

José Antonio Echeverría

José Antonio Echeverría was a Cuban democratic student activist who believed strongly in freeing his country from the dictatorship and corruption it was suffering under Fulgencio Batista. Echeverría died on the steps of the University of Havana in a shoot out on March 13, 1957, fighting along side his fellow students committed to removing a tyrant ruling Cuba by force and without legitimate authority. Echeverría was one of the great leaders the Cuban revolution who rallied students for a common goal and who sought democracy for his country.

José Echeverría was born in Cardenas Matanzas, on July 16, 1932. He was the first son to Antonio Echeverría Gonzalez and Concepcion Bianchi Tristan. He went on to graduate from high school in science. He moved on to Havana and enrolled in La Universidad de La Habana, where he would study and work to receive a degree in Architecture. While he was at the university he became fascinated with a political revolutionary movement for the independence of Cuba, to which he dedicated himself completely. This movement, the Federación Estudiantil Universitaria (FEU) was a student activist group formed in 1923 by Julio Antonio Mella, Herminio Portell Vila, Eduardo Suarez Rivas, Adolfo “Fifi” Bock, Manuel Bisbe, Alfredo Lecuona, Pedro Entenza and others (Julio Fernandez Leon, José Antonio Echeverría Vigencia y Presencia 509).

FEU’s founding objectives were to disband the corrupt professors who e bought and sold degrees at the university, to establish university autonomy to protect it from regime influence, to not unjustly expel or punish students for their arbitral beliefs, and to recognize the organization as representative of students committed to university

legislative and judicial reform (Hilda Natalia Berdayes Garcia, Papeles Del Presidente 13–15).

José Antonio Echeverría joined the FEU as part of his commitment to democracy in Cuba around 1951. During this time FEU sent him out to different locations around the country to rally support for democracy in Cuba.

On March 10, 1952 Batista overthrew the Cuban government and reestablished himself as the leader of Cuba (Garcia PDP 137). At that time Echeverría returned from his trip around Cuba and reaffirmed his dedication to the FEU and his support of a democratic Cuba free from Batista's tyranny. Echeverría, along with his fellow students and with wide support from a wide majority of the Cuban people, led a demonstration, arguing that the Cuban constitution was nullified by the actions of Batista against the state.

Throughout 1952 and all through 1953, Echeverría continued to protest against Batista's regime by being at every protest demonstration. On February 23, 1954, he was elected secretary of the FEU (Garcia PDP 140), and from this new position he organized protests such as that of March 28, 1954. At "los carnavales habaneros" (Leon, JAE 141) Batista set up a parade to overshadow the terrible things that were going on within the government. At this event the FEU would create a protest in the crowd where Echeverría would be arrested.

On September 30, 1954 he takes the position as the president of the FEU (Garcia PDP 140). Echeverría would then fight against the building of "el canal Via-Cuba". This canal would be similar to the Panama Canal. Echeverría went on to debate the building of such a canal because of the damage splitting Cuba in two would produce. In his debate,

Echeverria stated that a project of this magnitude would hurt the economy, society, and would cause the destruction of nature dedicated towards agriculture and. Furthermore, he challenged Batista's claim to being elected the constitutional leader of Cuba, when in reality he overtook the government by force.

Jose Antonio Echeverria was determined to make a difference not only in Cuba but also around Latin America. He planned a project to build a university city and organize an international program for Latin American students (Garcia PDP 142). He wanted to create an atmosphere where students could learn free from the persecution of their governments. With these programs he believed the students could contribute to a better future in their respective countries.

On February 24, 1956 Echeverria created the Directorio Revolucionario, the armed forces of the FEU (Garcia PDP 145). The Directorio Revolucionario was created to fighting against Batista's forces. On August 30, 1956, in Mexico he along with Fidel Castro writes the "Carta de Mexico" to overthrow the Batista regime (PDP146). From that moment on Echeverria worked tirelessly to overthrow Batista. On March 13, 1957 two groups were sent out, one group to kill Batista and another group to take control of "Radio Reloj" to announce that the tyrant Batista had been killed. The plan was set in motion, however the students never found Batista. Believing his fellow students had killed Batista Echeverría takes control of the radio station and announces that Batista had been killed. In doing so, he alerted the police to his location and on the way back to the university he was shoot and killed on the steps of La Universidad de La Habana.

Leading by example, José Antonio Echeverría strived for a democratic society in Cuba. He once said "No desconozco el peligro. No lo busco. Pero tampoco lo rehuyo.

Trato sencillamente de cumplir con mi deber” (Leon, JAE 483). He knew the danger that he would face, he only wanted what was right for his country. When Batista nullified the constitution with his dictatorship, Echeverría took his beliefs and turned them into actions by protesting and rallying his fellow students and countrymen to stand up and challenge a government that was illegitimate and unwanted. “Seremos libres o moriremos con el pecho constelado a balazos” (Leon, JAE 483). Echeverría was never scared to fight. He was willing to fight and die for what he believed in, than live in a society build on lies and an authoritarian regime. He set his visions on the future, never letting anything get in the way of what was best for Cuba. This man was tested time and time again demonstrated by his many injuries suffered at the hands of the opposition. However, he simply continued to push forward. Sadly a great leader was lost on March 13, 1957. He possessed courageous ambitions, a kind heart and a voice that made everyone listen and share his vision. To this day people still honor Jose Antonio Echeverria for who he was and what he stood for. His passion and determination still lives within the Cuban people, a fire that continues to grow even today 90 miles away for a free Cuba.

Work Cited

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Garcia, Hilda Natalia Berdayes. *Papeles Del Presidente Documentos y Discursos De José Antonio Echeverría Bianchi*. La Habana: Casa Editora Abril, 2006. Print.