

Martí and Fidel : Realities - Problems and Changes

By Wilkie Delgado Correa

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Translator's introductory note: *Four sets of quotations appear below with the object of providing context for Wilkie Delgado Correa's article on Cuba's 1961 literacy campaign. The impression here, 54 years later, is of a striking contrast between Cuba's commitment at the time to the good of all and that spirit of meanness and calculation informing discourse in the United States then and now.*

Paulo Freire, *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed,"* (Seabury Press, NY, 1974)

"Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffers the effects of oppression more than do the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. ...

"The pedagogy of the oppressed, animated by authentic, humanistic (not humanitarian) generosity, presents itself as a pedagogy of man. Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization. ...

"The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanitarian and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all men in the process of permanent liberation."

Fidel Castro, *speech to United Nations General Assembly, September 26, 1960*

"...In the coming year, our people intend to fight the great battle of illiteracy, with the ambitious goal of teaching every single inhabitant of the country to read and write in one year, and with that end in mind, organizations of teachers, students, and workers, that is, the entire people, are [now] preparing themselves for an intense campaign ... Cuba will be the first country in America which, after a few months, will be able to say it does not have one person who remains illiterate..."

Armando Valdez, *former literacy campaign volunteer. His words appear in Jonathan Kozol's "Children of the Revolution."*

"I never could have known that people lived in such conditions. I was the child of an educated comfortable family. Those months, for me, were like the stories I have heard of conversion to a new religion. It was, for me, the dying of an old life and the start of something absolutely new.

"I did not need to read of this in Marx, in Lenin, in Martí. I did not need to read of what I saw before my eyes. I cried each night. I wrote my mother and my father. I was only twelve years old. I was excited to be part of something which had never happened in our land before."

Jonathan Kozol, *"Children of the Revolution,"* (Delacorte NY, 1978). *As part of his inquiry into Cuba's literacy campaign of 1961, Kozol in 1976 and 1977 visited Cuban schools. The book stands alone as an essential English-language resource for understanding the literacy campaign.*

"There are these words in the Bible: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' In Cuban schools, unlike almost all others I have seen in various sections of the world, the vision is strong, the dream is vivid, and the goal is clear. There is a sense, within the Cuban schools, that one is working for a purpose and that the purpose is a great deal more profound and more important than the selfish pleasure of an individual reward. The goal is to become an active member in a common campaign to win an ethical objective."

Martí and Fidel : Realities - Problems and Changes - Wilkie Delgado Correa

Cuba on December 22, 1961, declared itself a territory free of illiteracy. Celebration now of another anniversary evokes many reflections on the present and the future here on the continent and in the contemporary world where this sad and humiliating evil still reigns. Illiteracy continues to contribute to the ignorance of millions of people. Cuba was the first country in America to achieve the feat of universal literacy, and so soon — just after the triumph of the Cuban revolution.

Solutions for problems of people and of humanity stem from their own knowledge. They discover ways for successfully confronting them, and the will and effort to transform the prevailing reality. In the end, people are able to take into their hands their imagined image of a new reality worthy of being loved.

Martí was warning about difficulties likely to be encountered on humankind's road of creation: "To be on guard against risks, it's necessary to know where they are. Anything that keeps us with our eyes covered, so we don't see them, or know about them, doesn't prepare us to overcome the risks and dangers life brings with it." [1]

"Education has to go where life goes. It's foolish to have education filling up the only time people have for preparing and then not doing it. Education must provide the means for resolving the inevitable problems that life presents. The big problems are: preservation of human existence, and achieving the means for doing so pleasingly and peacefully." [2]

"Governments take on the management of currents of opinion in a country with a tendency toward already determined political solutions. It is a mistaken idea that sharing the task among illustrious people keeps it from being crass. In truth government isn't that way. Instead, it's a matter of national forces taking the lead so that a human being can achieve his or her purposes with dignity and take advantage of all elements of the country's prosperity with the greatest possible benefits." [3]

Fidel, arguing his defense in "History Will Absolve Me" before the tribunal judging him for the attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953, was announcing a revolutionary strategy for putting an end to the gigantic social tragedy the country was suffering then. At the same time he was denouncing its causes and the people responsible.

