

Ernesto Che Guevara and the formation of university students in Cuba

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ABSTRACT

The work of Ernesto Che Guevara is useful in the formation of university students. From the historical-logical analysis, documentary analysis and critical review, this work proposes a selection of his texts that offer theoretical and ethical foundations for the strengthening of economic culture. The articulation in the formative processes developed by the University of the Ideas contained in these texts contributed to the conscious and responsible participation of students in the different socioeconomic activities they perform.

Keywords: Ernesto Che Guevara; Economic culture; University student formation; Cuba.

Introduction

Ernesto Che Guevara stated that the preparation provided by the country's universities was not adequate, neither in orientation nor in quantity, for the new needs of the Revolution (Guevara, 1977) and urged to train technicians and professionals according to the demands of the country's development. At present, Cuban universities work according to the model of a professional with a broad profile, able to perform the tasks required by social progress.

From the teaching of classes in different careers of the University of Guantánamo, the observation of the students' behavior in the development of extension activities and the

application of interviews, limitations in their economic culture are diagnosed. This is manifested in the insufficient use of the knowledge of international economic relations and financial policies of the capitalist powers to explain the contradictions of the contemporary world.

Students do not understand the challenges involved in the construction of socialism from the conditions of underdevelopment, as well as inconsistent modes of action with the saving of resources and their efficient use. Despite the fact that the professional model has been established and the Curricular Strategy for Economic Education has been developed, these results indicate the need to continue working on strengthening the economic culture of university students.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), in the World Declaration on Higher Education in the 21st Century: Vision and Action, endorses the importance of Higher Education for the socio-cultural, economic and ecologically sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations, affirming that its relevance must be evaluated in terms of what society expects from its institutions and what they do. (Unesco, 2021)

Cuba, immersed in a process of updating its economic and social model of socialist development, needs professionals with an economic culture anchored in scientific knowledge and ethical values related to the commitment to the construction of socialism, labor efficiency and resource saving. That is why the formation of a highly qualified professional is a great challenge for the Cuban university.

This work has the objective of proposing a selection of texts by Ernesto Che Guevara that offer theoretical and ethical foundations for the strengthening of economic culture. Through historical-logical analysis, documentary analysis and critical review, we determine the ideas contained in these texts that can be articulated in the formation of university students and contribute to their conscious and responsible participation in different socioeconomic activities.

Development

Ernesto Che Guevara's position in relation to the responsibility of the university in the training of technicians and professionals demanded by the economic and social

development of the country is understood, among other works, through *University reform and Revolution; That the university be painted black, of mulatto, of worker, of peasant and The role of the university in the economic development of Cuba*. These titles refer to ideas expressed by him in the universities of Oriente, Las Villas and Havana between 1959 and 1960, respectively.

In them he states that the university is the patrimony of the people and in this sense he recommends the university students:

... to put their shoulders to the practical things of the country, to the things that even allow each professional to increase his wealth of knowledge and to unite, to all the interesting things they learned in the classrooms, the perhaps much more interesting things they learn building in the real battlefields of the great struggle for the construction of the country. (Guevara, 1977, p. 29)

He also expresses "...the university is the great responsible for the triumph or defeat, in the technical part, of this great social and economic experiment that is being carried out in Cuba". (Guevara, 1977, p. 24)

Addressing the need for the economic struggle to diversify markets and national production together with the confrontation with U.S. policy towards Cuba he affirms that in these circumstances "... is when the role of technique and culture in development acquires validity and all its real importance; that is, the role of our educational centers in the future development of our nation." (Guevara, 1977, p. 42).

The Cuban pedagogical tradition that confirms the link between theory and practice and education and life, recognizing the importance of work as a formative tool, finds continuity in Ernesto Che Guevara's demands to the university to put itself at the service of the Cuban people and its revolution. He considered that education and economic development constantly acted together and were fully configured.

Several pedagogical researches address the problem of linking study with work and the correlation between education and development. Others such as those of Turner (1999); Martínez (2013) and Salles (2014) highlight the axiological and educational potentialities of the Che's legacy and although results are evidenced in the integral formation of university students, it is necessary to continue implementing alternatives consistent with Che's ideas about the role of the university in the social and economic development of the country.

