

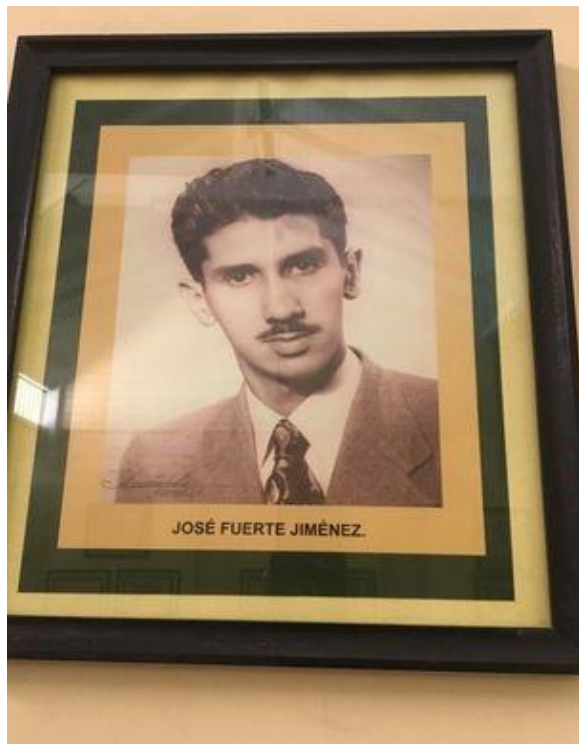
MENDIVE



REVISTA DE EDUCACIÓN

Translated from the original in Spanish

Relevant Pedagogues



José Manuel Fuertes Jiménez: teacher, patriot and revolutionary

José Manuel Fuertes Jiménez: maestro, patriota y revolucionario

José Manuel Fuertes Jiménez: professor, patriota e revolucionário

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The life of the educator and revolutionary José Manuel Fuertes Jiménez is little known, despite being an example. He knew how to fulfill Martí's mission to educate, both in the classroom and in the political and social organizations to which he belonged, as well as his dedication to the homeland and the Cuban Revolution.

Education and independence are two parallel axes of national history that are present in his trajectory as a social educator and in his revolutionary ideal. His life and work have an extraordinary value, both for the history of education in particular, and for the history of Cuba in general.

Childhood, adolescence and first years of youth

José Manuel Fuertes Jiménez was born on June 16, 1930 in Sagua la Grande. He was the eldest and only son of the marriage of José Manuel Fuertes Valdés, a worker at the "Resulta" (Antonio Finalet) power plant in Sagua la Grande, and María Jiménez Jiménez, a housewife. The family was completed by Aida and María. Their childhood years passed like those of so many children of humble workers. They lived in Sagua because of its proximity to the central, but

international and national events had repercussions in the domestic sphere.

In the last years of the 1930s there were strategic and tactical changes at world level. These were manifested in Cuba and contributed to the democratic opening that finally led to the 1940 Constitution. On the family level, the Fuertes Jiménez family also underwent major existential changes, since in 1941 José Manuel, the head of the family, died. María and her three small children left the house in Sagua la Grande and went to live in the "San Ramón" farm, property of their maternal grandfather, located in Viana, in the Calabazar neighborhood of Sagua.¹

In the rural public school, the children received the educational influence of the teacher Petra Roque, who soon discovered his intelligence and helped him to complete his studies in a modest private school in Sagua la Grande. There he attended the seventh and eighth grades of the Superior Primary School², in addition to preparing for the entrance exams to the Normal School for Teachers of Las Villas, located in Santa Clara. In those exams he obtained excellent grades and in 1944, when he was fourteen years old, he began his training as a teacher, an ideal preparation to work in elementary schools.

During the years that José Manuel Fuertes remained at the Normal School, the world panorama developed within the framework of the Second World War (1939-1945) and the post-war years, characterized by the defeat of fascism and the emergence of the cold war policy. This world panorama was manifested in Cuba, where authentic governments came to power. In this context, his life would change, he would leave the family environment to project his hopes and his future. Her main objective would be to finish her teaching studies and, in this way, obtain a job to ensure her family's existence.

However, María Jiménez and her family faced a new challenge: her son's stay at the Santa

Clara Normal School and the expenses they had to face. The municipality of Calabazar de Sagua and the support of the family were of great importance. José Manuel Fuertes obtained a \$19.00 scholarship from the City Hall and the family and close friends living in Santa Clara supported his lodging in that city. With great family sacrifices, they were able to help him finish his teaching studies and the other two daughters to improve their education.

