



RESTRAINTS OF THE LABOR'S WELFARE IN LYNN NOTTAGE'S PLAY *SWEAT* (2015)

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Abstract

The purpose of this analysis is to expose the issue about restraints of the labor's welfare which is done by the company in Reading, Pennsylvania and to know the contribution of the plot, setting, and character in revealing the restraints of the labor's welfare. This analysis is related to the concept *alienation* by Karl Marx that is supported by the text and context-based interpretation. The result of this analysis shows the company in Reading, Pennsylvania do many things to limiting, controlling, and stopping the labor's welfare to get much profit.

Key words: Restraint, Labor, Welfare, *alienation*

A. INTRODUCTION

Job is an important thing for human to earn money and survive in life. Job can affect human position in the society. According to Karl Marx in Merada (2017) society divided human being into two groups based on their job or the economic class, such as bourgeoisie and proletariat. Bourgeois is a term attached to the middle class, consists of educated and wealthy people. Bourgeois people mostly are entrepreneurs who do thing to get much profit. Meanwhile, proletariat are also known as lowest class or one of the lowest economic and social classes in a society. They mostly work as labors.

Living as a labor or working class people, one often faces challenges in life. This happens because the working class people often experience injustice in the company. The workers may be skilled or unskilled and work in a wide range of fields such as manufacturing, mining, construction, home renovation, temporary daily labor, maintenance and repair, and other forms of physical labor. They should work hard and use their physic to preserve their job. Even though they have been worked hard and obtained a lot of profits for their company, they still experience unequal treatments. The company already restraint their welfare.

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Restraints of the labor welfare are one of the treatments that the laborers get from their company. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary (2018) restraint is a way of limiting, controlling, or stopping something. While, in American Heritage-Dictionary of English Language (2018) welfare is health, happiness, and good fortunes; well-being. Restraint of the labor welfare refers to the company way in controlling the laborers in order to get more profit.

The company make the laborer live in misery. They can't save money for their future life, because they earn money only for their daily life cost. They do not have enough money to get an education. It make they live in poverty. It's difficult for them to change their life. The company also restrains their welfare in mental condition. They should work overtime every day. They do not have a quality time with their family. They cannot hanging out with their friends. They being stressed out.

The issue about restraints of the labor welfare is an important issue to be analyzed as this phenomenon is also found in our real life. A literary work that exposes the issue of restraint the labor welfare is a play that written by Lynn Nottage entitled *Sweat* (2015). Restraint of the labor welfare in this analysis refers to the company way in controlling, limiting and stopping the laborers' welfare in order to get more profit. They treat the laborers unfairly. They have some provisions that make the laborers live in the misery.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis of play *Sweat* (2015) is done through the text and context-based interpretation. The play analyze by using fictional devices on drama such as character, plot, setting, and stage direction. The devices are connected each other and give support to reveal the meaning of the play. Character is used to reveal the act done by the characters through analyze attitude, believe, and action. Plot is used to solve the conflict that face by the character. Setting has function to show the situation, atmosphere, and condition face by the character. This analysis used the concept alienation by Karl Marx.

C. DISCUSSION

This chapter is the analysis of the play using fictional devices, such as characters, setting, and plot (conflict). This analysis show the company way in controlling, limiting, and stopping the laborers welfare to get much profit. It can be seen from the characters who work as a labor in a steel mill in Reading, Pennsylvania. They work as floor staff from generation to generation. Restraint of the labor welfare is reflected through two aspects, financial and health conditions.

1. Financial Condition

The laborers are in bad financial condition. The company do anything to get much profit without think about the laborers. They reduce the expenses so that the laborers get the impact. There are three point to show this thing. The laborers

cannot get the career advancement, they get the low payment, and they do not get the retirement fund.

The first point is the laborers cannot get the career advancement. They work at the same company from generation to generation. They work more than 20 years, but the company do not give the advancement. It can be seen from the following quotation;

Tracey: Hey Stan, how many years did you put in before the injury?

Stan: Twenty-eight.

Tracey: and in those twenty-eight years you ever see anyone move off the floor?

Stan: Um, no ... wait, wait ... there was Griff Parker

Tracey: Yeah, but he left, went to college came back as management. They didn't pluck him off the line. Doesn't count. (p. 15)

The characters show that the company do the exploitation toward the laborers. The laborers work for more than 20 years without career advancement. The company does not want to give a pay rise because they want to reduce the expenses. It is difficult for the laborers to get the promotion job because the company did not give the chance to them for explore their capability. They think that the laborers is the proletariat who inappropriate to work as administration staff. The sentence *and in those twenty-eight years you ever see anyone move off the floor* means that the laborers cannot change their position even though they have worked hard.

