

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLMOUCI  
PEDAGOGICKÁ FAKULTA

Ústav cizích jazyk

# Bakalářská práce

Aleš Dokládal

Marxist concepts in Jack London's *Iron Heel*

Olomouc 2023

vedoucí práce: Mgr. Ivan Čipkár, Ph.D.

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedených pramenů a literatury. V  
Olomouci, 20. 4. 2023

---

podpis

I would like to thank Mgr. Ivan Čipkár, Ph.D. for his extensive support and valuable comments.

# Content

Abstract .....	5
Introduction.....	6
1. London’s life .....	7
1.1 Family environment 1876.....	7
1.2 Class consciousness 1886 .....	9
1.2.1 Child labor .....	10
1.3 Hardship at work 1890.....	12
1.4 Financial crisis 1893 .....	12
1.5 Exploitation at work 1893.....	13
1.6 Kelly’s Army 1894 .....	14
1.7 Imprisonment 1894 .....	15
1.8 Reading Marx 1895.....	16
1.9 Socialist Labour party 1896.....	19
2 The Iron Heel .....	20
2.1 Chapter 1 My Eagle .....	20
2.1.1 World revolution.....	20
2.2 Chapter 2 Challenges .....	21
2.2.1 Marxist critique of church.....	21
2.3 Chapter 3 Jackson’s Arm .....	24
2.3.1 Determinism.....	24
2.3.2 Alienation.....	26
2.3.3 Business ethics .....	27
2.4 Chapter 4 Slaves of the Machine.....	28
2.4.1 Cooperation of institutions.....	29
2.4.2 Manufacturing consent.....	29
2.4.3 Institution in the book vs institution today.....	30
2.5 Chapter 5 Philomaths .....	31
2.5.1 Fall of capitalism.....	31
2.6 Chapter 6 Adumbrations .....	32
2.6.1 Class collaboration.....	33
2.7 Chapter 8 The Machine breakers .....	34
2.7.1 Monopoly.....	34
Conclusion .....	37
Bibliography.....	38
Resumé.....	42
Annotation.....	43

## **Abstract**

This thesis deals with selected events from Jack London's life from 1876 to 1896, and also with *The Iron Heel*. The main aim of this thesis was to identify reasons for London's inclination towards Marxism. The secondary aim was to identify Marxist concepts in *The Iron Heel*, describe them, and analyze the text based on them. This thesis shows that London's life is full of events, which could have led to his inclination towards Marxism. Furthermore, *The Iron Heel* is rich in Marxist concepts such as: class collaboration, world revolution, alienation, determinism, etc. All in all, the thesis shows that Marxism played a key role in London's life as well as in his work.

## Introduction

I chose the topic of this thesis as I have always been interested in dystopian novels and their portrayal of the future. Among dystopian novels, *The Iron Heel* is from my point of view quite overlooked. I also believe that the novel itself is overlooked in Jack London's repertoire as such. That is the reason why I thought it would be worthwhile to analyze the book. As far as my reason for choosing Marxism is concerned, I consider Karl Marx to be the most influential philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (although he lived only in the 19<sup>th</sup>). Even though Marx outlined his ideas over a century ago, I still hold the view that they are worth examining. I also believe that some of his ideas could potentially be well illustrated in *The Iron Heel*.

The main aim of this thesis is to attempt to identify the reason why Jack London made use of Marxism in *The Iron Heel*. By analyzing nine events in London's life, the thesis attempts to discover why these events might have contributed to his inclination towards Marxism.

The other aim of the thesis is to identify Marxist concepts in *The Iron Heel* and also to analyze the text based on them.

The first part of the thesis covers London's life chronologically from his birth in 1876 to his joining Socialist Labour party in 1896. In particular, seven stages of London's life are analysed here and some of them are viewed from a Marxist perspective.

The second part deals with *The Iron Heel* itself. Excerpts from seven chapters of the book are selected that contain a Marxist concept. I made use of not only Karl Marx himself but also of historical as well as contemporary Marxists and left-wing intellectuals, such as David Harvey, William Shaw or Noam Chomsky.

# 1. London's life

One of possible ways of arriving at explanation as to why London made use of Marxism in the Iron Heel is the analysis of several stages of London's life. In this chapter there are presented events in London's life which might have contributed to his use of the aforementioned ideology. Some stages are analyzed with the help of Marxist philosophy.

## 1.1 Family environment 1876

London was born on January 12, 1876 in San Francisco California. Brandt describes London's earliest existence as follows:

In 1876, Jack London was an unwanted child born out of wedlock and into the working class. Cast among the dispossessed, his life at first took an all-too-predictable route: child laborer, gang member, wharf rat, tramp, convict. It all could have ended abruptly and violently for this juvenile delinquent, and no one would have taken much notice.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned above, London was born into a financially unstable environment. This also applies to his family background. London's mother was Flora Wellman. She was a practicing spiritualist and this was the main stream of her income; holding spiritual sessions. Flora suffered from mood swings and other emotional disturbances. London's biological father was an astrologist W.H. Chaney. After learning that Flora was pregnant he insisted on abortion. This led to a dispute which was described in the local press; According to the article, Chaney had driven Wellman out of their rented residence "for Refusing to Destroy Her Unborn Infant"<sup>2</sup>. Wellman then tried to kill herself, first with a sleeping medicine and then with a pistol.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Chaney left his partner before Jack London was born. On September 7, 1876, several months before London's birth, his mother married a war veteran John London. Consequently, Jack was named after his stepfather. John London had several temporary occupations. It can be stated that he accepted activity of any kind, given that it provided financial income. Jack's observation of his step-father shaped could have pushed his world views towards Marxism as

---

<sup>1</sup> BRANDT, Kenneth K. *Jack London*. p.1.

<sup>2</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*. p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*. p. 14.

mentioned in his biography “Watching his worn-out stepfather scramble for work made Jack London fiercely determined not to become another “work-beast”<sup>4</sup>.

John London, upon meeting his future wife, worked as a carpenter, however by virtue of his poor health he was forced to abandon it. The next source of his income became selling sewing machines door-to-door. At this time, Flora Wellman contributed to the family budget by giving piano lessons. In this way, the Londons lived on one of the “lower rungs of the social ladder”<sup>5</sup>.

Apart from his family environment, Jack London was also in touch with the working-class in bars and saloons which he started visiting at the age of ten.<sup>6</sup>

Considering the whereabouts of both Jack London’s closest family members, it can be stated that these circumstances played a significant role in forming future London’s political views and they also contributed to his future ideological inclination towards Marxism.

Here, Stone presents one particular explanation of London’s later inclination towards Marxism. Namely he states that it was inherited from his biological father. Professor Chaney was a left-wing intellectual long before London was born. In his profession Chaney gave lectures on causes and cures of poverty. Sympathy for the working class was also present.<sup>7</sup>

In opposition to this, Tusso argues that this argument is rather invalid. The reason being that it is uncertain if Chaney was even London’s father. Furthermore, even if such a condition was met, attributes such as ideological view of the world are acquired characteristics which are not inherent from the parents<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> STONE, Irving. *A Sailor on Horseback*. p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> TUSO, Joseph F. *Jack London and socialism: a study in contrasts* [online]. p. 11.



## 1.2 Class consciousness 1886

As John's health condition worsened, Jack was forced to start contributing to the family budget by laboring at the age of ten. London reflected on his childhood in his memoirs as follows:

Duty—at 10 years old I was on the streets selling newspapers. Every cent was turned over to my people, and I went to school in constant shame of the hats, shoes, clothes I wore.

Duty—from then on I had no childhood. Up at three o'clock in the morning to carry papers.