His stay in the Normal de Las Villas opened new horizons for him, both for the rigorousness of his studies and for the educational influence he received through his teachers, most of them influenced by Martí's preaching and with an excellent civic stance. Fuertes was emerging as a student leader, he was linked with his fellow students, who had different ideologies, but a common goal: to achieve the welfare of Cuba. Among his classmates were Luis Peralta, Roberto Noy and Pablo Ribalta, and among his professors, Gaspar Jorge García Galló.

In June 1948 he graduated as a teacher and began to prepare for the competitive examination for a teaching position, in which he obtained an excellent result. In September 1948 he began to work in the rural multigrade school of the "Victoria" farm, near the "Unidad" (Proletarian Unit), in those years, belonging to the municipality of Calabazar de Sagua.

As a teacher, he did not limit himself to simply complying with what was established by the Ministry of Education, since he carried out actions for the good of the community where the school was located, and of the municipality. He achieved the improvement of the school premises, communications, and supported the struggle for the construction of a municipal aqueduct. He also collaborated with the workers, especially the sugarcane workers, in actions in favor of the improvement of their living conditions.

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From his contacts with teachers in the municipality came the idea of creating an upper elementary school. In this way, sixth grade graduates could continue their studies without having to move from the town. In this endeavor he began his work of bringing together unions, lodges, associations, small settlers and others interested in the project.

Between 1949 and 1950 Fuertes developed an important professional and social work. He obtained an outstanding place in his teaching evaluation, materialized in the municipal hierarchy. This made it possible that in September 1950 he occupied the fifth-grade classroom at the "José Martí" urban elementary school in Calabazar de Sagua.

There he continued his work and organized the work with the community from the Association of parents, neighbors and teachers, a group that operated in the schools of the country. At the same time, he dedicated himself, together with other teachers of the municipality, to organize the *Colegio de Maestros Normales y Equiparados*³ in this territory, a group protected by decree 4101 of November 20, 1950, based on the spirit of article 70 of the Constitution of 1940, referring to the collegiality of professionals, and the law of November 21, 1946, which established the obligatory collegiality⁴.

Under the protection of the 1940 Constitution, Cuban teachers and professors organized different professional associations, in addition to the one mentioned above; these were: the College of Pedagogues, for the graduates of doctors in Pedagogy of the University of Havana and the Colleges of Professors, for university graduates of the specialties of doctors in Philosophy and Letters and doctors in Natural Sciences or Physical-Mathematicians who worked in the Institutes of Secondary Education and in the University.

Under this influence, on May 2, 1951, the *Colegio de Maestros Normales y Equiparados de Calabazar de Sagua* was constituted. Fuertes was elected as its dean (main leader) and deputy to the I National Congress, held in June of that year. In that meeting he was elected as representative of Las Villas⁵ in the National Directive Council, and he stood out for his power of analysis, courage and optimism in the face of diverse situations faced by the teaching profession.

At the same time, in those years, he enrolled in the Pedagogy career at the Faculty of Education of the University of Havana, with the purpose of obtaining the degree of Doctor in Pedagogy in the high educational center. He took the variant of the courses developed by the University on Saturdays for practicing teachers. In the capital he met Gladys Blanco, a young teacher of left-wing ideas with whom he married and they established their residence in Calabazar de Sagua.

In addition to his work as a teacher and leader of the sector, he joined the Youth of the Cuban People's Party (Orthodox)⁶ since he was a teenager, barely sixteen years old, and from the founding of the Party in Calabazar he was totally committed to the project of Eduardo Chibás, in which he worked with enthusiasm and was related to the members of his town, of Las Villas and at national level. Thanks to this, together with his constant studies on the work of José Martí, he reached an adequate preparation to face the existing republican evils.

In those years, political confrontation was inevitable. Extreme situations had been reached and a change was necessary, since Cuba was the victim of a structural crisis that affected the entire population, and the United States controlled both the economy and politics, but also endangered the reformist-bourgeois project. The hope of the people was centered on orthodoxy, and therefore, in the elections of June 10, 1952, they would surely win. However, this did not

suit the external and internal power groups, so they resorted again to Batista and militarism. As a result of the conspiracy, Batista staged a coup d'état on March 10 of that year. The country was left in mourning.

A few hours after this event, Fidel Castro addressed a manifesto to the Cuban people known as "Revolution no, zarpazo"⁷. He denied Batista and stated that what happened was a barracks coup against the Cuban people.