This condition also supported by the following quotation;

Brucie: Stan says you're being considered for a promotion.

Cynthia: Yeah. Warehouse Supervisor. Not just me. Tracey, Clarence and Fat Henry. We're all in the running.

Brucie (To Tracey): That true?

Tracey: Yeah. Deciding soon. But, I'm not holding my breath, they're just blowing smoke up our asses, because some fancy consultant told 'em it would be a good idea to chum the waters. (p. 28)

The quotation above means that the company offer the promotion job on certain purpose. They offer the promotion job after the laborers work more than twenty years. They do that because they want to cover up the fact that they have been exploit the laborers. They pretending to be nice so the laborers did not realize that they have been exploited. The word *chum the waters* it is like bait for fish. It means that the promotion job is a tactics to get more profit. It can be proof that the company do not care about the laborers’

The second point is the laborers get the low payment. It can be seen from the dialog between the laborers;

Jason: I figure I got another (*calculating*) month and half of saving and it’s mine. Fucking union got all our money tied up in benefits and shit, don’t have nothing left for fun.

Chris: You ain’t lying. Between my new lady---

Jason: Monique!

Chris: --- and Uncle Sam, money got a way of running outcha pocket. Nobody tells you that no matter how hard you work there will never be enough money to rest. It’s fact. A fact that should be taught to every child! Look at me. I been trying to save a little something for school, right? But every time I tuck it away, I hear the cry of “Nike Flightposite” “Air Jordan XV,” a meal at the Olive Garden, and a movies will set you back two days’ work. (p. 19)

Conflict that characters face can be proof that the company do many thing to increase their profit, but did not do something to increase the laborers welfare. The laborers get the low payment, while they do the heavy work more than 10 hours a day. The company give the low payment because they want to spend less money. The sentence *nobody tells you that no matter how hard you work there will never be enough money to rest* means that they only get money for their daily needs. They cannot having fun with their family or friends because they do not have enough money. This causes the laborers cannot get the welfare in their life. They spend their life only for working, but do not get the better life.

This condition also supported by the following quotation;

Jessie: Just tell us the goddamn truth!

Chris: Step off and listen.

Cynthia: it ain't gonna be easy. I can tell you how it's gonna play out. They're gonna ask for everyone to take a pay cut to save jobs. Sixty percent. (p. 51)

The quotation show that the company way to save their money in crisis economic. They do not want to get a loss and still want to get the much profit so that they do the pay cut towards the laborers. The laborers get the injustice, but the company think that it is not their problem. They only think about how much money they get.

The next point is the laborers does not get the retirement fund. Retirement fund is the laborers' right, but they do not get it from the company. It can be seen in this dialogue;

Stan: I hear that, so how many days you guys been locked out?

Brucie: Ninety-three weeks.

Stan: That's what I thought. Tough.

Brucie: Yup. Didn't wanna take the new contract. Be a fucking slave. That's what they want. We offered to take a fifty-percent pay cut, they won't budge, and they want us to give up our retirement. What's the point? Full circle, a lifetime, and be the same place I was when I was eighteen. What is that? (p. 23)

Based on the quotation above the characters show how the company force the laborers to make the new employment contract, without the career advancement. The company still employs the laborers who have passed the working age, because the company think that they can paid less for the old laborer. The company can get the advantage from this system because they have many laborers but with a little bit of expenses.

The company also do not give the laborers retirement fund after they locked out from that company. The sentence *we offered to take a fifty-percent pay cut, and they won't budge, they want us to give up our retirement* proved that the company does not regard that the retirement fund as their obligation toward the laborer. The laborers cannot get the chance to change their life after locked out from the company.

This condition also supported by the following question;

Tracey: The other day, I walked over to the union office. Do you know what they offered me? A bag of groceries and some vouchers to the supermarket. They asked us to hold out, they're gonna help. Yeah, pay my fucking bills, that's how you can help. But,

you know how many people were there for handouts? I looked for your eyes. Gimme something, Cynth. It was fucking humiliating.

Cynthia: Look, I'm sorry.

