GEORGE ORWELL AS SOCIAL CONSERVATIVE: POPULISM, PESSIMISM, AND NATIONALISM IN AN ORGANIC COMMUNITY, 1934-43

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

James Anthony Bauhs, B.A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1995

This thesis argues that a socially conservative tendency informed much of George Orwell's commentary between 1934 and 1943, and that the same tendency reflected a general European trend. The main sources of this thesis are a large selection of George Orwell's works and a smaller selection of works by Frantz Fanon, José Ortega y Gasset, and Antonio Gramsci. This thesis relies upon Orwell's involvement in the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1937 and his embrace of nationalism in 1940 as major organizational points of reference. This thesis concludes that Orwell's commentary was an example of a general European conservative reaction against Marxist-Leninist thought.
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CHAPTER 1

GEORGE ORWELL AS SOCIAL CONSERVATIVE: POPULISM, PESSIMISM, AND NATIONALISM IN AN ORGANIC COMMUNITY, 1934-43

Any effort to describe the past relies on imperfect generalizations. This thesis is no exception. But it describes the ideas of George Orwell with an awareness of how general descriptions distort reality. By admitting and exploring contradictions, this thesis strives towards the creation of a holistic, rather than merely unified, picture of Orwell's ideas.

George Orwell is a difficult writer to force into any single category. He was a proclaimed leftist by 1937, but he simultaneously offered corrosive criticism of his own political wing.\(^1\) Orwell's ambiguous position on the left can be explained by isolating the conservative strands of his thought and determining how they appeared in his response to the Second World War. Orwell appears as a conservative when his attitude towards social concerns--the beliefs a society should hold in common--receives

examination. At the same time he was an economic radical who wanted to see capitalism overthrown.

The social conservatism in Orwell’s writing facilitates his comparison with other thinkers who, like him, experienced the ideological chaos of the twentieth century. Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon, and José Ortega y Gasset all fall into a common category with Orwell. The similarities uncovered by comparing these intellectuals to Orwell suggest his suitability as an example of a conservative trend flowing through the European ideological environment. This thesis will define and analyze Orwell’s conservatism up to the middle of his writing career and attempt to prove that it reflected a general trend among European intelligentsia of the time.²

George Orwell (1903–1950) espoused the concept of the human community as a body whose cohesiveness depended upon stable, traditional social conventions. This belief gave much of his work a conservative cast. Orwell’s concern for an integrated, organic society consists of two narrower categories: populism and pessimism. He explored both before the Second World War. Both categories together, in turn, provide a philosophical description of his justification for British nationalism when the war began. Orwell’s faith in a

given society's roots, furthermore, finds echoes as far back as Edmund Burke's conservative reaction to the French Revolution.

Orwell expressed his populism with statements of faith in the masses and through attacks against the British leftist leadership. The latter divorced themselves, he argued, from a set of values the British populace and civilized society held. Orwell aimed for the creation of a socialist movement open to popular influence. Leftist intellectuals, without appealing to values with popular acceptance, could only impose socialism barbarously. Only by accepting their society's fundamental values—that is, by accepting the concept of an organic community—could the leftist movement further economic justice and simultaneously preserve the community's basic liberties.

Orwell's pessimism began as frustration with then contemporary social developments and then focused on frustration with socialism. His pessimism conveyed the belief that the vanguard of contemporary social development—the age's spirit—was moving towards disintegration of Britain's organic society. In a conservative mode, he found the only viable replacements by looking into the past. Orwell's understanding of his time's spirit—its zeitgeist—suggested to him that the left had to find, by looking into the past, its proper alignment in relation to the forces dismembering communal values. Orwell believed, however,
that socialism often contributed to the process of dissolution rather than preventing it.

In an effort to help preserve a cohesive British society based on popular values Orwell became a supporter of nationalism, which was to him in some ways a symptom of Europe's sickness. What Orwell saw as options, Soviet totalitarianism or German totalitarianism, were unacceptable. Instead, he fused conservative populist and pessimist positions into a nationalist ideology.

Orwell then applied nationalism to his understanding of political theory in an effort to encourage the creation of a socialist Britain. Orwell's commentaries during the first half of the Second World War reflect a hybrid of radical economic and conservative nationalistic thought. But by 1943 Orwell began to see his hybrid position as untenable.

The concepts of populism, pessimism, and nationalism all have echoes in the writings of European thinkers with experience in facing the totalitarian ideologies of the inter-war period. The writings of José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) are especially appropriate for comparison with Orwell. A conservative bias, albeit in widely varying degrees, appears in all of their writings. Gramsci and Fanon, along with Orwell, belong in some sense on the left. But they all appear as conservatives, along with Ortega,
when compared with the primary manifestation of leftist radicalism in their time: Marxist-Leninist Communism.

Soviet Communism grew philosophically from a Marxist-Leninist belief system hostile to the concept of an organic community. It emphasized the role of an elite minority imposing radical change. It looked upon the popular masses as raw material to be molded rather than a body of opinion to be consulted. Marxist-Leninist thought also provided the intellectual guidance for the success of the Russian Revolution and consequently the Soviet Union. Orwell saw the same model of thought active on the British left.

Fanon and Gramsci varied from the Marxist-Leninist philosophical model by emphasizing the importance of society's collective will over any elite minority. Ortega diverges from that same Marxist-Leninist elitism by arguing that a successful European civilization had to accept the idea that individuals had rights upon which the ruling state apparatus could not trespass. All of their respective conservative attitudes finds a reflection in the writings of George Orwell.

Orwell, born Eric Blair on 25 June 1903, had a childhood of academic distinction. He received scholarships permitting his attendance at schools, including the prestigious Eton, well outside his family's ability to

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afford. After his graduation from Eton in 1921, Orwell became in the next year a functionary of the British Empire in Burma. In doing so he followed in the career path of his father, then a former colonial official in India. By 1927, however, Orwell found the job unbearable, returned to England, and resigned.

Only at that point did Orwell begin a serious literary career. It was not easy. Orwell's initial subject matter, the lives of the poor and destitute, required that he live as they did for periods to write with any authority. The novel *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: 1933) was the result of his initial effort.

Orwell's next novel covered a subject he had deep experience in: life in Burma as a British colonist. He carried strong resentment of the system after leaving Burma and chose to vent it in the book. The novel, *Burmese Days* (New York: 1935), was dark and ended with the protagonist's suicide. The colonial system's politically sensitive nature makes the novel a useful starting point in the historical

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5 Ibid., 13-14, 77, 81, 111, 114.

analysis of Orwell’s work. This study begins with the publication of *Burmese Days* in 1934.

Orwell’s actual writings, the examination of which is necessary to prove the existence of these trends, are available from a variety of sources. *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell* (New York: 1968) are vital repositories. Selective reference to Orwell’s novels completes the picture. *Burmese Days, The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: 1937), and *Coming Up For Air* (London: 1939) provide important sources.

Two biographies flesh out Orwell’s life. Michael Shelden’s *Orwell: The Authorized Biography* (New York: 1991) provides a clear narrative history. Bernard Crick’s *George Orwell: A Life* (Boston: 1980), although also a narrative, presents primary source material for the reader to consider independently. Crick interprets Orwell as a leftist while Shelden generally avoids the interpretation of Orwell’s political tendency. This thesis varies from both books by offering an interpretation of Orwell’s political tendency, unlike Shelden, and primarily focusing on Orwell’s conservatism, unlike Crick.

Among the specific attempts to analyze Orwell’s ideas, Alex Zwerdling’s *Orwell and the Left* (New Haven: 1974) is an outstanding example. He traces the relationship of Orwell’s ideas to the contemporaneous ideological environment. This thesis relies heavily upon it.
The examination of Fanon, Gramsci, and Ortega requires reference to a varied group of sources. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (Paris: 1961) communicates a picture of colonial political and social reality. Ortega's *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: 1932), his most famous work, bears significant relevance to Orwell's ideas. Gramsci, unfortunately, never took an opportunity to write a single all-encompassing work. His ideas appear in journalistic format and in notes composed while imprisoned in Mussolini's Italy. Gramsci's 1926 essay "The Southern Question," however, is a valuable tool for understanding his conceptions.

The organization of this thesis is not entirely linear. The first two major chapters, examining the themes of populism and pessimism, both cover Orwell's writings between 1934 and 1937. Both end in close proximity to Orwell's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, a major watershed in his ideological development. The third major chapter initiates the theme of nationalism and examines Orwell's writings between 1938 and 1940. His adoption of nationalism took place abruptly in 1940 and therefore provides another logical chapter break. The final major chapter concludes Orwell's nationalistic concepts while covering 1940 through 1943. Early in 1943 Orwell's nationalistic faith falters, providing a logical ending point.
A note on methodology is necessary. The point of this thesis is not to argue that it is possible to separate economic and social issues neatly. They are in fact intertwined. Radical economic change would spark radical social change. This thesis argues, rather, that Orwell’s writings indicate that he understood his socio-political environment in a fashion such that a division of his ideas into economic and social categories describes them accurately.
CHAPTER 2


George Orwell’s experience as a colonial police officer in Burma had an extensive influence on his writing in the 1930s. His exposure to Burma, between 1922 and 1927, colored his perceptions long after his service as an imperial official ended.¹ Orwell’s colonial experience left him with a world view best described as populistic.

A leftist train of thought, revolving around the exploitative nature of capitalism, also informs Orwell’s understanding of colonialism. He dilutes his leftist leaning, however, with an emphasis on status and race rather than economic concerns. Capitalism as the organizer of colonial society’s foundation--a typical concern of Marxists--draws some of Orwell’s attention. But the intangible socio-cultural factors of status and race are at least equal concerns.

In fact Orwell’s entire commentary on British politics --colonial and later domestic--maintains a diluted concern with then-orthodox leftist concepts. His populist slant grows from his colonial experience and molds his commentary on British leftist political ferment. As a result Orwell drifts towards an emphasis on how Marxist-Leninist Communism deviates from populism’s values.

Populism pushes him away from accepting Marxist ideology and towards the idea of a popular British community. To accept the idea of populism requires in turn acceptance that the masses are a community: a group that interacts according to a common set of interests and social values. In order to espouse the interests of the common people they must be an identifiable group. The concept of community would later become a centerpiece of Orwell’s world view as the Second World War commenced.

Orwell’s life, between 1934 and 1937, was that of an aspiring writer. Orwell began the year 1934 hoping his usual publisher, Victor Gollancz, would publish his latest novel: *Burmese Days* (New York: 1934). Gollancz, however, balked over the possibility of libel and initially refused to take the risk. Orwell instead had to rely on Harper’s, which published the novel in the United States, after he included some anti-libel modifications in the novel.
Gollancz, after further changes still, eventually changed his mind and published the novel in 1935.\(^2\)


Orwell completed a final book before his departure for Spain’s civil war: *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: 1937). He prepared for it by visiting the economically depressed, industrial regions of northern England. The trip was only possible because of an advance from Victor Gollancz of £500. The advance, although not distributed in a lump sum, still represented a massive improvement in Orwell’s otherwise tenuous financial circumstances.\(^3\)

The book also gained importance because Gollancz published it under the rubric of the Left Book Club, an important voice among British leftists. The club, organized by Gollancz, distributed two books per month cheaply to a membership of around 60,000. The book choices usually

\(^2\) Shelden, *Orwell*, 181-184, 201-202; Some of Orwell’s initial name choices in *Burmese Days* came dangerously close to the names of living individuals. He also changed the occupation of British characters from government officials to private businessmen under pressure from Harper’s.

reflected Communist political opinion.\(^4\) Orwell’s contribution sparked significant protest. Much of *The Road to Wigan Pier* was highly critical of the ideological foundation on which British socialism rested. Gollancz felt compelled enough by the book’s criticism of socialist thought to include a foreword attacking much of its content. Simultaneously, however, it sold more copies than all of Orwell’s previous books combined: 46,000 copies.\(^5\)

Orwell’s life, outside of his immediate literary ambitions, proved to be extensively varied between 1934 and 1937. He began 1934 with a near-fatal case of pneumonia. He began part-time work at a small bookstore in October of the same year. The job would last until early in 1936 when Orwell travelled north to research *The Road to Wigan Pier*. While working at the bookstore he also met his future wife, Eileen O’Shaughnessy, whom he married 9 June 1936. His housing, beginning in spring 1936, was a seventeenth-century bungalow thirty-five miles outside of London with only a bicycle for transportation. Orwell resided there until


deciding to visit Spain and fight for the leftists during that nation's civil war (1936-1939).  

Orwell's writing between 1934 and 1937, according to both Orwell biographers Bernard Crick and Michael Shelden, underwent a fundamental transformation from a literary to a political purpose. The point of change came with the writing of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Orwell's previous books aimed primarily at artistic expression with social commentary as a by-product. *Wigan Pier*, however, was direct political commentary.

Populism unifies, despite any divisions based on purpose, much of Orwell's early writing. He shows an interest in the common people and a tendency to measure others in terms of the common people's values and concerns. Orwell exhibits a corollary of populism: a distrust of political and intellectual leadership from classes outside the proletariat. This theme of distrust defines Orwell's populism as a concept at odds with Marxist-Leninist thought. Marxist-Leninism relies on direction from a small body of educated revolutionaries rather than a grass-roots foundation characteristic of populism.

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7 Ibid., 218; Crick, *George Orwell*, 180.
Orwell's writings on the British colonial system, most importantly *Burmese Days*, provide an important, if indirect, vehicle for his populist focus. Orwell, from a foundation of populism, criticizes the entire colonial system. His populist commentary on the British colonial system also opens links to other observers of colonial reality. The observations of Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), mainly in *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: 1963), clearly parallel Orwell with a stress on populism and a hostile dissection of the colonial system. Both men derive direction from the common masses while attempting to formulate valid social theories.