In the former province of Las Villas, protest actions against the coup d'état began immediately, there were demonstrations in the streets and parks, and a communiqué was also broadcast on a radio station. In Calabazar and Encrucijada, Fuertes mobilized the student youth, and a group of orthodox youth and civic associations marched to Santa Clara to join the demonstrations. They also participated in the swearing in of the 1940 Constitution and in repudiation of the Constitutional Statutes. Shortly afterwards he organized an act in the municipality and hundreds of signatures were collected ⁸.

On August 16, 1952 José Manuel Fuertes was present at the commemoration of the first anniversary of the death of Chibás, in the Cemetery of Colón, in Havana, and brought for his town of residence an issue of the newspaper *El Acusador*, which he reproduced and distributed at the beginning of the school year in September, both in Calabazar and Encrucijada, as well as in Santa Clara. Through this medium, the position of Fidel Castro (Alejandro) began to spread among the people, especially among young people. Upon learning of the activity, the henchmen of the dictatorship arrested him, but could not keep him in prison for lack of evidence.

As a local leader of the Orthodox Youth and of the *Colegio de Maestros Normales y Equiparados*, he had the opportunity to relate with the opponents of the dictatorial

regime, so they organized actions in Calabazar, Encrucijada and other nearby towns.

In those conditions he began to prepare to pay homage to Martí in his centenary (1953). On January 27 he participated in the march of the torches held in Havana and, when the events of July 26, 1953 and the trial of the Moncada assailants became known, he became the main organizer of the activities in support of those events, followed by the most valuable elements of his municipality and its surroundings.

Teacher's leader and fighter against Batista's tyranny

In 1953, the teachers of Las Villas elected José Manuel Fuertes Jiménez as president of the Provincial Board of Directors of the Teachers' Association of Las Villas. He was accompanied as secretary by Evelio López Martínez-Marina, an experienced teacher leader in Las Villas, together with the deans of the municipal schools.

The school's board of directors was supported by young and old fighters of the teaching profession such as: Luis Peralta Santana, Luis García Domínguez, José Ramón Cartaya, Juan Peñol, Julio López Blanco, Jesús Manuel Suárez Estrada, Fray Álvarez Lombardía, Manuel Jorge Segura, Elena María Pino, María Teresa (Teté) Machado Padrón, José Luis Rabelo, Roberto Noy Bolaños, Rolando Cuartero, Sabina Suárez del Villar, María Pons Quesada, Pura Espinosa, among others.

At that time the newspaper *Vanguardia*, the official organ of the teachers of Las Villas, appeared. The first issue was published in 1952 and went beyond the provincial limits. It was a tabloid with four or six pages that gathered the concerns of the teaching profession, publicized its merits and recognitions, while condemning violating behaviors that flouted ethical and legal

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positions, such as free appointments and the theft of funds destined for public education.

The founder of *Vanguardia* was Luis Peralta Santana, seconded by Roberto Noy Bolaños and José Fuertes Jiménez. From 1953 onwards, the major responsibility fell on Fuertes as the main leader of the Colegio de Maestros Normalistas y Equiparados in Las Villas.

The newspaper was in favor of the need to provide public schools with books and school materials, to increase teachers' salaries, to promote civic freedoms, to respect the career ladders and the respect for competitive examinations; for the unification of education in a single school in order to eliminate private schools.

Vanguardia supported teachers and professors who confronted tyranny in different parts of the country and denounced the outrages against Aida Pelayo, Raúl Ferrer, José Ramón Cartaya, Carilda Oliver Labra, Antonio Núñez Jiménez and Judge Waldo Medina⁹.

A significant contribution of Fuertes and his followers was the creation in 1953 of the Calabazar de Sagua Upper Primary School, which was private and supported by a board of trustees made up of local personalities and institutions. Its objective was that the students of the municipality and its surroundings could complete their seventh and eighth grade studies without leaving the territory. Although the Upper Elementary School was private, the students did not pay for its services, since the teachers and employees were not paid for their teaching services.

The school had a capacity for 130 students; its first graduation took place in 1955. The teachers came from Calabazar, Encrucijada and nearby places; in some cases they were from Santa Clara and traveled to teach their classes. The janitor was the mother of one of

the students. As can be seen, the teachers and employees were not motivated by a profit motive, but rather to solve a pedagogical and social problem. Many steps were taken through the *Colegio de Maestros Normales y Equiparados* to make the Escuela Primaria Superior de Calabazar official. However, this was not achieved, since between 1957 and 1958 the situation of Fuertes and his classmates became untenable, so the school closed its doors.

