

This week in Cuba March 8 to March 14, 2020



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By Charles McKelvey

In today's "This week in Cuba," we review, first, the commemoration in Cuba of International Women's Day; and secondly, the plan implemented in Cuba to confront COVID-19.

(1) Cuba commemorates International Women's Day, March 8

In the March 9 issue of the Cuban daily newspaper Granma, various articles commemorated International Women's Day, March 8. An article by Gladys Leidys Ramos López describes the organizational strength, political power, and economic and social presence of women in Cuban society. She notes that the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), founded on August 23, 1960, counts today with a membership of approximately 92% of Cuban women fourteen years of age or older. She notes today that Cuban women are present in all spheres of society, from the National Assembly of People's Power and the organs of government to the cutting of sugar cane, agriculture, public health, teaching, science, and industry. She notes that 60% of the electoral authorities, 48% of the Council of State, 53% of the National Assembly,

68% of professionals and technicians, and 60% of higher education graduates are women.

Ramos reports on an interview with Teresa Amarelle Boué, Secretary General of the Federation of Cuban Women and member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Cuba. Boué noted that one of the important gains of the past year has been the participation of FMC in a program to attain the more active participation of women in urban and family agriculture. In cooperation with the National Program of Urban Agriculture of the Ministry of Agriculture and with the Association of Small Agricultural Producers, 3,000 brigades have been established that work with 28,000 land usufructs. In addition, another achievement during the past year has been the development of 6,000 daycare centers.

An article by Graziella Pogolotti in the March 9 issue of Granma, republished from Juventud Rebelde, reviews the historic integration of women into the revolutionary struggle, beginning with the nineteenth century struggle for independence. She notes that in the nineteenth century, it was common for the women of the family to gather together “to speak of the affairs concerning their sex, fashions, and the care of the children; while the men, apart, enveloped in tobacco smoke, tackled the problems of national and international politics. However,” she writes, “there was another reality. From the first cry for independence, numerous women gave themselves to the patriotic cause. They were in the camps of the rebel fighters, transmitting useful information to the combatants, supplying resources, giving sons and husbands to the struggle, suffering with pride and dignity the hardships of exile.” During the twentieth century, the participation of women in national politics grew. In forging the student movement, “Mella found among them effective collaborators, some permanently committed to the struggle for socialism.” Later, women conspired against and challenged in the streets the repression of the Machado dictatorship; they knew prison and exile. Women also were present in the battle against the Batista dictatorship, in the Sierra Maestra and in the cities and towns throughout the country. With the founding of the Federation of the Cuban Women, Vilma had clear consciousness of that history, without ignoring the contemporary realities imposed by the concrete reality of the country.

Pogolotti notes that during the course of the struggle, women attained concrete gains. Divorce in Cuba was legalized early in comparison to other countries, and degrading designations of children born out of marriage were eliminated. Women attained the right to vote in 1934, and they became workers’ leaders in the 1930s. Following the triumph of the revolution, sexual education and reproductive rights were attained.

Pogolotti observes that sexist manifestations continue to pervade zones of daily reality, a legacy of cultural tradition. Sexist expressions are found in popular songs and are disseminated in the buses and taxis, “sometimes with the contented complicity of many women. The cultural phenomena that emerge from a buried tradition and have social reach are not eliminated by decree. They require a well-designed strategy that involves educational institutions and the mass media, which reaffirm paradigms that lay claim to our history, referring to our present political involvement as well as our contributions to art, literature, and science.”

The March 9 issue of Granma also includes fragments of three speeches by Fidel Castro at the founding meeting of the Federation of Cuban Women on August 23, 1960; at the closing ceremony of the Second Congress of the Federation in 1974; and at the closing of the Third Congress of the Federation on March 8, 1980; and including segments from “Reflections of Fidel,” published in Granma on August 23, 2013. Fidel declared that “it is evident that women need to participate in the struggle against exploitation, against imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, racism; the struggle for, in two words, national liberation. But when finally, the objective of national liberation is attained, women ought to continue struggling for their own liberation in human society.”

Fidel further observed that enormous advances have been made since the triumph of the Revolution, but the work of the Revolution is not yet complete. There is not yet absolute equality for women in Cuban society. This is due to the survival of old culture, old habits, and old mentalities and prejudices.