Fanon's life most approximates Orwell's in terms of its bourgeois beginnings and its variety. He was born and educated on the French island colony of Martinique to a middle-class family. In 1943 he left Martinique to fight Fascism under Charles de Gaulle's French Army in North Africa. In 1945 Fanon received the *Croix de guerre* and then left the military in 1946. In 1947 Fanon resumed his education, but in France, where he eventually completed a degree in psychiatry. In 1953 he initiated an active medical practice in Algeria, then a French possession, and shortly thereafter began covertly working with the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), a militant Algerian independence group. By 1957 the aims of the FLN completely replaced
Fanon's professional life with a vocation of revolutionary activism.8

Fanon's commitment to a world view resting on a populist power base was among the clearest elements of his analysis. Irene L. Grendzier indicates Fanon's populist arguments warrant comparison with Maoist Communist doctrine and its emphasis on the popular masses.9 The peasant class is, in Fanon's opinion, the primary source of power for any movement attempting to win independence for a colony. Their approach to the question of liberation is usefully aggressive, direct, and violent.10 The peasantry also maintains an effective tradition of resistance dating from the period of initial European conquest: "The memory . . . is very much alive in the villages, where women still croon in their children's ears songs to which the warriors marched when they went out to fight the conquerors."11 Another example of Fanon's emphasis on the common masses resides in

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11 Ibid., 114.
his faith in the desperate urban poor: "It is within this mass of humanity . . . that the rebellion will find its urban spearhead. . . . [It] constitutes one of the most spontaneous and the most radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people." 12

Fanon uses his faith in the peasantry and urban poor to specifically criticize the role of the bourgeoisie political leadership in colonial society as largely counter-revolutionary. At the root of the middle class's counter-revolutionary tendency is social and economic alienation separating themselves, a relatively tiny percentage of the entire population, from the peasant masses. European colonial administrations work to maintain their control by promoting the division between the peasants and the bourgeois. 13 When the peasants react violently to their subjugation within the colonial system, the bourgeois nationalists fail to actively support or direct the uprising. "The nationalist parties make no use at all of the opportunity . . . to integrate the people of the countryside, to educate them politically." 14 A more likely fate for bourgeois political organizations, according to

12 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 129.

13 Ibid., 108-110.

14 Ibid., 116-117.
Fanon, is a collusive relationship with the European colonizers.\textsuperscript{15}

A smaller and still truly revolutionary element among the bourgeoisie, meanwhile, retreats from the middle-class moderates already co-opted by European colonial officials.\textsuperscript{16} An alliance with the peasants results. The opportunity for revolutionary change develops as result of a political union between the two groups: "the meeting between these militants . . . and these mettlesome masses of people [the peasants], who are rebels by instinct, can produce an explosive mixture of unusual potentiality."\textsuperscript{17} Fanon notes, furthermore, that the militants do not assume a dominant role but rather work in a complimentary fashion with the peasants: "[The militants] open classes for the people in military and political education. . . . but in fact the classes do not last long, for the masses . . . push their leaders on."\textsuperscript{18}

Fanon's faith in the masses as the driving force of revolution puts him directly at odds with Marxist-Leninism.

\textsuperscript{15} Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, 124-125.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 125-126.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 127.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
The militants of Fanon’s model are not the essential factor but only a complement. Marxist-Leninism reverses the order of importance to place the militant minority first in priority.

Orwell’s *Burmese Days*, a novel set in Burma under British colonial administration, parallels Fanon’s suspicious analysis of the native bourgeois. Anything he associates with formal colonial political leadership and overt nationalistic goals in the novel is a source of contempt. His depiction of an Burmese nationalist newspaper includes a derisive description: "It was a miserable eight-page rag, villainously printed on paper as bad as blotting paper, and composed partly of news stolen from the Rangoon Gazette, partly of weak Nationalistic heroics." The only rebellion in the novel, furthermore, which Orwell gives an overtly nationalistic goal is a farce organized by the novel’s antagonist, the native Burmese colonial official U Po Kyin, to improve his own standing among the Europeans. U Po Kyin describes his goals in fomenting rebellion against the British concisely: "I am raising this rebellion merely in order to crush it. . . . U Po Kyin, the man who quelled

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a most dangerous rising in the nick of time! I shall be the hero of the district."

U Po Kyin's plot, however, sparks a chain of events within the novel which suggests Orwell believes that the common people are, as Fanon argues, the dynamic social class. U Po Kyin's event results in the unnecessary shooting death of a Burmese rebel by a British official, Maxwell, who is in turn murdered by the rebel's relatives. Another character, Ellis, through his own violent and racially bigoted behavior then provokes a mob of Burmese to riot and attempt, unsuccessfully, to murder him, too. The rioters, despite their eventual failure, overwhelm the local colonial police force as they attempt to carry out their vendetta.

The class origin of various native leaders, highlighted by the riot, points to Orwell's populist emphasis. The riot's ringleader is a character only described briefly: "He was a strong debonair fellow of about thirty, with down-curving moustaches, wearing a singlet,

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20 Orwell, Burmese Days, 126.

21 Ibid., 204-205, 216-217.

22 Ibid., 221-228, 230-231.
with his longyi kilted to the knee."\textsuperscript{23} Orwell provides no further information about the character but instead has him disappear back into the crowd. Two characters native to a colonial holding, in contrast, which Orwell develops fully are hostile to the mob's aims: the previously mentioned U Po Kyin, and Dr. Veraswami, an Indian physician loyal to the British.\textsuperscript{24} Both are outside the lower class.

Orwell gives both U Po Kyin and Dr. Veraswami descriptions which have in common their acceptance of values defined by the colonial system and a rejection of their native heritage. The driving plot of \textit{Burmese Days} centers on a covert battle for prestige between the two characters. The prize in the battle is membership in a European, segregated social club which is being forced to accept non-white membership by the colonial Government.

Orwell describes the social significance of membership in the club for U Po Kyin poignantly:

\begin{quote}
It is a real triumph . . . for an official of the lower ranks to worm his way into the European Club . . . . that remote, mysterious temple, that holy of hollies far harder of entry than Nirvana! Po Kyin, the naked gutter-boy of Mandalay, the thieving clerk and obscure official, would enter that sacred place, call Europeans
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{23} Orwell, \textit{Burmese Days}, 225.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 232-236.
\end{footnotes}
'old chap', drink whiskey and soda and knock white balls to and fro on the green table!\textsuperscript{25}

One of U Po Kyin's traits, furthermore, which Orwell reveals early in the novel is a Eurocentric ethic forged as a child: "In his childish way he had grasped that his people were no match for this race of giants. To fight on the side of the British, to become a parasite on them, had been his ruling ambition."\textsuperscript{26}

Dr. Veraswami's rationale for membership similarly reveals an acceptance of association with the European as an ultimate goal. As he explains to the novel's protagonist, the European John Flory: "'And you do not know what prestige it gives to an Indian to be a member of the European Club. In the Club he practically iss [sic] a European. No calumny can touch him. A Club member iss sacrosanct.'"\textsuperscript{27} The Doctor, beyond the question of prestige, has little respect for his own culture's achievements: "'consider the great administrators who have made British India it iss. Consider Clive, Warren Hastings . . . . I quote your immortal

\textsuperscript{25} Orwell, \textit{Burmese Days}, 129.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 1-2.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 40.
Shakespeare--ass [sic], take them for all in all, we shall not look upon their like again.

Fanon describes behavior among native bourgeois political leaders parallel with Orwell's two characters. Fanon's criticisms group the individuals symbolized by both Dr. Veraswami and U Po Kyin under the label 'intellectual.' Fanon argues, reminiscent of the Shakespeare-quoting doctor, that the native intellectual accepts indoctrination favorable to the invader's culture. Europeans "had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonized intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal . . . : the essential qualities of the West, of course." Fanon describes the colonial world's U Po Kyins, the ambitious indigenous colonial politicians, also: "The native intellectual has clothed his aggressiveness in his barely veiled desire to assimilate himself to the colonial world. He has used his aggressiveness to serve his own individual interest."

Orwell's image of educated natives, Indian or Burmese, as champions of European interests derives from observations he made before the writing of Burmese Days. He displays an

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28 Orwell, Burmese Days, 32.

29 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 46.

30 Ibid., 50.
awareness, shortly after his resignation from the Imperial police, that British policy was "peace with the certain co-operation of the educated, or semi-educated, classes, from whom there might have been the risk of revolutionary leaders emerging." The friendly position of the educated non-white in British colonies reflects a policy of co-option by colonial officials.

The model of a native bourgeois leadership suggested by Fanon and Orwell, predicting collusion with the European occupiers and alienation from the native masses, receives further reinforcement from Burma's political situation in the 1920s and 1930s. Burma fell under the jurisdiction of two successive constitutions during the inter-war years which, although maintaining British control, allowed for considerable Burmese participation. Burmese politicians, however, proved incapable of challenging European interests.

The Burmese representatives working under both constitutions suffered from two fundamental flaws: their lack of popular support, especially from rural areas; and their vulnerability to internal conflicts over patronage.

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High salaries for government ministers exacerbated the internal disputes over electoral spoils. Roughly 17% of Burmese voters participated in 1925's contested elections, while roughly 19% appeared in 1928's, figures that indicate significant popular disinterest in politics. The number of lucrative positions within the Government, with their corresponding plague of Machiavellian patronage arrangements, increased in the second (1937) constitution. The general result of these factors was a majority Burmese nationalist party unable to translate its strength into meaningful change. British control of the government, with the help of minority representation, remained a de facto reality but provoked Burmese frustration.33

The Burmese populace, while the government failed to move, further confirmed the observations of Fanon and Orwell on popular radicalism. The end of 1930 saw a rebellion on a scale comparable with those dating from Burma's initial colonization. The uprising targeted European interests rather than any of several non-white minority populations in Burma with national liberation as a goal. The reaction of educated Burmese to the rebellion, although sympathetic,

mainly reflected an unwillingness to pursue a radical course. The uprising was, rather, a popular movement.  

Orwell’s sympathy for the masses appears in *Burmese Days* through the protagonist’s (John Flory) enthusiasm for Burmese culture. Orwell uses a description of a local bazaar to reveal the character’s lack of ethnocentrism. Orwell illustrates his protagonist’s attitude largely through the prejudiced, contrasting attitude of Flory’s love interest, Elizabeth. She reacts to the Burmese culture with unqualified bigotry.  

The expedition ends in disaster as Flory makes a plea that his more narrow companion shows tolerance: ‘But honestly, you oughtn’t to mind that sort of thing . . . These people’s whole outlook is so different from ours . . . One has to adjust oneself.”

Throughout *Burmese Days* Orwell reserves positive affirmation for an amorphous group, the Burmese people. Native characters, often intellectuals, tainted by European values, were debased in one fashion or another. Nationalism, in the hands of U Po Kyin, was only a manifestation of that taint.


36 Ibid., 119.
Orwell and Fanon also indicate that the native intellectual's embrace of European values mirrors the whole disposition of native society. The acceptance of things European necessitate the rejection of the native culture. The rejection of native culture in a colony was a general phenomenon. A corresponding insecurity results for all non-whites. Orwell elaborates the theme of insecurity even further by noting its presence among the white colonists.

Both writers emphasize socio-cultural analysis at least as much as economic—and therefore leftist—analysis. Fanon specifically contradicts Marxist theory and states that socio-cultural factors—specifically race relations—rather than economics form the colonial environment. Orwell gives status and race at least equal time in comparison with economic factors, weakening his potential connection with leftist ideology.

Fanon comments directly on the situation early in his career. In his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) he states "Every colonized people . . . [is a] people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality."37 The cause of the

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native's feelings of inferiority is a direct result of European colonial domination.\textsuperscript{38}

Orwell supports Fanon's theory of general race insecurity by manifesting it in a character in Burmese Days which had no political standing: Ma Hla May, the protagonist's Burmese mistress. Her eventual dismissal creates an opportunity for Orwell to open a window into her psyche, and through her into the colonial psyche: "'How can I go back, to be jeered at and pointed at by those low, stupid peasants whom I despise? I who have been a bo-kadaw, a white man's wife. . . . what shame!'"\textsuperscript{39} Here again Orwell creates a character, like the native intellectuals, alienated from the indigenous population and tied to European values in a web of status.

The status of the foreign, white individual within the colonial environment is a subject Fanon touched on but did not discuss extensively.\textsuperscript{40} He suggests, however, that the enforcers of the colonial system suffer significant damage even as they work to subjugate the native population. Fanon includes two profiles of European colonial police officials in The Wretched of the Earth, noting how they

\textsuperscript{38} Fanon, Black Skin, 92-93.

\textsuperscript{39} Orwell, Burmese Days, 139.

\textsuperscript{40} Hansen, frantz fanon, 77.
psychologically disintegrate under the strain of interrogating, brutally, Algerian nationalists. The process of maintaining European dominance in colonies required a degree of violence dangerous to the mental health of the enforcer and the general health of the victim. The implied argument that colonial society is a double-edged sword, cutting native and European populations alike, establishes ground for a further parallel with Orwell.

The condition of the European characters in *Burmese Days* follows Fanon's hint. Orwell describes in detail how the British in Burma suffer from self-destructive behavior, different from the native's cultural abasement, but of at least equal destructiveness. *Burmese Days* displays alcoholism and racism as important pillars of European colonial society. One of the novel's strongest points develops through its capacity to suggest a general climate of degradation for both the European and the subject population of Burma.

Orwell's contribution to the second number of *New Writing* in Autumn 1936, the first person essay "Shooting an Elephant," further details the difficult social environment

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41 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 264-270.


of European colonial society.⁴⁴ The significance of a white colonial official's code of conduct in the essay suggests a society as dedicated to intangible status as U Po Kyin's, Dr. Veraswami's, and Ma Hla May's. The essay's narrator explains that a facade of superiority, with a correspondingly narrow window of acceptable behavior, destroys the freedom whites appear to have in the colonial environment. "It is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life trying to impress the 'natives' and so in every crisis he has got to do what the 'natives' expect of him."⁴⁵ Any deviation from the code, however justifiable, risks making a mockery of European rule. Orwell's narrator describes the entire process of colonial administration as "one long struggle not to be laughed at."⁴⁶

Orwell suggests that an obsession with social status provided a common snare for native and European society. The Europeans establish a social environment while extinguishing indigenous culture. The native population's social system, in response, is warped by a Eurocentric value

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⁴⁵ Ibid., 239.