Among the first graduates were young people who were able to continue their studies, such as Ridgely Martínez Sardá, Ada Tiza, Adriana González and Gustavo Sosa, who were able to study teaching, commerce, secretarial work, nursing, technical or high school and, in some cases, they were able to complete their university education after the triumph of the Revolution. It is worth mentioning Neftalí Martínez, who fell in the events of April 9, 1958 in Sagua la Grande, as a student of that High School.

Among the teachers were: Pepe Fuertes, founder and director; Roberto Noy; Rafael Campos; Evelio Vidaurreta; Alberto Maura; Alicia García; Carmen Villazón; María García; Bestina Rodríguez; Rafael Octavio Campos; Víctor Tápanes; Lucila Sánchez; Enolia Monteagudo and Ada Álvarez. These teachers pledged that, when the Escuela Superior became official, they would sit for the competitive exams to prove their abilities and thus be able to work in this type of center.

The Superior Primary School of Calabazar de Sagua became official after the triumph of the Revolution. The formalities became a reality between January and February 1959. The inaugural ceremony was attended by the Minister of Education, Dr. Armando Hart Dávalos, the Moncada heroine Haydée Santamaría Cuadrado, and José M. Fuertes, then Municipal Commissioner of Calabazar. The school took the name of one of its first

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students and martyr of the revolutionary struggle: Neftalí Martínez.

Another of the projects carried out by Fuertes was the promotion of tourism, aimed at promoting the natural beauties of Calabazar de Sagua and its surroundings, as well as historical sites. The activities were related to the improvement of highways and roads, so walks, excursions and visits were planned. It was proposed to improve the life of the locality, especially of the young people, without having to make great expenses.

Dances, verbenas, tombolas and other activities were also organized to raise funds to be used for school repairs and the purchase of school materials, in order to try to make up for the government's shortfalls. It should be clarified that these activities were usual in other parts of the country and were driven by the initiative of teachers and the institutions to which they belonged.

Fuertes' actions against tyranny became more systematic after the events of July 26, 1953, as a result of his contacts with the teachers' leaders of the then Oriente province, such as Pepito Tey and his links with the Santamaría Cuadrado family; in addition to his links with the members of the Teachers' College, since he had been elected president of the organization in Las Villas in June 1953.

In all possible tribunes he referred to the bravery and patriotism of the Moncadistas; for example, on October 10 of that year, in a commemorative act carried out in the Calabazar theater, he expressed that the opponents were neither "crazy" nor mad, they were "[...] revolutionaries and those who die in the effort are martyrs of the homeland"¹⁰.

Fuertes was aware of the trial of the assailants that took place between September and October 1953, and learned of the sentences handed down. Later on, he

stood out for his pro-amnesty actions and for the dissemination of *La Historia me absolverá* at local and regional level; he relied on students from the Calabazar Upper Primary School, such as Neftalí Martínez, Aldo Romeu and Arturo Casanova, teachers Roberto Noy, from Calabazar, and Roberto Rodríguez, from Encrucijada, and drivers Evelio Alonso and Roberto Peche; he also made contact with union leaders from the surrounding areas and from Encrucijada.

In this way, he managed to unite in his actions people of different ideologies, creeds, races, economic and social position, who were willing to confront Batista's tyranny. This sense of unity was based on Martí's ideas, the traditions of struggle and Fidel Castro's conceptions expressed in History will absolve me: the need to unite the people to successfully confront tyranny.

The pro-amnesty campaigns were developed with dedication and enthusiasm in Calabazar. José Manuel Fuertes not only presided over the local actions; he was also in charge of the activities throughout Las Villas. The effectiveness of his work was influenced by his teaching responsibilities, his orthodox affiliation and his family relations, since one of his uncles through his father's side was a member of the Authentic Party and had become a councilman in the Calabazar town council.

That is why he knew how to take advantage of the 1954 elections, where rallies of opposition to Batista were held throughout the province, in order to support the demands for amnesty. Likewise, he took part in some meetings, but he was opposed by some politicians who only wanted to dedicate their efforts to their electoral campaigns and, as an answer to that attitude, he expressed in his exhortations: "Amnesty first, elections later" and before the attitude of the traditional politicians he added: "If there is no amnesty, I do not vote"¹¹.

