

## **Analyzing the Movie *Snowpiercer***

### **from the Issue of Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus**

While the world is controlled by certain people and class is used to decide a person's position in the society, to keep this kind of social system operating, ideology and state apparatus are the most feasible measure to reach the goal. The movie *Snowpiercer* is set in 2031 when the whole world is frozen and only those get on the XXX train survive. This train is invented by Wilford who is therefore in charge of the train. Everyone else on the train are assigned different social positions based on which cell they are on; that is, the cells closer to the locomotive where Mr. Wilford lives are inhabitants for upper class. The train formed by train cabins is the small version of the society in Capitalism where the rich exploit the poor to benefit themselves. To avoid the poor from uprising, the rulers use physical and mental power to force the labors in the last few cabins to accept a series of unfair policies and resource allocation.

In the first scene, labors are set to their works. They miss the food they used to eat and the beautiful life they used to live. As the food is cut down and they are always threatened by the upper class, the labors plan to overthrow the rule of Wilford. They wait for the right time until there is a man throwing a shoe to attack an upper class

ruler taking his child away but later brutally punished in front of his fellows. By disabling the man's arm, the soldier creates an atmosphere of fear which can reinforce the rulers' reign in the area. After the bloody punishment, the minister comes to lecture to the crowd, instilling a concept to them—what they call “shoe theory”. The theory spreads a thought that people can't wear their shoes on their heads; thus, the people in the different cabins must stick to their own jobs so that the train will keep going with cooperation with different classes. By the use of state apparatus and the instilling of ideology, it seems that the rulers have everything under control. But if we look at the history of the train, there are lots of failed uprisings against the reign of Wilford. Although the oppression is brutal and labors have no powerful weapons, they still do not give into the ruling of Wildford mainly because of the unbearable exploitation of their labors and deprivation of food.

The leader of the labors, Curtis, gets a piece of paper hid in their food about the intelligence in the upper class. All Curtis needs to do is to lead his people break into the door behind which the upper class lives. Curtis acts when he realizes that all the soldiers almost run out of bullets. Each time they break into a new door, they are closer to the locomotive. The doors here work as a symbol of the separation between classes. However, through each battle, their people become fewer and Curtis seems to

reflect some parts of his potential similar to the minister and Wilford, who only use their fellows' lives in exchange for their safety. When Curtis chooses to arrest the minister instead of saving his friend's life, although it seems he does so for the benefit of everyone, his sacrificing his friend is also a kind of exploitation, making him no difference with the rulers.

The minister being caught kept reminding them if it weren't Wilford who allow these labors to live in the train, they would have died in the freezing world. This conversation shows that even in the upper class, loyalty to the leader of the class can be reinforced by brain-washing which is further proven when Curtis and his people enter the education place for upper class children. On one hand, most of the children there are taught with a lot of wrong information about the labors who are described as lazy, dirty, and non-grateful people in the world; on the other hand, the children are taught to hail and be grateful to Mr. Wilford who create the train as a shelter for all the rest of human beings alive. Through education, children are subjected to the *ruling ideology* and believe that the fixed classes are necessary for the operation of the train.

In the end of the movie, Curtis eventually meets with Wilford. After knowing that his uprising is a plan designed by his mentor, a former rebel against Wildford, Curtis

starts to waver in his belief for this fight. He starts to realize how important the locomotive is and the sacrifice of some people is necessary to ensure the food supplied to a limited amount of people. Wilford is about to pass down the locomotive to Circus to let him become a new leader of the train. This scene exactly echoes to what Louis Althusser mentioned in *The Essentials of the Marxist Theory of the State*, “the objective of the class struggle concerns State power, and in consequence the use of the State apparatus by the classes.” The locomotive represents the state apparatus which will long survive in different State power. Curtis’s intention to take the position changes when seeing missing children are risking their lives to prevent the breakdown of the engine. The train is finally destroyed by an explosion triggered for class struggle and the only survivors are a girl and a child. The kids find that there are still creatures living outside the train.

The movie is so fascinating for creating a small version of world where people are put into different classes. The nature of human beings can transform easily—the oppressed are likely to be the oppressors once they are in power. It also reveals that for ruling purpose, education can be a perfect way to instill certain ideology to children. Once a person is conditioned by an ideology, their behavior and thinking is conditioned, too. In the part of the battle of the labors and rulers, it is the best

description of the class struggle mentioned by Marx. The ending focuses on a polar bear. Its surviving in the world outside the train not only shows that the world is ready for all creatures to live again, but also represents the end of the class struggle.

### **Works Cited**

- Althusser, Louis. *The Essentials of the Marxist Theory of the State* in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Leitch, Vincent B. et al, ed. 2011. page 1335 to 1343.
- Snowpiercer*, filmed in 2013 by Bong Joon-ho. Film company: YG Entertainment. Adapted from French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige* by Jacques Lob, Benjamin Legrand and Jean-Marc Rochette.