"The problem of land, the problem of industrialization, the problem of housing, the problem of unemployment, the problem of education, and the problem of health care: here I have put together six points where our efforts have been directed toward solutions, resolutely.

"In a countryside where the small farmer does not own land, why would anyone want agricultural schools? In cities where there are no industries, why would anyone want technical and industrial schools? Everything exists within the same absurd logic; when one thing is not there, the other also is not there." [4]

When the triumph of the revolution came about six years later, Fidel recognized that: "When we came into power, we ran into these needs: First, there was an extraordinary number of certified teachers with certification, nevertheless, they had no work; there were approximately 600,000 children, or a half million children, who were not being taught - and a government that had no resources. To deal with this, in a country full of unmet needs, the revolutionary government didn't have sufficient resources for facing up to everything the country required." [5]

But Fidel was not only referring to the prevailing conditions inherited like a heavy package of calamities and bearing down on the triumph of the revolution. He was also taking note of what was at the root of all of this, the interests of class and of dominant forces in society that kept people subjected to ignorance and exploitation. This problem affected learning at all levels, from the primary to the university. He declared in regard to this:

"I want the people to think, so that in doing so they find an explanation for why there were no schools, why no one knows how to read and write here. The reason is that keeping people in ignorance was of interest to politicians. That was because an ignorant population serves the well established interests as the most intractable enemy of progress and best ally they can have. They are sowers of prejudice and sowers of fanaticism." [6]

"Our people have lived in ignorance of the most essential questions on the economy. It's an ignorance that resulted from a perpetual bias toward keeping people uneducated. Why? Only in the absence of a political and economic consciousness here could those things be done that were done and demagoguery be established that's always been here. It manufactured all the lies which entered into explanations here on something as essential to the life of a people as the question of their economy." [7]

"The university is free now of the political problems that overwhelmed it and free now of eternal conflict with the ruling class. That's because the university sentiment, and public sentiment, and the peoples' sentiment, and sentiment of those who govern will from now on be the same thing. The university will be able to invest its extraordinary quantity of energy and enthusiasm in preparing men and women, in preparing the generation of qualified people needed by the homeland. Now it will be free of battles unleashed in the past, because the need will be gone; no longer will there be injustice, or tyranny, or immoralities. And where politicking, opportunism, and vice used to run amuck, virtue and qualifications must have full rein in the future." [8]

As can be proven, both leaders, Martí and Fidel, pointed toward the origins of social evils as their point of departure for looking for, conceiving of, and achieving their solutions. They shared the premise that in order to confront reality and finally to transform it, one must see reality just as it is — unadorned.

Men, women, and peoples of whatever epoch have difficult challenges to overcome. Generally, instead of the conditions they need for launching their struggles for transforming realities, destroying those that are obsolete, and building new and future ones, they encounter adverse or at least somewhat unfavorable conditions.

Hence the grand vision that Jose Martí projected concerning this transformative mission of peoples and of revolutions: "But peoples are not formed from men and women as they ought to be," he later affirmed, "but from men and women as they are. And revolutions are not victorious and peoples don't improve if they wait for human nature to change. They must proceed in conformity with human nature and must contend with people as they are — or against them!" [9]

The pedagogical thought of Fidel agrees essentially with the pedagogical ideology of Martí. There is an innovative continuity and creative development, adapted to the times.

The Cuban reality of today, especially the colossal work there in the field of education has a basis in those principal ideas, in those visionary dreams, and in those persistent battles by Martí and Fidel. These reflect and have been realized by outstanding generations of notable Cubans. For this reason, they also express the aspirations, ideas, feelings, and actions of the Cuban People.

Notes:

[1] José Martí. Complete Works, 23-278

[2] José Martí. CW, 22-308

[3] José Martí. CW, 8-369

[4] Fidel Castro: History Will Absolve Me: Plea before the tribunal that tried him for the attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953.

[5] Fidel Castro: Speech, 8-27-1959. On Education and Revolution, Cuban Institute of the Book, Havana, 1975, p. 18

[6] Fidel Castro, Speech, 3-29-1959, op. cit., p 18.

[7] Fidel Castro, Speech, 9-17-1959, op. cit., p 18.

