CHAPTER III

ORWELL'S RADICAL INDIVIDUALISM: SOCIETY, ECONOMY
AND POLITICS

It is revealing to study the radical individualism of George Orwell in his observations and ideas about the society, the economy and the politics of his time. It is also interesting to know how on his voyage of finding out truth—his truth if not the whole truth, and who has reached or attained the whole truth any way?—about the social, economic, political and other issues of his time, he went on shaping his thoughts and also remedies against the evils.

Orwell did not make any systematic study of sociology, economics or political science, in an academic sense. Had he done so, he could have become a sort of the public-school master in Coming Up for Air, made fun of by the central character, George Bowling: "He's rather a striking-looking chap, very tall, with curly grey hair and a thin, dreamy kind of face that's a bit discoloured but might almost belong to a boy, though he must be nearly sixty. It's funny how some of these public-school and university chaps manage to look like
boys till their dying day."


2 Ibid., p. 165.
poverty and discomfort which he had to accept in order to remain an individualist, because they were less uncomfortable to him than accepting the compromises of normal employment in an acquisitive society. Associated with this is another quality; he was a man who spoke with authority and not as the journalists. He gave this impression in his talk. When a question rose, one felt it had already received his attention. In his books he deals with contemporary social and political problems with the detachment of a fine intelligence. He deals with them as a man who has done all his thinking for himself. These qualities are rare and valuable; and they are natural sources of his popularity with readers who must learn, like him, to work things out for themselves.  

Richard Rees compares Orwell with D.H. Lawrence in this connection:

We hear something that is excessively rare in modern literature, something that had hardly been heard in England since D.H. Lawrence’s death in 1930, and was

hardly to be heard again after Orwell's in 1950: the voice of a man with a mind of his own, with something in his mind, and speaking his mind. Not the academic and cagey accents of a literary pundit, nor the suave tones of a public relations expert, nor the phonographic rigmarole of a party-liner, but the voice of an independent individual who saw with his own eyes and knew what he thought and how to say it. The rarity of the phenomenon was attested by the sensation it caused.  

Orwell's voice, his way of thinking or expression of ideas was as unique, awesome, enlightening and as purifying with the unfathomable elemental force as the fire in the eyes of Blake's 'Tiger'. It is the voice or a way of inquiry after truth which drew its energies from the East and the West, from the slums, spikes, casual wards, clink and common lodging houses, from overnight halts at Trafalgar Square and hop-fields, from the life as a tramp, beggar, plongeur in Paris hotels, tutor, and a book-shop assistant, from the coal-mines in Lancashire and Wigan and the working class dwellings, from

the Aragon front in the Spanish Civil War, from the position as an assistant director for B.B.C. Eastern Service, from the profession as a journalist, Home Guard, farmer and above all from the life as a literary artist. All these amazingly diverse and bizarre experiences melted in the furnace of Orwell's mind from which a unique method of inquiry after truth emerged.

Orwell was a committed writer. His documentaries, essays and journalistic writings discussed directly the social, economic, political, cultural and literary issues and problems. These issues and problems are presented indirectly in his novels. *Nineteen Eighty Four* is a novel of pure ideas. He was a writer who set out deliberately to make his experiences and ideas into literary artistic works. It is from these points of view that we will have to trace his radical individualism in his ideas about society, economy and politics.

a) Orwell's Radical Individualism: Society

Being a professional writer and thus a student and keen observer of society, Orwell offered thought provoking criticism of social trends and evils, and presented his vision of a sane, humane and happy society. Partly, his vision of
society was the society he saw in the early days of the Spanish Civil War. In his *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell gives a picture of such a society which he glimpsed in Barcelona town when he came there from England. He says that he did not like many of the conditions there but thought that such a state of society was worth fighting for. He states that the Anarchists were in virtual control in Catalonia and Barcelona. For the first time he had seen a town where the working class was in power. All buildings, shops, and cafe were collectivised and everyone called the other comrade. In outward appearance at least the wealthy class had practically ceased to exist. This was the free, equal and just society that Orwell saw.

Sonia Orwell points out how Orwell settled down to write as a journalist against totalitarianism after he was rejected as medically unfit for the army to fight against Hitler. He was also writing to propogate his vision of society: "But now he was also a journalist because he wanted to be effective, to raise his voice against the folly, stupidity and despair he saw and felt, and try to keep alive his belief in the free, equal and decent society he had briefly glimpsed in the early days of the Spanish civil war."  

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5 CEJL, introd. I, xvi.
The Spanish episode referred to above depicts only a partial vision of Orwell's society and to say unqualifiedly that it was his full vision of society would be probably jejune. One will have to travel the way travelled by Orwell, and certainly it was the road not taken by many. It is not enough if one travels with him from Mandalay in Burma to Wigan and other coal-mining industrial areas in Yorkshire and Lancashire, but one must be on the move with him till his journey ended in 1950. One can get a fairly comprehensive picture of the vision of the society projected by Orwell in his reactions to social issues and problems. And more, we should know his Socialism in order to understand his picture of society. But before one tries to know his Socialism which he offered as remedy against social evils, it is necessary to have a picture of the society as Orwell depicted it and the related issues and evils that he exposed.

The documentaries, novels, essays, journalistic and other writings of Orwell unfold a brilliant kaleidoscopic picture of the society of his time. The picture is visible from the moment of the publication of *Down and Out*, though there were the important pieces of this picture related to his childhood, education and his role as a victim and victimiser as an
imperial police officer in Burma which had been shaped concretely in his mind but not yet expressed.

But why should Orwell plunge into the nether world of poverty, unemployment, tramps, beggars, filth and starvation? Why this leap into the depth? One finds the reasons in his documentary, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. When he was a small boy he was prevented from playing with the plumber's daughter because she and such children were of common class. And the same class barrier and purse-pride hurt him at St. Cyprian's, as he records this in his essay, "Such, Such Were the Joys". Flip and Sambo, the headmaster's wife and the headmaster so nicknamed at St. Cyprian's were the victimisers. Orwell states that the middle class believed that the working classes smell and distanced themselves from them. Even a Communist of European bourgeois upbringing found it difficult to consider working man his equal. Orwell felt victimised by such unreasonable sentiments which separated man from man, and led to the justification for domination of man by man.

More than the sentiments stated above Orwell had a terrible sense of guilt of being an oppressor or a victimiser while he was a police officer in Burma. He says that for five years he had been part of an oppressive system, and he
remembered the faces of prisoners in the dock, of men waiting in the condemned cells, of subordinates he had bullied and aged peasants he had snubbed, of servants and coolies he had hit with his fist in moments of rage when he was provoked. He writes that he was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that he had got to expiate. He wanted to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. He wanted to submerge himself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them, and on their side against their tyrants. He asserts that it was in this way that he was drawn towards the working class and he saw that working class people were the symbolic expression of injustice playing the same part in England as the Burmese played in Burma.

Thus Orwell wanted to understand poverty in society including the 'respectable' poverty of those on the fringe of the middle-class like himself. And his social survey started with this attitude as he writes: "When I thought of poverty I thought of it in terms of brute starvation. Therefore my mind turned immediately towards the extreme cases, the social outcasts: tramps, beggars, criminals, prostitutes. These were 'the lowest of the low', and these were the people with whom I
wanted to get in contact."\textsuperscript{6}

Orwell's survey of the society in which he lived starts, as earlier stated, with \textit{Down and Out}. The picture exhibits the unemployment, poverty, squalor and hunger prevalent during the period of depression that followed World War I. It begins with a graphic and brisk description of the filthy hotel in collapsing condition in a Paris slum and the squalid hopeless life there:

"THE RUE DU COQ D'OR, Paris, seven in the morning. . . .

\textit{Madame Monce}: 'Sacré salope! How many times have I told you not to squash bugs on the wallpaper? Do you think you've bought the hotel, eh? Why can't you throw them out of the window like everyone else? Espece de trainée!'

\textit{The woman on the third floor}: 'Va donc, eh! vieille vache!'

Thereupon a whole variegated chorus of yells, as windows were flung open on every side and half the street joined in the quarrel."\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p.131.

Orwell was lodging in another slum hotel. The rooms were small and dirty; the walls were thin like matchwood; the cracks in the wall were covered with layer after layer of pink paper; near the ceiling long lines of bugs marched all day like columns of soldiers and at night came down ravenously hungry. And Boris, Orwell's friend at that time lived in a filthy room in a different lodge and in that room a long S-shaped chain of bugs marched slowly.

We find the picture of hotel employees, underemployed, unemployed and starving persons like Boris, never employable eccentrics like Charlie, swindlers like the members of the so-called Russian secret society, the poor eccentrics staying in cheap and filthy hotels like the Rougiers, Valenti, the waiter out of job and starving and discovering that he had prayed to the famous prostitute of the Empire for money considering her Sainte Eloise and the vociferous, mad Saturday evenings in the little bistro.

Orwell was jobless, moneyless and sometimes starving in the hotel room in which he stayed. Boris was starving. And many more such persons. He makes penetrating observations on poverty and hunger: "You discover the boredom which is inseparable from poverty; the times when you have nothing to
do and, being underfed, can interest yourself in nothing. For half a day at a time you lie on your bed, feeling like the jeune squelette in Baudelaire's poem. Only food could rouse you. You discover that a man who has gone even a week on bread and margarine is not a man any longer, only a belly with a few accessory organs. And of hunger Orwell observes: "Hunger reduces one to an utterly spineless, brainless condition, more like the after-effects of influenza than anything else. It is as though one had been turned into a jellyfish, or as though all one's blood had been pumped out and lukewarm water substituted. Complete inertia is my chief memory of hunger; that, and being obliged to spit very frequently, and the spittle being curiously white and flocculent, like cuckoo-spit. I do not know the reason for this, but everyone who has gone hungry several days has noticed it."

Orwell served as a dish-washer or plongeur. Of the employees of the smart hotels and restaurants he selects plongeurs for explaining their social significance. Stating that in a great modern city, there are thousands of people

8 Down and Out, p.15.
9 Ibid., p.36.
swabbing dishes in hot dens underground, he remarks:

His work is servile and without art; he is paid just enough to keep him alive; his only holiday is the sack. He is cut off from marriage, or, if he marries, his wife must work too. Except by a lucky chance, he has no escape from this life, save into prison. At this moment there are men with university degrees scrubbing dishes in Paris for ten or fifteen hours a day. One cannot say that it is mere idleness on their part, for an idle man cannot be a plongeur; they have simply been trapped by a routine which makes thought impossible. If plongeurs thought at all, they would long ago have formed a union and gone on strike for better treatment. But they do not think, because they have no leisure for it; their life has made slaves of them.  

Orwell gives a brilliant description of the life of tramps in the second part of *Down and Out*. He exchanged his clothes for a tramp's and slipped into the dirty ragged clothes:

10 Ibid., p.117.
An hour later, in Lambeth, I saw a hang-dog man, obviously a tramp, coming towards me, and when I looked again it was myself reflected in a shop window. For the first time I noticed, too, how the attitude of women varies with a man's clothes. When a badly dressed man passes them they shudder away from him with a quite frank movement of disgust, as though he were a dead cat. Clothes are powerful things. Dressed in a tramp's clothes it is very difficult, at any rate for the first day, not to feel that you are genuinely degraded. You might feel the same shame, irrational but very real, your first night in prison.¹¹

Here Orwell focusses our attention on a very serious social problem, i.e. the problem of tramps, casual ward and common lodging-house dwellers. Of course it showed the deeper problem of unemployment, depression and traits of a maladjusted society. And Laurence Brander points out: "At that time, in the very early thirties there were thousands of wanderers in England. In 1932, one of the worst years for

¹¹ Ibid., p.130.
tramps, 17,000 entered the casual wards every night. Less than a fifth of that number use them now."\textsuperscript{12}

One gets a stark sketch of the degrading and degenerating conditions of the living of tramps in Orwell's article, "The Spike". In a casual ward Orwell who was a tramp and other tramps undressed and stood naked to waist for medical inspection. It was a terrible sight: "No one can imagine, unless he has seen such a thing, what pot-bellied, degenerate curs we looked. Shock heads, hairy, crumpled faces, hollow chests, flat feet, sagging muscles – every kind of malformation and physical rottenness were there."\textsuperscript{13}

Jenni Calder compares Down and Out to The People of Abyss (1903) written by Jack London. Calder remarks that Jack London's sketch of the East End of London is impressionistic, almost melodramatic showing subjective involvement. On the contrary, Orwell writes objectively in order to produce a reaction in his readers rather than to describe a reaction in himself. Calder comments that Orwell found the down-and-out's London of 1930's similar to that of 1902 portrayed by Jack London.

