

Heberto Castillo

CONSTRUCTOR OF IDEALS

1928-1997

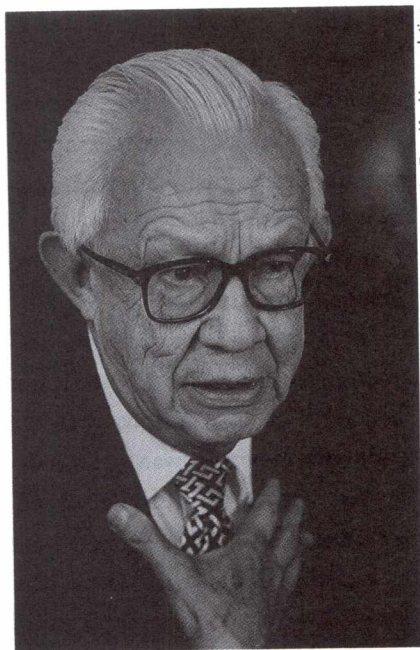


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There are men who fight for one day and they are necessary; there are men who fight for a year, and they are even more necessary; and then, there are men who fight for a lifetime. They are indispensable. Heberto Castillo belonged to this last category, an untiring fighter for just

causes and an irreplaceable creator of utopias, a builder of ideals.

Heberto Castillo Martínez was a man of achievement and conviction. His death last April 5 at the age of 68 inevitably creates a void in Mexican politics. But he also left behind him an example: Heberto will always be remembered—and hopefully emulated—for his integrity and adherence to his ideals.

The political biography of Heberto—as he was affectionately known by his friends, the people of Mexico, his comrades and even his political adversaries—a man of the left, is a winding road, with its ups and downs and successes and failures, but the whole way is characterized by his clarity, perseverance and, above all, his loyalty to his ideals.

From the time he was a young man, Castillo participated in social struggles. He actively supported the 1959 railroad workers struggle, the 1965 national doctors movement and the 1968 student movement. For his par-

ticipation alongside the students in 1968 as a leader of the Coalition of High School and University Teachers, he was jailed for over three years in the infamous Lecumberri prison.

Stubborn, and sometimes even obstinate, in the defense of his ideas—the fight for democracy and social justice in Mexico—he was never dogmatic. He dedicated a great part of his life to what he believed was a profoundly creative activity, politics. In the 1960s he founded the National Liberation Movement (MLN) together with important political figures like former President Lázaro Cárdenas, great intellectuals and writers such as Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, and old leftist leaders like railroad worker Demetrio Vallejo. The aim: under the influence of the Cuban Revolution, to take Mexico forward toward a socialist form of government.

While in jail after 1968, he developed the idea of creating a new political party; when he was released, he founded the Mexican Workers Party

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(PMT), under whose banner a decade later he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies. Later, he played a major role in the founding of the Mexican Socialist Party (PMS), which merged several different left-leaning parties, and for which he was the presidential candidate at the beginning of the 1988 electoral campaign. However, he resigned his candidacy in favor of that of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who was backed by the PMS, the Popular Socialist Party (PPS), the Party of the Cardenista Front for National Reconstruction (PFCRN) and the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM), all grouped in a coalition called the National Democratic Front (FDN).

Out of that movement came the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), of which Heberto was a founder. Under the aegis of the PRD, he was elected to the Senate, retaining his seat until his death.

A dedicated fighter for peace, he formed part of the Senate's Pacifi-

cation Commission (COCOPA) aimed at achieving peace with dignity and justice in Chiapas. Always energetic, he worked untiringly for peace, yielding neither to threats nor political pressure. Some of his ideas were widely known and roundly criticized, particularly by the more Jacobin sectors of the left, like for example, his critical opinion of some of the negative aspects of the Cuban Revolution, or his efforts to lead the left down a more democratic road, leaving behind the Leninist principles of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Heberto Castillo was an engineer by profession, an innovative scientist and audacious technician. He had an intense professional career in civil engineering. He was famous as the inventor of the *tridilosa*, a system for rationally distributing materials in concrete constructions, saving on costs without skimping on materials. Using this technique, he helped build numerous bridges and highways around the country, as well as the landmark Pemex Tower. Heberto followed this same logic of rationalization and distribution of resources in his political life.

A visionary, he always acted not only prudently, but also judiciously and tolerantly. To him, democracy meant above all dialogue. Perhaps this is the key to the fact that, in the second half of the twentieth century, Heberto Castillo was one of Mexico's most revered politicians, respected by both his own colleagues and his political opponents.

A man of action, he was also a man of ideas. His passionate, convincing

speeches in Congress will go down in history. Perhaps the most outstanding of these were his speeches during the José López Portillo administration, brilliantly criticizing the executive policy then called in political circles the "petroleumization" of the economy.

Time proved Castillo right in that case and on many other national political issues, particularly because the seasoned politician and fighter always sought creative solutions for the grave problems the country faced.

A builder of utopias, journalism was also one of his passions, which he engaged in with the same fervor he brought to all his endeavors. He left behind him a myriad of magazine and newspaper articles, particularly outstanding among which are his contributions to the Mexico City daily *El Universal* and the weekly magazine *Proceso*.

In many ways, his death was premature, not because of his age, but because it came at a time when the country is moving toward greater democracy, without authoritarianism, unrestricted to a single party, toward an ideal that Castillo had dedicated his life to. It was also premature because if anyone should have enjoyed the consolidation of democracy in our country it was precisely Heberto Castillo.

As his daughter, Laura Itzel Castillo, today a leader of the PRD, has said, "Some men are not buried. Some men are sown like seeds on the land."

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