⁴⁶ Ibid.
structure in accordance with Fanon's observations on native intellectuals and colonial society as a whole. Europeans, having meanwhile established images of dominance, consequently never escape from the constant pressure created by their own success. Colonialism creates a social environment inclusive of both native and European where the effort to maintain the system degrades everyone.

Fanon's concern with the colonial social environment connects with his direct questioning of orthodox Marxism. Fanon specifically questioned the Marxist belief that economic factors are the sole formative engine of colonial societies.

When you examine . . . the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched.47

Orwell also weighs the comparative significance of socio-cultural and economic factors in Burmese Days and like Fanon brings a solely economic interpretation of society into question. Orwell describes colonialism as an equally balanced social system. Orwell weighs the economic exploitation of Burma together with its diseased socio-cultural climate.

47 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 40.
The protagonist of *Burmese Days* offers an unambiguous attack on the colonial economic system. "How can you make out that we are in this country for any purpose except to steal?"48 The same character, when asked about the British's civilizing influence on Burma reaffirms the reality of economic exploitation: [I]t's only a grab on a larger scale. We would chuck it quickly enough if it didn't pay."49

Orwell's protagonist also notes that socio-cultural issues are the other half of the European colonist's dilemma. Just as Fanon emphasizes race relations Orwell suggests that the social climate of the colonial system is a problem apart from economics. Orwell's awareness of racism has been made clear already. He also reveals the British colonist's unrealistic wish to believe they are not exploiters. "It's at the bottom of half our beastliness to the natives. We Anglo-Indians could be almost bearable if we'd only admit that we're thieves."50 The effort to maintain an illusion of benevolence, Orwell suggests, contributes to a bankrupt social order he portrays completely in *Burmese Days* and in "Shooting an Elephant."


49 Ibid., 36.

50 Ibid., 33.
The completely populist and diluted economic interpretations drawn from his colonial experience grounds Orwell’s first direct step into domestic political criticism, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. In the book he examines the difficult economic circumstances of British coal miners and in doing so pays homage to the socialist establishment’s emphasis on economics. He also voices a populist faith directly by lionizing the common laborer.

The book’s leftist and populist themes conflict in a manner suggesting Orwell is more populist than leftist. Large portions of the book attack the British middle-class leftist leadership of the 1930s in the tenor of Fanon’s attack on native political and intellectual leaders: their alienation from the masses. Orwell translates his suspicion of intellectuals in the tropics to Britain and in turn finds it impossible to embrace orthodox Marxist-Leninist socialism with its support of rule by an elite body.

Britain, in the 1930s, underwent an economic transition especially important to the subjects covered in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Old industries, dedicated to the creation of goods for export, gave way to the new with an emphasis on domestic consumption. Coal mining and ship building, as a result, lost ground in terms of both production and work force size. Automotive and electrical appliance production,
meanwhile, gained ground, and service industries expanded.\textsuperscript{51}

Orwell focuses on the economic plight of the coal miner, a group abandoned by the drift of a blind capitalist system, in the first of the book's two parts. Socialist thinkers met it with accord. The second part's controversial attack on leftist ideology provoked, in contrast, loud protest.\textsuperscript{52} Gollancz, speaking for the Left Book Club, attacks the second part in his introduction. He accepts only the first part: "We cannot imagine anything more likely to rouse the 'unconverted' from their apathy than a reading of this part."\textsuperscript{53}

Orwell reveals his populist bent in \textit{Wigan Pier} in part through his analysis of the coal miner's world, both at work and at home. The coal miner carries out effectively, Orwell makes clear, an essential and difficult economic activity in Britain: "all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground . . . driving their

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\textsuperscript{51} Taylor, \textit{English History}, 304-305.
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\textsuperscript{52} Shelden, \textit{Orwell}, 230.
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shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel."  

His commentary is not entirely romantic excess. Coal mining, despite its decline, was still a productive industrial mainstay in the 1930s.\(^\text{55}\) The domestic life of the mine worker also, in Orwell's opinion, has much to recommend it: "a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so easy to find elsewhere . . . His home life seems to fall more naturally into a sane and comely shape."\(^\text{56}\)

*The Road to Wigan Pier*’s second half in part attacks a group playing a major role in British politics for the first time in the 1930s: middle-class intellectuals. The Labor party, beginning early in the decade, moved towards a pronounced leftist stance. New activists, middle-class intellectuals, provided the leadership for the change. They looked to the Soviet Union’s apparent success, although few claimed Communist party membership, as a model for economic change in the face of capitalism’s apparent collapse with the Great Depression.\(^\text{57}\)


\(^{55}\) Taylor, *English History*, 305.

\(^{56}\) Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 117.

\(^{57}\) Taylor, *English History*, 346-348.
Socialism for Orwell, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, is a movement threatening to collapse under the pressure of Fascism.  

He attempts a detailed analysis of Socialism’s failure and concludes the movement’s failure to adopt a value system in common with the working-class contributes to Fascism’s advance. Orwell’s claim implies that a wider working-class community with a identifiable set of accepted values exists. Only then can he level the populistic claim that the leftist leadership is alienated from the masses.

Orwell attacks Socialist intellectuals on the individual level claiming that they adhered to a code of beliefs intrinsically estranged from the mainstream British community. On the most general level, he attacks British Socialists for, in his opinion, eccentric personal behavior: “The mere word ‘Socialism’ . . . draw[s] . . . every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, ‘Nature Cure’ quack, pacifist and feminist.”  

Orwell argues on the grounds that “This kind of thing is by itself sufficient to alienate plenty of decent people.”  

Such a

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59 Ibid., 174.

60 Ibid.
person is not part of the wider community; "out of touch with common humanity."\(^{51}\)

Orwell specifically attacks British Marxist intellectuals by questioning their motivation. He states that tyranny, rather than the advancement of the working class, is often the Marxist's objective:

> Sometimes I look at a Socialist--the intellectual, tract-writing type of Socialist . . . . and wonder what the devil his motive really is. It is often difficult to believe that it is a love of anybody, especially of the working class, from whom he is of all people the furthest removed. . . . Poverty and, what is more, the habits of mind created by poverty, are something to be abolished from above, by violence if necessary; perhaps even preferably by violence. Hence his [the Marxist's] worship of 'great' men and his appetite for dictatorships, Fascist or Communist.\(^{62}\)

The Marxist's alienation from the working man establishes, in Orwell's opinion, their potential to become the enemy of the masses. Their support of the idea that authority should be imposed 'from above' puts them in conflict with Orwell's populism. Orwell's belief in the existence of a lower class community with homogeneous 'habits of mind'--or values--also is clear. Note that here, and generally, Orwell uses the term 'Marxist' to refer to the Marxist-Leninist ideology associated with the Soviet Union. Pure Marxism is a less common topic of his attacks.

\(^{51}\) Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 175.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 179.
The socialist who remains a member of the working class community, in contrast to the Marxist, maintains a fundamentally constructive ideological position. "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." Orwell echoes his own analysis of working-class socialist values while proposing a new direction for the British left. "The only thing for which we can combine is the underlying ideal of Socialism; justice and liberty. . . . Justice and liberty! Those are the words that have got to ring like a bugle." Orwell, after offering a blueprint for Fascism's ideological defeat in The Road to Wigan Pier, departed for Spain and attempted to contribute to Fascism's material defeat. Much of his important writing up to his departure—on both colonial and domestic topics—revolves around a populist world view. Orwell states his position in part by attacking those he saw as alienated from their larger communities: political and intellectual leaders of British or colonial origin.

63 Orwell, Wigan Pier, 176.

64 Ibid., 216.
His rejection of the dominant leftist theory of his time, a Marxist-Leninism friendly to rule by elites apart from the larger community, logically follows. But as Orwell's interest in both socio-cultural and economic issues in the colonial context demonstrates, he never was firmly attached to any formal leftist ideology. His refusal, along with Frantz Fanon's, to consistently follow leftist doctrine sets a foundation for their common classification as at least partial conservatives. The following chapter will define Orwell's conservatism with greater clarity.
CHAPTER 3

PESSIMISM AND CIVIL WAR: ORWELL AND
THE SEARCH FOR STANDARDS,
1934-37 REVISITED

At the same time that George Orwell moved towards the role of a political commentator, he also betrayed a pessimistic understanding of British society's general direction. Repeatedly he notes the erosion of stable social standards and their failed contemporary replacements. His emphasis on what society had relied upon for stability, rather than an emphasis on what new forms need to be created, betrays a socially conservative cast.

Orwell's pessimism about the currents pushing society became, in 1936, his pessimism about the direction of socialism. His commentary in *The Road to Wigan Pier* is good evidence for a strongly critical examination of the Marxist influence on socialism. Orwell's harrowing experience in the Spanish Civil War intensified his pessimism even more in 1937. By 1937 Orwell became, as a result of his critical stance, an ideological enemy of leftists who identified with the Marxist-Leninist dynamic of revolutionary elitists imposing change from above without regard for individual rights.
Alex Zwerdling wrote, in *Orwell and the Left* (New Haven: 1974), on Orwell's pessimism as a threat to his commitment to socialism. He examines Orwell's pessimism in terms of an evolutionary growth beginning with relative optimism over the possibility of a socialist society in 1937. By the end of the Second World War, pessimism, however, choked Orwell's hopes for achieving a socialist society. Orwell's conservative tendency, as Zwerdling interprets it, was a byproduct of his developing pessimism.1

A different interpretation of Orwell's pessimistic tendency is possible. Zwerdling adopts Orwell's faith in socialism, expressed during and after his return from the Spanish Civil War in 1937, as a theoretical foundation. Instead Orwell's conservatism can be used as a foundation. Before 1937 his conservatism can be considered a quality intrinsic to his mind and not, as Zwerdling suggests, a reflection of any developing pessimism after 1937. Given a new foundation, Orwell's pessimistic attitude towards the left, and specifically towards Marxist-Leninist thought, appears to grow from his conservative strain and was not the product of setbacks to the development of socialism.

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Orwell's conservatism is a narrowly social phenomenon. His experience in Spain inspired in him a radical drive to see the capitalist economic system replaced by a socialistic one. His social concepts, however, constantly draw from the stable traditions--standards--of the past. Social criticism, not economic criticism, is the raw material of Orwell's conservatism.

Orwell's emphasis on communal standards, and his fears of their collapse, bears a strong resemblance to many of the central ideas in José Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: 1932). Both men had deep fears for the direction of European society. Both center their arguments around the idea that valuable elements of the past's social structure were either falling into disuse or lacking valid replacements. Both, finally, reacted against the tendency of Marxist-Leninist ideology to encourage repression.

José Ortega y Gasset was born on 9 May 1883, the second of four children, in Spain. Ortega grew up in a turbulent Spain trying to recover from a decline violently manifested by a loss of her colonies to the United States in 1898. His father interjected a modern--relative to Spain--liberal influence into Ortega's childhood development. His mother, meanwhile, balanced his father's liberal ideas with an
influence friendly to Spanish Catholic religious traditions.²

Ortega had an extensive education, first in Spain and then in Germany. He was an outstanding student. Ortega managed to publish a newspaper article, at the age of nineteen, in 1902. He left for Germany in 1905 and received a firm grounding in philosophy. Upon returning to Spain early in 1908 he began a career in journalism and publishing.³

Ortega's work was scattered and distinguished. The newspaper El Sol reflected his ideological views and carried many of his essays. It was noted for its insight and fairness. Ortega also published the monthly review Revista de Occidente, a journal aimed at presenting the latest ideas in Europe. He also lectured to large crowds on a visit in 1928 to both Argentina and Chile. The following year saw Ortega contribute significantly to protests against Spain's dictatorial monarchy. In 1929 and 1930 The Revolt of the Masses also first appeared in print, in parts, as articles in El Sol. It is his most noteworthy book.⁴

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³ Ibid., 18-22.

⁴ Ibid., 24-30, 106.
Before the fall of the monarchy in April, 1931, Ortega had expressed support for a new republican form of government in Spain. His wishes came true in 1931 as Spain made the Republic a reality. The people elected him to a post in Spain’s new representative body in July, 1931. He found participation in government frustrating, however, and withdrew from politics completely in 1932. He retreated to the writing of theoretical essays and teaching until forced to France in 1936 by the chaos of the Spanish Civil War. Ortega had difficulty finding an environment conducive to intellectual productivity after the Spanish Civil War. Years of disenchantment preceded his death in 1955.5

Vital to the argument in *The Revolt of the Masses* is a conservative reverence for the past. Ortega argues that nineteenth century European innovations created an environment in twentieth century Europe of unequaled prosperity. Two fundamental concepts made the act of creation possible: liberal democracy and technical expertise. Only by continuing to maintain a foundation in the concepts of liberal democracy and technical expertise could European society advance. To ignore these concepts invited disaster. The means by which Europe’s twentieth century prosperity developed, however, also created a type

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of human being—the aggressive mass man—which threatened to destroy all that went before.\textsuperscript{6}

The first sin of the mass man, Ortega states, is complacency. "As they do not see, behind the benefits of civilization . . . they imagine that their role is limited to demanding these benefits peremptorily, as if they were natural rights."\textsuperscript{7} Ortega contrasts the mass man's self-satisfaction with a noble class defined by the possession of a drive to persistently set goals and overcome them: "nobility is synonymous with a life of effort, ever set on excelling oneself, in passing beyond what one is to what one sets up as a duty and an obligation."\textsuperscript{8}

Ideally, for Ortega, those capable of nobility would lead the masses. The nineteenth century, however, left the mass man in a position powerful enough to permit his collective refusal of any external direction.\textsuperscript{9} Ortega states further that the mass man was incapable of following any external direction: "their soul is wrought of hermeticism and indocility; they are from birth deficient in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{6} José Ortega y Gasset, \textit{The Revolt of the Masses} (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1932), 52-53.
  \item \textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 65.
  \item \textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 66-67.
\end{itemize}
the faculty of giving attention to what is outside themselves, be it fact or person."\(^{10}\)

The ability to look outside one's self, the capacity to appeal to standards, Ortega believed, made civilization possible. Without standards barbarism was the only reality:

There is no culture where there are no principles of legality to which to appeal . . . where there is no acceptance of certain final intellectual positions to which a dispute may be referred . . . where economic relations are not subject to a regulating principle to protect interests involved . . . where aesthetic controversy does not recognize the necessity of justifying the work of art. Where all these things are lacking there is no culture; there is in the strictest sense of the word, barbarism . . . Properly speaking there are no barbarian standards. Barbarism is the absence of standards to which appeal can be made.\(^{11}\)

Standards, upon their creation, immediately become a conservative social force because they are constant points of reference for constantly changing behavior. Standards mark an important point of connection, additionally, with Orwell's world view.