\textsuperscript{12} Brander, p.69.
\textsuperscript{13} CEJL, I.39.
For Orwell, Paddy becomes a specimen for almost the entire section of tramps in a depressed society of his time. Paddy was thirty five; he had served two years in the war; then he worked in a metal polish factory where he lost his job; and finally he was forced to be a tramp browsing pavements for cigarette ends and moving from spike to spike: "He was probably capable of work too, if he had been well fed for a few months. But two years of bread and margarine had lowered his standards hopelessly. He had lived on this filthy imitation of food till his whole mind and body were compounded of inferior stuff. It was malnutrition and not any native vice that had destroyed his manhood." 14

Orwell exposes the fallacies of popular misconceptions and prejudices about beggars and tramps. Beggars and tramps are ordinary human beings. The stories in the Sunday newspapers about beggars who die with two thousand pounds sewn into their trousers are lies. Beggars are considered outcasts like criminals and prostitutes. A beggar in fact works by standing out of doors in all weathers and getting vericose veins, chronic bronchitis, etc. His is a trade like any

14 Down and Out, p.154.
other; quite useless, of course - but there are many reputable trades that are quite useless.

Similarly a tramp is considered a blackguard, a repulsive and dangerous creature who would die rather than work, and wants nothing but to beg, drink and rob hen-houses: "A tramp tramps, not because he likes it, but for the same reason as a car keeps to the left; because there happens to be a law compelling him to do so. A destitute man, if he is not supported by the parish, can only get relief at the casual wards, and as each casual ward will only admit him for one night, he is automatically kept moving. He is a vagrant because, in the state of the law, it is that or starve."¹⁵

Orwell points out how tramps suffer unemployment, hunger, a state of being cut off from women, enforced idleness and enforced vagrancy. A tramp is an ordinary Englishman out of work. Orwell suggests small remedies like making casual wards have a small farm or kitchen garden where tramps can grow vegetables, and allowing them to stay a month or even a year at the same casual ward. However a fuller remedy lay in his Socialism, the idea of which he was to set forth later on.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.204.
Orwell's account of common lodging houses and hop-picking once again throws light on the poverty and unemployment experienced by the dispossessed of his time. The stories of common lodging houses and hop-picking are once again the stories of the dispossessed persons living on doles and meagre pensions. Orwell lived in common lodging houses at intervals. He states how a regular common lodging house dweller is cut off from women and how the lodging house separates husband from wife. The dwellers are made to suffer religious services as tramps are made to suffer the same in casual wards by the slumming parties which raid these lodging houses.

It was a serious social problem: "Common lodging houses, of which there are several hundred in London, are night-shelters specially licensed by the LCC. They are intended for people who cannot afford regular lodgings, and in effect they are extremely cheap hotels. It is hard to estimate lodging-house population, which varies continually, but it always runs into tens of thousands, and in the winter months probably approaches fifty thousand. Considering that they house so many people and that most of them are in an extraordinarily bad state, common lodging houses do not get the attention they deserve."16

16 CEJL., I.97
Unemployment and poverty appear to be the outcome of industrialism, monopoly capitalism, the war and the depression that followed. Laurence Brander points out: "In 1936 the outstanding social and political problem in Britain was unemployment. Over two million working men were out of work, with the result, as Orwell estimated, that something like twenty million people were underfed and lived in squalor or semi-squalor." The first part of The Road to Wigan Pier sketches this scene of poverty and unemployment. Between Down and Out and Wigan Pier Orwell wrote three novels and of them A Clergyman’s Daughter and Keep the Aspidistra Flying deal with these problems whereas Burmese Days depicts the decadent imperial society though it presents a glimpse of oriental poverty also.

Dorothy Hare, the central character in A Clergyman’s Daughter lives on the fringe of the middle class as a slave of her poor and eccentric father; she sinks into the abyss of the down-and-out at Trafalgar Square; she tramped and did hop-picking; she lived almost on dole as an assistant tutor at Mrs. Creevy’s private school which was a racket; and finally she returned home with the prospect of entering a common

Footnote: Brander, p.111.
lodging house after her father’s death as Mr. Warburton rightly foresees and foretells her.

Dorothy is, like Miss Minns, sketched pathetically by George Bowling in *Coming Up for Air*, "She lives on some kind of tiny fixed income, an annuity or something. ... It’s written all over her that her father was a clergyman and sat on her pretty heavily while he lived. They’re a social by-product of the middle classes, these women who turn into withered hags before they even manage to escape from home."\(^{18}\) Similarly Gordon Comstock refuses to live by the money-code and sinks into the depth of poverty. Gordon muses on love and money, "There are so many pairs of lovers in London with 'nowhere to go'; only the streets and parks, where there is no privacy and it is always cold. It is not easy to make love in a cold climate when you have no money."\(^{19}\) The animals except pigs and dogs are impoverished even after the revolution in *Animal Farm*. The overwhelming majority of proles live in squalor in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. And in essays like "How the Poor Die" the poor non-paying patients no longer remain human.

\(^{18}\) *Coming Up for Air*, pp.144-45.

beings, they become guineapigs: "As a non-paying patient, in
the uniform nightshirt, you were primarily a specimen, a thing
I did not resent but could never quite get used to".20

Orwell presents a unique portrait of the society that was
dominated by industrialism and commercialism. There was filth
and decay all around and especially the industrial towns. The
dirt the smell, the vile food, the sense of stagnant
meaningless decay of the lodginghouse of the Brookers where
people crept round and round like blackbeetles was a sample of
low-class lodgings that had sprouted in industrial towns.

The industrial society was rotting due to environmental
pollution. There was an appalling environmental and physical
degradation. As Orwell was entering the coal mining
industrial towns he saw effluents of the mines and factories
and what they had done to those who lived there. He writes:

The train bore me away, through the monstrous
scenery of slag-heaps, chimneys, piled scrap-iron,
foul canals, paths of cindery mud criss-crossed by
the prints of clogs. This was March, but the
weather had been horribly cold and everywhere there

20 Decline, p.35.
were mounds of blackened snow. As we moved slowly through the outskirts of the town we passed row after row of little grey slum houses running at right angles to the embankment. At the back of one of the houses a young woman was kneeling on the stones, poking a stick up the leaden waste-pipe which ran from the sink inside and which I suppose was blocked. I had time to see everything about her — her sacking apron, her clumsy clogs, her arms reddened by the cold. She looked up as the train passed, and I was almost near enough to catch her eye. She had a round pale face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who is twenty-five and looks forty, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and it wore, for the second in which I saw it, the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever seen.  

Class System

One cannot understand Orwell’s analysis of society, his attitude towards its evils, and his suggestions to eradicate those evils without knowing his ideas about the class system that existed in the society of his time. Orwell saw class

21 Wigan, p.16.
distinction as a barrier between man and man. He, in fact, wanted to see all feelings of class divisions to be smashed. We find this important theme of class being brought up for probing by Orwell in all of his works including Animal Farm, Nineteen Eighty-Four, his major essays and other sociological writings. Even in his critical essays he brings in the element of class to discuss a writer's works and make a relevant point. John Atkins who stresses the importance of the theme of class divisions in Orwell's works points out that division of society into classes was one of those subjects, like poverty and intellectual liberty, that Orwell studied closely and carefully. His views on the class structure are worth studying partly because they were based on knowledge and partly because of his honesty. One knows little about other sectors except a little about one's small sector. The class system breeds hatred between one class and the next. Orwell's ideal society was one in which class feelings were eliminated.

Orwell belonged to what he called the lower-upper-middle class, i.e. practically the bottom of the middle class. Jenni Calder, points out: "In wigan Pier Orwell's revolt against his own class was savagely expressed in terms of a condemnation of
left-wing middle-class intellectuals. While articulating their allegiance to the working-class they continued to relax protected by bourgeois padding - this was his allegation." And Richard Hoggart observes, "It is plain, from Wigan Pier as well as from many of Orwell's other writings, that he was reacting intensely against his social and educational background, was much of the time trying to cast off his class."23

Orwell has dealt with the phenomenon of class system directly and elaborately in such works as Wigan Pier and implicitly or briefly in almost all of his works. In Nineteen Eighty-Four there is a very rigid and unchangeable class or caste system which need not be taken as Orwell's final statement on the class system, but which deserves attention. In Nineteen Eighty-Four Orwell created the setting for the totalitarian regime of the future and the rigid caste or class system was what such a regime needed. But does it not contain a grain of truth when it comes to the fundamental and formidable human problem of preventing strong and vile persons


23 Richard Hoggart, "George Orwell and The Road to Wigan Pier", The Critical Quarterly, 7, No.1 (1965), 73.
from exploiting the weak and the poor? Has such a type of
exploitation ceased to exist in society today?

In the book, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical
Collectivism* ascribed to Immanuel Goldstein and cited in
*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, any reader can understand that
Goldstein's conception of the class is, in fact, the
conception of the class practised by the invincible Party in
Oceania. The book reveals how the rigid class system is a
historical inevitability, and how the class exploitation will
always remain, though, in newer forms:

Throughout recorded time, and probably since the end
of the Neolithic Age, there have been three kinds of
people in the world, the High, the Middle and the
Low. They have been subdivided in many ways, they
have borne countless different names, and their
relative numbers, as well as their attitude towards
one another, have varied from age to age: but the
essential structure of society has never altered.
Even after enormous upheavals and seemingly
irrevocable changes, the same pattern has always
asserted itself, just as a gyroscope will always
return to equilibrium, however far it is pushed one
way or the other.  

The passage cited above sounds Marxist in tone; it is the same historical inevitability which in Marxist philosophy is historical materialism, and which Karl Popper would call historicism. Of course, Orwell was holding up to ridicule and vehemently criticising the totalitarian way of thinking. Whereas Marx's prophecy was for a classless society, the Party in Oceania was for a class-ridden society. Class conflict arises because the aims of these three groups are entirely irreconcilable. The aim of the High is to retain their top position. The Middle want to oust the high and occupy the top position. The aim of the Low, if they have an aim - for they are so sunk in drudgery that they hardly have any time for nourishing any aim - is to abolish all distinctions and create a society in which all men shall be equal. The Middle sometimes overthrow the High with the assistance of the Low and thrust the Low back into their original position once their aim is fulfilled. But the Low have no hope, "But no advance in wealth, no softening of manners, no reform or revolution has ever brought human equality a millimetre

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And thus Oceanic society in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* contains three classes:

Big Brother is the guise in which the Party chooses to exhibit itself to the world. ... Below Big Brother comes the Inner Party, its numbers limited to six millions, or something less than 2 per cent of the population of Oceania. Below the Inner Party comes the Outer Party, which, if the Inner Party is described as the brain of the State, may be justly likened to the hands. Below that come the dumb masses whom we habitually refer to as 'the proles', numbering perhaps 85 per cent of the population. In terms of our earlier classification, the proles are the Low: for the slave populations of the equatorial lands, who pass constantly from conqueror to conqueror, are not a permanent or necessary part of the structure.26

In *Animal Farm* the revolutionary principle of equality gradually faded away after the revolution took place and the


26 Ibid., p.165.
animals who were to be equal saw that new classes had emerged. With Napoleon as the supreme leader the pigs with dogs became the ruling class, then came the sheep and all other animals called lower animals. Pilkington, the neighbouring farmer, in his speech at the banquet hosted by the pigs remarks that the lower animals in Animal Farm did more work and received less food than any animals in the country. He said that he and his fellow visitors had observed many features on the Animal Farm which they intended to introduce on their own farm immediately. He points out that between the pigs and human beings there was no clash of interests on the matter of handling the lower class or lower animals: "'If you have your lower animals to contend with', he said, 'We have our lower classes'."

Thus class as Orwell observes becomes the symbol of exploitation, oppression and tyranny. In any society there would be ruling class and subject class, or the rich and the poor. And these classes are further subdivided. The class structure is rigid as rock in Nineteen Eighty-Four, and in Animal Farm except pigs and dogs the condition of all other

animals is worse than their condition under their human master, Mr. Jones, in the past. The reader finds Orwell discussing the class in his other novels through the characters, more elaborately in Wigan Pier, to a remarkable extent in The Lion and the Unicorn, and again in a longer essay, "The English People".

Orwell identified broadly three classes in the society of his time — the upper class, the middle class and the lower or the working class. Of course, the three classes had very many subdivisions. Richard Rees comments, "At the time of Orwell's birth in 1903 almost everyone would have recognised, and not many would have criticised the fact of the existence of three more or less clearly defined social classes: a small upper class of 'gentlefolk', a big middle class, and a very big lower or 'working' class. They shaded into one another, of course, and with sufficient ingenuity it was possible to distinguish innumerable subdivisions." 28 Rees points out that to belong to the most exclusive though not the most powerful or conspicuous sections of the upper class one had to belong to an "old" family — not necessarily a titled family but one which could trace its lineage and its high status back through

28 Rees, p.20.
many generations. The word "gentleman" like the word "noble" which was used in an ethical sense made the understanding of the class system very subtle. The members of the working class called a member of the upper class 'a real gentleman' when they approved of his behaviour. However any member of any class could be praised for gentlemanliness. The mystical idea of the gentleman as one who acts honourably and behaves on all occasions with courtesy and gentleness was a very confusing factor in the three-class system, which might otherwise appear to be a fairly simple matter of grading society according to a combination of economic status and birth. The myth of the gentlemanliness of the members of the nobility comes down from the middle ages.

Orwell's view of class did not exclude money stratification, but he emphasised the pretences, prejudices and the assumed manners that went with the class. Thus, in a casual ward, when Orwell told the Tramp Major that he was a journalist, the Tramp Major considered Orwell a gentleman though at that time Orwell was a tramp. Verall, a member of the nobility who went to Burma as a policeman in *Burmese Days* was not a "real "gentleman since he behaved rudely towards the members of the small British colonial society at Kyauktada.
The class is a very subtle phenomenon and it infiltrates even the lowest group of menial workers or even the lowest of the low like tramps, beggars and all. Of Down and Out, and the class differences in the group of the employees of the hotel where Orwell was a plongeur, Jeffrey Meyers observes, "One of the larger ironies of the book is that Orwell fled this unjust social hierarchy only to find, among the down-and-out, an even more rigidly military caste system." And Orwell observes:

Our staff, amounting to about a hundred and ten, had their prestige graded as accurately as that of soldiers, and a cook or waiter was as much above a plongeur as a captain above a private. Highest of all came the manager, who could sack anybody, even the cooks. We never saw the patron, and all we knew of him was that his meals had to be prepared more carefully than those of the customers; all discipline of the hotel depended on the manager. ...

