The Road to Wigan Pier Study Guide

The Road to Wigan Pier by George Orwell

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Plot Summary

Orwell, commissioned by the Left Book Club to write a book about unemployment in England, travels to Northern England and lives in a slum while he investigates unemployment and poverty among coal miners in Wigan, Sheffield, and surrounding areas. In Part I of the text he provides details about their lives and in Part II of the text he examines the idea that Socialism could provide a path out of mass unemployment and poverty. Alongside the assertion, Orwell provides a critique of Socialism and Socialists.

Orwell begins by describing his experiences living in a boardinghouse run by the Brooker family, a disagreeable situation which he declares to be entirely normal for the area. He then considers the life lived by most coal miners in Wigan and other coal centers. The discussion includes coal mining techniques and the economics of coal production. Orwell also notes the social situation of miners, including observations on personal hygiene, diet, and finances. Orwell also describes typical housing throughout much of Northern England and considers contemporaneous programs to build new housing. Orwell also observes the general physical degeneracy of Englishmen, noting their poor health and general malnourishment. He concludes Part I of the text by commenting upon the general aesthetic ugliness of industrialism. Part I of the text was generally well-received and was even republished without Part II.

Unlike the relatively straightforward preceding portion of the text, Part II of the book was controversial and involved much political theory. In the second portion of the book, Orwell presented his own interpretation of Socialism and offered a critique of Socialist practices then obtaining. The premises of Part II are essentially simple—that the appalling conditions described are not tenable; and that Socialism could improve the conditions. Why, then, asks Orwell, is Socialism not embraced by all? Orwell offers several possible answers to this question, including class prejudice, an irrational compulsion to venerate machinery, a failure of Socialists to concentrate on the real problems at hand, and the disparate ideologies traditionally lumped into Socialism. Orwell refers to many Socialists as 'cranks' because they hold various extraneous ideological beliefs that are entirely repudiated by the working class.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Orwell, commissioned by the Left Book Club to write a book about unemployment in England, travels to Northern England and lives in a slum while he investigates unemployment and poverty among coal miners in Wigan, Sheffield, and surrounding areas. In Part I of the text he provides details about their lives, and in Part II of the text he examines the idea that Socialism could provide a path out of mass unemployment and poverty. Alongside the assertion, Orwell provides a critique of Socialism and Socialists.

Chapter 1 begins Part I of the text. Having been commissioned to write the text about the plight of the working class poor in Northern England, Orwell travels to Wigan and takes residence in a boardinghouse run by the Brookers. The boardinghouse has several bedrooms and even features an indoor bathroom. The ground floor has a kitchen/living-room with an open range hearth kept lit around the clock. On one side of the living-room is a largely unsuccessful tripe shop and on the other side is a larder, descending into a dank and foul basement where the tripe is stored for apparently prolonged periods of time. Mrs. Brooker, the landlady, suffers from a vague malady which keeps her on a decomposing sofa in the living-room, festooned under grimy blankets. Orwell rather suspects her illness to be nothing more than obesity and a propensity to constantly overeat. Mr. Brooker, the landlord, is a dark, small man whose distinguishing feature is personal filthiness. Everything he touches is marked with grimy thumbprints, including the slices of bread he distributes at meal time. As Mrs. Brooker is an invalid, Mr. Brooker does all of the work of the house, moving about in apparent slow motion and constantly complaining about having to suffer through endless rounds of so-called woman's work. He is inefficient, and full chamber pots remain about for hours while the entire interior is filthy. Orwell particularly focuses on the squalor and stench, noting that the house was rather unexceptional, in these regards, for the entire region.

The tripe shop, also operated by the Brookers, is filthy and not often frequented. The Brookers never eat tripe and never serve tripe to their boarders—presumably because the boarders are too intimate with the conditions under which it is stored. Dead flies pile in the front window while the tripe, delivered frozen, is stored in the larder until it thaws and then turns hard. The Brookers spend most of their time complaining about how their boarders are parasites, and trying to chase the boarders out of the house for the majority of the day. Most of them are unemployed and thus hide in their rooms or go to the public library and read newspapers, all day, every day. Ironically, the Brookers have taken out life insurance policies on two of their older boarders and daily discuss the health of the aged men, obviously hoping they will soon die. Aside from the semi-permanent boarders, there are a number of transient guests who stay one or two nights. Some of these boarders are shocked at the disgusting squalor; others appear nonplussed.

The Brookers have many adult children though none of them are particularly helpful around the boardinghouse—and all have moved away. One of their son's fiancé works as a type of unpaid scullery maid. The marriage has been indefinitely postponed for unspecified reasons, yet the girl is expected to work as if she were a family member. Orwell discusses the meals offered in some detail—in general, meals consisted of bread and margarine, occasionally supplemented by biscuits and cheese which the Brookers refer to as 'cream crackers.' Orwell finally abandons the tenement on a day when breakfast is served at table while full chamber pots remain sitting about the room. His departure bewilders the Brookers, even as he rides a train through the unsullied countryside to his next destination of squalor. Such is the derelict life of most in the industrialized regions of Northern England.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Coal is the fundamental energy of Orwell's England. Coal energy heats homes, cooks food, and provides the motive force for all the machinery that drives the Industrial complex. Without coal, England's economy would vanish. Thus, Orwell examines the methods of coal production and mining. In England—particularly in Northern England—coal mines consist of deep vertical shafts traversing to coal seams that lie at whichever angle and depth they are found. Coal mines follow coal seams and hence are haphazard affairs, full of heat, noise, confusion, darkness, and foul air. Most coal mines are little more than random mazes of interconnected cramped spaces. At the end of a vast maze of traverses lies the actual coal face itself—a shiny black wall of perhaps three or four feet in height. The overhead and underfoot rock faces are not mined away. Orwell describes coal mining as something like scooping out the middle tier of ice cream in a Neapolitan mix. Orwell notes that the layout and operation of coal mines is so haphazard and confusing that one must make several trips into several mines before one has any idea of what is really going on.

At the coal face the actual coal miners, or extractors—known colloquially as 'fillers'—kneel and use their shoves to chop out scoops of coal which is then flung backward over their shoulder and onto a constantly moving conveyor belt that hauls the coal to carts on narrow-gauge railways. These carts then haul the coal to the lifts that pull it to the surface. There, the coal is sorted and sifted. The commercial coal goes to market while the slag—mined components of no commercial worth—is discarded into giant slag heaps that typically ring round about towns built around a colliery. As the ceiling is not raised beyond the coal seam's limits, miners must remain kneeling throughout their shift—a position unsuited to shoveling. Orwell focuses on the harsh working conditions within most mines, where coal dust fills the air and vision is limited to only a few feet. The conveyor belts loudly shriek and groan and the mines are full of hot, stinking air. Conditioned by constant, brutal, physical labor, most coal miners are striking physical specimens, even though usually short and nearly always covered in filthy coal dust. Each seven hour shift offers no time off—the miners usually take a brief, if illicit, break to eat their light lunch.

During one shift, the coal face is 'undercut' by a huge machine that saws into the coal seam at the bottom to a depth of about five feet, thus weakening the rock-like coal seam. During the second shift the conveyor belt is advanced about five feet and the working space made ready. During the third shift the actual miners shovel out the coal face and work their way to the end of the undercut segment. There are real dangers associated with all of the operations; injury and death among miners are common. The work is exceptionally difficult. Orwell suggests that were he forced to earn his living by mining, he would be worn out and dead within a few weeks.