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This slogan spread quickly. Even before the elections, the opponents had already been defined in two blocks. On the one hand, there were those who were in favor of the elections and played the tyranny's game with the electoral farce; while, on the other hand, there were Fidel Castro's followers who fully interpreted his thinking and were not in favor of the elections. Thus, he understood that those elections were incompatible with the principles proclaimed by Fidel and abandoned his proposal.

In 1954 he supported, together with his comrades, the demands of the sugar workers of the territory and other unions. They also showed their solidarity with the Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz, victim of the maneuvers of the U.S. government. He presided over the Provincial Committee for Free Latin America, integrated by well-known figures of the territory of Villarreal; he was accompanied as secretary by Dr. José Felipe Carneado, lawyer and member of the Popular Socialist Party. In addition, he spoke out against the construction of the Via Cuba Canal.

During 1955 he developed a tireless work, he contributed to unite the most valuable forces of Calabazar, Encrucijada and its surroundings; he helped to organize the economic support to the families of the imprisoned revolutionaries and the support to the persecuted or those who were in hiding. As a teacher leader in Las Villas, he developed activities together with Evelio López, Luis Peralta, María Teresa (Teté) Machado, José Ramón Cartaya, Verena Pino Machado, Pura Espinosa, Jesús Suárez Estrada, Payita Sánchez, María Alonso, Alicia and Mery García Domínguez and Haydée Domenech.

On May 15, 1955 Fidel Castro and his comrades were released from prison, as a result of popular pressure, and in June the National Directorate of the 26th of July Movement was organized in Havana. Haydée

Santamaría, because of her family and emotional ties in the areas of Encrucijada, Calabazar and its surroundings, was in charge of organizing the 26th of July Movement in her native territory. Fuertes was a founder of the organization.

Later, at the inauguration of the Veteran's House in Calabazar, homage was paid to the fighters against the Spanish colonial rule, heroes and martyrs of the homeland. Haydée Santamaría, invited by Fuertes, sat at the presidential table. Referring to the Moncada heroine, she expressed that she was "[...] a veteran of the centenary generation, a fighter for the freedom of the homeland and the dignity of the citizens" ¹². The relations between these two revolutionaries deepened, he made direct orders to her and supervised her assignment to distribute *La Historia me absolverá* (History will absolve me).

The circumstances of instability of the University of Havana after the coup d'état and the diverse responsibilities that he had, made that he could not continue his higher studies of Pedagogy in that high educational center.

However, he developed his revolutionary activities with great effectiveness, since he moved documents, explosives, weapons and publicly expressed his disagreement with the tyranny. For these reasons he was frequently arrested, had his house searched, was persecuted and was not allowed to take part in public events. For that reason, he expressed his ideas in the school environment, in the acts dedicated to commemorate the historical dates and the beginning or closing of the school year. During arrests by the Rural Guard or the police, he was physically abused and beaten by the henchmen, but since they could not prove his actions against tyranny, they had to release him.

In December 1955, Fuertes, as a representative of the Teachers College, supported the sugar strike in Las Villas, which turned from a strike for economic demands into a political event of national repercussion.

In spite of the complex tasks, he fulfilled his professional duties in his fifth-grade classroom at the "José Martí" School, in Calabazar, during the mornings, and in a private high school in Encrucijada in the afternoons; he also directed and coordinated the activities of the Upper Primary School. He dedicated his evenings to his clandestine work guided by the 26th of July Movement, and on weekends he went to Santa Clara to fulfill his duties at the Teachers' College.

The multiplicity of tasks did not prevent him from taking care of his family, both his mother and sisters, who already at that time lived in Santa Clara, and the home he founded, composed of his wife Gladys and his young children Sonia and José Manuel.

Between 1955 and 1957 Fuertes' voice could not be silenced and at the end of the 1955-1956 school year ceremony, in his capacity as a leader, he expressed: "[...] the homeland is going through one of its most fateful, sad and shameful moments. There is no freedom and its most courageous sons are assassinated or are in jails. The current situation we live in must change, and we must all do our bit to bring about this change"¹³.

On September 11, on the occasion of International Teachers' Day, he met with his colleagues in the presence of Dr. Carmen Berta Pinto, chief inspector of the Urban School Inspection District of Sagua la Grande, and Nolasco Moreno, president of the Calabazar Board of Education. There she made an analysis of the situation in Cuba and referred to the outrages carried out by the tyranny against Raul Ferrer and Aida Pelayo, for which the president of the Board of

Education withdrew and shortly afterwards the Rural Guard showed up at the school with the aim of taking him away under arrest, but Dr. Pinto prevented that from happening.