Below the manager came the maître d'hôtel... A little below the head waiter came the head cook, .... Then came the chef du personnel; ...
Then came the other cooks, ... then the waiters, ... then the laundresses and sewing women; then the apprentice waiters, ... then the plongeurs, ... then the chambermaids, ... and lastly the cafetiers, at five hundred a month.30

Orwell reveals how even the beggars, 'the lowest of the low' had social differences in their section. A sharp social line existed between those who merely cadged and those who attempted to give some value for the money. He points out that street acrobats and street photographers were comparatively prosperous beggars, then came organ-grinders followed by screevers. Below screevers there were the people who sang hymns, or sold matches, or bootlaces or envelopes containing a few grains of lavender. Orwell bases the social hierarchy of beggars on their earnings.

Finally, one comes to the three main classes that Orwell analysed in his works. He had his own views on the upper class or bourgeoisie, the middle class or petty bourgeoisie and the working class or proletariat. Orwell considered all those with more than £2000 a year as the upper class. Gordon

30 Down and Out, pp.69-70.
Comstock in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* gives a list of those who constituted the upper crust: "The money-priesthood, the pink-faced masters of the world. The Upper Crust. A welter of sleek young rabbits in thousand guinea motor cars, of golfing stockbrokers and cosmopolitan financiers, of Chancery lawyers and fashionable Nancy boys, of bankers, newspaper peers, novelists of all four sexes, American pugilists, lady aviators, film stars, bishops, titled poets, and Chicago gorillas."  

Orwell, while elaborating his Socialist programme and the resistance to such a movement by the upper class, gives a rough figure of the total number of the bourgeoisie in the English society of his time in *The Lion and the Unicorn*: "The resistance will come from the big capitalists, the bankers, the landlords and the idle rich, roughly speaking the class with over £2000 a year - and even if one counts in all their dependents there are not more than half a million of these people in England."  

Orwell observes that it was unfortunate that England was

31 *The Aspidistra*, p.164.

ruled by the rich and by people who stepped into positions by right of birth. He points out that the upper class that ruled England was incapable of ruling England. Of the upper class characters who appear in his novels only Ravelston, the friend of Gordon and the editor of Antichrist is portrayed well. But then he was a left-wing intellectual, a Socialist. The paradox is that he was a Socialist by faith and in fact a rich man. Hermione who was rich and fiancee of Ravelston was stupid and hypocritical towards Socialism. She says to Ravelston. "Oh, people like this poet friend of yours. All those people who write for your paper. They only do it to cadge from you. Of course I know you're a Socialist. So am I. I mean we're all Socialists nowadays. But I don't see why you have to give all your money away and make friends with the lower classes. You can be a Socialist and have a good time, that's what I say."

Sir Thomas Hare, cousin of Dorothy, was too stupid to arrange anything. Verall in Burmese Days belonging to the upper class was too rude to be a gentleman. And more than anything else, the members of the upper class were the useless section of the English society:

Only half a million people, the people in the

33 Aspidistra, p.109.
country houses, definitely benefited from the existing system. Moreover, the tendency of small business to merge together into large ones robbed more and more of the moneyed class of their function and turned them into mere owners, their work being done for them by salaried managers and technicians.

For long past there had been in England an entirely functionless class, living on money that was invested they hardly knew where, the 'idle rich', the people whose photographs you can look at in the Tatler and the Bystander, always supposing that you want to. The existence of these people was by any standard unjustifiable. They were simply parasites, less useful to society than his fleas to a dog.  

Orwell remarks that the ruling class i.e. the upper class thought that Fascism was on their side: "The British ruling class were not altogether wrong in thinking that Fascism was on their side. It is a fact that any rich man, unless he is a Jew, has less to fear from Fascism than from either Communism or democratic Socialism. One ought never to forget this, for

34 Lion and Unicorn, pp.56-57.
nearly the whole of German and Italian propaganda is designed to cover it up. The natural instinct of men like Simon, Hoare, Chamberlain etc. was to come to an agreement with Hitler." The upper class failed miserably to read the dangers of Hitlerism. They were unwilling to face a change in their way of life and had shut their eyes to the nature of Fascism and modern war.

Middle Class, Working Class and Socialism

In *Wigan Pier*, in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, and in "The English People" which can be taken as representing Orwell's sociological ideas, he visualises a broadly Socialist society emerging from the combination of the middle class and working class. If he criticised the middle class, especially the middle class Socialist leaders harshly in *Wigan Pier*, it was only to make the middle class and their Socialist leaders to see how much they had in common with the working class. If he idealised the working class interior as he does in *Wigan Pier*, again, it was to persuade the middle class to drop their snobbish attitude towards the working class. The middle class and the working class should be united under Socialism, for the regeneration of English society which was degenerating

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35 Ibid., p.60.
under the upper class rule, and for protecting English society against the onslaught of Fascism. But the members of the middle class had hypocritical attitude or pretences of superiority towards the working class which Orwell holds up to ridicule in his sociological essays.

The class having an income between £400 and £2000 a year was the middle class. Orwell points out: "Between those with £400 a year and those with £2000 a year or even £1000 a year there was a great gulf fixed, but it was a gulf which those with £400 a year did their best to ignore." The class with £400 a year was what Orwell calls 'a shabby genteel' class.

Orwell is harsh in his attack of the 'shabby genteel'class, or the middle-middle class, or the lower upper middle class. It is the same class that Gordon ridicules: "The Comstocks belonged to the most dismal of all classes, the middle-middle class, the landless gentry. In their miserable poverty they had not even the snobbish consolation of regarding themselves as an 'old' family fallen on evil days, for they were not an 'old' family at all, merely one of those families which rose on the wave of Victorian prosperity and

36 Wigan, p.107.
then sank again faster than the wave itself."\(^37\) It is the same class that George Bowling satirises: "It was through Hilda that I first got a notion of what these decayed middle class families are really like. The essential fact about them is that all their vitality has been drained away by lack of money. In families like that, which live on tiny pensions and annuities—that’s to say on incomes which never get bigger and generally get smaller—there’s more sense of poverty, more crust-wiping and looking twice at sixpence, than you’d find in any farm labourer’s family, let alone a family like mine."\(^38\) Of this class Orwell writes: "Most clergymen and schoolmasters, for instance, nearly all Anglo-Indian officials, a sprinkling of soldiers and sailors, and a fair number of professional men and artists, fall into this category."\(^39\) And statements like these abound in the writings of Orwell.

Orwell points out how the dislike, prejudices, and snobbery of the middle class towards the working class were nourished since childhood in the middle class families. Thus,

\(^37\) *The Aspidistra*, p.43.
\(^38\) *Coming Up for Air*, p.141.
\(^39\) *Wigan*, p.109.
for a middle class person, the plumber's children are common; the lower classes smell; the workers are a sinister flood creeping upwards to engulf himself and sweep all culture and all decency; and finally even for a middle class Socialist the proletarian manners are disgusting. All these deep rooted snobberies are wholly irrational and need to be eliminated, according to Orwell. But it is a challenging task since the working class had grown servile and the middle class was snobbish. Both classes should know that they have economically not much difference, but the difference is of mental traits and long bred prejudices. These two classes should combine to establish Socialist society in England and fight for liberty against Fascism.

Unfortunately middle-class Socialist leaders were the stumbling block on the path of setting up a Socialist society in England. Orwell comes down on middle-class Socialist leaders almost to the point of exaggeration: "One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist, and femininist in England." 40

40 Wigan, p.152.
Orwell decries the way middle-class Socialist leaders in England had made Socialism unacceptable to the vast majority of the members of the middle class and working class. He lists the obstacles in the way of acceptance of Socialism and its implementation. He says that he is sometimes amazed that Socialism which is elementary common sense has not established itself already. He observes: "The world is a raft sailing through space with, potentially, plenty of provisions for everybody; the idea that we must cooperate and see to it that everyone does his fair share of the work and gets his fair share of the provisions seems so blatantly obvious so that one would say that no one could possibly fail to accept it unless he had some corrupt motive for clinging to the present system."\(^4^1\) Moreover for an ordinary worker Socialism means nothing more than better wages, shorter hours and nobody bossing over him. He does not know the deeper implications of Socialism and Orwell asserts: "Often, in my opinion, he is a truer Socialist than the orthodox Marxist, because he does remember, what the other so often forgets, that Socialism means justice and common decency."\(^4^2\)

Orwell elaborates the obstacles that middle class

\(^{41}\) Ibid., pp.149-50.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., p.154.
Socialist leaders had created in the way of establishment of Socialism. The first obstacle was that Socialism in its developed form was projected as a theory entirely confined to the middle class. Secondly, the Socialists by their own acts presented themselves as cranks. Thirdly, pining for a classless society, they clang like glue to their miserable fragments of social prestige. And the Socialists of working class origin in their fight against bourgeoisie became bourgeois themselves. More importantly, for many middle-class Socialists revolution did not mean a movement of the masses but a set of reforms imposed on the working class by them who were intelligent. Thus, Socialism as it is presented appeals to unsatisfactory and even inhuman types. The Socialists were unaware that thinking people might be repelled by the objective towards which it was moving. The Marxist dismisses this kind of a thing as bourgeois sentimentality.

Orwell observes that there seemed to be a sort of spiritual recoil from Socialism as it manifested itself in sensitive people. Socialism is bound up with the idea of machine production and it is an urban creed. Industrialism need not necessarily lead to Socialism but to the Slave-State, since, when developed above a fairly low level, it must lead
to some form of collectivism. The Socialists depicted Socialism as a completely mechanised, immensely organized world, depending on the machine, as the civilization of the past depended on the slave. Not many people cherish this phenomenon since it frustrates human need for effort and creation. The total effect of all these contradictions is that Socialism did not attract those it should have attracted.

Orwell pleads that everyone who knows the meaning of poverty, every one who has a genuine hatred of tyranny and war, is on the Socialist side, potentially, and such persons should be roped in for establishing Socialism. The Socialists should stop glorifying machine civilization though the machine would stay. The fight was between Socialism and Fascism, and the aim of the fight was to set up a Socialist society imbibing justice and decency. Orwell says that there should be a genuine Socialist party representing the middle class and working class, and when they fought side by side against Fascism, they would forget their class difference, and merge into the Socialist society:

And then perhaps this misery of class-prejudice will fade away, and we of the sinking middle class - the private schoolmaster, the half-starved free-lance journalist, the colonel's spinster daughter with £75
a year, the jobless Cambridge graduate, the ship's officer without a ship, the clerks, the civil servants, the commercial travellers, and the thrice-bankrupt drapers in the country towns - may sink without further struggle into the working class where we belong, and probably when we get there it will not be so dreadful as we feared, for after all, we have nothing to lose but our aitches.”

Orwell, in his longer essay, “The English People” visualised that the middle class and working class were losing their rigid pattern. His argument is that the industrial technique had been releasing man from heavy manual labour. The council houses of workers nearly resembling those of stockbrokers, mass production of furniture, cheap clothes, literature, cheap books, amusements, and radio and film programmes were ironing out class differences. The cheap hotels and fairly smart restaurants, the number of which was increasing, promoted uniform taste in food. Thus, even if the class structure was still identifiable, the essential difference between man and man had been diminishing:

Whatever may be the ultimate fate of the very rich,

43 Ibid., p.204.
the tendency of the working class and the middle class is evidently to merge. It may happen quickly or slowly, according to circumstances. It has been accelerated by the war, and another ten years of all-round rationing, utility clothes, high income tax, and compulsory national service may finish the process once and for all. The final effect of this we cannot foresee. There are observers, both native and foreign, who believe that the fairly large amount of individual freedom that is enjoyed in England depends on having a well-defined class system. Liberty, according to some, is incompatible with equality. But at least it is certain that the present drift is towards greater social equality, and that this is what the great mass of the English people desire.44

When one makes an attempt at assessing Orwell's sociological analyses, and his radical individualism in this context, one should know that there have been critics who have pointed out Orwell's analyses were defective and wrong. John Beavan compliments Orwell for his superb criticism of

44 CEJL, III, 23.
Communism and for his concern for the mental and moral health of the Left but remarks: "Orwell's quest for the worker was a failure. He never attained a deep understanding of the ordinary English wage-earner and his aspirations; and he never appreciated, therefore, the virtues of the Labour Party and the Trade Union movement which fulfil so successfully the English wage-earner's needs." 45

Raymond Williams compares D.H. Lawrence's "England my England" to Orwell's "England your England" and concludes, "For 'England my England' is an assertion, a declaration of independence, a challenge. 'England your England', by contrast, is a vision, a story, a dream. And when it breaks, under pressure, it will become a nightmare." 46 The obvious reference is to the 'nightmare' in Nineteen Eighty-Four.

How far were Orwell's interpretations of the society and the class correct? Was his vision of emergence of a Socialist society from the combination of the middle class and the working class a wishful thinking? An interesting point that one must note before answering the questions raised, is that

45 John Beavan, "The Road to Wigan Pier" in World Review, p.48.

46 Williams, p.28.
Orwell’s sociological analyses are Marxian in tone, though Orwell was a consistently vehement critic of orthodox Marxism. Orwell, who was writing against the background of the war, depression, unemployment, poverty and hunger, thought that capitalism was incapable of winning against Fascism and finding solution to internal problems. He felt it was collapsing; Marx too, had predicted the death of capitalism. Orwell considered that Socialism was nearer realisation, "The fact that we are at war has turned Socialism from a textbook word into a realizable policy."\(^47\) He believed that, or rather hoped that the middle class and working class would merge. This sounds like Marx’s prophecy of the death of Capitalism, establishment of proletariat dictatorship and the withering away of the State. Again Orwell says, that the members of the middle class ‘have nothing to lose but their aitches’, as Marx said the workers had ‘nothing to lose but their chains’. More examples can be given in this connection.