Facing the limitations caused by the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the U.S. on Cuba, as well as the need to perfect socialism, are among the

main demands that Cuban society makes to its universities. In this sense, work is being done to train students with a developed economic culture. It is agreed that the work of Ernesto Che Guevara is, in the context of the Cuban model of socialist construction, a reference for this creative process of men and women who have that mission. (Salles, 2014).

His texts are a source of knowledge and ethical values that, coherently articulated in the formative processes developed by the university, favor the achievement of the economic culture demanded by Cuban socialist development. The relevance of their use is justified on the basis of the critical review of the same, which allowed verifying the coherence of the ideas expressed in them with the demands of the construction of the socialist society, the development of the economic culture and the model of the professional that is aspired to be formed.

Considering economic culture as the complex system of social interactions established in the process of production of material goods and services in a given historical context that transcends all human activity, which is revealed through knowledge, modes of action, economic awareness, and is expressed in the creation and preservation of material values in close relation to ethical-economic and spiritual values in general (Cabrera, 2009), texts by Ernesto Che Guevara of cognitive and ethical abundance are proposed for its development.

The text is assumed as "... any coherent communicative statement, carrying a meaning, which is expressed in a given context, with a defined intention and purpose, for which the sender uses certain functional communicative means..." (Roméu, 1992, p. 10). The texts of Ernesto Che Guevara proposed here are characterized by a clear, precise and orienting language.

These texts reveal his ideas in relation to the responsibility of the university in the development of the country and international economic relations. He argues the consequences of the mechanisms of domination of the capitalist powers as well as the demands of socialist construction from the conditions of underdevelopment. They are:

- The role of the university in the economic development of Cuba. (1960)
- Speech before the Inter-American Economic and Social Council of the Organization of American States (OAS). (1961)
- Cuba: historical exception or vanguard in the anti-colonialist struggle? (1961)
- Speech at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (1964)

- On the budgetary system of financing. (1964)
- Socialism and man in Cuba. (1965)

These texts integrate knowledge on the historical and economic evolution of Latin American countries and the exploitative essence of imperialism. They express an original interpretation and application of the Marxist-Leninist theory, as well as proposals to channel the construction of socialism in Cuba. They show a consistent anti-imperialism, ethical and revolutionary values valid for the development of the economic culture.

In *El papel de la universidad en el desarrollo económico de Cuba (The role of the university in the economic development of Cuba)*, delivered in 1960, he states:

... a country will never be able to call itself truly developed until it can make all its plans and build most of the products necessary for its subsistence within its own borders. The technique will allow us to build anything, but how to build, to see beyond the present is the task of the planners and that must be studied in University Institutes of category with a broad cultural base, so that really the production of that new university that we all dream of can respond to the call of the Cuba of 10 or 15 years from now. (Guevara, 1977, p. 46)

This reflection is considered instructive in relation to the mission of the university and as a guide for the work of professors who, according to Ernesto Che Guevara's criteria, should be able to interpret the rhythm and direction of the development of the Cuban economy in order to be consistent with the revolutionary project. The training of professionals in the economic and business sciences, as well as the implementation of the Curricular Strategy for Economic Education, are working in this direction.

He insisted on the need to study the characteristics of the regime that turns a country into an underdeveloped country and the measures that make it possible to get out of that situation. (Guevara, 1977). To address these aspects, *Cuba: historical exception or vanguard in the anti-colonialist struggle?* and *Speech before the Inter-American Economic and Social Council of the Organization of American States*, both written in 1961, are proposed.

On underdevelopment he expresses:

That is what we are in reality, the so-called "underdeveloped" countries, in truth colonial, semi-colonial or dependent countries. We are countries whose economy has been distorted by imperial action, which has abnormally developed the

industrial or agricultural branches necessary to complement its complex economy. Underdevelopment", or distorted development, entails dangerous specializations in raw materials, which keep all our peoples under the threat of hunger. We, the "underdeveloped", are also those of the monoculture, of the monoprodukt, of the monomarket. (Guevara, 1977, p. 28).

This thought contributes to the understanding of the reality of the Third World peoples insofar as it contains the characteristics that distinguish underdeveloped countries, including Cuba. It identifies in the practice of the imperialist powers the causes of dependence and the impossibility of diversified development, hunger, unemployment and poverty of the Latin American peoples. It also explains the role of the latifundia in the scheme of imperialist domination and exploitation of the peoples of the continent.

