

Eli de Gortari, Ana Mérida, and Alfonso García Robles

Eli de Gortari: off the beaten track

Eli Eduardo de Gortari (1918-1991), a university professor and researcher, pioneer in the fields of dialectics, logic and the history of science in Mexico, and member of the professor's coalition during the student movement in 1968, died last year in Mexico City on the 30th of June.

Completely devoted to science and humanism, his work is among the most outstanding in the critical thinking of the sixties. A Marxist theorist of dialectic logic, his work reflects his profound interest in enriching science in a critical and creative way, starting from the principle that all knowledge is transitory and will be inevitably replaced by more novel and innovative forms.

De Gortari was born in Mexico City on the 28th of April, 1918. He studied engineering and mathematics and received his Ph.D. at the *UNAM*. From 1948 he taught at the *UNAM* and in 1954 began to do research. His knowledge was encyclopedic, and his university work was characterized by the rigor with which it approached all issues touching on science and philosophy. A truly critical mind, he was open to any new argument -if he considered it well-founded.

His enthusiasm and his unlimited capacity for work can be seen in the volume of his writings and publications, among which are more than 30 books, pamphlets, and translations on various subjects. His most outstanding are works on the history of science and dialectic logic, among which are: *La ciencia de la lógica (The Science of Logic)*, *Introducción a la lógica dialéctica (Introduction to Dialectical Logic)*, *Dialéctica de la física (The Dialectics of Physics)*, *Lógica General (General Logic)*, *El método dialéctico (The Dialectic Method)*, *La Ciencia en la Reforma (Science at the Time of the Reformation)*, *Ciencia y conciencia en México (Science and Consciousness in Mexico)*, and *La ciencia en la historia de México (Science in the History of Mexico)*.

His restless, untiring mind led him to combine his teaching and research work with other projects: round-tables, conferences, and seminars. The most



Eli de Gortari.

Pedro Valtierra/Cuartoscuro

noteworthy of these being the organization of the *Seminario de Problemas Científicos y Filosóficos (Seminar on Scientific and Philosophical Problems)* in 1955. Bringing together specialists from the exact and the human sciences to discuss common problems, this seminar left an indelible mark on Mexican academia.

De Gortari considered it impossible for scientific and philosophical knowledge to progress as long as they developed parallel. His interest in promoting this seminar, the first of its kind at the *UNAM*, was to carve out a terrain in which philosophy and science could meet. The results of the discussions were published in note-books, supplements and books. Over a period of more than ten years, the seminar generated 33 books and 89 supplements and notebooks, including works by foreign authors not known in Mexico at that time.

Eli de Gortari was convinced that science is inextricably linked to economic, political, social and cultural life. This conviction kept him from ever renouncing his social and political commitment to change and democracy. This brought him into conflict with political powers.

As Rector of the *Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo* from 1961 to 1963 he tried to raise the institution's academic standards without losing sight of the community toward which his efforts were directed. He founded the *Escuela de Altos Estudios* (School of Higher Studies), which taught progressive cultural and philosophical thinking, and Marxist philosophy of science. He also created the bibliographical series *Problemas científicos y filosóficos* (Problems in Science and Philosophy), which made available to Mexican scholars the most advanced knowledge both in science and in philosophy.

While at *San Nicolás de Hidalgo* he was an active member of the Mexican Communist Party. His administration enjoyed the support of students and professors from his own university and other universities, and from worker's and peasant's organizations. However, his reforms ran afoul of certain vested interests, and eventually brought down upon him the wrath of conservative groups within the university itself backed by the state and federal government. They violently put a stop to De Gortari's reforms with a new, illegal Organic Law. De Gortari denounced the law, and then resigned in early 1963.

In 1968, with Heberto Castillo, he was one of the most outstanding members of the Professor's Coalition in Support of Democratic Freedoms, which played an important role in legitimizing and protecting the fragile student movement. His participation led to his imprisonment together with other members of the movement. They were charged with 19 federal offenses, such as leading illegal gangs, incitement to rebellion, attacks on public thoroughfares, criminal association, and theft.

Sentenced to 17 years in prison, two and a half years later charges against him were dropped and he was released. In prison, he and other prisoners had staged a hunger strike to insist that they should be brought to trial. De Gortari had to give up the hunger strike after 12 days due to an attack of diabetes. The strike lasted 42 days.

