



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 11, 2017

Wondering Where the Money Went, Venezuelans Start Rationing Toothpaste

Want to know how bad things are in socialist Venezuela? According to the [Washington Post](#), the economic situation has become so dire that people are rationing toothpaste — and, worse, finding solace in *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*.

After 18 years of rule by Marxist presidents Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela is on the verge of starvation and disintegration. The country's enormous, petroleum-funded welfare state began unraveling even before oil prices plummeted, and now it is teetering on the brink of collapse, the economy having contracted by 24.5 percent over the last three years.



Rather than admit failure and liberate the economy, the government tried printing its way out of the situation — Venezuela currently suffers from a 700-percent annual inflation rate — and then imposing price controls to mask the inevitable results. This, naturally, produced shortages of all controlled products such that “those items can usually be obtained only by standing in lines for hours or by signing up to receive a subsidized monthly grocery box from the government with enough to feed a family of five for about a week,” reported the *Post*.

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Even if one has all day to queue up for food, he may not have the money to buy it despite the price controls. The current minimum wage — Maduro just hiked it for the 16th time in four years — amounts to about \$33 a month, about a fourth of that of poverty-stricken Haiti; 32 percent of Venezuela's workforce earns minimum wage.

Under such circumstances, poverty is growing rapidly. “Since 2014,” noted the *Post*, “the proportion of Venezuelan families in poverty has soared from 48 percent to 82 percent, according to a study published this year by the country's leading universities. Fifty-two percent of families live in extreme poverty, according to the survey, and about 31 percent survive on two meals per day at most.”

Families are spending all their meager earnings just to eat, and even then, it's not enough.

Thirty-year-old slum resident Rainer Figueroa, who works at a diaper factory that no longer produces diapers, told the *Post* he has lost 24 pounds in the past six months and has quit playing soccer. “I can't afford to burn calories or wear out my sneakers,” he said.

His neighbor, cosmetics-factory worker Ana Margarita Rangel, says she's had to cut back on brushing her teeth because a tube of toothpaste sets her back half a week's wages. “I've always loved brushing my teeth before going to sleep. I mean, that's the rule, right?” she said. “Now I have to choose. So I



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only do it in the mornings.”

Rangel’s household, which consists of herself and her three adult sons, rarely has food despite their combined incomes. According to the *Post*:

The family has eliminated beef, chicken, salad and fruit from its diet. Instead, Rangel and her sons eat rice, beans, yucca, plantains, sardines and sometimes eggs. “We used to be able to have juice with our meals,” Rangel said. “I miss it so much.”

“And chocolate! We can’t even afford to buy a little cup of coffee on our way to work,” she said.

Such woes have led to massive protests against the Maduro regime in recent months, during which at least 75 people have died. The regime has responded to even peaceful opposition with a [show of force](#), banning an opposition leader from public office and nearly dissolving the opposition-controlled legislature. Even now, the country, at Maduro’s request, is considering drafting a new constitution that would, as *The New American* [reported](#) in March, “essentially make him dictator for life.” Should the new constitution be approved, it will surely spark even more uprisings.

Meanwhile, for the common folks, the situation will continue to deteriorate. Rangel told the *Post* she avoids meeting with her friends because they “always end up talking about all those things we can’t get anymore.” The one ray of hope in her day, it seems, is watching the Kardashians on television because, she explained, “you see how people that have everything live,” and that briefly helps “you forget what your life is like.” Perhaps, too, it serves as a reminder that no matter how much money one has, happiness and familial harmony are not guaranteed.

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