



An Outlook of Leninism in Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist

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Abstract

The Industrial revolution in the 19th century drew many countryside paupers into the towns. Class struggle existed in the society and people suffered a lot. The workers were paid less. Due to frustration the working class revolted. This article endeavours to exhibit an outlook of Leninism through Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. *Oliver Twist* portrays the reality of social injustice to poor people in Britain during the Victorian Era. Dickens' points out that the officials who ran the workhouses, violated the values they preached to the poor. The protagonist of this novel carries leninist aspect in him. Oliver gradually wins the situation he faces and finally triumphs.

Keywords: Chales Dickens, Oliver Twist, Leninism, Marxism.

1. Introduction

The Industrial Revolution in the early 19th century (building of factories and mills), drew many countryside paupers into the towns. The working mass hoped for a better life, but the conditions and wages were a pittance even if they were lucky enough to be employed. The rich had the upper hand and the poor unemployed were ruled upon. Class struggle or class warfare or class conflict is set to exist because different groups of people have different interests. Social sciences group people with similar features into classes. Most of these features are economic.

Commonly in a society there are two main classes of people. The people who manufacture and the people who provide labor. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels say that for most of history there has been a struggle between these two classes. This struggle happens when the rich business owners pay the workers to make things for them to sell. The workers have to receive the pay without a say and were compelled to do so. Jobs were the only choice that gave them money and they had to work for the rich who made the business. Class struggle occurs in numerous forms like Economic, Political and Ideological form.

Problem arises when the capitalists fail to pay the workers that they deserve. On the other hand due to frustration, deprivation, and aggression, the working class try to revolt to standardize their lifestyle. Dickens' exposes how cunning and uncaring Victorian society was. Folks just ignored the shame and agony of the less fortunate because they were self-satisfied. Dickens' *Oliver Twist* depicts the reality of social injustice to poor people in Britain during the Victorian era.

To voice the suppression of Russia, Lenin, a follower of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, spoke out the socialist, political and economic theories developed from Marxism for practical application to the socio-political conditions of the Russian Empire. Lenin believed and wanted a revolutionary leadership to depose Capitalism in Imperial Russia. According to his belief he formed a vanguard party who led the fight for the political independence of the working class. This was the only way the proletarians could fight against Capitalists. Hence Lenin's way of Marxism was termed as Leninism. This political science term 'Leninism' entered common usage in 1922.

Charles Dickens through *Oliver Twist* challenges the organization of charity run by the Church and the Government of his time. By the Poor Law of 1834, the workhouses were put into a place, which stipulated that the poor could only receive government assistance if they moved into government workhouses. Residents of those workhouses were essentially inmates, whose rights were severely curtailed. Labor was required, families were almost separated and rations of food and clothing were meager. The workhouses operated on the principle that poverty was the consequence of laziness. The workhouses did not provide any means for social or economic betterment. Dickens points out that the officials who ran the workhouses, violated the values they preached to the poor.

In this novel we see the life of the poor orphan Oliver, who has no one or nothing: making himself someone from the lower class. Oliver struggles and encounters many obstacles to become happy. Mr. Bumble, the Beadle, a man in the commanding position threatens Oliver with his physic and power. Not able to withstand hunger, a group of boys make Oliver ask for more food. Asking for more food than what was given is almost violating the rule of the institution. Oliver is punished for the words 'I want some more'. Here Dickens criticizes the public policy towards the poor in 1830's England. Actually Dickens himself has undergone such social evils. As a child he was working in a factory keeping away all his childhood dreams. Also Dickens is one of the most important social critics who used fiction effectively to criticize economic, social and moral violations in the Victorian Era and showed compassion and empathy towards the vulnerable and disadvantaged class of English society.

In the workhouse the poor children were trained to work for the bell. Even the gruel that was served should be taken only on the ringing of the bell. Whereas the governing members of the workhouse feasted almost every meal. Mr. Bumble's dinner on the way to London consisted of 'Steaks, Oyster sauce, hot gin and water. Whereas food in the workhouse included an unlimited supply of water and a periodic supply of porridge. Onion twice a week and half a roll on Sundays. 'It needed no cleaning' – the food was so insufficient that the inmates left nothing on their plates and it was clean as before.

In the Victorian Era the lower class were treated as slaves and animals. The upper class always dominated and suppressed the lower. Poor Oliver was sold as cattle to a coffin maker. There was no justice in that air. Dickens is so sarcastic that he creates a scene where Oliver is made to sleep at ease inside a coffin box at Mr. Sowerberry's house. Dickens uses Oliver as a perfect element to explore important moral issues and values in Victorian society. It is evident that the society claims that the poor are 'bad' from birth and they have a link to their hereditary traits, usually deemed negative. This is clearly evident from the way Oliver was named in the workhouse. Clothing is another way that class and status were made obvious. This is the reason for too many silk handkerchiefs under Fagin's custody. The rich always carried Silk handkerchiefs, whereas the poor children in the workhouses or in the streets were wearing clothes that did not fit and wore whatever they got.

The spirit to fight and revolt is a Leninist quality. Oliver carries this spirit throughout his life and exhibits whenever necessary. He does this by instinct. Karl Marx says that the lower class need to revolt for their rights before getting buried. Lenin believes that this courage alone can bring about equality and independence in the society and in the life of the individuals. Oliver raises his voice and asks for more food. His voice against the Institution is a revolt and as a result he is punished. In the life of the revolutionist, decision making is very essential according to Lenin. Unable to withstand, Oliver strongly decides to brutally attack Noah Claypole for abusing him of his parentage.

Traces of Leninism within the protagonist is evident when he makes odd moves in life. The rich or the upper class would find it difficult to take such decisions as Oliver does. Necessity compels him to do so. Oliver, a poor orphan with nothing to lose, an element of the working class, finds no time to set himself in the streets of London not worrying for the next meal or shelter. The champion of the poor is mentally prepared to fight his life. Fulfillment of immediate needs would keep any revolutionist away from reaching the goal of socialism. Hence it is very essential to fight with a single mind even for a long period of time, to achieve success. Oliver fights throughout his life until he happens to settle in the hands of Mr. Brownlow. As Lenin was for Russia, Mr. Brownlow saves the good souls in the novel. He is the Dictator of the Proletariat who finds harmony in the life of the suppressed and unnoticed souls. Dickens makes the evil characters find their deserved destiny as it would happen to the capitalists in a revolutionary state.

T.H. Lister, responding anonymously in the *Edinburg Review* for October 1938, praised the young author Charles Dickens' pathos and humanity. He says that the tendency of his writing is to excite our sympathy on behalf of the aggrieved and suffering in all classes and especially in those who are most removed from observation – the orphan pauper – the parish apprentice. His humanity is plain, practical and manly. Rival Novelist William Makepeace Thackeray was amazed at Dickens' power to elicit sympathy even for the brutal murder of Nancy.

2. Conclusion

To conclude, Charles Dickens evokes images of early Victorian London. He exposes the uncaring Victorian society through the character Oliver. As a need of the hour, the author identifies himself with the socially downtrodden and traces of Leninism in the protagonist is to support the working class and a portrayal of his own childhood life. His hatred towards the then parish and workhouse is to highlight the evil and the values the officials violated to practice. As a writer he triggers the readers by his writings and remains practical for which he is praised by his fellow writers- from Leo Tolstoy to George Orwell, G.K. Chesterton and Tom Wolfe- for unique characterisation and social criticism.

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