

ON EDUARDO GALEANO

Recently, the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano stated that he could not re-read his book, “The Open Veins of Latin American,” because of its worn-out rhetoric and absence of a well-informed economic analysis. He did not seem to regret having written the book, but he said that its moment had passed. These statements have provoked a flurry of reactions, especially among the Latin American Left.

Before a wall of silence descends over this topic, which is what usually happens in these situations, I would like to applaud the honesty and maturity shown by Eduardo Galeano. It’s worth clarifying to those who were offended by his statement that he has not renounced his position on the Left, nor has he sought refuge in the political arguments of the right. He limited himself to acknowledging one of the issues the many of us who sympathize with the human themes of the Left have observed for decades, usually without discussing it publicly, perhaps to avoid giving the appearance of supporting the positions of Imperialism and the Right, thus strengthening them with our self-criticism.

The doctrinaire Latin American left has not been able to transcend the discredited discourse of the barricades, the idea of unconditional support, the persistence in outdated ways of thinking, the inability to objectively criticize the errors and contradictions of leaders and candidates and calls for popular revolution. The result of this inertia is paralysis of the fair argument of the Left. This has brought us official acceptance of lies and contradictions, indifference to flagrant violations of the ideal of social justice, and intellectual resignation to the idea that ideology is all-important and justifies broad disregard of the reasoning behind any argument that goes against dogma, even if it is to contribute to improve social conditions.

“The Open Veins of Latin America” still correctly identifies the genesis of many of the economic and political problems we experience in the Americas today. Galeano’s admission does not undermine the majority of the correct observations in his book. Nor does his honesty give general validation to the ideas of the right, nor does it “forfeit” victory to the imperialistic argument. Even so, it does not surprise me that the spokespeople of the dogmatic left - I could never understand how they could explain Marx’s dialectic - have now taken up their traditional hemming and hawing, this time targeting Galeano.

Let’s not forget the terrible political debacle suffered by international communism. Even in the “workers’ paradise” of Russia, the working masses did absolutely nothing to avoid or defend against its complete collapse. The historic fact that Marxist-Leninism did not gain

sufficient popular support to avoid disappearing entirely is something extraordinary and worthy of discussion at the most serious levels on the left. Forgive me if I am wrong, but the only writer who I remember having mentioned this fact is the Mexican Jorge Casteñeda, in his book, “Utopia Unarmed.”

Many intellectuals from the traditional (*criollo*) Left have remained attached to an indefensible dogma, still hanging on to rituals like the cult of Fidel, still speaking within the confines of pure 1960s rhetoric, as if no time had passed and as if they had learned nothing from what has happened since then. Despite the contradictions between their discourse and the reality of the times, they remain committed to blaming all the ills of the world on Imperialism, capitalism, and the right, without accepting that some of the responsibility lies with human beings, including those who support their own ideas.

By publicly exposing his doubts, Galeano’s revelations show the lie that this group of the Latin American left insists on living. His self-criticism stupefies, confuses, and enrages them, even making them suspect that they have been betrayed. They can only accept what they can make out through the dogmatic-ideological fog that surrounds them. Outside of it, nothing is real. Therefore pronouncements like Galeano’s, which only show historical errors, are either buried under a deep silence, or resolved by being ignored.

Venezuela nourishes the United States with the oil that permits it to keep the pace of its “imperialist” action. In Nicaragua, Ortega allies himself with what he once denounced as the corrupt political power to change the constitution and win re-election. In Cuba, one of the most educated populations in the Americas is not allowed to exercise the free expression of their critical thinking.

Our world is much more complex and diverse than that which initially justified the ideas of Marx and Engels. The Left should recognize the necessity of evolving into an improved and consolidated, modern and inclusive option to intelligently confront the siren songs of the right and its most extreme and inhumane forms, such as xenophobic and/or neo-fascist groups that are gaining more and more popularity on the global political and social scene, among other reasons, because of the weakening of Socialist ideology.

Galeano’s self-criticism doesn’t mean he has accepted the Right and their anti-popular, anti-solidarity, eminently materialistic arguments. His self-criticism does not mean that he has embraced Fascism as Stalin embraced Hitler in 1940 to obtain half of Poland, which the majority of the Left did not even criticize him for at the time. Galeano has not renounced the content of the social justice argument, the vital foundation of the Left. His self-criticism

is a sign of maturity.

I believe the correct way to convince the majority of the world of the benefit of true socialism is to base one's actions and thoughts on human beings and in their physical and spiritual potential, rather than shrouding this potential in immutable and absolute dogma, abandoned by its own authors, which permits and justifies slavery of the soul and mind in favor of an abstraction, unreachable as it is inhumane. Socialism should transcend political theory that offers material opportunities, which have not necessarily been earned, in exchange for the absolute subordination to a theory, which demands the death of common sense and acceptance of unreality. Otherwise, the Left risks losing political relevance, as Marxist-Leninism did by its own self-inflicted wounds.

Hopefully Eduardo Galeano's comments will stimulate an honest discussion that will enable critical and objective examination of the current state of the Left in Latin America, and of its future in the realm of public policy. Hopefully the debate will open the door to international discussion, which could sustain and help to improve, without tricks or lies, the foundations of our genuine social concerns. May the emotions on both sides of Galeano's comments be transformed into a synthesis of common will, generating proposals that will be sustainable in their practice, and that will contribute to the successful development of ideas capable of producing a more just and decent society.

A world that would not require heroes, where each individual would contribute according to his or her abilities, to the defense and growth of a universal spirit which represents us all.

I join those who congratulate Eduardo Galeano for his honesty.

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