

# CUBA IN TRANSITION

Volume 23

Papers and Proceedings of the

Twenty-Third Annual Meeting of the  
Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE)

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## PREFACE

On August 1-3, 2013, the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE) held its 23<sup>rd</sup> annual conference at Miami's Downtown Hilton under the theme "Reforming Cuba?" The board of directors chose this theme as we felt it would allow us—together with the many diverse participants at this year's gathering – the ability to critically understand and evaluate the process of economic reform begun in Cuba in recent years. Given that the Cuban government itself prefers to refer to these changes as an "updating" or "perfecting" of socialism, eschewing any talk of economic "reforms" and much less a political "transition," we felt that a critical approach was warranted.

Personally, when I am invited to speak on the Cuban economy under Raúl Castro, I like to pose the following question: "Two steps forward and one step back: Will Raúl's economic mambo work for Cuba?" In other words, while there is general agreement among Cuba-watchers that Raúl's reforms are a significant departure from economic policy under Fidel Castro, analysts are still far from convinced that the reforms enacted to date are sufficient even to meet the government's own stated goals. The recent reversal of fortune for many of Cuba's self-employed workers who had been re-selling imported clothing using seamstress and tailor licenses or running 3-D cinemas and arcades with entertainer and food service licenses indicates that while the *quantity* of economic changes and the record number of newly self-employed is significant, the *quality* (the depth and breadth) of those same changes continues to be quite cautious and limited.

ASCE is not a political organization. From its beginnings 23 years ago, it has consistently followed a clear policy. As stated in its mission statement:

The Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE) is a non-political, non-partisan, professional association whose main objectives are to promote interest in the study of the Cuban economy in its broadest sense [...]. Of special interest to ASCE is the study of economic and business development issues, legal reform, and social and environmental problems associated with the transition of Cuba to a free-market democracy. Membership is open to all scholars, teachers, students, other professionals, and institutions interested in the study of the Cuban economy and society.

In order to carry out this mission in a critical, scholarly, and inclusive manner, we have the obligation to be well informed about what goes on within the island, about the standard of living of the Cuban people who are the human base on which an economy is built, and about the economic policies of the Cuban government. For this reason, ASCE maintains professional contacts with economists inside Cuba—whether independent or associated with the Cuban government—who are interested in engaging in scholarly discussion and research.

For a fruitful exchange to take place all participants must accept a few basic ground rules: that dialogue and debate be serious, respectful, and based on arguments and evidence, not on slogans, insults, or personal attacks. We need not agree with one another on how well the *guagua* (bus) of the Cuban economy runs—and in fact it

is better and more productive if we have and air our honest disagreements—but to have a seat on that *guagua*, we must find a space for all who are willing to debate, dialogue, and even argue with one another in good faith. As the Mexican statesman Benito Juárez famously said: “Respect for the rights of others is peace.”

As president of ASCE, I would like to thank the board of directors for their time and effort in making this year’s conference a resounding success. In particular, I would like to single out Rafael Romeu, president ex-officio of ASCE, for his guidance, Joaquín “Mr. ASCE” Pujol for his tireless work on behalf of the organization, our treasurer Geni Gómez for his expertise at managing our funds, our secretary Stephen Kimmerling for his organizational work, Enrique Pumar for continuing to run the student prize committee, Luis Luis and Ernesto Hernández-Catá for their launching of ASCE’s new blog, and Maria Werlau for her work as head of the membership committee as well as her assistance in bringing scholars to the conference from Cuba. As always, Jorge Pérez-López has continued the extraordinary work of organizing the conference program and editing the conference proceedings.

Finally, ASCE would like to recognize the financial support of the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, the Sobel Family Foundation, and the Cuba Study Group. Thanks to their generosity, we were able to extend invitations to this year’s conference to a record number of conference participants coming directly from the island. In all, we were able to welcome more than 15 such participants, whose presence over the three days immeasurably enriched our gathering. They included Lenier González and Roberto Veiga of the *Revista Espacio Laical*, Yociel Marrero of the *Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez*, Antonio Rodiles and Alexis Jardines of *Estado de SATS*, Armando Chaguaceda of the *Universidad Veracruzana*, lawyer and activist René Gómez Manzano, independent lawyers Laritza Diversent and Veizant Boley of the *CubaLex* Legal Information Center, Karina Gálvez of the *Revista Convivencia* in Pinar del Río, José Luis Leyva Cruz of the *Universidad de Camagüey*, art historian Rosendo Romero of Baracoa, lawyer Amelia Rodríguez, independent LGBT activists Ignacio Estrada and Wendy Irepa, and recently-emigrated independent scholars Nora Gámez and Abel Sierra.