But there are sharp differences. Whereas Marx presented a holistic theory for a sweeping change of the social structure, Orwell being a literary artist and thinker developed his own ideas of a Socialist society based on

\(^47\) *Lion and Unicorn*, p.102.
justice and decency. Marx's ideology culminated in the totalitarian regime of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union. On the contrary, though Orwell's vision of the emergence of a Socialist society in England did not materialise, it did at least find its way, however partially, into the various welfare measures and the policies of nationalisation of the Government of the Labour Party which was voted into power in the general elections in England after World War II. Orwell's plunge into the underworld of *plongeurs*, beggars, tramps, 'the lowest of the low', his fight for justice and liberty in Spain, his trip to Wigan and entry into the coal-mine - all confirm his radical individualistic approach to social issues and problems. No doubt *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* negate all Socialist values he cherished. But they need not be the only yardsticks for assessing Orwell's sociological interpretations, nor do they deny his radical individualism towards society.
b) Orwell's Radical Individualism

Orwell's radical individualism towards economy consists in his understanding and critical analyses of the poverty, hunger, unemployment, money, imperialism, class system, Socialism and political set up of the England of his time. Orwell studied these subjects both as an insider and as an outsider. He did not offer an elaborate economic theory, nor system, partly because he was too much involved in his writings against Fascism during the Second World War, and partly because his way of thinking was against any holistic way of thinking and analysis. Nevertheless, a reader of Orwell cannot fail to get Orwell's ideas on the economy of the England of his period.

Orwell was a bitter critic of the economic evils of his day, and offered Socialism as a remedy, though this remedy is negated in Animal Farm and becomes a nightmare in Nineteen Eighty-Four. He did not write directly and elaborately on the economy of England and Socialism. However, there emerges a broad Orwellian conception of economy from his writings. The reader will have to bring together Orwell's observations and ideas related to the economy from his documentaries, novels, essays and other miscellaneous writings in order to have a
satisfactorily clear picture of his conception of the economy of England. His approach to the issues of economy, it should be emphasised at the outset, was closely involved in, and very much concerned with the process of finding out remedies for the economic evils of his time. And more, it will have to be stressed that Orwell was trying to diagnose the economic evils and suggest remedies from the standpoint of a literary artist with a very deep and conspicuous commitment to make the world a better place to live in. Thus, one will have to probe the Orwellian conception of economy as Orwell observed and understood it as a committed student of society and literary artist, and not as an economist in the usual academic sense.

Orwell started his career as a writer and student of society with the study of poverty, and especially the conditions of life of the down-and-out, or the social outcasts. In other words, his career begins with the analysis of the miserable economic condition of the outcasts of the existing economic order of his day. The beggars, tramps, prostitutes and other people of the abyss, or the underworld, are the products of capitalist economic structure. Orwell saw such deprivation and misery of the people as the symptoms of the formidable disease of economic injustice. And such economic
injustice was the essential characteristic of the maladjusted capitalistic economic order. In a healthy community there should not be poverty. And thus, for Orwell, poverty becomes a yardstick for measuring the economic injustice in a community. Poverty, the indicator of economic injustice became an obsessive theme for Orwell till he directed his creative energy against Fascism. Orwell gives the description of poverty and injustice even in his later works which are considered political writings. Orwell was against economic injustice and declared: "Poverty is what I am writing about, and I had my first contact with poverty in this slum. The slum, with its dirt and its queer lives, was first an object-lesson in poverty, and then the background of my own experiences. It is for that reason that I try to give some idea of what life was like there." 48 Orwell wrote this about the poverty in the slum in Paris. Stansky and Abrahams make the same point when they write: "In one or another of its destructive forms, poverty was to become his obsessive subject - at the heart of almost everything he wrote until Homage to Catalonia." 49

48 Down and Out, p.5.

49 Stansky and Abrahams, p.203.
Poverty as an economic evil and injustice has a debilitating effect on people. Describing the life of the poor and the deprived people in Paris slums Orwell observes: "There were eccentric characters in the hotel. The Paris slums are a gathering-place for eccentric people - people who have fallen into solitary, half-mad groves of life and given up trying to be normal or decent. Poverty frees them from ordinary standards of behaviour, just as money frees people from work."\(^5^0\) Poverty is naturally associated with hunger, and hunger degrades a man both physically and spiritually and makes him totally unfit for any work.

Orwell gives a brief but comprehensive description of the class structure of the hotel employees in Down and Out, and points out how most of the employees are the underpaid workmen, forced by the existing economic order to be what they were. A plongeur gets 750 francs a month; a chambermaid and a cafetier get 500 francs each a month. All these were the underpaid slaves of the racket called capitalist economy.

In the second part of Down and Out, Orwell gives a sketch of the economic conditions of beggars and tramps. He makes

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\(^5^0\) Ibid., p.3.
fun of the Sunday papers which sometimes carried the stories of beggars dying with £2000 sewn into their trousers. Orwell discloses that many beggars do not get more than half a crown a day: "Match-selling and street-singing are simply legalised crimes. Not profitable crimes, however; there is not a singer or match-seller in London who can be sure of £50 a year – a poor return for standing eighty-four hours a week on the kerb, with the cars grazing your backside." The street photographers, street acrobats, organ-grinders, screevers, street-singers and match or bootlace sellers were all beggars as Orwell saw them.

The tramps were, by and large, working men out of work and condemned to remain so by the unjust economic law of the State. Besides their miserable life they were actually forced to waste their energy by spending about eighteen hours a day in the cell and on the road from one casual ward to another. Orwell remarks: "There must be at the least several tens of thousands of tramps in England. Each day they expend innumerable foot-pounds of energy – enough to plough thousands of acres, build miles of road, put up dozens of houses – in mere, useless walking. Each day they waste between them

51 Down and Out, p.174.
possibly ten years of time in staring at cell walls. They cost the country at least a pound a week a man, and give nothing in return for it."52

The root cause of poverty was unemployment. Unemployment led to poverty and poverty made one unemployable. Thus, unemployment, poverty, and hunger completed a vicious economic circle. Orwell has portrayed the unemployment problem of the period between the wars and especially the period of the Great Slump: "Millions of men had suddenly been kicked out of the army to find that the country they'd fought for didn't want them, and Lloyd George and his pals were giving the works to any illusions that still existed. Bands of ex-service men marched up and down rattling collection boxes, masked women were singing in the streets and chaps in officers' tunics were grinding barrel-organs. Everybody in England seemed to be scrambling for jobs, myself included."53 One can see a picture of a scramble for jobs as Dorothy saw it: "Already a score of vaguely mangy-looking people were prowling up and down, and the number swelled by ones and twos till there were no less

52 Down and Out, p.207.
53 Coming Up for Air, p.128.
than sixty. Presently the doors of the library opened, and in they all surged, racing for a board at the other end of the reading room where the 'Situations Vacant' columns from various newspapers had been cut out and pinned up.\textsuperscript{54}

Orwell depicts the unemployment problems faced by the industrial and mining districts in his work, \textit{Wigan Pier}. He observes that in Wigan, a typical mining and industrial town with a population of 87,000 in 1936, there were around 36,000 unemployed persons living on dole. The average unemployed family lived on an income of about 30s a week of which a quarter went in rent. He points out that such an unemployed family lived on an appalling diet of white bread, margarine, corned beef, sugared tea, and potatoes.

And what about the economic condition of miners? People believed that a miner's annual income was around £150. Orwell proves that it was a gross over-estimate, and as a matter of fact, for the year 1934 the average gross earnings of all miners throughout Great Britain was only £115 11s. 6d. And after all stoppages or compulsory deductions there remained

£105 as the annual income of a miner. Thus, a miner could bring home on an average £2 or slightly less than that.

An interesting aspect of the Orwellian approach to economy is that he made a lot of comments on money and the role of money in life. Of course, Orwell was bitterly critical of the role of money. He brought up the question of money to condemn its perverted function. He observed that in his time people worshipped the money-god or Mammon. It was especially the case with the rich and the middle class people who worshipped the money-god brazenly. Money was the barometre of respectability, and even begging could become respectable if it brought more money: "In all the modern talk about energy, efficiency, social service and the rest of it, what meaning is there except 'Get money, get it legally, and get a lot of it'? Money has become the grand test of virtue. By this test beggars fail, and for this they are despised. If one could earn even ten pounds a week at begging, it would become a respectable profession immediately."55

Money was omnipresent and omnipotent. It entered schools and educational institutions and spoiled the educational  

55 Down and Out, p. 175.
atmosphere. It was so with Mrs. Creevy's private school: "Her oft-repeated phrase, 'It's the fees I am after', was a motto that might be — indeed, ought to be — written over the doors of every private school in England." And there was Orwell's own experiences as a schoolboy at St. Cyprian's which he so graphically presents in his well known essay, "Such Such Were the Joys". At St. Cyprian's, an expensive and snobbish school, students were caned or not caned, treated well or badly on the basis of the money that their parents possessed. No student whose parental income was over £2000 a year was ever caned. Orwell was admitted to that expensive school though his parents could not afford to send him there, because Sambo, the headmaster would take at greatly reduced fees, some boys, who could win scholarships and bring credit to the school. Orwell was considered such a boy, and thus he entered St. Cyprian's. Orwell writes that at St. Cyprian's he suffered humiliation for want of money. Flip, the wife of the headmaster, and Sambo always reminded him that he was eating their bread, and was taken at greatly reduced fees to win scholarships. Sambo used to tell Flip, pretending that Orwell was not there, though he was there, "I think he's given up

56 A Clergyman's Daughter, p.211.
that idea. He wants to be a little office boy at forty pounds a year."\(^{57}\) And Flip would add her comments, implying that Orwell was a parasite on them. So, it was money that ruled the school.

Money becomes an obsessive theme in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Gordon interprets everything including his way of living and career in terms of money. He feels he could not be a successful writer for want of money: "It was the lack of money, simply the lack of money, that robbed him of the power to 'write'. He clung to that as an article of faith. Money, money, all is money! Could you write even a penny novelette without money to put heart in you? Invention, energy, wit, style, charm - they've all got to be paid for in hard cash."\(^{58}\) Gordon as an assistant at McKechnie's bookshop sympathised with the old couple, the beggar and his wife who came there and offered for sale the unsaleable books which were naturally rejected: "Gordon watched them go. They were just by-products. The throw-outs of the money-god. All over London, by tens of thousands, draggled old beasts of that description; creeping like unclean beetles to the

\(^{57}\) CEJL, IV, 335-36, 341-42.

\(^{58}\) Aspidistra, p.14.
Gordon had rejected money in his life; he had given up his more paying job as an advertisement copy writer to become a low paid bookshop assistant. He knew by his experiences that the lack of money led to discomfort, squalid worries, shortage of tobacco, ever present consciousness of failure and utter loneliness. All failures emanated from the lack of money. Gordon mused on it and felt that social failure, artistic failure, and sexual failure were due to lack of money. One could not be courteous, friendly and cultured without money.

For Gordon money and sex seem to have a close connection. Women did not like men without money and were never prepared to have sex with moneyless men even if they had feelings of love towards them. That was the way Gordon analysed his relationship with Rosemary, the girl who loved him. He says to Rosemary, "Look at you and me. You won't sleep with me, simply and solely because I've got no money. Yes, that is the reason." 60

Gordon was finally defeated in his war with money when

59 Ibid., p.21.

60 Aspidistra, p.126.
Rosemary conceived after the sexual contact with him. He had no alternative. As Richard Rees observes: "In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* the money god says, in effect: Obey me by getting a 'good' (i.e. an immoral, anti-social and degrading) job and you can afford to have a baby. Disobey me, by writing poetry or doing any disinterested work, and you will have to forgo sex altogether, because no woman will go with a pauper; or if you do have the luck to find a generous girl, you will have to resort to contraceptives or abortion." Thus, Gordon surrendered to the money god. The tragedy lay in the factor that he killed the desire within him to be a poet or writer: "He had blasphemed against money, rebelled against money, tried to live like an anchorite outside the money-world; and it had brought him not only misery, but also a frightful emptiness, an inescapable sense of futility. To abjure money is to abjure life. Be not righteous over much; why shouldst thou die before thy time? Now he was back in the money-world, or soon would be."61 Money proved to be more powerful than man. That is how the role of money is pictured in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.

61 Rees, p.38.

Orwell exposed the fraudulent nature and evils of the imperialist economy. The capitalist economy of his day was nourished by colonialism, or imperialism. The imperial economic aspect that Orwell criticised gives another dimension to the Orwellian conception of economy. Orwell rightly perceived that imperialism was nothing more; or nothing less than economic expansion, or economic hegemonism. It was the means by which the then Great Powers of Europe tried to establish their trade monopolies in the backward regions of the world. The uncontrolled greed, and the mad race for trade monopolies, and expansionism had exploded in the forms of the two world wars. Even before World War II, Orwell, as an imperial police officer in Burma, had seen the meaning of imperialism, and its dangers. Having understood imperialism as robbery, Orwell had given up his job in Burma. He observed that the British prosperity was based on the exploitation of the natives and colonies. Britain would be a poor country and a small power without the colonies, or the Empire. The Englishmen were there in India, Burma or Africa to steal, plunder or loot the colonies. This is pointed out by Flory in *Burmese Days*. Flory considered the Anglo-Indians, those who ran the imperial government in the colonies as liars and thieves: "The British Empire is simply a device for giving
trade monopolies to the English — or rather to gangs of Jews and Scotchmen.”

