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Professor Rose
Venezuela Photo Essay

<<< **VIVA VENEZUELA** >>>



Translation: *“Here Socialism of the 21st Century is constructed”*

Although Venezuela is a capitalist country, the ideological force driving the recent Bolivarian Revolution is socialism. The concept of living in a society with little competition is foreign to me, as I have lived in the United States my entire life. In order to understand Venezuelans’ thoughts about the socialist revolution that they are actively pursuing, I will share the thoughts and observations of students from a Mission Sucre class that I attended.

According to the Mission Sucre students, within the socialist Bolivarian Revolution, the people of Venezuela are one community. Through various missions, people are cared for collectively from before their birth until their death. Therefore, Venezuelans that were forgotten in the past now have the support of a community behind them. Under this socialist system of government, one student commented that “every one has a value” (1/11/07). The Mission Sucre class that I attended was devoted to social justice, and the adult students voiced their future goals of giving back to the community following the completion of their degree. Additionally, they stated that through socialism, in contrast to capitalism, it is important to share the little that they have.

Translation: *“If nature opposes us, we will fight against her until she obeys us.”*



These famous words spoken by Simon Bolivar can be viewed as representative of the will of Venezuelans in their social revolution. Through this photograph, I would like to share what both Charlie Hardy and Lisa Sullivan described as defining moments in Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution.

Charlie attributed a defining moment in Venezuela's social revolution to the Caracazo. On February 27, 1989, in response to rising gas prices, peasants revolted by flocking to Caracas in protest. Military intervention, called for by President Pérez, resulted in the deaths of approximately 5,000 people. The day of the Caracazo is described as "The day the people came down from the mountains," in which the poor population of Venezuela asserted their presence in the country.

Lisa described what she viewed as a turning point the people's revolution as April 14, 2002. Following the attempted coup against Chávez, it was on this day that Chávez returned to power. For Lisa, Venezuelans confirmed their presence in the country and restored their dignity by demanding Chávez's return.

One important theme that emerged from the interview with the principal of the Zaragoza School is the role of the community in the construction of the school. Goya asserted that the people's involvement in building this school, which included the work of men, women, adults and children, was crucial to its success. She declared that in deciding to build and support a school, the community chose to actively participate in their own liberation, through providing their children with an education.

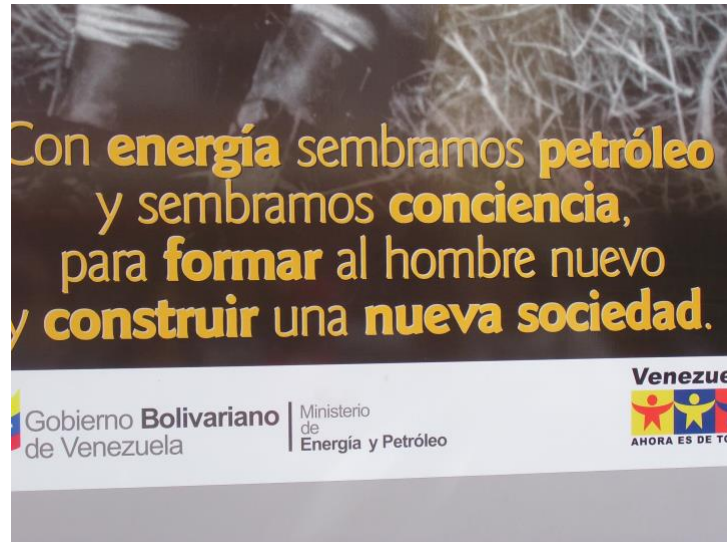


(left to right: Lindsey Hazel, Meghan Erdman, Goya, Naylalee Padilla, Alexis Henry)

A second important theme that Goya reiterated is that the Zaragoza school is NOT a product of Chávez. The Zaragoza school was constructed in 1992, six years prior to his election. However, because the Zaragoza school is governed by similar principals to that of the Bolivarian revolution, it is often used as an example for Bolivarian schools.

Translation:

“With energy we sow petroleum, and we also sow consciousness in order to form a new man and construct a new society”.



I found this advertisement displayed in the street to concisely summarize what I interpret as a principal goal of the Bolivarian Revolution. Through conserving oil and using oil wealth wisely, Venezuela is able to provide funding for social programs that are changing the lives of many Venezuelans.

In his work, Paulo Friere notes that the first step to creating a just society is for the oppressed to become conscious of their oppression through education. Not only are Bolivarian elementary and high schools being created for children in Venezuela, but educational missions are providing adults with an education. It is hoped that these educational programs, funded by petroleum revenue, will provide Venezuelans the necessary education to ultimately create a society based on equality. Through the featured advertisement, it is possible to see a representation of the Bolivarian Government's support and commitment to this process.

These are three students that participated in a discussion group that I led at La Pastora, a Bolivarian school constructed in 2003. After speaking with the students in their first and second year at La Pastora, I was overwhelmed by the students' excitement and gratitude for their education. The girl in the green jacket told me that prior to La Pastora, she did not have the opportunity to attend school. When asked the importance of receiving an education, the students' responses varied from "it provides me with a good opportunity" to "I like my teachers and learning" to "it is necessary for my future."



In speaking with a teacher at the school, Zoraida, I gained an even deeper appreciation for the education these students were receiving. She commented that for these students, education was not just about learning their eight subjects, but that it was learning how to be humans. She also reiterated the same hope for the student's future that I felt throughout my discussion with them. She stated that although the students may not become the teachers, lawyers, doctors, or veterinarians that they claimed they would like to be, the students are gaining the confidence through an education to dream. This right was previously denied to them.



Juan Jose Escalona

Following dinner at his house, Juan Jose began what turned into an hour long informal monologue. An anthropologist and also a very gifted speaker, he began to discuss both historical and current themes and problems found in Venezuela. I found his presentation particularly meaningful after studying the same themes in my Latin American Literature class. It turned out that I had even read some literature that Juan Jose referred to, like Mariátegui, who wrote about indigenous people. Juan Jose began by referencing the language barriers that prevented indigenous participation in Venezuelan society and continued to discuss the historical oppression of the poor, as well as the racism that many people suffered and continue to suffer. Additionally, he analyzed the contrast between socialism and capitalism in the context of the rich and the poor in Venezuela. In discussing this contrast, Juan Jose referred to religion. According to him, Chávez is a religious man. Juan Jose proceeded to ask us if it is more Christian-like to share the little that one has as the socialist state does, or if it is more religious to only be concerned about oneself, as is true with capitalism.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all of the people that graciously shared their time with me. From the adults and children at the schools I visited, to the drivers of our vans, their stories have not fallen on silent ears.



From the writer and our guide, Charles Hardy:

“If you are looking for heroes, talk to Simon, Ana, Jose, Pablo or Maria; these people, people you will find walking in the street or selling candy at a bodega, they are the heroes of Venezuela”.