The seven-hour shifts are themselves misleading, however. Most coal faces are deep underground and far from the elevator shafts. The connecting tunnels have uneven walls, run at non-horizontal angles, and have floors festooned with bracing and narrow-gauge rail ties. Many mines feature pools of mud. To control mine ventilation, doors or thick curtains are common. Coal miners refer to the act of getting from the mine entrance to the coal face as 'traveling,' and Orwell notes that often a round trip of traveling consumes two or more hours—the mine face being several miles from the bottom of the mine shaft. At 6' 2" in height, Orwell found the process of moving even one mile underground as intensely painful and exceptionally difficult. Coupled with the process of commuting from home to the top of the mine shaft, many coal miners spent ten or more hours a day commuting, traveling, and working.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Coal miners emerge from the coal pit covered in coal dust. The dust invades every crease and wrinkle, coats the interior of the mouth and throat, and settles in the lungs. Emerging miners gargle to clear their mouths and throats. Deprived of adequate and good air, the emerging miners' faces—under the black pall of coal dust—are an unearthly and unhealthy white. Within a few moments of breathing good air, they again turn pink. Orwell states that at least two full baths are required to become 'clean' after being in a coal pit. Some larger collieries feature pithead baths and lockers, so that miners ending their shift can store their coal-dust-impregnated work clothes on site, take a full-body bath, and return home dressed in clean clothes. Most miners strongly prefer this arrangement, but it is not common. If the colliery does not provide a pithead bath, some communities establish a Miner's Welfare Fund which erects a bath. However, most miners go home covered in coal dust and bathe in a single basin of water, cleaning their face, head, and upper body after ever shift but infrequently taking an entire bath—bathing facilities being simply unavailable. Additionally, most miners spend nearly ten or eleven hours of every day working or getting to or from work. Orwell observes that nearly all miners bathe as completely and as often as they realistically can. This contrasts markedly with the middle-class perception that miners are a filthy lot because they refuse to bathe and glory in slovenliness.

Coal miners are widely regarded as being 'well paid' for working class men. The conventional wisdom pins a miner's wage at ten or eleven shillings every shift and hence makes perhaps £150 per annum. This is wrong, however. The rate per shift varies with the actual job performed and the eleven shillings per shift rate is given only to the highest-paid miners. Work stoppages—failure of machinery, collapsing of shafts, pit shutdowns—do not yield compensation of any sort. Most miners are 'laid off' for at least several days in a working year; pit closures are especially common in the spring and summer months when coal is not needed for heating. Orwell cites Mr. Joseph Jones, Mayor of Barnsley, and derives some of his own figures to suggest the average coal miner enjoying full-time employment makes a net pay of about £105 per annum, or roughly two-thirds of what is popularly imagined. Even this amount may be too high, for various noted reasons including union dues and various insurance and benevolent fund withholdings.

Orwell estimates that a typical colliery produces about 280 tons of coal per full-time employee per annum. Orwell notes an average cost, in Northern England, per hundredweight of coal to be 1s. 6d., or £1 10s. per ton (the rates would be higher in Southern England). Thus, each colliery employee produces at least £420 of value per annum at a gross labor expense of just over £105 per annum. The productivity numbers offered do not consider non-labor, non-reimbursed overhead amounts incurred by the colliery, which are not discussed in the book in terms of concrete figures. Orwell rather hints, however, that such amounts would not be hugely significant. Collieries could

produce far more coal than they do—their output is limited by market demand. In summary, coal miners work in exceptionally difficult and dangerous jobs and make very little pay, whereas the colliery makes a great deal of money from the labor of its employees. Further, the economic system supporting the colliery industry causes many men to be unemployed for much of their lives (the topic of widespread unemployment is further examined in Chapter 5).

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Industrial towns spring up in unorganized fashion, resulting in each town being a labyrinth of smoke-blackened small brick houses surrounded by miry alleys, tiny cindered yards, and stinking dust-bins. Indoor plumbing is rare, and most people still use a backyard privy. Backyard areas are just large enough to hold a privy and a bin for trash. Most homes in the areas Orwell examines were build during the 1870s or 1880s and are widely considered unfit for habitation—except that the residents have nowhere else to go. Thus, horrid slums are common and extensive and still, many working poor have no place to live. Orwell spends a great deal of time describing the interior conditions of housing in and around Wigan and other towns. The houses are simple in construction, most often being a stone building of two stories, infrequently with a cellar. A few windows are put around but most houses have only a single door. The ground floor has a single room, perhaps ten feet by 15 feet, which serves as a kitchen, parlor, and living area. Usually the space beneath the stairs is used as a larder. The upper floor usually consists of one or perhaps two rooms, always crammed with beds. Most residents sleep two, three, or even more to a bed. Few beds have sheets and blankets. Cellars are dank, often muddy, and usually used as storage or—more frequently—as another bedroom. Most houses have a coal storage area. Indoor plumbing is rare. As most of the homes stand on ground riddled, far below, with ancient mine shafts, settling of the ground is rather the rule. Therefore most windows are permanently stuck shut and doors must be occasionally re-hung in order to close or open. Many walls are bulging or leaning at odd angles and very few houses are square and true. Leaking roofs, cracked walls, and boarded windows are common. Many homes are 'back to back' houses—essentially a single building with a stone wall built down the center, allowing two homes to be made of a single structure. Half of these residents front onto a row of lavatories crammed into a filthy back alleyway. Orwell completes this general description with specific notes about individual houses. The notes substantiate the general claim. Orwell also notes that the houses, uniformly poor in construction, are almost universally filthy, and nearly always full of bugs such as roaches, lice, and bedbugs. Entire regions of slum are full of refuse, filth, and stench. Nearly all residents consider these conditions normal. As even these houses are insufficient for the population, many thousands of people live in extemporized housing such as tents or abandoned vehicles such as buses. Many of these people even pay rent for their meager quarters.

Government programs in some localities have caused new housing to be built. These houses, while quite modest, are vastly superior to other housing. Yet they are being built at such a slow pace that they will never satisfy demand. Multi-story housing has been attempted, but most refuse to live in condominium or apartment style units. Additionally, new housing developments are often developed on the outskirts of town which makes transportation to and from work a serious obstacle for residents. Orwell notes many men walking a mile or more in each direction on a daily basis. Finally, specific examples

of new housing projects are offered. Along with the new house, residents must sign on to a restrictive list of covenants that forbid certain behaviors and demand others. In effect, these covenants seek to enforce middle-class values on working-class residents and they are not well-received.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 examines unemployment in England during the 1930s. Newspaper accounts of the period usually place unemployment figures around two millions. Orwell argues that this figure is a gross underestimate. Unemployment figures are derived from the numbers of people on the dole, and of course many unemployed people do not receive public assistance. Instead, Orwell suggests—without really supporting the suggestion—that the number is more likely six millions. Additionally, many people are employed but do not receive a wage sufficient for survival—by today's terms they would be said to be underemployed. Orwell estimates the numbers of these people at between ten and twenty millions. Northern towns such as Wigan and Sheffield probably feature as many as one out of every three people subsisting entirely upon the dole. Orwell then presents a lengthy discussion of the dole, the areas from which unemployment benefits can be gained, and the rates of unemployment benefits.

The initial stages of unemployment are compensated by the worker's prior payment, while employed, into National Insurance, colloquially known as the stamp. Workers exchange stamps for unemployment benefits for up to one year. Subsequently, for twenty-six weeks workers receive a transitional benefit from the Unemployment Assistance Board. After this period is exhausted, workers receive funds from the Public Assistance Committee (PAC). In addition, a variety of subscription-based unemployment benefits might be offered. In summary, unemployed workers receive some type of monetary benefit for prolonged periods of time—often extending into years and decades. The amounts paid vary by marital and family status and slightly by region, but are typically insufficient to meet the demands of basic necessity. Rents at public housing for unemployed workers on the dole are controlled as a percentage of the unemployment benefits received—usually one-quarter of all benefits being the amount charged for rent. In order to qualify for the dole, unemployed persons are subjected to an economic investigation and judgment referred to as the Means Test, a particularly despised and controversial process.

Orwell takes a coal miner as typical of the working class and presents a complete discussion of wages and deductions. The reporting is necessarily complex and inexact, but a typical coal miner earns 9s. 1¾d. per shift; Orwell estimates a typical net income for a regularly employed coal miner at approximately £105 per annum. Miners disabled through work-related accidents receive from the company between £39 and £75 8s. per annum. Single unemployed men would receive a dole of between £32 10s. and £44 4s. per annum. A typical family of five with an unemployed father would receive a dole of about £83 4s. per annum. Men and families on the dole would spend roughly one-quarter of their income on housing, which is received at a discounted rate. Orwell notes that because of the housing discount, for a typical family there is little economic difference between the father enjoying full-time, regular employment, and being entirely

unemployed. In execution, single unemployed men are perhaps the worst off under the system.