A similar attitude of defense of the rights of José Manuel Fuertes was taken by the Teachers College of Las Villas. In October 1956, through Evelio Lopez, the lawyers of the National College of Teachers took legal steps to ensure that he could carry out his duties as a teacher and as a leader of the teachers' organization without being constantly harassed.

At that time, the prestige of the teachers and professors of Villaraigosa grew even more, due to their honest and combative attitude towards the actions of tyranny. An example of that position was Dr. Margot Machado Padrón, inspector of Private Schools of Las Villas, who, taking advantage of her possibilities of moving around the province and her integration to the College of Pedagogues, moved in the territory of Villaraigosa and fulfilled the orders of the 26th of July Movement. In this way, he strengthened revolutionary bonds and sincere friendship with Fuertes.

On November 30, the uprising of Santiago de Cuba took place in support of the landing of the Granma. Pepito Tey, a teacher leader, fell in the action. The capital of the province of Las Villas would support the expeditionaries; in the neighborhoods of Santa Clara, the revolutionaries were waiting for orders to go into action.

That day, close to noon, José Manuel Fuertes knew about the events in Santiago and went to Santa Clara to look for contacts and orientations, but he did not achieve his objective. When he returned to Calabazar he was detained and incommunicado. Thanks to popular efforts, he was released the following day. Barely twenty-four hours had elapsed when the landing took place on December 2.

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When the news was known, the support of the people was undeniable.

José Manuel Fuertes was part of the Provincial Propaganda Section of the 26th of July Movement. He and other revolutionaries of his municipality expressed their support to the events of March 13, 1957, and publicly condemned the death of José Antonio Echeverría and the rest of the revolutionaries fallen in those actions. They also assumed a similar attitude before the landing of the Corintia, on March 23, 1957, and the subsequent assassination of almost all the expeditionaries, for which they carried out protest actions. Some of them participated in the funerals of the martyrs Chiqui Gómez Lubián and Julio Pino Machado, on May 27. All of them repudiated the murder of Josué País on June 30 and joined the strike carried out as a consequence of the crime committed against Frank País in Santiago de Cuba a month later.

Fundraising, sabotage, the sending of men and war supplies to the Sierra Maestra were carried out effectively, and on September 15 they prepared to support the Cienfuegos uprising.

Although Fuertes' activity was increasingly dangerous, he did not cease in his efforts to fight tyranny. At school events he tried to circumvent the orders of the Batista forces not to speak. Thus, his companion Roberto Noy, previously coordinated with this revolutionary, spoke on December 3, 1957, the day of the doctor, to pay homage to Dr. Mario Muñoz, a doctor who fell in the Moncada actions, as well as to Pepito Tey. Fuertes' voice could not be silenced, he wrote for the newspapers *Vanguardia*, *Sierra Maestra* and *Turquino*, all of them of the teachers' movement, and he was in charge of printing many of the July 26th Movement's propaganda in the mimeograph of the Teachers' College of Las Villas.

In July 1957 the Provincial Assembly of the Teachers College was held, where José Manuel Fuertes and Evelio López were reelected. The villareños were preparing to hold the IV Teachers' Congress in August, whose objective was to hold it in Las Villas and defeat the candidacy of Rigoberto Caso, national dean, to avoid the control of the organization by the Havana delegation, which had an openly pro-Batista position. This objective was not achieved, since the Minister of the Interior did not authorize its celebration in the province, nor did he authorize the holding of preparatory and informative meetings.

Not all the delegates from the province who had Fuertes as their candidate for the position of national dean, seconded by the delegation from Oriente and by delegates from other provinces, could be accredited. The triumph was certain, but the tyranny stopped the democratic actions and the leaders submitted to Batista appeared in the national candidacy.

Faced with this fact, the delegation of Las Villas, led by Fuertes, withdrew from the Congress as a sign of protest. So did the delegation from Oriente and a considerable number of delegates from other provinces. In spite of this, some representatives from Las Villas and Oriente were elected, who resigned their posts immediately.

At the end of 1957, their situation became untenable; it was necessary to move on to a new activity. For that reason, the National Directorate of the 26th of July Movement authorized his trip abroad, so that from exile he could support the armed struggle of his compatriots.

In February 1958 he traveled to Miami, where he met with the revolutionaries and began his work. Later he moved to Venezuela, where he raised funds, sent men, airplanes and weapons to Cuba, and carried out propaganda activities. His actions were

developed in Caracas, Maracay and Maturín. In the latter place he took up residence and worked as a teacher in a Secondary School (Liceo). Soon after, his wife and children arrived.