Imperialism was a huge swindle and exploitation of the natives in the colonies. Instead of uplifting the poor or civilizing the natives, as the imperialists claimed, it was, in fact, plain robbery. It was a fraud committed to suppress the native industries, and use the colonial raw materials for the imperial industries, and dump the finished products in the colonial markets. The observations of Flory are very apt:

We teach the young men to drink whisky and play football, I admit, but precious little else. Look at our schools — factories for cheap clerks. We have never taught a single useful manual trade to the Indians. We daren't; frightened of the competition in industry. We've even crushed various industries. Where are the Indian muslins now? Back in the 'forties or thereabouts they were building sea-going ships in India, and manning them as well. Now you couldn't build a seaworthy fishing boat there. In the eighteenth century the Indians cast

guns that were at any rate upto the European standard. Now, after we've been in India a hundred and fifty years, you can't make so much as a brass cartridge case in the whole continent. The only eastern races that have developed at all quickly are the independent ones."64

Orwell ridiculed the left-wing intellectuals for their hypocrisy on the question of imperialism. The left-wing intellectuals were very rhetorical in criticising capitalism, and imperialism which was the foundation for capitalist exploitation. But no left-wing intellectuals nor any left-wing leader was ready to give up the British Empire, nor prepared to allow the Empire to disintegrate. That was the essential hypocrisy of the left-wing intellectuals, and their hypocrisy shielded their selfishness. Their selfishness lay in the fact that the high standard of living in England was dependent on the imperialist economy. Orwell criticised such dishonesty and hypocrisy:

For, apart from any other consideration, the high standard of life we enjoy in England depends upon our keeping a tight hold on the Empire, particularly

64 Ibid., p.39.
the tropical portions of it such as India and Africa. Under the capitalist system, in order that England may live in comparative comfort, a hundred million Indians must live on the verge of starvation – an evil state of affairs, but you acquiesce in it every time you step into a taxi or eat a plate of strawberries and cream. The alternative is to throw the Empire overboard and reduce England to a cold and unimportant little island where we should all have to work very hard and live mainly on herrings and potatoes.65

Again in "Not Counting Niggers", and in his essay on Kipling Orwell asserts that Englishmen lived by robbing Asiatic coolies. England had become fat at the expense of the natives in the colonies:

What we always forget is that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain, but in Asia and Africa. It is not in Hitler’s power, for instance, to make a penny an hour a normal industrial wage; it is perfectly normal in India, and we are at great pains to keep it so. One

65 Wigan, pp.139-40.
gets some idea of the real relationship of England and India when one reflects that the per capita annual income in England is something over £ 80, and in India about £ 7. It is quite common for an Indian coolie's leg to be thinner than the average Englishman's arm. And there is nothing racial in this, for well-fed members of the same races are of normal physique; it is due to simple starvation. This is the system which we all live on and which we denounce when there seems to be no danger of its being altered. Of late, however, it has become the first duty of a "good anti-Fascist" to lie about it and help to keep it in being. 66

Orwell was honest in his hatred against the decadent British Empire, and argued for the dismantling of it. He knew the wretched conditions which prevailed in the colonies. The imperial exploiters would be replaced by the native exploiters. The native crocodiles like U Po Kyin would begin to devour their own people. Exploitation would continue. But the crocodiles like U Po Kyins were created by the capitalist imperial government. The Empire was responsible for such a

66 CEJL, p.397.
condition: "It is a common place that the average Indian suffers far more from his own countrymen than from the British. The petty Indian capitalist exploits the town worker with the utmost ruthlessness, the peasant lives from birth to death in the grip of the money-lender. But all this is an indirect result of the British rule, which aims half-consciously at keeping India as backward as possible. The classes most loyal to Britain are the princes, the landowners and the business community—in general, the reactionary classes who are doing fairly well out of the status quo."67 Thus the economic interests of the imperial capitalists and the petty Indian capitalists were identical. Besides the exploitation of the natives by the petty native capitalists, Orwell had clear views on the imperial capitalist economy.

For Orwell the class divisions in the English society of his time indicated the economic structure. There were the idle rich who lived on the dividends they got from their investments in the shares. There were the snobbish middle class people whose annual income was low, but who nevertheless pretended to be of the upper class. And then there were the working class or lower class people with lower income.

67 Lion and Unicorn, p.109.
Finally came the unemployed and the dispossessed people - tramps, beggars, criminals and prostitutes.

No doubt, Orwell's classification of society depended on false notions, prejudices and snobberies that people of his period virtually believed about the class structure in their period. Orwell fully analysed such irrational class prejudices of his time which made a lower-middle class person with working class income believe and act as though he belonged to the upper class. But it cannot be denied that class for Orwell was also money stratification. Thus the class structure stood for the economic position of the classes concerned. Orwell states how those with more than £ 2000 a year formed the real bourgeoisie or the upper class. Those with an annual income between £ 400 and £ 2000 constituted the middle class. But the middle class was further divided since there was too much gap between the groups having £ 400 and £ 2000 a year. The people with around £ 400 a year were the middle-middle class or the lower-upper-middle class who formed the largest faction of the bigger middle class. Those with an income below £ 400 a year made the lower class or the working class. Of these the mine-workers whose economic position Orwell describes in Wigan Pier - had on the average £ 105 a
year. The fringe-dwellers like beggars of various descriptions, probably got £50 a year. The working class or the proletariat formed the largest class in England. This is how Orwell understood and analysed the class divisions on the economic basis, in his writings.

Orwell condemned the capitalist economic structure of his time for forcing the largest portion of the population to settle down almost on the dole of the P.A.C. He was like Marx a staunch critic of capitalist economic system but at the same time radically different from Marx in respect of the tools he used in describing class divisions, the logic he employed, and finally in respect of the conclusions he reached or the remedies he suggested.

The capitalist economic structure led to the physical and moral decay of an overwhelming number of people. Boris and Paddy in *Down and Out*, Dorothy in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, Gordon in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Katie, Hilda, Miss.Minns, Elsie and even George Bowling in *Coming Up for Air*, Flory and the whole gang of Anglo-Indians in *Burmese Days*, and a large number of other characters in other writings of Orwell were all victims of the capitalist economy in one way or another. The capitalist economy robbed a large number
of people of job opportunities and decent livelihood. It tossed thousands of people from casual wards to casual wards; it pushed many more thousands into the common lodging houses; it made millions scramble for jobs; and it threw away many to the distant colonies for exploiting the natives.

The capitalist economy, according to Orwell, was a formidable machinery of exploitation. The beneficiaries of this fraudulent capitalist economic structure numbered only about half a million. And Orwell thought that England was actually two nations, and challengingly asks, "But is not England notoriously two nations, the rich and the poor?" It is against this background that Orwell pleaded for establishing a Socialist economy.

Orwell perceived clearly that many of the evils like unemployment, poverty, hunger and slums were the consequences of the capitalist mode of production and distribution. He describes the development of industrialism and capitalism in a brisk and brilliant style:

For this is part at least of what industrialism has done for us. Columbus sailed the Atlantic, the

68 Ibid., p.47.
first steam engines tottered into motion, the British Squares stood firm under the French guns at Waterloo, the one-eyed scoundrels of the nineteenth century praised God and filled their pockets; and this is where it all led - to labyrinthine slums and dark back kitchens with sickly ageing people creeping round and round them like black beetles. It is a kind of duty to see and smell such places now and again, especially smell them, lest you should forget that they exist; though perhaps it is better not to stay there too long. 69

B.T. Oxley points out that Orwell did not consider capitalism as better than feudalism it replaced: "In introduction to British Pamphleteers, Orwell described capitalism as a progressive event only insofar as it could lead eventually to a Socialist society. Considering its actual achievements - 'the destruction of one culture after another, the piling-up of millions of human beings in hideous ant-heaps of cities, and above all, the enslavement of the coloured races' - it was difficult to regard it as superior to

69 Wigan, p.16.
The inability of the Chamberlain Government to read the mind and motivations of Hitler, the retreat at Dunkirk and the setbacks convinced Orwell that capitalism was incapable of standing up to the great challenge of carrying England to victory against Hitler. Capitalism with its private profit motivation had failed to inspire people to fight and in coping with the urgent needs of the war: "What this war has demonstrated is that private capitalism - that is, an economic system in which land, factories, mines and transport are owned privately and operated solely for profit - does not work. It cannot deliver the goods." Here we find a clear statement of capitalist economy and its serious limitation as Orwell understood it.

The weakness of England on the eve of the Second World War, and in the course of the war lay in the fact that England was ruled by the capitalists who were incapable of formulating and carrying out an effective war strategy:


71 *Lion and Unicorn*, p.73.
England is a family with the wrong members in control. Almost entirely we are governed by the rich, and by people who step into positions of command by right of birth. Few if any of these people are consciously treacherous, some of them are not even fools, but as a class they are quite incapable of leading us to victory.... The shock of disaster brought a few able men like Bevin to the front, but in general we are still commanded by people who managed to live through the years 1931-9 without even discovering that Hitler was dangerous. A generation of the unteachable is hanging upon us like a necklace of corpses. 72

Capitalist economy failed to solve both internal and external dangers. Moreover Orwell thought that capitalism was doomed. It was against such a background that he visualised Socialist economy as a remedy.

Socialist Economy

Orwell pleaded for establishment of a Socialist economy against the evils of capitalist economy. The wrong and unjust methods of production and distribution of wealth and grossly

72 Ibid., pp.81-82.
unfair sharing of the national income made Orwell to advocate strongly for the change of existing capitalist structure into Socialist structure. He deals with Socialism more directly, if not minutely and very elaborately, in *Wigan Pier* and later in *The Lion and the Unicorn*. He was deeply preoccupied with the question of poverty, and the theme of all his books and novels till he wrote *The Homage to Catalonia* was poverty, which of course, was the result of unemployment and the unfair sharing of the national income. Even after *The Homage* his writings pictured poverty and misery as undercurrents. Orwell himself came from the impoverished section of the middle class. He wanted the brazen economic inequalities to be eradicated. In his preface to the Ukranian edition of the *Animal Farm* Orwell writes how he became a Socialist:

It was only from 1934 onwards that I was able to live on what I earned from my writing. In the mean time I sometimes lived for months on end amongst the poor and half-criminal elements who inhabit the worst parts of the poorer quarters, or take to the streets, begging and stealing. At that time I associated with them through lack of money, but later their way of life interested me very much for its own sake. I spent many months (more
systematically this time) studying the conditions of the miners in the north of England. Upto 1930 I did not on the whole look upon myself as a Socialist. In fact I had as yet no clearly defined political views. I became pro-Socialist more out of disgust with the way the poorer section of the industrial workers were oppressed and neglected than out of any theoretical admiration for a planned society. 73

Orwell wrote when there was a terrible civilizational crisis which included a profound economic crisis, the Great Slump, or Depression. And more, there was the menace of Nazism and Fascism. All sensitive intellectuals were embracing Stalinist Communism in their search for a better political and economic order. As pointed out by Richard Rees there was a wave of hysterical Russia-worship which swept through the English intelligentsia and washed many of them into the Communist Party: "Orwell, who must have been almost unique among the intellectuals of that time in his knowledge of the facts of extreme poverty, was one who kept his head. He was never intoxicated by the revolutionary toasts and dialectical-materialist cocktails which flowed like water

73 CEJL, III, 403.
wherever the progressive intellectuals foregathered; and it is worth recalling the extraordinary and hysterical background against which he stands out."^ It was in such a period that Orwell saw through the Stalinist dogma and offered his own version of Socialism as a cure.

Orwell's conception of Socialist economy was not doctrinaire socialism. For him it was based on plain common sense. It is a simple economic system according to which everybody does his part of work, and gets a fair share of what he needs. It means justice and decency. Orwell has offered his definition of Socialism:

Socialism is usually defined as 'common ownership of the means of production'.Crudely: the State, representing the whole nation, owns everything, and everyone is a State employee. This does not mean that people are stripped of private possessions such as clothes and furniture, but it does mean that all productive goods, such as land, mines, ships and machinery, are the property of the State. The State is the sole large-scale producer. It is not certain that Socialism is in all ways superior to

74 Rees, p.45.
capitalism, but it is certain that, unlike capitalism, it can solve the problems of production and consumption. 75

A capitalist economy produces more than what is needed in some sectors, leading to a waste of surplus, and unemployment. It cannot cope with war-time requirements. On the contrary in a Socialist economy the state produces what are needed and arranges for their fair distribution. Money ceases to be a mysterious all-powerful thing and becomes a sort of coupon or ration-ticket issued in sufficient quantities to buy up such consumer goods as may be available at the moment.

Orwell qualifies his Socialism by saying that 'common ownership of the means of production' is not in itself an adequate definition of Socialism:

One must also add the following: approximate equality of incomes (it need be no more than approximate), political democracy, and abolition of all hereditary privilege, especially in education. These are simply the necessary safeguards against the reappearance of a class-system. Centralised

75 Lion and Unicorn, p.74.
ownership has very little meaning unless the mass of the people are living roughly upon an equal level, and have some kind of control over the government. 'The State' may come to mean no more than a self-elected political party, and oligarchy and privilege can return, based on power rather than on money.\textsuperscript{76}

Orwell thought that the war had forced England to move towards Socialism: "But since a classless, ownerless society is generally spoken of as 'Socialism', we can give that name to the society towards which we are now moving. The war and the revolution are inseparable. We cannot establish anything that a western nation would regard as Socialism without defeating Hitler; on the other hand we cannot defeat Hitler while we remain economically and socially in the nineteenth century."\textsuperscript{77}

This was also the general trend as pointed out by Oxley: "In England, between the General Strike of 1926 and the start of the Second World War, Socialism was the chance of the common people to escape from their traditional role of being acted upon by others, the passive victims of 'their' realism. In Europe of the same period, Socialism seemed to be the best

\textsuperscript{76} Lion and Unicorn, p.75.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., pp.95-96.
Orwell suggests the steps for setting up a Socialist economy in England. The first step was the nationalization of land, mines, banks and major industries. Nationalisation meant State ownership. It meant that nobody could live on unearned income like the interests and dividends on deposits and shares. Everybody should work and earn his bread. Petty business and small land-holders would continue with private ownership. But the State would impose ceiling on the ownership of land without allowing ownership of land in urban area.

Secondly the State would limit the incomes on such a scale that the highest tax-free income in Britain does not exceed the lowest by more than ten to one. Orwell knew that the absolute equality of incomes was impossible and impractical. The limitation of incomes implied fixing of a minimum wage and managing internal currency based on the amount of available consumer goods.