[8] Fidel Castro, Speech, 3-13-1959, op. cit., p 36.

[9] José Martí. CW, 2-62

Translated by Tom Whitney

Se cumplen 54 años de la declaración de Cuba como territorio libre de analfabetismo

Martí y Fidel: los problemas y los cambios de las realidades

Por Wilkie Delgado Correa

La celebración de un nuevo aniversario de la declaración de Cuba como territorio libre de analfabetismo el 22 de diciembre de 1961, primer país de América en lograr tal proeza en fecha tan temprana después del triunfo de la revolución cubana, suscita muchas reflexiones válidas para los tiempos presentes y futuros en un continente y un mundo contemporáneos donde aún impera este mal triste y vergonzoso que sume en la ignorancia a millones de personas.

La solución de los problemas del hombre y la humanidad pasa por el conocimiento de los mismos, el hallazgo de las vías para enfrentarlos con éxito, y la voluntad y el esfuerzo para producir las transformaciones de la realidad imperante y, al final, poder alcanzar con las manos la imagen soñada de una nueva realidad digna de ser amada.

Sobre las dificultades que es posible encontrar en el camino creador del hombre, Martí alertaba: "Para precaverse de los riesgos es necesario saber dónde están. No nos habilita para vencer los obstáculos y los peligros que trae consigo la vida, el que nos mantiene con los ojos vendados, para que no los veamos, ni sepamos de ellos." [1]

"La educación ha de ir a donde va la vida. Es insensato que la educación ocupe el único tiempo de preparación que tiene el hombre, en no prepararlo. A educación ha de dar los medios de resolver los problemas que la vida ha de presentar. Los grandes problemas humanos son: la conservación de la existencia,- y el logro de los medios de hacerla grata y pacífica." [2]

"Aunque se tiene por Gobierno, con error que no por ser compartido por gente ilustre deja de ser craso, el manejo de de las corrientes de opinión de un país, con tendencia a determinadas soluciones políticas, la verdad es que el gobierno no

es eso, sino la dirección de las fuerzas nacionales de manera que la persona humana pueda cumplir dignamente sus fines, y se aprovechen con las mayores ventajas posibles todos los elementos de prosperidad del país".[3]

Fidel, en su alegato de defensa "La Historia me Absolverá", ante el tribunal que lo juzgó por el ataque al Cuartel Moncada el 26 de julio de 1953, anunciaba la estrategia revolucionaria para poner fin a la gigantesca tragedia social que sufría el país, a la vez que denunciaba sus causas y responsables.

"El problema de la tierra, el problema de la industrialización, el problema de la vivienda, el problema del desempleo, el problema de la educación y el problema de la salud del pueblo; he ahí concretados los seis puntos a cuya solución se hubieran encaminado resueltamente nuestros esfuerzos.

En un campo donde el guajiro no es dueño de la tierra, ¿para qué se quieren escuelas agrícolas? En una ciudad donde no hay industrias, ¿para qué se quieren escuelas técnicas e industriales? Todo está dentro de la misma lógica absurda: no hay ni una cosa ni otra." [4]

Cuando seis años después se alcanzó el triunfo de la Revolución, Fidel reconocía: "Al llegar nosotros al poder, nos encontramos con estas necesidades: primero, un número extraordinario de maestros con título que, sin embargo, no tenían trabajo; seiscientos mil niños aproximadamente, o medio millón de niños, que no estaban recibiendo enseñanza, y un gobierno que no tenía recursos, frente al cual, en un país lleno de necesidades, el gobierno revolucionario no tenía recursos suficientes para afrontar todas las necesidades del país." [5]

Pero Fidel no sólo apuntaba hacia la situación imperante al triunfo de la Revolución, y que heredaba como un pesado fardo de calamidades, sino que apuntaba hacia la raíz de las mismas: el interés de la clase y fuerzas dominantes en la sociedad por mantener al pueblo sometido a la ignorancia y a la explotación. Era un problema que afectaba a la enseñanza en todos los niveles, desde el primario hasta el universitario. Al respecto expresaba:

