



CLARA

Campoamor

Clara Campoamor Rodríguez

Much more than the female vote

Madrid, 1888 - Lausanne, 1972

On 1 October 1931, Spanish women won the right to vote for the first time, later than women in Finland (1906), Great Britain or Germany (1918) but earlier than those in France (1944), Italy (1947) or Switzerland (1971). Clara Campoamor has gone down in history as the mastermind behind the female vote in Spain.

So who was Campoamor? Her father was an accountant and her mother was a seamstress. Her father's death forced her to work at an early age as a dressmaker, a shop clerk, a civil servant as an assistant at Telégrafos and later a teacher at the Escuelas de Adultas.

She finished her Law degree at the age of 36. She was the third woman to join the Bar Association in Spain, in Madrid and would later be the second women to join the Bar Association in San Sebastián and the first in Seville, Alcalá de Henares and Vitoria.

A multifaceted jurist, she participated in creating the International Federation of Women in Legal Careers and showed a particular predilection for civil law, where she fought against women's '*impersonalidad*' (lack of legal standing) in the laws of the period, especially married women, as they lost their rights and were treated as minors upon marriage. She was the first woman lawyer to appear before the Supreme Court on matters related to women's legal status.

Politics led her to be one of the three female MPs in the 1931 Constituent Courts (along with Victoria Kent and Margarita Nelken), when women did not yet have the right to vote, although they could be elected. There, she promoted reforms for legal equality which transformed the lives of women, such as her passionate, solo defence in favour of the female vote. Her party, the Partido Radical (Radical Party), abandoned her. One famous historical episode is her vibrant parliamentary clash with another woman, Victoria Kent, who was against

introducing women's suffrage at the time because, Kent maintained, they would not vote for the Republic because they were influenced by the Catholic Church. Two clashing women... the press nicknamed 'la Clara y la Yema' (a play of words on 'clara', meaning egg white, and 'yema', meaning egg yolk).

The female vote won: 161 votes in favour and 121 against. And the 1931 Constitution called for equal electoral rights for men and women. Campoamor also participated in the Divorce Law, the Civil Marriage Law and the Law on Legitimacy of Children Born out of Wedlock.

Women voted in 1933, but Clara Campoamor did not earn enough and lost her seat in parliament. A prolific writer, two of her emblematic books are *El voto femenino y yo: mi pecado mortal* (1936) and *La revolución española vista por una republicana* (1937, initially published in French). When the Civil War broke out, when went into exile in France, Buenos Aires and Switzerland, where she died after a life devoted to fighting for women's rights. The Franco regime never allowed her to return to Spain.

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