

***NOTHING COMPARES TO THE PAST:
INDUSTRIAL DECLINE AND SOCIO-
CULTURAL CHANGE IN ASTURIAS***

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THE PRESENT



- *October 2014: a corruption scandal outbreaks involving José Ángel Fernández Villa, leader during 35 years of the mining section of the UGT (socialist labor union) and most powerful political character of the Asturian region throughout the last decades.*



- *Industrial ruins: heritage and memory of labor usually suffer abandon.*

THE PRESENT



- *Recent working conflicts: mining strike (2012) and fight against the closure of a factory owned by transnational company Tenneco (2013-14).*

THE PRESENT

- *Unemployment: rates of 20% (september 2014) and 39,6% of youth unemployment (under 25 years)*
- *Demographic decline: 1.061.256 inhabitants in 2014 / 1.129.556 in 1981*
- *One of the lowest birth ratios in the world (6,3 births for each 1.000 inhabitants in 2013)*
- *Young emigration (12% of youngsters from 16 up to 25 years live outside Asturias. 19.000 went out to foreign countries within the last 5 years)*
- *Ageing (population over 65 doubles population under 16)*
- *Population loss (-9.195 inhabitants in 2012 / - 6.909 in 2013)*

DEMOGRAPHY

Year	ASTURIAS	ESPAÑA	%
1975	1,102.294	36.012.241	3,06
1981	1.129.556	37.742.561	2,99
1986	1.112.186	38.473.332	2,89
1991	1.093.937	39.433.942	2,77
1996	1.087.885	39.270.313	2,77
2001	1.075.329	40.499.791	2,65
2006	1.076.896	44.708.964	2,40
2011	1.077.090	47.190.493	2,28

THE PAST

- *Asturias has been, since the 19th century, a region of industrial tradition with an economy based upon mining and steel.*
- *Strong labor unions and a working class movement with long tradition and solid roots have grown around mining and steel industry.*
- *Asturian working class struggles have been a reference several times for the whole Spain and, at least twice have reached international impact: the 1934 Revolution and the 1962 strikes against Francoist dictatorship.*



THE PAST

- *Working Class Movement has been the main structuring agent of Asturias both in economical, political and social senses.*
- *In the mining areas and in the industrial seaside towns, Working Class communities developed well-united and were quite active in political terms.*
- *The owners of Asturian industries have traditionally been a weak class: foreign investors, state protection and weak political structure.*
- *The state and the trade unions became the main economical and social actors.*

THE PAST

- *The two decades that followed the civil war (the 1940's and 50's) are marked in Spain by autarchy and isolation. Asturias gave two strategic products: coal and steel.*
- *The turn towards a more liberalized, less protected, economical policy (Stabilization Plan, 1959) marks as well the beginning of the decline for the coal mining sector. From then on, companies weakness and high labor unrest would lead to a growing intervention from the State.*



THE PAST

- *In the final years of the Francoist dictatorship, most of industrial workers in Asturias, (and specially the most conflictive and organized sectors) are state employees: more than 20.000 miners, over 25.000 steel workers and several thousands more in shipyards, arm factories, aluminium and many others.*
- *During the transition to democracy, state-owned industrial companies will become strongholds of working-class labor unions, with high rates of affiliation, high ability for mobilization and strong influence on the left political parties that rule most city councils since 1979 and the region from 1983.*
- *The zenith of the political power of labor unions took place at the same time as the sunset of the economic welfare.*

THE INDUSTRIAL DECLINE

EMPLOYMENT

Year	AGRICULTURE	INDUSTRIY	BUILDING	SERVICES
1970	75.133 22%	153.741 45%		112.123 32,8%
1975	103.325 26,0%	123.971 31,2%	33.804 8,4%	136.800 34,4%
1980	77.564 21,0%	116.961 31,6%	26.356 7,1%	149.180 40,3%
1985	79.949 21,3%	99.378 26,5%	25.992 6,9%	169.507 45,2%
1990	64.678 16,7%	88.587 23,0%	35.920 9,3%	196.391 50,9%
1995	49.764 14,4%	65.775 19,0%	33.300 9,6%	196.546 56,9%
2000	38.299 10,5%	61.745 16,8%	43.489 11,8%	222.706 60,8%
2005	24.850 6,2%	60.235 15,0%	47.355 11,8%	269.180 67,0%
2010	16.851 4,3%	62.299 15,9%	36.199 9,24%	274.110 70,3%