Ernesto Che Guevara's critique of the Alliance for Progress reveals how U.S. policy towards the region perpetuated the underdevelopment and dependence of Latin American countries:

Dollars are given to build roads, dollars are given to build sewers; gentlemen, with what are sewers made, with what are things made? Why are dollars not given for equipment, dollars for machinery, dollars so that our underdeveloped countries, all of them, can become industrial agricultural countries, at once? (Guevara, 1977, pp. 435-436).

The knowledge of underdevelopment, through these ideas, provides arguments to understand that this is the result of the action of imperialism and its strategy of domination. It helps university students to understand the complexity of the tasks of socialist construction in Cuba by realizing that it is carried out under conditions of underdevelopment and attacked by the U.S. It also helps to explain the need to establish a new international economic order that puts an end to the dumping and protectionism that characterizes international trade relations.

Ernesto Che Guevara highlights the importance of planning to overcome underdevelopment and the conditions that must be in place to achieve it:

...the precondition for real economic planning is that political power be in the hands of the working class. That is the sine qua nom of true planning for us. Also necessary is the total elimination of the imperialist monopolies and state control of the fundamental productive activities. Once these three points are well tied up, we enter into the planning of economic development... (Guevara, 1977, p. 440).

These three points (political power in the hands of the working class, total elimination of imperialist monopolies and state control of the fundamental productive activities) together with the centralized planning of the economy, as endorsed by the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, are the bases on which the construction of the Cuban socialist model is developed. These ideas resize their value insofar as they express the political and economic principles on which the Cuban socialist project is built.

The Speech at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, delivered in Geneva, 1964, contains a broad reflection on international economic and political relations. He examines the complex system of relations between socialist countries and developed capitalist countries; between underdeveloped countries and developed capitalist countries and about the problems of development for the dependent world.

He denounces the problem of the foreign debt of the underdeveloped countries and how the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) does not guarantee the elimination of the obstacles to the commercial exchange of the underdeveloped countries. The importance of the discourse, according to the proposal of this work, lies in the fact that it illustrates the sharpening of contradictions in the imperialist phase, as well as the ineffectiveness of the mechanisms created to ensure economic development and reciprocity in international trade relations.

Ernesto Che Guevara's analysis of the Latin American situation in the 1960s contains valid elements to explain the main economic and social problems affecting the region today. All these circumstances should be understood by university students since this is the scenario where Cuba develops its economy to build a prosperous, socialist, independent and sovereign nation that intends to update its economic model of socialist development.

In relation to the Cuban experience on how to lead the economy and achieve the formation of the new man in the contradictory period of construction of socialism, we address two texts: *On the budgetary system of financing and Socialism and man in Cuba*, written in 1964 and 1965, respectively.

In *On the budget financing system* he expresses:

Communism is a goal of humanity that is reached consciously; therefore, education, the liquidation of the defects of the old society in the conscience of the people, is a factor of utmost importance, without forgetting, of course, that without parallel advances in production such a society can never be reached. (Guevara, 1977, p. 259).

Once again Ernesto Che Guevara insists on the importance of education and production as processes that must be attended to and developed at the same time in order to advance social development. Education and work as an educational tool, help to form the conscience that the construction of the new society demands; together with this, the increase of production and services to satisfy the needs of the population are processes that must be conducted at the same time, configuring each other.

In this sense, it is worth highlighting the development of consciousness as a condition for the increase of production. This idea is closely related to the need for economic culture to raise the conscious participation of students in the activities of the economic and social development of the country and make them appreciate, increasingly, work as a pleasant imperative, a social duty. (Guevara, 1977)

Considers that:

... centralized planning is the mode of being of socialist society, its defining category and the point at which man's consciousness reaches, at last, to synthesize and direct the economy towards its goal, the full liberation of the human being in the framework of communist society. (Guevara, 1977, p. 273).

In the work for the development of economic culture, the above-mentioned ideas guide the attention towards the significance of man's action as a subject of social change, capable of transforming his circumstances and creating new social and economic realities. Knowledge and social commitment help to be in a position to act according to the knowledge of the laws of social development and to advance as much as possible within what is objectively possible.

In *Socialism and mankind in Cuba* Che considers the formation of the new man and the development of technology as pillars of the construction of socialism. (Guevara, 1977).