Thus one can see how Orwell's conception of economy exhibits a profound concern for the poor, unemployed and
dispossessed people, bitter attacks on the capitalist economy, and the plea for establishing the Socialist economy as a remedy for the evils he exposed and attacked. Critics have argued that ultimately Orwell gave up hope and presented an utterly pessimistic vision of life without his earlier Socialist ideal. The works cited in this context are *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In these last two great literary works Orwell presented a picture of the centralised economy based on Socialism in which the lower animals and the proles live in conditions worse than their conditions before the revolution. But then Orwell was presenting such a picture as a probability. He did not give up his belief in Socialist economy till the end of his life. In this connection, Bernard Crick has asserted: "... and even in his post-war seclusion on the island of Jura, and during those long months of fighting tuberculosis in sanatoria and hospitals, his socialism still burned strong, if not quite with the wildfire of 1940."\(^79\) Orwell offered a very humane picture of the economic conditions of his time and tried to formulate his own version of the Socialist economy. The Orwellian approach to the economy of his time evinced his radical individualism.

c) Orwell's Radical Individualism: Politics

One would fail to assess Orwell's contribution to the literary and the intellectual heritage of England, and the world, without understanding his analyses of the political crises of his time. Orwell was a committed writer; he wanted to make the world a better place to live in; he became a political writer since politics dominated every sphere of life in his period. He declared he was a political writer: "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing such subjects. Everyone writes of them in one guise or another. It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows. And the more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity." 80

If it were Orwell's desire to comment on the politics of his time, he could have remained an ordinary journalist or a political commentator. He knew the demarcation line between

80 Decline, P.186.
politics and literature. There could be no literature without aesthetic experience. And literature would be stuffless if it did not embody profound experiences including political experiences in life. Orwell knew that the most inspiring political theory or writing contained implicitly the aesthetic pleasure of literature, and the most inspiring literary work concerning political experiences did not fail to embody political wisdom. He wanted to cast the political experiences into literary artistic works or forms. He set out with an avowed goal of turning political experiences and observations into an art. His commitment in such political writings was to expose some lie or injustice as a literary artist. Orwell accepted this challenge:

What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art'. I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine
article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience.  

Orwell lived in an essentially political age, and it was inevitable that he should be a political writer. In this context Russell points out: "But our age is dominated by politics, as the fourth century was dominated by theology, and it is by his political writings that Orwell will be remembered - especially by Animal Farm."  

George Orwell asserted: This is a political age. War, Fascism, concentration camps, rubber truncheons, atomic bombs, etc are what we daily think about, and therefore to a great extent what we write about, even when we do not name them openly. We can not help this. When you are on a sinking ship, your thoughts will be about sinking ships. But not only is our subject-matter narrowed, but our whole attitude towards literature is coloured by loyalties which we at least, intermittently realise to be non-literary."  

Orwell was a political writer and not a political

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81 Ibid., P.186.
82 Bertrand Russell, "George Orwell", World Review, p.5.
83 CEIL, IV, p.408.
philosopher. Wyndham Lewis writes: "My subject, George Orwell, is of the English war and post-war writers, not alone the one most worthy of attention, but he is the only one....Orwell is almost purely a political writer, a political novelist, and a political essayist."\textsuperscript{84} It is revealing to recall the words of Bernard Crick:

Orwell came to see himself as a 'political writer', and both words were of equal weight. He did not claim to be a political philosopher, nor simply a political polemicist: he was a writer, a general writer, author of novels, descriptive works that I will call 'documentaries', essays, poems and innumerable book reviews and newspaper columns. But if his best work was not always directly political in the subject matter, it always exhibited political consciousness. In that sense he is the finest political writer in English since Swift, satirist, stylist, moralist and stirrer, who influenced him so much.\textsuperscript{85}


\textsuperscript{85} Crick, p.16.
Orwell was aware of the dangers of being a political writer. Political writing could arise from political allegiance, or lead to political loyalty to an ideology or a party. Such an allegiance might make the writer blind to realities and truth. Since political loyalty inevitably narrows down the range and breadth of thinking, it might lead to lack of objectivity, impartial and scientific inquiry into the state of affairs. This is the predicament of a political writer that Orwell discusses in his essay, "Writers and Leviathan". In an age in which a writer was forced to take political sides, the greatest challenge for a creative writer was to retain his moral and intellectual integrity, and also to keep the spirit of liberalism alive.

Orwell exposes the hypocrisy of the intellectuals, writers and political leaders: "The key words are 'progressive', 'democratic' and 'revolutionary', while the labels which you must at all costs avoid are 'bourgeois', 'reactionary' and 'Fascist'. Almost everyone nowadays, even the majority of Catholics and Conservatives, is 'Progressive', or at least wishes to be thought so... We are all of us good democrats, anti-Fascist, anti-imperialist, contemptuous of class distinctions, impervious to colour prejudice, and so on..."
Orwell observes that the left-wing political creed was very explicit about its fight against oppression, economic, social and political. But then the whole of left-wing ideology, scientific and utopian, was evolved by people who had no immediate prospect of attaining power. The forces of the left in their fight against tyranny thought that the particular tyranny, i.e. capitalism would be overthrown and Socialism would follow. But the first big bump was the Russian Revolution. Orwell wonders how the whole of the English Left had been driven to accept the Russian regime as "Socialist", while they silently recognised that its spirit and practice were quite alien to anything that is meant by "Socialism" in England. The willful blindness to the political realities and truth was exhibited both by the left-wing and right-wing intellectuals and writers. The danger of this trend was that it created a situation in which a scientific, fair and impartial thinking on political issues became a formidable task.

Orwell offers suggestions which could help a political writer to retain his moral and intellectual integrity. He

86 CEJL, IV, 409.
says that a writer should draw a sharper distinction between political and literary loyalties. A writer should engage in politics not as a writer but as a citizen and a human being. He should be able to act co-operatively and if he chooses, he should be able to reject completely the official ideology. A writer has the liberty to write in the most crudely political way, but he should do so as an individual, an outsider, at the most an unwelcome guerilla on the flank of a regular army. It may be reasonable to be willing to fight in a war if one thinks the war ought to be won, and at the same time refuse to write war propaganda. A writer should remain detached and dispassionate while he is writing. In politics, it is a question of which of the two evils is the lesser. War, for example, may be necessary, but it is certainly not right nor sane. Even a General Election is not exactly a pleasant or edifying spectacle. A writer is forced to take part in such things and in such conditions he should keep part of himself inviolate. It is this saner, detached, dispassionate self of the writer which is beyond the compulsions of politics that is able to record things as they are done, and reveal the truth without any deception.

There is no doubt that Orwell passed this test of writing
on the political issues and crises without any blindness, dishonesty, bias, and without sacrificing truth for political expediency. He asserted the liberty of the writer, of the individual, and sought after truth without the inhibitions of any political dogma though he was a political writer. His development into a supreme political writer was a long and painful process. He states lucidly how he became a political writer:

First I spent five years in an unsuitable profession (the Indian Imperial Police, in Burma), and then I underwent poverty and the sense of failure. This increased my natural hatred of authority and made me for the first time fully aware of the existence of the working classes, and the job in Burma had given me some understanding of the nature of imperialism: but these experiences were not enough to give me an accurate political orientation. Then came Hitler, the Spanish civil war, etc. By the end of 1935 I had still failed to reach a firm decision.\footnote{The Spanish war and other events in 1936-7 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood.} The Decline, pp.184-186.
For Orwell politics was a means, nothing more than a means, and probably one of the means, for bettering and shaping this world into a place where poverty and oppression were eradicated. But this does not mean that he was a utopian. He was a bitter critic of all utopias. He was very much empirical in his approach.

A reader of Orwell cannot fail to identify two main themes - poverty and oppression. Broadly speaking, before he wrote Homage to Catalonia his books and writings were on poverty. The Road to Wigan Pier could be considered a transitional work. The first part of the book deals with poverty, and the second part launches bitter attacks on the Socialist leaders of his time, and offers an acceptable version of Socialism as Orwell understood it. Richard Rees has observed, "But Orwell was no political theorist. What he does is to give a sketch of his own intellectual development up to the time he became a Socialist, followed by an account of his disappointment on meeting other middle-class Socialists, of the unsatisfactory state of contemporary socialism, and of how it could be remedied." And Homage and later books and writings were on political oppression, or more accurately, in

88 Rees, p.49.
defence of liberty or freedom against Fascism and totalitarianism. Wyndham Lewis has pointed out: "These two books, the Wigan Pier, book and the Catalonia book, were Orwell’s first essay in straight political writing. Their perusal should have enlightened anyone concerned with the organization of the Popular Front in England that this new recruit might prove extremely dangerous. In the sequel, he did in fact prove a far more effective debunker of insincere leftish claptrap than any detached critic could hope to be, simply because of his left-wing status, and his record in Catalonia as a man wounded fighting on the side of the Frente Popular."  

The evolution of Orwell into a mature political writer was via his childhood world-view, the unavoidable sense of class snobbery, imperialist oppression, his own and other people’s poverty and unemployment, Wigan, Socialism, Spain, Fascism, Nazism, Stalin regime, World War II and totalitarianism. However, Homage exhibits a clear and distinct mark of Orwell as a political writer. Orwell himself has remarked: "My book about the Spanish Civil War, Homage to Catalonia, is, of course, a frankly political book, but in the

89 Lewis, p.172.
main it is written with a certain detachment and regard for form.... I happened to know, what very few people in England had been allowed to know, that innocent men were being falsely accused. If I had not been angry about that I should never have written the book." In his critical evaluation of *Homage*, Brander identifies *Homage* as a distinct break in Orwell's development as a political writer:

> It leads directly to *Animal Farm* and as in the both he is concerned with propaganda, his development a stage further to *1984* is quite clear. Orwell was first and last a writer and he looked on politics from a writer's point of view. Truth and integrity exist for the writer, and from the moment he came up against totalitarian methods of propaganda in Spain his whole energies were ranged against this monstrous falsification of human values. This is why *Homage to Catalonia* is the most important of his autobiographies. It records the experiences which turned his life and turned all his energies to one end.91

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90 *Decline*, p.187.

91 Brander, p.129.
It was as a champion of liberty of the individual against totalitarianism that the reader can find the maturity of Orwell as a political writer. Orwell who began his literary career with the theme of poverty, became a great and formidable defender of liberty because he saw that poverty could be eliminated by introducing reasonable equality in the social, economic and political structure, and there could be no reasonable degree of equality without liberty. He had seen how the totalitarian regimes emerged from the ideal of equality, and destroyed that very ideal by suppressing liberty. So for Orwell equality and liberty were not antithetical; they were complementary ideals or concepts in humanised politics in which means should justify the end.

A Champion of Liberty.

Orwell was a unique political writer, and it could be stated that all of his works had ultimately one theme, i.e. defence of liberty against the monstrous totalitarianism. The dignity of and the respect for the individual will have to be maintained in a political structure. But these necessary conditions for a worthwhile living were denied by poverty in an exploitative society and economy. No dignity, no respect could exist in a state of poverty. For eliminating this basic
evil, Orwell thought, equality enshrined by Socialism was an answer. But the very destruction of the ideals of equality, dignity of and respect for the individual as witnessed in Spain, and later distinctly in the Stalin regime made it necessary for Orwell to espouse liberty as the primary principle without which decent living, dignity and respect could never be there for man. Liberty almost became a basic necessity along with other basic necessaries, and without liberty as a basic necessity all other basic necessaries could be denied. The Orwellian politics was aimed at getting this basic necessity for the individual. There was no denial of Socialism, nor the rejection of the ideal of equality. The critics who have pointed out that Orwell ultimately rejected Socialism, the ideal of equality and also all hope in life have misinterpreted Orwell since they read and inferred too much from Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four. However for Orwell there could be no genuine dignity of and respect for the individual, and no Socialism without liberty. Tracing Orwell's development as a political writer Atkins points out how liberty became the most fundamental and the supreme ideal for Orwell:

He approached politics through poverty, but later, when the new totalitarian regimes replaced poverty
by security in return for social servility and political discipline, he realised that the crux of modern politics is liberty. The old English doctrine that liberty was more important than equality was challenged by the Marxists. Orwell noticed, however, that the equality established by a totalitarian regime did not last very long, and the people realised too late that they had traded their liberty and received nothing in return. Therefore liberty must be retained at all costs and the fight for equality should take place on entirely different ground. There should be no bargains, no pretence that security was equivalent to equality.  

It is from the standpoint of liberty that Orwell viewed the political scenario of his period. Politics became important because there was oppression all around. It became an urgent need to defend liberty. Liberty was under seize and there could be no liberty without humane and humanised politics. Besides Homage, Animal Farm, Nineteen Eighty-Four and political essays that he wrote, there were political perspectives in his literary, sociological and miscellaneous

92 Atkins, p.130.
writings and reviews. All these go to comprise different aspects of the fight for individual liberty. Imperialism, Fascism, Nazism, Soviet Communism and other forms of totalitarianism were all different modes of oppression, and the target of their oppression was liberty of the individual.

For the discussion of the modes of oppression as Orwell saw them, the natural point of beginning is imperialism. Being an imperial policeman in Burma, Orwell came to hate imperialism as a form of despotism. He was not having a distinct political consciousness at that time. His political ideas began to take shape when he resigned his job and came back to England. *Burmese Days*, which deals with his experiences as an imperial policeman is not pronouncedly political. But it is political enough to give a picture of imperialism as a political evil, and a form of despotism for which the imperialist countries paid heavily, when hitherto unseen despotic regimes emerged from it. Historians and political analysts trace the origin of Fascism, Nazism and the two world wars in imperial power rivalries.