When that was finished I did not go home but continued on to school. School out, my evening papers. Saturday I worked on an ice wagon. Sunday I went to a bowling alley and set up pins for drunken Dutchmen. Duty—I turned over every cent and went dressed like a scarecrow.<sup>9</sup>

From the citation above, it may be deducted that London had already started developing his class-consciousness in childhood. Although, at that time, he may not have understood the social structure in a Marxist way, he could observe the difference between his clothes and clothing of his schoolmates. This is significant as clothes can be considered as one of key aspects of class-consciousness; wealthier persons wear more expensive clothes. Clothing also impacts the way in which individuals behaves, those dressed as members of the upper class will tend to behave accordingly.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> KRAUS, Michael W., Jacinth J. X. TAN a Melanie B. TANNENBAUM. *The Social Ladder: A Rank-Based Perspective on Social Class*. p. 88.

## 1.2.1 Child labor

Adverse effect of the child-labor on London's childhood is further characterized by the statement "from then on I had no childhood"<sup>11</sup>.

Marx discusses the phenomenon of child labor as follows:

The practice of boys working at all by day and night turns either in the usual course of things, or at pressing times, seems inevitably to open the door to their not unfrequently working unduly long hours. These hours are, indeed, in some cases, not only cruelly but even incredibly long for children.<sup>12</sup>

London also made notes regarding his child labor in *John Barleycorn*. According to the text, the labor regularly lasted ten hours. The author points to the fact that besides work there was not time for any leisure activities.

When to ten hours of actual work at a machine is added the noon hour; the walking to work and walking home from work; the getting up in the morning, dressing, and eating; the eating at night, undressing, and going to bed, there remains no more than the nine hours out of the twenty-four required by a healthy youngster for sleep.<sup>13</sup>

A potential fitting Marxist parallel could be identified in connection with the situation mentioned by London; theory of subsistence wages. According to Marx, the wages paid to workers suffice only to recover the labor-power (the ability to work). In this example, London was paid the very minimum required to survive and then the cycle repeated. *The Communist Manifesto* further explains this phenomenon as follows:

The average price of wage labor is the minimum wage, i.e., that quantum of the means of subsistence which is absolutely requisite to keep the laborer in bare existence as a laborer.

What, therefore, the wage laborer appropriates by means of his labor merely suffices to

---

<sup>11</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> MARX, Karl. *Capital: An Abridged Edition*. p. 369.

<sup>13</sup> LONDON, Jack. *John Barleycorn*. p.62.

prolong and reproduce a bare existence.<sup>14</sup>

Another fitting statement describing London's condition was put forward by Marx in *Capital* in which he states:

It must be acknowledged that our labourer comes out of the process of production other than he entered. In the market he stood as owner of the commodity "labour power" face to face with other owners of commodities, dealer against dealer. The contract by which he sold to the capitalist his labour power proved, so to say, in black and white that he disposed of himself freely. The bargain concluded, it is discovered that he was no "free agent", that the time for which he is free to sell his labour power is the time for which he is forced to sell it, that in fact the vampire will not lose its hold on him "so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited."<sup>15</sup>

London also mentions one occasion on which he worked for thirty-six consecutive hours.<sup>16</sup>

Considering the aforementioned circumstance of London's early existence, it can be stated that those could have had a certain influence on him with regards to his later inclination towards Marxism. It can be also stated that up to this point he lived life of proletariat, which is the very class at which Marxism aimed. The ideology could then later give him answers to his existential problems and put them into a coherent philosophical concept, according to which London could act. His further financial struggles are described in the next chapter.

---

<sup>14</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*. p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> MARX, Karl. *Capital: An Abridged Edition*. p. 796.

<sup>16</sup> LONDON, Jack. *John Barleycorn*. p.62.

### 1.3 Hardship at work 1890

Due to still unstable financial situation of his family, after graduating from Cole Elementary School Oakland, at the age of fourteen, London started working full-time in place of continuing his studies at high school. The first occupation was pickle-picking at Hickmott's cannery. The working time was variable, stretching from ten to twenty hours daily. The hourly wage made for ten cents.<sup>17</sup>

London later reflected on this time in his *How I Became a Socialist* where he claims that at that time he was dominated by bourgeois ethics. The author had been in fact proud of his occupation and he claimed the dignity of labor to be the most impressive thing in the world. London also states that he had been an unconscious individualist and that at this point he turned to an unconscious socialist.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.4 Financial crisis 1893

Another occupation was working at a jute mill. The wages and physical demand of this job were on par with the previous one. The low wages relate to the surplus of workforce in 1890s. This was caused by a financial crisis referred to as “The Panic of 1893”<sup>19</sup>. This lasted from 1893-1897.<sup>20</sup> This was the first financial crisis in London’s life in which he could observe flaws of capitalism.

At this time a few financial institutions went bankrupt as well as the silver-mining industry. This in turn led to a domino effect, whereby other businesses started failing which led to increase of unemployment.<sup>21</sup> In connection with this, Marx states that if the supply on the labor market exceeds the demand workers turn into beggars. In this way, the worker becomes a commodity that nobody is willing to buy. Hence, they need to lower the price of their labor ( lowering wages). This enables capitalists to pay the lowest wages possible (subsistence wages) as workers have no other means of preserving their existence.<sup>22</sup> To further illustrate the magnitude of this crisis,

---

<sup>17</sup> LONDON, Jack. *John Barleycorn*, p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> *How I Became A Socialist* [online]. Available from: <https://www.online-literature.com/london/3875/>.

<sup>19</sup> *The Panic of 1893* [online]. [cit. 2023-03-18]. Available from: <https://florencekelley.northwestern.edu/historical/panic/#:~:text=The%20Panic%20of%201893%20was,pay%20workers%20or%20buy%20materials>

<sup>20</sup> *The Panic of 1893* [online]. [cit. 2023-03-18]. Available from: <https://florencekelley.northwestern.edu/historical/panic/#:~:text=The%20Panic%20of%201893%20was,pay%20workers%20or%20buy%20materials>.

<sup>21</sup> PAULA, Petrik. Parading as Millionaires: Montana Bankers and the Panic of 1893. p. 729

<sup>22</sup> MARX, Karl. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. : *Wages of Labour* [online]. 1844 [cit. 2023-03-18]. Available from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/wages.htm>

which London experienced, let me present an example of the Indianapolis plan. According to this plan, food was given to workers in exchange for work. One ration of food that was supposed to do for a family for a week was worth one labour day. Due to later complaints of workers, this reward was raised to one dollar worth of food.<sup>23</sup> Here, we can speak of subsistence wages.

The crisis presented another potential reason for London's later sympathy for works of Karl Marx and the use of such concepts in *Iron Heel*.

## 1.5 Exploitation at work 1893

In search of a better future, London decided to quit his job and learn to become an electrician at the Oakland Street Railway. This occupation turned out to lie in shoveling coal. The wage was set at thirty dollars a month. In regards to the working time, London received one day off per month.

On average, one shift consisted of 13 hours.<sup>24</sup> Such a duration of shifts brought his hourly wage under eight cents an hour which was even less than what he had earned at the cannery when he was fourteen. London later learnt that before he was employed, his work had been conducted by two men taking turns. In order to reduce the labor-costs, the employer decided to fire the two workers and put London in place of them. One of the former workers later committed a suicide out of frustration of not being able to provide for his relatives.<sup>25</sup>

London reflected on this:

I was willing to work, and [my employer] was more than willing that I should work. I thought I was learning a trade. In reality, I had displaced two men. I thought he was making an electrician out of me; as a matter of fact, he was making fifty dollars per month out of me. The two men I had displaced had received forty dollars each per month; I was doing the work of both for thirty dollars per month.<sup>26</sup>

Like many working-class American men at that time, London also held belief that through hard work and persistence he would be able to rise<sup>27</sup>. This adheres to the American dream concept.

---

<sup>23</sup>REZNECK, Samuel. Unemployment, Unrest, and Relief in the United States during the Depression of 1893-97. p.331.

<sup>24</sup>STONE, Irving. *A Sailor on Horseback*. p. 53.

<sup>25</sup>STONE, Irving. *A Sailor on Horseback*. p. 54.

<sup>24</sup>LONDON, Jack. *What Life Means to Me.*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> SWAFFORD, Kevin. Tramping with Jack London: Poverty, Performance, and Social Critique in "The Road". p. 173.

