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# Depiction Of Drawbacks Of Industrialization In The Jungle

## By Upton Sinclair

In the novel *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair illustrates that “Neither the squeals of hogs nor tears of visitors made any difference to the workers; one by one they hooked up the hogs, and one by one with a swift stroke they slit their throats” exemplifying the desensitization of workers in the meat-packing industry. This desensitization was the result of years of tedious work that removed all hope from the workers and left them isolated. However, it is not only the nature of the work that affected them, but those who had more power than them. The advance of the industrial revolution resulted in businessmen and bosses gaining power simultaneously while workers were becoming circumscribed by their work.

The rise of monopolies ensured that businessmen controlled the lives of industrial workers. For example, in the *Gospel of Wealth*, Andrew Carnegie had the misconception that the poor who were not sharp did not deserve charity and only libraries, parks and cultivation of hobbies should be funded. This establishes that Social Darwinism, the idea that businessmen were “selected” to rule was prevalent. As a result, there was a distinct wall between the businessmen and the workers-the businessmen not being able to really see the workers and painting an idealized version of them in their heads where the workers only exist to benefit them. In the *Life Story of a Lithuanian*, Antanas Kaztauskis pointed out that “They get all the blood out of cattle and all of the work out of us men”, exposing that there is hardly a distinction between cattle and men. There were also bosses who had power on a smaller scale and had more of an association with the workers.

The foremen at the factories were unprofessional, seeking to manipulate and swindle the workers from money, even managing to invade their private lives. In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair contends that despite the fact that the meat-packing industry “employed thirty thousand men” these men did not reflect the general population. Older or weaker men, who ironically became that way because of work, were unable to find work. In *The Jungle*, when Jurgis tried to get a job “one of the bosses noticed his form towering above the rest” and he got hired instantly. However, when his father desperately tried to get a job, a man who was sent from the boss sensed his desperation and asked if “he was willing to pay one-third of his wages”. This shows that the immigrants were at a disadvantage because of their innocence in a society that rewards the unjust. Their high expectations of America blinded them to the way they were being treated. Also, the bosses held personal vendettas against their workers, trying to find out more about them, and if their beliefs did not align then they would be fired. Even the unions, which should have been a safe space for the workers had spies so that the bosses could learn more about

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them. The bosses spying on them showed that the bosses were afraid enough to care, giving the workers an illusion of victory. The bosses also had information about the people in each family. Since workers were isolated at work, they were most likely to be closer to their families. In the Jungle, Ona is taken advantage of by her boss and fearfully professed that “He knew all about us, he knew we would starve”. Her familial ties- the one need she had left-was used in an unprofessional manner befitting an unjust society. The workers learned to expect this treatment, consequently becoming meek.

The workers assimilated with the machines they worked with, changing their former values. In the beginning of the Jungle, Upton Sinclair implies that Jurgis and his family did not expect to move from the jungle in Lithuania to another allegorical one. Jurgis repeatedly assures his wife that “Leave it to me; leave it to me. I will earn more money-I will work harder”. But the constant repetition of this throughout the novel cannot help but make one wonder whether it was true that hard work is valuable, or he wanted to convince himself that it was. It soon proved to be the latter, because as the novel progressed he loses his spirit and he even became more selfish and “went home half ‘piped’”. The workers, in their misery, sometimes seemed to forget about the others that relied on them, even ceasing to speak with each other. For example, in On Child Labor, Andrew Carnegie reveals that even children in a breaker room who should be joyful “were bending over till their spines were curved, never saying a word all the live long day”. These children never had the time to think of anything but work, so even if they had some other talent they would not even know. The workers were stripped of their personality as quickly as meat was processed.

The opposition may argue that outside of work, the workers could save up some money and indulge in hedonism. However, just as the sausages they made and ate were reused and “made over for home consumption”, the “new” houses that they had the chance to buy were often “built a dozen at a time” with “no less than four families” who already lived there. Ultimately, the appearance of luxury would try to be maintained in order to lure people into the idea of the “American Dream”. The only dream that the workers had was to stay alive, while being exploited by bosses whose dream it was to make money. Clearly, there were no universal dreams. Ironically, the purpose of industrialization was to connect people through railroads and the telegraph. Which would be hard if one was dead. But, admittedly people would not be living a luxurious lifestyle today, if it were not for their suffering.

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