THE INDUSTRIAL DECLINE

- *All major industrial sectors suffered crisis in the second half of the 70's: mining, steel, shipyards, textile.*
- *The main state owned companies had millionaires loses, but closures and workforce cuts were not possible because of the political context.*
- *Between 1983 and 1985, three factors made possible the restructuration of heavy industries:*
 - 1. A strong socialist government with absolute majority and close to a great labor union.*
 - 2. The increasing losses of the major state owned companies.*
 - 3. The conditions imposed on the entrance of Spain into the European Community.*

THE INDUSTRIAL DECLINE

- *Coal mining cuts are delayed until 1992. The state owned mining company suffers huge losses, but the situation remains without any changes because of several reasons:*
 1. *Coal didn't take part of the negotiation in the process of entering into European Community.*
 2. *Miners kept an enormous power of mobilization, as the strikes of 1987 had shown.*
 3. *The miners' unions managed to preserve a wide political influence, within the region and also in Madrid.*

THE INDUSTRIAL DECLINE

- *The socialist Government defeated the resistance by buying social peace.*
- *The whole process has hard consequences on the territory, the mining and industrial communities and, especially, on the youngsters opportunities of employment. But better conditions are offered to those workers who were within the core of sectors that are well organized and had high ability of mobilization.*
- *The Size of the estate owned industrial companies become shorter and shorter and shorter Asturias.*

STATE OWNED COMPANIES

YEAR	JOBS
1971	51.600
1980	54.995
1986	44.639
1990	37.482
1993	27.064
2000	8.516
2013	1.693

REESTRUCTURED SECTORS

	MINERÍA (HUNOSA)	STEEL INDUSTRY (ENSIDESA/Arcelor Mital)	SHIPBUILDING (Juliana/Naval Gijón/others)
1980	22.648	25.682	3.488
1985	21.122	19.765	1977
1990	18.380	14.885	1.381
1995	10.175	9.495	1.060
2008	2.760	6.592	273
2013	1.693	5.800	0

THE SOCIAL CONFLICTS

- *Long term strikes, radical forms of mobilization, local and regional general strikes, enormous demonstrations of protest against industrial crisis, in defense of the jobs or asking for re-industrialization plans took place during the last 40 years.*
- *Minorities that mobilized have done so thanks to support given by resources accumulated in the past. In those spaces where the strength of the working class movement relied in the past, workers found themselves much more ready to defend their jobs –or to negotiate the conditions of their extinction-*



A SHORT CHRONOLOGY

- *1976-1979 – several general strikes against closures of industries in mining counties*
- *1983 – general strike against industrial crisis in Gijón.*
- *1984 – four general strikes against the closure/resize of the shipyards in Gijón.*
- *Between 1983 and 1987 Gijón lived among fire barricades, street clashes and great demonstrations.*
- *1987 – general strikes and riots in the mining counties.*
- *1991 – general strikes in mining counties and afterwards in the whole region asking solutions for mines, steel and shipyards.*
- *1992 – great demonstrations against the loss of employment in mines and steel factories.*

A SHORT CHRONOLOGY

- *In the 90's, a long term conflict of redundant metalworkers became radical and violent: taking the tower of the cathedral, hunger strike, sabotages of trains and banks offices, clashes against police*
- *2000-2009 – shipyard workers go on several strikes against employment cuts and closures*
- *2012 – miners go on strike for more than two months. A great demonstration in Madrid shows the support when a march of walking miners enters in the city*



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THE SOCIAL CONFLICTS

- *Resistance offered has been much greater than in other areas, and the struggle has given more profits to those groups that have maintained it with more commitment.*
- *State has been the destination of most of the vindications and it had to guarantee the standard of living even though the decline of all economic activities.*