However, his experience led him to change his point of view. Hard work in his case led rather to frustration and mental deprivation. After this incident, London proclaimed that “certain forms of work (those physically demanding) lead to nowhere but the “social pit””<sup>28</sup>.

In this case, London experienced being exploited by a capitalist. Tuso states that the aforementioned experience might have been one of the reasons why London later became fond of Marxism. Hard physical work gave London compassion for his fellow workers and at the same time disdain for the capitalist system which didn't seem to protect the poor.<sup>29</sup>

## 1.6 Kelly's Army 1894

Having been disappointed by the circumstances, London opted to join Kelly's Army<sup>30</sup>. This was a subgroup of unemployed workers called Coxe's Army. As a reaction to the preceding crisis, they organized with the aim of reaching Washington DC and presenting their demands to the Government of the United States. Namely, the subject of the discussion was to be 500 million dollars for a public works program that would give the unemployed jobs by building roads.<sup>31</sup> This is also a phenomenon at play which Marx battled with. Such a desperate action of workers could be attributed to their belief, as Marx would put it; “nothing to lose but their chains”<sup>32</sup>.

Coxey's Army initiated their walk in Ohio. Kelly's Army, which was about to join them in Washington, scheduled their departure from Oakland April 1894. Jack London missed this event and he finally managed to join them in Nevada. In the end, he did not accompany the group to its final destination but he went astray.<sup>33</sup> After leaving the group London was a hobo. He headed for Chicago. In this city, he could observe large groups of hobos living in squatter camps. This he would describe as:

the cellar of society, down in the subterranean depths of misery about which it is neither nice nor proper to speak... the pit, the abyss, the human cesspool, the shambles and the charnel house of our civilization. ....the part of the society that society chooses to ignore.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> SWAFFORD, Kevin. Tramping with Jack London: Poverty, Performance, and Social Critique in "The Road". p. 174

<sup>29</sup> TUSO, Joseph F. *Jack London and socialism: a study in contrasts* [online]. p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> VOELTZ, Herman C. *Coxey's Army in Oregon, 1894*. p. 264

<sup>32</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 84.

<sup>33</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> LONDON, Jack. *What Life Means to Me*, p. 37.

Joining the army of unemployed revealed for London other faiths of other workers. In this way he could have acquired more sympathy for the working class. Most importantly, he could have gained sense of belonging. This in turn could have later led to his sympathy for Marxism.

## 1.7 Imprisonment 1894

He later went to Niagara Falls where he was arrested for vagrancy and put into the city jail. The trial was symbolic and the imprisonment lasted for 30 days. The judge seemed to be very brief in his contemplation of his sentence as London later described:

I had been denied my right to trial by jury, I had been denied my right to plead guilty or not guilty, I had not been allowed to communicate with a lawyer nor anyone. I was forced to toil hard on a diet of bread and water and to march the shameful lock-step with armed guards over me.<sup>35</sup>

Along with London, sixteen other homeless were also sentenced.<sup>36</sup>

In this incident, London could personally experience the systematic discrimination on the part of a state institution which was biased against the poor. In a Marxist terms it could be stated that there was a certain antagonism between London and the Judge. London, being member of the struggling proletariat standing against the judge, the representative of the oppressive institution. This experience could have also contributed to London's adoration of Marxism also to his belief contemporary social, political and economic system needed to be changed.

After his release, London commuted on trains, namely got on them illegally. This, although risky strategy, enabled him to travel significant distances at no financial cost. In this way he travelled from Buffalo through Pennsylvania to Washington D.C. After that he travelled to Baltimore, New York City and Montreal. On this journey he came in closer contact with other hobos. He learnt that the people were not all degenerates or alcoholics. In fact, they were simply too old, disabled or weak to work. In other words they were willing to work but the system seemed not to be compatible with this. The aforementioned events can have sparked further London's sympathy for the working-class and later for Marxism. London writes in his *How I Became a Socialist* that these six months played the most significant role in his transition from an individualist to a

---

<sup>35</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Road*. p.85.

<sup>36</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p.38.

socialist. Concerning the imprisonment he states “I think it is apparent that my rampant individualism was pretty effectively hammered out of me, and something else as effectively hammered in”<sup>37</sup>.

Upon observing Kelly’s walk, he states following:

Since that day I have opened many books, but no economic argument, no lucid demonstration of the logic and inevitableness of Socialism affects me as profoundly and convincingly as I was affected on the day when I first saw the walls of the Social Pit rise around me and felt myself slipping down, down, into the shambles at the bottom.<sup>38</sup>

Social pit stands here for a metaphor of the working class. It can be observed that London apprehended getting into the same situation. From this statement it can already be partly deduced that the author could feel slight superiority to the working class as he did not desire to become really one of them<sup>39</sup>.

## 1.8 Reading Marx 1895

In 1895 London decided to join Oakland High School with the intention of transforming himself from a “work-beast”<sup>40</sup> into a “man of brains”<sup>41</sup>. The Oakland Public Library was the place where he came in touch with Marxism for the first time in his life. This was thanks to a librarian Frederick Irons Bamford. In particular, London read *The Communist Manifesto*.<sup>42</sup> The book seemed to address every issue that London had encountered up to this point.

Here, we may state that London had been a socialist also prior to this encounter. However, he was an unconscious socialist and now he was about to turn into a conscious one. The evidence for our claim may be found in *How I Became a Socialist*, where it is stated:

I was now a Socialist without knowing it, withal, an unscientific one. I had been reborn, but

---

<sup>37</sup> *How I Became A Socialist* [online]. Available from: <https://www.online-literature.com/london/3875/>.

<sup>38</sup> *How I Became A Socialist* [online]. Available from: <https://www.online-literature.com/london/3875/>.

<sup>39</sup> LENNON, John. Can a Hobo Share a Box-Car? Jack London, the Industrial Army, and the Politics of (In)visibility. p.7.

<sup>40</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p. 42.

<sup>42</sup> STEFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*, p. 44.



not renamed, and I was running around to find out what manner of thing I was. I ran back to California and opened the books. I do not remember which ones I opened first. It is an unimportant detail anyway. I was already It, whatever It was, and by aid of the books I discovered that It was a Socialist. Since that day I have opened many books, but no economic argument, no lucid demonstration of the logic and inevitableness of Socialism affects me as profoundly and convincingly as I was affected on the day.<sup>43</sup>

According to Tuso, *The Communist Manifesto*, thanks to its clarity, became one of the main inspirations for London's transition to a Marxist. In particular he endorsed the idea of abolition of private property, collective ownership of means of production and lastly the belief in inevitability of victory of the class struggle.<sup>44</sup>

To get a better idea of what particularly London might have found appealing about the aforementioned concepts, let's take a look at their precise formulation in *The Communist Manifesto*.

In regard to class struggle:

The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.<sup>45</sup>

In regard to abolition of private property:

The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products, that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few. In this sense, the theory of the

---

<sup>43</sup> *How I Became A Socialist* [online]. Available from: <https://www.online-literature.com/london/3875/>.

<sup>44</sup> TUSO, Joseph F. *Jack London and socialism: a study in contrasts* [online]. p. 46.

<sup>45</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 78-79.

Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.<sup>46</sup>

Lastly, the collective ownership:

Private property must, therefore, be abolished and in its place must come the common utilization of all instruments of production and the distribution of all products according to common agreement – in a word, what is called the communal ownership of goods. In fact, the abolition of private property is, doubtless, the shortest and most significant way to characterize the revolution in the whole social order which has been made necessary by the development of industry – and for this reason it is rightly advanced by communists as their main demand.<sup>47</sup>

As far as *Das Kapital* is concerned, it is unclear what portion of the text London read. At that time only the first volume was available in English.<sup>48</sup>

Tuso states that London might have taken the first volume with him into the Klondike in 1897, however no precise evidence is given.<sup>49</sup>

Considering the fact that London might not have even read *Das Kapital* at all and he only stuck to *The Communist Manifesto*, we might state that his understanding of the Marxist philosophy was of no particular depth. He seems to have acquired the very basics, which are clearly stated in the *Manifesto*, while avoiding deeper Marxist concepts such as dialectics etc. In spite of all this, this fundamental knowledge was sufficient for including the Marxist philosophy in *The Iron Heel*.