Unemployment brings with it a dreadful debilitating effect upon everyone involved. Idle men jam public facilities trying to stay warm. Bored people spend what money they do have on cheap entertainment and sweets as a diversion from the routine of life and are therefore often malnourished, having spent limited money on trivialities. Orwell argues that at the very least, the unemployed should be allocated a space of ground upon which to garden. Instead, the unemployed are left to wander aimlessly about without purpose. Eventually, unemployment seems normal and Orwell cites examples of new families being started by men with no future prospect of ever working. Instead of clamoring for more money, the working class adjusts itself to unemployment by lowering its standards. Conventional wisdom of the middle-class suggests that an infinite need for work exists, and that the unemployed working-class are simply idle, useless men who chose to be unemployed. Orwell argues that when vast segments of society are perpetually unemployed, it cannot be explained as aggregated individual laziness. The economic systems obtaining must be rebuilt to allow laborers to find suitable employment. Clearly, most people do not enjoy undergoing privation and want and would work to better their position if gainful employment was available. For many millions in Northern England, however, the chance of winning a football pool is much greater than the chance of securing a job.

Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 examines the eating habits of the working-class in Wigan, Sheffield, and the surrounding areas. Humans require food and everything else then follows. The availability of food shapes world politics, yet most people little consider the impact of food on a daily basis. Thus, Orwell argues, to fully understand the poor you must understand how they manage to get themselves fed. A few sample budgets are presented and critiqued. Orwell argues that a typical family of three might spend 16s. per week, or £41 6s. per annum, on food and cooking fuel. Food prices are examined, and Orwell concludes that it would theoretically be possible for the hypothetical family to survive, assuming they made only wise purchases of high-value food items. In fact, it would be possible for an adult male to subsist on as little as 4s. per week, or £10 8s. per annum, by eating only raw vegetables and coarse bread. Yet such a diet, devoid of fats, fruits, and vegetables, is hardly conducive to health. Instead, most people seek to escape crushing boredom by spending their money on sweets such as ice cream, or on tobacco or tea. White bread, perceived as more pleasant, is preferred even though it is more expensive and less nutritious.

Thus, most Englishmen are malnourished and suffer from a physical degeneracy. In the north, natural teeth are deemed a nuisance and in any case are exceptionally rare in an adult. Death rates are high, and infant mortality rates are very high. Disease and premature death are strongly correlated with income and, indirectly, diet. Orwell also mentions that during the Great War, the one million most-fit men were shipped overseas to slaughter, which has surely caused the English hardiness to deteriorate. Orwell laments these facts but offers little by way of solution, other than noting that the French are far more conservative about food. Meanwhile, he applauds efforts to educate working-class peoples about proper nutrition, even as he concedes such efforts are seen by many as insulting.

Fortunately for those living in the north, fuel—in the form of coal—is fairly cheap. Thus, fewer funds are defrayed in heating and can therefore be used for foods. In fact, many in the north engage in coal picking and coal 'scrambling.' In coal picking, unemployed people wander across the vast slag heaps in search of tiny fragments of coal or pieces of cannel—a somewhat inflammable shale with no commercial value. Unemployed miners may even sink shafts into slag heaps to search for buried bits of coal. In this way, a person might gather as much as fifty pounds of coal fragments in a full day of searching. Coal scrambling, or scrambling for the coal, is a practice in at least Wigan whereby men line up near the narrow-gauge railway used to run slag out from the colliery to the slag heaps. Men leap aboard an individual slag car and thereby—by custom—claim the contents as their own. Although technically illegal, coal picking and scrambling are usually tolerated by collieries. In scrambling, the men use their own shovels to empty the cars as they search for coal and thereby provide at least some minor service to the colliery. However, the process of leaping onto moving railcars is

exceptionally dangerous and Orwell notes dismemberment during coal scrambling to be not uncommon.

Chapter 7 concludes Part I of the text. Most of Southern England is picturesque, but passing north beyond the Midlands the countryside turns into a dreadfully ugly series of slag-heaps and industrial towns with smoke-belching factories. The slag-heaps are extensive and formless, creating a lunarscape that is alien and never fully recovered by nature. Often, they are on fire for weeks at a time. Wigan is routinely condemned as the ugliest town in England, though Orwell suggests Sheffield should hold that distinction. Although there is nothing inherently and unavoidable ugly about industrialization, yet in the north of England it inevitably assumes that quality. Northerners consider themselves superior to southerners—northerners have grit, pluck, and warm hearts; southerners are snobbish, effeminate, and lazy. Or so runs opinion in the north; Orwell refers to this ideology as the Northern Cult. He suggests the roots of the Northern Cult lie at the very heart of nationalism—the English, noting their country was quite high in latitude, developed the idea that northern equated to superiority. This notion extends to intra-national extents as well. Post industrialization culture equated grit to the knowledge of how to make money; even though in reality the northern businessman is not quite so good at turning a profit as the southern businessman, yet the tradition is persistent.

In reality, however, the petty gentry and the educated due tend to gravitate to the warmer climes of the south. Thus, the peculiar accents of the north remain in the north. The chapter concludes with Orwell discussing class values—the middle-class values monetary success, education, and politeness. The working-class values work, honesty, and the paycheck. The final segment of Chapter 7 is a fairly artistic rendering of class distinction in England obtaining during the inter-war years. Although he claims not to, Orwell rather idealizes the working class in the description.

Chapters 8 and 9

Chapters 8 and 9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 begins Part II of the text. There is a notable shift in construction at this point in the book, as Orwell moves from presenting information to critiquing an existing system. Orwell examines his own class attitudes, providing a fair amount of autobiographical data. He describes his upbringing as 'lower-upper-middle class,' generally meaning the strident part of the middle-class, yearning to belong to the upper class and exhibiting this yearning habitually by kicking down the lower class. He attended St. Cyprian's School in Eastbourne, Sussex, then Wellington, then Eton. In 1922 he joined the Imperial Police in Burma, an experience that taught him to hate imperialism. He returned to England in 1927, resigned his police position, and devoted himself to full-time writing. He briefly lived in Paris where he worked various odd jobs and continued to develop as a writer. After leaving Paris he returned to England and, while staying at his parents' house, continued to work odd jobs and to write, enjoying some success. He was commissioned by the Left Book Club to write the current text, and lived for several months in Northern England, gathering observations for the book.

Orwell argues that the middle class traditionally dislikes the working class because it is from thence the middle class has been created. The middle class sniggering superiority is encapsulated in the institutionalized snobbishness and superiority taught to middle class children. It can be epitomized in the middle class belief that the lower class 'smells'—that is, has different habits, tastes, and preferences.Orwell suggests that Saintsbury's overtly antagonistic attitudes toward the lower classes is not atypical of the middle-class attitudes—but in fact epitomizes them. This class hatred was exacerbated by the Great War, where millions of working class men and boys were consigned to death by middle and upper class 'old men.' Orwell then examines the effects of Imperialism on class consciousness, noting that class rivalries are nowhere as bitter and implacable as in Great Britain. Orwell's personal awakening to the plight of the working class came only upon his return from Burma c. 1927. He then describes the processes he used to become familiar with the working class and to root out, insofar as possible, middle class prejudice. Even after a dedicated and concerted effort, Orwell admits to retaining many class prejudices. Throughout Chapters 8 and 9, Orwell refers to his own previously published books and is quite candid in admitting his own personal foibles and prejudice.

Chapter 10, 11, and 12

Chapter 10, 11, and 12 Summary and Analysis

The middle class often conflates the working class with tramps, beggars, criminals, and social outcasts. This is a mistake, in that these types of individuals are exceptional and no more representative of the working class than they are of the middle class. It is easy to be on equal terms with such individuals, however, as their society is very open and porous. Orwell suggests that many literary figures have mistaken their access into the society of tramps and criminals as having been access into the working class. Indeed, access into the real working class is exceptionally difficult for middle class investigators. Orwell notes numerous anecdotes revealing that while it is easy to e.g. live alongside the working class it is altogether another thing to merge into it. Orwell states that the working class is not penetrable, and suggests that even while many middle class intelligentsia decry the class system and propose methodologies for doing away with it, few of them actually want to dismantle it. Orwell notes that the English quality of life is based upon the exploitation of foreign labor through the Imperial system; few middle class persons want to do away with that question. The novels of Galsworthy and other authors are offered as representative of middle class values. He then examines the methodologies proposed to abolish the class system, of which there are two. In the first, the middle class is absorbed into the working class—this hold particular horror for most members of the middle class who, after all, don't want to smell. In the second, the working class is elevated to the status of the middle class—Orwell argues that few working class persons are interested in advancement to the middle class because of the essentially unbridgeable gulf in values. Of course, the working class is interested in better economic status—but this alone hardly convinces them to abandon their values. Orwell notes that the mistaken belief that the working class desires to become middle class is held entirely by middle class thinkers, and it is apparently supported by the constant but slow steam of working class intelligentsia that manage to elevate themselves to some semblance of the middle class, usually be totally abandoning their working class values. Orwell notes that these types of objections are perhaps local and temporary, in that they need not obtain, though often do, outside of Great Britain.