Orwell considered the imperialist machinery as very oppressive and degenerating. Obviously, it oppressed and exploited the natives. Flory, the central character in
**Burmese Days** remarks, "The Indian Empire is a despotism - benevolent, no doubt, but still a despotism with theft as its final object." But more subtle and horrible than the oppression of the natives was that the Englishmen who were running the imperialist government in the colonies lost their individual freedom. Flory understood how imperialism corrupted and oppressed the Anglo-Indians, the British in India:

It is a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored. In England it is hard even to imagine such an atmosphere. Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy them back in private, among our friends. But even friendship can hardly exist when every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism. Free speech is unthinkable. All other kinds of freedom are permitted. You are free to be a drunkard, an idler, a coward, a backbiter, a fornicator; but you are not free to think for yourself. 94

93 *Burmese Days*, p.68.

94 Ibid., p.69.
Imperialism destroyed Flory when in utter desperation and dejection he shot himself dead. The Anglo-Indians were the victimisers: "The wretched prisoners squatting in the reeking cages of lock-ups, the grey cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos, the women and children howling when their menfolk were led away under arrest - things like these are beyond bearing when you are in my way directly responsible for them."95

Imperialism was an expression of force and brutality. But at the same time the victimisers were also the victims of their own oppressive machinery: "I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys."96 This is a profound political insight about imperialism that Orwell had attained. It was from this point of view that Orwell pleaded for decolonisation.

Orwell became a fighter, in fact, a militiaman against Fascism for the cause of genuine Socialist values, and especially for the workers' government he saw in Barcelona.

95 Wigan, p.128

96 CEJL, I, 239.
or the workers' government. But once again it was to be a fight for liberty against oppression in the form of writing a book on his Spanish experiences, since he was so angry that he stated, that innocent men were falsely implicated, arrested, thrown into prison and murdered by the Communist dominated republican government in Spain. Orwell knew of the Moscow trials or 'the Great Purges' as they were called, but did not know that the whole International Communist Movement was involved in, or condoned the disgusting Russian terrors and follies. Before he went to Spain Orwell was not aware that Fascism and communism shared common features. But he knew that Fascism was not 'advanced capitalism', but a perversion of Socialism. His Spanish experiences were of great significance because the Spanish Civil War exhibited international political struggle, though many did not recognise it to be so at that time. It was the Spanish Civil War theatre which was moving towards a terrible and devastating explosion i.e. the Second World War.

Orwell was not aware of the real nature of the Spanish Civil War at first. He saw that the workers' government as he saw in Barcelona needed to be defended, and therefore joined the POUM. It was later on that he realised, "It was above all
things a political war." And again, "As a militiaman one was a soldier against Franco, but one was also a pawn in an enormous struggle that was being fought out between two political theories." At one level the Right-wing Socialists, Liberals, Communists, Anarchists and POUM a dissident Marxist party, were all fighting against Franco. At another level the Communists were at first clandestinely, and later very openly fighting against the POUM and Anarchists and were liquidating them. The Communists were just for winning the war against Franco; the POUM wanted the socialist revolution to continue while the civil war was going on; the Anarchists wanted decentralisation of power and equality. The Communist Party as soon as it became dominant with Russia's backing first hit the POUM and then moved against the Anarchists. That finally all was lost to Franco and the Fascists, a part of history. But what appalled Orwell was the treacherous role of the Communist Party of Spain during the civil war period.

The Spanish Civil War indicated a very complicated

97 Homage, p.46.

98 Ibid. p.47.
political conflict of international dimension. It was a civil war; there was the revolution; Franco was assisted by the Nazi Germany and the Fascist Italy; the Communists were supported by the Soviet Communist regime. It was a miniature international struggle for power before the catastrophe broke out. And more, it revealed the totalitarian nature of the International Communist Movement, which simply toed the Moscow line. Homage reveals brilliantly all these conflicting factors at play in Spain.

The Communist Party of Spain acted as a counter revolutionary force, and as soon as it became a dominant force, it launched a vile campaign against the POUM. Orwell was shocked to know the Communist propaganda of lies in Spain:

The P.O.U.M. was declared to be no more than a gang of disguised Fascists, in the pay of Franco and Hitler, who were pressing a pseudo revolutionary policy as a way of aiding the Fascist cause. The P.O.U.M. was a 'Trotskyist' organization and 'Franco's Fifth Column'. This implied that scores of thousands of working-class people, including eight or ten thousand soldiers who were freezing in the front-line trenches and hundreds of foreigners
who had come to Spain to fight against Fascism, often sacrificing their livelihood and their nationality by doing so, were simply traitors in the pay of the enemy. And this story was spread all over Spain by means of posters, etc., and repeated over and over in the Communist and pro-Communist press of the whole world. 99

Thus by exposing the vile campaign of lies of the oppressive and totalitarian Communist Party of Spain in Homage, "Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War", "Spilling the Spanish Beans", etc., Orwell fought for liberty against oppression. And Homage is a very important book since it anticipates many factors in Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four. In Homage Orwell figures both as a militiaman and writer for Socialism and liberty, against Fascism.

Politics of totalitarianism

Orwell's treatment of totalitarian politics in Animal Farm, and Nineteen Eighty-Four, his masterpieces, is actually a profound study in liberty against oppression and totalitarianism. Of these two celebrated literary works, 99 Homage, pp.63-64.
Animal Farm deals with totalitarianism in an allegorical form. Orwell called it a 'fairy story' on dictatorship. And Tom Hopkinson in his review states, "For myself, I know only two present-day works of fiction before which the critic abdicates: one is Arthur Koestler's Darkness at Noon, the other Orwell's Animal Farm." Atkins points out the prominent features of Animal Farm:

Animal Farm is written on many levels. It is already a children's story in its own right. It is an attack on Stalinism — and it should be pointed out that it is an attack from the Left. Right-wing journalists tried to extract more comfort from it than was warranted. I have shown how Orwell believed that one of the difficulties Socialists had to content with is the familiar belief that Soviet Russia is Socialist, and that therefore any criticism of Russia is a criticism of Socialism. Animal Farm is a Socialist's mockery at the expense of Soviet Russia. It contains very little real comfort for an English Conservative because it will make very few converts. Most Englishmen believed in

100 Tom Hopkinson in World Review, p.54.
Animal Farm before it was written, but they were delighted by the form in which their beliefs appeared. The book is also a lament for the fate of revolutions and the hopes contained in them. It is a moving comment on man's constant compromise with the truth. In a very short compass it contains most of Orwell's main ideas about men and politics. 101

Animal Farm is a superb fable which opens with the dawn of hope and ends with gloom. It is all bright when Old Major, the prize Middle White boar of the Manor Farm reveals his political wisdom to other animals on the farm:

I merely repeat, remember always your duty of enmity towards Man and all his wys. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in

101 Atkins, p.222.
trade. All the habits of Man are evil. And, above all, no animal must ever tyrannise over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers. No animal must ever kill any other animal. All animals are equal. 102

And Major prophesies that the tyrant Man shall be overthrown, and all animals shall be rich, happy and free. This was the revolutionary ideology which was developed into Animalism, and later reduced to the seven commandments by the animal leaders. Of course, it is easy to identify Major with Marx, Animalism with communism, Napoleon, the fierce looking Berkshire boar with Stalin, and Snowball, a more intelligent boar with Trotsky. The animals under the leadership of Napoleon and Snowball revolted against Mr. Jones, the old senile owner of Manor Farm given to heavy boozing, chased him and his men out of the farm, and instituted Animalist regime. The Manor Farm was henceforth called Animal Farm.

The later part of the story depicts the betrayal of the revolution and the revolutionary ideals. It becomes a fable of the defeat of a grand utopia. The pigs who had become the

102 Animal Farm, pp. 21-22.
new masters were no better than the old human master. The humans who were the enemies according to Animalism became friends of the pigs. The end of the story is very tragic, and shows the total defeat of the revolutionary ideals. The innocent oppressed animals saw through the window of the farm hall that the pig leader and the visiting human guests had boozed, and were playing a game of cards and shouting at each other: "Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but it was already impossible to say which was which." The pigs had become human beings and the human beings had become pigs. It made no difference for the innocent and oppressed animals. This is the profound tragedy of Animal Farm.

The betrayal of the revolution was complete. The pigs had started walking on their hind legs. The kernel of Animalism, "All animals are equal", was modified into "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others". Napoleon had effected the purges killing his

103 Ibid., p.128.
political opponents and other animals on fake charges to create an atmosphere of terror and submission: "They were all slain on the spot. And so the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones."¹⁰⁴ There were clothes, alcohol, sleeping in bed—all things and practices forbidden earlier were introduced again by the pigs as the ruling elite. The thrilling prophetic song, "Beasts of England, and beasts of Ireland", was abolished since it was thought to be absurd to retain it after the revolution was effected. The new song was a eulogy of the great leader, Comrade Napoleon. Low rations, long hours of working, fear, servility were the conditions of living of the large number of innocent exploited animals. Finally the Animal Farm became the Manor Farm again by name also.

The post-revolutionary regime of the pigs was highly regimented. It became a totalitarian regime with the frank lust for power. The other animals were afraid of the pigs and the Ogpu dogs. Squealer, an intelligent pig and a

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.83.
professional liar was present at all moments of doubts on the part of other innocent animals, to clarify their doubts and invalidate the facts by telling lies. He was erasing the memory of other animals and confusing them by telling lies so that other animals simply accepted what was told by the pigs without any doubt. Thus Snowball, the political opponent of Napoleon never fought against Jones and his men, and was never hurt in the battle. After Snowball was chased out of the Animal Farm never to appear again, he was held responsible for all failures and the collapse of the windmill. His name was invoked to evoke hatred against him and love for Napoleon. The ailing Boxer was sent to veterinary clinic for treatment and not sold to the horse-slaughterer. All these lies were manipulated by Squealer.

Ultimately, neither equality, nor liberty remained on the Animal Farm, now called the Manor Farm again. True, in the time of Jones the animals lived in poor servile conditions. But there were no organised terror, slavery, lies, suspicion that prevailed under the new regime. The revolution carried out to institute a utopia had crushed both equality and liberty.
Nineteen Eighty-Four presents a definitive critique on totalitarianism in post-totalitarian Super States. It creates such a picture of an all pervading gloom, and the vaporisation of the spirit of the individual that it goes down the gullet of the reader like hot liquid iron. It terrifies the reader since the post-totalitarian regime is indescribably terrifying. It depicts the unspeakable devastation produced by the new oligarchical collectivist politics in all spheres of life. V.S. Pritchett in his review opines: "Nineteen Eighty-Four is a book that goes through the reader like an east wind, cracking the skin, opening the sores: hope has died in Orwell's wintry mind, and only pain is known. I do not think I have ever read a novel more frightening and depressing; and yet, such are the originality, the suspense, the speed of writing and withering indignation that it is impossible to put the book down." Isaac Deutscher observes, "Few novels written in this generation have obtained a popularity as great as that of George Orwell's 1984. Few, if any, have made similar impact on politics. The title of Orwell's book is a political byword. The terms coined by him

- 'Newspeak', 'Oldspeak', 'Mutability of the Past', 'Big Brother', 'Ministry of Truth', 'Thought Police', 'Crimethink', 'Doublethink', 'Hate Week', etc. have entered the political vocabulary; they occur in most newspaper articles and speeches denouncing Russia and communism.\(^{106}\) George Woodcock points out: "... Orwell the Englishman imagined himself the victim of totalitarianism to such effect that Nineteen Eighty-Four now stands beside Darkness at Noon and Fontamara among the classic works of the age of concentration camps.\(^{107}\)

Brander points out the unique quality of the totalitarian horror in Nineteen Eighty-Four by comparing it with Darkness at Noon, Brave New World and Fontamara, and says that all the great novels against totalitarianism describe the duel between the individual and the brutalised State. But the horror of Nineteen Eighty Four is different: "The special quality of the horror of 1984 is that the duel is completely sordid. In all the others it is human nobility which is being broken. In 1984 it is merely Winston Smith, a waif and stray of the human spirit, scarce able to formulate a criticism. His simple


\(^{107}\) Woodcock, p.180.
probings towards the most elementary order of thought are sufficient to ensure his elaborate destruction. In other books the fine flowers of human personality are destroyed; in 1984 the huge paraphernalia of obliteration are put in motion to destroy a weed."108 The novel is a plausible nightmare of the authoritarian tendencies of Orwell's times. And Crick has commented: "Whatever the defects, it does ring true as a theoretically coherent model of what a regime would look like that blended the techniques of Communism with those of Nazism for no other purpose than to perpetuate a power-hungry elite of intellectuals in power. And it is authentic as a plausible nightmare that has haunted us ever since, more than any other of the anti-Utopias of this century whether by Wells, London, Huxley or Zamyatin, from all of whom Orwell borrowed, but greatly improved and transcended."109

In order to understand the nature of the incomparably terrible totalitarian structure of Nineteen Eighty-Four it is necessary to read carefully The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism, the authorship of which is ascribed

108 Brander, pp.186-87.
109 Crick, p.552
to Immanuel Goldstein, the mysterious enemy of the Party in Oceania. The extracts of this work quoted in Nineteen Eighty-Four disclose the ideology of the Party and also the nature of the post-totalitarian regimes of the whole world. In the chapter on war Goldstein describes in his book the political structure of Oceania, and also of the other two Super States. The entire world gets organised into three Super States—Eurasia, Oceania and Eastasia. Oligarchic collectivism appears to be the post-totalitarian ideology which is far more comprehensive and powerful than the totalitarianism of the past. All three Super States have their own party-ideologies:

