

The Revolution Continues: Contemporary Cuban Women Workers

UALE 2019

Introduction

- Gender and labor studies delegation

Agenda

- Cuban Women's Federation
- University of Havana
- Cuban Federation of Labor



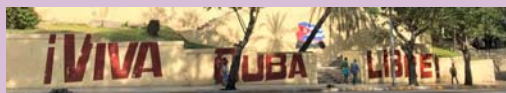
It blows your mind to be in a country where the government actually enacts policies to further women's equality and devotes resources to listening to women in all walks of life.



Ericka Wills – Some History

Historical Context for Our Session Presentations

- This history may be very personal for some people in the room. After our presentations, we want to have a respectful conversation that can include your perspective, as well as primarily focusing on how we integrate this material into labor education classrooms.



- My Goal: Provide historical context for presentations to follow:
 - 1) spotlight the changing role of women through the Revolution and into the present economy
 - 2) overview history of the U.S. embargo/blockade policy and continuing economic and social impact on Cuba and its people

Women in the Cuban Revolution

- The focus of our delegation was to learn about issues of gender, the law, and workplace in Cuba.
- However, to understand the role that women play in Cuba's society, government, and workforce today, you must recognize the ways in which **the Revolution redefined women's place in society and voice in decision making.**

- Generally speaking, before the Revolution, women had low workforce participation outside the home (approx. 10%) and limited protections or rights under the law. *Judy will discuss more...*

- However, as women played a pivotal role in organizing and fighting in the Revolution, they then assumed a voice in the new government and society, achieved through the Federation of Cuban Women. *Joan will discuss more...*



Women in the Cuban Revolution

- Women served as leaders, tacticians, spies, advisors, etc. including all women combat platoon - the Marianas
- "As young wives and daughters, they'd donned high heels and their nicest skirts to smuggle, in their petticoats, everything from film to explosives....Older women had carried passports and documents; farm girls had served as the backbone of the rebel army's communications system; young women had served as telephone operators; others had done whatever they could..."

One Day in December: Celia Sanchez and the Cuban Revolution by Nancy Stout



Celia Sanchez

- Part of 26th of July Movement – named after the date of Castro's initial attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago.
- The Castros and supporters went to Mexico to prepare/plan the Revolution. They returned by boat in a disastrous landing losing the majority of men. Sanchez organized clandestine networks of peasant families critical to the rebels' survival.
- Fought with the rebels in the Sierra Maestra mountains and was one of the first women to assemble a combat squad.
- Collected and saved every scrap of paper, battle order, speech notes, document, which would form the official archives of the Revolution.
- After the Revolution, launched numerous projects, from parks to literacy programs to orphan care.



Vilma Espín

- In 1953, Espín graduated as a chemical engineer – the second woman in Cuba to ever earn such a degree. This specialization is later demonstrated in her knowledge of explosives.
- After post-grad work in the U.S., Espín returned to Cuba via Mexico acting as messenger between the 26th of July Movement in Mexico and leaders back in Cuba.
- Involved in nearly every aspect of the Revolution, her home serving as temporary headquarters, setting up an underground medical network, translating with U.S. officials, serving as messenger and spy, etc.
- Her and other women's involvement in the Revolution helped transform gender norms in Cuba. In 1960, Espín became the president of the newly established Federation of Cuban Women.



Federation of Cuban Women

- FMC's achievements include the mass education of women, advancing women in workforce, promoting public health/vaccinations, pushing legislation/social reform for gender equality.
- 1960s literacy campaign, over 100,000 volunteer teachers used popular education to reach 700,000 people resulting in Cuba having the world's 2nd highest national literacy rate.
- FMC created programs in cities that taught rural women machine sewing and other skills. Women returned home and through popular ed taught others these skills.
- Nurseries and early education programs were developed for children and facilitated women's entry into the waged workforce.
- FMC played a pivotal role in passing the Family Code in 1975, which ensures equal property and social rights for women, and the 1974 maternity leave laws.
- *Joan will speak more about the FMC and Steffi will address popular education.*



Women in the Government

- According to the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) women currently hold government leadership roles that include:
 - Over 53% of the members of Parliament are women
 - 2/3 of the top positions in Parliament are held by women
 - Women are head of 8 federal ministries (over half)
 - In the provinces, over 50% of the highest governmental positions are held by women.
- This data supports the FMC's assertion that women have a voice in government and women/gender issues are addressed in policy decisions – a theme the other panelists will elaborate.



