

SOCIAL CLASS OPPRESSION IN STEPHEN HILLENBURG'S *SPONGEBOB SQUARE PANTS SERIES* : A MARXISM STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the social class oppression as reflected in the SpongeBob SquarePants Series using the theory of Marxism. The existence of class differences can lead to oppression between social classes. The focus of this research is the reasons, kinds, and impacts of the oppression carried out by one of the characters in the SpongeBob SquarePants Series, namely Mr. Krab against two of his employees, SpongeBob and Squidward. The result of this research is that the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is the reason Mr. Krab oppresses two of his employees. Mr. Krab is a bourgeois who likes to collect as much money as possible, he doesn't mind if he has to victimize his employees SpongeBob and Squidward who are proletariats to raise money. Mr Krab's form of oppression is, he demands that his employees continue to work non-stop. As the impacts of this oppression, two of his employees, SpongeBob and Squidward, experience tiredness and mental disorders.

Keywords : social class, oppression, Marxism, SpongeBob

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In social class there are two classes, namely capitalist and proletariat. Capitalist is a term for people who have large capital in a market economy. The maximization of profit is the guiding concept of capitalism (Wikipedia, 2021a). Meanwhile, the proletariat is the class that receives salaries from the first class, namely the capitalists. They work to meet their daily needs. The proletariat is often the target of exploitation by the capitalists. For this reason, they are often blackmailed and given low salaries in the interest of making the maximum profit (Wikipedia, 2021b). The proletariat wants to live in peace, so those who live to work are alienated. They are people who can't create their own jobs, so they rely on investors (capitalists) to create goods with more value. This surplus value is created from the formulation of the value of the goods minus the value of all production results and creates a profit. Therefore, the proletariat deprived of its freedom will protest the capitalist tyranny with demonstrations and other necessary

things. But the capitalists will reject it. It's an oppression of the proletariat to strengthen the capitalists (Class Action, 2021).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background, the research problem is formulated to address the following issues:

1. What are the rationales of Mr Krab (the capitalist) for oppressing his employees ?
2. What kinds of oppressions does Mr Krab do against his employees?
3. What are the impacts of Mr Krab's oppression on Spongebob and Squidward ?

2. THEORITICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. Marxism Theory

Karl Heinrich Marx was a philosopher who introduced the term "Marxism" to describe his theory. Marxism is a theory regarding social class differences in society. This theory also entails taking action in order to effect change (society or the systems). Karl Marx developed a theory that included economic, social, and political systems. Marxism's aim is to create a classless society based on common ownership of production, distribution, and exchange means (Barry, 2002).

2.2 Social Class

According to Marx, there are two major classes in society. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat are those two classes, and they are constantly at odds with one another, with the latter being oppressed. The proletariat is a working-class society in which the majority of people, especially those in the middle and lower classes, are forced to labor for a living. This is the group that Marx is attempting to defend. The bourgeoisie is the other class, the governing class, even if it is a small group of individuals. In other words, they are the factory owners, and the proletariats are the factory workers. Those who benefit the most from capitalism are the bourgeoisie. They make all of the money while the proletariat does all of the work. These two classes are constantly in conflict with each other. The ruling class has complete control over the proletariat's lives. They have not only taken over the life of the workers, but they have also undermined the basis of work (Muhammad et al., 2018).

2.3 Oppression

According to Savelle, the act of oppressing, the imposition of unjustified loads; the state of being oppressed or overwhelmed; suffering; hardship, grief, calamity, depression, dullness of spirits; a sense of heaviness are all definitions of oppression. From this definition, oppression is defined as inhumane deeds that cause others to suffer (Adinda, 2019).

Marxists, social democrats, and even some liberals agree that "oppression" exists, and that certain groups in society do not get the same legal, political, or economic rights as others. According to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the new

bourgeois society that arose from the ruins of feudal civilization has not eliminated class conflict. It has really created new classes, oppressive conditions, and modes of struggle to replace the old ones (Marx & Friedrich, 1967) .

According to Iris Marion Young (through Heldke & O'Connor, 2004), there are five types of oppression :

2.3.1 Exploitation

Exploitation is defined as the use of people's labor for profit without adequately compensating them. People who work in sweat shops are exploited. Despite the fact that they are compensated for their efforts and toil, they are not paid a fair wage in comparison to the amount of money they generate for the company. Capitalism is used via exploitation to subjugate people. People are allowed to freely exchange goods, according to capitalism's economic philosophy. However, whenever this has happened in the past, it has resulted in the formation of two kinds of people: wealthy and poor.

