

Significance of Prout Training for Venezuela Dada Maheshvarananda – 2003

This presentation will outline some of the social conflicts that Venezuela is now undergoing and the significance of the recent Prout training given in December 2003.

Background

In the early 1900s, the discovery of huge oil reserves in Venezuela brought some prosperity to what had previously been one of the poorest countries in Latin America. But corruption and the hoarding of wealth by the elites meant that little of this newfound wealth reached the common people.

In December 1998 Venezuelans signaled their desire for a change by electing an army colonel, Hugo Chávez, to the Presidency with the largest vote margin in 40 years. He vowed to break the system of traditional political power-sharing, alleviate poverty and end corruption. He is a charismatic populist and was re-elected for a six-year term by a comfortable margin again in 2000.

President Hugo Chavez' efforts to alleviate poverty

The President is hugely popular with the common people due to his many programs to alleviate poverty and make the society genuinely more democratic.

Democratic reforms

- Doubled investment in education and increased primary school enrollments by one million, who were previously excluded.
- Infant mortality lowered from 21 to 17 per 1,000 live births.

President Chavez has doubled investment in education at all levels. By constructing schools in poor barrios and rural areas and hiring more teachers, he has increased primary school enrollment by one million who were previously excluded. He has also initiated national programs for literacy, for primary and high school remedial courses, occupational training and a free university.

Infant mortality, which is usually considered the best indicator of overall health in a society, lowered from 21 to 17 per 1,000 live births, showing a dramatic improvement in health care facilities for the poor.

- A new progressive constitution was ratified.
- Land reform and titles awarded to self-built houses in slums.
- 30,000 cooperatives were started.

People take to the streets after the coup in April 2002

Unfortunately, President Chavez has also encountered stiff opposition from the wealthy elites and upper middle class who no longer have control over the government. The mass media attacks him daily for both real as well as imagined mistakes.

In April 2002 a coup took place by some military officers who had moral and financial support from US political foundations. Chavez was arrested and flown to a military camp, and the business leader who was appointed President announced that he was canceling the Congress, the judicial system and the constitution. Angry, the people took to the streets to defend their democracy.

Soldiers awaiting the return of Chavez on 14 April 2002

Led by General Raul Baduel, loyal soldiers rallied and were able to recapture the Miraflores Presidential Palace without a fight, surrounded by tens of thousands of pro-Chavez supporters. So, 48-hours after his arrest, President Chavez was flown back to a hero's welcome.

Ali Rodriguez, new director of the National Petroleum Company (PDVSA)

- Former head of OPEC, took charge of PDVSA when the directors went on strike to paralyze the country and overthrow the government.
- He said: "The cemeteries of the world are filled with people who thought they were indispensable!"

After the coup failed, the opposition then organized a national strike to force President Chavez to resign. It had only mixed success until the directors and supervisors of the national petroleum company of Venezuela, which brings in 70% of the government revenues, went on strike, halting all production to paralyze the country and overthrow the government.

President Chavez then called engineer Ali Rodriguez, then the head of the oil-producing countries (OPEC) in Geneva, and asked him to take charge of PDVSA. After talking with the companies workers, who insisted they could run the company without the striking managers, he fired the managers and thereby saved the country millions in unnecessary salaries and corruption. Within two months production was back to normal.

Opposition

An opposition rally against President Chavez on 27 February 2004 took place.

Leopoldo Lopez, an opposition leader and Mayor of Venezuela's wealthiest municipality (Chacao), wearing a white cap, lead demonstrators towards the perimeter set by authorities to protect foreign delegations attending the G-15 Summit. The major newspapers and television, all owned by the opposition, called the demonstration 'peaceful', and argued that demonstrators were 'provoked' by troops. One person was reported dead and more than 30 wounded. Among the wounded were several supporters of President Chavez, and National Guard officers, but the majority were opposition demonstrators were wounded by rubber bullets.

New book

In April 2003, I went to Venezuela to publish the Spanish edition of my book, 'After Capitalism: Prout's Vision for a New World'. With the preface by Noam Chomsky and the help of many contributors and supporters, this introduction to Prout reached the hands of many influential leaders, including PDVSA director Ali Rodriguez and President Chavez.