Orwell's pre-Spanish Civil War concern with social standards manifested itself in a variety of fashions. An early example appeared in the form of a book review

\(^{10}\) Ortega, *The Revolt of the Masses*, 67.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 72.
Orwell began with a disturbing sentence which foreshadows the review’s concerns with lost standards: “Modern man is rather like a bisected wasp which goes on sucking jam and pretends that the loss of its abdomen does not matter.”

The wasp’s abdomen is Orwell’s metaphor for a system of religious belief which he believed no longer existed. The loss of the religious standard, even if it was itself dark, made the world a darker place. The ugliness of basic functions like birth and sex became all the more intense when, with the loss of religion, physical death became eternal death. Orwell believed that British society compensated the loss of religion with cheerful illusions: "it is a different matter to admit that life is full of misery when you believe that the grave really finishes you. It is easier to comfort yourself with some kind of optimistic lie.”

Orwell did not support any organized religion. He felt that organized religion contributes to society by giving the

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13 Ibid., 154.

14 Ibid., 155.
community a standard for behavior, and in turn, giving life meaning. Orwell is not a conservative in the sense that he wants a religious revival. His conservatism is clear in that he judges his contemporary society's efforts to replace the social standard contributed by religion pessimistically.

The solution Orwell offers in his New English Weekly review for the loss of traditional religious beliefs echoes Ortega's definition of nobility. Orwell applauds the book which he reviewed, Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer (Paris: 1936), because it pushes the reader to confront contemporary society's cheerful illusions. The book encourages the idea of an individual with an awareness of external reality and the drive to transcend it: "[The author expresses] enthusiasm with the process of life. What he seems to be saying is that if one stiffens oneself with the contemplation of ugliness, one ends by finding life . . . worth living."¹⁵ Ortega's understanding of nobility reflects a similar process of engaging the outside world and transcending it. Social standards, furthermore, guided Ortega's process of engagement. Orwell's similar emphasis on a process of engagement and social standards suggests an outlook similar to Ortega's.

Orwell displays an ability to express a reverence for traditional standards even when they conflicted with his

beliefs. An essay on the writings of Rudyard Kipling, published 23 January 1936, simultaneously presents his positive and negative tendencies. Orwell wrote of Kipling's supportive attitude towards British imperialism with regret.\textsuperscript{16} Time did not change his already established hatred of the colonial system. Orwell values the writings of Kipling, however, as a presence which gave order to the world of the British middle class: "He was a sort of household god with whom one grew up and whom one took for granted whether one liked him or whether one did not."\textsuperscript{17} Orwell, while admitting Kipling's lack of literary polish, also praises the formal quality of his writings while attacking contemporary prose: "in the less obvious qualities of construction and economy he is supreme. It is, after all (see the \textit{Times Literary Supplement}), much easier to write inoffensive prose than to tell a good story."\textsuperscript{18} Orwell sees Kipling as a valuable, if not perfect, standard for a needful contemporary Britain.

Communities on the scale of western civilization had, according to Orwell, valuable defining standards. Orwell

\textsuperscript{16} Orwell, "[On Kipling's Death]," \textit{The Collected Essays}, 1:159-160.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 159.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
briefly reveals his attitude, in an review published 23 January 1936, through his understanding of humor. For my own part I don’t object to old jokes—indeed, I reverence them. When sea-sickness and adultery have ceased to be funny, western civilization will have ceased to exist."20

The issue of western civilization’s standards appears again in Orwell’s review of Cyril Connolly’s (1903-1974) novel The Rock Pool (Paris: 1936) published on 23 July 1936.21 Here again Orwell defends a set of traditional community values. He finds the novel’s subject, a band of avant-garde British artists hostile to the west’s value system, unacceptable. "Connolly rather admires the disgusting beasts he depicts . . . he even compares them, in their ceaseless war against decency, to heroic savage tribes struggling against western civilization."22 Again Orwell assaults the cutting edge of contemporary social developments in the name of tradition.

The entire review should be understood as Orwell’s call to confront the empty quality of modern existence and his

19 Orwell, "Review," The Collected Essays, 1:162.

20 Ibid., 161.


22 Ibid., 226.
own pessimism. Orwell declares, "[M]odern mechanized life becomes dreary if you let it."  Three unacceptably escapist responses, furthermore, characterized common reactions to the contemporary world. One could adopt religion, materialism, or, like Connolly's artists, socially corrosive nihilism as a standard. Orwell affirms, however, a fourth path allowing for a satisfying individual existence without simultaneously compromising socially acceptable ethics: "it is possible to be a normal decent person and yet to be fully alive."  He also, just as in his review of Tropic of Cancer, finds engagement with reality an important part of a meaningful existence: "the essential evil is to think in terms of escape."  

Orwell's clearest call for viable standards appears in relation to the literary world at large and first appeared in the New English Weekly of 12 and 19 November, 1936.  Here again he also makes his frustration with contemporary society clear. Orwell felt the entire critical mechanism responsible for judging novels--publishers and reviewers--

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
threatened to destroy the novelistic art form: "the novel is being shouted out of existence . . . . [R]eviewing has sunk to its present position because every reviewer has some publisher . . . twisting his tail by proxy."\(^{27}\) The reviewing process had become a prisoner to the publishing industry's economic requirements, and in turn, debased to the point of malignancy. No objective standard existed, to the entire industry's harm, to help the public differentiate good novels from bad.\(^{28}\)

Orwell's solution is a simple return to objective standards. "The essential need is a paper that would keep abreast of current fiction and yet refuse to sink its standards."\(^{29}\) After a lengthy attack on the economic motives of the publishing industry, he did not offer any proposal to change any fundamental aspects of the system. Instead, Orwell maintains an insistence on objectivity as a solution, despite economic difficulty. "It would have to be an obscure paper, for the publishers would not advertise in

\(^{27}\) Orwell, "In Defense of the Novel," The Collected Essays, 1:250-251.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 252-253.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 254.
Orwell's antagonism to capitalism appeared later in *The Road to Wigan Pier* and especially after the Spanish Civil War.

In the *New English Weekly* of 31 December 1936 Orwell published a review which unifies a concern with standards and an interest in British leftist politics. Orwell stated that contemporary standards for all art were collapsing. The aesthetic standards of the previous decade declared art intrinsically worthwhile ('art for art's sake') with a vaguely defined concept of the beautiful as a goal. Political or religious questions should play no proper part in an aesthetic judgment. The Communist Party was part of a trend, however, displacing the old standard with overt political considerations.

Orwell attacks contemporary aesthetic judgment's transitional quality. Critics on the left and right suddenly concerned with art's propagandistic value relied on 'art for art's sake' rhetoric to attack anything they found politically offensive. "Hence the frightful intellectual dishonesty which can be observed . . . . They are employing

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32 Ibid., 257.
a double set of standards and dodging from one to the other according as it suits them."\(^{33}\)

The disingenuous application of standards by the left and right led Orwell to warn that the differences between the two political wings was blurring. He argues that the Communist Party's orthodox Marxist ideology especially undermined the entire struggle against the far right by mirroring their tactics. "For what is it but the most ordinary chauvinism turned upside down? It simply gives you the feeling that the Communist is no better than his opposite number."\(^{34}\)

Orwell, in addition to a general concern for standards, expresses a more specific point of agreement with Ortega. Both view the phenomenon of technological advances in contemporary Europe pessimistically. The proponents of technology, according to both men, exhibited a dangerously narrow world view. Orwell found his distrust of technology linked with his analysis of socialism and specifically socialism's Marxist wing. Ortega focused on the danger of intellectual specialization, required of scientists, to the composition of the European community's guiding ideas. Both

\(^{33}\) Orwell, "Review," The Collected Essays, 1:257.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 258.
feared the ramifications of accepting direction from a culturally alienated faction, either Marxist or scientific.

Ortega's and Orwell's concern with alienation fails to parallel completely. The criticisms leveled by Orwell in general, and Fanon in the previous chapter, focus on alienation from the popular masses. Ortega focuses on alienation from a body of ideas with no direct relationship to a socio-economic group. His argument, because it does not propose alignment with the popular masses, cannot be considered populistic. Ortega was an elitist in comparison with Orwell, but it does not prevent both from reaching similar conclusions about the nature of society's ills.

Ortega states that technology contributed, along with liberal democracy, to the advance of Europe. The natural tendency of continued technological advance, however, created the most pronounced examples of the mass man in revolt. European scientific method required individual specialization in order to continue. But the cost was individual isolation from everything outside a narrow field of knowledge: "the scientist . . . was progressively losing contact . . . with that integral interpretation of the universe which is the only thing deserving the names of

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science, culture, European civilization." The scientist, through his intellectual alienation, moved towards mass man status and threatened to contaminate the concepts which defined the European community.

The narrow understanding scientists had of the world eventually became an aggressively asserted world view. The European scientists since 1890 reached the point of affecting disdain for any general body of knowledge. The scientist, Ortega states, "takes no cognisance of what lies outside the narrow territory specially cultivated by himself, and gives the name of 'dilettantism' to any curiosity for the general scheme of knowledge." Ortega indicated that the specialized, scientific mind, with false but real confidence, naturally proceeds to impose its judgments outside of its narrow field. The failure to admit external standards, central to Ortega's whole argument, manifested itself strongly in the specialized mind. The results for European civilization were potentially catastrophic:

Anyone who wishes can observe the stupidity of thought, judgement, and action shown to-day in politics, art, religion ... by the "men of science," and of course, behind them, the doctors, engineers, financiers, teachers, and so on. That state of "not listening," of not submitting to higher courts of appeal which I have

36 Ortega, The Revolt of the Masses, 110.

37 Ibid.
repeatedly put forward as characteristic of the mass-man, reaches its height precisely in these partially qualified men. They symbolize, and to a great extent constitute, the actual domination of the masses, and their barbarism is the most immediate cause of European demoralization.\textsuperscript{38}

Orwell’s \textit{Burmese Days} offers an attack on a society based on European technology in terms of its byproducts. Under the influence of British industrial technology the novel’s protagonist paints a picture of a generic, dehumanized Burma: “forests, villages, monasteries, pagodas all vanished. And instead, pink villas fifty yards apart; all over those hills, as far as you can see, villa after villa.”\textsuperscript{39} Orwell had his protagonist continue to suggest a similarly empty social order on a global scale by inventing a hypothetical news organ: “... And all the forests [of Burma] shaved flat--chewed into wood-pulp for \textit{News of the World}.”\textsuperscript{40}

\textit{The Road to Wigan Pier} marks Orwell’s closer parallel with Ortega through its attack on specialized, narrow world views. Marxist ideology, according to Orwell, supported a worship of technology and a corresponding inability to judge scientific progress by any external standard. Orwell’s

\textsuperscript{38} Ortega, \textit{The Revolt of the Masses}, 112-113.

\textsuperscript{39} George Orwell, \textit{Burmese Days} (New York: Time Incorporated, 1934), 35.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
Marxist, like Ortega's scientific man, appeared to accept a world view committed to a narrow end and could not refer elsewhere for a standard to judge its sociological impact. Orwell, as foreshadowed in *Burmese Days*, offers a further detailed attack on technology lacking in Ortega's general analysis.

Orwell states that Marxism presupposed an economic interpretation of the universe. No other standards had any relevance. The constricted quality of Marxism's vision led to an inability to pass judgment on the ultimate ends of the socialist movement: "thinking people may be repelled by the objective towards which socialism appears to be moving. The Marxist, especially, dismisses this kind of thing as bourgeois sentimentality."\(^{41}\) The result of such a restricted vision was the alienation of potential supporters of socialism outside of Marxist ideological blinders, a "spiritual recoil from Socialism."\(^{42}\)

A central manifestation of the socialist's narrow Marxian world view was an unquestioned acceptance of technological progress as an end in itself. Socialism, in turn, encouraged the follower to dismiss any standards of value which question an ordered, utopian, technological

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\(^{42}\) Ibid., 187.
world view. 43 Orwell refuses to pardon technology in The Road to Wigan Pier and in turn resumes Ortega's issue of standards. "To begin with, there is the frightful debauchery of taste that has already been effected by a century of mechanization." 44 Orwell narrowed his criticism of technological standards to the literal question of taste. "In the highly mechanized countries, thanks to tinned food, cold storage, synthetic flavoring matters, etc., the palate is almost a dead organ." 45 Mechanization, he concludes, destroys standards by contaminating society and in turn creating a demand for the products of mechanization. "Mechanization leads to the decay of taste, the decay of taste leads to the demand for machine-made articles and hence to more mechanization, and so a vicious circle is established." 46 Orwell, by attacking mechanization, magnifies his conservatism by attacking another contemporary phenomenon.

In The Road to Wigan Pier Orwell displays a concern in common with Ortega over the combination of technology and

43 Orwell, Wigan Pier, 188-189.

44 Ibid., 204.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 205.
narrow--scientific or Marxist--world views. He does not, however, emphasize society's collapse as a result of the failure to pass judgment from any external standards. He mainly protests the development of a set of standards growing from Marxist ideology encouraging a generic, dehumanized society: "I want a civilization in which 'progress' is not definable as making the world safe for little fat men." 47

Orwell's experience in the Spanish Civil War, however, moved him directly to Ortega's emphasis on barbarism. Orwell learned in Spain that the most prominent representative of socialism, the Communist Party, represented a problem more dangerous than excessive faith in technology. The vicious means that the Communists used to carry out their political will became Orwell's concern in Spain.