2.3.2 Marginalization

The act of relegating or limiting a group of individuals to a lesser social standing or the outer limit or edge of society is known as marginalization. Overall, it's an exclusionary procedure. In some ways, marginalization is worse than exploitation because society has decided that these people cannot or will not be used for labor. People are frequently marginalized because of their race.

2.3.3 Powerlessness

The concept of powerlessness is related to Marx's theory of socialism, which states that certain individuals "have" power while others "do not." The ruling elite dominates the helpless, who are positioned to take instructions but rarely have the authority to give them. Inhibition to develop one's capacities, lack of decision-making power, and exposure to disrespectful treatment due to diminished status are some of the underlying injustices connected with powerlessness.

2.3.4 Cultural Imperialism

Cultural Imperialism is the practice of imposing the ruling class's culture as the norm. The dominant groups in a community have complete influence over how its members perceive and communicate. As a result, that society's viewpoints are the most widely disseminated and reflect the experiences, values, aspirations, and accomplishments of these groups.

2.3.5 Violence

Violence is the overt and most noticeable form of oppression. Some groups' members are aware that they must always be on guard against unjustified attacks on their members or property. These assaults frequently have no rhyme or reason, but they are always intended to hurt, humiliate, or destroy the person.

3.METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher used a Marxist approach to analyze Spongebob SquarePants Series by Stephen Hillenburg "Fear of a Krabby Patty" episode.

Marxist approach is a method for understanding conflicts between social classes, especially the capitalist and proletariat. The researcher used the film series as the main source of information. To complete the data, the researcher performed several processes. The first step is to watch and understand oppression as a social class conflict in the film series that will be analysed. The next step is to describe the phenomena on the basis of Marxist theory.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Rationales for Oppression

The researcher found two reasons why Mr Krab oppress two of his employees, Spongebob and Squidward. Here are the reasons why Mr Krab is oppress his employees :

4.1.1 The relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat

The relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat can lead to oppression because a bourgeois/capitalist always collects money from the proletariat. Mr Krab is someone who loves money very much, he is very stingy and greedy, willing to victimize his employees to raise as much money as possible. It can be seen from the conversations below.

***Mr Krab :** “What? Chum Bucket open 23 hours?! Plankton thinks he can stay open longer than me, does he? Well he’s wrong! As of now, the Krusty Krab is open 24 hours!”*

***SpongeBob :** “Did you hear that, Squidward? We get to keep working and working and working without ever having to go home!”*

In the conversation above, Mr. Krab set the new working hours to be 24 hours non-stop just because the plankton restaurant was open 23 hours. Longer working hours mean more money will be earned from the restaurant, SpongBob and Squidward have to work without a break and go home.

4.1.2 Economic Motives

The bourgeoisie/capitalist always wants to collect as much money as possible. They will make maximum use of the labor/proletariat to generate a lot of profit. It can be seen from the conversations below.

***Mr Krab :** “There may be a problem after all.”*

***SpongeBob :** “What does this mean?”*

***Mr Krab :** “It means there’s something wrong with your head, look I think maybe you should see a professional!”*

***SpongeBob :** “Wrestler?”*

***Mr Krab :** “No, a psychiatrist!”*

***SpongeBob :** “Oh, but where am I gonna find a psychiatrist?”*

From the conversation above Mr. Krab said that SpongeBob should go to a psychiatrist because SpongeBob looks afraid of the Krabby Patty. Mr. Krab said that actually because he didn't want SpongeBob to make a Krabby Patty the wrong way and make him lose money, not because he was worried about SpongeBob's condition, he just wants SpongeBob to get back to work properly and make some more money for him.

4.2 Kind of Oppression

Oppression can be defined as the malicious or unfair treatment or use of power, often under the guise of governmental authority(Wikipedia, 2022). Mr. Krab, as a boss or restaurant owner feels entitled to regulate and control his employees as he wishes. According to Iris Marion Young, oppression is categorized into five types, namely exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. In the Spongebob Squarepants series, researchers found four forms of oppression, namely exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

4.2.1 Exploitation

Exploitation is the term used to describe using someone else's labor for financial gain without paying them fairly(Heldke & O'Connor, 2004). The exploitation in the Spongebob Squarepants series is certainly very clear from the treatment of Mr. Krab towards his two employees. The following below are two forms of exploitation by Mr. Krab against SpongeBob and Squidward :

4.2.1.1 More Working Hours

Employees who work are often exploited. Despite the fact that they are compensated for their efforts and hard work, they are not paid a fair wage compared to the amount of money they make for the company. Mr Krab who arbitrarily makes new working hours but doesn't give proper salaries to his employees. It can be seen from the conversations below.

