

Political Corruption and Its Oppressive Power: A Marxist Approach to *Animal Farm*

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Abstract

Corruption is a form of dishonesty or a criminal offence which is undertaken by a person or an organisation which is entrusted in a position of authority, in order to acquire illicit benefits or abuse power for one's personal gain. Corruption can involve many illegal activities which include bribery, influence peddling and embezzlement as well as legal practices. Political corruption occurs when an office holder or another governmental employee acts with an official capacity for personal gain. What is corruption and how is it depicted in Animal Farm? Who are the characters involved in corruption in Animal Farm? How is this political corruption really implemented and what are its consequences? These are the questions that this paper analyses through the Marxist approach in order to propose effective regulations for good governance.

Keywords: Political, corruption, oppressive, power, critical analysis.

Introduction

Corruption and oppression are endemic sociological occurrences which appear with regular frequency in almost all the countries on a global scale with varying degrees and proportions. Defined as a “dishonest or illegal behaviour, especially of people in authority” (A. S. Hornby, 2010: 329), the issue of corruption has been of great interest to many writers and critics for a long time. When a person in a position of power changes from moral to immoral standards of behaviour by misusing their power or accepting money or any bribe, they get corrupt. Once they get corrupt, they are ready to do anything illegal or immoral to influence others. Most of the times, the influence that the corrupt agent wields on others leads to oppression.

For S. D. Morris (1991), “political corruption is the illegitimate use of public power to benefit a private interest”. In the same perspective, V. Tanzi (1998: 8) argues that corruption is “the abuse of public power for private benefit”. Yet, it is not in every case of corruption that the abuse of public power is exercised for one's private benefit. There are several cases in which it can be used “for the benefit of one's party, class, tribe, friends, family and so on” (Ibid.: 8-9). This shows how widespread corruption is and the serious damage it can cause to the development of a market economy and a free society. This view is corroborated by I. Senior (2006: 207), for whom, corruption stands for the “action to secretly provide a good or a service to a third party to influence certain actions which benefit the corrupt, a third party, or both in which the corrupt agent has authority”. It can be understood that “acts of corruption do not take place in broad daylight” (Op. Cit.: 8), and if ever it happens to be the case, they have always been beneficial for both the corrupt agent and the bribe giver.

It must be noted that, corruption happens not only in political fields but also in social and economic fields such as business, education, media and so on. In this regard, I. Amundsen (1999: 1) characterises corruption as a “disease, a cancer that eats into

the cultural, political and economic fabric of society, and destroys the functioning of vital organs”. It can involve many illegal activities which include bribery, influence peddling and embezzlement. But when corruption includes legal practices, it becomes a “legal corruption” (D. Kaufmann, 2005), in which, not only is power abused within the confines of the law but also those with power often have the ability to make laws for their protection.

Political corruption occurs when an office holder or another governmental employee acts with an official capacity primarily for personal gain. In *Animal Farm*, political corruption is rife in the actions of some characters, especially, power holders. Mr. Jones and Napoleon are the office holders who use political power for personal gains. This fraudulent behaviour has unfortunately led them to oppress others in order to get these illicit benefits. What is then corruption? How is it depicted in *Animal Farm*? Who are the characters involved in corruption in *Animal Farm*? How is this political corruption implemented and what are the consequences of it? These are the questions that this paper analyses and proposes effective regulations for good governance.

The Marxist literary criticism is used to conduct the analysis in this paper. As it advocates that individuals' “social existence determines their consciousness” (K. Marx, 1970: 21), the Marxist criticism “seeks to expose the dominant class, show how its ideology controls and oppresses all actions of the working class, and finally highlight those elements of society most affected by such oppression” (C. E. Bressler, 1994: 122). So, this approach helps expose how the corrupt behaviours of bourgeois class “not only oppress those who live in misery but appear to be determined to eliminate them” (R. Williams 2006: 115-116). In addition, as “an open theory which continually transforms itself” (J. Derrida, 1982: xv), the Marxist criticism helps have a close “understanding of the nature of reality” (Bressler, Op. Cit.: 115), the corrupt environment in which characters live and how these characters function in *Animal*

Farm. In sum, while making “a historical survey of it from Marx and Engels to the present day” (E. Terry 1976: vii), the Marxist approach is, therefore, of paramount importance to analyse typical characters – whose “innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society” (L. Georg, 1972: 122).

The paper is divided into two sections. The first section explores the concept of political corruption through the analysis of Mr. Jones and Napoleon and shows how their dishonest behaviour has led them to oppressive acts. The second section discusses the issue of political oppression and its consequences and proposes transparency in the implementation of laws for good governance.