---

<sup>46</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 81-82.

<sup>47</sup> Marxist.org, 2020. [online]. [Accessed 14 March 2023]. Available from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>

<sup>48</sup> TUSO, Joseph F. *Jack London and socialism: a study in contrasts* [online]. p. 45.

<sup>49</sup> TUSO, Joseph F. *Jack London and socialism: a study in contrasts* [online]. p. 45.

## 1.9 Socialist Labour party 1896

London's inclination towards Marxism is finally proven by his joining of the Oakland Socialist Labour party in 1896. Soon after joining the party, the author engaged in giving speeches to students. As a speaker he grew swiftly in popularity as we may deduce from the excerpt from San Francisco Article; "Jack London, who is known as the boy socialist in Oakland, is holding forth nightly to the crowds that throng City Hall park. There are other speakers in plenty, but London always draws the biggest crowd and the most respectful attention"<sup>50</sup>. However, some scholars argue that London's intentions were of rather selfish nature. ...As Kenneth S. Lynn states that London viewed himself as superior to the masses and the idea of controlling them seemed very appealing. "[T]he conversion of Jack London to the philosophy of Marx had more to do with rising in the world than with world revolution"<sup>51</sup>.

Regardless of what London's intentions of converting to Marxism were, he certainly did make use of the concepts in *Iron Heel* which is to be discussed in the next chapters of the practical part.

---

<sup>50</sup> TRINKL, John. JACK LONDON: Historical Essay. [online]. p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> LYNN, Kenneth S. *The dream of success;: A study of the modern American imagination*, p. 84.

## 2 The Iron Heel

The practical part of the thesis focuses on particular excerpts from the book itself. The excerpts are analyzed with the help of the Marxist theory, in particular with the concepts presented in *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*. The Chapters in this part are organized chronologically in line with the chapters in the book.

### 2.1 Chapter 1 My Eagle

#### 2.1.1 World revolution

World revolution is a Marxist concept which was described in particular in *The Communist Manifesto*. According to Marx, workers all around the world should rise simultaneously with the aim of overthrowing the ruling class of bourgeoisie. The national identity is in this case not taken into account as from a Marxist point of view, what matters is a class rather than a nation. In other words, it does not matter where the worker comes from as long as there is capitalism in place, the same concept of revolution can be applied there<sup>52</sup>.

This concept can be identified in the first chapter of *The Iron Heel*.

This chapter begins with the anticipation of revolution. Avis Everhard, one of the main characters of the book, describes it as follows; “All the world is quiet, but it is the quiet before the storm. I strain my ears, and all my senses, for some betrayal of that impending storm. Oh, that it may not be premature! That it may not be premature!”<sup>53</sup>.

Regarding this statement, we may find a fitting parallel in *The Communist Manifesto*, where revolution is also referred to as storm; The French revolution of 1848, whereby is stated: “The revolutionary storm of 1848 swept away this whole shabby tendency and cured its protagonists of the desire to dabble in socialism. The chief representative and classical type of this tendency is MrKarl Gruen”<sup>54</sup>.

Further down the chapter, Avis gives a more precise description of the impending events when

---

<sup>52</sup> WOODS, Alan. World revolution.

<sup>53</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*. p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 75.

she states; “The solidarity of labor is assured, and for the first time will there be an international revolution wide as the world is wide”<sup>55</sup>.

Now let’s break down this statement. Avis suggests that the revolution is supposed to be carried out globally. The workers of the whole world should unite in their common struggle against the global bourgeoisie. This concept of a global revolution is presented in the declaration of the Communist party, where it says; „In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things”<sup>56</sup>.

Here is another statement which also fits Avis’s proclamation

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistrevolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite.<sup>57</sup>

The last sentence is critical as it stresses theinternationality of the revolution, which is in line with what Avis is awaiting.

## **2.2 Chapter 2 Challenges**

### **2.2.1 Marxist critique of church**

In this chapter, Ernest Everhard leads a discussion with the bishop about his view of social dynamics. Ernest is putting forward arguments regarding class antagonism, whereby he states as follows:

We say that the class struggle is a law of social development. We are not responsible for it.

We do not make the class struggle. We merely explain it, as Newton explained gravitation.

We explain the nature of the conflict of interest that produces the class struggle.<sup>58</sup>

In this statement we can discover a reference to a Marxist concept, namely, the inevitability of

---

<sup>55</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 83.

<sup>57</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 83.

<sup>58</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 16.

class struggle within a capitalist society. According to Marx, Capitalism is a system in which class struggle is inherent. In other words, the class struggle is one of flaws of capitalism, without which, however, capitalism cannot exist. Ernest goes even further when he refers to this concept as a law of social development. In *The Communist Manifesto*, we can find a fitting excerpt which further describes this concept presented by Ernest:

I consider myself bound to state that the fundamental proposition which forms its nucleus belongs to Marx. That proposition is: that in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes.<sup>59</sup>

Now, to stress the scientific foundation of his statement, Ernest compares class struggle to Newton's findings about the law of gravitation. Marx takes a similar approach, with the exception that he makes a comparison to Darwin in place of Newton: "This proposition, which, in my opinion, is destined to do for history what Darwin's theory has done for biology"<sup>60</sup>.

Ernest also makes a comment on the private property when he states that:

The cycle of class struggles which began with the dissolution of rude, tribal communism and the rise of private property will end with the passing of private property in the means of social existence.<sup>61</sup>

In this statement there is described the concept of abolition of private property. This concept is also discussed by Engels in *The Principles of Communism*, where he states:

In fact, the abolition of private property is, doubtless, the shortest and most significant way

---

<sup>59</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 96.

<sup>60</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 96.

<sup>61</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 16.

to characterize the revolution in the whole social order which has been made necessary by the development of industry – and for this reason it is rightly advanced by communists as their main demand.<sup>62</sup>

The argument between Ernest and the bishop gradually gets to a point where the role of the church within the capitalist system is discussed. Ernest argues that the church is obedient to the ruling class of bourgeoisie as the capitalists pay the church. In return for this payment, the church promises workers heaven after death, which keeps the working class obedient to the status-quo. Ernest refers to the relationship between capitalists and workers as “pig-ethics”<sup>63</sup>, whereby he states: “Yes, pig-ethics,” Ernest went on remorselessly. “That is the meaning of the capitalist system. And that is what your church is standing for, what you are preaching for every time you get up in the pulpit. Pig-ethics! There is no other name for it”<sup>64</sup>.

Such a role of church, which is suggested by Ernest, is also dealt with in the Marxist theory. Marx in the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* argues that the religion is the “opium of the people”<sup>65</sup>.

One of possible interpretation of this statement, which is in line with Ernest’s, could be as follows: The Church is an entity which institutionalized religion. This institution gives workers hope that there might be heaven after death as long as they behave well and do not revolt. This is in the interest of the ruling class of capitalists who pay the church. In this way, workers may be ignorant of the fact that they are exploited as they might interpret this as their inevitable faith and the God’s will. As a result, the status-quo is preserved and capitalists can rule on.<sup>66</sup>

In *Iron Heel*, Ernest refers to such a relationship between the capitalists and the working class as “pig-ethics”<sup>67</sup>, whereby he suggests that the church functions as a transmitter, allowing this principal to work.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> ENGELS, Friedrich. *Principles of communism*. p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> MARX, Karl. *Early writings*, p. 244.

<sup>66</sup> LENIN, Vladimir Il’ich. *Socialism and religion*. p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 18.

