



**ANALYSIS ON ANTI CAPITALISM IN THE “CLAMPDOWN”**

**LYRIC**

**BY THE CLASH**

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## Analysis on Anti Capitalism in the “Clampdown” Lyric by The Clash

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### ABSTRACT

Kapitalisme merupakan sistem sosial yang diterapkan dalam sebuah Negara untuk mengatur infrastruktur dalam sebuah Negara termasuk masyarakat dan seluruh institusi di dalamnya. Di dalam lirik “Clampdown” yang ditulis oleh The Clash pada tahun 1979 di London, United Kingdom, penulis menemukan adanya indikasi penolakan terhadap sistem sosial yang diterapkan oleh pemerintahan di United Kingdom. Penulis menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi terhadap lirik tersebut guna mendapatkan informasi lebih lanjut terhadap lirik mengingat masalah yang terkandung di dalam lirik merupakan masalah tentang struktur sosial di dalam sebuah Negara. Dengan mengacu pada teori Karl Marx yang menolak kapitalisme sebagai sistem sosial, penulis memanfaatkan hubungan teori tersebut dengan lirik guna mencapai hasil penelitian yang ingin dituju.

Dalam melakukan pembelajaran terhadap lirik tersebut, penulis menemukan penolakan yang cukup kuat terhadap kapitalisme yang muncul di Inggris pada masa itu. Adanya perbedaan kelas sosial yang kental di Inggris pada saat itu membuat The Clash menyuarakan suara masyarakat terhadap kondisi yang mereka hadapi. Mengingat pada tahun 70an, masyarakat Inggris sedang mengalami banyak masalah di dalam tubuh Negara. Dimulai dari inflasi yang tinggi serta tingkat pengangguran yang mencapai tingkat tertinggi pada akhir 70an sampai dengan pembatasan pembagian jatah listrik di setiap daerah. Hal tersebut merugikan semua pihak di Inggris pada masa itu. Namun yang paling mendapat tekanan dari keadaan tersebut tentu saja kaum proletar. Kesenjangan social yang terjadi saja sudah cukup mengganggu kenyamanan hidup mereka sehari-hari. Dengan keadaan seperti itu di Inggris mereka mendapat penderitaan berkali-kali lipat banyaknya setiap hari.

Di dalam lirik “Clampdown” The Clash mengajak kaum kelas bawah untuk melakukan revolusi terhadap keadaan di Inggris pada saat itu. Dengan memanfaatkan semangat para pemuda di Inggris mereka mengajak masyarakat untuk melakukan perlawanan terhadap sistem sosial yang berjalan pada saat itu. Mereka juga menunjukkan hal-hal yang dapat dilakukan kaum kapitalisme dalam memanipulasi dan mengeksploitasi masyarakat untuk terus berada di dalam sistem kapitalis. Alienasi yang dilakukan kaum kapitalis terhadap kaum pekerja juga tidak luput dari perhatian The Clash untuk membuat mereka sadar bahwa para pekerja telah diperas waktu dan tenaganya setiap hari karna bekerja untuk kaum kapitalis.

#### A. Background of Study

Literature is known as a particular sort of writing containing literary works and it has been a part of our life. Laurence Perrine in his book *Literature (Structure, Sound*

*and Sense)* states that “poetry might be defined as a kind of language that says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language” (1956: 3).

People may feel familiar with literary works such as prose, poetry and play, as those are the kind of literary works that we usually found. Prose is described as a literary work that is not in verse. Prose is more like spoken language, such as folklore and legend. Meanwhile, play may be known as a drama played in a stage or in theatre. Stands for one of the oldest genres in literary history, poetry is quiet hard to explain to the exact language. Hudson in his book *An Introduction To The Study of Literature* quotes some explanations of poetry:

Poetry says Johnson is “metrical composition”. It is “the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to help of reason” and its “essence” is “invention”[...] Poetry says Shelly, “in a general sense may be defined as the expression of the imagination; it is, says Hazlitt, “the language of the imagination and the passions”” (1913: 82-83).

Meanwhile, the term poetry indicates to poet; person who makes verse. Poet is also a member of society who shares the same environment just like other people. As Warren and Welleck claims in their book *Theory of Literature* that “the poet himself is a member of society, possess of a specific social status, receives some degree of social recognition and reward and addresses an audience, however hypothetical” (1949: 89). In poetry, the poet goes out of himself, mingles with the action and passion in his world and deals with what he discovers in live with reference to his own individuality. As Hudson states in *An Introduction to The Study of*

*Literature* that “the boundary lines between these two division cannot, of course, be drawn with precision and in much poetry, especially in our extremely composite modern poetry, personal and impersonal elements continually combine” ( 1913 :125-126).