Orwell notes, however, a pervasive and durable argument against Socialism in that many among the working class and the middle class object to Socialism not on the grounds of its methodology—but on the grounds of its very goals. Orwell offers a complicated analysis of why this is so and how, in his opinion, this leads many left-leaning individuals briefly into Communism where they become disillusioned and subsequently exit to Fascism. Thus, the traditional Socialist failure to appreciate the complex motives of others often makes Fascists of potential recruits. To support his argument, Orwell notes that the economic system of Fascism benefits the middle class at the expense of the working class, but the working class often supports Fascism because the system appeals to patriotism and religion in a way that transcends purely economic motives. Hence, Socialism must become more than a purely economic system if it is ever to enjoy wide appeal. Orwell then examines at considerable length

the Socialist admiration of machine-society, or mechanized and industrialized production. As Socialism envisions a world of great efficiency and coordinated communication and distribution, it readily adapts to mechanization. Indeed, the global Socialism championed by most Socialists nearly inherently demands a high degree of machine-production. This, however, alienates the working class who often feel that 'progress' of this nature conflicts with their own interests. In addition, many members of the middle class fear that extensive mechanization is devaluing and corrosive to social customs. Again, Orwell appeals to literature as indicative of generally-held values and argues that Socialism must better adapt its appeal to wider audiences.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

Part I presents factual information, and Chapters 8 through 12 present a critique of the Socialist paradigm obtaining, and an attempt to explain why "so many normal decent people are repelled by...Socialism" (p. 217). Chapter 13 examines the question of how Socialism should, or at least could, proceed. In order to defeat the specter of Fascism, Socialism must be made to appeal to many. Orwell argues that anyone who is opposed to poverty, tyranny, and war should be an adherent of Socialism, so long as they are not estranged by 'cranks' or strident ideology.

Those objecting to machine-society and 'progress' of this nature often object to Socialism because it promotes such advances. In effect, these people should be educated that these types of advances will happen in any economic system and that the only way to regulate the process for the benefit of all is to adapt it to Socialism. Failing that, the process will be adapted to capitalism. Mechanization cannot be stopped and is not hastened by Socialism. Socialism should be divorced from what Orwell refers to as Machine worship by humanizing the ideology of Socialism.

Orwell then appeals to all "left-wingers of all complexions" (p. 220) to drop all differences and rally around Socialism. Only by divorcing 'crank' ideas and practices from the left will the left be able to appeal to the common working and middle class person. Instead of retaining 'crank' ideas that will doom Socialism, Orwell calls on all Socialists to abandon their external differences for the greater good. This infers, also, that the differences of class must be faced head on instead of, as has heretofore been practices, swept under the rug. Although the English class system has outlived its usefulness, it shows no signs of decay. Instead of pretending that class differences do not exist or are maintained by artificial economic differences, Socialism should adapt to class differences in a realistic way. This is especially true because as economies become more depressed, class distinctions become more pronounced. Orwell then concludes the text with a concise recounting of the situation and his proposed general methodology.

Characters

George Orwell

The author, George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair (1903-1950) in India while it was part of the British Empire. Orwell's father worked in the civil service. His mother returned to England with Orwell when he was young and he did not see his father for several years. He describes his upbringing as 'lower-upper-middle class.' He attended St. Cyprian's School in Eastbourne, Sussex, then Wellington, then Eton. In 1922 he joined the Imperial Police in Burma, an experience that taught him to hate imperialism. He returned to England in 1927, resigned his police position, and devoted himself to full-time writing. He briefly lived in Paris where he worked various odd jobs and continued to develop as a writer. After leaving Paris he returned to England and, while staying at his parents' house, continued to work odd jobs and to write, enjoying some success. He was commissioned by the Left Book Club to write the current text, and lived for several months in Northern England, gathering observations for the book.

From 1936 to 1937 he fought as an infantry soldier for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War against the Nationalist insurrection. During the fighting he was shot through the neck, a serious injury which he survived. He returned to England to recuperate and continued to write on a wide variety of subjects. During World War II he worked producing official English war propaganda; his experiences would later appear in fictionalized form in the novel 1984. Toward the end of the war he began writing for independent journals and also produced the anti-Stalinist allegory Animal Farm. After World War II he continued to write numerous essays and articles until his death from tuberculosis, 1950, in London.

Victor Gollancz

Victor Gollancz (1893-1967) was a British editor and publisher, and socialist. Born in London and raised a Jew, Gollancz served in the British Army during the Great War. After the war Gollancz published magazines and books, forming his own publishing company in 1927. The text offers little biographical data for Gollancz, other than what he supplies in the foreword. Gollancz, along with Harold Laski and John Strachey, founded the Left Book Club in 1936 and shortly thereafter commissioned Orwell to write the text under consideration. The men also served as the editors for the book. Gollancz and the other editors were so perturbed by Orwell's critique of Socialists that Gollancz wrote a long foreword which attempted to apologize for most of Orwell's criticism. The foreword has been republished in most editions of the text.

The Brookers

Mr. and Mrs. Brooker form a landlord couple who rent Orwell a bed during his several-weeks' stay at Wigan. In addition to their boarding house, they run a tripe shop from the

same establishment. Mrs. Brooker is hugely fat and suffers from a diffuse and unspecified ailment which Orwell suspects is simply obesity, coupled with continual overeating and depression. In any event, she spends day and night on a collapsing sofa in the downstairs parlor of the boarding house and does no work. She is impartial to personal cleanliness and apparently entirely dependent upon her husband who eventually clears away her chamber pot and mountains of snot-filled newspaper fragments. Mrs. Brooker's chief, and perhaps only, contribution to the boarding house is an incessant complaining about how bad things are, how dishonest the boarders are, and how the tripe business has fallen off remarkably in the past few years.

Orwell describes Mr. Brooker as a dark, small-boned, sour, and Irish-looking man. Mr. Brooker is a thin man who is perpetually covered in filth. Everything he touches with his wide, blackened thumb, receives a gritty thumbprint—including the slices of bread he hands out to the boarders during meals. Orwell squirms as he accepts the bread and notes the thumbprint, reminiscing about Mr. Brooker's habit of carrying over-full chamber pots with the same thumb well below the inside rim. Mr. Brooker does all the work of the establishment, but moves almost as if in slow motion. Mr. Brooker has no concept of cleanliness and Orwell reports watching the same crumbs, day after day, move about on the table and the same piles of filth, week after week, shuffled about in the rooms. Mr. Brooker also voices constant complaints about the state of the world and deeply suspects all of his boarders of being parasitical miscreants.

Orwell humorously notes that the Brookers never eat their own tripe and never serve it to their boarders—presumably because the boarders know about the unsanitary and horrid conditions in which the tripe is stored. The Brookers' establishment is filthy, features piles of dead flies in the front window, and entirely depressing. Orwell finally leaves after sitting down to dinner at a table next to a full chamber pot remaining from the morning. However, Orwell notes that in nearly all respects it is much the same as many other hundreds and hundreds of boarding establishments throughout Wigan and, indeed, the entire northern industrial area of England. The Brookers are presented in a sympathetic light and Orwell's typical humor allows them to be viewed with equal parts distaste and acceptance.

Mr. Reilly and the Injured Scotch Miner

The two men indicated are lodgers in the Brookers' boardinghouse and share a single room with Orwell. The room contains four beds—one of which is a double bed and fairly good quality. That bed is reserved for transient boarders, however—the three long-term boards sleep in the other single beds. Orwell reports the room to smell like a ferret's cage. Reilly is an elderly man and works as a surface mechanic at the Wigan colliery. He departs for work at 5:00 a.m. and little biographical data are offered about him. The Scotch miner was injured and permanently disabled; he had been pinned by a large chunk of stone in the mine and remained thus pinned for many hours. In compensation for his wounds he had received £500 in a lump sum distribution, apparently from the colliery. He is described as a handsome man of forty, with grizzled hair and a clipped mustache. He often lies in bed until late in the day, smoking a pipe. Orwell finds the

Scotch Miner the most annoying, as the man spends interminable hours reading various newspapers and then wants to discuss the trivialities of every column. Although there are other lodgers mentioned in Chapter 1, the two men indicated suffice as a representative sample. None of the men are again mentioned in the text.