Women in the Workforce

- Women's participation in the workforce has steadily increased since the Revolution, due to factors we discussed with FMC programs.

"Labor participation rate by sex"

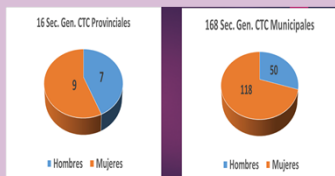
	1953	1981	1990	2000
Women	13.5%	44.5%	51.7%	48.9%
Men	79.3%	91.8%	87.3%	82.0%

Chart data provided by Dr. Norma Vasallo, PhD in Psychology, Director of Women Studies, University of Havana

- Today, the highest concentration of women workers are in the education and healthcare sectors where they account for 70% of the workforce...suggesting persistent gendering of occupations.

Women in Union Leadership

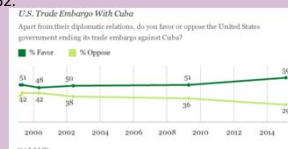
The Federation of Cuban Women states that women do not account for the majority of the workforce %; however, data provided by the Worker's Central Union of Cuba (CTC) shows that **women hold the majority of union leadership roles** at every level from local to national.



For instance, women hold the majority of the highest union positions as Secretary General in the levels we may equate to union Regions and Sections.

U.S. Embargo/Blockade on Cuba

- In 1960s the U.S. placed an embargo on exports to Cuba except for food and medicine after Cuba nationalized U.S. properties and oil in Cuba. The extent of the embargo, known as the blockade in Cuba, has shifted over time.
 - Trading With the Enemy Act of 1917; Foreign Assistance Act of 1961; Cuba Assets Control Regulations of 1963; Cuban Democracy Act of 1992; Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996, (Helms-Burton Act); The Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000.
- The 1960 embargo against Castro's Cuba was, in some ways, an expansion of the U.S. 1958 policy to no longer sell arms to Batista, and arguably, pressured Castro to turn to the USSR post-1962.



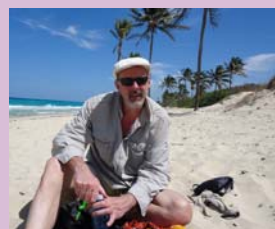
Economic and Social Impacts

- UN passes annual resolutions for the US to end the embargo against Cuba – in 2018 passed 189 to 2 (US and Israel opposed).
- Amnesty International notes the “negative impact of the embargo on the economic and social rights of the Cuban population, affecting in particular the most vulnerable sectors of society.” “The U.S. Embargo Against Cuba: Its Impact on Economic and Social Rights,” Amnesty International, 2009
- Studies have concluded that the embargo has negative health implications from the population including potentially nutrition, lack of access/raised cost of medicines supplies, medical rationing during the “Special Period” 1989+ after the fall of the USSR. “The impact of the economic crisis and the US embargo on health in Cuba” by R Garfield, and S Santana, American Journal of Public Health
- US Chamber of Commerce estimates the U.S. loses \$1.2 billion a year due to the embargo. In reports to the UN, Cuba estimates a loss of \$3-4 billion a year for the U.S. “On resolution 70/5 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, entitled “Need to end the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba” (2016)
- Judy will speak more about the blockade and current policy.



UALE 2019
Joan G. Hill, Attorney
USW Education
Department

Labor Rights in Cuba After the Updated Economic Model





Cuban National Assembly (ANPP)

Approve, modify and repeal laws based upon the concepts of

- consensus
- consultation and
- participation

Consultation with constituents, experts, parties of interest, and mass organizations, i.e. PCC, CTC, FMC, ANAP and CENESEX.

2010 Labor Restructuring (*Reordenamiento*)

In September 2010, the Cuban trade union federation issued a statement announcing to Cubans that half a million state employees were to be redeployed by April 2011. At that time, it was expected that most of the “disposable” workers would transfer into the private sector, non-agricultural worker cooperatives or self-employment.

Updated Economic Model - 2010

Primary goal to guarantee economic equality governed by Socialistic Principles of ownership over the means of production and distribution:

“...from each according to his/her capacity to each according to his/her contribution.”