### **B. The Clash Biography**

The Clash was a punk rock band from London, England, United Kingdom, active from 1976 to 1985. As one of the most successful and iconic bands from the first wave of punk in the 1970s, they incorporated rock and roll, reggae, rockabilly, and eventually many other music styles into their repertoire. They were legendary for their uncommonly intense stage performances. At first, punk was an ideology that emerged from the lower class youth who felt oppressed by the system of government which made them difficult to get a job to continue their lives. The writer looks up to Bindas in *The Future is Unwritten*:

In 1976, more than one million persons were out of work and the inflation rate soared above 18 percent; The *New Statesman* estimated that 35 percent of those under twenty-five years of age were unemployed. After graduation at sixteen, thousands of young people immediately went on he dole, which quickly symbolized the problems in Britain (1993: 69).

While class struggle in the capitalist system was in progress of incessant, a new ideology emerged with an attribute that was quite surprising. Punk itself soon expanded into the music industry during the domination of rock and roll and progressive rock that required skill to

create great and comprehended music. Punk immediately rejected, at the time, about the music that had to put the skill to create music. They considered that everyone could make music, everyone had the right to be a musician and everyone was able to create good music. In the spirit of do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic, punk immediately distorted the music industry which was dominated with rock and roll music and progressive rock.

The Clash formed in 1976 with Joe Strummer in rhythm guitar and vocal, Mick Jones in melody, Paul Simonon in bass and Nicky "Topper" Headon on drum. Their 1979 album *London Calling* was considered by critics as one of the greatest albums in the history of rock music. Joe Strummer the lead guitar wrote almost all of the lyrics and Mick Jones managed most of their music. Bassist Paul Simonon's background in painting helped shape the band artistic overview. The drummer "Topper" Headon was a journeyman drummer who found his passion for playing with The Clash. With these mix personalities, they were once told as "the perfect engine". Unfortunately this band was broken up their harmony and decided to split up in the 1985.

### **C. The Definition of Capitalism and the Characteristic of the Capitalist Society**

Capitalism as a word came in early 19 century, and it is being said closely related to social system. Looking up on Raymond Williams *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, it is being said that "capital and at first capitalist were technical terms in any economic

system" (1985:51). For further information of what kind of economic system does it related, the writer quotes from Ayn Rand, he claims that "capitalism is a social system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights, in which all property is privately owned" (1967:19). In other words, capitalism allows someone to deal with something or not as his or her individual judgment and interest, and hypothetically its relationships are voluntary. Therefore, it is fair to say that a member of society, are free to set everything he wants without dealing with the government first. However, it does not work that way unfortunately. As Milton Friedman wrote in *Capitalism and Freedom*:

A citizen of the United States who is under the laws of various states is not free to follow the occupation of his or her own choice unless he or she can get a license for it. It is just being deprived of an essential part of his or her freedom (1982: 9).

It is interesting how capitalism work its relationship into voluntary, yet Gramsci complained about voluntary relationship in *The Gramsci Reader*:

The word is meaningless or it is used with the meaning of arbitrary will. Will, in a Marxist sense, said the awareness of ends which means exact knowledge of one's own power and the intention to express its action. Therefore, the class becomes distinct, individual, compactly organized and disciplined to its own specific ends without wavering or being deflected at the first place (2000: 38)

In the capitalist society, the government has drawn a line for people so they can live properly under the law regarding their free relationships in society. However, the fact about the imbalance situation occurred in the society especially proletariat could not be put behind as the workers in the development of industrialization are facing the exploitation, alienation, discrimination, etc. We can take example of workers in the factory. Every worker has to responsible for all processes in their job to produce the desired product of a company. However, in the process, not all workers have the power to decide over what would happen next to the goods output. They have no power over what they do and they know nothing of what will happen to the goods of their products. They only have limited responsibility for their time given to complete the production of the goods by their bosses. This kind of work ethic in the capitalist system seems not good enough. The effect of this situation may cause psychological issues on the worker in making decision outside the workplace as it is discussed in *The Capitalist System: A Radical Analysis of American Society*:

Effective participation in decision making requires certain skills (keeping one self informed, understanding the issues, presenting one's viewpoint clearly and forcefully) and certain attitudes (a motivation to participate, and the self confidence to do so) which a worker shut off from decision making at work (1978: 267).

