

IDEOLOGY PREVAILS

by Caridad Herrera

A PASTURE MORE OR LESS

I remember when I worked in agriculture, several years ago, we were preparing the field for the cattle they were bringing in to pasture in the fields near Holguín. The drought had lasted several months and only a few drops fell on the ground. Like the farmer I was it did not seem to me like it was the right time to plant the pasture.

Nevertheless, they brought in several trailers loaded with the St. Augustine grass sods that, according to party orientations, we should plant. I dared, with much respect and with some apprehension and fear, to say to the commander in charge of the job that it seemed like a waste of time to plant without rain in the forecast. The ground was very dry and the grass would not grow.

He told me we had to meet the goal set by the Party, and to mind my own business, that nobody had asked my opinion. He said: "If the grass does not grow, it doesn't matter, we bring over another pair of oxen in yoke to till the field and plant it again."

COPELITA

Candelita made ice cream in the town of Sancti Spiritus. The government gave her the flavors, the rice, and the bread flour in proportion to how much ice cream she produced. She prepared it in the place authorized for its production and sale. The ice cream portions were generous, and it was well-liked by her neighbors. Candelita earned good money with the sale of her ice cream because of its quality, and she dreamt of opening up an ice cream shop that she would name Copelita, after the famous Copelia Ice Cream Shop in Havana, Cuba.

She could imagine her clientele standing in line in front of her ice cream shop. The salary the government paid her was in proportion to the ice cream she sold, depending on whether she met the goals set by the state.

In fact, the ice creams that she prepared were the most flavorful in the district, and they soon became famous.

The truth was that Candelita improved the recipe by adding milk to the ice cream. She would take some money out from her earnings and buy milk from a local farmer who owned some cows.

Candelita always made sure that no one would know that she had improved the quality of her ice creams. One day a government inspector arrived at Candelita's ice cream shop and, in spite of the fact that my dear friend did everything she could for the inspectors not to taste the ice cream, he asked for one to relieve him from the heat. Even though she presented to him her all her documents, which were valid, the inspector noticed the ice cream tasted like milk.

She could not help but to reveal her secret to the inspector confessing that by adding milk she served her clients a better product, and that because of the good quality of her ice cream, sales were going up everyday.

The inspector, visibly perturbed by the discovery, absolutely prohibited Candelita to put milk in the ice cream ever again. According to him, it was a violation of the state's technical norms for the preparation of ice cream.

Candelita had to pay a fine, something she found difficult to do, of course, and the people could no longer enjoy her famous ice creams made from milk anymore.



NEITHER GIRL, NOR WOMAN

I was so busy that I could not go to the state store to buy pads for my daughter when she got her first period. So I asked my brother

Raulito to go to the pharmacy collective store to get the pads through the ration book allotted to girls who turn twelve.

When my brother arrived at the pharmacy they indicated that his niece did not have the right to get the pads because, according to the law, she was still a child not yet the age of twelve, and could not get any without a medical certificate stating she had her period before twelve signed by her doctor.

Upset, however unable to do anything, he went straight to the stand where they distributed the mincemeat made from soy and meat for the children. He then requested the meat allocated for his niece. The clerk automatically told him his niece was no longer a child and that she did not qualify to receive any meat. Screaming at the top of his lungs without minding the consequences, my brother Raulito yelled out: "I want somebody to tell me, *what my niece is* - she is not a child so she can't have any meat- and she is still a child so she can't have her pads!". Everybody, including to the clerks started laughing, except my brother who was visibly frustrated.

ESTHER'S EGGS

Esther had three sons that she had to feed, and naturally what they gave her in the ration book was not enough for anything in Cuba. Her niece's husband worked in a state-owned chicken farm driving a delivery truck where he transported the eggs to Havana. When he passed by Artemisa he would always drop off two or three cartons so Esther could give eggs to her boys or sell them for some *chavitos* to buy them something more to eat in the black market. When Esther would get the eggs, which was always at night, she would hide the cartons in the roof of her house and burn them a few at a time so that nobody in her block would know that she had eggs.

One morning very early she carefully prepared her backpack with the eggs so they would not break on the trip to Havana. She arrived at the bus stop with her backpack full of eggs.

It was truly an attractive backpack. It was beautiful and new since her cousin had sent it

to her from the United States only a few days earlier. Esther really liked it, but she did not have any other choice but to use it to transport the eggs in order to sell them later.

However, fate was against her. That day there was a police officer walking around the bus stop, and seeing her visibly nervous, noticed the backpack. Unpretentiously, she put the backpack down on the floor and walked a few steps away from it as if not minding it, but the officer, who saw what was going on, approached her and asked her if the backpack was hers, and why she had placed it on the floor. She answered yes, and that she had put it on the floor because it was very heavy. In response, the policeman asked what she was carrying in it and, as they usually do, asked her to open it. Dying, Esther lifted the backpack up from the floor and opened it displaying the eggs she was carrying.



Saying no more the policeman told her he was taking her in for illegal trafficking of eggs. There they put her in a cell where there were several people who had been detained for illegally transporting

eggs. Her cell was next to another one where they kept those who transported meat, and so it was in every other cell, where people were placed according to what merchandise they were caught transporting: there was the cell for eggs, the cell for meats, the one for chickens, etc.

Esther was lucky in that one of her relatives was a police officer, and to this day she does not know what he told the sergeant in the station, but he managed to get her released without any charges. What she did lose was her backpack, for they never returned it to her. She did not know what happened to the eggs either.

P.S.

Sometime later, Esther told me she had a friend of a friend who had access to the room where they kept all confiscated knapsacks. It was a small dark room, without even a light bulb, with napsacks piled by the hundreds. There among many others was hers.