



Manuel Llaneza Zapico was a miner, trade unionist and pioneering socialist from the coal mining region of Asturias in northern Spain. The son of a miner himself, he was born in the village of Veneros in Langreo on January 14, 1879, and died in the town of Mieres on January 24, 1931.

As a child, Llaneza moved with his family to Barruelo de Santullán in Palencia where, at the age of eleven, he began working in the mines there. At the end of the century, he returned to Asturias, to the town of Sama de Langreo, and by 1902 he was working in the Corujas Mine in Mieres while commencing studies at the School of Mine Foremen, which he did not finish.

In 1903, he joined the socialist party in Mieres, and in January 1904, he participated in the establishment of Socialist Youths party. He actively took part in the 1906 “Huelgona” strike against the Mieres mining company, and his activism led to his dismissal from the Mina Poca Cosa Mine. Being blacklisted prevented him from finding work anywhere in the regional mines. After a brief stay in the mining town of Puertollano in the distant region of Ciudad Real, he emigrated to France in 1908, where he obtained employment in the mines of Pas-de-Calais in Lens. During the two years he spent there, he continued studying the labor organizations of France and Belgium, from which he conceived the idea of establishing a centralized and robust union institution in Asturias.

Upon his return to Spain in mid 1910, Llaneza focused on the creation of the Asturian Miners’ Union, SOMA, which was founded by him on November 10 of that year in the village of Vegadotos in Mieres. It would be the first union in Spain to unify all workers of the same industrial profession into a single federation. From its inception, SOMA established itself not only as a cornerstone of the General Union of Workers, UGT, but also as the socialist movement in Spain, solidifying Asturias as a pivotal stronghold. Manuel Llaneza served as president of the National Mining Federation from 1917 until his death and led the Commonwealth of Asturian Coal Mining Towns. At the 1916 UGT Convention, he was elected to the National Commission. The following year, during the nationwide general strike in August, he played a crucial role in politics in Asturias. After the strike, Llaneza was imprisoned for several months and was released in 1918.

He served as a councilor of the Mieres Town Hall from January 1911, and served as mayor between January 1918 and March 1921. In October of the following year, after a major strike, SOMA achieved its greatest union and social success by winning the seven-hour mining workday. However, both UGT and the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, PSOE, soon faced a prolonged crisis, which was particularly severe in Asturias, concerning their adherence to the Third International. While Llaneza positioned himself from the outset against the Third International’s postulates, actively participating in the debates of the UGT Convention of June 1920, the Asturian Socialist Federation—then led by Isidoro Acevedo—leaned towards Leninism. This internal



division, which even forced him to resign from the mayoralty in March 1921, and the crisis experienced by Asturian mines after the exceptional situation created by the ending of the First World War, made Llaneza go through a difficult period at the helm of SOMA—stepping down from its leadership for a few months—and endangered the hard-won achievements of previous years.

In 1923, Manuel Llaneza was elected deputy for the Oviedo constituency. However, his time in parliament was short-lived due to General Primo de Rivera's coup in September of that year. During the early days of the dictatorship, Llaneza gained public attention by meeting with the dictator and offering his cooperation to the new authorities. He believed that this approach was necessary to implement a state protectionist policy that would protect the Asturian coal region from an impending crisis and, over time, could lead to the nationalization of the mines, which was a solution he aspired to. Although the enactment of the Coal Statute in 1927 was seen as a step in that direction, Llaneza's relationship with the regime deteriorated when the directorate reinstated the eight-hour workday.

Llaneza also served as a member of the Institute of Social Reforms, an advisor at the International Labour Conference held in Geneva in 1929, and represented Spanish miners at the International Convention that year. He published the *El Minero de la Hulla* newspaper, promoted the creation of the Asturian Miners' Orphanage in 1929, and that year was a labor advisor at the International Labour Conference held in Geneva and represented Spanish miners at the International Mining Convention. He died in Mieres on January 24, 1931, in this Casa del Pueblo. The bust you see, the work of the local sculptor Félix Magdalena, represents him in at an elderly age.

Sources:

Real Academia de la Historia

<https://historia-hispanica.rah.es/biografias/25495-manuel-llaneza-zapico>

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https://fpabloiglesias.es/entrada-db/11584_llaneza-zapico-manuel/