"Under this lies a fact never mentioned aloud, but tacitly understood and acted upon; namely, that conditions of life in all three super-states are very much the same. In Oceania the prevailing philosophy is called Ingsoc, in Eurasia it is called Neo-Bolshevism, and in Eastasia it is called by a Chinese name usually translated as Death-Worship, but perhaps better rendered as Obliteration of the Self. The citizen of Oceania is not allowed to know anything of the tenets of the other two philosophies, but he is taught to execrate them as
barbarous outrages upon morality and common sense. Actually the three philosophies are barely distinguishable, and the social systems which they support are not distinguishable at all. Everywhere there is the same pyramidal structure, the same worship of semi-divine leader, the same economy existing by and for continuous warfare.\footnote{\textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four}, p.157.}

All three Super States are, in fact, war regimes. But the nature of war has changed since each Super State is too self-contained, too vast and too powerful to be conquered even by the combination of the remaining two Super States. The continuous war between the Super States is for the control of the disputed area for the cheap labour available there. More important than this is that the oligarchical collectivist structure of any Super State cannot be stable and peaceful if there is not war-frenzy, and if there is no scarcity of materials caused by war, to keep the vast majority of people at the level of meeting the bare needs of life only. The ruling class wages war against its own subjects to keep the structure of society in tact. From all these points of view

\footnote{\textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four}, p.157.}
war and peace have lost their conventional meanings, and therefore the slogan of the Party is, "... war is peace." 111

In the post-totalitarian political structure, i.e. oligarchical collectivist polity there is no liberty. Intellectual liberty is granted to proles since they have no intellect. But a Party member has no intellectual liberty, and not even the smallest deviation of opinion on the most unimportant subject can be tolerated: "A Party member lives from birth to death under the eye of the Thought Police. Even when he is alone he can never be sure that he is alone. Wherever he may be, asleep or awake, working or resting, in his bath or in bed, he can be inspected without warning and without knowing that he is being inspected." 112 Total repression, total control of the past, and never ending campaigns of lies are necessary for maintaining the belief that the Big Brother is omnipotent, and that the Party is infallible, on which factors the stability of Oceanic political structure rests. Nobody is free since nobody can escape the microscopic view of Big Brother; Big

111 Ibid., p.159.

112 Ibid., pp.166-67.
Brother is omnipotent and omnipresent; 'Big Brother is watching You'.

The oligarchical collectivism of Oceanic polity is a post-revolutionary phenomenon. In the past the totalitarian regimes crushed the individual and his freedom. But the new oligarchical collectivism has created such a regime in which neither the individual nor freedom exists. Even if the individual exists he is a dummy, a mere number. The 'Newspeak', the official language of Oceania does not contain such words like 'individual' and 'freedom', or even even if they exist they have already lost their past, ordinary but profound meanings.

Winston Smith, an Outer Party member is the anti-hero, and Julia, another member of the Outer Party the anti-heroine in the novel. They are what they are, mere dummies, since there are no individuals in Oceania. Winston is a victim, as much as Julia and all others of Oceania. He is a rebel, but the weakest rebel because he, and all others are reduced to non-entities already. He is a rebel in the sense of having some thoughts against the Party, and not in the sense of doing anything or sabotaging against the Party. His crime, if that is a crime, is what in 'Newspeak' is called 'crimethink', and
that is all. He gets a diary and records his feelings and thoughts beginning with, 'Down with Big Brother'. And, "To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone — to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone:"

"From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink — greetings!"113 For this thoughtcrime Winston should be vapourised; Julia should be vapourised for 'sexcrime'.

There is no love between man and woman in Oceanic society. It is a vast endless infertile desert from which no love can sprout between man and woman. That is why Winston in love with Julia thinks that their embrace is a climax of victory against the Party. Their love was a political act. Julia wants freedom of the body. It is through the need of the body that she reaches her wisdom as to why the Party thwarts the normal sexual instincts: "When you make love, you're using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don't give a damn for anything. They can't bear you to feel

113 Ibid., p.25.
like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time. All this marching up and down and cheering and waving flags is simply sex gone sour. If you're happy inside yourself why should you get excited about Big Brother and the Three-Year Plans and the Two Minutes Hate and all the rest of their bloody rot?" So oligarchical collectivist regime should thwart and regulate sexual instincts.

Winston Smith is accused of 'thoughtcrime' and there is an elaborate process of torture and brainwashing to change him to the view of the Party. The Party does not want to make a martyr of him, but make him love Big Brother and then vaporise him. Winston Smith is treated like a mental patient with the disease of 'thoughtcrime' which needed to be cured, and O'Brien is his psychiatrist, tormentor, friend and philosopher. The conversion of Winston to love Big Brother before he is shot is the final part of the nightmare in the novel: "He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was

114 Ibid., p.109.
all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother."115 So the Party wins, and it crushed 'the last man' to submission, made him to love Big Brother before vaporising him. The Party wins in the struggle to prove one of the principle tenets, namely, "Freedom is Slavery".

The oligarchic collectivist regime is a regime of power, by power, for power: "The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power.... The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their motives.... Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of power is power."116 "The individual has no existence, nor identity outside the party. A human being who is alone and free is always defeated. O'Brien observes that an individual is powerful and immortal, if he makes a complete submission, if

115 Ibid., p.236.

116 Ibid., pp.208-09.
he can escape from his identity, and merge himself in the Party. Power is the very heart of oligarchic collectivism, and it denies the very existence of the individual.

Political Commentary

To end the analyses of Orwell’s political ideas without considering the deeper implicit message of Nineteen Eighty-Four, and without understanding his political essays, columns and reviews, is to get an incomplete picture of Orwell’s political ideas. It is true that many of the political ideas that he thought over, discussed and reviewed for years in his writings crystalised in 1984. As a political novel it is utterly pessimistic, showing how the oligarchic collectivist regime made the last man love Big Brother, and then vapourised him. However, to accept this totally bleak future for man as the final political statement of Orwell, without regarding the profound implicit meaning it conveys, would be an unfair assessment. Why not consider 1984 as an imaginative projection of a plausible nightmare? Orwell considered it as such:

My recent novel is Not intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of perversions to which a centralized economy is liable and which have
been partly realized in Communism and Fascism. I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily will arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it could arrive. I believe also that totalitarian ideas have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, and I have tried to draw these ideas out to their logical consequences. The scene of the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere.  

So Orwell wrote 1984 to sound a warning against totalitarianism; it is a negative exercise in asserting the positive principles of liberty and Socialism. Crick points out: Nineteen Eighty-Four is a long premeditated, rational warning against totalitarian tendencies in societies like our own rather than a sick and sudden prophecy about a Soviet or neo-Nazi takeover, still less a scream of despair and recantation of his democratic Socialism.”

117 CEJL, IV, p.502.
118 Crick, P.568.
Orwell wrote regularly on a wide range of political subjects throughout his writing career. He gives a brighter picture of the political traits of the English people in The Lion and the Unicorn. He observes that respect for constitutionalism and legality, the belief in the law as something above the State and above the individual, something which is cruel and stupid, of course, but at any rate incorruptible, still existed in England. The totalitarian idea that there is no such thing as law, there is only power, has never taken root except the theoretical acceptance of such view by the intelligentsia. People still believed in such concepts as justice, liberty and objective truth. If such beliefs are illusions, they are nevertheless very powerful illusions in which people still believed. Orwell describes briefly the political outlook of the English people in his essay, "The English People." He says that the English People are indifferent to the finer points of doctrine; they dislike holistic ideologies or theories. He observes that there are, in effect, only two political parties, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party which represent the main interests of the nation, and they have sometimes identical or similar views on some issues. It is not possible for a Conservative government to revert to what would have been Conservationism in the
nineteenth century; nor for any Socialist government to massacre the propertied class, not even expropriate them without compensation.

Orwell wrote several articles and columns against Fascism, pacifism and totalitarianism. In one of his "As I Please" columns in the Tribune, Orwell shows how difficult it is to define Fascism, and how people understand Fascism as something cruel, unscrupulous, arrogant, obscurantist, antiliberal and anti-working class. And except for a small number of Fascist sympathisers. Fascism for any English person is a synonym for 'bully." Orwell says that pacifism as a theory against war propagated by some intellectuals in England was pro-Fascist. He points out that Germany, and Japan did not allow any pacifist propaganda on their soils, but encouraged such propaganda in England and elsewhere. He was right in pointing out that it assisted Hitler and the Fascists and that there was no alternative between Hitler and war.

Orwell was familiar with the contemporary books on totalitarianism and politics, since he was reviewing many such books for magazines or periodicals. Reviewing F.Borkenau's book, 'The Totalitarian Enemy, Orwell writes that one can not
struggle against Fascism unless one is willing to understand it, the thing which both left-wingers and right-wingers failed to do. The Hitler-Stalin pact was an eye-opener, and the two regimes were moving towards the same end i.e. oligarchical collectivism. In a short article, "Prophecies of Fascism" Orwell states how *The Iron Heel*, *The Sleeper Awakes*, and *Brave New World* are an attack on totalitarianism. He was trying hard to find a political solution to the socio-political and cultural predicament of his time. In his review of *The Road To Serfdom* by F.A Hayek and *The Mirror of the Past* by K.Zilliacus, he concludes, "Between them these two books sum up our present predicament. Capitalism leads to dole queues, the scramble for markets, and war. Collectivism leads to concentration camps, leader worship, and war. There is no way out of this unless a planned economy can be somehow combined with the freedom of the intellect, which can only happen if the concept of right and wrong is restored to politics."119

In his pamphlet on "James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution", Orwell sums up the main thesis of Burnham. Burnham thinks that since Socialism is failing to replace capitalism that is dissappearing, a new managerial society is

119 CEJL, III, 119.
emerging. The rulers of this new society will be the people who effectively control the means of production; they are business executives, technicians, bureaucrats and soldiers, whom Burnham calls "managers". The managers eliminate the old capitalist class, crush the working class, and so organise society that all power and economic privilege remain in their own hands. Burnham is of the opinion that all talk about democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity, all revolutionary movements, all visions of Utopia, or "the classless society", or "the kingdom of Heaven on earth", are humbug, covering the ambitions of some new class which is elbowing its way into power. Orwell finds a very serious lapse in Burnham, that is, the worship of power which he calls a major mental disease. Orwell criticises Burnham for at first admiring Hitler, and then Stalin.

Broadly speaking, in his political essays and columns, Orwell wrote in defence of the liberty of the intellectual, free thinking and expression without any inhibitions of party or an ideology. In his essay, "Freedom of the Park", he condemns the police and the legal system for arresting the five newspaper sellers, and then sentencing each of them to a month's imprisonment for they happened to sell the newspapers
of the revolutionary groups. Orwell pertinently remarks: "The point is that the relative freedom which we enjoy depends on public opinion. The law is no protection. Governments make laws, but whether they are carried out, and how the police behave, depends on the general temper of the country. If large numbers of people are interested in freedom of speech, there will be freedom of speech, even if the law forbids it; if public opinion is sluggish, inconvenient minorities will be persecuted, even if laws exist to protect them." 120

Orwell was a literary artist, who, with his regular comments on and analyses of the political issues of his time, and his critique of totalitarianism added new dimensions to political thinking. His clear simple but well-defined approach to politics via poverty at the beginning, his anti-imperialist stand, his Socialism, his profound interpretation and condemnation of totalitarianism or oligarchical collectivism, and his commitment to liberty and equality represent his radical individualism in politics. As Raymond Williams points out, "He remained a democratic socialist. He gave most of his political energies to the defence of civil

120 CEJL, IV, 40.
The biggest problem that Orwell confronted was that of making liberty and equality compatible and complementary. But the new political structure—call it totalitarianism, or oligarchic collectivism—was making these two concepts incompatible. He writes in his review of We by Y.I. Zamyatin, "The Single State is ruled over by a personage known as The Benefactor, who is annually re-elected by the entire population, the vote being always unanimous. The guiding principle of the State is that happiness and freedom are incompatible. In the Garden of Eden man was happy, but in his folly he demanded freedom and was driven out into the wilderness. Now the Single State has restored happiness by removing his freedom." Orwell's Socialism rests on the compatibility of equality and liberty, or happiness and freedom. Crick makes a relevant point: "If Orwell's political thought is hardly systematic, it is nonetheless brilliantly expressive of that tradition of 'English socialism' which through William Morris, Robert Blatchford, Edward Carpenter, the early H.G.Wells, R.H.Tawney, G.D.H. Cole, Harold Laski and

121 Williams, p.68.

122 CEJL, IV, 73.
Aneurin Bevan, has argued that only in a radically more egalitarian, more fraternal and less competitive society can liberties flourish and abound for all and ordinary people thus achieve their full human potential.¹²³

Orwell's distinction as a political writer and indeed, as a political thinker lies in the fact that he distrusted holistic ideologies, and tested all theories against his own experiences and the experiences of other people. Crick has very admirably pictured Orwell's stature as a political writer and political thinker:

So as well as a political writer, Orwell was a political thinker of genuine stature. Nineteen Eighty-Four can be seen as a 'development model', of a kind familiar to economic historians and social scientists, challenging comparison, in its ironic logic and internal consistency, with Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan, the masterpiece of English political philosophy. The governing regime is a wickedly clever and plausible synthesis of Stalinism and Nazism. Nineteen Eighty-Four is to the disorders of

¹²³ Crick, introd. in Lion & Unicorn, p.29.
the twentieth century what *Liviathan* was to those of the seventeenth. Orwell chose to write in the form of a novel, not in the form of a philosophical tractatus.124

Orwell's political writings have a distinct stamp of radical individualism since his vision combined the vision of a literary artist and that of a political philosopher. As Crick observes: "If one takes the term 'political writer' in its broadest sense to include philosophers, statesmen, publicists and pamphletees who might claim to be secure in the canon of English literature, three names seem indisputably pre-eminent: Thomas Hobbes, Jonathan Swift, and George Orwell."125 Even among these three, Orwell appears radically individualistic in defence of liberty and democratic Socialism.

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124 Crick, p.25