

From Eduardo Galeano's *The Open Veins of Latin America*, 1971

Latin America is a region of open veins. Everything, from the discovery until our own times, has always been transmuted into European – or later United States- capital, and as such has accumulated in distant centers of power. Everything: the soil its fruits and its mineral rich depths, the people and their capacity to work and to consume, natural resources and human resources. Production methods and class structure have been successively determined from the outside for each area by meshing it into the universal gearbox of capitalism. . .

For those who see history as competition, Latin America's backwardness and poverty are merely the result of its failure. We lost; others won. But the winners happen to have won thanks to our losing. The history of Latin America's underdevelopment is, as someone has said, an integral part of world capitalism's development. *Our defeat was always implicit in the victory of others; our wealth has always generated our poverty by nursing the prosperity of others – the empires and their native overseers. In the colonial and neocolonial alchemy, gold changes into scrap metal and food into poison* Potosi, Zacatecas, and Ouro Preto became desolate warrens of deep, empty tunnels from which the precious metals had been taken; ruin was the fate of Chile's nitrate Pampas and of Amazonia's rubber forests. Northeast Brazil's sugar and Argentina's *quebracho* belts, and the communities around oil rich Lake Maricaibo, have become painfully aware of the mortality which nature bestows and imperialism appropriates. The rain that irrigates the centers of imperialist power drowns the vast suburbs of the system. In the same way, and symmetrically, the well being of our dominating classes – dominating inwardly, dominated from the outside – is the curse of our multitudes condemned to exist as beasts of burden. . .

According to the United Nations, the amount shared by 6 million Latin Americans at the top of the social pyramid is the same as the amount shared by 140 million at the bottom. There are 60 million campesinos whose fortune amounts to \$.25 a day. At the other extreme, the pimps of misery accumulate \$5 billion in their private Swiss or US bank accounts. Adding insult to injury, they squander in sterile ostentation and luxury, and in unproductive investments constituting no less than half the total investment, the capital that Latin America could devote to the replacement, extension and generation of job creating means of production. Harnessed as they have always been to the constellation of imperialist power, our ruling classes have no interest whatsoever in determining whether patriotism might not prove more profitable than treason, and whether begging is really the only formula for international politics. Sovereignty is mortgaged because "there's no other way." The oligarchies' cynical alibis confuse the impotence of a social class with the presumed empty destinies of their countries. . .

For its foreign masters and for our commission agent bourgeoisie, who have sold their souls to the devil at a price that would have shamed Faust, the system is perfectly rational; but for no one else, since the more it develops, the greater its disequilibrium, its tensions its contradictions. Even industrialization – coming late and in dependent form, and comfortable coexisting with the latifundia and the structures of inequality – helps to spread unemployment rather than to relieve it; poverty is extended, wealth concentrated in the area where an ever multiplying army of idle hands is available. New factories are built in the privileged poles of development – Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Mexico City – but less and less labor is needed.