1. Political Corruption in *Animal Farm*

Political corruption, as Inge Amundsen argues, is not only all about “unethical behaviour which violates the norms of the system of political order” but it concerns “the breaking of the formal rules that regulate a position of political authority” (I. Amundsen, 2006: 5) as well. For R. Cerqueti & R. Coppier (2019: 1), political corruption “represents a specific type of public-to-public corruption which implies that one participant of corrupt transaction belongs on the State and the other to the private sector”. That is why it occurs when politicians, who are entitled to make laws and enforce them by the citizens, act in a corrupt way by using their political power “to pursue their own economic benefits and/or maintain their powerful position” (Ibid.). As a result, political corruption implies “any transaction between private and public sector actors through which collective goods are illegitimately converted into private-regarding payoffs” (I. Amundsen, 1999: 3).

It can be understood from these definitions that political corruption involves political decision makers and takes place at the high levels of the political system. Corruption can occur on different scales. At the lower level, it exists through small favours among a small number of people. Then, corruption soars up to affect the government on a large scale, that is, the political one that is the concern in this paper. So, when corruption reaches this stage, it becomes so prevalent that it affects every structure of society – state agents as well as other citizens.

Once everybody is involved in corruption, it mostly leads to organized crime and for fear of losing what they have already unjustly acquired, some politicians never hesitate to use the political power they are armed with, to maintain their power, status and wealth. Corruption can be defined in the context of this paper as a dishonest act undertaken by a political leader who misuses their entrusted authority to acquire illicit benefits for themselves or their class. This section explores the concept of political corruption through the analysis of Mr. Jones and Napoleon and shows how their dishonest behaviour has led them to oppressive acts.

1.1. Political Corruption under Mr. Jones' Leadership

It must be noted that corruption usually stems from three different circumstances, namely “weak institutions, discretionary power and economic rents” (Op. Cit., 2019). This means that when an institution is weak, there is room for the state agent and the bribe giver to come into agreement on a deal. For fear of being caught and punished, both dealers must make sure that the rewards gained from corruption be more significant than the foreseen profit. Then, the deal opens the way to corruption which occurs when the State member in question is able to control the designation of resources in a discretionary

manner. As a result, the deal is signed when extractable rents are created by the state agent using their discretionary power.

Mr. Jones' dishonest behaviour at the beginning of *Animal Farm* exposes the corrupt manners in his attitude. Corrupted by the fact that he drinks too much alcohol, Mr. Jones weakens both his leadership and the whole farm as an institution. Concerning his corrupt behaviour in drinks, Orwell opens his novel by depicting Mr. Jones as being “too drunk to remember to shut the pop-holes” (G. Orwell, 1945: 1) of his henhouses. Soon before the rebellion is carried out, this recurring attitude of drinking is referred to as “the evil days” on which Mr. Jones has fallen. The narrator mentions the dishonest and idle behaviour of Mr. Jones and his men as follows:

He [Mr. Jones] had become much disheartened after losing money in a lawsuit, and had taken to drinking more than was good for him. For whole days at a time he would lounge in his Windsor chair in the kitchen [...] drinking, and occasionally feeding Moses on crusts of bread soaked in beer. His men were idle and dishonest, the fields were full of weeds, the buildings wanted roofing, the hedges were neglected, and the animals were underfed. (Ibid.: 12)

The above quotation gives a true picture of Mr. Jones, the corrupt leader of the Manor Farm. This dishonest behaviour at the opening of *Animal Farm* shows that he has no more the control of the farm. This emptiness created by Mr. Jones, the irresponsible leader, gives the signal to animals that the farm is ripe for the revolution. Mr. Jones' careless attitude toward animals has also created a power vacuum which rings a bell in animals to fill it up through a rebellion. The farm animals have understood from Mr. Jones' everyday dishonesty that only his expulsion can put an end to the starvation and misery that they undergo.

Mr. Jones gets addicted to alcohol as it has been reported that he “went into Willingdon and got so drunk at the Red Lion that he did not come back till midday on Sunday. [His] men had milked the cows [...] and then had gone out rabbiting, without bothering to feed the animals. When Mr. Jones got back he immediately went to sleep on the drawing-room sofa [...] the animals were still unfed” (Ibid.: 12-13). This painful situation shows how corrupt Mr. Jones has become through his everyday drinking. His dishonest attitude has plunged him into fraudulent deals and games which betray his governance of the farm. Mr. Jones not only neglects animals by keeping them unfed but he also beats them regularly. The discontentment of animals is shown during the Cowshed battle through Snowball's war cry: “War is war. The only good human being is a dead one” (Ibid.: 29).