His stint in prison did not prevent him from continuing his intellectual work. His cell-mates remember him as constantly reading, writing, or giving classes. One of his most important works, *La lógica dialéctica*, was written in prison. Nevertheless, De Gortari never idealized his sojourn in prison, nor did he conceal the disadvantages of prison life for intellectual and personal development. For this he was criticized by certain intellectuals and students,

saying he had lost courage. However, these criticisms never succeeded in tainting his image as a man who lived by the light of his militant intellectual ideals.

Upon his release, he continued his work as researcher and professor and -with the support of the *UNAM*-orchestrated the rebirth of the *Seminario de Problemas Científicos y Filosóficos* which had been dormant for some years. Untiring, De Gortari continued his intellectual and political activities right up to the last months of his life with rigor and dedication.

In the posthumous homage paid to him on the 19th of September, 1991, Rector José Sarukhan said that his death was a great loss for the National University of Mexico and for higher education in general. His long academic career, guided by his lively curiosity about all things scientific, had produced a body of work that went far beyond its particular field, making important contributions to both science and humanism.

At the homage, the philosopher Jaime Labastida described Eli de Gortari as "a professor who was more modern than most, and whose critical thinking had room for all the sciences, both hard sciences and human ones. An audacious, unusual mind, he was capable of reinvigorating university thinking and knowledge as a whole."

Ana Mérida: a life devoted to dance

Ana Mérida Galves (1922-1991), dancer and choreographer, considered to be one of the creators of modern dance in Mexico, died in Mexico City on the 12th of August. She started dancing early in her life, encouraged by her father, Carlos Mérida, a Guatemalan painter who lived and worked in Mexico City, and whose extensive oeuvre reflects the movement in the early part of this century to revitalize indigenous cultural motifs.

Carlos Mérida, who collaborated with Diego Rivera on the murals in the Ministry of Education, considered dance to be a complex web of aesthetic inspirations and expressions capable of exposing the roots from which the nation's modern life had sprung, an ideal that had been pursued in painting since 1920. His views crystallized when he founded the School of Dancing, initially part of the Ministry of Education's department of Fine Arts.

The School of Dancing was to become the womb of the Mexican modern dance movement. Classical ballet, Greek dancing and acrobatics, Mexican folk dances, staging, folk music, make-up art, set design, scenic art, and the basics of modern painting and sculpture were all taught there.

Ana Mérida began her studies in the school directed by her father. From him she learned the



Ana Mérida.

importance of discipline, study, and freedom of expression. Carlos Mérida, an enemy of improvising, taught his daughter that all works of art emerge from solid work built on discipline and order: "What hasn't been thought out clearly," he said, "cannot be put into practice with any clarity either¹." Ana danced in public for the first time when she was twelve years old in a Festival of Mexican Dances organized by the school in 1934. Some years later she decided to take up dancing as a career.

In 1939 Ana Sokolow, a dancer who hoped to cleanse dance of its artificial, arbitrary, and traditional forms, came to Mexico for the first time. This ballerina captivated Mexican audiences with her technical mastery and artistic charisma. In 1940 she returned to establish a Mexican dance troupe called *La Paloma Azul*, through which she decisively influenced the development of modern dance in Mexico. Ana Mérida joined the troupe and became one of Sokolow's most brilliant disciples. Working with Sokolow she learned the technical and didactic aspects of modern dance and choreography.

In 1942 Carlos Mérida went to the North Texas Teacher's College to give special courses in modern art. Ana took advantage of this to enroll in advanced courses there in dancing, choreography and music.

When the famous ballerina Waldeen arrived in Mexico -invited by the Department of Fine Arts to organize a Modern Dance Company drawing from her extensive experience in the study of folk dances -the work begun by Ana Sokolow was consolidated and

¹ Antonio Luna Arroyo, *Ana Mérida en la Historia de la Danza Mexicana (Ana Mérida in the History of Mexican Dance)*. Publicaciones de Danza Moderna, México, 1959, p. 17.

expanded. With tact and taste Waldeen used folk sources to turn dance into an expression of the deepest essence of Mexican life.

