexico City now demanded that Proal be expelled from the state. The next day, local officials warned María Luisa Marín to avoid any action that was intended to interfere with the proceedings against Proal.⁶¹ At that point it became clear that the national labor federation representatives and state officials had worked out a plan to marginalize the threat posed by Proal, Marín and the entire membership of the Revolutionary Syndicate of Tenants.

⁵⁹*El Dictamen*, April 1-3, 1925.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, January 13, 1926

⁶¹*Ibid.*, January 14, 1926.

When Proal boarded a steamer for Frontera, Tabasco on January 14, 1926, city officials served María Luisa Marín an ultimatum: discontinue agitation in the tenements and help bring the strike to an end or be expelled from the state herself.⁶² At four o'clock that afternoon, accompanied by a group of Syndicate women María Luisa walked into city hall. There the head of a city council dedicated to ending the rent strikers' movement met with the tenant leader. Officials requested that she and other rival groups join forces with labor organizations in the city in the interest of ending the strike. Ever defiant in the face of authority, María Luisa told city officials that she would never agree to disband the Tenant Syndicate. Marín was then told that if she did not relinquish her post within forty-eight hours she would be arrested and eventually kicked out of Veracruz. If her followers refused to "quit painting red stars on the doors and windows of their tenements," she was warned, "They too would be apprehended and sent to jail."⁶³

The next day, María Luisa filed an injunction against President Calles, the mayor and police chief of Veracruz in an attempt to block her arrest and possible expulsion from the state. Upon receiving the request, a local judge suspended charges against Marín until a ruling could be made. Believing that the tenant leader intended to renew her campaign, the police again arrested María Luisa on January 28, 1926.⁶⁴ City officials informed the public the next day that the unrepentant agitator would be given the opportunity to remain in jail or leave Veracruz and travel to Mexico City. After hearing the ultimatum, she told officials that she would leave the city on Monday, after taking time to sell some of her things. In wishing her good luck as she

⁶²In Tabasco, governor Tomás Garrido Canabal refused to let Proal enter the state. On January 24, officials installed him in the Santiago Tlatelolco prison in Mexico City.

⁶³*El Dictamen*, January 15, 1926.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, January 28, 1926.

left, members of the Tenant Syndicate assured María Luisa that they would continue their protest until an acceptable agreement with landlords could be reached.⁶⁵

Although María Luisa Marín returned a couple of years later to Veracruz, she would never again command the degree of political influence there that she had enjoyed during the earlier years of the strike.⁶⁶ As renters in Veracruz were gradually obliged to sign new contracts with their landlords, the power of the Revolutionary Syndicate declined. By the time Marín reunited with her militant colleagues, urban popular politics in Mexico were rather more tightly controlled by the national government than they had been during the early 1920s.⁶⁷

The career of María Luisa Marín marked the beginning and the end of the radical tenant movement in Mexico. Her work as a popular organizer testified to a tremendous strength of character and commitment to social justice. Encouraged by the ideals of democracy expressed in the official discourse of the revolution, she demanded radical changes in the nature of Mexican society. Inspired by the rhetoric of international communism and by the early campaigns to emancipate women, Marín dedicated herself unstintingly to improving the everyday lives of working class residents in Veracruz. Despite her sometimes-overzealous use of direct action tactics, María Luisa never failed to insist that property owners and public officials consider the substandard housing conditions in which many residents in the port were forced to live and that

⁶⁵Ibid., February 1, 1926. Following the departure of Marín, Inés Terán took over as Secretary General of the Syndicate.

⁶⁶Historian Mario Gill writes that Proal “abandoned” María Luisa and married a woman named Lola Muñoz as soon as his political influence had declined. Mario Gill, “Veracruz: revolución y extremismo,” *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 2, no. 4 (April-July 1953) p. 626.

⁶⁷Although the details are unclear, letters written by residents from the neighborhoods of *22 de Marzo* and *Colonia Vicente Guerrero* to the governor in November 1928 complaining about María Luisa suggest that she was no longer welcome. See: communication to Obregón from *Union Cooperativa de Colonias Obreras 22 de Marzo* and *Colonia Vicente Guerrero*, October 21, 1928. Governor Rodríguez received a similar letter from residents in the port regarding María Luisa on November 7, 1928. AGN, Obregón/Calles 802-v-58.

they do something about them. Although the utopian vision for an emancipated humanity that she shared with other rent protesters was never fulfilled, María Luisa Marín's passionate adherence to the tenant movement in Mexico represents a powerful example of one woman's dedication to the goals of social justice.