In August 1958 he was invited to participate in the XV Congress of the Venezuelan Federation of Teachers, an event in which other Latin American teachers also participated. There he made known the situation in Cuba, the abandonment of the schools, the violations of the ranks and the attitude of those who fought and died for the homeland. He referred to Pepito Tey, René Fraga, Rubén Bravo, Pablo Pérez, Josué País, Marcelo Salado, Oscar Lucero, among others. He also denounced the persecution, murder and torture of teachers, such as Aida Pelayo, Esther Lina Milanés, Raquel Valle. But the most moving was the account of the death of Frank País García and the attitude of the people of Santiago in the face of that crime¹⁴. He used the radio waves to address Venezuelans, Americans and Cubans who listened from Radio Continente and Radio Rumbo. In that complex revolutionary activity, he was surprised by the victory of January 1, 1959. From then on, his life would take on new horizons.

The triumphant Revolution

Fuertes returned to Havana in the first days of 1959 and immediately took on new tasks. The first of them was that of delegate of Urban and Rural Primary Education of the Ministry of Education, appointed by Armando Hart, Minister of Education. Later he went to Calabazar as a municipal commissioner. There he attended the official creation of the Higher Primary School and declared without effect the lease contract that the municipal council had been making since 1933 to private companies that operated in the El Purio power plant, municipal property and the only case in Cuba. From then on, the factory became the total property of Calabazar.

In 1960 he collaborated in the organization of the Literacy Campaign, since he was part of the National Education Commission and, in the middle of the campaign, in 1961, he offered valuable help. In that year he was elected member of the National Union of Education Workers, where he shared his work with some of his former comrades in struggle and accompanied his teacher, Dr. Gaspar Jorge García Galló, who had been elected as secretary general of the aforementioned union. However, he did not give up his responsibilities as municipal commissioner and served as head of Zone LV-14 of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA), which included the municipalities of Calabazar, Encrucijada, Sagua la Grande, Quemado de Güines, Corralillo, Rancho Veloz and Cifuentes. He was in charge of intervening the large estates and distributing the land to the peasants, as established in the First Agrarian Reform Law; he also worked in the organization of milk production in LV-14.

In spite of his efficient work in Calabazar, the Minister of Education requested him again and he was reappointed to the position he previously held. In the midst of his activities, the mercenary invasion of Playa Girón took place on April 17, 1961 and he joined Battalion 365 in Sagua la Grande. After the defeat of imperialism, he returned to his duties at the Ministry of Education, but he remained there for a short time, since he was selected to take a political training course at the "Nico López" National School.

The Revolution demanded new challenges for Fuertes. Still without finishing the Training School, he was appointed to work in the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI), and at the beginning of 1962 he began his task as a cadre of the political vanguard group. The difficulties that arose in the ORI as a result of sectarian errors committed by some of its leaders, led Fidel Castro to denounce them on March 27, 1962. A tactical change was made to eradicate these errors.

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The Commander in Chief called a group of cadres to work on the formation of the United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba (PURSC) and José Manuel was one of them. The work was arduous and complex and was done in all the provinces. To accomplish the task he moved to Camagüey and assumed, together with Felipe Torres Trujillo, the responsibility of organizing the party in that province.

In the midst of the difficult circumstances of 1962 and 1963, a change took place in his personal life. He ended his marriage and married Georgina Jiménez, a university professor and journalist. From this union his son José Guillermo was born.

The work in Camagüey was very complex. Together with other revolutionaries of proven trajectory, the party was formed; Felipe Torres was elected as first secretary and Fuertes as organizing secretary. In mid-1963 he was part of a delegation headed by Comandante Ernesto "Che" Guevara that traveled to the Soviet Union to attend the celebration of the XLVI Anniversary of the triumph of the October Revolution.

During 1964 and 1965 his work in Camagüey was extraordinary. For his selfless and meritorious work, he was proposed to the position of second secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Party, which he held until 1966, when he was promoted to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba in the Commission of Revolutionary Orientation (COR). He worked in the area of Public Orientation; as part of his work, he systematically oriented the national press, both written and radio and television. He also attended the National Seminar on the use of free time and recreation. He remained in these functions until 1968.

In September 1968, taking into account his experience in agricultural tasks and in view of the need to reinforce the Cordón de La Habana project ¹⁵, he was appointed director

of the Dairy Plan. In this responsibility, he began planning dairy cattle, rationed grazing and optimal use of the animal load; he even sowed more than half of the plan's pasture areas.