The issue that may be arising in the capitalist system seems not good for the proletariat. To respond the proletariat situation in the capitalist country Antonio Gramsci writes:

The proletarian revolution cannot but be a total revolution. It consists in the foundation of new modes of labor, new modes of production and distribution that are peculiar to the working class in its historical determination in the course of the capitalist process (2000: 70).

That is more or less having the same purpose as Raymond Williams in *Marx and Literature*. He stated that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (1977: 75).

#### **D. 1970s in the United Kingdom**

Throughout the 70s, the United Kingdom was in seemingly never ending recession, and at the end of decade the oil crisis and gas shortage continued. High inflation and unemployment, riots in the suburbs, racism and constraints on the labor movement caused social problem and poverty among the working classes. Bindas quoted McLaren, who was the manager of The Clash, in *The Future is Unwritten*:

...I was listening to the radio in '75 and there was some expert blabbing about how if things go on as they are there'll be 800,000 people unemployed by 1979, while another guy was saying that if that happened there'd be chaos, there'd be actual-anarchy in the streets (1993:70).

The highest inflation occurred in the United Kingdom in 1975. Stewart Morrison in *The Social Structure of Modern Britain* says that “the rate of inflation was high [...] peaking July 1975 at 26%”; it was not until 1983 that inflation slowed” (2005:2). The situation was tearing the nation torn apart. Margaret Thatcher, who led at the end of the 70s, did not make the situation better. The surprising act from Thatcher was when she went on television and talked about immigrant in Britain. Matthew (2010) writes that “Margaret Thatcher [...] unexpectedly called from and end to immigration, to stop foreigners from taking British jobs”. Riot was uncontrolled when British has Thatcher as their back up from taking their rights from immigrant.

The situation of high rate unemployment and inflation was not over. British still has to struggle to get a proper life in their country. In Julien Temple’s *The Filth and the Fury* (2000), the punk icon Johnny Rotten of *The Sex Pistols* gives his view:

England was in state of social upheaval. [...] There was rioting all over the place, strikes on every kind of amenity you could think of. Tv channels would go on and off randomly. People were fed up with the old way; the old way was clearly not working (0:02:47-0:03:18).

The young working class generation felt alienated by the government system and to them the regime of British socio-economic system was failure.

The recession in the 70s hit all levels of society in the United

Kingdom. Rich and poor people were experienced the oil price spike and electricity restriction. Although inflation was going up and down in the late 70s, but it somehow showed indication to recovered and made good effect on the rate of unemployment. It is mentioned by Matthew (2010) while he compared the situation with 1980s:

Many projects were killed by the mid-70s recession and the oil price spike. [...] inflation was under 10% again, unemployment was far lower than it would be in the 80s, and so on. Yet the dominant narrative is that the 70s recession was awful, while the 80s recessions were necessary. I think this is down to one key fact: the 70s recession hit the rich and the middle class, whereas in the 80s it was the poor who got screwed.

#### **E. Background of “Clampdown” lyric**

The lyric was written in 1979 by The Clash who came from England. In that favor, the lyric tells the listener about the situation in England. In the 70s, United Kingdom experienced such unbalanced social circumstance that hit every level of society. The poor, the reach was suffered by inflation and high rate of unemployment. It was started by oil and gas shortages to the uncontrolled rate of unemployment which affected by the Second World War. The difficult social circumstances in England at that time made public had to stand against the authority to take their own rights that should be given to them. It shows by the first to third lines of the lyric below:

*The kingdom is ransacked* Line 1

*The jewels all taken back* Line 2

*And the chopper descends* Line 3

The bold-printed words above are things that commonly owned by capitalist. The first lines above, “*the kingdom is ransacked*”, will generate question about what has happened to the kingdom that it could be robbed. Something that might be the answer is the indignation of public against the leadership of the king or queen represented England at that time. Moreover, the economic situation was going through the hard times. The high rate of unemployment, inflation, electricity restriction made public lost control at that time. People thought that if it was going to continue, it might become worse, and the next step that would possibly be taken was to take by force what was rightfully theirs.