## 2.3 Chapter 3 Jackson's Arm

### 2.3.1 Determinism

In this chapter Avis Everhard listens to a testimony of a worker named Jackson, whose limb was lost during an accident in a factory. The worker wanted to sue the company for money and he went on trial with them. However, the judge and the factory lawyer were familiar and thus Jackson's attempt failed. Here we can identify another conflict of interest between the bourgeoisie and the working class. The capitalists tend to support each other in order to remain in control of the working class. This situation is described in the following excerpt by Jackson:

Colonel Ingram and Judge Caldwell are pretty friendly. I'm not saying that if I'd got the right kind of testimony out of their witnesses on cross-examination, that friendship would have decided the case. And yet I must say that Judge Caldwell did a whole lot to prevent my getting that very testimony. Why, Judge Caldwell and Colonel Ingram belong to the same lodge and the same club. They live in the same neighborhood—one I can't afford. And their wives are always in and out of each other's houses. They're always having whist parties and such things back and forth.<sup>69</sup>

In this example, we can observe the complexity of relationship between members of bourgeoisie. Their bounds are extensive as they also apply to their family members. Not only individual bourgeoisie but also their family members are regularly in touch. Thus, also the family members are aware of their upper status and they tend to interact with individuals of the same class level.

Such a situation, in a Marxist language, might be referred to as economic determinism. This means that wealthy people tend to interact exclusively with other wealthy people and thus there is no space for social mobility. A critical idea in this regard is the fact that the wealthy people were already born wealthy. Thus, their economic as well as class situation was determined from their birth. To give a concrete example of the aforementioned from the book, we can analyze Colonel Ingram and Judge Caldwell. These both individuals are wealthy men and come from the bourgeois class. Hence, they stick together. Their relationship was determined by their economic

---

<sup>69</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 27.



conditions (determinism)<sup>70</sup>. The very same principal can be applied to their wives, whose relationship exists mainly due to their economic situation. In other words, if Colonel Ingram were a poor beggar, Judge Caldwell would never interact with him in a friendly manner and vice versa. Both Caldwell and Ingram stand in direct class opposition towards Jackson. It is an example of struggle between a member of the working class (Jackson) and member of Bourgeoisie (Caldwell and Ingram). Marx describes functioning of society within the framework of economic determinism as follows: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past”<sup>71</sup>.

London then further describes the principal of loyalty of bourgeoisie with respect to Ingram as follows:

The function of the corporation lawyer was to serve, by corrupt methods, the money-grabbing propensities of the corporations. It is on record that Theodore Roosevelt, at that time President of the United States, said in 1905 A.D., in his address at Harvard Commencement: “We all know that, as things actually are, many of the most influential and most highly remunerated members of the Bar in every center of wealth, make it their special task to work out bold and ingenious schemes by which their wealthy clients, individual or corporate, can evade the laws which were made to regulate, in the interests of the public, the uses of great wealth.”<sup>72</sup>

This excerpt from the book accurately summarizes principles of class loyalty between member of bourgeoisie (Ingram and Caldwell), whereby is stated that the rich tend to support rich in order to remain rich.

---

<sup>70</sup> SHERMAN, Howard. Marx and Determinism. p. 63.

<sup>71</sup> MARX, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 27.

### 2.3.2 Alienation

Further down the chapter, Jackson describes his relationship towards the mills as follows:

I used to belong to the union. But I've stayed by the company through two strikes. They called me 'scab.' There's not a man among 'em to-day to take a drink with me if I asked him. D'ye see the scars on me head where I was struck with flying bricks? There ain't a child at the spindles but what would curse me name. Me only friend is the company. It's not me duty, but me bread an' butter an' the life of me children to stand by the mills. That's why.<sup>73</sup>

According to this statement, Jackson seems to experience alienation. The occupation has alienated him from the products of his labor and he sees no deeper meaning in this conduct. He does it solely in order to provide for his offspring. Jackson has to take a clearly pragmatic stance in this case as he has no other choice. He can either work or he and his family will starve. In this way, he does not feel fulfilled by his occupation and his social bounds have been cut as well. In other words, he is alienated. Here, we can speak of work alienation.<sup>74</sup> Brief comment of Marx on this topic:

Man alienates the products of his labor because he alienates his labor activity, because his own activity becomes for him an alien activity, an activity in which he does not affirm but denies himself, an activity which does not free but subjugates him.<sup>75</sup>

In particular, the last part of Marx's statement is very important: "an activity which does not free but subjugates him"<sup>76</sup>. This is in line with Jackson's statement regarding his occupation; "It's not me duty, but me bread an' butter an' the life of me children to stand by the mills. That's why"<sup>77</sup>.

Jackson's occupation does not seem to free him, conversely it rather seems to subjugate him. As already partially explained above, the subjugation lies in the fact that due to his children's

---

<sup>73</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 28.

<sup>74</sup> PETROVIĆ, Gajo. *Marx's Theory of Alienation*. p. 419.

<sup>75</sup> PETROVIĆ, Gajo. *Marx's Theory of Alienation*. p. 419.

<sup>76</sup> PETROVIĆ, Gajo. *Marx's Theory of Alienation*. p. 419.

<sup>77</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 28.

dependence on the income from the factory, he cannot act as a free agent. If he had the option to act as a free agent, he would probably leave the company and move on to conduct a different activity. However, this option is out of question and a fitting London's description of Jackson's situation might be as follows; "Jackson is caught in wheels and cogs of the industrial machine"<sup>78</sup>.

### 2.3.3 Business ethics

Below, we can observe a conversation between Jackson and Avis regarding the company's fierce struggle to avoid paying any compensations for injuries in the workplace.

"It means hundreds of thousands a year to the stockholders," he said; and as he spoke I remembered the last dividend that had been paid my father, and the pretty gown for me and the books for him that had been bought out of that dividend. I remembered Ernest's charge that my gown was stained with blood, and my flesh began to crawl underneath my garments.<sup>79</sup>

Jackson argues that stockholders do this in order to receive as high dividends as possible. At this point, Avis is slowly coming to a realization of evil practices of members of her class. Her transition had already been initiated by Ernest's unsuccessful attempted to persuade her.

However, now, she seems to be convinced more; "my flesh began to crawl underneath my garments"<sup>80</sup>.

In the excerpt, we can also identify a concept of business ethics. According to Shaw, capitalism can create an environment in which people are tempted to engage in unethical behavior in order to pursue their own self-interest. However, it is also true that businesses need to follow certain rules and trust each other in order to function effectively. Without these rules and trust, business transactions would be similar to those among criminals, and business would be impossible. While the law helps to enforce these rules and create a fair environment for business, it is not enough on its own. Businesses also need to adhere to shared norms and values in order for the system to survive and function satisfactorily.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 32.

<sup>79</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 29.

<sup>81</sup> SHAW, William H. *Marxism, Business Ethics, and Corporate Social Responsibility*, p. 567

Shaw also argues that law enforces certain rules. However, such rules might not always be positive. What if, as can be observed in the case of Jackson's injury, is law used to conduct ethically problematic things. Lawyers of the factory act perfectly according to the law, however, one might doubt that their conduct is virtuous. They act in line with the legal system, however, such a legal system might not be ethical at all. To draw a concrete historical parallel, we can take the slavery in the United States into consideration. Here, slavery was perfectly legal until the introduction of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 which says; "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction"<sup>82</sup>

## 2.4 Chapter 4 Slaves of the Machine

In the excerpt below, Avis is attempting to bring justice to Jackson by spreading word about the case through the newspapers. Here, we may also identify several Marxist concepts.

Next I tried the newspapers. I wrote a quiet, restrained, dispassionate account of Jackson's case. I made no charges against the men with whom I had talked, nor, for that matter, did I even mention them. I gave the actual facts of the case, the long years Jackson had worked in the mills, his effort to save the machinery from damage and the consequent accident, and his own present wretched and starving condition. The three local newspapers rejected my communication, likewise did the two weeklies.<sup>83</sup>

In this part, Avis is attempting to identify the reason for suppressing her in the press. She approached Percy Layton, who is an employee in the newspaper, and they discuss the situation. Layton informs her that he as an employee must follow a certain policy, otherwise he would get fired. Layton as a subordinate has no control over this policy that is crafted by the editors. The editors promote corporate interests. Layton describes the situation as follows:

---

<sup>82</sup> Legal Information Institute: 13th Amendment. Available from: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiii>.

