The Jungle As An Argument For Socialism

In Upton Sinclair's “The Jungle’, the author uses Karl Marx’s theory of the proletarians being exploited by the capitalist bourgeoisie, and brings it to life using the character of Jurgis Rudkus and his family. The naive immigrants from Lithuania come to Chicago chasing the American dream that is sold to many others like them. Sinclair uses the book as a way to expose the dirty corrupt politics that a hard-working American in a capitalist economy has to go through in the early 1900’s. This book provides a persuasive argument for socialism because of the connections between the metaphorical ‘jungle’ of Chicago’s meatpacking industry and the constructs in the real world. Sinclair also takes a deep-dive into the oppressive nature of those motivated by laissez-faire capitalism and the idea of letting things take their own course. The differences in capitalism and its principles when compared to socialism in the book help further develop “The Jungle” as a persuasive argument towards the use of socialism.

Sinclair paints Chicago’s meatpacking industry with horrid colours of oppression throughout the story, he does this by using the metaphor of a ‘jungle’ and comparing it to Packingtown where the prey is the proletariat (working class) and the predators are the bourgeoisie (employers) in this capitalist economy. The author uses this metaphor to show that capitalism encourages ones ‘primitive instincts’.“-he [Jurgis] lived like a dumb beast of burden, knowing only the moment in which he was.” This is an excellent metaphor used by the author to emphasize the struggle immigrants like Jurgis and many other working class Americans go through when the demands for a job are very high and workers almost have to bid to get a job. But instead of the idea of ‘highest bid wins’ it is actually quite the opposite and the lowest price for which a worker is willing to work is considered the winner. The author portrays proletariats as helpless and vulnerable because having a job in a capitalist economy is essential and the heavy sway of greed push the capitalist bourgeoisie to make more money at the expense of underpaid and overworked employees. Here is where the author also talks about Darwin’s theory of the survival. Darwin believed in the theory of ‘natural selection’ and deemed necessary the idea of ‘survival of Upton Sinclair, The jungle (New York: Penguin Books, 1985) 1871 the fittest’. Sinclair relates this to capitalism by showing the reader the cruel environment that the working class have to live and work in.

Sinclair uses the character of Jurgis to show the reader the coinciding parts of a capitalist economy in the early 1900’s. The author also uses his character to show how a young boy eager to take a shortcut, in order tolive the life he fantasized about bought into the idea of the’American Dream’ sold by capitalism, only to find out that it was too good to be true.

In that country, rich or poor, a man was free, it was said; he did not have to go into the army, he did not have to pay out his money to rascally officials—he might do as he pleased, and count himself as good as any other man. So America was a place of which lovers and young people dreamed. If one could only manage to get the price of a passage, he could count his troubles at an end.

As the reader progresses into the story there is a harsh light that is shone on the disturbing laissez-faire capitalism that is going on in Packingtown. The idea of ‘the grass being greener on the other side’ is taken to a bit of an extreme when the bourgeoisie decide to sell the

proletariats who are otherwise unhappy in their respective countries on the “American dream” almost like a bribe but these dreams are often shattered once immigrants find out the truth.“They were like rats in a trap, that was the truth; and more of them were piling in every day” Once the working class sees that the ‘Land of opportunities’ is actually a scam the proletariats see how they are really just working harder and harder each day for the same bits and pieces and still not getting enough.“This was in truth not living; it was scarcely even existing, and they felt that it was too little for the price they paid. They were willing to work all the time; and when people did their best, ought they not to be able to keep alive?” This quote explains how hard it felt for Jurgis and his family to leave everything behind to find a brighter future but being unable to grasp it even though it was within arm’s reach for them. Ona is shown as very hard working and is married to Jurgis and even though she constantly works towards doing a better job she was raped by her boss. This is not to say that capitalism made him do it but, capitalism had given the factory owners so much power because of their laissez-faire tactics that it was something that happened because of lack of freedom for the proletariate.

Sinclair uses the book to guide the reader into looking into the principles of socialism as the answer to fix the ongoing problems that have been caused by capitalism in the story. This can be shown through Jurgis’s work. In a capitalist economy the workers provide the necessary means for the bourgeoisie to take advantage. This is made possible because capitalism promotes competition, ‘if you work hard enough you can become rich’, competitive cost of items, competitive wages for workers, competitive rates of profit. That was “competition,” so far as it concerned the wage-earner, the man who had only his labor to sell; to those on top, the exploiters, it appeared very differently, of course—there were few of them, and they could combine and dominate, and their power would be unbreakable. And so all over the world two classes were forming, with an unbridged chasm between them, —the capitalist class, with its enormous fortunes, and the proletariat, bound into slavery by unseen chains. The latter were a thousand to one in numbers, but they were ignorant and helpless, and they would remain at the mercy of their exploiters until they were organized—until they had become “class-conscious.

Socialism takes on a different approach and promotes co-operation instead. Socialism would give an equal platform for all those involved and help out the working class by giving them the freedom and voice they desperately need and deserve.

Through the use of connections between the metaphorical “jungle” and the constructs in the real world, as well as laissez-faire capitalism in regards to letting things run its course and lastly through differences in capitalism and its principles when compared to socialism, I believe proves that the book “The Jungle” by Upton Sinclair is a persuasive argument for socialism.

Bibliography

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