Mr. Joseph Jones, Mayor of Barnsley, Yorkshire

Mr. Jones is presented as an expert on the wages typically paid out to miners in Barnsley, which is presumed to be typical of northern colliery wages. Jones states that the official average wages paid to miners includes the highest-paid men's salaries and rolls in overtime rates—while ignoring periods where miners do not work. Thus, the average miner's income appears to be fairly robust, when in fact the figures do not portray the large portion of miners who are out of work or receive less or intermittent pay. Orwell's personal calculations dovetail nicely with Jones' statements. Jones is offered as an expert in the text, and no biographical data are provided for him—except that he is the Mayor of Barnsley and apparently somewhat sympathetic to the local coal miners' plight. Much of the book's financial analyses come to rest on Jones' authority and accuracy.

Alf Smith and Bert Jones

The two men indicated are offered by Orwell as examples of the debilitating effects of prolonged unemployment. Although given names, the men are certainly caricatures intended to illustrate the point. Alf becomes unemployed before Bert, and as Alf watches Bert depart for work every day, Alf feels that he is personally responsible for being unable to find work and begins down a spiral of self-loathing. As his self-worth drains away, Alf is unaware that in the meantime Bert has also become unemployed. Bert then starts the cycle over again. Eventually both men become used to idling away year after year, and lose their shame of being on the dole. At that point, unemployment is nothing atypical or even exceptional.

Major Clifford Hugh Douglas

Major Douglas (1879 - 1952) was a British engineer who proposed the Social Credit economic reform. Orwell provides no biographical data for Douglas, but notes that Douglas would doubtlessly find it pleasing that collieries could easily produce more coal than they routinely did produce. Douglas' contention was that the total costs of goods should roughly equate to the sums paid out to produce the goods—in other words, the collective worker salary should, in principle, be sufficient to buy back what the workers produced. Douglas concluded that inequity was caused because the economic system was organized to maximize profits for those making economically significant decisions. Orwell refers to Douglas in an offhand and humorous way at the end of Chapter 6.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton

Gilbert Keith ("G.K.") Chesterton (1874 - 1936) was an influential English writer with a broad viewpoint. His opinions were often considered paradoxical in that they were not easily pigeonholed into a standard political ideology. Chesterton's writing was accessible and held popular appeal. In addition, it was generally based in a Christian milieu Chesterton's influence was near its pinnacle during the 1930s, and hence Orwell responds to many Chestertonian ideas within the text. Orwell refers to Chesteron's ideology in Chapters 2, 4, 8, and 11, generally in disparaging terms.

John Galsworthy

John Galsworthy (1867 - 1933) was an English novelist and playwright. Galsworthy's work often dealt with the plight of the poor, and most of his fictional characters believed that slums are created by slum-dwellers, and not the other way around. Also, Galsworthy generally puts forward a view that women in general and the working-class in particular are generally exploited—but that there is nothing possible to be done to change it. Orwell states that by the age of eighteen he had read and re-read all of Galsworthy's works and found them supportive of middle-class snobbery. Orwell refers to Galsworthy as a "very think-skinned tear-in-the-eye, pre-war humanitarian...start[ing] out with a morbid pity-complex which extends to thinking that every married woman is an angel chained to a satyr" (p. 158). Orwell refers to Galsworthy's work in Chapters 4, 9, and 10.

George Saintsbury and Robert Smillie

George Saintsbury (1845 - 1933) was an English writer; Orwell refers to him as Professor Saintsbury, in reference to his position as professor of rhetoric and English literature at the University of Edinburgh. Orwell refers to Sainsbury throughout portions of Chapter 8, noting that Saintsbury's outspoken class prejudice, which he finds offensive, is nevertheless typical of what most middle- and upper-class people think about the working-class.

Robert Smillie (1857 - 1940) was a trade unionist and Labour Party politician. Orwell provides virtually no biographical data about Smillie but does cite his as an example of a working-class hero treated as something of a boogeyman by the middle-class, stating that old ladies looked under their beds to make sure Robert Smillie was not hiding there. The textual representations of the two men can be seen as different aspects of the middle-class attitudes toward the working-class.

Objects/Places

Wigan

A town in northern England, some 17 miles northwest of Manchester and 17 miles northeast of Liverpool. Wigan is situated on the River Douglas and is within Lancashire. Wigan experienced expansion during the Industrial Revolution and has long been known as a coal mining center—though coal mining ceased during the latter-1900s. Much of Orwell's experience in Wigan focused on coal mining and coal miners. Orwell's book illuminates the poor working and living conditions in Wigan and similar towns during the 1930s. At the time of the book, Wigan's population was about 85,000.

Wigan Pier

The actual Wigan Pier was probably a wooden wharf on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal which was historically used to tipple coal onto barges during Wigan's early coal mining period. The pier originally was the terminus for a narrow-gauge railway extending to colliery loading areas. Ironically, the pier itself—memorialized in the name of the text—was demolished c. 1929 and its components sold as scrap. Within the text, Wigan Pier is symbolic of the economic forces contributing to the Wigan slums and local standard of living. Note that a modern recreation of the pier today marks the spot of the original structure. The nearby pub, The Orwell at Wigan Pier, today commemorates the famous author's interest in the area. The pier itself has little actual significance in the text. In England at the time, the phrase 'pier' vaguely was equated with a seaside holiday and hence Orwell's selection of 'Wigan Pier' sarcastically infers Wigan to be a resort destination. The phrase Wigan Pier was in circulation among music-hall comedians at the time of publication.

The Brookers' Boardinghouse

During his several-weeks' stay at Wigan, Orwell rents a bed in a typical boardinghouse owned by Mr. and Mrs. Brooker. The house has a few rooms which are shared by boarders—Orwell's room is literally crammed with beds such that he cannot sleep stretched out without kicking another boarder in the body. The boardinghouse is filthy and Orwell finds the squalor horrible but typical of the slums. The boardinghouse is fully described in Chapter 1 of the text.

The Dole

Orwell refers to the dole often in a collective sense though in fact the system of benefits for the unemployed, colloquially referred to as the dole, was composed of several interrelated organizations. The initial stages of unemployment were compensated by the worker's prior payment, while employed, into National Insurance, colloquially known as

the stamp. Workers could exchange stamps, or coupons, for unemployment benefits for up to one year. Subsequently, for twenty-six weeks, workers received a transitional benefit from the Unemployment Assistance Board. After this period was exhausted, workers would receive funds from the Public Assistance Committee (PAC). In addition, a variety of subscription-based unemployment benefits might be offered. The intricacies of unemployment benefits—the dole—are not critical to the text, however. In summary, unemployed workers would receive some type of monetary benefit (actual amounts are discussed under Wages, below) for prolonged periods of time—often extending into years and decades. The amounts paid varied by marital and family status and slightly by region, but were typically insufficient to meet the demands of basic necessity. Rents at public housing for unemployed workers on the dole were controlled as a percentage of the unemployment benefits received—usually one-quarter of all benefits being the amount charged for rent. In order to qualify for the dole, unemployed persons would be subjected to an economic investigation and judgment referred to as the Means Test.

Wages

Orwell takes a coal miner as typical of the working class and presents a complete discussion of wages and deductions. The reporting is necessarily complex and inexact, but a typical coal miner earns 9s. 1¾d. per shift; Orwell estimates a typical net income for a regularly employed coal miner at approximately £105 per annum. Miners disabled through work-related accidents receive from the company between £39 and £75 8s. per annum. Single unemployed men would receive a dole of between £32 10s. and £44 4s. per annum. A typical family of five with an unemployed father would receive a dole of about £83 4s. per annum. Men and families on the dole would spend roughly one-quarter of their income on housing, which was received at a discounted rate. Orwell notes that because of the housing discount, for a typical family there was little economic difference between the father enjoying full-time, regular work, and being entirely unemployed. By way of comparison, Orwell was paid £500 in advance to write the book, which took about one year of labor.