The Spanish Civil War was an opportunity to crusade against Fascism for many British intellectuals. 48 Orwell was no exception. He left Britain for Spain on 23 December 1936. A confrontational encounter with the head of the British Communist Party, Harry Pollitt, insured Orwell's entry into Spain with credentials from the leftist but non-


Communist Independent Labor Party. The military organization in Spain linked with the Independent Labor Party (I.L.P) was the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (P.O.U.M.). Orwell shortly joined the P.O.U.M. militia to fight the Fascists.\(^49\)

The Spanish Civil War began as an uprising by the army under General Francisco Franco (1892-1975) against a "Popular Front" government, an alliance of left-wing and moderate political parties against Fascism. Quickly it developed international political significance. The Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy interfered in favor of either the Popular Front (the Spanish Republic) or the Fascists in accordance with their own foreign policy interests.

The influence of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party came to dominate the Popular Front and decisively affected, in turn, Orwell's career. Under Communist direction the Republican government carried out the forcible dissolution of the small Spanish leftist parties including the P.O.U.M. The Communists concealed their tactics with the lie that the purged leftists were active or passive tools of Fascist agents. Communist disinformation spread unchallenged to the left-wing parties in Britain as well. Orwell witnessed the purge while in Spain, narrowly avoided

imprisonment, and escaped to Britain in 1937. He also suffered a nearly fatal wound from a Fascist sniper while in Spain.\textsuperscript{50}

Immediately upon his return to Britain, Orwell responded to the Spanish Republic's betrayal of socialism by attacking the Communists through his journalistic and creative writing. In turn persecution against Orwell among British leftists proved very real and forced his use of a publisher outside of Communist influence for his own book on the civil war \textit{Homage to Catalonia} (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938). Orwell met the harassment while losing his faith in the belief that the difference between Communism and Fascism was real. A common tendency towards brutality, he felt, united them.\textsuperscript{51} Interestingly on 31 December 1936, before leaving for the war, Orwell claimed in print that such an equation of the left and right was a "vulgar lie."\textsuperscript{52} Spain initiated a transition in Orwell's political beliefs.

Orwell's response to Spain, and his resulting problems back in Britain, carry the stamp of his intrinsically conservative character. The difficulty of classifying


\textsuperscript{51} Crick, \textit{George Orwell}, 226n–228.

\textsuperscript{52} Orwell, "Review," \textit{The Collected Essays}, 1:259.
Orwell also becomes clear because his writings from the immediate post-civil war period contain positive commentary on revolutionary activity hostile to capitalism. At the same time he maintained a conservative stance by attacking Marxist-Leninist ideology's failure to leave any room for dissent in society. Orwell's socio-political critique falls back to traditional nineteenth century liberalism as a proper standard to gauge the acceptability of political movements.

Orwell admits a commitment to the socialist cause while in Spain: "I have seen wonderful things & at last really believe in Socialism." That commitment survived Orwell's return to Britain and manifested itself in his writing. He describes the nature of Spain's socialist society as a popular phenomenon rather than a discipline imposed from Marxist-Leninists: "the Government was almost powerless, local soviets were functioning everywhere and the Anarchists were the main revolutionary force." The disruption of authoritative institutions fused with a popular sense of change. "For several months large blocks of people believed that all men are equal and were able to act on their belief.

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The result was a feeling of liberation and hope."\(^{55}\)

Orwell’s populism analyzed in the last chapter echoes strongly here.

The eventual Communist dominance over the Spanish Republican forces, however, destroyed Orwell’s ideal socialist society. He equates Fascism and Communism through their common repression of dissident minorities. Communist policy in Spain created "a régime in which every opposition party and news-paper is suppressed and every dissentient of any importance is in jail. Of course, such a regime will be Fascism."\(^{56}\)

Orwell’s emphasis on repression opens him to another comparison to Ortega and the theme of standards. Ortega condemns in *The Revolt of the Masses* the far left and right, like Orwell, on the basis of both movements’ reliance on repression to silence dissent. Such a critical position betrays, for Ortega, an acceptance of traditional nineteenth century liberal democracy: "it is the right which the majority concedes to minorities . . . . It announces the determination to share existence with the enemy; more than


that, with an enemy which is weak."\textsuperscript{57} Liberal democracy also was a standard at odds with mass men in revolt and their extremist political movements, Bolshevism--Ortega's term for Russian Communism--and Fascism.\textsuperscript{58}

Both movements' antagonism to liberal democracy, the idea of minorities' rights, condemned them to create only barbarism. Ortega states that progress relied on a social order based on Europe's heritage. Rejection of the past prevented growth. "The struggle with the past is not a hand-to-hand fight. The future overcomes it by swallowing it. If it leaves anything outside it is lost."\textsuperscript{59} Bolshevism and Fascism both abandoned liberal democracy: "an advance must be made on the liberalism of the XIX Century. But this is precisely what cannot be done with by any movement such as Fascism, which declares itself anti-liberal."\textsuperscript{60} Both movements could either progress by co-opting liberalism or destroying Europe in a constant war.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{57} Ortega, \textit{The Revolt of the Masses}, 76.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 77, 92.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 94.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
In an article published 11 December 1937 Orwell himself directly admits his reliance on minority rights as a standard of judgment for the war's results.\(^{62}\) In that article he reviewed a book which predicted, consecutively, that the Spanish Civil War would be a long one, that victory for the Fascists was likely, and that Spanish democracy would not survive. With remorse, he agrees. "All of them [are] depressing conclusions, but the first two are quite probably correct and the last is most assuredly so."\(^{62}\)

Either the probable Fascist or possible Communist victory meant the death of individual rights protected by Ortega's standard of liberal democracy.

Both Ortega's and Orwell's commentaries upset simple understandings of what left and right wing political differences actually meant. Neither found the standard of classification aligning the left with extensive government intervention, and the right with only limited government, useful. Ortega claims his attack on political extremism is "neutral . . . . Conservative and radical are none the less mass, and the difference between them . . . has been very superficial."\(^{64}\) Orwell, instead of claiming to look at the


\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Ortega, The Revolt of the Masses, 96.
political world from outside the right/left wing standard, declares Communist influence--traditionally understood as leftist--part of the right wing: "Communists everywhere are . . . using the whole of their powerful machinery to crush or discredit any party that shows signs of revolutionary tendencies."65

The truly revolutionary quality of both Communism and Fascism rested on both of them rejecting minority rights, and therefore liberal democracy, as an acceptable social standard. Both Orwell and Ortega refused to abandon that standard. The Fascists and Communists both violated the tradition of individual rights, and both writers in turn offer a conservative counter-argument. Conservative and radical categories, revolving respectively around a positive or negative attitude towards individual rights, model the political environment precisely.

Orwell made his general pessimism over his Spanish experience clear in a personal letter, dated 13 July 1937, just after his return to Britain.66 "What I saw in Spain did not make me cynical but it does make me think that the


future is pretty grim."\(^67\) Orwell's pessimism after the escape from Spain addresses a consistently political topic as opposed to his previous general commentary. He began, after Spain, to picture all of Europe crushed by oppressive states which were either openly Fascistic or covertly so and cloaked with leftist or democratic rhetoric. Civil war, Orwell darkly hints, was the only solution to repression's spread.

Orwell expresses his pessimistic world view by attacking the concept of the Popular Front; the anti-Fascist alliance of leftist and bourgeoisie factions in Spain. Orwell believed the Popular Front concept had become the tool of the Communist Party and in turn, ironically, an organ for spreading repression to Britain. "Of course all the Popular Front stuff that is now being pushed by the Communist[s] . . . boils down to saying that they are in favor of British Fascism (prospective) as against German Fascism."\(^68\) The Communists, behind the Popular Front, were only attempting to create allies for the Soviet Union in a war against Germany, only attempting to "... get British capitalist-imperialism into an alliance with the USSR and


thence into a war with German." 69 Britain at war would be, finally, a Fascist Britain: "Fascism . . . will be imposed on us as soon as the war starts. So you will have Fascism with Communists participating in it, and, if we are in an alliance with the USSR, taking a leading part in it." 70

Orwell suggests that civil war in Britain was the only escape from impending Fascism. Foreign wars, Orwell argues, were manipulative projects instituted by the wealthy: "war against a foreign country only happens when the moneyed classes think they are going to profit from it." 71 Civil wars could be, however, a tool for the poor to institute revolutionary change. An individual who failed to make such a distinction "is simply saying . . . that violence may be used by the rich against the poor but not by the poor against the rich." 72

Orwell combined his attitude towards civil war with his pessimistic vision of world politics where democracy was, like Marxist-Leninist socialism, also Fascism:


70 Ibid; See Orwell, "Review," The Collected Essays, 1:286 for a similar proposed linking of British and Soviet diplomatic aims.

71 Orwell, "Review," The Collected Essays, 1:283.

72 Ibid.
We like to think of England as a democratic country, but our rule in India, for instance, is just as bad as German Fascism . . . . I do not see how one can oppose Fascism except by working for the overthrow of capitalism, starting, of course, in one's own country. If one collaborates with a capitalist-imperialist government in a struggle "against Fascism", i.e. against a rival imperialism, one is simply letting Fascism in by the back door."

Orwell the leftist revolutionary becomes clear as he enunciates his pessimistic world view. Orwell obviously supported the overthrow of the capitalist system in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War.

Simultaneously, both previous to and after the Spanish Civil War, Orwell was clearly a conservative dedicated to a society based on traditional social standards. A reverence for objective aesthetic standards and the idea of a cohesive western civilization characterize Orwell's pre-Spanish Civil War standards. But the concept of individual rights, with, as Ortega made clear, its roots in the previous century was the most important standard after the civil war. That standard put Orwell at odds with the radical totalitarian philosophies which gave Hitler's Fascism, and most importantly Stalin's Marxist-Leninism, direction. The resolution of Orwell's desire for revolutionary economic change and his concern for keeping traditional social

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standards alive would eventually find a meeting, but only one forced by the Second World War.

Orwell’s pessimism underwent focusing from 1934 to 1937. A vague conservative distrust of technological advances and contemporary social norms, and an imperative to confront the ugliness of the world, eventually came to bear on Marxist-Leninist thought. Orwell’s political vision ends in 1937 with an almost paranoid vision of Europe falling under regimes with different names but with the same oppressive goal. And yet with his blatant calls for the overthrow of capitalism he still avoids a tidy right-wing classification.
CHAPTER 4

THE EVOLUTION OF A NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY:
MOTIVATION, PESSIMISM, AND THE
COMMUNITY, 1938-40

Despite their common antagonism for Marxist-Leninist thought, George Orwell's early writings and both Fanon's and Ortega's fail to agree on the question of nationalism. Nationalism was initially not a major issue for Orwell while both other writers stressed it as a powerful social force. The period between 1938 and 1940, however, saw Orwell's lack of emphasis change drastically. By the end of 1940 Orwell created a nationalistic ideology in response to the upheaval of the Second World War. Orwell's ideology was a conservative phenomenon composed of his faith in the concept of community and his pessimism regarding contemporary social standards.

The word "Ideology" carries with it a challenge to the historian. The term can communicate meanings practically indistinguishable from terms like "world view" or "myth." Vagueness, consequently, destroys the term's potential use.

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Through the examination of Orwell's ideas from 1938 to 1940 it is possible to note the totalitarian state's demoralizing and volatile influence on his intellectual development and simultaneously put forward a specific description of ideology's components.

"Ideology" narrowly defined is "the interrelated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program."² Orwell's writing between 1938 and 1940 does not always exhibit a strong set of theories and actual programs in sufficient conjunction to warrant an application of the definition. His ideas evolve from an angry, defensive position present after the Spanish Civil War towards political despair in 1939. Orwell's writing undergoes a drastic reorientation in 1940, however, with the expression of a nationalistic ideology.

Many ideas Orwell uses in his ideological construct, however, appear in his work previous to the 1940s. Orwell weds ideas he expresses in 1938 and 1939 about what motivates people to fight to his nationalistic ideology. His interest in motivation ties into a resurrection of his pessimism evident before the Spanish Civil War. Orwell

² Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. "Myth: a usu. traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people;" s.v. "Weltanschauung (world view): a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world esp. from a specific standpoint;" s.v. "Ideology [broad]: a systematic body of concepts esp. about human life or culture."
pessimistically concludes by 1940 that totalitarianism, and specifically German Fascism, is an effective motivator and that therefore its enemies must adopt its outlook in part to survive. The modern values western culture associates with civilization, in contrast to Fascism, rests on a faulty foundation by failing to admit a barbarous facet in every individual.

Orwell avoids accepting a totalitarian outlook by including the concept of a community in his nationalistic ideology. The fact that we are part of a community, Orwell argues, prohibits the unrestricted barbarism possible under any totalitarian state and motivates people to defend themselves. Orwell derives his concept of community from a popular model by stripping the traditional British religious value structure of reactionary tendencies. His use of the concept community reflects his continued struggle against the Marxist-Leninism because it reflects faith in an organic society.

This chapter should be considered a branch of Alex Zwerdling's study Orwell and the Left (New Haven: 1971). Zwerdling describes a division in the critical thought of George Orwell. Orwell's loyalty to socialism drives him to assume the role of the movement's internal critic. He consistently argues for a socialist movement free of the myths some leftist philosophers considered necessary for political dynamism. Myths led only to dangerously amoral
behavior in defense of contradictions inevitably generated by myth's application to the real world. Ironically, however, Orwell creates his own myth, expressing faith in the common people of Britain, in his struggle to create a socialist movement.\(^3\)

Orwell's writings prior to 1940 display the role of myth destroyer as he assaulted the Popular Front. Orwell's writings in 1940 fit Zwerdling's broad concept of myth creation, but fall more precisely into the description of a narrow ideology. Orwell's emphasis on destructive rhetoric initially prevents the expression of defined objectives. The components of a nationalistic ideology, however, waited for an event of global significance: the Second World War.