The ideology of revolution in itself has created the sense that there could be a bright future in store for animals. This is shown through the objectively true points made by Old Major in his speech to the animals:

Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself. Our labour tills the soil, our dung fertilises it, and yet there is not one of us that owns more than his bare skin. (Ibid.: 4)

Most definitely, Mr. Jones is a cruel and unsympathetic master who cares little or not at all about the well-being of animals. Mr. Jones symbolizes Man, that is the human race. His being corrupt by alcohol shows, therefore, the carelessness of humans toward animals. As a result, man becomes the only real enemy of animals. As Man does not play his role, he has become useless for animals and must, in this regard, be removed from the scene for the forever abolishment of animals' hunger and overwork.

1.2. Political Corruption under Napoleon's Leadership

Mainly caused by the lack of transparency and effective regulations, corruption undermines institutions' reputations, instability and working efficiency. Not only is corruption an impediment to economic development and wealth collection but it can also distort individuals' freedom and rights. If corruption is not swiftly remedied, it attacks democracy and weakens justice and this constitutes a blockade to good governance. Napoleon emerges from the very beginning of *Animal Farm* as an utterly corrupt opportunist. Although he does attend all the early meetings after the rebellion, Napoleon never makes a single contribution to the revolution. He neither takes part in the formulation of its ideology nor contributes to the bloody struggle that it necessitates. The initial attempts made for the new farm to establish itself and gain strength do not interest him. His only motive is the strength of his power over the farm, how to train dogs so as they become his own private secret police to be used to impose his will on others.

Indeed, when the rebellion surprisingly happens successfully, things initially seem as if they are going to go in a positive direction for animal: there are debates among the animals, animals have the ability to propose items for discussion, and every animal participates in the working of the farm. Best of all, the animals pull in the best and fastest hay harvest that the farm has ever seen, suggesting that their revolution has benefits in addition to freeing them from a cruel situation under Mr. Jones. It is obvious that the revolution has truly lifted individual workers above horrible, totalitarian leaders like Mr. Jones and that self-government is possible too.

No sooner can animals enjoy the fruits of their own labor without the overbearing rule of humans than the idea of equality that fueled the revolution in the first place gradually gives way to individual and class-based self-interest. The analysis offers clues that corruption begins to take hold on *Animal Farm* long before Napoleon takes drastic steps to turn it into a totalitarian state. It is not an accident that only the pigs and the dogs are the ones who become fully literate and become undoubtedly the ones who ultimately seize control. Corruption makes its way as the idealistic Snowball confiscates the entire crop of apples and all the cows' milk for the literate pigs, that is, the "mind workers" who are engaged in figuring out how to run the farm efficiently. This power shift illustrates how a revolution can be corrupted into a totalitarian regime through slow and gradual changes.

Napoleons' corruption does not end with the theft of milk and apples; over time, he gets corrupted by his own power and changes all of the Seven Commandments, which have been created to keep the animals humble and on equal footing, to allow the pigs to enjoy prohibited privileges and comforts. One of the most corrupt things is when the pigs move into the farmhouse, Napoleon amends the commandment about not sleeping in a bed to read, "No animal shall sleep in a bed *with*

sheets" (Ibid.: 46). Napoleon changes other commandments to allow the pigs to wear clothes, drink alcohol, and even kill other animals. By the end, the original commandments have been reduced to one statement: "ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS" (Ibid.: 92), symbolising the corrupt nature of the farm. Though most animals do not notice this corruption, those that do are either frightened into pretending not to or executed for expressing concern. This blind attitude of combining fear and unthinking trust in leaders is one of the most important elements that allows corruption to flourish in *Animal Farm*.

It has also been noticed from the analysis that for the reduction of corruption rate, every individual at every layer of the society must take part. This collective participation is also pruned by Coroneel when he argues: "The fight against corruption should involve all of society and all citizens; the organizations of the state; academic institutions; the media; religious institutions; and political, business, and labor associations, in order to reverse the effects of corruption and allow for the rebirth of our moral and ethical values." (G. Coroneel, 2006: 4-5)

Although *Animal Farm* has begun with a rebellion against humans whom, animals treat as greedy, alcoholic, corrupt, and cruel enemies, it ends with a friendly tour for dinner between Napoleon and his fellow pigs and the human farmers. From this sameness at the end of the novel, emerges the cyclical aspect of revolution which repeats throughout time. Because of corruption, those individuals who are powerful to begin with or who overthrow cruel and heartless leaders can inevitably come to resemble those former leaders, once they understand what it is like to occupy such a position of power. In this sense, the analysis of *Animal Farm* shows clearly that even when the ideals of a revolution may be good, it is all too easy to twist them. By so doing, one falls prey to corruption and as a result, the movement is poisoned as countless powerless individuals are harmed in the process through oppressive ways.