On the third line, the situation develops with line “*and the chopper descends*”. The writer assumes that it is about the advanced situation of the previous line. The authority comes to settle down the situation or even fight against the protesters, considering that United Kingdom is monarchy constitution and has authority as their government to manage the social condition. It can be the image that is shown by The Clash to describe the situation in a capitalist country where publics are not satisfied with the system they decide to fight against it. Furthermore, the capitalist do not stay in their chamber just to see what the proletariat might do to their properties. They, of course, will fight back and this is not going to end well. This is one of the situations that

Karl Marx predicted in the capitalist country about the development of industrialization. The proletariat will make union to stand against the ruling party to take over what they deserve and this fight will not end in one or two days because the capitalist will also defend their properties and everything that they have got within the years of their works. This lyric clearly brings Marxism spirit to stand against capitalist with the force of the low class society. The three lines above reflect what the low class might do to the domination of capitalist when they are unite to fight the capitalist.

*They're hidden in the back* Line 4

*With a message on a half-baked tape*

Line 5

*With the spool goes round* Line 6

Meanwhile, these three lines show an advance situation from the three previous lines before. On the lines above the capitalist began to be cornered by the actions of the public who dared to fight against the authority. The word “they’re” in line four refers to the capitalists that are secured from the heated situation between the authority and the proletariat who demand justice for their fate. Within line one to six, the listener can see an indication of revolution by the proletariat. As Gramsci noted as the proletarian revolution that consists new foundation to the society through the determination in the course of the capitalist process. New psychology, new way of feeling, new modes production and distribution on the system are needed to change the society that the proletarian consider broke.

*Taking off his turban, they said, is  
this man a Jew?* Line 11

*'Cos working for the clampdown*  
Line 12

The lyric above shows the hatred of public against the capitalist. However, the lack of power to get into the capitalist circle makes people throw their fight to those who are in their range. This was happened in United Kingdom in the 70s when people thought that Jews, Pakistani and the other immigrants are the right hand of the capitalist to take and to dominate the United Kingdom economy. The immigrants came to England to get a job while the public in United Kingdom was not in a good economic condition and many of them were unemployed. Those situations triggered riots that happened in United Kingdom in the 70s. It proves that public awareness is important in society and the lack of it will cause a civil war when the real enemy is watching and doing nothing. The British was misunderstanding though, because the immigrant is just another victim of another social system.

Another example about the ignorance of public in United Kingdom is also show on the line above. *Turban* is a kind of headgear used by Muslim while the Jews used to cover their head with *yamakas* or *kippah*. However, is that true that The Clash shows the ignorance of British by saying "turban" is worn by "Jew"? Or is it just the error by The Clash to say turban is for Jew? Previously, the writer takes a look on Joe Strummer, one of the most productive members that created The Clash's lyric and "Clampdown" is on

of them. He was received well high education due to his father was one of the government member. In that case, the writer assumes it is not a misunderstanding but it is a purpose. The Clash wanted to show how apathetic people in England were at that time to the immigrants. The line "*taking off his turban, they say, is this man a Jew?*" means the public take the identity of someone and use it as a stereotype. This is an after-effect that may occur in the capitalist country. People who lose their rights will be able to do anything to take back what is rightfully theirs because the government who should be responsible chooses not to pay attention to the people.

*They put up a poster saying we earn  
more than you!* Line 13

*When we're working for the  
clampdown* Line 14

The sentence that contains satire above is a message from The Clash to the listener so they will get their sense back together and not caught up in the game served by capitalist. The Clash wants reader to be aware of what might the capitalist do to them and not forget about the hatred that should have been addressed to the capitalist by using satire on public belief. The ridiculous public's belief quipped by The Clash through the lines above is evidence of the presence about anti-capitalism aspect contained on the lyric. The capitalist who also called the ruling party will always manage the workers in doing their job. That is just the rule of the company where the capitalist as someone who has the material and the machine will always be the boss of the proletariat who



work for them. Apparently, it will indirectly eliminate the workers instinct in dealing with problems or deciding something out of their work place because they have been accustomed to follow the instructions of their superiors at work. This is one of the issues arising in a capitalist country. Karl Marx referred this as alienation. Alienation of workers is a state where the workers lose their ability to decide something or to resolve problem at work. They even have no power to know what will happen to the goods they produced in the work place because they have been programmed to follow the rules of the company in order to maximize production process. In the capitalist society when the authority is the capitalist, public will be controlled in whatever they do. The voluntary relationship in capitalism seems worthless, because the freedom in society, economy and politic are just dreams.