Much of Orwell's commentary in 1938 and 1939 echoes ideas resulting from his experiences in the Spanish Civil War. His belief in the similarity between Fascism, Communism, and British democracy persisted. The enemy most directly available for Orwell's attack was the British Popular Front and the Communists in it. The belief that the diverse elements of the Popular Front, with their insistence in an 'anti-Fascist' alliance, could advance democratic socialism became for Orwell the critical blind spot of the left-wing.

The Popular Front’s demand for a confrontational policy towards Germany gave Orwell an opening to attack. The need to resist the spread of German Fascism stated by the Popular Front became in Orwell’s opinion the desire for war. War encouraged British Fascism. In a letter published on 26 May 1938 Orwell indicates the true aim of the Popular Front: "Virtually the whole of the left-wing intelligentsia . . . are clamouring for a Popular Front government as a prelude to war against Germany."\(^4\) The ultimate result of war mobilization, he argued in July 1939, was Fascism: "Only after two or three years of it, and we may sink . . . into some local variant of austro-Fascism. And perhaps a year or two later . . . a real Fascist movement."\(^5\) Occasionally Orwell managed to suggest his entire argument in a single contiguous statement. In one of his typically acidic book reviews published in February 1938 on the Spanish Civil War, he wrote:

Rubber truncheons and castor oil have scared people of the most diverse kinds into forgetting that Fascism and capitalism are at bottom the same thing. Hence the Popular Front . . . In England the Popular Front is as yet only an idea, but it has already produced the


\(^5\) Ibid., "Not Counting Niggers," The Collected Essays, 1:398. For similar commentary on the effect of mobilization note also 405.
nauseous spectacle of bishops, Communists, cocoa-magnates, publishers, duchesses and Labor MPs marching arm in arm to the tune of "Rule Britannia" and all tensing their muscles for a rush to the bomb-proof shelter when and if their policy begins to take effect.\(^6\)

Orwell's references to wealthy, politically conservative elements within the Popular Front, "duchesses" and "cocoa-magnates," permits him to expand his campaign of attack to the British right-wing as part of the Popular Front. Orwell's argument against political conservatives appears in his review of yet another book, with a Duchess as the author, on the Spanish Civil War.\(^7\) The author's socio-economic class assumes for Orwell as much importance as the book's Communist interpretation of the civil war. Why, he rhetorically asks, did a conservative and wealthy member of British society write an essentially Communist interpretation of the Spanish Civil War?\(^8\) Orwell answers that they are necessary to unifying domestic opinion for war: "And what is the function of the Conservative anti-Fascist? They are the liaison officers . . . the link between Left and Right which is absolutely necessary for the

\(^6\) Orwell, "Review," The Collected Essays, 1:305. For other reviews of books on the Spanish Civil War see 276, 287, 295, 340, and 344.

\(^7\) Ibid., "Review," The Collected Essays, 1:344.

\(^8\) Ibid., 344-345.
purpose of war" (published on 21 July 1938). A conservative element within the Popular Front was not entirely a product of Orwell's imagination. In 1938, involvement did shift to include elements of both left- and right-wing political parties.\textsuperscript{10}

The book review and essay "Not Counting Niggers," published in July of 1939, represents Orwell's continued doubts about British democracy.\textsuperscript{11} The review's central theme argues that imperialism ruled out any moral superiority British democracy might have over German Fascism: "It is not in Hitler's power . . . 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."\textsuperscript{12} Orwell obviously is still haunted by his colonial experience.

Orwell concludes the essay with a brief reaffirmation of his socialist faith, including a reference to his populism. He states that the only option open to avoid totalitarianism for Britain was the politically unlikely

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\textsuperscript{9} Orwell, "Review," The Collected Essays, 1:346.
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\textsuperscript{11} Orwell, "Not Counting Niggers," The Collected Essays, 1:394.
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\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 397.
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"real mass party whose first pledges are to refuse war and to right imperial injustice."\(^{13}\) Orwell’s desire for a socialist system based in the support of the people remained. His opposition to revolution by a militant clique, along Marxist-Leninist lines, remained by default.

Orwell’s own political allegiance formally went to the Independent Labor Party. His political alignment reflects political isolation and resistance to the orthodox Communist—essentially Marxist-Leninist—line. The I.L.P. had its beginnings in British domestic dissent against the First World War and arguments for a negotiated resolution of the conflict. The I.L.P. was leftist, but never, unlike the Communist Party, did it consistently follow a policy dictated from Moscow. Much of the I.L.P.’s potential support diverted to the Labor Party when the latter reorganized along socialist lines late in the First World War. By the second half of the 1920s the I.L.P. suffered a significant loss of power and became a marginal party of radical bourgeois idealists.\(^{14}\) Orwell’s published announcement of his membership in the I.L.P., appearing 24 June 1938, furthermore, expressed general political isolation: "I believe that the ILP is the only party which

\(^{13}\) Orwell, "Not Counting Niggers," The Collected Essays, 1:398.

\(^{14}\) Taylor, English History, 89, 91, 142-143, 237-238.
... is likely to take the right line either against imperialist war or against Fascism when it appears in its British form" (my emphasis).

The novel *Coming Up for Air* (London, 1939) displays a drift towards the rejection of any positive ideology. The novel's main character, George Bowling, attends a lecture and finds the speaker, and the politically aware members of the audience, precursors of and promoters of violence to come under a totalitarian state: "They're the long-sighted ones, the first rats to spot that the ship is sinking. Quick, quick! Fascists are coming! ... Smash others or they'll smash you." Orwell singled out a single character in the audience as "Trotskyist." The term, for Orwell, implied a revolutionary socialist outside of, antagonistic to, and left of the Communist Party. The I.L.P. was a Trotskyist organization by Orwell's definition. The Trotskyist character does express a position in the novel consistent with many of Orwell's own

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17 Ibid., 177.

political positions. Bowling concludes, however, with the observation "They're all the same, really." Orwell provides only a shallow rationale to separate Trotskyist from Communist in Coming Up for Air.

Orwell presents a complete denial of all positive ideologies in his literary criticisms published in a book titled Inside the Whale (London, 1940). He argues in it that the literature of the 1930s gravitated towards the actively propagandistic. Orwell, however, celebrates Henry Miller's writing for its absence of overt propagandistic statements and its simultaneous awareness of western civilization's impending destruction. "[H]e believes in the impending ruin of western civilization much more firmly than . . . 'revolutionary' writers; only he does not feel called upon to do anything about it."

Miller's attitude of total fatalism, according to Orwell, is appropriate because it reflects a correct understanding of European society's developing totalitarian form. The individual, and especially the artist, as conceived in European society, will be destroyed by a social

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19 Orwell, Coming Up for Air, 178-180.


21 Ibid., 520.
system totally antagonistic to the idea of individualism.\footnote{Orwell, "Inside the Whale," The Collected Essays, 1:525-527; see 351 and 382 for earlier expressions of despair.} Orwell describes this conscious nihilism as "quietism" and states "A novel on more positive, 'constructive' lines, and not emotionally spurious, is at present very difficult to imagine."\footnote{Ibid., 526.} War came to Britain, in September of 1939, as Orwell was completing Inside the Whale. After over roughly two years of fringe political activism, war destroyed, briefly, Orwell's capacity to espouse anything.

Orwell's life outside of critical opinion in 1938 and 1939 took a similarly grim path. Physically and psychologically the period just before the Second World war was difficult for him. He writing production, however, did not suffer.

Sickness hit Orwell hard at the beginning of 1938. In March respiratory problems surfaced and by the middle of the same month he was admitted to a sanatorium. X-rays revealed images suggesting blood leaking into Orwell's lungs.\footnote{Michael Shelden, Orwell: The Authorized Biography (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 289.}

Orwell's hospitalization slowly returned his strength. His doctors advised the necessity of time in a warm, dry
climate for continued recovery. With the help of an anonymous loan, Orwell and his wife, Eileen, responded by arranging for passage to French Morocco. They began their journey 2 September 1938.25

George and Eileen spent half a year in Morocco. He finished the rough draft of Coming up for Air while on enforced vacation. Concern with political developments in Europe provided Orwell a second major distraction. Eileen reports he often discussed nightmare scenarios resulting from a coming general war while in Morocco.26

Orwell’s return home in March 1939 confronted him with his father’s slow but ultimately futile struggle against intestinal cancer and a potential fight with Gollancz over publishing Coming up for Air. Serious conflict between author and publisher failed to materialize, but Gollancz never published another of Orwell’s novels afterwards. His father died on 28 June 1939 at the age of eighty-two. Orwell was with his father and managed to reconcile with him over previous personal conflicts before the time of death.27

25 Shelden, Orwell, 296; Orwell’s anonymous benefactor was L.H. Meyers, an author, associate, and eventual friend.

26 Ibid., 300, 302-303.

27 Shelden, Orwell, 307-310, 312.
That summer the political landscape offered nothing Orwell considered worth defending. A complete break with the previously dominant nihilism appears in a letter dated 10 January 1940 where Orwell expresses frustration with having "failed to serve HM government in any capacity . . . because it seems to me that now we are in this bloody war we have got to win it & I would like to lend a hand." The comment indicates the presence of nationalism in Orwell, largely masked by two years of struggle against democratic socialism's ideological deception by the Popular Front and imperialism.

The question of Orwell's sudden nationalism is a complex one. Four months before his patriotic commentary in the 10 January 1940 letter, he had attempted to find a direct means of contributing to the war effort. Orwell's biographers offer differing interpretations of his change. Michael Shelden attributes the decision to emotional patriotism in Orwell. Bernard Crick argues that the Nazi-Soviet pact's vicious duplicity served as a catalyst for Orwell's sudden retreat from nihilism. He also noted

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28 Orwell, "Letter to Geoffrey Gorer," The Collected Essays, 1:410. Also see 527-528 and 539 for evidence of eagerness to serve.

29 Shelden, Orwell, 318.
that Orwell’s commitment to socialism simultaneously remained pronounced.

Crick’s analysis linking the Nazi-Soviet pact with Orwell’s conversion to nationalism relies on an essay printed in autumn 1940 while the agreement between Hitler and Stalin appeared in late summer 1939. The possibility of other politically relevant events activating Orwell’s nationalism, considering the gap of roughly thirteen months between the pact’s signing and the essay’s printing, seems strong. It must be noted that Orwell wrote approvingly of ‘quietism’ as war came to England and after the Nazi-Soviet pact’s establishment in Inside the Whale. He started writing it in May 1939 and finished it after volunteering for war-related work in September 1939. The book’s nihilism is not consistent with Crick’s suggestion of indignant nationalism activated in the late summer of 1939. Orwell’s patriotic decision to volunteer is inconsistent with the fatalistic book.

With this inconsistency, it seems best to suggest another possible contributor to Orwell’s nationalistic turn.

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His perception of a disintegrating Popular Front may have contributed to his disavowal of political nihilism. Orwell, because of his professional relationship with Victor Gollancz, had first-hand knowledge of the Popular Front's difficulties as the Soviet Union allied with Nazi Germany. Gollancz's Left Book Club, with its Communist alignment, had propagated the Popular Front position of anti-German Fascism. The unfolding of events, however, forced change.

Gollancz, after hesitancy about The Road to Wigan Pier, had directly refused to publish Orwell's Homage to Catalonia. Differences over left-wing politics did not, however, destroy the professional relationship between the two men. Gollancz edited The Betrayal of the Left (London: 1941) which included contributions from Orwell.

Gollancz also moved closer to Orwell politically early in the Second World War by breaking with the Soviet decision to ally with Germany. The change developed gradually but was clear by 1941 and correspondingly modified the Left Book Club's editorial policy. Orwell commented on Gollancz's defection, anticipating the decline of the Popular Front, in

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32 Taylor, English History, 396-397.

a letter written on 10 January 1940: "I saw Gollancz recently & he is furious with his Communist late-friends, owing to their lies etc, so perhaps the Left Book Club may become quite a power for good again."  

The disruption of the Popular Front implicit in the Left Book Club's change could have created for Orwell a new political environment and a corresponding need for a new position.

A break in Orwell's pessimism, in any case, opened a window for affirmative politics. A conscious belief in the efficacy of ideas as a means of social manipulation animated Orwell's new espousal of resistance to the Fascists and support for Britain. Orwell's interest in the process of motivation, however, predated 1940's nationalistic change by at least a year.

A document apparently written in 1939 by Orwell, "Notes on the Spanish Militias," comments on the relationship between ideas and allegiances. In it Orwell suggested that political loyalty acted in Spain to create dedicated soldiers and a particularly merciless level of warfare.

Conditions in Spain were difficult. Troops held sections of the line for periods of up to five months and thus "they

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were sleeping in trenches in intolerable discomfort, usually lousy and up til April almost always cold."³⁶
Reconsidering the performance of the Republican troops, of whom about 75% completely lacked military experience, Orwell writes "the fact the they did not disintegrate . . . converted me (to some extent) to the notion of 'revolutionary discipline.'"³⁷

Another, more explicit, analysis of political motivation appears through Orwell's comparison of veterans and "'good party men'" in terms of effectiveness. "A man who has fully identified with some political party is reliable in all circumstances." Veterans, in comparison, had limitations.³⁸ Orwell indicated the politically charged context of the Spanish Civil War, furthermore, resulted in amoral ferocity. The execution of Fascist officers taken prisoner proved to be common policy among the Republicans.³⁹

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³⁷ Ibid., 321, 323.

³⁸ Ibid., 326.

³⁹ Ibid., 327.
In the essay "Democracy in the British Army," published in September of 1939, Orwell's nihilism was in full rhetorical bloom. His interest in an idea's capacity to mold behavior, however, also continued. His argument compares the Spanish Militias unfavorably in terms of military effectiveness with professional forces such as the British army but describes the political values of the militia as ideal. The militias were "a genuinely democratic army, but they were also a very primitive type of army, capable of only defensive actions." 

