

Socialism does work

Is socialism dead? "No" say two Cuban women who visited South Africa recently. They spoke to Rosalee Telela about life in Cuba

"Life is tough in Cuba – but the peoples commitment to socialism has not died." That's the message from Magarita Vidal and Olena Navas who recently visited South Africa.

Why is life tough? "Many countries like the United States of America (USA) have banned companies and people from trading with Cuba," explained Vidal, senior manager in the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Trade.

"But," say the two, "the people in Cuba are clear it is not socialism which makes life tough – it is the outside pressure.

"It is very difficult to get important items like food for babies, milk, meat and cereals," said Vidal.

SPEAK asked them what they are doing about the problem.

"We are trying to find solutions and we are producing products for ourselves and to sell in different markets," said Vidal.

80 percent of Cuba's trade was with the former socialist countries which have disappeared. People in Cuba now make things like shampoos, conditioners, tampons and other things they can no longer buy.

The majority of people in Cuba want to save the revolution because they feel they have achieved a lot through it. Earlier this year, 93 percent of the people re-elected Fidel Castro as President.

"Women in particular have won many victories over the years," said Vidal.

Before the revolution, machismo (male behaviour and attitudes that are aggressive and offensive to women) was very strong.

Most men would not let their wives work.

"After the revolution we began a very long process of educating people about women's rights. This was important because people, like my parents, held on to the old ideas about the role of women in society," Vidal said.



MAGARITA VIDAL:
"Women can take their husbands to court if they refuse to share in the housework."

To make sure women were active and equal members of society in the new revolutionary Cuba "we said that all the women should study. Education was and is one of our priorities" she added.

Cuba's constitution does not accept discrimination on the basis of race, sex or religion.

For Vidal, the problem of who was responsible for the home still remained.

"I started working for the ministry when I was 17 years-old. When my son was born I was working and studying at the same time. I remember that after school I would have to come home to do the washing, cooking and cleaning," said Vidal.

"It's difficult for women to

OLENA NAVAS:
**“Only through
 fighting can we
 obtain a
 better future.”**

Photos: Rosalée Tejada



combine all the responsibilities. You are a mother, a worker, a wife, a daughter, a sister – you are a lot of things at the same time,” adds Vidal.

In 1975 Cuba passed a law, The Family Code, on International Women’s Day which says men should share in housework and child-care and that women have the responsibility and duty to take part in political activity and jobs outside the home.

“This has made the life of women in Cuba a little easier. Women can take their husbands to court if men refuse to share

in the housework,” said Vidal.

Violence against women happens, but it is against the law for a man to beat his wife or ill-treat her in any way.

Sexism still exists. There are more women than men in jobs like administration, which is seen as women’s jobs.

Nevertheless, the develop-

ment of women in Cuba has increased through the years.

“Representation of women in the Cuban government is high compared to other developing countries. In the national assembly, which is the main organ of power in the state, there are between 25 to 30 women. You even find women between the ages of 21 and 22 in the assembly,” said Vidal.

Olena Navas, who works with Vidal as assistant managing director said “only through fighting can we obtain a better future for ourselves and our children. At the moment in Cuba, the law says there should be equality between men and women but women still have to fight.”

Both women say the harshness of life without comforts has made the people in Cuba more determined to fight for their revolution. ★

About Cuba

Cuba is an island in the Caribbean between Latin America and the United States of America.