Ana Mérida joined this new company in 1945 and, with Guillermina Bravo, became one of its most outstanding members. Ana always said that she had never had any teacher like Waldeen, her great gifts as both dancer and choreographer had enabled her students to understand and learn what it is to compose a ballet. "I owe to her my consolidation as a professional dancer²."

When Waldeen left Mexico in 1946, Guillermina Bravo and Ana Mérida assumed responsibility for continuing and developing her work, directing the company which remained faithful to her teachings. That same year they formed the Ballet Waldeen, whose aim was to create a true Mexican ballet founded on Mexican dance themes and techniques of contemporary dance.

In 1947 they gave their first performances in the Hotel del Prado, with pieces choreographed by Waldeen, Bravo and Ana Mérida. The Ballet Waldeen became the first rung of a ladder that was to lead to the foundation of the National School of Dance.

That same year Ana Mérida was guest dancer with Katherine Dunham's Black Ballet. Also at that time, the Academy of Mexican Dancing was founded, directed jointly by Ana Mérida and Guillermina Bravo. In 1948 Ana became sole head of the Academy and, the following year, organized a season of performances of works by Ana Mérida, Guillermo Keys, Amalia Hernández and Raquel Gutiérrez, among others.

Artistic differences with the rest of the Academy in 1950 led to Ana's appointment as director of the Academy's new experimental group, where she continued to pursue her own aesthetic ideas about modern Mexican dance. For two years she headed this group and staged several successful tours both in Mexico and Guatemala. One of her best pieces, presented in Guadalajara, was *La Luna y el Venado*, for which she received several awards.

When she retired from the Academy of Dancing in 1952, Ana Mérida was invited by the governor of the State of Chiapas to create a ballet based on the recently discovered murals in the Mayan ruins in Bonampak. This discovery had created a stir among Mesoamerican scholars because it confirmed the tremendous sophistication of Mayan aesthetic concepts.

The aim of the ballet Bonampak was to show the cultural complexity, the vitality and the ingenuity of the most brilliant native indigenous civilization through the medium of dance. This was a challenge for Ana Mérida's creative capacity and her skills as

² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

a choreographer. She rose to the challenge with one of her most outstanding works.

The ballet *Bonampak* was performed for the first time on the night of the 15th of September, 1951, at the open-air theater in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, capital of the State of Chiapas. The interest it aroused led to repeat performances in Mexico City sponsored by the National Institute of Fine Arts. *Bonampak* was considered an artistic triumph both in Mexico and abroad, and its success was undoubtedly due to Ana Mérida.

As a scholar of folk dancing, one of the most neglected aspects of dance, Ana toured Central and South America with the Mexican Ballet (1955-57), and the *Bellas Artes Modern Dance Ballet* (1958). During her tenure as Director of the National Institute of Fine Arts' Department of Dance (1958-61) she succeeded in getting official recognition for professional teachers, dancers and choreographers.

Always vital and creative, she coordinated the World Folklore Festival in Mexico in 1968. She directed dance programs for the first four Cervantino Festivals, and worked on dance and music programs for television's Channel 13, as well as a twelve part series called "The Golden Age of Mexican Dance" for UTEC (Educational and Cultural Television Unit).

As choreographer of the National Dance Company (1979), she choreographed and produced the ballet *Ausencia de Flores*, an homage to José Clemente Orozco. She also acted in several films, and in 1973 she received an award for her performance in the film *El Santo Oficio*.

Ana Mérida's extensive oeuvre contain *La Calaca*, *Profecía*, *Choros*, *La balada del pájaro y la doncella*, *El cielo de los negros*, *Norte*, *Psique*, *Balada de los quetzales*, *La llorona*, *Electra*, and *Equilibrio en punto negro*. Her personality and sensitivity, along with her dedication to creating an authentically Mexican dance, make her death a great loss.

Alfonso García Robles, man of peace

Alfonso García Robles (1911-1991), an uncompromising and untiring fighter for disarmament and an exceptional standard-bearer of Mexican foreign policy for over half a century, died last year in Mexico City on the 2nd of September.

A model of professionalism and humanitarian passion, García Robles belonged to the group of diplomats trained in the post-revolutionary decades who administered Mexico's foreign policy in the

complex world dominated by the Cold War. Promoting both conventional and nuclear disarmament were the mainsprings of his life.