Orwell argues in the essay that in order to achieve effectiveness a nation's military establishment had to be a professional organization rather than one based on citizen soldiers. The British professional soldier "was essentially a mercenary, and his self-respect depended on his conception of himself not as a worker or a citizen but simply as a fighting animal." Orwell isolates a cause for this mind set in the abstraction "regimental loyalty." The organization of the British Army included a social system


41 Ibid., 404.

42 Ibid., 402.

43 Ibid.
manifested by a complex system of traditions capable of inculcating its members with a sense of loyalty. Orwell states that as a result "there is no question that the long-term private soldier often identifies with his own regiment almost as closely as the officer does." The essay as a whole is an attack on the political ramifications of the British army's organizing philosophy. It is also, more importantly, an examination of what factors encourage military effectiveness.

In an book review published on 25 April 1940 titled "The Limit to Pessimism" Orwell asks and answers a question about the entire British people's will to fight. The book reviewed argues, in Orwell's opinion, that the Second World War was "the struggle of people who have no faith [the British] against people who have faith in false gods [the Axis]." 'God' serves as a metaphor for Orwell to describe a people's faith in their national character. Orwell disagrees with the book's claim on the British lack of faith. Orwell supports his position by noting the author of the book, Malcolm Muggeridge, joined the army despite a


46 Ibid., 535.
belief in the bankrupt state of British morale. Orwell argues that Muggeridge derived his motivation from belief in a "military tradition" intrinsic in the British middle class. Muggeridge is an example of a man "who finds in the moment of crisis that he is a patriot after all . . . . As I was brought up in this tradition myself I can recognize it . . . and also sympathize with it." Orwell’s interest in motivation led him, in "The Limits to Pessimism," to link nationalism with ideas similar in scope to "regimental loyalty" and "Good Party Men." Orwell narrows nationalism in the essay to a tradition of military service; a tradition with direct relation to his own belief in the need to resist the Germans. The narrowing process of general beliefs into ideas with distinct practical ramifications, such as joining the army, separates Orwell’s narrow ideology from general concepts like myth and world-view.

Orwell’s concern with motivation eventually developed a connection to his interest in totalitarian ideologies. Orwell betrays his curiosity about the totalitarian state in a letter dated 26 December 1938: "But I think it’s really time someone began looking into Fascism seriously . . . .

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48 Ibid.
Mussolini has been 'just about to' collapse ever since 1926.\textsuperscript{49} Evidence of Orwell's own examination of Fascist totalitarianism appears in 1940. He writes that Fascism is a valid outlook because it reflects an element present in people's minds. He pessimistically concludes that everyone has a vein which responds to Fascism's appeal: the heroics of violence and sacrifice.

Orwell's position is clear in a book review published 21 March 1940.\textsuperscript{50} In it, he argues that Fascism's success resides within the basic assumptions of recent western civilization. Hitler's success in motivating the German people rested on the fact that "he has grasped the falsity of the hedonistic attitude to life."\textsuperscript{51} The goal of physical comfort and stability, the major object of consideration for western civilization since the First World War, fails to encompass people's entire psychological grounding. Another, and important, aspect of human needs includes "struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, 

\textsuperscript{49} Orwell, "Letter to Jack Common," The Collected Essays, 1:370.


\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
flags, and loyalty-parades." Orwell concludes warning that it would be a mistake to underestimate the significance of Fascism's strange emotional attraction.

Warning evolves into criticism of the left in a book review published on 12 July 1940 titled "Prophesies of Fascism." The essay begins as an analysis of various authors' bleak conceptions of the future but focuses on the pro-socialist writing of Jack London. London's writing offers an accurate prediction of Fascism's brutal and effective nature. Orwell argues that other modern socialist writers never foresaw the possibility that socialism's antagonist movement would prove so formidable. Orwell attributes London's perception to the author's character, encompassing a "love of violence and physical strength, [and] his belief in a natural aristocracy. . . [London] had in him what one might fairly call a Fascist strain." Orwell's appreciative attitude towards Fascism suggests a


53 Ibid.


55 Ibid., 31.

56 Ibid.
belief that defeating Germany required the controlled adoption of the enemy's methods.

Orwell's pessimistic admission of Fascism's effectiveness led him towards conservative attacks on his society's driving ideas. In the essay "Notes on the Way," published 6 April 1940, Orwell offers a clear example of conservative criticism.\(^\text{57}\) He classifies the tendencies of the European intelligentsia as one of rebellion for the last 200 years: "[T]here was a long period during which nearly every thinking man was in some sense a rebel."\(^\text{58}\) Orwell applauds the rebellion because it was a reaction to Europe's oppressive economic system. But by his own time the act of rebellion had gone to far. He establishes in "Notes on the Way" a metaphor for the intelligentsia's rebellion: sawing through a tree limb upon which society rests. Orwell describes the final results of sawing through the limb and falling in the coming of Fascism and War: "[D]own we came. But unfortunately there had been a little mistake. The thing at the bottom was not a bed of roses after all, it was a cesspool full of barbed wire."\(^\text{59}\) With his metaphor


\(^{58}\) Ibid., 15.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.
Orwell is saying that attacks on society's status quo—the status quo protected by conservatives—had progressed too far and brought disaster.

There is similarity between Orwell's ideas in "Notes on the Way" and his commentary before the Spanish Civil War. At both times, pessimism concerning society's direction led him to conservative criticism. Literal evidence of a connection exists. At the beginning of "Notes on the Way" Orwell uses a bisected wasp as an image for the contemporary loss of religious belief: "It is the same thing with modern man... It was absolutely necessary that the soul should be cut away. Religious belief... had to be abandoned."^60 Orwell relies on the same image for lost religious belief in a book review, already cited in the previous chapter, published 14 November 1935 in the New English Weekly.^61

Orwell, in the 1935 essay, followed his commentary on the loss of religious belief with an argument for individual engagement in the world despite potential demoralization. He shifts his argument in "Notes on the Way" by instead extracting the concept of community from a traditional religious belief structure he felt was generally reactionary


and obsolete. The specific, secular concept of community also appears before Orwell's turn to nationalism in *Coming Up for Air*. Both express enthusiasm for a unified, organic social order.

Orwell argues in *Coming Up for Air* that a sense of community is a glue which provides social stability by defining good and evil. Orwell begins his analysis by stating that the life of the common British citizen before the end of the First World War could be brutal, but that they had something lacking in contemporary society: "a feeling of continuity." Moral relativism was not yet a challenge: "Their good and evil would remain good and evil. They didn't feel the ground they stood on shifting under their feet." Existence in an organic community, furthermore, inspires in its members a sense of confidence necessary to face even death. "It's easy enough to die if the things you care about are going to survive . . . . Individually they were finished, but their way of life would continue."

Orwell's enthusiasm for an earlier social order conveys his conservative stance. A vital sense of community gave

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62 Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, 125.

63 Ibid., 126.

64 Ibid.
British society "something that we haven't got now . . . [:] simply that they didn't think of the future as something to be terrified of."65 Terror, manifesting itself in resigned nihilism, was something Orwell understood.

Orwell mentions formal religious belief in his discussion of an earlier organic community, but only to indicate its peripheral significance. "I don't believe it made very much difference that what's called religious belief was still prevalent in those days."66 The relationship between the community and religion is at best tenuous.

In "Notes on the Way" Orwell's faith in the concept of community persists. Orwell suggests here that British society had not completely lost its sense of community. He instead attempts to harness community spirit to generate the confidence necessary to face German Fascism:

[I]t is often argued that men can never develop the sense of a community unless they believe in God. The answer is that in a half-conscious way most of them have developed it already. Man is not an individual, he is only a cell in an everlasting body, and he is dimly aware of it. There is no other way of explaining why it is that men die in battle. It nonsense to say that they only do it because they are driven. If whole armies had to be coerced, no war could be fought. Men die in battle--not gladly, of course, but in any rate

65 Orwell, Coming Up for Air, 124.

66 Ibid., 125.
voluntarily--because of abstractions called "honor," "duty," "patriotism" and so forth.  

Just as with the abstractions 'military tradition' and 'good party men' Orwell analyzes the concept of community as a means of motivation. Note also that he gives formal religious belief minor importance.

Orwell did not limit his appreciation of the community in "Notes on the Way" to its capacity to inspire military resistance. He also considers it the antithesis of the totalitarian state: a denial that raw power and the will to use it makes for a healthy social order. He specifically singles out contemporary Marxists as guilty of belittling the concept of community. Orwell does not request in turn a total conservative reaction but does endorse the sense of a stable community conservatism provides.

Orwell notes the failure of both extreme conservative and Marxist programs. "The Kingdom of Heaven, old style, has definitely failed, but on the other hand 'Marxist realism' has also failed." The failure of Marxists specifically rested a reliance on naked power alone to enforce communal stability:

Marx’s famous saying that "religion is the opium of the people" is habitually wrenched out of its context and


68 Ibid., 2:16-17.
given a meaning subtly but appreciably different from the one he gave it. Marx did not say, in any rate at that place, that religion is merely dope handed out from above; he said that it is something the people create for themselves to supply a need that he recognized to be a real one. "Religion is the sigh of the soul in a soulless world. Religion is the opium of the people." What is he saying except that man does not live by bread alone, that hatred is not enough, that a world worth living in cannot be founded on "realism" and machine-guns?"  

Orwell's solution to the failure of radical and traditional social structures is the continuation of the communal impulse stripped of formal religious belief. The totalitarian state was the only other recourse. "There is very little hope of escaping it unless we can reinstate the belief in human brotherhood without the need for a 'next world' to give it meaning."  

The essay "Notes on the Way" is a focus document for recurrent themes in Orwell's writings. It reflects his continued pessimistic interpretation of contemporary social trends and corresponding conservative judgements. It also reflects his interest in the concept of the popular, and essentially organic, community.  

Orwell portrays the tendency of intellectuals as a socially destructive but necessary process for the 200 years leading up to the Second World War. He argues, however,  

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70 Ibid., 17.
that society's tolerance for the erosion inflicted by the intellectual has ended. His image of society's ongoing disintegration strikes a pessimistic note: severed wasps, cesspools, and barbed wire. In doing, so he aligns against social change and assumes a conservative stance. His position has obvious roots in his pre-Spanish Civil War commentary.

Orwell's acceptance of direction from a popular model--the community--puts him at odds with the most extreme form of radicalism in his day: Marxist-Leninist doctrine. All direction in the Marxist-Leninist model comes from above; the totalitarian state apparatus. Orwell maintains his social conservatism by continuing to reject such a model. He argues furthermore in "Notes on the Way" that even Marx might have rejected the perversion of his own theory by contemporary leftists. Orwell's populism, and his conflict with Marxist-Leninist thought, has roots in his colonial populism.

Orwell also expresses his recently acquired patriotism in the essay. His concept of community becomes, as a result, a means of promoting British resistance to foreign totalitarianism. Many of Orwell's ideas from 1938 and 1939 reflect a similar desire to translate theory into a tangible force. Among the most alarming examples of tangible force he discusses is the power of Fascism. But his populism continually reassures readers.
Orwell’s aim to link abstract ideas into real results allows the valid application of the term ideology to his nationalistic writings. To define only abstract ideas places a theoretician at the mercy of his audience’s interpretations. Ideology can have a narrow application only if it relates ‘a sociopolitical program’ together with its general vision of the world. Orwell’s socio-political program of resistance against the Axis is clear. The next chapter will examine that program’s continued development up to and including 1943.
George Orwell continued to express a hostility to commonly accepted socialist doctrine between 1940 and 1943. That hostility developed from both Orwell’s previous ideas and the failure of socialism to stop the threat of Fascism. Part of his hostility appears as his conservative nationalist stance leads him still further away from the Marxist-Leninist emphasis on a radical elite leadership and instead towards social consensus. The first half of the Second World War saw Orwell argue that socialism had to broaden its appeal beyond the working poor to include the British middle class. This ideological shift would insure both socialism’s ascendancy and the defeat of the Axis. The accuracy of his argument is less important than its purpose as an example of an intellectual’s reaction to the Second World War.

Orwell also attacks a second socialist concept: that capitalism would collapse without any practical political activism. In doing so, he makes clear the point that his economic radicalism remains alive. Orwell attacks the means
by which socialists understand capitalism, but ending
capitalism remains his goal. He also contradicts himself,
but only on a theoretical level, by suggesting that
capitalism would indeed automatically collapse in time.
Practical activism, in any case, remains his primary focus.

While formulating his criticism on the left's lack of
political activism Orwell also equates capitalism and
Fascism. This belief links his economic radicalism with his
conservative nationalism. The mortal enemy of the British
nation during the Second World War was German Fascism, which
in Orwell's mind was a fundamentally capitalistic
phenomenon. Capitalism and Fascism occupy positions
similarly antagonistic to the British nation in Orwell's
theoretical framework. Socialism, finally, as the opposite
of capitalism and as a means of mobilizing resources for the
war effort, became a nationalistic measure.

Orwell was not alone in challenging socialistic theory.
To place Orwell's ideas in the context of the larger
community of European intellectuals, it is useful to compare
his life and ideas with those of Antonio Gramsci
(1891-1937). Gramsci was an important member of the Italian
Communist party and, posthumously, an influential theorist.

Gramsci's family lived on the island of Sardinia among
poor Italian peasants. The Gramsci family, although
relatively well-educated, was quite poor. As a child he
fell victim to an accident, permanently stunting his normal
development, and damaging his over-all health. He was, as a result, a hunchback and a social outcast. He was also a talented student and won a scholarship to the University of Turin.¹

A considerable degree of similarity exists between the childhood experiences of Orwell and Gramsci. Owing to their individual talents, both received educations beyond their family's respective means. Orwell attended the impressive public school, Eton, on scholarship. Orwell also seemed alienated from his peers, although more from choice than from the tragedy of Gramsci's childhood.²

Gramsci's adult life largely revolved around advancing the Italian Communist party. He assumed important leadership roles within the party and wrote overtly political journalism. In Mussolini's Italy, his activity was quite dangerous. The Fascists arrested and imprisoned him in November 1926. While in prison, and after, the subject of Gramsci's writings switched to socialism's theoretical concerns. Gramsci, with the help of various supporters, managed a conditional release in 1934. His health had suffered immensely from imprisonment, however,

¹ Anne Showstack Sassoon, "Gramsci's Life," Approaches to Gramsci, ed. by Anne Showstack Sassoon (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1982), 150.

and he never escaped from hospitalization after his release. He died on 27 April 1937.³

Orwell similarly displayed a willingness to run risks in the name of a cause hostile to Fascism. Orwell fought among the common leftist infantry in Spain against the Fascists in that country's civil war. He suffered a near-fatal wound to the neck on the battlefield.⁴

The Second World War provided Orwell another opportunity for involvement in events on a material level. Orwell's talents eventually came to interest the British Broadcasting Corporation, involved at that time in propaganda, and he was willing to work for it. On 18 August 1941 he accepted a position with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) producing radio propaganda to counter similar German broadcasts in India. Orwell's experience with the BBC, however, was a painful one. Work in the BBC was both exhausting and boring. Censorship, furthermore, was a serious problem. Orwell resigned from the BBC on 24 September 1943.⁵

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⁴ Shelden, Orwell, 267-268.

