

Antonio Sas

World Civilization II

Professor David Turk

Spring 2023

### 15.3: Compendium and Description of the West Indies

1. What are the conditions of labor for the workers in the mercury and silver mines according to Espinosa? Why are there abuses? Whose interests do the operations of the mines serve?

According to Espinoza, there were no safety precautions and absolute forced labor, which made for appalling working conditions for the employees. Even though they first worked to extract mercury and silver, they eventually ran across diseases that at the time were incurable, posing a serious risk to the employees. High levels of mercury exposure and numerous accidents also occurred around them. Additionally, it is said that workers had to exercise caution when transferring material in flasks because they contained mercury and there was a risk of poisoning. It is also mentioned that because there were so many Indians living there, the Spaniards frequently mistreated them and tried to extort them. The Spaniards, who had a large deal of riches and increased production at a very low cost, were the ones who gained the most from this, it is important to note.

2. Do the operations of the Potosi Mine represent hierarchies working for the network interests, networks working for hierarchy interests, or some combination of both? Explain. Would the Tlaxcalan cabildo or Zhang Han approve of the operations?

The operations of the Potosi Mine, which was one of the largest and most productive silver mines in the Spanish Empire, likely represent a combination of hierarchies working for network

interests and networks working for hierarchy interests. The Spanish crown and the wealthy mine owners were part of a hierarchical power structure that sought to exploit the resources of the colony for their own gain. At the same time, they were part of a network of colonial interests that included merchants, ship owners, and other powerful individuals who were all seeking to profit from the wealth generated by the mine.

It is unlikely that the Tlaxcalan cabildo or Zhang Han, who were both indigenous communities in colonial Latin America and China respectively, would have approved of the operations of the Potosi Mine. The harsh treatment of the indigenous workers and the exploitation of their labor and resources would have been seen as unjust and oppressive by these communities, who were often subjected to similar forms of exploitation and violence under colonial rule.