The Jungle: Capitalism Versus Socialism

The Jungle, written by Upton Sinclair, displays to every reader the lurid reality of the meat packing industry in the twentieth century and investigates America's capitalist system. In order to do so, accordingly, Sinclair researched and wrote about the meat packing plants' in Chicago for over a year. The first-hand experience he received allowed him to see the dire straits the overworked and underpaid "slaves" were in. Upton Sinclair's novel impacted many lives and changed the meat packing industries ways and works, by telling a story about a married couple living in this disorder. Upton uses his novel to persuade his readers to his views on socialism and capitalism. He said, "capitalism is immoral" and "socialism is the only solution to capitalism." Throughout his novel, he demonstrates the horrors of capitalism and continuously backs his view up with facts and proved himself to be a socialist hero.

In the famous novel, the main characters are Jurgis Rudkus and his wife Ona Lukosazaite, who are both Lithuanian. Soon after moving to America, they were taken to Packingtown, a section in Chicago where the meat packing industry was the focus, in hopes to find jobs. Jurgis and Ona discover the truth behind everything in Packingtown. The workers were treated more like slaves than employees, working long days, losing limbs, getting infections and diseases, and getting diseased meat at an affordable price. The employees had no other choice than to stick around in these harsh conditions due to the decrease of jobs and the increase in prices. Sinclair's infamous novel brought light to the situation and was one of the steps behind organizations like the USDA and OSHA. The conditions of the workers obviously changed drastically. In today's time, workers must wear steel toed shoes, cut resistant aprons that are given to everyone, hard hats, knives with safety features, cut resistant gloves, and they are all taught how to reduce stress on their wrist, hands, legs, and back.

The cattle had been fed on "whiskey-malt," which made the animal's skin break out into boils like chicken pox. "It was a nasty job killing these, for when you plunged your knife into them, they would burst and splash foul-smelling stuff into your face." At the time, they had a law that restricted the distribution of diseased meat out of state. The diseased meat was sold to employees at a reduced price. Considering the employees made dirt money, they had to take the deal or starve. After a month of this novel being on the shelves in stores, the White House started receiving "100 letters a day demanding a Federal cleanup of the meat industry." And that's exactly what President Theodore Roosevelt did. On June 30, 1906, Roosevelt signed the Meat Inspection Act of 1906. This required a member of the USDA (United Stated Department of Agriculture) to inspect any and all meat before and after being slaughtered and consumed by humans. Roosevelt also singed the Pure Food and Drug Act, this regulated food and drugs moving in interstate commerce and rejected the manufacture, sale, and transportation of poisonous patent medicines. Upton Sinclair's novel brought so much more under the spotlight. The novel explains throughout the story of the couple that capitalism allowed harsh and unjust actions. Capitalism created a world wind of gender inequality, especially in places of work. Women in the twentieth century struggled more than ever to find a job that payed enough to afford their needs. Due to the lack of employment, women turned to prostitution and petty crimes. In The Jungle, one of the characters, Marija, had a harder time in a capitalist country, like Chicago, because hiring women did not help capitalism. In The Jungle, Upton strongly portrays his strong disbeliefs on capitalism in the twentieth century. Sinclair believed that

capitalism violated America’s essential morals and values; it also allowed many unjust actions.

Although capitalism did not have a place in Sinclair’s heart, socialism was a different story in his eyes. Sinclair believed that socialism was the one and only thing that could eliminate capitalism and all the horrors that followed it. Ostrinski described the increase in competition, “The workers were dependent upon a job to exist from day to day, and so they began to bid against each other.” Socialism wiped out competition between people for survival. Another reason socialism was better in Sinclair’s eyes was the fact it decreased the gender inequality. Women were encouraged to do more and learn more in a socialist country rather than a capitalist country. The novel also illustrates that socialism promotes a more equal and fair justice system. This was shown when Jurgis went on trial, the judge didn’t listen to Jurgis’ defense because he was poor and didn’t have any money, he chose to listen to Conor because he had more money and more power than Jurgis ever thought about having. Conor had an easy time persuading the judge against Jurgis and he was sent to jail. In a capitalist country the capitalists had the power while the common working class held no power making it easy for Jurgis to receive an unfair trial. In a socialist country, this was not an issue because everyone was held on the same level; there was not a rich and a poor because everyone had the same pays and job offers.

In conclusion, Upton Sinclair changed many people’s views on capitalism versus socialism. Instead of letting people live in the dark while wealthy people got away with many unjust lifestyles, he stood up for himself and the people who had the great misfortune of living in a country overran by capitalist. He shed a bright spotlight on all of the horrific things like, the way cattle were handled very poorly. The workers were treated more like slaves rather than employees, they were forced to work in harsh conditions and even had missing limbs due to their capitalist country. Women were led to prostitution and petty crimes due to the gender inequality that the capitalists created because they cared more about their own wealth rather than their own neighbors. The poor people that got sent to trial were treated very unfairly compared to the wealthy people, once again, this was due to capitalism. Maybe, even our country has a bit of capitalist lingering around in the shadows, but it is nowhere close to being as harsh as it was for people living in the twentieth century. The main person we must thank for that is the socialist hero, Upton Sinclair. Due to his amazing novel, we have less inequalities now. If only there were more people today that lived up to Upton Sinclair's heroism, we could have a greater America.