

Inside Film  
Presents

A Kino Dee Production

**Listen  
To  
Venezuela**

A film by  
Mike Wayne & Deirdre O'Neill

## About The Filmmakers

Deirdre O'Neill has been teaching film studies for more than 15 years. For the last few years she has worked in the prison education sector in the UK. She currently runs Inside Film, an organisation set up with the aim of providing prisoners with the kind of education (critical, creative, theoretical and practical) that they would not normally have access to.

Mike Wayne is a Professor of film studies at Brunel University (UK). He has published widely on radical film traditions and documentary. He is the convenor of an MA in Documentary at Brunel and also works on the Inside Film project.

*Listen To Venezuela* is the first film that Deirdre O'Neill and Mike Wayne have made.

## Statement from the Filmmakers.

We arrived in Venezuela with our 9 year old son, Jake, on February 14th, 2008. Thanks to a Leverhulme Trust award, we were in a position to stay for nearly a year in Venezuela and immerse ourselves in the complex and exciting process of a country undergoing a vast practical experiment in radical social change. We taught film theory and practice in a variety of places, including a school, in the barrios, at the Miranda Centre for Information, at an independent documentary film school and at the Bolivarian University in Caracas.



Our initial plans to make a short documentary about the grassroots media scene that has flourished in recent years quickly transformed into a more ambitious project: to make a feature length documentary that did justice to the collective and complex reality of a country in revolution.

The film is called *Listen To Venezuela* because what has been happening in Venezuela has been either ignored or distorted by the western corporate media, which has

been obsessed with the figure of the Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez. What it has failed to do is engage with and analyse the many practical experiments in institutional reform across many sectors, such as the media, the economy, politics, education, community power and healthcare. The attempts in Venezuela

to build a participatory democracy have been denounced as old style populism and patronage on behalf of the Chávez government. This view of top-down hand-outs buying off the wider population completely misrepresents a process in which millions of ordinary people are demanding change, fighting for change, and have become incredibly politicised and involved in creating a 'socialism for the twenty-first century'.

Now is a really apposite time to be looking at and listening to Venezuela, when the neo-liberal model of capitalism is suffering a major worldwide economic crisis, and in many countries is suffering a huge political crisis as representative democracy has been hollowed out by global capital and its institutions.



While the governments of the west are completely in thrall to the power of big business, the Venezuelan government has prioritised the people of Venezuela and rejected a capitalist model that has increased inequality and social exclusion. It is for this reason that the western corporate media has been so hostile and dismissive of what has been happening in Venezuela. For Venezuela demonstrates that there is at least the possibility of another model, a possibility which has been systematically denied by governing elites and their ideologues since the 1980s. Most western journalists have slavishly followed US foreign policy perspectives on Venezuela since the election of Chávez in 1998. Combined with this pragmatic acquiescence to power, many western journalists come from upper middle class backgrounds that naturally orientate their sympathies towards the Venezuelan oligarchy. On top of that they appear to

approach the initiatives in Venezuela with a neo-colonial mind-set which cannot believe that a people in a developing country have achieved anything novel that we in the west could learn from.

We hope that our film will introduce viewers to an exciting experiment in popular participation and power that will resonate with them despite their very different historical and social contexts. In our film they will hear and see the aspirations and dreams of ordinary Venezuelans rather than the middle class and the elites whose perspectives shape so much international perception of that country.

## **Film Synopsis.**

*Listen To Venezuela*, a feature length documentary (127 minutes) is an attempt to represent a complex and collective process of revolution. To this end the film departs from some of the more conventional approaches within documentary. *Listen To Venezuela* is not a character focused documentary, but instead concentrates on the collective protagonist driving the revolution forward. The film avoids using a series of official experts pronouncing on the situation in Venezuela. Most of the voices heard in the film come from the real experts, Venezuelan people living the revolution on a daily basis. *Listen To Venezuela* is *critically aligned* with the revolution. Unlike more conventional documentaries *Listen To Venezuela* does not attempt to understand the revolution by 'balancing' between advocates of the revolutionary process and those (who dominate the private media in Venezuela and outside it) who seek a restoration of a government dedicated to capitalism. Instead the film tries to immerse itself in the contradictions and conflicts that are inevitable in a process of social change.

Rather than trying to tell a linear story, the film has a collage structure organised around a series of 11 chapters, each dealing with a different aspect of the Venezuelan revolution. The film opens with a Prelude where we hear the voices that most often dominate the international media perception of Venezuela, the Venezuelan middle class. They complain about the Chávez government in a tired language full of outdated Cold War cliches and stereotypes. Then, in the chapter on Oil, the film begins to sketch out the economic and political backdrop against which Chávez came to power in 1998. Subsequent chapters deal with politics, community power, the role of the workers, the development of an alternative grassroots media, the important question of cultural struggle in the battle to change ingrained habits and perceptions, popular memory vs amnesia, the extension and transformation of education and the important arena of electoral struggles. The final chapter, Prelude II avoids a conclusion, as the revolution is still an open ended process.

*Listen To Venezuela* has been inspired by many radical documentary traditions. These include the social democratic work of Humphrey Jennings who explored the cultural fabric of Britain in such films as *Spare Time* (1939) and *Listen To Britain* (1942) to the revolutionary traditions of the Soviet filmmakers, Sergéi Eisenstein and Dziga Vértov. But perhaps the strongest influence comes from the tradition of radical documentary filmmaking that emerged in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, exemplified by the work of Santiago Álvarez and Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, who made the groundbreaking film *Hour of The Furnaces* (1968).

*Listen To Venezuela* was filmed in various places across the country, including Caracas, Puerto La Cruz, Carora, Coro, Mérida, Barquisimeto and Bocha de Uchire.

## Equipment

The film was shot with a Panasonic camcorder (NV GS230) on mini DV. The camera was fitted with an external Sennheiser microphone. This small portable camera for the consumer market, had a number of advantages over larger more professional camera equipment. It meant that shooting could be set up quickly to



record events or images that we found as we traveled around.

The small scale equipment was also ideal in a potentially risky environment, such as parts of Caracas where street crime is high. Because we travelled around by public transport, the equipment could be easily stored in back-packs. Finally a small palm held camera that is familiar to a lot of people, does not signify 'professional filmmaker'. Therefore people were more likely to feel comfortable being filmed and interviewed.

The film was edited on a MacBook Pro using Final Cut Pro software.

40 hours of film was shot over an 11 month period.

## **Film Credits**

Directors: Deirdre O'Neill & Mike Wayne

Editors: Deirdre O'Neill & Mike Wayne

Camera: Deirdre O'Neill & Mike Wayne

Narrator: Angie Northwood

Original Music: Roberto Sainz de la Maza

Translator: Franco Munini

Illustrations: Iván Lira & Peter Keighron

'The Oligarch's Poem': Written by Ronnie McGrath & Performed by Roberto Sainz de la Maza

## **Contact Details**

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