THE SOCIAL CONFLICTS

- *The strength of unions provides a strong political influence in a socially homogeneous context as the coalfields, where the tradition of the left is entrenched.*
- *Union power extended to local Socialist Party organizations. Large, disciplined and active basis made possible gaining control of the party and, given its status as a political main force, the municipal and regional institutions.*
- *Far from weakening, that power was increased with the widespread decline of the industry, which reinforced the weight of the coal mining, still able to delay closings. Even when pit closures occur, compensatory funds for economic recovery in the coalfields become a new source of union power.*
- *Unions filled the vacuum that let the absence of others, be they corporate or institutional. And the concentration of power brought the hypertrophy of the vices. The process is, in this respect, different in the coalfields or in industrial areas.*
- *Union power is weaker in the iron and steel regions, socially more diversified. Neither the pervivence of the memory and traditions of the labor movement is comparable to those mining environments.*



SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

- *Theoretical reflection and political debates on the problems of industrial decline have been poor in Asturias.*
- *Both University and political instances and social environment have paid less attention to the study and understanding the problem.*
- *Pesimism is the prevailing mood in Asturian society. The images of a lost prosperous past combine with fear about an uncertain future.*
- *Interviews with youngsters reveal the shadow of the past, the idealized memory of great fights in contrast with the current feeling of defeat and certain complex of inferiority that has to be with not being at the same height as previous generations.*

SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

- *The miners' strike of 2012 showed the survival of the repertoires of mobilization, the force that keeps the memory of past struggles both within the coalfields communities or its external image (social support along the walking march, huge demonstration in Madrid...).*
- *A collective so called Coal Women on Fight has taken the baton from their older predecessors and has reinterpreted by adopting autonomous forms of organization and preserving their class identity and gender on the basis of claims of community character.*
- *Despite having achieved extraordinarily favorable social plans for surplus miners and large amounts of funds for economic recovery of mining areas, mining unions have become a target of criticism and have fallen into a serious disrepute.*



NEW GENERATION ATTITUDES

- *In the most politicized sectors, this nostalgia of the past results in radical speeches and epic tales (commemorations of the 1934 revolution, memories of the Francoist repression and opposition to the dictatorship).*
- *Another attitude tends to nihilism and despair. The image of mining areas without future, massive youth unemployment and emigration as the only -and not desired- way out.*
- *Although their visibility, these attitudes represent groups which are minority among youth: those who are more directly connected with the past of the working class in industrial and mining areas. The majority has lost the references in which their grandparents and parents had socialized during the dictatorship or the recent democracy.*

NEW GENERATION ATTITUDES

- *At the same time, family structures have turned, through intergenerational solidarity, in the main shelter against the hardest effects of the decline.*
- *This function of support of consumption and redistribution of the income among generations has not avoided the creation of a social stereotype quite critical towards workers who retired before 65.*
- *Early retired workers are often accused of having sold their jobs and betrayed the future of younger generations.*
- *Both the memories of working class fights as well as the nostalgia feelings regarding past times are more intense in the mining areas than in the rest of the region. Also critical attitudes towards retired miners and a trend to blame them as responsible for the defeat and the closures.*

NEW GENERATION ATTITUDES

Musical creation has reflected in the last years this situation from different youth languages and aesthetics:

- *Dark la eMe: Un asturiano en Madrid*
- *Dixebra: Lleenda urbana*
- *Spanta la Xente: Díes de barricá*
- *Escuela de Odio: Asturias arde*
- *StonedAtmosphere: Patria sin sol*
- *Arma X: Zona minada*

They preferably reflect the mood of the more conscious and dissenting youth. Their lyrics express rebellion, frustration and the presence of a memory to be reinterpreted and with which comparisons are required.

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The majority has lost the references in which their grandparents and parents had socialized during the dictatorship or the recent democracy. Nor their experiences or expectations are similar to their elders.

NEW GENERATION ATTITUDES

- *Miners and shipyard workers struggles still remain in the memories of most of people. However, these role models act as impossible reference for those youngsters that show more intense social and political concerns*
- *Deep changes in social and economical bases have affected the role of labor unions and have been accompanied by the crisis of the working class consciousness. That happens in a context where the survival of former cultural references are mixing with hard ruptures.*
- *The past still acts as a powerful reference, but labor conditions today offer a limited frame to reproduce the legacy of fights and collective actions.*





VALLE DE TURÓN PATRIMONIO HISTÓRICO DE LA MINERÍA



PLATAFORMA JUVENIL POR LA DEFENSA DEL VALLE.