Capital City: Havana

Official language: Spanish

Population: 10.8 million

Some important dates:

1959 – The Cuban people won the revolution

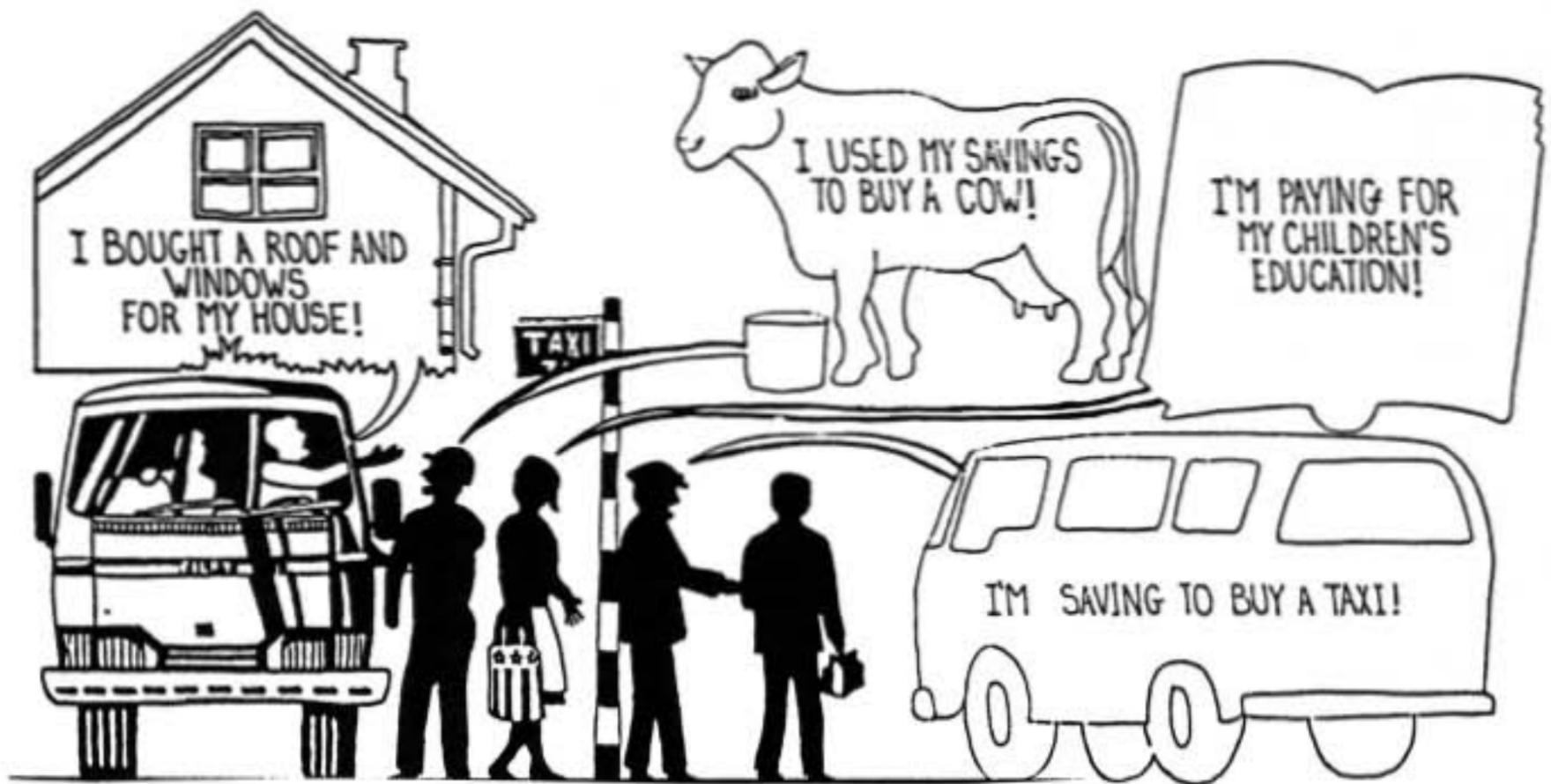
1960 – The Federation of Cuban Women formed with 70 000 members

1975 – The Family Code law was adopted saying there must be equality between men and women in the family

Cuba has helped many liberation struggles, especially in Africa. There is a Cuba Solidarity Committee in South Africa. If you want to offer financial and material assistance for Cuba telephone the ANC Health Department at (011) 330 7205.



