



Valentín Campa

Unbending Working Class Fighter

*I can die as I was born, be sure of it,
Pure, modest and optimistic,
Standing on the land like a tree
In the ranks of the Communist Party...*

Song to the Party

Witness to the century, a communist and a tenacious working class fighter: that was Valentín Campa Salazar. Born in Monterrey, Nuevo León, February 14, 1904, he writes in his memoirs, “All my primary education (1910-1916) took place in the atmosphere of civil war.”¹ This left a permanent mark on his personality. He worked on the line at the La Corona company, subsidiary of the Royal Dutch Company from 1920 to 1921, and from 1922 on at the National Railroad Company, whose union he led from 1943 to 1947.

In 1923 he joined the Communist Party of Mexico (PCM), and all his life he untiringly defended the demands for justice of the Mexican workers movement, particularly those of railroad workers, for which he was persecuted and jailed a dozen times. His first jail sentence was in 1927 for his participation in the railroad strike against the control by official union leader

Luis N. Morones and President Plutarco Elías Calles, who had him arrested and ordered him shot, an order later rescinded.

Almost all his life and especially in the 1930s and 1940s, he participated in the organization of independent unions. One was the United Union Confederation of Mexico (CSUM), which would be one of the initial founders of the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM) in 1936, when the workers movement was on the rise.

He was expelled from the Mexican Communist Party in 1940 after opposing the assassination of Leon Trotsky, a position which brought him into conflict with painter David Alfaro Siqueiros, who later participated in the plot that eventually ended in the murder of the exiled Russian leader.

Campa was arrested along with another workers leader, Demetrio Vallejo, during the great rail strike of 1959, the most important attempt to break the state’s corporatist control over the unions. He was confined to the infamous Lecumberri Prison, known as the “Black Palace,” from February 1959 to July 1970. His release came after the crime he had been imprisoned for, “social dissolution,” was erased from the lawbooks thanks in part to pressure from the 1968 student movement.

From the “Black Palace” he continued to participate in the nation’s political life and emerged from prison once again a militant of the PCM. As a party leader he proposed a return to electoral participation. In 1976, he ran in a write-in campaign for the presidency against Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate José López Portillo. After the legalization of the PCM, he was elected federal deputy, serving from 1979 to 1981. He witnessed the creation of the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM), founded with the merger of the PCM with other left currents, and then the Mexican Socialist Party (PMS), which would later cede its registration to the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) after Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas’ 1988 presidential campaign.

He is remembered as firm in his convictions, unbending in the fight for workers’ demands, but kind and affectionate in his personal dealings. His co-activists agree in describing him as one of those men who prefer to leave his children no material goods but a legacy of honor; he always lived modestly and never took advantage of his union posts for personal benefit or to make himself rich. The consistency between his practice and his thinking is the unforgettable moral legacy that he left to

those who worked with him. He only slowed his activism due to a series of physical health problems that he said originated in his political persecution and imprisonment.

The author of innumerable political articles and pamphlets, he also wrote *Mi testimonio. Memorias de un comunista mexicano* (I Bear Witness. Memoirs of a Mexican Communist). Between 1979 and 1986, he regularly published in the daily *Excelsior* and the PSUM newspaper, *Así es*.

Valentín Campa was a fixture in many of the movements for human rights in Mexico in the twentieth century. His casket was draped with three flags on the morning of November 25, 1999: the flag of the PCM, the PRD and of Mexico.

María Cristina Hernández Escobar

Assistant Editor

NOTES

¹ Valentín Campa, *Mi testimonio. Memorias de un comunista mexicano* (Mexico City: Era, 1978).

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