- Compelled labor right reforms including a revision in established rights (repeal/diminition)
- Identified redundancies in state sector employment and
- Encouraged non-government employment (private sector) and small business
i.e. private restaurants (*paladares*) building trades, services, manufacturing, tourist housing (*casa particulares*) and self-employed (*cuentalpropistas*).

2011 Communist Party Guidelines (*Lineamientos*)

“To recommend to the National People’s Power Assembly, the Government and all relevant bodies to draft and approve ... necessary legal rules to create the legal and institutional framework in support of the ...economic modifications that may be adopted.”

2013 New Labor Code

Workers in Cuba enjoy labor rights such as guarantee of employment, participation in management of the enterprise, social security, including pension, unemployment, as well as medical care, education –many rights initially guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba and Labor Code of 1985.

The Federation of Women: Economic and Labor Reforms

Most licenses gave self-employment opportunities for men.

"Women don't see themselves as doing this kind of work; men don't see women as capable of doing this work."

Numerous other examples of established rights for women post-Revolution.

The Case for Woman-Friendly Legislation

National Federation of Women:

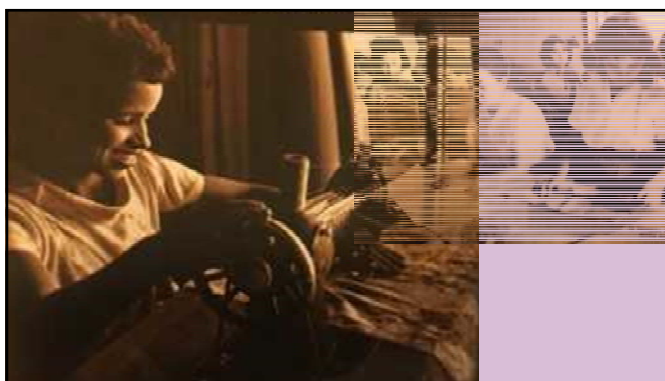
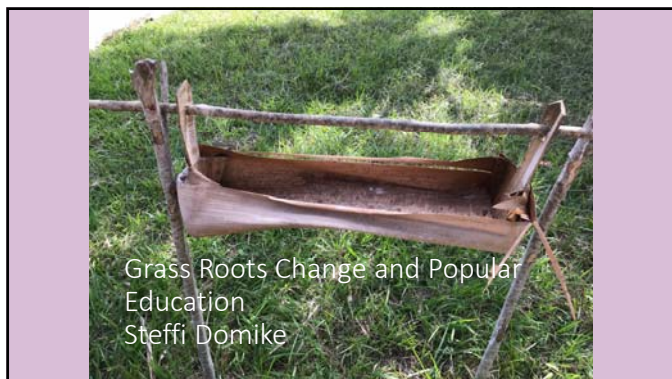
To ensure the "opportunity and possibility" to work, addressing sexual and reproductive rights, equal rights – at home and in the workplace.

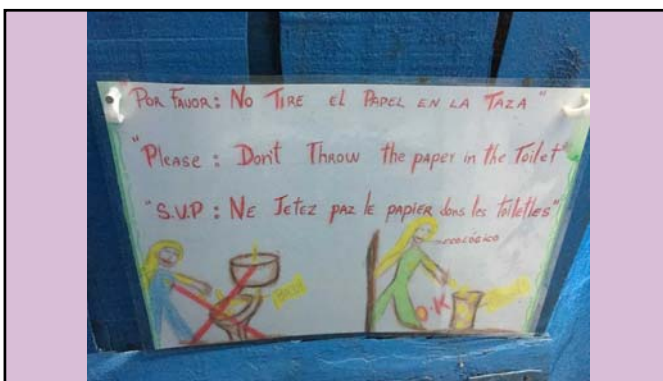


A Call for Collective Behavior

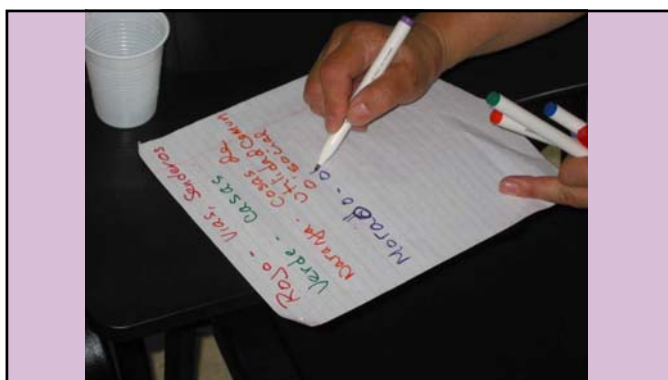
The announced policy of the Obama Administration, to no longer seek regime change in Cuba, had significant benefit to the people of Cuba. With the lifting of the travel restrictions in 2016, as well as joint business ventures between Cuba and the US, there was a shift in support for an end to the embargo by US businesses. Under Trump, travel restrictions have been reinstated and the future of business ventures is in doubt.













