

Socialists of Caltech — Discussion Session: Comuna Under Construction

Tuesday Feb 23

5:00 - 6:30 pm

ZOOM: <https://caltech.zoom.us/j/87357557857>

Join us for a discussion session on collective organizing in South America. We will be watching a documentary that takes a close, day-to-day look at major efforts to build communal power in Venezuela, and shows the internal challenges organizers face, as well as their interaction with existing state institutions. Our goal will be to learn together about how communities can collectively seize and wield power over their own lives, and to use this documentary footage to reflect on our own solidarity and organizing efforts.

Comuna Under Construction (2010) [LINK TO VIDEO](#) — “In the mode of a simple listening and looking at various gatherings in the poor neighborhoods of Caracas, and also in rural areas, the film accompanies a fascinating process that has taken hold of large segments of the country: tens of thousands of *consejos comunales* (communal councils) have been founded in Venezuela in the spirit of the new constitution, which emphasizes political participation. These neighborhood gatherings focus on housing refurbishment, health care, and garbage pick-up routes, with financial support of the state, and to a great extent do so independently of the local administration. Comuna Under Construction puts forth for discussion the practice of a, by no means conflict-free, revolution that is not exhausted in the takeover of power, but rather, is defined as a complex construction process leading to the goal of self government of the citizens.”

Optional Background Materials

As mentioned above, this documentary shows the everyday efforts that build communal power in Venezuela, but it doesn't provide the historical and political context of the Bolivarian Revolution. The following materials may be helpful before watching Comuna under Construction. Keep in mind that this film is from 2010, so a lot has changed in Venezuela (e.g. Chavez died and Maduro took his place), but our goal for this discussion is not so much a detailed historical analysis as it is a discussion about organizing dynamics.

- [The War on Democracy](#) - a documentary about the imperial interventionism of the US in Latin America in the 20th century, with particular attention to the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez.
- [The Social Fabric of Chavismo](#) - article with a more pro-state perspective
- [Venezuela: ¡Comuna o Nada!](#) - article with a more anti-state perspective

Discussion Prompts

We would like to focus this discussion session on how organizing is carried out and how decisions are made communally. For many of us, this close look at active political participation and governance is very new, but in a way, similar to our own efforts to build community through our own organizing work. As you watch the documentary, maybe have a place to write down some moments you noticed and want to remember.

Intros & first impressions (<2 min each)

Historical context (5-10 min)

Guiding Questions & Open discussion

Here are some guiding questions:

- What moments surprised us, inspired us, frustrated us, or stuck with us?
- What are the biggest challenges the communities face?
- How are meetings run in these comunas?
- What is the relationship between state representatives, lead organizers, and other community members?
- What are some differences between the various comunas we get to know in the film?
- What similarities or differences do we notice when comparing comunas to our own organizing efforts in Caltech, Pasadena, LA, and the U.S.? What can we learn from seeing the comunas in action?

Featured Communes

- Emiliano Hernandez - Communal Council
 - Commune
- Barinas - rural communal council
- Antonio Jose de Sucre
- Maca - tension with the government guy
- Cooperatives