Rents and Rates

Orwell frequently gives the cost of housing as a compound number in the form of e.g. "Rent 4s. 9d., rates 2s. 6d., total 7s. 3d." (p. 53). The rent was paid to the landlord or owner of the residency whereas the rates were a local tax on the residency, passed through to the occupant. Added together, they indicated the total economic burden imposed upon the tenant for the use of the residency. Orwell's rents and rates are generally reported in amounts due per week; the very cheapest tenements, little more than tents or abandoned buses, renting for 5s., or about £13 per annum. Orwell does not indicate whether the quoted rates were discounted due to the occupant's employment status.

Colliery Productivity

Orwell estimates that a typical colliery would produce about 280 tons of coal per full-time employee per annum; the measurement is given in Imperial Units and is equivalent to about 284 metric tonnes. Orwell notes an average cost, in Northern England, per hundredweight of coal to be 1s. 6d., or £1 10s. per ton. Thus, each colliery employee would produce £420 of value per annum at a gross labor expense of slightly more than £105 per annum. The productivity numbers offered here do not consider non-labor overhead amounts, which are not discussed in the book in terms of concrete figures. Orwell rather hints, however, that non-labor overhead amounts would not be hugely significant. Collieries were able to produce far more coal than they did—their output was limited by market demand.

Socialism

Socialism, as used by Orwell, indicates a theoretical economic system where all must "co-operate and see to it that everyone does his fair share of the work and gets his fair share of the provisions" (p. 171). Socialism generally envisions large economies of scale, efficient distribution, and efficient and timely communication. There are numerous viewpoints of how Socialism could effectively be implemented. Orwell argues in a major theme of the book that Socialism does not appeal to the working-class for several reasons.

Advocatus Diaboli

Advocatus Diaboli, or the devil's advocate, is a term of art used to indicate someone who takes a position for the sake of argument. Orwell notes that in Part II of the text he is assuming such a role not to critique or destroy Socialism, but to explore reasons why Socialism has not gained in popularity within the working-class, where, presumably, it would have the most to offer.

I.L.P.

Orwell frequently refers to the I.L.P., or Independent Labour Party, a Socialist political party obtaining in the United Kingdom from c. 1893 through the time of the book's publication. The I.L.P. gained several seats in the 1922 general election and thereby gained general credibility in the Labour party political system; the I.L.P. broke with the Labour party c. 1931. It is interesting to note that, after writing the book, Orwell traveled to Spain and fought against Fascism as an infantryman with the I.L.P. contingent.

Themes

Unemployment and Poverty

The book's commissioned purpose was to illustrate the conditions obtaining in Northern England for the unemployed. During the 1930s England—indeed the world—was suffering from prolonged economic depression and unemployment was rampant. Officially, two millions of people were unemployed though Orwell suggests that six millions would be closer to the truth. Beyond the unemployed, Orwell notes that between ten and twenty millions were working but receiving a less-than-subsistence wage for their labor. This economic paradigm resulted in many millions of people living on the national dole—welfare—for years or decades at a time. Needless to say, the dole amounts were based upon calculation of the minimum amount a person required to stay alive. Thus, vast segments of English society were living at a subsistence level, facing starvation and malnourishment on a daily basis. Part I of the book focuses nearly entirely on the issues of unemployment and poverty, being something like a collection of topical essays on various aspects of poverty. Part II continues the topic by examining various methods for escaping mass poverty. By any standard, unemployment and poverty form one of the core themes of the text.

Socialism and Socialists

While Orwell, and others, felt that Socialism offered the clearest path from mass poverty, he also allowed that other solutions were possible. However, for Orwell the best solution was the application of Socialism. Although he curiously does not define rigorously Socialism in the text, it can be argued that as a commissioned work the book was intended to be read mainly by Socialists and hence such a definition would be spurious; Orwell's p. 171 definition of Socialism can be seen to be sufficient. Nevertheless, Part II of the book features Socialism as a prominent theme. Orwell further argues that Socialists were harming the very cause they espoused by their elitism and broad acceptance of practices utterly rejected by the working class. Orwell terms the practitioners of various quirky movements subsumed into Socialism as 'cranks,' and states that there is usually a "prevalence of cranks wherever Socialists are gathered together" (p. 174). He humorously observes that any gathering of Socialists will include large numbers of prominent fruit-juice drinkers, nudists, sandal-wearers, sex-maniacs, Quakers, 'Nature Cure' quacks, pacifists, and feminists. While this risibly pragmatic analysis of the social movement angered many it did help explain why the working-class rejected en masse the ideals of socialism and, a little later, Communism. Orwell's observations are still timely and applicable.

Class Friction

Much of the Part II discussion of Socialism examines the question of why many among the middle class espouse Socialism while very few among the working class espouse the doctrine. After all, the middle class benefits from capitalism at the economic expense of the working class and widespread Socialism could only better the lives of the working class at the economic expense of the middle class. Thus, Orwell asks, why was Socialism in England during the 1930s essentially a program advocated by the middle class? Many of the theorems developed in Part II of the text examine this strange situation from the understanding of the inherent tension existing between the middle class and the working class. Orwell does not really cast class friction in Marxist terms but instead focuses on actual examples of problem areas between the two groups of people.

It is particularly interesting to note that Gollancz's foreword to the original edition—usually reprinted with the text—criticizes Orwell's critique of Socialists by arguing that Orwell was firmly entrenched in the middle class and hence, apparently, unable to adequately distinguish working class values. While interesting, the argument is problematic in several obvious respects. In any event, Orwell freely admits to his own bias. Class friction is thus a major intentional theme of the text, as well as being an unintentional theme of the text's publication.

Style

Perspective

The book was commissioned by the Left Book Club and has a specific political goal—to illustrate the terrible conditions endured by the working class poor of England. The Left Book Club was ostensibly an apolitical, left leaning organization. However, it did have a thinly-veiled dedication for Socialism and openly admired Communism as then practiced in Russia. The book was sold as a selection-of-the-month to Left Book Club members and was also made available to the general public at a higher price. The club fostered numerous discussion groups throughout Great Britain where the text was undoubtedly discussed in detail. The Left Book Club editors were thoroughly pleased with Part I of Orwell's book which was an emotionally charged eye-witness description of poverty obtaining in northern England and the conditions experienced by millions of working-class peoples. The editors were less than pleased with Part II of the book, which features Orwell's personal critique of Socialism and Socialists. One of the editors provided the foreword for the book—the foreword being a sort of critique of Orwell's critique of Socialism. Most modern editions include the original foreword.

That Orwell was a dedicated author is beyond question—the text opens with a description of his personal living quarters in a filthy tenement in Wigan, an abode amidst squalor that Orwell maintained for several weeks while gathering materials for the text. Orwell subsequently relates the results of hundreds of personal investigations of working class houses, observations of personal visits to coal mines, and notes summarizing hundreds of interviews conducted. After delivering the book to the publisher, and before its publication, Orwell departed to fight in the Spanish Civil War as an infantryman fighting against the Fascist forces.

Tone

The book consists of thirteen chapters written in the course of only a few months, and as such enjoys a remarkably consistent tone. The tone of the entire collection is serious and insightful, but simultaneously humorous. Orwell is never above laughing at himself when appropriate, and nearly always deliberately points out his own shortcomings and personal opinions regarding the topic of discussion. The text is generally objective in perspective; Orwell takes his personal experience and broadens it. When Orwell provides sections which he considers to be subjective he clearly announces them as such. His intent as an essayist is not to politicize or necessarily convince, but to state his opinion clearly and develop his theses from facts and personally observed events. This transparent style allows the reader to ascertain the facts, analyze the argument, and come to their own conclusion regarding Orwell's analyses.

The serious but accessible tone, coupled with Orwell's obvious mastery of the subject, allows the book to be easily accessible and quite enjoyable. The broader topics remain

timely for the most part, even though the specific instances may no longer obtain. Although Orwell is best remembered as a novelist and satirist, this collection makes it clear that his strength as a writer extended well beyond those genres with which he is typically associated.