<sup>83</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 35.

“Editorial policy,” he said. “We have nothing to do with that. It’s up to the editors.”

“But why is it policy?” I asked.

“We’re all solid with the corporations,” he answered. “If you paid advertising rates, you couldn’t get any such matter into the papers. A man who tried to smuggle it in would lose his job. You couldn’t get it in if you paid ten times the regular advertising rates”<sup>84</sup>

### **2.4.1 Cooperation of institutions**

Judging from the two excerpts above, the interconnection of the institutions become clear. At first, one might consider the factory and the newspapers two separate entities. However, it gradually becomes clear that they both cooperate to remain in power. They are the system. In the book there seems to be no institution that would protect the workers from injustice from other institutions.

### **2.4.2 Manufacturing consent**

The excerpts above can be analyzed using Noam Chomsky's theory of manufacturing consent, which argues that the media is not an independent watchdog of power, but rather serves the interests of powerful elites. According to this theory, the media is controlled by a small number of corporations that use their power to shape public opinion and advance their own interests.

In the excerpt, Percy Layton suggests that the editorial policy of the newspaper is not determined by the journalists or editors, but by the corporations that own the paper. He implies that the newspaper has a policy of avoiding any content that might be critical of these corporations or their interests. Another suggestion on his part is that advertising rates are used to control what content is published in the paper. He argues that if someone tried to publish content that was critical of the corporations, they would lose their job.

This excerpt supports Chomsky's theory of manufacturing consent by suggesting that the media is not an independent entity, but rather a tool that is used by powerful corporations to shape public opinion. The fact that editorial policy is controlled by the corporations that own the newspaper,

---

<sup>84</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, pp. 34-35.

and that advertising rates are used to control what content is published, suggests that the media is not an objective source of information, but rather a tool for advancing the interests of the powerful<sup>85</sup>

### **2.4.3 Institution in the book vs institution today**

In the present day in the Czech republic we have the labor office that is responsible for supervising that work regulation is followed by employers. In our present situation in the Czech republic, unlike in the book, workers have the right to complain about their working condition and the labor office is obliged to step in. The Czech republic, to a certain extent, seems to guarantee fundamental workers' rights (minimal wage, vacation etc.).

If we consider the United states of America, the state also guarantees certain protection against exploitation. For instance, the federal minimum wage for covered nonexempt employees is \$7.25 per hour.<sup>86</sup>

If Jackson lived in today's America, his situation would be much better. The Occupational Safety and Health administration is an institution that regulates safety and health conditions of workers. The factory in the book would these days be subject to the OSH Act also have a general duty to provide work and a workplace free from recognized, serious hazards. In the book, workers tend not to complain about issues they face as they are afraid of punishment by the employer. In today's America, Jackson could be a part of The Whistleblower Protection Program. Their chart contains whistleblower (anti-retaliation) provisions that generally provide that employers may not discharge or retaliate against an employee because the employee has filed a complaint or otherwise exercised other rights provided to employees under the statute. Each law requires that complaints be filed within a certain number of days after the alleged retaliation. Complaints may be filed orally or in writing, and OSHA will accept the complaint in any language.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> HERMAN, Edward S. a Noam CHOMSKY. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. p.18

<sup>86</sup> Minimum Wage. Available from: <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/wages/minimumwage>.

<sup>87</sup> Whistleblower Statutes Summary Chart. Available from: [https://www.whistleblowers.gov/whistleblower\\_acts-desk\\_reference](https://www.whistleblowers.gov/whistleblower_acts-desk_reference).

## 2.5 Chapter 5 Philomaths

In this chapter Ernest leads a fierce discussion with philomaths in which he presents his critique of the current state of affairs and he also outlines what is to come:

You cannot escape us. It is true that you have read history aright. It is true that labor has from the beginning of history been in the dirt. And it is equally true that so long as you and yours and those that come after you have power, that labor shall remain in the dirt. I agree with you. I agree with all that you have said.

Power will be the arbiter, as it always has been the arbiter. It is a struggle of classes. Just as your class dragged down the old feudal nobility, so shall it be dragged down by my class, the workingclass. If you will read your biology and your sociology as clearly as you do your history, you will see that this end I have described is inevitable. It does not matter whether it is in one year, ten, or a thousand—your class shall be dragged down. And it shall be done by power. We of the labor hosts have coned that word over till our minds are all a-tingle with it. Power. It is a kingly word.<sup>88</sup>

### 2.5.1 Fall of capitalism

In the excerpt above, we may identify the concept of fall of capitalism. The fall of capitalism has been seen as inevitable by Marxist scholars for centuries. According to Karl Marx, capitalism is inherently flawed and bound to collapse due to its internal contradictions. He believed that the exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie would eventually lead to a revolution that would overthrow the capitalist system.<sup>89</sup> Friedrich Engels, Marx's collaborator, also believed in the inevitability of capitalism's downfall. He argued that capitalism's focus on profit over people and

---

<sup>88</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 54.

<sup>89</sup> COHEN, G. A., R. VERYARD, D. H. MELLOR, A. G. M. LAST, Randolph QUIRK a John MASON. *Historical Inevitability and Human Agency in Marxism [and Discussion]*. p. 65.

its tendency to create wealth inequality would lead to its downfall.<sup>90</sup>

More recent Marxist theorists have also made predictions of the collapse of capitalism if fundamental principals are to remain constant. David Harvey, a Marxist geographer and a social theorist, presents several arguments. In his view, capitalism is a dynamic and constantly evolving economic system that is characterized by the exploitation of labor and the pursuit of profit. He argues that capitalism creates wealth and prosperity for some, but also leads to social, environmental, and economic instability. According to Harvey, capitalism is driven by a constant expansion of capital, or the accumulation of wealth through investment and reinvestment (compounding). This expansion is what drives economic growth and the creation of new markets, but it also leads to a concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and the marginalization of large segments of the population. Harvey also critiques the idea that capitalism is an inherently efficient system, pointing out that it is plagued by recurrent financial crises, income inequality, and ecological degradation. He argues that these problems can only be solved through a radical restructuring of the economic and political systems that underpin capitalism. In summary, Harvey sees capitalism as a dynamic, but flawed, economic system that is in need of significant reforms if it is to continue to serve the needs of society as a whole.<sup>91</sup>

As we can see Marxist thinkers have long seen the fall of capitalism as inevitable due to its inherent contradictions and unsustainable practices, just as stated in the excerpt in *The Iron Heel*. The specific timing and circumstances of its collapse may vary, but the belief in its eventual downfall remains central to Marxist thought.

## 2.6 Chapter 6 Adumbrations

In this chapter, Ernest receives a job offer from the government, namely the appointment of a Commisar of Labor. The position promises high salary, which would also provide for Avis. Ernest reacts to this offer as follows:

“It is a bribe,” he said. “Behind it is the fine hand of Wickson, and behind him the hands of greater men than he. It is an old trick, old as the class struggle is old—stealing the captains

---

<sup>90</sup> MARX, Karl and Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*. p. 20.

<sup>91</sup>David Harvey's new thesis is that 'capitalism is too big to fail.' Is it?. Available from: <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/david-harveys-new-thesis-is-that-capitalism-is-too-big-to-fail-is-it>



from the army of labor. Poor betrayed labor! If you but knew how many of its leaders have been boughtout in similar ways in the past. It is cheaper, so much cheaper, to buy a general than to fight him and his whole army. There was—but I'll not call any names. I'm bitter enough over it as it is. Dear heart, I am a captain of labor. I could not sell out. If for no other reason, the memory of my poor old father and the way he was worked to death would prevent"<sup>92</sup>

### **2.6.1 Class collaboration**

In the excerpt above, we may identify a concept of class collaboration.

This concept is defined as a situation in which certain groups of workers are in a strategic position and they receive a portion of the profits that are extracted from their fellow workers in the same shop or industry, from workers in other industries in their land, or from the surplus value extracted from the workers in other countries.<sup>93</sup> This enables capitalism to give certain workers a wage above the average, thus reconciling them to capitalism. It also creates a subtle sense of superiority in these workers, destroying their solidarity with their fellows and their consciousness of class.

