

‘BARE FOOT DOCTORS’ MODEL’

Community Health Care System

[Following are excerpts from ‘Revolutionary Doctors : How Venezuela and Cuba are changing the World’s Conception of Health Care’ by Steve Brouwer]

‘Revolutionary Doctors’ gives readers a first-hand account of Venezuela’s innovative and inspiring programme of community health care, designed to serve-and largely carried out by-the poor themselves. Drawing on long-term participant observations as well as in-depth research, author Steve Brouwer tells the story of Venezuela’s Integral Community Medicine programme, in which doctor-teachers move into the countryside and poor urban areas to recruit and train doctors from among peasants and workers. Such programmes were first developed in Cuba, and Cuban medical personnel play a key role in Venezuela today as advisors and organisers. This internationalist model has been a great success-Cuba is a world leader in medicine and medical training-and Brouwer shows how the Venezuelans are now, with the aid of their Cuban counterparts, following suit.

But this program is not without its challenges. It has faced much hostility from traditional Venezuelan doctors as well as all the forces antagonistic to the Venezuelan and Cuban revolutions. Despite the obstacles it describes, ‘Revolutionary Doctors’ demonstrates how a society committed to the wellbeing of its poorest people can actually put that commitment into practice, by delivering essential health care through the direct empowerment of the people it aims to serve.

The Cuban medical education model, so eloquently described in this book, has not merely transformed health care in much of Central and South America. It has shown doctors and medical students who work in the unjust and dysfunctional US health care system that another world is possible.

Venezuela and Cuba clearly show that the basic human right of access to medical and health care in time of need is not dependent on the level of economic development. Venezuela and Cuba are not rich countries yet, and in spite of this, health care reaches the majority of their populations. They should be considered points of reference for poor countries that want to break with the underdevelopment of health. This book is a rigorous and balanced account of how they did it.

‘Revolutionary Doctors’ tells the story of Cuba’s extraordinary medical personnel who leave their homes and families to support radical struggles for health care abroad. And it shows how this struggle is taken up in places like Venezuela, where poor communities are organising to provide health care from the ground up. This is a story that deserves to be known. Thus observed Sujatha Fernandes, assistant professor of sociology, Queens College and CUNY

Graduate Center; author, *Who Can Stop the Drums? Urban Social Movements in Chavez's Venezuela*.

Steve Brouwer is the author of *Robbing Us Blind: The Return of the Bush Gang*; *Sharing the Pie: A Citizen's Guide to Wealth and Power in the United States*; *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism (co-authored with Susan D Rose)*; and *Conquest and Capitalism, 1492-1992*. He is also a carpenter and designer, and has organised worker-owned construction businesses and housing cooperatives. In 2007-2008, he lived in a rural village in the mountains of Venezuela and wrote about his campesino neighbours and the Bolivarian Revolution. □□□