Structure

The 232-page book is divided into two enumerated parts, and each part is further divided into chapters. Part I includes Chapters 1 through 7 and Part II includes Chapters 8 through 13. Most editions of the text include the original 1937 foreword written by Victor Gollancz. The book was originally commissioned by the Left Book Club—the club furnished members with a monthly selection in special edition for the cost of 2s. 6d. The club also helped organize Left Discussion Groups to discuss the text of the month. The Left Book Club's three editors included Gollancz, Harold Laski, and John Strachey, and club numbered in the neighborhood of 50,000 members. Published volumes included a variety of subjects though all had a left slant. The club was strongly socialist and pro-Communist. Gollancz, as indicated by his foreword, strongly opposed many of Orwell's viewpoints and later republished the book, against Orwell's wishes, omitting the objectionable (to him) Part II.

Most of the chapters presented in the text resemble an essay on a given topic. Taken together, Part I depicts the plight of the impoverished working class in England during the 1930s, and Part II is Orwell's individualistic critique of contemporaneous socialism. Gollancz's foreword reads as a critique of Orwell's critique in Part II, and essentially states that Orwell's objections arise because Orwell was himself a member of the middle class—of course, Orwell admits this in the text itself.

Quotes

The shop was a narrow, cold sort of room. On the outside of the window a few white letters, relics of ancient chocolate advertisements, were scattered like stars. Inside there was a slab upon which lay the great white folds of tripe, and the grey flocculent stuff known as 'black tripe', and the ghostly translucent feet of pigs, ready boiled. It was the ordinary 'tripe and pea' shop, and not much else was stocked except bread, cigarettes, and tinned stuff. 'Teas' were advertised in the window, but if a customer demanded a cup of tea he was usually put off with excuses. Mr Brooker, though out of work for two years, was a miner by trade, but he and his wife had been keeping shops of various kinds as a side-line all their lives. At one time they had had a pub, but they had lost their licence for allowing gambling on the premises. I doubt whether any of their businesses had ever paid; they were the kind of people who run a business chiefly in order to have something to grumble about. Mr Brooker was a dark, small-boned, sour, Irish-looking man, and astonishingly dirty. I don't think I ever once saw his hands clean. As Mrs Brooker was now an invalid he prepared most of the food, and like all people with permanently dirty hands he had a peculiarly intimate, lingering manner of handling things. If he gave you a slice of bread-and-butter there was always a black thumb-print on it. Even in the early morning when he descended into the mysterious den behind Mrs Brooker's sofa and fished out the tripe, his hands were already black. I heard dreadful stories from the other lodgers about the place where the tripe was kept. Blackbeetles were said to swarm there. I do not know how often fresh consignments of tripe were ordered, but it was at long intervals, for Mrs Brooker used to date events by it. 'Let me see now, I've had in three lots of froze (frozen tripe) since that happened,' etc. We lodgers were never given tripe to eat. At the time I imagined that this was because tripe was too expensive; I have since thought that it was merely because we knew too much about it. The Brookers never ate tripe themselves, I noticed. (pp. 7-8)

It is impossible to watch the 'fillers' at work without feeling a pang of envy for their toughness. It is a dreadful job that they do, an almost superhuman job by the standard of an ordinary person. For they are not only shifting monstrous quantities of coal, they are also doing, it in a position that doubles or trebles the work. They have got to remain kneeling all the while—they could hardly rise from their knees without sitting the ceiling—and you can easily see by trying it what a tremendous effort this means. Shoveling is comparatively easy when you are standing up, because you can use your knee and thigh to drive the shovel along; kneeling down, the whole of the strain is thrown upon your arm and belly muscles. And the other conditions do not exactly make things easier. There is the heat—it varies, but in some mines it is suffocating—and the coal dust that stuffs up your throat and nostrils and collects along your eyelids, and the unending rattle of the conveyor belt, which in that confined space is rather like the rattle of a machine gun. But the fillers look and work as though they were made of iron. They really do look like iron hammered iron statues—under the smooth coat of coal dust which clings to them from head to foot. It is only when you see miners down the mine and naked that you realize what splendid men, they are. Most of them are small (big men are at a disadvantage in that job) but nearly all of them have the most noble bodies; wide

shoulders tapering to slender supple waists, and small pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs, with not an ounce of waste flesh anywhere. In the hotter mines they wear only a pair of thin drawers, clogs and knee-pads; in the hottest mines of all, only the clogs and knee-pads. You can hardly tell by the look of them whether they are young or old. They may be any age up to sixty or even sixty-five, but when they are black and naked they all look alike. No one could do their work who had not a young man's body, and a figure fit for a guardsman at that, just a few pounds of extra flesh on the waist-line, and the constant bending would be impossible. You can never forget that spectacle once you have seen it—the line of bowed, kneeling figures, sooty black all over, driving their, huge shovels under the coal with stupendous force and speed. They are on the job for seven and a half hours, theoretically without a break, for there is no time 'off'. Actually they, snatch a quarter of an hour or so at some time during the shift to eat the food they have brought with them, usually a hunk of bread and dripping and a bottle of cold tea. The first time I was watching the 'fillers' at work I put my hand upon some dreadful slimy thing among the coal dust. It was a chewed quid of tobacco. Nearly all the miners chew tobacco, which is said to be good against thirst. (pp. 22-24)

When the miner comes up from the pit his face is so pale that it is noticeable even through the mask of coal dust. This is due to the foul air that he has been breathing, and will wear off presently. To a Southerner, new to the mining districts, the spectacle of a shift of several hundred miners streaming out of the pit is strange and slightly sinister. Then-exhausted faces, with the grime clinging in all the hollows, have a fierce, wild look. At other times, when their faces are clean, there is not much to distinguish them from the rest of the population. They have a very upright square-shouldered walk, a reaction from the constant bending underground, but most of them are shortish men and their thick ill-fitting clothes hide the splendour of their bodies. The most definitely distinctive thing about them is the blue scars on their noses. Every miner has blue scars on his nose and forehead, and will carry them to his death. The coal dust of which the air underground is full enters every cut, and then the skin grows over it and forms a blue stain like tattooing, which in fact it is. Some of the older men have their foreheads veined like Roquefort cheeses from this cause. (p. 36)

As you walk through the industrial towns you lose yourself in labyrinths of little brick houses blackened by smoke, festering in planless chaos round miry alleys and little cindered yards where there are stinking dust-bins and lines of grimy washing and half-ruinous w.c.s. The interiors of these houses are always very much the same, though the number of rooms varies between two or five. All have an almost exactly similar living-room, ten or fifteen feet square, with an open kitchen range; in the larger ones there is a scullery as well, in the smaller ones the sink and copper are in the living-room. At the back there is the yard, or part of a yard shared by a number of houses, just big enough for the dustbin and the w.c.s. Not a single one has hot water laid on. You might walk, I suppose, through literally hundreds of miles of streets inhabited by miners, every one of whom, when he is in work, gets black from head to foot every day, without ever passing a house in which one could have a bath. It would have been very simple to install a hot-water system working from the kitchen range, but the builder saved perhaps ten pounds on each house by not doing so, and at the time when these houses were built no one imagined that miners wanted baths. (p. 51)

Do you consider all this desirable? No, I don't. But it may be that the psychological adjustment which the working class are visibly making is the best they could make in the circumstances. They have neither turned revolutionary nor lost their self-respect; merely they have kept their tempers and settled down to make the best of things on a fish-and-chip standard. The alternative would be God knows what continued agonies of despair; or it might be attempted insurrections which, in a strongly governed country like England, could only lead to futile massacres and a regime of savage repression.
Of course the post-war development of cheap luxuries has been a very fortunate thing for our rulers. It is quite likely that fish-and-chips, art-silk stockings, tinned salmon, cut-price chocolate (five two-ounce bars for sixpence), the movies, the radio, strong tea, and the Football Pools have between them averted revolution. Therefore we are sometimes told that the whole thing is an astute manoeuvre by the governing class—a sort of 'bread and circuses' business—to hold the unemployed down. What I have seen of our governing class does not convince me that they have that much intelligence. The thing has happened, but by an un-conscious process—the quite natural interaction between the manufacturer's need for a market and the need of half-starved people for cheap palliatives. (p. 90)

It is unfortunate that the English working class—the English nation generally, for that matter—are exceptionally ignorant about and wasteful of food. I have pointed out elsewhere how civilized is a French navy's idea of a meal compared with an Englishman's, and I cannot believe that you would ever see such wastage in a French house as you habitually see in English ones. Of course, in the very poorest homes, where everybody is unemployed, you don't see much actual waste, but those who can afford to waste food often do so. I could give startling instances of this. Even the Northern habit of baking one's own bread is slightly wasteful in itself, because an overworked woman cannot bake more than once or, at most, twice a week and it is impossible to tell beforehand how much bread will be wasted, so that a certain amount generally has to be thrown away. The usual thing is to bake six large loaves and twelve small ones at a time. All this is part of the old, generous English attitude to life, and it is an amiable quality, but a disastrous one at the present moment. (pp. 98-99)