2. Political Oppression in *Animal Farm*

Oppression refers to the cruel or unfair treatment of a group of people by the oppressor that can be an individual or an organisation more powerful than the oppressed. Political oppression is the exercise of power by dominating state agents to create political, social, and economic barriers that are maintained by force and fear in the benefit of the oppressors at the expense of the oppressed. Oppression is related to excessive discipline, class, society, and punishment. It can be overt, like that of Mr. Jones or intentionally concealed like Napoleon's at its beginning or even a combination of the two, depending on how it is practiced.

Oppression targets or disproportionately impacts specific groups of people whereas injustice does not target and may not directly afflict everyone in society. This to say that oppression is more discriminatory than injustice. Though we can have different types of oppression, such as social oppression, cultural, political, religious, institutional oppression and economic oppression; the concern of the paper is centered on the political one. This political oppression which refers to the unjust or cruel exercise of power by a government over its citizens, has to do with marginalization, powerlessness, violence and exploitation as is the case in *Animal Farm*. Whenever an authoritarian government like Napoleon's uses oppression to subjugate the people, it wants its citizens to feel the coercion and live in fear.

Napoleon's tools of oppression include punishments (for the hens which refuse to lay eggs); the creation of a secret police (the dogs); the prohibition of freedoms of speech, assembly; the imprisonment of other leaders like Snowball, who may pose a threat to his power or the killing of activists. Whether under Mr. Jones' or Napoleon's government of the farm, malicious or unjust treatment has been exercised on other animals. Both leaders have used their power to violently oppress and exploit others. Both Mr. Jones and other humans, and Napoleon along with his accomplices, the raised dogs and some pigs, have all violated rules to extend oppression on the farm.

2.1. The Exploitation of Animals by Mr. Jones

Being an allegory of the way humans exploit and oppress one another, *Animal Farm* depicts humans oppressing animals as well as an oppression among animals themselves. While the animals' rebellion is mostly comic in tone, it ends on a serious and touching note, when the animals get rid of Mr. Jones' oppression. The harness-room at the end of the stables is broken open; the nose-rings, the dog-chains, the cruel knives with which Mr. Jones uses to castrate the pigs and lambs before slaughtering them after, are all flung down the well, just after the successful rebellion. From Mr. Jones' oppression, one can establish a parallel between the exploitation of animals and that of human workers in real life. As a case in point is when Mr. Pilkington utters this joke to Napoleon: "If you have your lower animals to contend with [...] we have our lower classes!" (Ibid.: 95).

The question is to know if Mr. Pilkington's utterance is really a joke. One can say no; it is not a mere joke because it carries a hidden message – the misery reserved to the oppressed in the society. Although this "bon mot set the table in a roar", yet, this is not a joke but rather a mockery of how animals have been exploited and oppressed. So wicked as he is, the narrator informs us just after that "Mr. Pilkington once again congratulated the pigs on the low rations, the long working hours, and the general absence of pampering which he had observed on *Animal Farm*" (Ibid.). From this point, it can be argued that the ruling class, represented here by Mr. Pilkington and the pigs, considers animals and workers as the same entity – the lower class people, who deserve to undergo the same oppression because they are powerless and ignorant.

Another element, which has favoured political oppression in *Animal Farm*, is the ignorance and naivety of the working animals. The most impressive accomplishments of *Animal Farm* is its portrayal not just of the people in power but also of the oppressed animals themselves. Inspired by the mentality of the lower class people in society, Orwell depicts the farm animals as being gullible, loyal, and hardworking. The animals' gullibility not only gives the chance to the oppressors but it has also motivated these power holders to work out new strategies in order to continue with their corrupt behaviour and create more situations of oppression in which they can maintain animals forever.