In the Cordón de La Habana he was carrying out a fruitful and arduous work, when on December 20, 1969, he was surprised by death. He died in a car accident on the road between Calabazar and Las Guásimas, in the former province of Havana.

The life of José (Pepe) Fuertes Jiménez is a sample of the attitude of the young people who confronted Batista's tyranny and contributed to eradicate the evils of that Neocolonial Republic.

Martiano par excellence, follower of Fidel Castro and with great faith in the possibilities of socialism as the only solution to Cuba's problems, he was able to overcome the difficulties of life with hope and optimism. He did not fight for wealth or material goods. His main weapon was his intelligence at the service of a just and humane society, which he tenaciously helped to build.

Sources of consultation:

Unpublished documents treasured in the stationery of Aida Fuertes Jimenez's personal archive, as well as the oral history narrated by her and interviews were carried out with her companion and friend Roberto Noy Gonzalez; both offered valuable testimonies. Birth, marriage and death certificates of the biographer were also consulted, and the information was verified with other teachers and members of the 26th of July Movement in the province, through the triangulation of sources.

Translated from the original in Spanish

¹ Viana was one of the neighborhoods of Calabazar de Sagua where the "San Ramón" farm was located, near Sagua la Grande. Calabazar de Sagua began to be populated in the first half of the XIX century in a beautiful ranch converted into a communal farm with pumpkin plantations; it was a district of Sagua la Grande. The main population came from Remedios. In 1878, due to the political-administrative division, it became a municipality and in 1976 it became part of the municipality of Encrucijada. See Colectivo de autores: ob. cit. pp. 26-30.

² The Upper Primary School included the seventh and eighth grades. With the Comprehensive Education Reform in 1959, the current Basic Secondary School was created, which includes the seventh, eighth and ninth grades.

³ The Colegio de Maestros Normales y Equiparados was one of the teachers' organizations that emerged in the 1950s. After the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, it gave way to the Sindicato Nacional de la Enseñanza and, in 1961, to the Sindicato Nacional de Educación, la Ciencia y el Deporte.

⁴ See "Constitution of 1940", in Hortensia Pichardo: ob. cit., volume IV, 2nd part, pp. 329-418.

⁵ The province of Las Villas obtained that name according to the 1940 Constitution; it was previously called the province of Santa Clara because of the political-administrative division of 1878, in which the former provinces of Pinar del Río, La Habana, Matanzas, Santa Clara, Puerto Príncipe and Santiago de Cuba were created. In the case of Las Villas, it remained until 1976, when its territory gave rise to the current provinces of Villa Clara, Cienfuegos and Sancti Spíritus.

⁶ The Cuban People's Party (Orthodox) had as its central figure Eduardo Chibás, who organized and proclaimed it in 1947, as a

result of the detachment of the Cuban Revolutionary Party (Authentic). Its slogan was "Shame against money", as a response to the political-administrative corruption of the authentic governments of Grau San Martín (1944-1948) and Prío Socarrás (1948-1952). Chibás committed suicide in 1951, in the midst of divisions and conflicts of the orthodoxy.

⁷ See "Manifiesto de Fidel Castro al pueblo de Cuba", in: Cuba ¿República? Compilation. Editorial Félix Varela, Havana, 2010, 1st part, pp. 198-201.

⁸ See Collective of authors: Síntesis histórica provincial de Villa Clara. Editorial Historia, Havana, 2010, pp. 342-344.

⁹ In making the History of the Education Union in the 1980s, personal archives were consulted and interviews were conducted with Juan Peñol, Julio López Blanco, Roberto Noy, Elena María Pino, Teté Machado, among others. The results were delivered to the National and Provincial Unions. At present there is no evidence left, but there are some copies of notes in Zoraida Maura Romero's private archive.

¹⁰ Interview with Aida Fuertes Jiménez. May 2016. Notes and stationery collected in her personal file.

¹¹ Interview with Roberto Noy Bolaños. January, 2016.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Interview with Aida Fuertes Jiménez. Notes and stationery collected in her personal file.

¹⁴ Interview with Aida Fuertes Jiménez. Notes and stationery collected in her personal file.

¹⁵ El Cordón de La Habana was an economic and socio-political project aimed at covering the needs of the Cuban capital, which emerged in the 1960s.

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Conflict of interest:

The author declares not to have any conflicts of interest.

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The author has participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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