

Reimagining Socialism

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To re-imagine and reinvent Socialism has been the Bolivarian Agenda and it is refreshing that progressives through- out the world are daring to re-conceive this debate. In Venezuela, when one speaks of 21st century socialism, it means empowering people by retaining the grassroots aspirations of anti-capitalist movements but rejecting the institutions that have failed to meet people's needs.

Solidarity is extremely relevant. It can be a practice that allows new ways to think about individuals, about society, as well as about North-South relations. This is why the Venezuelan government practices a number of non-market policies that are expressions of social solidarity, such as the discounted heating oil program for poor communities in the US, the solidarity-based trade initiative known as ALBA, and the Petrocaribe agreement, which provides low interest financing for oil.

Although there is still much to be done and done better, in Venezuela the government fosters equity of distribution and give people control over their own lives and economic circumstances. Communal councils and communal banks are key institutions for creating Socialism of the 21st century in this context. Communal councils consist of communities organized to deliberate their most pressing problems and work with local government and national officials to turn community ideas into feasible projects. Through the communal banks, which are funded by the central government, thousands of local projects that emphasize collective property and participatory economics (Socialist Enterprises, cooperatives, etc) have been financed. This model is still developing but generally gets rid of bureaucracy and corruption, eliminates top down command, improves efficiency, and gives a sense of empowerment to the whole community. By reimagining socialism Venezuelans are creating a more equitable, empathetic, and human society.

Venezuela aims to move towards an economic model that replaces the market, top-down planning, corporate decision-making, and alienating divisions of labor, in favor of participatory planning and substantive equality.

In polity Venezuela needs grassroots popular power, local assemblies, and informed active citizens, which is why there are 27,000 communal councils, on the road to 50,000 to be the infrastructure of a new type of government.

There are many "socialisms". An anti-imperialist agenda is key to start the debate on the global financial crisis and the new America. Hopefully the discussion of a better economy and society undertaken in the US will be informed by and perhaps even contribute to the efforts to build a better economy and society in Venezuela. □□□