Saving makes cents



Graphic: Saccol

Credit unions, like stokvels, play a positive role in providing informal "peoples banks". *SPEAK* looks at whether this banking system does benefit people

Harriet Mfeka joined her credit union three years ago. Mfeka works as a domestic worker and earns R400 a month. Her credit union was formed in 1987 by domestic workers living in the same area. Today the Nulusapho Credit Union has a membership of 80 domestic workers.

"Before I joined the credit union my daughter was out of school because I did not have the money to pay for school fees. Since I became a member, I was able to send my child back to school with the loan I made. Next year she will be going to nursing college," says Mfeka proudly.

She has also been able to build a house in the Transkei, where the rest of her family lives, with her savings and a loan from her credit union.

"I struggled a great deal before I joined the Nulusapho Credit Union, now I am a woman, I can do things myself," says Mfeka.

The Masakhane Credit Union in Wadeville, Benoni was started in 1987 by pensioners. The members of this credit union meet every week at an Old Age Centre and every member is encour-

aged to save every month. For many it is hard because of the little money pensioners get.

"I was able to save a little at a time. With my savings and a loan I went to Durban on a pensioners' outing. It brought me great pleasure being able to do this and not worry about high interest rates," says Priscilla Nkosi.

She made a second loan to help pay for her daughter's study fees.

"It took me a long time to pay off the loan and save at the same time but I could," added Nkosi.

Credit unions are co-operatives where people save money together, like banks. "It is different from banks because it is democratically controlled by all its members," explains Olivia Henwood of the South African Savings and Credit Co-operative League (Saccol).

"And unlike banks, credit unions operate in the townships and squatter areas," adds Henwood.

"Every month members save their money with the credit union. The monthly savings of members are deposited into a joint banking account.

"Members can take out loans, which are agreed



Photo: Compliments Saccol

Pensioner Priscilla Nkosi speaks to a Saccol fieldworker

on by everyone in the union and must be paid back.”

Henwood said the interest on loans is much lower than banks.

“Everyone can therefore afford to take out loans, pay them back and save at the same time.”

“The union’s members share a common bond, for example, people who work together, such as mine-workers, farm-workers, teachers; or live in the same area. Because of it, members share a sense of mutual concern, loyalty and trust,” adds Henwood.

She said any group of people who share a “common bond” can start their own credit union. Saccol will assist the group in setting up the union.

“We also assist and show the different credit unions how to audit their books.”

Members of the credit unions say they prefer this system to stokvels because they are more formal and there is a strict control over the money. Many say they learn skills about working with money.

“Many credit unions are run in members’ houses, community organisations or at the workplace,” said Henwood. ★

If you want find out more about credit unions contact Saccol:

- **Western Cape**
76 Long Street, Cape Town 8001
Telephone: (021) 23 8360
- **Northern Cape**
377 Long Street, Nababeep 8265
Telephone: (0251) 38 847
- **Eastern Cape**
27 Alexander Avenue, Umtata
Telephone: (0471) 31 0284
- **Transvaal**
PO Box 4989, Johannesburg 2000
Telephone: (011) 333 8204

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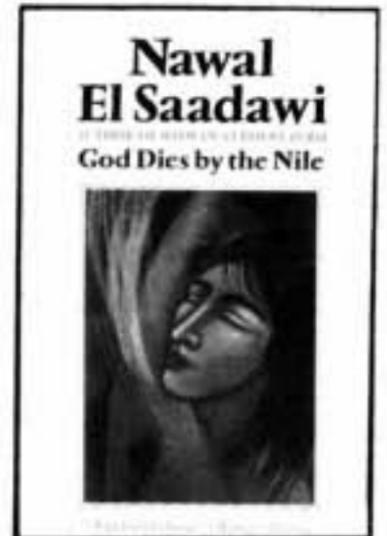
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Rules of the competition: The decision of the judges is final. This competition is only open to people living in Southern Africa. Employees and relatives of employees of SPEAK are not allowed to enter. The closing date is 1 September 1993. The winner will be announced in the October issue of SPEAK.