Tracey: What am I supposed to do with that? Huh? What do you want me to do with that? You know what? This is my first time outta my house in one solid week. Do you know what it's like to get up and have no place to go? I ain't had the feeling ever. I'm a worker. I have worked since I could count money. That's me. And I'm thinking I'm not gonna go out, you know why? Because I don't wanna spend money, because when my unemployment runs out I'll have nothing. So, I don't go picking at my fucking cuticles. Why'd you come in here? Huh? What do you want? (p. 55-56)

The quotation above show the situation after the laborers quit from that job. The company does not give allowances to the laborers after they to be laid off suddenly. The company restraint the laborers' right to get the allowance after the hard work that they did for a long time. The company cover up this issue and pretending give them help. It can be seen from the sentence *do you know what they offered me? A bag of groceries and some vouchers to the supermarket. They asked us to hold out, they're gonna help*. The sentence show that the company try to make the laborers still believe to them, and so that the laborers do not dare to do a rebellion that can make the company loss. The company give help for the laborer, but it is not enough to fix up the laborers' financial, such as they only give the laborers a bag of groceries and some vouchers to the supermarket.

The laborers cannot achieve their welfare even though they have been worked for more than twenty years. They can't save money for their future life. They can't make their financial condition better.

The laborers cannot save money for their future also shown in this following quotation;

Brucie: I hear that. But whassup? You start school?

Chris: Nah, I didn't enroll this semester.

Brucie: Why? What's your mom think about that?

Chris: Things have been a little strained between us. So—

Brucie: You need to tell her.

Brucie: Why? I know what she's gonna say. But, you feel me, right?

Brucie:

Chris: Right? And with the shit that's going down I didn't make tuition. Things are tight. I was counting on those double shift this summer. (p. 60)

The characters show that because they can't save money for their future, they can't continue their school and get knowledge formally. The character show that he should take double shift to increase his income. It means that his basic pay cannot comply the daily needs.

Briefly, the company restraint the laborers' welfare reflected through the financial condition. The company do not give them the career advancement even though they have been worked more than 20 years. It is difficult for the laborers to get promotion job, because the company do not want to give the wage raise to them. They have been exploited. The company pretending to give them help so that the laborers do not realize they have been exploited. The laborers get low payment. They cannot continue their school because they do not have enough money. They cannot save money for their future life. They also cannot get the allowances or the retirement fund. This cause the laborers unable to get the welfare in their life.

2. Health Condition

The laborers are in bad health condition. They do not get the health insurance. The company do not care when the laborers get accident in working hours. The laborers forced to do overtime work. They cannot having fun with their family and friends. They being stress out. There are two points to show it. They are in bad mental health condition, and physical health condition.

The first point is mental health condition. The laborers tend to worried about the employment contract, because the company do not state clearly enough about it. It can be seen from the following quotation;

Tracey: Freddie Brunner?

Stan: Turns out he was up to his neck in fucking debt.

Tracey: Terrible—

Stan: And Clarence—

Cynthia: Clarence Jones?

Stan: Says he got wind that they were gonna cut back his line at the plant. Couldn't handle the stress.

Cynthia: That rumor's been flying around for months. Nobody's going anywhere.

Stan: Okay, you keep telling yourself that, but you saw what happened over at Clemmons Technologies. No one saw that coming, right? You could wake up tomorrow and all your jobs are in Mexico, whatever, it's this NAFTA bullshit— (p. 11)

The conflict show that the company do not transparently about the employment contract between them and the laborers. The laborers alienated from the product that they have been produce. The character worried if they be laid off suddenly because the crisis economic. The company change the policy without think about the effect toward the laborers. The sentence *says he got wind that they were gonna cut back his line at the plant* means that the company do not state clearly enough about the contract. They laborers only get rumors about the laid off, and because of this thing they being stress out.

The laborers forced to work harder and harder every day. They cannot do anything else, because the company do not give the day off. They forced to take the overtime work. The company get much profit, but they do not want to give the wage raise. The laborers get the mental pressure because of this. This condition can be seen in this dialogue;

Chris: Psh. I'm gonna let you ponder that question! Which may be a little difficult for you, I know, and I'm sorry.

Jason: Fuck you. You haven't even gone to college and you're already an asshole.