The excerpt provides an example of this concept in action. It shows that the government in the book is using soft power against Ernest , offering him a large sum of money in exchange for his loyalty. Ernest, apparently familiar with this tactic, recognizes this as an old trick, used by capitalists to buy out labor leaders and prevent them from leading their armies against them. He is bitter about it, as this would be a betrayal of labor, which is against his morals. He also doesn't want to disgrace the memory of his father.

This excerpt provides an excellent example of the concept of class collaboration. It shows how capitalists are able to use the soft power, namely buying out labor leaders, thus preventing them from leading their armies against them, in their favor. It also shows how this creates a subtle sense of superiority in those who receive the bribes, which in turn can lead to destroying their solidarity

---

<sup>92</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 59.

<sup>93</sup> WOLFE, Bertram D. *HOW CLASS COLLABORATION WORKS*. pp. 8-9.

with their fellows and also to weakening their class consciousness. This excerpt and the concept of class collaboration beautifully demonstrate the use of soft power in capitalism.

## 2.7 Chapter 8 The Machine breakers

In the following excerpt a small businessman is complaining about the issue of rising power giant trusts, which eventually may lead to monopoly.

“The railroad knows my business just a little bit better than I do,” he said. “It knows my operating expenses to a cent, and it knows the terms of my contracts. How it knows these things I can only guess. It must have spies in my employ, and it must have access to the parties to all my contracts. For look you, when I place a big contract, the terms of which favor me a goodly profit, the freight rate from my quarry to market is promptly raised. No explanation is made. The railroad gets my profit. Under such circumstances I have never succeeded in getting the railroad to reconsider its raise. On the other hand, when there have been accidents, increased expenses of operating, or contracts with less profitable terms, I have always succeeded in getting the railroad to lower its rate. What is the result? Large or small, the railroad always gets my profits”<sup>94</sup>

### 2.7.1 Monopoly

The railroads in this excerpt can be viewed as an example of growing monopolies in the capitalist system.

Here is a quote from Karl Marx's *Capital, Volume I* where he discusses the tendency towards monopoly under capitalism:

The battle of competition is fought by cheapening of commodities. The cheapness of commodities depends, *ceteris paribus*, on the productivity of labor, and this depends on the scale of production. Therefore, the larger capitals beat the smaller. It will further be

---

<sup>94</sup> LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*, p. 66.

remembered that, with the development of the capitalist mode of production, there is an increase in the minimum amount of individual capital necessary to carry on a business under its normal conditions. The smaller capitals, therefore, crowd into spheres of production which modern industry has only sporadically or incompletely got hold of. Here competition rages in direct proportion to the number, and in inverse proportion to the magnitudes, of the antagonistic capitals. It always ends in the ruin of many small capitalists, whose capitals partly pass into the hands of their conquerors, partly vanish. Apart from this, with capitalist production anarchy is complete, the cooperation of the labour-process is nil, and the process of production itself is carried on without any regard to the health or life of the workman, unless society forcibly compels them to take this into account.<sup>95</sup>

This passage highlights Marx's view that competition between capitalists leads to larger firms beating out smaller ones, and that this process eventually leads to monopolies.

The excerpt about the railroad and the passage from Marx's *Capital, Volume I* both deal with the relationship between capitalism and monopolies. The railroad owner in the first excerpt describes how the railroad company has access to information about his business and uses that information to extract profits from him. This is an example of how larger, more powerful companies can use their position to dominate smaller businesses and extract profits from them, which is a key feature of monopolies as described by Marx. The passage from Marx's *Capital, Volume I* explains how competition between capitalists leads to the concentration of capital in a few large firms, which then use their power to drive out smaller competitors. This process leads to the formation of monopolies, which Marx sees as a form of exploitation that allows the owners of capital to extract greater profits from workers and consumers. Both the excerpt from *The Iron Heel* about the railroad as well as the Marx's passage highlight the ways in which capitalism can lead to the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few large corporations, which can then dominate the market and suppress competition. They also illustrate how this process can have negative consequences for smaller businesses and workers.

Growing power of railroad companies that could potentially transform to monopolies were also

---

<sup>95</sup> MARX, Karl. *Capital: An Abridged Edition*. p. 347.

viewed as a threat in America in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as we may read in the *Scientific America*, whereby is stated:

We see in the future of this country no danger more threatening than the growth and existence of enormous monopolies, particularly railroad monopolies. The past has demonstrated that our system of government gives almost unlimited scope for the growth of these enormous fungi upon the body politic. Their roots have struck.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> RAILROAD MONOPOLIES. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26040884>. p.55.

## Conclusion

The thesis had two aims. Firstly, by dealing with selected moments from Jack London's life from 1876 to 1896 to discover potential reasons why London made use of Marxism in *The Iron Heel*.

In this regard, it was discovered that several circumstances could have sparked his inclination towards Marxism. The first moment could have already been the environment into which he was born, namely working class.

Another possible reason might have been the fact that he had to start working very early in his life at the age of ten. The reason could have also been the economic crisis in 1893, in which London could observe flaws of capitalism at first hand. Subsequently, London's joining of army of the unemployed and later being put in prison unjustly could have also played its role in his inclination towards Marxism.

The last potential explanation could also be the combination of all the aforementioned events together.

Here it can be stated that London's motivation to use Marxism in *The Iron Heel* is of great complexity and further research might be needed to suggest other possible theories.

The second aim of the thesis was to identify Marxist concepts in the book itself and also analyze the text based on them. In this regard several concepts were identified. In the Chapter 1, Avis Everhard was awaiting a world revolution, which is in line with Marx's concept of world revolution. In the Chapter 2, where Ernest has an argument with the bishop, concept of Marxist critique of church was discovered. In Chapter 3 concepts of Determinism and Alienation were discovered. In Chapter 4, concept of institutions ruled by the oppressive class was discovered, whereby Chomsky's theory of Manufacturing Consent was used. In Chapter 5, we discovered a concept of inevitability of fall of capitalism, whereby Harvey's view was presented. Chapter 6 contained a concept of class collaboration. Lastly, in chapter 8, concept of capitalist monopolies and their relation to small businesses was described.

Here it can be stated that *The Iron Heel* is rich in Marxist philosophy as well as Marxist concepts. Some excerpts of the book are even very similar to excerpts from *The Communist Manifesto*. Judging from this it can be stated that London showed certain inclination towards Marxism. The thesis covered only some aspects regarding Marxism in *The Iron Heel*. In order to cover the whole complexity of Marxism in the book, further research needs to be conducted.

## Bibliography

BRANDT, Kenneth K. *Jack London*. Online edn. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018, ISBN 9781789629156.

COHEN, G. A., R. VERYARD, D. H. MELLOR, A. G. M. LAST, Randolph QUIRK and John MASON. Historical Inevitability and Human Agency in Marxism [and Discussion]. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series A, Mathematical and Physical Sciences* [online]. London: Royal Society, 1986, **407**(1832) pp. 65-87[cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 65-87, ISSN 00804630.

Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2397783>

David Harvey's new thesis is that 'capitalism is too big to fail.' Is it?. *Canadian Dimension* [online]. 2020 [cit. 2023-04-13]. Available from:

<https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/david-harveys-new-thesis-is-that-capitalism-is-too-big-to-fail-is-it>

ENGELS, Friedrich. *Principles of communism*. London: Pluto Press, 1970. ISBN 0902818023. Originally published: 1847.

HERMAN, Edward S. a Noam CHOMSKY. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Softcover. New York: Pantheon, 1988. ISBN 9780679720348.

*How I Became A Socialist* [online]. In: LONDON, Jack. 1905 [cit. 2023-03-18]. Available from: <https://www.online-literature.com/london/3875/>

KRAUS, Michael W., Jacinth J. X. TAN a Melanie B. TANNENBAUM. The Social Ladder: A Rank-Based Perspective on Social Class. *Psychological Inquiry* [online]. Taylor & Francis, 2013, **24**(2), 88 [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 81-96, ISSN 1532-7965. Available from:

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43865620>

Legal Information Institute: 13th Amendment. *Cornell Law School* [online]. Ithaca: Cornell Law School [cit. 2023-04-13]. Available from:

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiii>

LENIN, Vladimir Il'ich. *Socialism and religion*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954.