The New Constitution and Cuba's Future – Judy Ancel

The New Constitution of 2019

- 84.4% of resident citizens voted in the constitutional referendum
- 86.8 % voted "Yes,"
- 9% voted "No"
- 2.5% blank ballots
- 1.6% annulled



Rights established in the 1960 and 1976 Constitutions

- Right of peasants to the land
- Right of people to a just wage, free education and medical care
- Full political, civil, and social rights for blacks, indigenous persons, and women
- The Communist Party of Cuba is the highest teaching and moral authority but it has no governing authority
- In 1992 a new reform declared that the principle means of production belong to the State.
- In 2002 an amendment declared the irrevocable character of Cuban socialism

3 months of popular discussion on the new draft Constitution

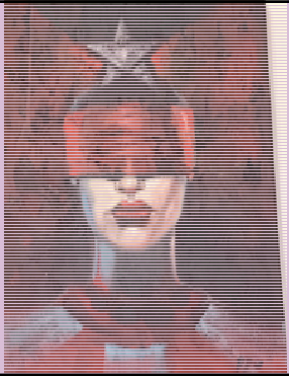
- August 13-November 15, 2018
- 133,680 meetings in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.
- 8,945,521 participants, two million attended more than one
- 3/4ths of the population participated
- 1,706,872 commentaries by the people, with 783,174 proposed modifications, additions, or eliminations
- The draft was revised with more than 50% of the proposals of the people were included in the modifications
- Nearly 60% of the articles were modified in some form.

The New Constitution

- Cuba is a socialist, democratic, and sovereign nation. Socialism and its revolutionary social and political system are irrevocable.
- The Communist Party of Cuba is a vanguard party
- Education, medical attention, housing, and nutrition are a right. Due process and freedoms of religion, speech, and assembly are rights. It is the duty of the state to protect the environment; and it affirms the principle of gender equality.

What about gender?

- In addition to equality of all, regardless race, color, sex or national origin, the new constitution expands the equal protection clause to include sexual orientation, gender identity, religious belief, or disability.
- Raise legal age of marriage to 18



And marriage?

- 1/4th of the comments and people at 2/3rds of the meetings opposed legalizing gay marriage.
- The provision was withdrawn
- But the traditional definition of marriage,, as a union between a man and a woman-was deleted.
- Instead the Constitution mandates a popular consultation on a new family code, further popular debate and popular education.
- There will be a final popular referendum on the new family code

Cubans understand imperialism



They won't back down

- The Preamble of the new Constitution identifies with the historic Cuban struggle against slavery, colonialism, and imperialism for a free, independent, sovereign, and democratic nation, with social justice. It declares that Cuban citizens are determined to carry forward the Revolution that triumphed in 1959, guided by the ideals and the examples of Jose Martí and Fidel as well as the ideas of Marx and Lenin.



The New Social and Economic Model

- 2012 New Economic Model: Expanded self-employment, small-scale private property, cooperatives, and foreign investment, while maintaining state ownership as the principal form of property;
- The state is still manager and regulator of the economy.
- The 2019 Constitution gives constitutional legitimacy to the New Social and Economic Model of 2012.



New attacks on Cuba by US

- Restrictions on financial transactions with entities linked to the Cuban military, as well as limitations on travel
- Large reduction of staff at US embassy in Havana
- Soft coup attempt against Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela
- Enforcement of the Helms Burton provision of the Cuba embargo



Trumpkin
Purchased in a
craft market in
Havana

We need to change AFL-CIO policy on Cuba

- [Resolution 43](#): Resolution on Permitting Remittances and Lifting Travel Restrictions to Cuba (2009)

Questions to consider

- Your questions
- Our questions
 - What can we learn from Cuba's experience in developing the leadership of women?
 - Is it important to include information on Cuba in our teaching as labor educators? If so how?