"Quiero que el pueblo piense, para que encuentre en eso una explicación de por qué no había escuelas, de por qué aquí todo el mundo no sabe leer y escribir. Porque a los políticos les interesaba mantener al pueblo en la ignorancia, porque un pueblo ignorante es el peor enemigo del progreso y el mejor aliado que puedan tener los intereses creados, sembradores de prejuicios y sembradores de fanatismo." [6]

"Nuestro pueblo ha vivido en la ignorancia de las cuestiones más esenciales de la economía, en una ignorancia que fue producto del interés que se mantuvo siempre en mantener al pueblo inculto. ¿Por qué? Porque sólo en la ausencia de una conciencia política y económica, se podían hacer las cosas que aquí se hicieron, se podía erigir la demagogia que aquí siempre existió, elaborar todas las mentiras con que aquí se trataba de explicar una cuestión tan esencial para la vida de un pueblo como es la cuestión de su economía." [7]

"La universidad, libre ya de los problemas políticos que la embargaban, libre ya del eterno conflicto con los gobernantes, porque el sentimiento universitario, y el sentimiento público, y el sentimiento del pueblo, y el sentimiento de los gobernantes, serán en lo adelante una sola cosa; libre ya de las batallas que antes libraba, porque ya no tendrá que librarlas, porque ya no habrá injusticia, porque ya no habrá tiranía, porque ya no habrá inmoralidades, la universidad podrá invertir su extraordinario caudal de energía y de entusiasmo en preparar a los hombres, en preparar a la generación de hombres capacitados que la patria necesita, porque allí donde campeaba antaño la politiquería, el oportunismo y el vicio, ha de campear en el futuro la virtud y la capacidad." [8]

Como se puede constatar, ambos líderes, Martí y Fidel, apuntaban hacia la raíz de los males sociales como punto de partida para buscar, concebir y lograr sus soluciones. Ver la realidad desnuda, tal cual es, es la premisa para abordarla y finalmente transformarla.

Los hombres y los pueblos de cualquier época tienen desafíos difíciles que vencer, y, generalmente las condiciones que requieren para librar sus luchas para transformar las realidades, destruyendo las caducas y construyendo las nuevas y las del porvenir, son adversas o, al menos, no enteramente propicias.

De ahí la gran visión que tuviera José Martí sobre esta misión transformadora de los pueblos y de las revoluciones, cuando afirmara:

"Pero los pueblos no están hechos de los hombres como debieran ser, sino de los hombres como son. ¡Y las revoluciones no triunfan, y los pueblos no mejoran si aguardan a que la naturaleza humana cambie; sino que han de obrar conforme a la naturaleza humana y han de batallar con ellos como son o contra ellos!" [9]

En el pensamiento pedagógico de Fidel existen coincidencias esenciales con el ideario pedagógico de Martí, hay continuidad renovadora y existe un desarrollo creador acorde con los tiempos.

La realidad cubana de hoy, y en especial su obra colosal en el campo de la educación, tiene su fundamento en esas ideas cardinales, en esos sueños visionarios y en esas batallas perseverantes de Martí y de Fidel, que son concreción y reflejo de lo más descollante de las generaciones de hombres notables del pueblo cubano, y también son, por eso mismo, la expresión de las aspiraciones, ideas, sentimientos y acciones del pueblo cubano.

Notas:

[1] (José Martí. OC, 23-278)

[2] (José Martí.OC, 22-308)

[3] (José Martí.OC, 8-369)

[4] (Fidel Castro: La historia me absolverá: Alegato de defensa ante el tribunal que lo juzgó por el ataque al Cuartel Moncada el 26 de julio de 1953)

[5] (Fidel Castro: Discurso, 27-8-1959. En La educación en revolución, Instituto Cubano del Libro, La Habana, 1975, p. 18)

[6] (Fidel Castro: Discurso, 29-3-1959. En La educación en revolución, Instituto Cubano del Libro, La Habana, 1975, p. 18)

[7] (Fidel Castro: Discurso, 17-9-1959. En La educación en revolución, Instituto Cubano del Libro, La Habana, 1975, p. 18)

[8] (Fidel Castro: Discurso, 13-3-1959. En La educación en revolución, Instituto Cubano del Libro, La Habana, 1975, p. 36)

[9] (José Martí.OC, 2-62)