LENNON, John. Can a Hobo Share a Box-Car? Jack London, the Industrial Army, and the Politics of (In)visibility. *American Studies* [online]. Fayetteville: Mid-America American Studies Association, 2007 [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 5-30, ISSN 00263079. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40644104>

LONDON, Jack. *John Barleycorn*. Softcover. Santa Cruz: Western Tanager Press, 1981. ISBN 0-934136-17-3.

LONDON, Jack. *The Iron Heel*. Softcover. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2009. ISBN 9780486473659.

LONDON, Jack. *The Road*. Softcover. Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016. ISBN 9781535132404.

LONDON, Jack. *What Life Means to Me*. Softcover. Delhi: Alpha Editions, 2019. ISBN 9789353608514.

LYNN, Kenneth S. *The dream of success;: A study of the modern American imagination*,. Hardcover. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1972. ISBN 9780837162690.

MARX, Karl a Friedrich ENGELS. *The Communist Manifesto*. Hardcover. London: Pluto Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-7453-2847-8. Originally published: 1848.

MARX, Karl. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. : *Wages of Labour* [online]. 1844 [cit. 2023-03-18]. Available from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/wages.htm>

MARX, Karl. *Capital: An Abridged Edition*. Softcover. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-953570-5. Originally published: 1867.

MARX, Karl. *Early writings*. London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1992. ISBN 0-14-044574-9.

MARX, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Paperback. Norderstedt: Hansebooks, 2021. ISBN 978-3337999339. Originally published: 1898

Marxist.org, 2020. [online]. [Accessed 14 March 2023]. Available from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>

Minimum Wage. *U.S. Department of Labor* [online]. [cit. 2023-04-13]. Available from: <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/wages/minimumwage>

PAULA, Petrik. Parading as Millionaires: Montana Bankers and the Panic of 1893. *Enterprise & Society* [online]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, **1**(1) [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 729-762, ISSN 14672227. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23701272>

PETROVIĆ, Gajo. Marx's Theory of Alienation. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* [online]. Rhode Island: International Phenomenological Society, 1963, 1963, **23**(3) [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 419-426, ISSN 00318205. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2105083>

RAILROAD MONOPOLIES. *Scientific American* [online]. New York: Scientific American, a division of Nature America, 1871, **24**(4) [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 55-56, ISSN 00368733. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26040884>

REZNECK, Samuel. Unemployment, Unrest, and Relief in the United States during the Depression of 1893-97. *Journal of Political Economy* [online]. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953, **61**(4) [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 324-345, ISSN 00223808. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1826883>

SHAW, William H. Marxism, Business Ethics, and Corporate Social Responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics* [online]. New York: Springer, 2009, **84**(4) [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 565-576, ISSN 01674544. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40294761>

SHERMAN, Howard. Marx and Determinism. *Journal of Economic Issues* [online]. Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 1981, **15**(1) [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 61-71, ISSN 00213624. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4224996>

STEFFOFF, Rebecca. *Jack London: An American Original*. Illustrated. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 14 s. ISBN 978-0195122237.

STONE, Irving. *A Sailor on Horseback*. Softcover. New York: New American Library, 1969, 79 s. ISBN 978-0451162472.

SWAFFORD, Kevin. Tramping with Jack London: Poverty, Performance, and Social Critique in "The Road." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* [online]. Iowa: Midwest Modern Language Association, 2018, **51**(1), [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 173-195, ISSN 07425562. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45017410>

The Panic of 1893. In: *The and Times of Florence Kelley* [online]. Northwestern University School of Law, 2012, [cit. 2023-03-18]. Available from: [https://florencekelley.northwestern.edu/historical/panic/#:~:text=The%20Panic%20of%201893%](https://florencekelley.northwestern.edu/historical/panic/#:~:text=The%20Panic%20of%201893%20)



20was.pay%20work%20ers%20or%20buy%20materials.

TRINKL, John. JACK LONDON: Historical Essay. *The San Francisco digital archive* [online]. [cit. 2023-04-13]. Available from: [https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=JACK\\_LONDON](https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=JACK_LONDON)

TUSO, Joseph F. *Jack London and socialism: a study in contrasts* [online]. 1964, 11 s. [cit. 2023-04-13]. Available from: <https://repository.arizona.edu/handle/10150/319292>. The University of Arizona.

VOELTZ, Herman C. Coxey's Army in Oregon, 1894. *Oregon Historical Quarterly* [online]. Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1964, **65**(3) [cit. 2023-04-13]. pp. 263-295, ISSN 00304727. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20612805>

Whistleblower Statutes Summary Chart. *U.S. Department of Labor* [online]. [cit. 2023-04-13]. Available from: [https://www.whistleblowers.gov/whistleblower\\_acts-desk\\_reference](https://www.whistleblowers.gov/whistleblower_acts-desk_reference)

WOLFE, Bertram D. *HOW CLASS COLLABORATION WORKS*. Washington: DAILY WORKER PUBLISHING CO, 1926.

WOODS, Alan. World revolution. In: *In defence of Marxism* [online]. 2019 [cit. 2023-04-13]. Available from: <http://www.marxist.com/world-revolution.htm>

## Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá vybranými momenty ze života Jacka Londona v letech 1876 až 1896 a také knihou *Železná pata*. Hlavním cílem této práce bylo identifikovat důvody Londonovy náklonosti pro marxismus. Vedlejším cílem bylo identifikovat marxistické koncepty v knize *Železná pata*, popsat je a na jejich základě analyzovat text. Tato práce ukazuje, že Londonův život je plný událostí, které mohly vést k jeho náklonosti k marxismus. *Železná pata* obhasuje mnoho marxistických konceptů jako, jako jsou: třídní kolaborace, světová revoluce, odcizení, determinismus atd. Celkově práce ukazuje, že marxismus hrál klíčovou roli v Londonově životě i v jeho díle.

## Annotation

<b>Jméno a příjmení:</b>	<b>Aleš Dokládal</b>
<b>Katedra:</b>	<b>Ústav cizích jazyků</b>
<b>Vedoucí práce:</b>	<b>Mgr. Ivan Čipkár, Phd.</b>
<b>Rok obhajoby:</b>	<b>2023</b>

<b>Název práce:</b>	Marxistické kocepty v Jackově Londonově Železná Patě
<b>Název v angličtině:</b>	Marxist concepts in Jack London's Iron Heel
<b>Anotace práce:</b>	Bakalářská práce se skládá se dvou částí. První část se zabývá životem Jacka Londona od jeho narození v roce 1876 do jeho vstupu do socialistické strany v roce 1896. Tato část zachycuje několik událostí v Londonově životě, které mohli přispět k jeho náklonnosti k Marxistické filozofii. Druhá část práce se zabývá analýzou textu sedmi vybraných kapitol knihy Železná Pata. V každé části textu je identifikován Marxistický koncept a jsou zde popsány principy na kterých v textu funguje.
<b>Klíčová slova:</b>	Jack London, Karl Marx, Železná pata, třídní boj, kapitalismus, marxismus, revoluce, práce, mzda
<b>Anotace v angličtině:</b>	The bachelor thesis consists of two parts. The first part deals with the life of Jack London from his birth in 1876 to his joining the Socialist Party in 1896. This part depicts several events in London's life that may have contributed to his inclination towards Marxist philosophy. The second part of the thesis analyses the text of seven selected chapters of The Iron Heel. In each section of the text, a Marxist concept is identified and the principles on which it operates in the text are described.

<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině:</b>	Jack London, Karl Marx, The Iron Heel, class struggle, capitalism, Marxism, revolution, labor, wage
<b>Přílohy vázané v práci:</b>	
<b>Rozsah práce:</b>	44 s.
<b>Jazyk práce:</b>	Anglický