

This week in Cuba / December 22 to 28, 2019



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By Charles McKelvey

In today's "This week in Cuba," we review, first, a meeting of the newly formed Cuban Council of Ministers; secondly, the issue of a new Cuban Family Code; and thirdly, the perspective of a Cuban journalist on the U.S. entertainment industry.

(1) The new Cuban Council of Ministers meets

The Cuban Council of Ministers met on Thursday, December 26, just five days after it was formed by the designation of the National Assembly of People's Power, in accordance with the Cuban Constitution of 2019. The meeting was presided by President Miguel Díaz-Canel.

The president declared four fundamental priorities of the government. First, the ideological battle, in the face of the present colonizing project of the government of the United States, which wants to discredit

the Cuban Revolution and impose its interests. Secondly, the military defense of the nation. Thirdly, the intense legislative work of developing complementary laws for the new Constitution, in order to ensure its implementation. And fourthly, the economic battle, to which a great part of the meeting was devoted.

Díaz-Canel observed that it is necessary to unleash the productive forces, and what Cuba is doing should not be confused with privatization, which is not the Cuban road. Rather, what must be done is to understand well the role of both the state and the private sectors in the making of a dynamic economy. He pointed out that in the coming year the government is going to be working to give space to all forms of property and management, in accordance with the new Constitution and the new Cuban social and economic model formulated by the Party. Among the priorities, he asserted, are improvement in the efficiency in the work of the government; the modernization of the financial banking system; the strengthening of foreign investment; and a greater production of food and medicine and import-substitution.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Planning, Alejandro Gil, maintained that it is necessary to overcome the problems related to investment. Post-investment studies have shown that on many occasions the results are far less than what initially was foreseen. This problem can be overcome, he asserted, because the country has sufficient scientific-technical knowledge and capacity to attain high quality results in the post-investment analyses, which would permit a real growth in investment. This is an important task, because the country cannot hope to attain greater rates of growth without an efficient investment process.

For the first time, the Council of Ministers was presented with a report on activities in nanoscience and nanotechnology, presented by the Minister of Science, Technology, and Environment, Elba Rose Pérez. The report stressed the importance of nanotechnology for economic and social development. The Minister observed that the country has the political will for the practical utilization of science and innovation as a motor driving the economic and social development of the nation.

The Minister of Work and Social Security, Martha Elena Feitó, reported that 2019 is closing with 4,515,200 Cubans working in the economy, more than three million of them in the state sector. This represents an increase of 32,500 workers over the previous year, including the reincorporation of 12,000 teachers in classrooms at different levels of learning, as a result of an increase in salaries.

(2) Cuba will debate new family code

An article by Yudy Castro Morales on Thursday, December 26, in the Cuban daily Granma, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba, informed that a new family code will be presented to the National Assembly of People's Power in March 2021.

In the popular consultation on the Constitution conducted from August 13 to November 15, 2018, the theme most addressed in the interventions of the people was that of marriage. The proposed new Constitution initially changed the language of the 1976 Constitution defining marriage as a union "between a man and a woman," proposing a union "between two persons." Nearly 25% of the proposals of the people addressed the issue, more than twice that of any other issue. Overwhelmingly, the proposals of the people were in favor of reverting to the 1976 language of "a man and a woman," or arguing that a constitution ought not address the issue. The theme was addressed in 66% of the meetings. Interestingly, in the section expressing the equal rights of all without discrimination, the insertion of sexual orientation and gender identity did not provoke controversy. The people seemed to be saying that, yes, all people have rights, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, but gay marriage ought not be legitimated or legalized.

The Constitutional Commission responded to the polemical debate by modifying the language of the proposed new constitution. The change removed the 1976 definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman, but at the same time, it does not define the subjects that enter a marital union, thus deferring the debate to a later moment. In its transitional dispositions, the new Constitution directs the National Assembly to develop a family code, including a definition of marriage, on the basis of a popular consultation, which should be submitted to popular referendum.

Following the popular consultation and debate in the National Assembly, the Assembly arrived to a more inclusive Constitution. Whereas the Constitution of 1976 affirmed the equality of all, regardless race, color, sex or national origin, the 2019 constitution expands the equal protection clause to include no discrimination for reason of sexual orientation, gender identity, religious belief, or disability. The amplification of the equal protection clause is in accordance with international tendencies, and it reflects changes in Cuban society, as it has evolved since 1976.

In recent years, the revolutionary leadership has moved toward embracing the international tendency toward affirmation of the rights of gays and transgender persons. However, it did not want to do so in a way that provoked a reaction from religious persons, whom it also wanted to include. Its orientation has been to educate rather than to impose. It has sought consensus, with the intention of avoiding a conflictive divide among the people in relation to religion and homosexuality. The Revolution does not see the question as central to the essence of revolution; that is, a person could be gay or not, or religious or not, and could still be revolutionary (or not). Therefore, the Revolution has sought to ensure consensus and mutual respect among the people on questions related to homosexuality and religion.

In this approach to a polemical issue, the Cuban Revolution reflects a historic principle: the people must be respected. If, as a result of pervasive confusions and distortions, the people have an unscientific or an unreasonable idea, they must be educated and persuaded; the political will of an “enlightened” minority can never be imposed.

The article by Yudy Castro in the December 26 Granma continues the effort to educate the people on the issue. It calls, gently, for an open and inclusive family code, in accordance with the principles and values of the new Constitution, leaving aside prejudices and stereotypes. The article maintains that the Family Code has to reflect the times in which we live, and therefore it ought to recognize all the forms of Cuban families that exist today. Castro observes that the Constitution refers to marriage as a free agreement, without mentioning any particular end of the agreement, and therefore it does not require heterosexuality. People should be free, she maintains, to choose the form of marriage that is adjusted to their life project.

(3) The alliance between the CIA and the entertainment industry

An article by Raúl Antonio Capote in the Cuban daily newspaper Granma on Thursday, December 26, describes the alliance between the special services of the United States and the entertainment industry. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, films and television series presented an idealized vision of the American way of life, including the latest model cars and nights at glamorous discotheques, which were disseminated throughout the world. After September 11, with news disclosures of secret prisons and torturing, there emerged films and television programs to repair the damaged image, exalting violence by men of action who were always acting in the name of the United States and in defense of its sacrosanct “national security.”

In contrast to the U.S. entertainment industry, Cuban television programming and newspapers often tell stories of ordinary people who are living in accordance with the highest human values of devotion to service, knowledge, community, and nation.

This is Charles McKelvey. We will be back next Sunday with “This week in Cuba,” reviewing the news emerging during the week from revolutionary Cuba.

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