Mr Krab : *“What do you boys think of my masterpiece?”*

Spongebob : *“New business hours , 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.”*

Squidward : *“What? That is totally unfair!”*

SpongeBob : *“Squidward’s right,that’s totally unfair. Couldn’t we get to work earlier than 6 a.m.? Like 5:30 a.m.? Or 5:00 a.m.? Or 4:00 a.m.?”*

Mr Krab : *“What? Chum Bucket open 23 hours?! Plankton thinks he can stayopen longer than me, does he? Well he’s wrong! As of now, the Krusty Krab is open 24 hours!”*

Mr. Krab, who initially set a new working hour from 6 am to 11 pm, instead made a 24-hour non-stop working hour. But Mr. Krab doesn't increase Spongebob and Squidward's salary even though their working hours are much longer than before.

4.2.1.2 Working Non-Stop

A boss should not impose excessive working hours or force the workforce to work from early morning until late at night without rest or with very little rest time because it will have a bad impact on the health of the workers. Mr Krab implemented a new working hour, which is 24 hours non-stop, which means his employees continue to work without going home or sleeping. This is of course the exploitation of workers. It can be seen from the pictures and conversations below.

Mr Krab : “Day ten of non-stop service!”

Squidward : “ Mr Krab, can I go home yet?”

Mr Krab : “ No one goes home!”

From the conversation above, Mr Krab, who had imposed a new 24-hour working day, began to count the days. On the 10th day, an exhausted Squidward asks Mr. Krab if he can go home, but Mr. Krab replies emphatically that no one should go home. Mr Krab's selfish attitude must be really bad as he only thinks about money and doesn't care about his exhausted employees.

4.2.2 Powerlessness

Marx's theory of socialism, states that certain individuals "have" power while others "do not". This is related to the concept of powerlessness, the ruling elite dominates those who are powerless, who are positioned to receive instructions but rarely have the authority to give them(Heldke & O'Connor, 2004). Mr. Krab is a boss of a restaurant company called the "Krusty Krab" who manages all the provisions in the Krusty Krab. Because he has power, he is the one who dominates and controls his employees. It can be seen from the conversations below.

Spongebob : “New business hours , 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.”

Squidward : “What? That is totally unfair!”

From the conversation above, it can be seen that Mr. Krab arbitrarily arranges new working hours which are much longer, from early morning to late at night, which is of course very inhumane for his employees, Squidward who heard it immediately protested and said that it was unfair, but Mr. Krab ignored him and instead increased working hours up to 24 hours. Squidward's powerlessness makes him have to obey all the words of Mr. Krab because Squidward works at his restaurant.

4.2.3 Cultural Imperialism

The act of establishing the culture of the ruling class as the standard is known as cultural imperialism. The dominant groups in a community have complete control over how its citizens perceive and communicate(Heldke & O'Connor, 2004). Mr Krab controls SpongeBob by motivating him to keep making Krabby Patties. It can be seen from the pictures and conversations below.

Mr Krab : “ Kick it into high gear! We got a big order! I'm counting on you , boy! I need you to raise that spatula! And I need you to say ‘Team Krusty Krab’!”

SpongeBob : “*Team Krusty Krab!*”

Mr Krab : “*Now, make me 10.000 patties! And no breaks!*”

From the conversation above, Mr. Krab gets SpongeBob excited because they got a big order, he makes SpongeBob lift the spatula and shout "Team Krusty Krab" then tells him to make 10,000 Krabby Patties without a break. SpongeBob who is often motivated by Mr. Krab for always being passionate about making Krabby Patty and finally being very passionate about his work, he doesn't mind the orders at all, in fact he will gladly do it. It was Mr Krab's attempt to control SpongeBob the way he wanted.

4.2.4. Violence

Violence is the observable and most obvious form of oppression. Violence is an act of physical force to injure someone. Violence can cause physical, psychological, or perhaps both(M. Jacquin, n.d.). Mr Krab physically violates SpongeBob as shown below.



