Jungle By Upton Sinclair Essay, Research Paper

A French philosopher once said that the greatest tyranny of democracy was when

the minority ruled the majority. Upton Sinclair?s The Jungle gives the reader

a great example of exactly this. A man who earns his living honestly and through

hard work will always be trapped in poverty, but a man who earns his living

through lies and cheating will be wealthy. The Jungle portrays a Lithuanian

family stuck in a Capitalistic country. It shows the ongoing struggle of a lower

class that will never get farther in life as long as the minority of rich people

rule over them. The Jungle conveys a struggle between Capitalism and Socialism.

Socialism is the best way out for the peasants, but a Capitalistic America has

already trapped them. When Jurgis Rudkus and his family first come to America,

they do not know how it was run. Once Jurgis begins working in the stockyards,

he finds out that the upper class dominates over the lower class. Supposedly

America is a democratic nation, but this is not true. Capitalism rules the

nation. The upper class bosses rule what goes on in the peasants lives. It is a

form of slavery. Sinclair writes: Things that were quite unspeakable went on

there in the packing houses all the time, and were taken for granted by

everybody; only they did not show, as in old slavery times, because there was no

difference in color between master and slave. (106) Sinclair compares the

conditions of the factories to that of slavery. The rich boss is the master and

the peasant is the lowly slave. Capitalism rules in the stockyards of Chicago.

The higher class people can get ahead in life because they have an in with the

system, but the peasants will forever be stuck at their work on the machines in

a packing plant. Jurgis Rudkus endures the work in the factory system. He comes

across Capitalism first hand here. Through his work in the meat packing plant,

he sees how they are able to work around government regulation through bribes

and deceit. He also soon learns that everyone steals from the people below them

in the system. Sinclair writes, ?…the bosses grafted off the men, and they

grafted off each other; and someday the superintendent would find out about the

boss, and then he would graft off the boss? (59). Sinclair reveals that men of

a higher status were able to steal freely from others and get away with it. If

one found out, he just stole right back from another. This was Capitalism in and

of itself. Here, in the stockyards of Chicago, the upper class rules over the

lower class. In Packingtown, Jurgis Rudkus and his family face many difficulties

with the Capitalistic rule. The people take advantage of them and steal their

money. When they first came to America, they had to pay many fees because they

were foreigners and did not know better. Eventually, Jurgis decides to buy a

house. He thinks he is getting a good deal, but in reality is not. The real

estate agent tells him that it is a brand new house, but this is a lie. Sinclair

writes, ?…it was not new at all, as they had supposed; it was about fifteen

years old, and there was nothing new upon it but the paint? (65). The real

estate agent took advantage of them because they were lower class. He was able

to do so because they did not know any better. The upper class ruled over them.

They lived in a Capitalistic nation that trapped them as lower class citizens.

The Capitalistic way of life allows for a lot of corruption in the government

and police department. Many people pay off high officials in order to get lead

way in court and other places. Men who own saloons pay the police so they can

sell liquor on Sundays. At one point in the book Jurgis beats up a bartender

because he will not give him his change for a hundred dollar bill. The bartender

does not get in trouble for this because he has paid people off. Sinclair

writes, ?…the owner of the saloon had paid five dollars each to the

policemen alone for Sunday privileges and general favors? (249). This was a

common thing among many bartenders. Capitalism involved the police, government,

and common people. If one had the money, then he could get special privileges in

life. After ?hoboing? around the country and going to jail, Jurgis comes

across a man by the name of Jack Duane for the second time. It is now when he

becomes involved with politics. Jurgis and Duane help to get votes. The system

is full of corruption. Jurgis becomes a Democrat, but actually helps to get

votes for the Republicans. Lies make up the government as a whole. One critic

writes, ?The democratic institutions which might have provided a means of

change have all been bought off by the ?Machine.? The opportunity to

?rise? causes men to betray their fellow workers and countrymen? (?The

Jungle? 3096). Democracy does not help anyone apart from its institution at

this point in time. It helps few to rise, but causes many to betray others. The

government corrupts society and those who work for it. Sinclair writes: …He,

Scully, would elect him with the ?sheeny?s? money, and the Republicans

might have the glory…. In return for this the Republicans would agree to put

up no candidate the following year, when Scully himself came up for reelection

as the other alderman for the ward. (259) Capitalism plays a big role in

government affairs. It helps move others forward in politics. Scully is able to

pull this off because he holds a high position and has a lot of money. He is a

big man in the business and can get what he wants with his money. It is

Capitalism along with greed and power that leads to the corruption in

government. Jurgis Rudkus gets out of his business with the government and finds

a regular job towards the end of the book. He becomes heavily involved with

Socialism during this period. One critic writes that the conversion of Jurgis to

Socialism is really impossible after his soul has been murdered (Brooks 382).

Jurgis really wanted to find a way to better the working conditions in the

factories. It is not entirely impossible because Jurgis was still strong and

willing to fight. Jon A. Yoder writes: By the end of [The Jungle the

protagonist] has become a thoroughly convinced socialist, part of the social

movement that he and Sinclair expected to turn Chicago into a place fit for

Americans. (501) This is really what Jurgis Rudkus hopes to achieve. He wants to

improve working conditions and establish a better pay. It is possible for Jurgis

to become a Socialist. For the last few chapters of The Jungle, Jurgis fights

with the Socialist party. He converts many to his side. Jurgis sees Socialism as

a way to solve many problems. Sinclair writes, ?…it was the task of

Socialists to teach and organize them for the time when they were to seize the

huge machine called the Beef Trust…? (317). The Socialists? plan is to

bring down Capitalism and run the Beef trust properly. They intend to change it

and make actual food instead of figuring out how to make as a big a fortune as

possible. One critic writes, ?The Socialism he preached implied a human

ability (collectively expressed) to master that system? (?The Jungle?

3096). The goal of the Socialists is exactly this. They plan to clean up the

factory system and master it, to make it better and fairer. Socialism is to

conquer Capitalism and make a better America. Capitalism versus Socialism is a

common theme throughout The Jungle. Jurgis Rudkus chances upon both in different

ways. He is a victim to Capitalism, a member of Socialism. He battles Capitalism

with Socialism. For him, Socialism seems to be the best way of life, while for

others Capitalism is. Capitalism and Socialism make up much of society and for

the rest of time there will be people on both sides; neither will ever dominate

the country.

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