Not only did we benefit from the presence of a record number of Cuba-based participants, but this year’s conference was also enriched by a record number of submissions for the ASCE student prize: 10 graduate and 12 undergraduate students representing a wide range of universities. As a result of this, and again thanks to the generous support of the Sobel Family Foundation, we welcomed to the conference what was also likely a record number of student participants including Jared Genova of the University of Texas, Margarita Giraldo and Seth Marini of the University of Miami, Daniel Pedreira of George Mason University, Roberto Armengol of the University of Virginia (the first prize winner in the graduate student category), Roberto González of the University of North Carolina, Emily Snyder of the University of Florida (the first prize winner in the undergraduate student category), and José Luis Leyva Cruz from the Universidad de Camagüey. We hope that they will continue to attend meetings of the Association.

Ted A. Henken  
President

## IN MEMORIAM

### OSCAR ESPINOSA CHEPE (1940-2013)

It is with great sadness that we mourn the death of Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who passed away on September 23, 2013. Oscar was a long-term friend, member and contributor to ASCE; papers he authored were read at nine of the Annual Meetings of the Association and published in the *Cuba in Transition* volumes (below).

Oscar graduated from the Universidad de la Habana as an economist in 1967 and worked in a number of government agencies, including the Central Bank of Cuba. In 1968, while serving as an adviser to then-Prime Minister Fidel Castro, he was punished for questioning economic policies being implemented and reassigned to collect bat droppings in caves. From 1970 to 1984, he served as Chief of the Department in charge of Cuba's economic relations with Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and from 1984 to 1987 as Economic Adviser to the Cuban Embassy in Belgrade. In 1987 he was forbidden to return to his post in Belgrade and reassigned to the National Bank of Cuba until 1992, when he was charged with being a "counter-revolutionary" for espousing critical views on government economic policies, fired from his job and banned from holding government positions.

Soon after he started working as an independent economic journalist. In this capacity he authored scores of essays and commentaries on the Cuban economy that were for the most part smuggled out of Cuba and published in various newspapers abroad. He also participated by telephone in a radio program on economic issues on Radio Martí, broadcast out of Miami. His essays and commentaries have been published abroad in edited collections. In 2003, he published *Crónica de un Desastre* (Editorial Hispano-Cubana, Madrid); in 2007, *Cuba, Revolución o Involución* (Aduana Vieja, Valencia); and in 2011, *Cambios en Cuba: Pocos, Limitados y Tardíos*, a digital publication. He also co-wrote a chapter on the Cuban economy (in English) in a new book, *Cuba In Focus*, to be published by ABC-Clio Press that is co-edited by Ted Henken, Miriam Celaya and Dimas Castellanos.

In March 2003 Oscar was arrested with 74 others as part of the Cuban government's crackdown on peaceful dissidents (known as the "Black Spring"). Sentenced to serve twenty years, Oscar was released after twenty months on a temporary medical parole, but subjected to "house arrest." Amnesty International declared him a "prisoner of conscience."

Oscar Espinosa Chepe will be remembered as an honest, thoughtful and competent economic analyst who had the courage to express his views even in the face of persecution. ASCE is honored to have had him as a member of this organization and express our condolences to his widow, Miriam Leiva.

Joaquín P. Pujol

Oscar Espinosa Chepe's essays published in *Cuba in Transition*:

- El estado real de la economía cubana, Vol 10, 2000
- Cuba: La crisis se profundiza, Vol 12, 2002
- La crisis de la producción agropecuaria cubana: Causas y posibles soluciones, Vol 16, 2006
- Cuba: Opciones para un futuro digno, Vol 17,
- Cuba ante un futuro incierto, Vol 18, 2008
- Crisis sobre crisis: La difícil situación económica, social y política de la sociedad cubana; probabilidades de su agravamiento, Vol 19, 2009
- La economía cubana: ¿tiempos de esperanza?, Vol 20, 2010
- Situación económica, política y social de Cuba, Vol 21, 2011
- Situación de la economía cubana, Vol 22, 2012