2.2. The Exploitation of Animals by Napoleon

It must be noted that Napoleon's malicious and intentional division between intellectual and physical labor quickly comes to express itself as a new set of class divisions. The fact that the pigs claim to be the "brainworkers" has given them a kind of authority over other animals. As a result, these pigs have used their superior intelligence received from their privilege of being

educated to manipulate and oppress other animals to their own benefit. This negative state of affairs of class stratification, which is born just after the rebellion, constitutes a great danger and threat to democracy and freedom shared by all animals through the doctrine of Animalism. As a matter of fact, rules are violated and other less intelligent animals are oppressed and exploited by Napoleon and his ruling board.

Napoleon's oppressive actions have been amplified with violent and cruel killings of other animals in public. When he moves from verbal and threatening oppression to the practical torturing and slaughtering of animals, Napoleon displays how far his wicked ambition and bloodshed oppression can go. The violent way Napoleon has proceeded to seize power foreshadows his cruelty as far oppression is concerned. Being aware of the immense carnage that awaits him, he trains some loyal dogs that he uses to chase Snowball, his main rival, off the farm. Snowball's departure from the farm lays bare Napoleon's oppressive ambitions and the fear of his dogs keeps any doubting animal from speaking out.

This fear creates a kind of terror and panic which compels some animals to confess crimes they do not commit with the hope of sparing their lives. Any so-called traitor animal must find something to confess before being slaughtered. Napoleon's oppressive purges of other animals is narrated as follows: "And so the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones" (Ibid.: 58). Instead of bringing about equality among animals, Napoleon has created a society in which the pigs have taken the place of the humans in their corruption and oppression.

Besides, the naivety of the oppressed animals under Napoleon's leadership shows that they are not necessarily in a position to be better educated or informed even if they have had a chance. Furthermore, their loyalty toward the oppressor has kept them deaf and dumb and this silence has maintained them forever in an empty-belly-hardwork without any sign of retaliation. The animals' ignorance, which fuels their oppression, is rife in the character of Boxer, who prefers repeating to himself that "Napoleon is always right" (Ibid.: 46), rather than puzzling out the implications of various possible actions related to the dilemma, he is presented with. Indeed, the depiction of Boxer who is the embodiment of the working class in *Animal Farm* shows how the inability or unwillingness of the oppressed people to question the leading authority, condemns the working class to suffer the full extent of the ruling class' oppression.

In spite of the loyal support that Boxer has given to Napoleon, abusing his body in the farm and windmill activities, the pigs rather skip over his promise of peaceful retirement and sell him to a glue factory once he weakens and is no longer useful. This fatal incident reminds us of what Old Major has predicted for Boxer under Mr. Jones' leadership: "You, Boxer, the very day that those great muscles of yours lose their power, Jones will sell you to the knacker, who will cut your throat and boil you down for the foxhounds" (Ibid.: 5). Boxer's cruel death represents the exploitation of the working classes as well as the death of the idealism that leads to the establishment of *Animal Farm*.

Conclusion

The analysis has shown that corruption occurs when there is a motive, an opportunity, and an impunity of action. If Mr. Jones gets corrupt, it is because the animals have given him this care free opportunity which allows him to get drunk everyday and keep them unfed. Likewise, if Napoleon gets corrupt, it is because of his early motive to rule the farm and also due to the fact that the animals have given him the ideal political setting in which none of his actions has neither been retaliated nor punished.

The paper has also shown that political corruption always entails political oppression. It has then advocated the idea that power, especially the political one, has inevitably the same effect on anyone who wields it – it always corrupts. The more absolute it becomes, the more corrupt its holder becomes. It, therefore, has it that any other possible ruler in *Animal Farm* would have been just as bad and as corruptible as Napoleon and Mr. Jones, if they have been placed in the same political environment. Thus, Snowball and Old Major are not incorruptible either. Although Napoleon is more power-hungry, plenty of evidence exists to show that Snowball and Old Major would have been as corrupt rulers as Napoleon, if they have had a chance to rule.

The analysis has, furthermore, shown that ignorance can lead to oppression just as knowledge can fail in leadership. If animals are oppressed, it is because they are not educated and ignore the issues of the farmhouse. The oppressed ones who are educated but refuse to act and change their situation are aware that intelligence in such a dictatorial State, would rather be useless and harmful to its holder. Yet, the pigs' intelligence rarely produces anything of value for the well-being of other animals. It has rather been used to manipulate and abuse the other animals. This failure of intellectual activity has shown that intelligence can be worthless without the moral sense to engage in politics and the courage to act.

In sum, the analysis has underscored that the fight against illegal corruption cannot be independent from the reform of the State whereas the curtailing of legal corruption necessitates the implication of all the actors in society to reach transparency and good governance.

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