
Exploitation And Its Effects In "The Jungle"

"Under capitalism, man exploits man", John Kenneth Galbraith. In "The Jungle" by Upton Sinclair he shows the struggles of being exploited by the ruthless system of capitalism. The main character Jurgis and his family suffer when they move to Chicago from Lithuania, and they get exploited for cheap labor. Exploitation is part of a cruel system where wealthy people take advantage of others and use it to their benefit. In "The Jungle" poor immigrants' American dream is crushed at every turn; in their employment, when they sign contracts and by those who provide services.

Jurgis a Lithuanian man who moves to America with his family, and the woman he wants to marry, with her family. Besides they had nothing left in Lithuania, so they thought why not take a chance at a better life in America. They move to America because they believed in the "American Dream", and if they moved to America they would be able to become rich and earn enough for him and Ona to get married. "It was Jonas who suggested that they all go to America, where a friend of his had gotten rich" (13). They were influenced into the idea by a family friend named Jokubas who apparently moved to America and got rich owning a delicatessen store. However, they later find out that he is actually struggling to maintain his business. "Jokubas Szedvilas had just mortgaged his delicatessen store for two hundred dollars to meet several months' overdue rent" (9). So they were brought to America through false hope. When they arrive they are met with several obstacles that show them it was not as easy as they thought. "They had a hard time on the passage; there was an agent who helped them, but he proved a scoundrel," (13). Nevertheless, they try to persevere through the hardships, especially Jurgis who seems to be very naïve, and believes that he can take care of everyone around him. "Little one," he said, in a low voice, "do not worry—it will not matter to us. We will pay them all somehow. I will work harder." (10)

Immigrants come from all over the world, and move to other countries for a better life than the one they have. In the book Jurgis and his family move to America from Lithuania. They move because they heard that "a friend of his had gotten rich" (13), so they thought why not move there to earn their own "American dream". However, when they get there from their first day they are met with difficulties. When they find jobs at the meat packing industry they encounter how immigrants are exploited in America. It also appears that whenever there is a large immigration from a certain country the big industries employ them for cheaper wages than the workers before them. For example, how before the Lithuanians had come there were the Polish, and before that they employed Germans. The immigrants are exploited for cheap labor by having them working long hours and then paying them a very low wage. Also the fact that Jurgis is unfamiliar with the English language and American culture therefore he is exploited by others like his employer and when they bought the house. When they begin working they have high hopes that they will make a living and enjoy their jobs. However, Jurgis starts to criticize others for being weak and then he gets hurt and becomes weaker he does not realize that he is just like everyone else. "But there was no work for him." "In the beginning he had been fresh and strong, and he had gotten a job the first day; but now he was second-hand, a damaged article," (72). Which takes a blow on his ego and makes him bitter and isolated from his family. "As Jurgis lay on his bed, hour after hour there came to him emotions that he had never known before" "It might be true, then, after all, what others had told him about life, that the best powers

of a man might not be equal to it!" (68). This shows that the effects of capitalism have a huge impact on a person's grit and perseverance, and that it can break even the strongest people who would do anything to make sure their families are safe and healthy.

In this system they are exploited and have no job security. If they are sick or even if they are a few minutes late it might cost them their day's salary or even their job. "If one of them be a minute late, he will be docked an hour's pay," (11) Even if they thought of leaving their jobs the owners or supervisors would abuse their power and make sure that they have a hard time getting a job elsewhere. The people with higher authority often use their power to exploit the worker. Seeing as Ona was very desperate to keep her job and provide for her family she was willing to be exploited by those above her. Which shows the true power that is given to people in the corrupt system of capitalism, and how the abuse of power can result in affecting people's lives greatly. Even though it might come down to survival of the fittest, Sinclair shows that even the fittest can be broken down, and the idea that they can make it is a false hope advertised by capitalism. If they ever become sick, get hurt, or even die and it is caused directly from the company the corrupt system allows the company to get the best lawyer and demolish any allegations against the company. "To this there was no exception, save when the accident was one for which the firm was liable; in that case they would send a slippery lawyer to see him, first to try to get him to sign away his claims, but if he was too smart for that, to promise him that he and his should always be provided with work." (73)

Jurgis and his family are not only exploited in the work environment but everywhere else. Such as when they are purchasing the house, and the realtor uses the advantage of them not being educated enough to read the contract to the house. "They were poor people, and this was all they had in the world, and if there was anything wrong they would be ruined" (29). Even when Jurgis becomes furious and demands to go see a lawyer who can review the contract, the lawyer assures them that it is a standard contract and that they have nothing to worry about. "The lawyer read over the deed, and when he had read it he informed Szedvilas that it was all perfectly regular, that the deed was a blank deed such as was often used in these sales" (29). Yet when they move into the house their neighbor tells them that they were tricked into it like the owners before them, and that the realtors use the fact that immigrants can not understand contracts, and do not know the concept of interest. "Then they stared at her. 'Interest!' they cried" (41). Many of the services take advantage of the family's unfamiliarity of the new environment they are in. Even in the time where the family is trying to celebrate Jurgis and Ona's wedding they are manipulated by the saloon keeper, bartender, and by their own guests. The bartender gives people as many drinks as he could so that the bride and groom have to pay him more. "Still others, worse yet, would crowd about the bar, and at the expense of the host drink themselves sodden," (3). Their guests also take advantage of the free food, drinks and a good time and they do not pay the fine of coming so that they can help the bride and groom with their new life together. "They would come in crowds and fill themselves with a fine dinner, and then sneak off." (3). The saloon keeper uses their need to enjoy their night to his advantage by charging them a high sum even though he might know that it is hard for them to afford the costs of the veselija, the traditional Lithuanian wedding feast. "The saloon-keeper stood in with all the big politics men in the district; and when you had once found out what it meant to get into trouble with such people, you would know enough to pay what you were told to pay and shut up." (3). Furthermore, the family has to deal with it and pay all of it because they do not have any other choice.

Upton Sinclair portrays the hardships of being a foreigner in a new country and how easily it is

for a person to be exploited if they do not know what they are getting themselves into. The author helps the reader discover a new environment alongside the characters as they learn the ways of capitalism and how even if they work their hardest it would never be enough because of how the system is structured for the rich to become more wealthy and the poor to become more poor. Also “The Jungle” is symbolic for a real life jungle where the predators, which in this case are the wealthy and the people with authority, will always have an advantage over the prey, which are the poor, the immigrants, and women. Furthermore, considering Sinclair’s socialist beliefs he puts forth a strong argument on why the capitalist government is corrupt and dishonest.