

Women in Cuba

Dena Clamage

1968

Editor's note: Dena is a Detroit movement activist who went to Cuba in February of this year. She was part of a group of 20 members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) who made the trip at the invitation of the Cuban government. This is the fourth article in a series.

The situation regarding the status of the Cuban woman is similar to the situation of black people there. As with black people, women have been integrated into economic and political life of the country, but it has been impossible to completely erase in ten years the scars of centuries of male chauvinism.

Because women participated in the revolutionary struggle on all levels and because all potential labor must be mobilized for the economic development of the country, women who formerly were tied to housework and child care can now find jobs in many areas of the economy. They also participate fully in the Communist Party, the League of Communist Youth, and other political organizations, to the extent that there are a number of women on the Central Committee of the Party.

However, discrimination has not been completely eliminated. For example, the state nurseries, which have contributed greatly to the liberation of women, are staffed only by women. When we asked nursery workers about this, they told us, "This is woman's work. Men don't know how to care for children." Also, many women still remain in the home or do housework in hotels, resorts, etc.

The contradiction between arbitrarily designating certain traditional areas of work as "woman's work" and the thrust towards women's liberation is not readily apparent to Cuban women.

As it was explained to me by a district official of the Federation of Cuban Women (which, by the way, has 'a men's auxiliary!'), "Before the revolution, women were dissatisfied because they could not participate in the economic and political life of the country. But now, even when we are doing housework, we are contributing to the progress of the revolution. It is impossible to isolate any form of work from the building of the revolution." Well, it sounds nice, but not completely convincing...

At any rate, the Cuban revolution has made great strides forward in eliminating both racism and male chauvinism. Although it has not completely succeeded in doing away with the psychological roots of these phenomena, it has succeeded to the extent that these attitudes can no longer be of tremendous material consequence.

The Cubans, for the most part, are conscious of the limitations of their success. But they feel that with continuing education, the ultimate solution will develop out of the daily life of the people, working together, studying together, making decisions together, in a common struggle to create a revolutionary, humanistic socialist nation.

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