Figure 1 (00:04:38)



Figure 2 (00:04:39)



Figure 3 (00:05:31)

From the picture above, it can be seen that Mr. Krab slaps SpongeBob to resuscitate SpongeBob who is starting to get depressed from exhaustion, he also drags SpongeBob who is scared and causes chaos among the customers. Even though SpongeBob doesn't seem to be in any pain, it's still physical violence that shouldn't be done.

4.3 Impact of Oppression

The impact of oppression carried out on employees makes them tired and exposed to mental disorders. Here are the impacts of Mr Krab's oppression on his employees:

4.3.1 Tiredness

Tiredness is a momentary loss of strength and energy that occurs as a result of hard physical or mental work (Vocabulary.com, n.d.-b). Tiredness is one of the impacts of Mr Krab's oppression of his employees. The following are forms of tiredness due to the oppression by Mr. Krab on his employees, namely SpongeBob and Squidward:

4.3.1.1 Squidward Tiredness

Squidward is an outspoken person, he asked Mr Krab's permission to rest because he was tired. It can be seen from the conversations below.

Squidward : “ *Mr Krab, can I go home yet?* ”

Mr Krab : “ *No one goes home!* ”

Squidward : “ *Look at these bags under my eyes, even my bags have bags!* ”

Mr Krab : “ *Quit your bellyaching Squidward! You don't hear SpongeBob complaining, do ya? You could learn a few things from that boy.* ”

Squidward : “ *Mr Krab, he is not normal.* ”

Mr Krab : “ *Alright you can sit down for five minutes, then it's back to work!* ”

On the 10th day of non-stop service, Squidward asked for permission to go home to Mr. Krab but Mr. Krab didn't allow it, Squidward showed big eye bags due to lack of sleep, of course it was because of working non-stop. Squidward has been working as a cashier for 10 days non-stop, when Mr Krab gives him a 5 minute break he immediately falls asleep.

4.3.1.2 SpongeBob Tiredness

Unlike Squidward, SpongeBob really loves his job, he is always happy when making a Krabby Patty, but Mr. Krab's orders are too much and make SpongeBob tired, even though he doesn't complain but it can be seen from his physical condition and behavior. It can be seen from the coversations below.

Mr Krab : “ *Day 15! Give it up for day 15!* ”

SpongeBob : “ *1.332..* ”

When making 10,000 Krabby Patties Spongebob started to get tired, he made a Krabby Patty while counting, but his voice started to weaken and he started to feel lethargic because he was sleepy and tired. On day 43 he started making Krabby Patty the wrong way.

4.3.2 Mental Disorders

Mental disorder is a behavioral or mental tendency that significantly impairs personal functioning or causes severe distress (Shepphird, n.d.). The following are forms of mental disorders as a result of Mr Krab's oppression of his employees:

4.3.2.1 Hallucination

Hallucinations are perceptions that arise after seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, or smelling something that is not really there (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Due to exhaustion, SpongeBob begins to hallucinate. It can be seen from the conversations below.

SpongeBob : “ *Stay Back! I'm warning you!*”

Mr Krab : “ *Alright. Now you're just acting silly. I want you to....*”

SpongeBob : “ *No, don't eat me! I'm too chewy!*”

While talking to Mr Krab, SpongeBob sees Mr Krab turning into a giant Krabby Patty who is about to eat him. SpongeBob then runs out of the kitchen, but the customers also turn into a giant Krabby Patty, in SpongeBob's eyes everyone turns into a Krabby Patty monster. That's because SpongeBob has made so many Krabby Patties non-stop that he's exhausted and hallucinating.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to find out the reasons, kinds, and impacts of Mr. Krab's oppression on two of his employees, SpongeBob and Squidward. The researcher uses Karl Marx's Theory of Marxism, Marx thinks that the capitalists always collect money at the expense of the proletariat. In the SpongeBob SquarePants Series, Mr. Krab as the bourgeoisie or the upper class and the boss of the restaurant named "Krusty Krab" regulates all the provisions in his restaurant, while SpongeBob and Squidward as the proletariat or the lower class must obey all the rules made by Mr. Krab because they work in his restaurant. The relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat gave rise to oppression between social classes. Mr. Krab as a capitalist likes to collect as much money as possible, all he thinks about is money, he doesn't mind if he has to victimize his employees to raise money. This is the reason for Mr Krab's oppression of his employees. Mr Krab's form of oppression is that he demands his employees to keep working non-stop, but he doesn't even raise his employees' salaries. As a result of this oppression, two of his employees, SpongeBob and Squidward, experience tiredness and mental disorders.

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