In both tasks the university has strategic responsibilities. Starting from the premise that the construction of socialism is a conscious act, he insists on the need to develop education and consciousness with the purpose of forming the new man, which will be built simultaneously with the material basis of the new society.

In relation to the process of formation of the new man and his conduct, he states:

It is still necessary to accentuate his conscious participation, individual and collective, in all the mechanisms of management and production, he must also understand the need for technical and ideological education, so that he feels how these processes are closely interdependent and their progress is parallel. Thus he will achieve the total consciousness of his social being, which is equivalent to his

full realization as a human creature, broken the chains of alienation (Guevara, 1977, p. 375).

In this logic is inserted the purpose that the appropriation of scientific knowledge and economic awareness be translated into ethical values and modes of action consistent with the model of man that the construction of socialist society demands. The understanding by university students of these theses brings them closer to the model of the professional being formed and of the new man of which Ernesto Che Guevara outlined the contours that would define him.

Economic culture is created and strengthened by multiple educational influences. The pedagogical collective plays a fundamental role in this, which is enhanced by the use of the ideas contained in Ernesto Che Guevara's texts, which become a valuable educational resource.

It is important that in its performance, the pedagogical collective assumes Ernesto Che Guevara's thought as a coherent whole (Kohan, 2005; Martínez, 2010), as it expresses a conception for the economic and social emancipation of the peoples and of man himself. Creativity and systematicity must propitiate a work style that stimulates students to search for their ideas as a reference for the transformation of society.

Likewise, it is recommended to take into account the considerations of García Alzola (1972) and Roméu (2007) in relation to textual comprehension and the dialectic between the cognitive, the communicative and the sociocultural. It is necessary to distinguish the particularities of the text and how economic and political aspects are related to it; to know the concepts used and the intention with which they are used. To understand the general style of writing and to recognize the relationship between complementary and essential ideas.

It is recommended to the pedagogical group to carry out the study and intentional analysis of Ernesto Che Guevara's texts, as well as the economic characterization of the contemporary national and international context. Take advantage of the systematic updating of the students' diagnosis to identify the cognitive and attitudinal deficiencies related to economic culture and implement actions coherent with their formative needs in this sense.

The articulation of the proposed texts with the contents of economic culture will be done according to the transversal axes and the objectives of each academic year and corresponding subjects. In this way, the treatment of the exposed ideas harmonizes with the profile of the professional and consequently with the social needs.

The development of workshops is proposed where topics related to the international economic situation and its impact on the national economy, the updating of the Cuban economic and social model of socialist development and ethical-economic values of the economic culture will be addressed. These activities will stimulate the collective construction of new knowledge and the development of reflective critical thinking in students.

The articulation of the content of Ernesto Che Guevara's texts in the formative process of the university student, besides enriching the knowledge related to economic matters, favors the development of a conduct consistent with the demands of the country. This creates favorable conditions for their protagonist participation becoming subjects of social and economic development.

The pedagogical collective, from an inter and transdisciplinary approach, systematizes in different formative processes the treatment of Ernesto Che Guevara's thought. Thus, the work to develop the economic culture of university students through the proposed texts results in an integral improvement of the formative work, which is corroborated by the criteria of experts, observation and applied surveys.

Changes are identified in the students' modes of action, manifested in the attitude of saving, care for social property and criticism of attitudes contradictory to the professional model. At the same time, a greater mastery of the contents of economic culture and evidence of greater efficiency and use of resources by the students were observed.

The work with the proposed texts contributed to the motivation and interest of the students to participate in the different activities promoted by the University Student Federation and the Young Communist Union, assuming with greater protagonism and responsibility the fulfillment of their student and social duties.

Conclusions

The university plays a strategic role in the construction of society given its responsibility in the training of professionals capable of providing solutions to the complex problems of economic and social development in Cuba.

Ernesto Che Guevara's thought, expressed in his texts, is a theoretical and ethical heritage that can be used to understand the economic and social problems of Latin America and the circumstances from which Cuba is channeling its economic and social development. Its systematization by the pedagogical collective favors the formation of university students in conditions to creatively interpret and transform their social historical context from a Latin Americanist, anti-imperialist and socialist perspective.

The strengthening of the economic culture, through Ernesto Che Guevara's texts, resulted in the development of scientific knowledge about the economy and society in university students, as well as in frequent modes of action that privilege the commitment to the construction of socialism, the saving of resources and labor efficiency.