On 1 June 1 2003 on Venezuelan National TV, President Chavez recommended the book, saying: "Dada Maheshvarananda and other citizens of the world are welcome ...especially those that struggle and dream of a better world, just as it says in After Capitalism: Prout's Vision for a New World."

Prout training for PDVSA

- Proutist Universal was contracted to give 3-day training to 2 groups of supervisors in the telecommunications, planning and cooperatives departments.
- Called 'Proutist Economic Development: Constructing a New Future for Venezuela', it:
 - presented Prout principles;
 - planning tools;
 - examples of local initiatives that illustrate the principles;
 - discussion and practical exercises.

Our success was due to Prout's invisible global support network.

Because of the President's recommendation, two months later the national oil company requested Proutist Universal to give them professional training in Prout planning. They said, "We want a new direction for our country."

The second group of PDVSA participants

A second group of PDVSA employees took the training. All the written evaluations at the end of the course expressed that the training met or exceeded their expectations. The organizers were so pleased in fact, that during our last four days in the country, they drove or flew us to five different cities to give lectures on Prout.

The topics covered in the training were:

0. Significance of Prout Training in Venezuela
1. Introduction
2. Possible Futures for Venezuela
3. The Number One Problem: Poverty
4. Economics, Community and Ecology
5. People's Economy
6. Economic Self-Sufficiency
7. Decentralised Economic Planning
8. People's Economy and Eco-Design

9. Triple Bottom Line
10. Three-Tier Industry
11. Cooperatives
12. Housing Cooperatives
13. Agriculture
14. Balanced Economy
15. Different Forms of Currency
16. Trade
17. Prout's Five Fundamental Principles
18. Resource Types: Physical, Mental, Spiritual
19. Psycho-Economic Exploitation
20. Middle Class and Psycho-Economics
21. Wholistic Human Development: Neo-Humanism
22. Ethics for Personal and Social Transformation
23. Six Hats Thinking
24. Ideal Leadership
25. Meditations

Children and youth learning together in the AMURT community center in Barlovento

The PDVSA participants were especially impressed with the video presentation by Didi Ananda Sadhana (a female meditation teacher) about the AMURT Community Center Master Unit she founded and directs. This project based on Prout philosophy is located on 3 ½ hectares of land in Barlovento, 2 hours from Caracas.

The focus of the Center is to serve the impoverished rural villages of Barlovento through education, health, agriculture and cooperatives. Due to a legacy of slavery, poverty and unemployment, most of the Afro-Venezuelan villagers suffer from a dreadful inferiority complex, hopelessness and despair. The Center's programs strive to develop community solidarity, to empower the people, and to motivate, awaken and infuse positive values in the children and youth.

The AMURT Center teaches local youth how to use computers.

Volunteers at the Master Unit

The strength of this project is the dedication, initiative and hard work of the many women volunteers, who come both from overseas as well as from the surrounding communities. They have helped the mothers to form a successful sewing cooperative.

The volunteers regularly visit five local communities and organize many educational and cultural programs for the children and youth, as well as sports teams.

The girls have volleyball teams at the AMURTEL Center. The boys basketball team is inspired by Michael Jordan's letter to them.

All the youth were very inspired when world-famous basketball star Michael Jordan sent them autographed photos and an inspirational message. The Center then organized workshops for the youth of each community, explaining Jordan's teachings about the value of hard work and staying in school.

The Potential in Venezuela to implement Prout

- Because of petroleum sales, the country has money and does not need to follow the dictates of the IMF (International Monetary Fund).
- President Hugo Chavez has popular support of the majority of the people.
- The President wants to eliminate poverty and corruption, and he wants to start more cooperatives.
- The President believes in the power of spirituality.

Prout Research Institute in Venezuela

Efforts are underway to open a permanent Prout Research Institute to:

- prepare reports and recommendations for each section of society;
- publish articles and papers in progressive journals;
- give lectures about Prout;
- train others to propagate Prout.

Volunteers are needed for this Institute.

Proutist Universal must authentically communicate the spirit of total transformation that it espouses.