

Chapter VI

Summary

For the rest of the year, the animals work at a backbreaking pace to farm enough food for themselves and to build the windmill. The leadership cuts the rations—Squealer explains that they have simply “readjusted” them—and the animals receive no food at all unless they work on Sunday afternoons. But because they believe what the leadership tells them—that they are working for their own good now, not for Mr. Jones’s—they are eager to take on the extra labor. Boxer, in particular, commits himself to Animal Farm, doing the work of three horses but never complaining. Even though the farm possesses all of the necessary materials to build the windmill, the project presents a number of difficulties. The animals struggle over how to break the available stone into manageable sizes for building without picks and crowbars, which they are unable to use. They finally solve the problem by learning to raise and then drop big stones into the quarry, smashing them into usable chunks. By late summer, the animals have enough broken stone to begin construction.

Although their work is strenuous, the animals suffer no more than they had under Mr. Jones. They have enough to eat and can maintain the farm grounds easily now that humans no longer come to cart off and sell the fruits of their labor. But the farm still needs a number of items that it cannot produce on its own, such as iron, nails, and paraffin oil. As existing supplies of these items begin to run low, Napoleon announces that he has hired a human solicitor, Mr. Whymper, to assist him in conducting trade on behalf of Animal Farm. The other animals

are taken aback by the idea of engaging in trade with humans, but Squealer explains that the founding principles of Animal Farm never included any prohibition against trade and the use of money. He adds that if the animals think that they recall any such law, they have simply fallen victim to lies fabricated by the traitor Snowball.

Mr. Whymper begins paying a visit to the farm every Monday, and Napoleon places orders with him for various supplies. The pigs begin living in the farmhouse, and rumor has it that they even sleep in beds, a violation of one of the Seven Commandments. But when Clover asks Muriel to read her the appropriate commandment, the two find that it now reads "No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets." Squealer explains that Clover must have simply forgotten the last two words. All animals sleep in beds, he says—a pile of straw is a bed, after all. Sheets, however, as a human invention, constitute the true source of evil. He then shames the other animals into agreeing that the pigs need comfortable repose in order to think clearly and serve the greater good of the farm.

Around this time, a fearsome storm descends on Animal Farm, knocking down roof tiles, an elm tree, and even the flagstaff. When the animals go into the fields, they find, to their horror, that the windmill, on which they have worked so hard, has been toppled. Napoleon announces in appalled tones that the windmill has been sabotaged by Snowball, who, he says, will do anything to destroy Animal Farm. Napoleon passes a death sentence on Snowball, offering a bushel of apples to the traitor's killer. He then gives a passionate speech in which he convinces the animals that they must rebuild the windmill, despite the backbreaking toil involved. "Long live the windmill!" he cries. "Long

live Animal Farm!”

Analysis

Part of the greater importance of the novella owes to its treatment of Animal Farm not as an isolated entity but as part of a network of farms—an analogue to the international political arena. Orwell thus comments on Soviet Russia and the global circumstances in which it arose. But the tactics that we see the pigs utilizing here—the overworking of the laboring class, the justification of luxuries indulged in by the ruling class, the spreading of propaganda to cover up government failure or ineffectiveness—evoke strategies implemented not only by communist Russia but also by governments throughout the world needing to oppress their people in order to consolidate their power.

Napoleon makes the outrageous claim that Snowball was responsible for the windmill’s destruction in order to shift the blame from his own shoulders. Governments throughout the world have long bolstered their standing among the populace by alluding to the horrors of an invisible, conspiratorial enemy, compared to which their own misdeeds or deficiencies seem acceptable. Stalin used this tactic in Russia by evoking a demonized notion of Trotsky, but the strategy has enjoyed popularity among many other administrations. Indeed, during much of the twentieth century, it was the communists who served as a convenient demon to governments in the West: both German and American governments used the threat of communism to excuse or cover up their own aggressive behaviors.

More broadly, the windmill represents the pigs’ continued manipula-

tion of the common animals. They not only force the animals to break their backs to construct the windmill by threatening to withhold food; they also use the windmill's collapse—the blame for which, though it is caused by a storm, rests with the pigs for not having the foresight to build thicker walls—to play on the animals' general fear of being re-enslaved. By deflecting the blame from themselves onto Snowball, they prevent the common animals from realizing how greatly the pigs are exploiting them and harness the animals' energy toward defeating this purported enemy.

In this chapter, Orwell also comments on the cyclical nature of tyranny. As the pigs gain power, they become increasingly corrupt. Soon they embody the very iniquity that Animal Farm was created to overturn. As many political observers have noted, Stalin and his officials quickly entered into the decadent lifestyles that had characterized the tsars. The communists themselves had pointed to these lifestyles in maligning the old administration. Orwell parodies this phenomenon by sketching his pigs increasingly along the lines of very grotesque human beings. Throughout the novel, the pigs increasingly resemble humans, eventually flouting altogether Old Major's strictures against adopting human characteristics. With the pigs' move into the farmhouse to sleep in the farmer's beds, Orwell remarks upon the way that supreme power corrupts all who possess it, transforming all dictators into ruthless, self-serving, and power-hungry entities that can subsist only by oppressing others.