He was the main force behind the 1967 signing of the Treaty for the Banning of Production and Use of Nuclear Weapons, better known as the Tlatelolco Treaty. He firmly believed that the people of the world could live together in peace and solve their differences by legal means.

His efforts to establish a juridical system to work for disarmament, and his defense of the rights of peoples and the sovereignty of nations were recognized in 1982, when in conjunction with Alva Myrdal of Sweden he became the first Mexican to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.



Alfonso García Robles.

Pedro Valtierra/Cuartoscuro

The Nobel Committee explained that they had been awarded the prize for their work at raising public awareness of the dangers of a continuing nuclear arms race, and thus contributing to a world-wide sense of responsibility. On receiving the prize, García Robles said humbly, "This is useful for disarmament because this cause will make itself heard once again, especially because the world now faces a choice: disarmament or annihilation."

Alfonso García Robles was born in Zamora, Michoacán, on the 20th of March, 1911, in the first days of the Mexican Revolution. He studied law in Mexico City and Paris. By the time he was thirty he had published two books, *El panamericanismo y la política de buena vecindad (Panamericanism and the Good Neighbor Policy)*, and *La cuestión del petróleo en México y el derecho internacional (The Oil Question in Mexico and International Law)*, the second of which was published in French shortly after the nationalization of oil. These books reflect his deep interest, from the start of his diplomatic career, in international and Mexican affairs.

A witness to the international crises of the thirties, World War II and the collapse of the League of Nations, he participated in nascent groups that were later to become the United Nations.

In 1939 he was appointed Third Secretary to the Mexican Embassy in Stockholm, Sweden, at the same time Alva Myrdal worked in the Swedish social-democratic government on working women's issues. They were to meet again in the United Nations, when Mrs. Myrdal was Director of the Social Affairs Division and García Robles was Director of the Political Affairs Division, a post he held for eleven years from 1946 to 1957.

During his tenure as Director he worked on the creation of the state of Israel and the Palestinian question, he helped to organize the Bogota Conference and labored to diffuse the Egypt-Israeli war of 1956. He firmly believed in the principles and objectives of the United Nations. In a period characterized by constant threats to world peace, his diplomacy was outstanding in its capacity to propose solutions that averted possibly violent conflicts, and the ease with which it balanced between the desirable and the possible.

García Robles was Chairman of the Preparatory Commission for the De-Nuclearization of Latin America from its inception in 1964 to the signing of the Treaty in 1967. His tenacity, his enthusiasm, and

his negotiating skills were decisive in the shaping of the treaty. In 1969 he was in charge of drawing up a permanent agenda with the aim of assuring the de-nuclearization of Latin America, and in 1970 he was appointed permanent Mexican representative to the Geneva Disarmament Committee, where he set up a joint disarmament program.

From 1964 to 1970 García Robles was Under Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Later on, in 1976, President Echeverría appointed him Minister. In October 1981 he was given the rank of Ambassador Emeritus and in 1982 he received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Referring to García Robles's personality the Mexican columnist, Miguel Angel Granados Chapa, wrote, "Sergio Sarmiento, the editor of the Encyclopedia Británica in Mexico, on hearing of Don Alfonso's death recalled that he seemed to live without any material interest. Sometime after García Robles had received the Nobel Prize Sarmiento asked him for a short piece on disarmament for inclusion in the famous collection of human knowledge, and was willing to pay a very high fee for it. But García Robles preferred to receive, as payment, a copy of the Encyclopedia, which he probably had never been able to buy throughout his long and fruitful life. Sarmiento also recalls the disdainful opinion of García Robles held by some miserable politician who looked down on him because, in spite of the high posts he had occupied, he didn't even own a house in Mexico City (*La Jornada*, 10-09-91, p.4)."

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' homage to García Robles, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari said that the diplomat was "A universal Mexican and an untiring fighter for world peace."

Convinced that the peoples of the world should devote their resources—especially if they are scarce—to the fight against social inequalities, and the promotion of development and well-being, cooperating as fairly as possible among themselves, Alfonso García Robles made a lasting mark with his struggle to, as he put it, "bring the day closer in which general and complete disarmament under efficient international control may become a reality, as the people of the world demand that it should." ❧