

The Take (2004)

The Take documents a series of revolutionary factory takeovers helmed by the workers movement in Argentina, and in the process, elucidates the problems of capitalism as conceptualized by Karl Marx. In *The Take*, a large number of middle-class workers suddenly found themselves unemployed following Argentina's economic crisis in 2001. The economic collapse is precipitated by President Menem (1989-99), who according to guidelines imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), restructured the economy to become a more capitalist one. Marxism argues that capitalism facilitates exploitation and class struggle between the "bourgeoisie" class who possess most of society's wealth and means of production, and the "proletariat" working class who toil daily for them. According to Marx, this struggle between social classes will eventually lead to a revolution to overthrow the system. Marxist ideas of class divide, among others, is salient in *The Take*, which acutely depicts the conflict between the factory workers and the factory owners.

Argentina's spiral towards economic collapse can be partially attributed to colonial practices. Menem's unpopular "Model" was implemented under the pressure of the IMF, an institution enacted by the US under the Bretton Woods System as part of an overarching plan to spread and reinforce the capitalist ideology globally. IMF loans are selective and only approved for countries which abide by IMF guidelines – these guidelines are naturally crafted in the interest of the US rather than the loan-recipient country. The excessive privatization under IMF policies signalled a sudden deviation from workers' interests – multiple factories were closed, assets were liquidated, and money rapidly fled the country. Furthermore, Menem closed the banks, inciting widespread panic and rioting. Many suddenly found themselves unemployed and with no means to get back the wages they were

owed. This prompted a workers movement whereby the Argentinian working class took things into their own hands and occupied, resisted, and produced in the factories themselves.

This echoes Marx's idea of a proletarian revolution, in which the working class defies and attempts to overthrow the bourgeoisie. Class struggle is a recurring theme throughout the film, from when the workers were let go, to when they riot and occupied the factories against the wishes of the factory owners. In response, the owner of Zanon Ceramics, Luis Zanon, confidently claimed that he was "going to get (the factory) back" and that "the government will give it back to (him)". This presents an inevitable clash of interests between the capitalist and the working class that is likely irreconcilable, possibly rendering Marx's vision of a classless society increasingly attractive.

The Take also highlights the easily exploitable and dispensable nature of the working class –the capitalists enjoy reaping profits made from the workers' labour, but the workers are disposed of (retrenched) the moment they no longer serve the interests of the capitalist class. As narrated in the film, what pervades these factory workers is a "sense of powerlessness" and "if workers demand better conditions, multinationals simply shut down and move", making it a choice between unemployment or exploitation.

In *The Take*, work is portrayed as almost an integral part of one's identity. The importance of work to man is captured in how Freddy's wife said: "The saddest thing is a man without work. A humiliated man.". There is a fundamental notion held by many that people's value lie in their productivity and labour output. This could have made Marx's idea of alienation very prominent in the film. However, even before the workers movement, the

workers in *The Take* appeared to appreciate their jobs and did not view the factory like a place that facilitated alienation. With the shift to worker-operated factories, workers further regained the power to determine the value of their output and ability to work as autonomous human beings rather than like cogs in a machine. In this aspect, the society depicted in the film seems to differ from Marx's thinking – one limitation to the theory of alienation then would be that workers might not necessarily end up hating or detaching themselves from their work, even if under capitalist settings.

In conclusion, Marx's ideas have profoundly manifested themselves in *The Take*, ranging from the problems of capitalism, to exploitation, class struggle and revolution. In the film, the workers are depicted to have increasingly lost faith in their leaders (as in the case of Maty refusing to vote) and in their “bosses”, the owners of the factories who abandoned them. Consequently, the Argentinian workers then decided to take matters into their own hands, to prove that factories and production lines can run smoothly even without an authority figure at the top. This is reminiscent of Marx's portrayal of a classless society, in which a society can function without conflicts relating to class and inequality.

Word Count: 784

Dear Jeanette,

Well done! Good analysis of both film and Marxian concepts. A bit more concrete definition and discussion on the concepts to explain the context would have give your paper edge.

Grade: A-/B+