In Fidel's view, it is "a struggle against discrimination against women, a struggle for the equality of women, a struggle for the integration of women, which ought to be carried out by the entire society," including the Party, educational institutions, and all the mass organizations. Old habits of thought and prejudices have to be eliminated. And "to attain these objectives, men and women have to struggle together. . . . They have to launch this battle together."

Fidel saw men and women as equal, but not the same. "The woman is the natural workshop where life is formed. Women are, par excellence, the creators of the human being." And because of this, "women deserve special considerations of the society. . . . If in the human society there is some inequality, they ought to be some small privileges and small inequalities in favor of the woman." Because it would be sad if in the Revolution not even the reminiscences

of bourgeois or feudal chivalry would remain. "Against that bourgeois or feudal chivalry, a proletarian chivalry ought to exist, proletarian courtesy, proletarian consideration toward the woman."

Fidel recalled the many, very important tasks that women have carried out in the Revolution: "tasks related to the defense of the Revolution and the homeland, the struggle against illiteracy, the struggle for the education of the daughters of the peasants, the struggle for the preparation of domestic workers for productive employment, the struggle against prostitution, the struggle to incorporate women into work, the struggle to create daycare centers, the tasks of support for education, the campaigns of public health, the social works, the deepening of the political consciousness and ideology of women, and the struggle for the development of an internationalist spirit."

Fidel believed that the full and equal integration of women into the revolutionary project has resulted in the consolidation of the Revolution. "The Revolution has today in Cuban women a true army, an impressive political force. And therefore, we say that the Revolution is invincible. Because when the woman acquires that level of political culture and revolutionary militancy, it means that the country has taken a very big political leap, that our people has overcome at an extraordinary level, that no one can stop the march of our country toward the future. . . . I am absolutely convinced that the society attains more to the extent that it is capable of developing and taking advantage of the qualities, and moral, human, and intellectual capacities of women."

(2) Cuban plan for confronting COVID-19

On Monday, March 9, the evening radio-television new program La Mesa Redonda was devoted to the new coronavirus that causes Covid-19. Cuban Prime Minister Manuel Marrero, Deputy Prime Minister Roberto Morales, and Minister of Public Health José Ángel Portal Miranda explained the measures for the prevention and control of Covid-19. La Mesa Redonda was covered in detail the following day in a Special Supplement to the March 10 issue of Granma.

The Plan of Prevention and Control of Covid-19 gives emphasis to waging the battle against the infirmity at the local level and with the participation of all, with the family doctor playing a central role. All the health staff have received training in relation to the infirmity, as well as those who work in sectors where vigilance is needed, such as tourism, transportation, and points of entry into the country. Mass organizations of workers, women, and neighborhoods are involved, organizing health meetings in communities and work centers. The people are asked to wash their hands frequently and to present themselves to their family doctor immediately upon the feeling of any respiratory symptoms. The plan calls for the testing and observation of persons with symptoms. Hospitals have been identified where those with the illness will be treated and persons who ought to be isolated will be observed. Masks have been produced. The state has earmarked financing for all the resources necessary for the implementation of the plan.

The airport terminals have a program that has been established by the Minister of Public Health, and it has been implemented for some time in order to avoid the entrance into the country of a transmissible infirmity. When an airplane arrives, before the passengers deplane, a nurse enters and asks the crew if

there are any passengers with suspicious symptoms. If so, the passenger is guided to the rear exit of the plane and is escorted to a temporary isolation room for evaluation and, when appropriate, transported to a designated hospital.

Once the passengers deplane, they pass by strategically located video cameras that are designed to measure body temperatures. An alarm sounds for cases in excess of 37 degrees Celsius, alerting nurses who isolate the person from the flow of passengers.

The airport medical team has a list of passengers with relevant information, so that they know which travelers have recently been in areas of high risk. These passengers are questioned concerning the specific locations of their travels and any symptoms.

There is further vigilance for all the passengers, who are required to fill out a traveler's declaration of health.

On Wednesday and Thursday, four cases of Covid-19 were identified in Cuba and are presently being treated. Three are Italian tourists, and the fourth is a Cuban citizen whose wife recently returned from a trip to Italy. They passed through the airport prior to the appearance of symptoms, which can take up to two weeks before becoming manifest.

In Cuba, there is a high level of confidence in the authorities. The people believe that the risks are being neither minimized nor exaggerated, and they are disposed to cooperate with the precautionary measures recommended.

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