As you travel northward your eye, accustomed to the South or East, does not notice much difference until you are beyond Birmingham. In Coventry you might as well be in Finsbury Park, and the Bull Ring in Birmingham is not unlike Norwich Market, and between all the towns of the Midlands there stretches a villa-civilization indistinguishable from that of the South. It is only when you get a little further north, to the pottery towns and beyond, that you begin to encounter the real ugliness of industrialism—an ugliness so frightful and so arresting that you are obliged, as it were, to come to terms with it. (p. 105)

The road from Mandalay to Wigan is a long one and the reasons for taking it are not immediately clear.
In the earlier chapters of this book I have given a rather fragmentary account of various things I saw in the coal areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire. I went there partly because I wanted to see what mass-unemployment is like at its worst, partly in order to see the

most typical section of the English working class at close quarters. This was necessary to me as part of my approach to Socialism, for before you can be sure whether you are genuinely in favour of Socialism, you have got to decide whether things at present are tolerable or not tolerable, and you have got to take up a definite attitude on the terribly difficult issue of class. Here I shall have to digress and explain how my own attitude towards the class question was developed. Obviously this involves writing a certain amount of autobiography, and I would not do it if I did not think that I am sufficiently typical of my class, or rather sub-caste, to have a certain symptomatic importance. (p. 121)

When I was fourteen or fifteen I was an odious little snob, but no worse than other boys of my own age and class. I suppose there is no place in the world where snobbery is quite so ever-present or where it is cultivated in such refined and subtle forms as in an English public school. Here at least one cannot say that English 'education' fails to do its job. You forget your Latin and Greek within a few months of leaving school—I studied Greek for eight or ten years, and now, at thirty-three, I cannot even repeat the Greek alphabet—but your snobbishness, unless you persistently root it out like the bindweed it is, sticks by you till your grave. (p. 137)

But unfortunately you do not solve the class problem by making friends with tramps. At most you get rid of some of your own class-prejudice by doing so.
Tramps, beggars, criminals, and social outcasts generally are very exceptional beings and no more typical of the working class as a whole than, say, the literary intelligentsia are typical of the bourgeoisie. It is quite easy to be on terms of intimacy with a foreign 'intellectual', but it is not at all easy to be on terms of intimacy with an ordinary respectable foreigner of the middle class. How many Englishmen have seen the inside of an ordinary French bourgeois family, for instance? Probably it would be quite impossible to do so, short of marrying into it. And it is rather similar with the English working class. Nothing is easier than to be bosom pals with a pickpocket, if you know where to look for him; but it is very difficult to be bosom pals with a bricklayer. (p. 154)

Meanwhile what about Socialism?
It hardly needs pointing out that at this moment we are in a very serious mess, so serious that even the dullest-witted people find it difficult to remain unaware of it. We are living in a world in which nobody is free, in which hardly anybody is secure, in which it is almost impossible to be honest and to remain alive. For enormous blocks of the working class the conditions of life are such as I have described in the opening chapters of this book, and there is no chance of those conditions showing any fundamental improvement. The very best the English-working class can hope for is an occasional temporary decrease in unemployment when this or that industry is artificially stimulated by, for instance, rearmament. Even the middle classes, for the first time in their history, are feeling the pinch. They have not known actual hunger yet, but more and more of them find themselves floundering in a sort of deadly net of frustration in which it is harder and harder to persuade yourself that you are either happy, active, or useful. Even the lucky ones at the top, the real bourgeoisie, are haunted periodically by a

consciousness of the miseries below, and still more by fears of the menacing future. And this is merely a preliminary stage, in a country still rich with the loot of a hundred years. Presently there may be coining God knows what horrors—horrors of which, in this sheltered island, we have not even a traditional knowledge. (p. 170)

Every sensitive person has moments when he is suspicious of machinery and to some extent of physical science. But it is important to sort out the various motives, which have differed greatly at different times, for hostility to science and machinery, and to disregard the jealousy of the modem literary gent who hates science because science has stolen literature's thunder. The earliest full-length attack on science and machinery that I am acquainted with is in the third part of Gulliver's Travels. But Swift's attack, though brilliant as a tour de force, is irrelevant and even silly, because it is written from the standpoint—perhaps this seems a queer thing to say of the author of Gulliver's Trawls—of a man who lacked imagination. To Swift, science was merely a kind of futile muckraking and the machines were nonsensical contraptions that would never work. His standard was that of practical usefulness, and he lacked the vision to see that an experiment which is not demonstrably useful at the moment may yield results in the future. Elsewhere in the book he names it as the best of all achievements 'to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before'; not seeing, apparently, that this is just what the machine can do. A little later the despised machines began working, physical science increased its scope, and there came the celebrated conflict between religion and science which agitated our grandfathers. That conflict is over and both sides have retreated and claimed a victory, but an anti-scientific bias still lingers in the minds of most religious believers. All through the nineteenth century protesting voices were raised against science and machinery (see Dickens's Hard Times, for instance), but usually for the rather shallow reason that industrialism in its first stages was cruel and ugly. (pp. 190-191)

In the first part of this book I illustrated, by a few brief sidelights, the kind of mess we are in; in this second part I have been trying to explain why, in my opinion, so many normal decent people are repelled by the only remedy, namely by Socialism. Obviously the most urgent need of the next few years is to capture those normal decent ones before Fascism plays its trump card. I do not want to raise here the question of parties and political expedients. More important than any party label (though doubtless the mere menace of Fascism will presently bring some kind of Popular Front into existence) is the diffusion of Socialist doctrine in an effective form. People have got to be made ready to act as Socialists. There are, I believe, countless people who, without being aware of it, are in sympathy with the essential aims of Socialism, and who could be won over almost with-out a struggle if only one could find the word that would move them. Everyone who knows the meaning of poverty, everyone who has a genuine hatred of tyranny and war, is on the Socialist side, potentially. My job here, therefore, is to suggest—necessarily in very general terms—how a reconciliation might be effected between Socialism and its more intelligent enemies. (p. 217)

Topics for Discussion

After studying family budgets presented in the early chapters of the text, it becomes evident that an employed man, after paying rent, would have about as much income as an unemployed man, after paying controlled rent. There would thus seem to be little incentive to work. If you were in a similar social situation, would you actively seek work or simply live on the dole? Why?

Orwell summarizes middle-class distaste for the working-class by noting that the lower classes smell (refer to Chapter 8). In the foreword, Gollancz appears to take this statement at face value, arguing that smell is an irrational justification of class-hatred. Do you think that Orwell refers to smell in the restrictive, literal sense? Or is he using it in a broader sense to encapsulate a host of cultural differences between the classes?

Orwell characterizes the Socialist movement as composed largely of 'cranks'—individuals who have extra-political convictions that are ideologically offensive to the working class. He labels as 'cranks' fruit-juice drinkers, nudists, sandal-wearers, sex-maniacs, Quakers, 'Nature Cure' quacks, pacifists, and feminists. Do you think that, since Orwell's time, any of these practices have gained acceptance with the working-class?

In the foreword, Gollancz criticizes Orwell for failing to define Socialism. In fact, Orwell does not present a rigorous definition, but does provide a generalized 'working' definition on p. 171. Given that the book was commissioned for a Socialist audience, do you find Orwell's omission damaging to the text?

Orwell makes extensive references to a whole host of literary and political figures, doubtlessly familiar to his perceived readers—the intelligentsia of the Left Book Club. Many of the figures to whom he refers, however, are today virtually unknown. Do you think that literary references of this sort generally weaken a book's value over time? Why or why not?

The book has a heavy focus on class divisions but does not seriously examine race and gender divisions. Do you think this narrow focus restricts the text's usefulness as an examination of Socialism? Why or why not?

Orwell notes that an average coal miner, working full-time and regularly, would make about £105 per annum. Orwell was paid a £500 advance to write the text. Do you think this fundamental inequity in economics adversely impacts the book's overall credibility? Discuss.