Chris: No offense, but I'm fucking sick of jacking. Phomp. Phomp. Phomp. The machines are so fucking loud and I can't even think. It's getting harder and harder to pull myself up and go to work every day. (p. 20)

The laborers' mental health condition also can be seen from this following quotation;

Jessie: I guess, I wish . . . I had gotten to see the world. You know, left Berks, if only for a year. That's what I regret. Not the work, I regret the fact that for a little while it seemed like, I don't know, there was possibility. I think about that Jessie on the other side of the world and what she woulda seen. (p. 38)

The character show that as a laborer she cannot explore herself to do anything else. This is proof that the laborers alienated from the human species-being. They

are restrained and cannot do something else as a social beings. This is happen because the laborers do not get the day off. They cannot go on vacation with their family and friends. They do not have possibility to reach their dream.

Despite they have been worked hard for more than twenty years, but it is difficult for them to get the opportunity to change their live to be better. They struggling to face the coercion that come from the company. They spend their live to work in that company, but their economic condition cannot be better. It can be seen from this dialogue;

Cynthia: I've stood on that line, same line since I was nineteen. I've taken orders from idiots who were dangerous, or even worse, racist. But I stood on line, patiently waiting for a break. I don't think you get it, but if I walk away, I'm giving up more than a job, I'm giving up all that time I spent standing on line waiting for one damn opportunity.

Tracey: You want us to feel sorry for you?

Cynthia: ... I didn't expect you to understand, babe. You don't know what it's been like to walk in my shoes. I've absorbed a lotta shit over the years, but I worked hard to get off that floor. Call me selfish, I don't care, call me whatever you need to call me, but remember, one of us has to be left standing to fight. (p. 57)

The second point is physical health condition. The laborers do not get the welfare in physically. They do not get health insurance. They get the back pain. It can be seen from the following dialogue;

Cynthia: Shit, you wanna be fifty and standing on your feet for ten hours a day? Tities sagging into the machines. I got bunions the size of damn apples. // My back—

Tracey: Bla ... bla. Write a book.

Cynthia: Don't know about you, but I can feel my body slowing down, a little every day. I go home and my hands are frozen, I can't even hold a frying pan. I gotta rub 'em together for an hour before they even move. (p. 16)

The quotation above show that the characters has health problem because they forced to work overtime. They have to work every day without the day off. Their body slowing down day by day. They do not have time to take rest. The company do not give health insurance. This things effect to the laborers' welfare.

The company do not respect the laborers. They do not care even though the laborer get injured during the working hours. They do not want to take responsible for anything that happen to the laborers during the working hours. It can be seen from the following question;

Stan: I hear you. Getting injured was the best thing that ever happened to me. Got me out of that vortex. Three generations on the floor. Loyal as hell, I never imagined working anywhere else. I get injured. I'm in the hospital for nearly two months. I can't walk. Can't feel my toes. Not one of those Olstead fuckers called to check on me, to say, "I'm sorry for not fixing the machine." They knew that machine was trouble. Ramsey, Smitz—everyone wrote it up.

Brucie: I know how that goes.

Stan: The only time I heard from Olstead is when they sent their hard-ass lawyer to the hospital, 'cause they didn't want me to sue. Fucking pricks. Twenty-eight years. That's when I understood. That's when I knew, I was nobody to them. Nobody! Three generations of loyalty to the same company. This is America, right? You'd think that would mean something. They behave like they're doing you a goddam favor. (p. 23)

The conflict show that the company do not care about anything that happen to the laborers. According to them the laborers is not a human being, but only a tool that they use to develop the company and obtain much money. They do not check the machine regularly, so that it can be danger for the laborers. It can be seen from the sentence *I'm sorry for not fixing the machine*. The company do not want to confess the accident that happen to the laborers as their fault, because they do not want to ruin their reputation. They pretending give help and pay the hospital cost, because they want to force the laborer to do not sue and make the company get loss. It makes the laborer cannot do anything to get their rights.

Briefly, the company restraints the laborers' welfare reflected through the health condition. The laborers get mental and physical health problems. The company do not state clearly enough about the employment contract, so that the laborers worried about to be laid off suddenly. The laborers do not get the day off. They cannot go on vacation, or hanging out with their family and friends. They forced to work overtime. They get the back pain. The company does not want to take responsibility when the laborers get injured during the working time. They also do not give health insurance. The company do not want to give the laborers' right. This cause the laborers unable to get the welfare in their life.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The play *Sweat* (2015) written by Lynn Nottage, reflects restraints of the labor's welfare. The analysis of this play deals with the concept of alienation by Karl Marx. It refers to the company way in limiting controlling, and stopping the laborers' welfare to get much profit. It can be seen from how the characters who work as labor in steel mill treated by the company in Reading, Pennsylvania. The company restraints the laborers' welfare through the financial condition and health condition.

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