*We will teach our twisted speech*  
Line 15

*To the young believers*  
Line 16

*We will train our blue-eyed men*  
Line 17

*To be young believers*  
Line 18

The lines above are message from The Clash to inform what the capitalist could possibly do against the youth that supposed to be the successor of the nation. Those lines say that the character “we”, refers to the capitalist, are capable to make the second character “blue-eyed men” which the writer believes as symbol of the innocent men being one of

them. The writer sees a message from The Clash to their listener to keep their awareness to the power of capitalist in manipulating the psychology of youth as the successor of the nation. Anti-capitalism is shown by The Clash on the lyric above as the listener could feel the warning through the figure of speech above.

*The judge said five to ten but I say  
double that again* Line 19

*I'm not working for the clampdown*  
Line 20

Those lines are closely related to Gramsci’s explanation about Marx theory in the previous chapter about proletarian revolution. The Clash says that we, as low class workers, are the one who should start the revolution. The lines above state that we need a new standards, new psychology, and new way of feeling. The right attitude is showed by the narrator of the lyric says he is willing to receive the bigger punishment but he do not want to work for the capitalist. The Clash invites the listener to be brave against the threat of the capitalist system, because they believe that the youngster is capable of doing something for the nation.

*But, you grow up and you calm down  
and* Line 33

*You're working for the clampdown*  
Line 34

*You start wearing the blue and  
brown and* Line 35

*You're working for the clampdown*  
Line 36

*So you got someone to boss around*  
Line 37

*It makes you feel big now*

Line 38

*You drift until you brutalize*

Line 39

*You made your first kill now*

Line 40

The stanza above tells the listener about the situation that the youngsters will grow up and eventually give up fighting the capitalist power. This is a fact about the spirits and energy of youth which starts to fade away after growing up and they will try to settle in into the capitalist system. On the lines above, The Clash describes about situation when youth, who should stand against capitalist, is growing up and starting to lose their spirit to fight capitalism and choose to fit in into the capitalist system.

In line thirty five to thirty six, we can see another example of what capitalist could do to the society system. In the phrase “blue and brown”, the writer sees the level of workers. Blue collar workers are those who are usually located in the factory for production in the company. They usually have a leader who will regulate every movement of the blue collar workers in the production process and in each section. By the development of industry and the grown up level, it is the white collar worker. White collar workers are those who work in the office. They do not deal directly to the production process. They are involved into the regulation of production by blue collar. Both the blue collar and white collar have different levels. Typically, white collar workers are those who

received higher education than the blue collar. It is also due to the development of the industry, where the capitalist need more qualified workers to manage the complicated things in the production process. It is certainly detrimental to certain parties, especially blue collar workers who do not have enough education to work a little lighter in the office environment.

The capitalist will take the advantage from the workers to produce goods for company to the degree of “brutal”. The proletariat only has time and energy to support their lives and it is going to be taken by the capitalist in the capitalist system. Those things are rarely recognized by the low class worker. They are not aware of their own situation where the capitalist is taking their time and energy to keep working in the company. It may be caused by the unwritten law in the capitalist country as “they, who have power, will live longer”. It is probably not much different from the law in the jungle where the animals who have power will survive by eating the weaker animals.

#### **F. Conclusion**

The lyric “Clampdown” written by The Clash is one of their statements toward the social system and the conditions of working class under capitalism. The Clash invites the listener to rise up and fight against the capitalist through the idea of capitalist system in the lyric. The Clash, as a punk band that is famous for their lyric, always discusses about the social and political issues as Joe Strummer the lead guitar of The

Clash famously stated that “punk for me is a social movement”.

Furthermore, the situation of the low class worker is really dreadful by the system committed by the capitalist starting from exploitation by the capitalist until the alienation of the workers that seems not right in the social system. The Clash mostly states about the situation of the proletariat in the social system occupied by the capitalist and the lyric invites the listener to realize the real situation in the capitalist system. The system states that capitalists define their science as the study of managing the communities or nation’s resources. However, the resources itself turned out to be the proletariat and the fact that the human itself, as the principal of the resources, become specific as the capitalists need human as the factors of production in their land, forest and mines.

In addition, there are certain factors considered as the cause of miserable condition of the workers. The policies in the capitalist system allow workers to be oppressed. The capitalist manages the situation of the workers to work for them without realizing the real situation that occur in their individual life and the government seems cannot proceed in this situation and make the situation worse.

However, the practice of capitalism may have good impact for society since they are free to make decision over what they want in their social life although they have to follow the rule that has been made by the government to keep the balance of society. Meanwhile, the

proletariats are still oppressed in the capitalist system because they are not free enough to make decision in the workplace. After the situation happens continuously, the situation of the capitalist and society may get better and people will live without classes and discrimination among them.

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