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CUBA

A charter of solidarity

A seminar with two very special Cuban women speakers has inspired a charter designed to aid Cuba's defence of its independence and right to self-determination

ON 13 September 2003, a delegation from the Women's Section of the Fire Brigades Union, Dona Feltham (National Women's Chair), Jo Winrow-Jones (Merseyside) and Janette Ferguson (Scotland) attended a seminar held in London organised by the women's section of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign [group].

Two very special guests were invited – Alicia Gonzalez Gutierrez, who attended a FBU Conference several years ago and Isabel Moya Richard, who was in this country to carry out a series of visits around England.

Other speakers included Dona Feltham (FBU), Tanya Dominguez Rosas (Cuban Embassy), Elaine Smith (Scottish MP), Anita Halpin (TUC Women's Committee), Michelle Emerson (CWU) and Janet Ryder (AM).

The theme of the London seminar was to allow the group who attended, the opportunity to ask questions of Alicia and Isabel about just what is happening in Cuba and to find out how we could help the Federation of Cuban Women in the work they do within their own country, as they help to run the country as equals with their male counterparts.

There was a choice of workshops: 1. Women's Access to Civil Rights and Justice. 2. Women's Role in the Revolution. 3. Women's Representation and Women in Politics. The day was ended in very good cheer for us by Lizzie Shirley who enter-

tained us by singing a selection of "revolutionary songs".

We found that Cuban Women start the 21st Century showing undoubted achievements in the equality of rights and opportunities in both the public and private fields.

Women have played important roles in the main changes that occurred in the economical, political and social life in the country. At the same time, they have been the main agents in the process of modifying the traditional roles assigned and assumed by men and women. They have also been working in the process of building relationships based on equality and a full realisation and respect for those differences.

Women have been active social subjects in the most decisive changes in the last four decades, either in their lives, or in their thoughts and ideas.

The theoretical and political conception of the status of women as a fundamental problem in Cuban society has been the starting point to begin the struggle for the full exercise of equality of rights and opportunities for women. Thus, it has been included as one of the strategic objectives in the profound human project and of social justice of the Cuban Revolution.

At present in Cuba, women represent 49.5% of all who graduated in higher education and 62% of university students.



Left to right: Alicia, Jo, Isobel, Janette and Dona

WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE REVOLUTION

WOMEN also constitute:

WORKERS	22%
TECHNICIANS	66%
ADMINISTRATORS	87%
SERVICE	54%
MANAGERS	34%

The Cuban Socialist Government has recognised that women were subjected to different forms of oppression based on class, race and sex. The Government's plan for the advancement of women in Cuba started from this point and it launched appropriate programmes, specific measures and actions aimed at transforming the status of women while finding solutions to gender equalities in order to achieve "a real culture of equality"

"...the Cuban State, in accord with its programme of social justice, participatory democracy and tenacious struggle to eliminate all forms of discrimination and oppression based on class, gender or race, has since 1959 put into practice

its National Development Strategy. This programme calls for the detailed and harmonious execution of economic and social programmes, aimed at the creation and development of economic, political, ideological, legal, educational, cultural and social bases to guarantee equality of rights, opportunities and possibilities for women and men, transforming the conditions of discrimination and subordination under which Cuban women had lived for centuries, and promoting the elimination of traditional sexual stereotypes and a new concept of women's role in society and in the family."(National Plan of Action)

Women now account for:

PARLIAMENTARIANS	36%
MEMBERS of the State Council	16%
MINISTERS	18%
VICE-MINISTERS	23%
ATTORNEYS	61%
JUDGES	49%
JUDGES in the Supreme Court	47%

The profound revolutionary changes which have occurred in Cuba in the last 45 years have transformed it from a country

with high levels of illiteracy, insalubrities and corrupt Governments, into a society that shows higher indicators for the quality of life compared to other Latin American countries and which is comparable with many other developed countries. All of these advancements have been achieved despite hostility from the most powerful empire on this planet.

WOMEN IN POLITICS

THE economic, commercial and financial blockade has cost the Cuban economy the equivalent of more than 70 million US dollars. An aggressive policy encouraging terrorism has provoked 3,478 deaths and injured more than two thousand people. The US has tried, without success to prevent the Cuban people from building their own destiny.

Six out of every ten Cubans were born or have lived under these conditions and as a result have suffered materially, psychologically and spiritually. It has limited the country's economic and social development.

CUBA



This policy violates the principles of International Law and on several occasions the General Assembly of the United Nations has condemned it.

Cuban women denounce the USA economic, financial and commercial blockade against Cuba, the policy of aggression and the media war intensified in the last year as the hardest violation of their human rights.

So we asked ourselves, just what can we as women do to help the Cuban people fight against the US blockade and also the renewed and very real threat of an American invasion of a free country which quite frankly does not want nor needs to be invaded.

After lengthy debate we came up with this charter to work from:

1. Increase information about the achievements of women in Cuba and the role of the FMC (Federation of Cuban Women) in

all our publicity, including our website and produce a Women in Cuba pamphlet.

2. Explain the nature of democracy in Cuba, including the role of the FMC and the question of human rights for women.

3. Promote exchanges and visits for women between Cuba and UK, including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

4. Organise a women's study tour to Cuba in liaison with the FMC.

5. Encourage women in Trade Unions to communicate with and support women in Cuba, e.g. by twinning.

6. Work with women MPs in England, Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland to put pressure on the UK Government to oppose the US blockade and all aggression against Cuba.

7. Build links with women's organisations in Europe, MEP'S and European Cuba Solidarity organisations.

8. Liaise with the Cuban Embassy and

cultural organisations to invite visiting Cuban women to CSC organised meetings.

9. Develop our work and links with colleges and young people.

10. Promote Cuban women on International Women's Day, 8 March, every year.

The women of the "Red Rose Club" (the Executive Committee of the women's section of Cuba Solidarity) in London, who organised the seminar, declared the event a great success and have included the above charter in their annual work plan and are now planning a Women's Study Tour in Cuba in 2004.

To get in touch with the 'Red Rose Club' or Cuba Solidarity call 020 7263 6452 or email office@cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

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