

Stefan Gandler: Bolívar Echeverría. A Biographical Sketch

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The intellectual life of Bolívar Echeverría begins in 1958 with the reading of philosophical texts, originally with existentialist orientation (Unamuno, Sartre, Camus, Heidegger) and he experiences in 1959 the Cuban revolution as an important impulse. He moves in 1961 to Freiburg, Germany, and shortly thereafter to West Berlin. In the groups of the "pre-68" he is recognized and esteemed as a "Third world"-specialist, and makes friends with the student leaders Bernd Rabehl and Rudi Dutschke, whom he visits continuously until shortly before his death in the Danish exile. Echeverría writes during this time the introduction to the first German-language biography of Che Guevara (1968).

From 1968 until his death he lives in Mexico City, where he is married first with Ingrid Weikert and since the beginning of the eighties with Raquel Serur, both professors of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). With Ingrid he has one son (Andreas, 1976) and with Raquel two sons (Alberto, 1984 and Carlos, 1986). In 1975 he becomes professor of economics at the UNAM, and 1987 professor of philosophy at the same University, the largest and most important of Latin America, whose philosophical faculty is considered one of the best in the world. From 1974 to 1990 he is member of the important political and social-theoretical review Cuadernos Políticos. Bolívar Echeverría is the winner of the price Premio Universidad Nacional 1997 (UNAM) in the section of Social Sciences and the Premio Libertador Simón Bolívar Al Pensamiento Crítico 2007, in acknowledgment of his book *Vuelta del siglo* (2006).

His philosophical and economic writings have two main argumentative and thematic basic orientations: on the one hand, a critical, undogmatic and productive interpretation of the works of Karl Marx and, on the other, the development of a materialist theory of culture, in the widest sense of the word. He tries to introduce Marx's analysis of the natural form of the social reproduction, which often has been underestimated in its importance, to the theoretical and philosophical discussion, with the intention to demystify step by step the bourgeois ideas about their own social reality. The philosophical terms 'nature' and 'culture', are mostly only introduced as a substitute for those aspects of the present social reality, which should not be, or are not recognizable for the predominating ideology. In difference to most Marxist and capitalism-critical authors, Echeverría doesn't extract from this problem the fast conclusion that we better should not speak about culture and nature as aspects of social life.

In analogy to Benjamin's sentence that the fight about tradition should not be left to the conservatives and right wing forces, Echeverría tries to develop a materialistic theory of culture and social / natural relations. Thus he develops further central aspects of the Critical Theory of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Neumann, A. Schmidt's and - in particular in the last years of his life - Benjamin. He does it in a way, which is, as far as we can see, singular in this world-wide discussion.

The death of Bolívar Echeverría is a deeply drastic loss, not only for the noneurocentric development of a Critical Theory of Society in a Spanish-speaking political and intellectual context, but also for the world-wide discussion about the conditions and possibility of an urgent transformation of the fundamentally destructive structures of contemporary social relations.

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A large number of the publications of Bolívar Echeverría can be found at his internet site:
<<http://www.bolivare.unam.mx/>><http://www.bolivare.unam.mx/>