⁵ Ibid., 336-338.
Among the most important of Orwell’s wartime publications, *The Lion and the Unicorn* (London: 1941), reflected the immediate reality of the war. It was a short book combining a call to defeat the Germans with a demand for a socialist England. It sold well, with twelve thousand copies printed, in two editions.\(^6\)

The similarity between Orwell and Gramsci reflects a theoretical grounding in their common rejection of two socialist ideas. The idea, first, that the capitalist system carries in it the seeds of its own destruction in all nations, suffered common rejection by Orwell and Gramsci. The belief, second, that socialism could advance by a violent uprising of a single class also failed under both men’s analysis.

Both Orwell and Gramsci examined instead the formation of a socialist society in a single nation. The process would require the promotion of a broad social consensus rather than dictatorship of a single faction or class. Both men, therefore, deviated significantly from the Marxist-Leninist path towards socialism by adopting a national focus.

Both Orwell and Gramsci existed in an international socialist community with its own history. Socialist thought before the First World War received significant direction

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from debate within the Second International, an organization of European leftist political parties dominated by German and French factions, active between 1889 and 1914.\(^7\) A Marxist theory of significance to come out of the Second International was that the dominance of the working class was inevitable owing to flaws intrinsic to capitalism.\(^8\)

Russia’s Communist revolution of 1917 was a considerable success for the international socialist community. Gramsci uses the event to attack the failure of European socialism up to that point. Gramsci considers the Russian Bolsheviks’ successful revolution a repudiation of socialism’s inevitability. Socialism developed successfully in Russia as a result of the political opportunism of the Bolsheviks rather than any intrinsic failure within Russian capitalism. Gramsci emphasizes, in turn, groups organized with a political goal rather than impersonal socio-economic forces as the engine of revolution.\(^9\)

Orwell contradicts himself on the same question of how revolutionary change comes about. Orwell disagrees with


\(^{9}\) Ibid., 46.
Gramsci theoretically by accepting the inevitability of socialist revolution. On the practical level, however, he accepts the Italian's emphasis on the need for immediate activism. He wrote in fall 1942 on the level of theory, "I myself believe . . . that the common man will win his fight sooner or later, but I want it to be sooner and not later."\(^{10}\) Orwell admits a belief in the value of practical activism, in a separate essay, while noting the difficulties of British leftists during the Second World War: "As to the real moral of the last three years--that the Right has more guts and ability than the Left--no one will face up to it."\(^{11}\) No fault of the capitalist system was going to substitute for incompetence on the left.

Orwell's divided attitude about the actual mechanism of radical change, between theoretical models and practical necessities, overlaps with his interest in Fascism. Orwell defines Fascism as fundamentally capitalistic and attributes its ascendance with the left's practical political failure.

A BBC broadcast on 5 March 1943 frames Orwell's position


\(^{11}\) Ibid., "Letter from England to Partisan Review," The Collected Essays, 2:278.
through an analysis of the author Jack London (1876-1916). Orwell argues:

London did foresee . . . that when the working-class movements took on formidable dimensions and looked like dominating the world, the capitalist class would hit back. They wouldn’t simply lie down and let themselves be expropriated . . . . Karl Marx, indeed, had never suggested that the change-over from Capitalism to Socialism would happen without a struggle, but he did proclaim that the change was inevitable, which his followers, in most cases, took as meaning that it would be automatic. Till Hitler was firmly in the saddle it was generally taken for granted that Capitalism could not defend itself . . . . [T]he menaced capitalist class would counter-attack and not quietly die because the writers of Marxist text-books told it to die.

Orwell again hints at an acceptance of the left’s inevitable success but refuses to abandon the necessity of political action against capitalism. Obviously his radical anti-capitalism remains, still complicating any easy political classification. Orwell also portrays capitalism, by suggesting that Adolph Hitler (1889-1945) was that economic system’s defender, as the root of Fascism.

Orwell made the same argument, before his employment with the BBC, in July of 1940. The 1943 commentary is consistent with Orwell’s earlier opinions: the essentially

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13 Ibid., 124-125.

capitalistic nature of Fascism and the practical failure of a socialist movement waiting in vain for capitalism's self-destruction. This consistency is notable in that all work at the BBC underwent the scrutiny of a censor once, taking security issues into consideration, and again, for policy considerations.\textsuperscript{15} The 1940 commentary roots the Fascist movement in the fact that the "capitalist class was quite clever enough to see . . . [the growth of socialism] and counter-attack against the workers."\textsuperscript{16} The socialist leadership, meanwhile, was politically naive: "Their interpretation of history has been so mechanistic that they have failed to foresee dangers that were obvious to people who had never heard the name Marx."\textsuperscript{17}

Orwell manages to turn his underlying hostility to capitalism into part of his plea for British nationalism. His argument centers around capitalism's inability to effectively mobilize resources. Orwell's essay published in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} W. J. West, "Introduction," Orwell: The Lost Writings, ed. W. J. West (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 21.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Orwell, "Prophecies of Fascism," The Collected Essays, 2:30.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 31.
\end{itemize}
the 22 October 1943 Tribune expresses this position clearly: "[A]n economy ruled by the profit motive is simply not equal to rearming on a modern scale. Britain only began to arm when the Germans were in Calais." In The Lion and the Unicorn Orwell uses the ineffective nature of capitalism as an argument for socialism. "The war and the revolution are inseparable. We cannot establish anything that a western nation would regard as socialism without defeating Hitler." In a separate essay published in 1941, "Patriots and Revolutionaries," Orwell echoes "we turn England into a Socialist democracy or by one route or another we become part of the Nazi empire. There is no third alternative."

In Orwell's world view, capitalism became unpatriotic, and given its relation to Fascism, almost treasonous. Again in The Lion and the Unicorn, he states that the British

18 Orwell, "Who Are the War Criminals?," The Collected Essays, 2:325.

19 Ibid., 321.


ruling class did not want to defeat Hitler so much as maintain capitalism. Their influence only hindered the British war policy by pushing it in a defensive direction.\footnote{Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," The Collected Essays, 2:85.} "Patriots and Revolutionaries" states the same position on the capitalist ruling class: "Since they will not . . . put through the necessary social and economic changes, they cannot alter the balance of forces, which is at present heavily against us."\footnote{Ibid., "Patriots and Revolutionaries," ed. by Victor Gollancz, The Betrayal of the Left, 243.}

Orwell's general message describes capitalism as both an internal and external—in the form of Fascism—enemy of Britain. Socialism is the British nation's salvation. Such a belief structure permits Orwell to espouse the overthrow of the capitalist system while supporting an essentially conservative nationalism.

Orwell's conception of Fascism as an especially brutal form of capitalism conflicts with much of Gramsci's analysis of the same subject. Orwell's theory of Fascism holds the movement within the single class of the capitalist. This position becomes clear, beyond the already cited evidence, in Orwell's critique of W.B. Yeats published in January of
1943. For Orwell, "in a single phrase, 'Great wealth in a few men's hands', Yeats lays bare the central reality of Fascism." Gramsci holds, in contrast, that the Fascist movement, at least in Italy of the 1920s, could not be understood as the reflection any specific class interests. It was, rather, the result of a broad decay of civilization having an impact upon and drawing support from different classes simultaneously.

Fascism for Orwell is both capitalistic and an efficient means of mobilizing the German state for war. Orwell is not willing to admit that the British are capable, unlike the Germans, of pairing capitalism and efficiency. To admit capitalism's potential efficiency in Britain would undermine his own argument for radical economic change. It would discredit Orwell's claim that only socialism could win the war for Britain.

The greatest importance of Fascism, for both Orwell and Gramsci, rested in its political and military role as the enemy of socialism. The success of Fascism demanded that both men reconsider their socialist faith and reject any weak elements in it. Any points of divergence between the

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25 Ibid., 274.

26 Adamson, Hegemony and Revolution, 78.
writings of Orwell and Gramsci over Fascism dwindled in the face of its power.

Both men looked towards nationalistic solutions in response to the dilemma of Fascism. To rely on national culture required both men to deviate from the Marxist-Leninist model of revolution instigated by a violent faction acting for the working class alone. Both instead promoted a national consensus to found a socialistic program.

Gramsci's central theoretical concept developed directly in response to the success of Fascism in Italy. Fascism's success led Gramsci to compare the Italian left's failure with the Russian left's corresponding success. He concluded that a different set of social and political circumstances made the confrontational approach of the Bolsheviks, which he admired at the closing of the First World War, inappropriate for western European nations. Socialist revolution in western European nations required, relative to civil war in Russia, more subtle tactics adapted to their own complex socio-political environment.\(^\text{27}\)

Gramsci's rejection of direct revolutionary tactics rests in his theory known as hegemony. Hegemony's general definition is:

\[\text{[A] socio-political situation . . . in which the philosophy and practice of a society fuse or are in equilibrium; an order in which a certain way of life}\]

\(^{27}\) Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 86-87.
and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotation. An element of direction and control, not necessarily conscious, is implied. This hegemony corresponds to a state power conceived in stock Marxist terms as the dictatorship of a class.  

Socialist revolution requires the establishment of a new hegemony under the control of the working class. This process’s complexity, however, prohibits acceptance of the simplistic concept of the dictatorship of any one class.

The imposition of a socialistic hegemony, rather than a direct and bloody assumption of power by the working class, involves a voluntary and unconscious acquiescence from other societal groups. This process requires a socialist movement to propagate an acceptance of its values among other classes before it assumed any direct political control. When the hegemony of the ruling elements of a nation declined, owing to some crisis, the situation would be fluid enough for the socialists and their allies to take direct political control. Some violence, but not without a corresponding

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29 Ibid., 587.
expression of supporting consensus by a majority, would secure a socialist revolution and a new hegemony.\(^{30}\)

Gramsci's emphasis on national consensus appeared even before his prison years when he began working on the theory of hegemony. An essay he completed just before his imprisonment in 1926, "The Southern Question," was a call to expand the appeal of socialism outside of Italy's northern industrial working class to the peasantry of the south.\(^{31}\) Gramsci recalls the past efforts of Communists in the city of Turin to reach out to the southern peasantry and create a national socialist consensus. "The first problem to be solved . . . was that of modifying the political orientation and general ideology of the proletariat itself, as a national element which lives inside . . . the state."\(^{32}\) By rejecting a tradition of prejudice against southerners and working for inclusion, the Turin Communists revealed a path to national unity. "They reacted energetically . . .

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succeeding in creating, actually in Turin, the embryo of what will be the solution of the southern problem."\textsuperscript{33}

Orwell's promotion of a national consensus appears in \textit{The Lion and the Unicorn}. Like Gramsci, he deviates from the narrow Marxist-Leninist understanding of revolution. His criticism, like Gramsci's concept of hegemony, aims at the failure of the simplistic working class revolution as a useful tactic. Orwell argues that an effective British socialist movement "would have recognized that the old-fashioned 'proletarian revolution' is an impossibility."\textsuperscript{34} The practical impact of accepting an obsolete political theory was disastrous for the English left: "The suffocating stupidity of left-wing propaganda had frightened away whole classes of necessary people, factory managers . . . naval officers . . . white-collar workers."\textsuperscript{35} At the root of the proletarian revolution's inadequacy, Orwell implies, was the expansion of the British middle class: "It has happened on such a scale as to make

\textsuperscript{33} Gramsci, "The Southern Question," \textit{The Modern Prince}, 32.

\textsuperscript{34} Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," \textit{The Collected Essays}, 2:93.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
the old classification of society into capitalists, proletarians, and petit-bourgeois . . . almost obsolete."

Orwell fails to limit his criticism to the political assumptions of the left-wing, and instead engages in an attack at a national level. The scope of his criticism connects him to Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Both men state that a system of social conventions united any nation, and the given social system had at its roots the values of the ruling class. The institution of imperialism, for Orwell, serves as the specific manifestation of the British ruling class's hegemony. Orwell's established hatred of the colonial system predicts his imperial focus.

Orwell states that the English, essentially capitalist, ruling class was in decline. The process had its base in the trend of modern industry towards conglomeration. The owners of companies became divorced from their own work and, in turn, only owners. Lower classes assumed the actual burden of making the modern industrial system work. The ruling class lost any social function beyond consumption and sapped the strength from British society as a whole,

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36 Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," The Collected Essays, 2:76.
including the Empire. They were simply parasites, less useful to society than his fleas are to a dog."

A slowly dying Empire, strangled by a centralized bureaucracy based in England, hurt all of British society. It was especially the British middle-class that suffered. The paralysis of the Empire discouraged, beginning in the 1920s, the best middle-class talent from serving in its administrative structure. Private trading concerns suffered from a similar level of mediocrity. Here decline accelerated as independent merchants suffered absorption by clumsy monopolistic entities. Decline came, furthermore, despite continued vestigial support for imperialism. "Imperialist sentiment remained strong in the middle class, chiefly owing to family tradition, but the job of administering the Empire had ceased to appeal.”

Imperial decline also fed on itself in a self-perpetuating process. The generally sluggish social climate resulting from the Empire’s decline provided no outlet for British intellectuals. They could exercise their

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38 Ibid., 70.

39 Ibid., 73-74.

40 Ibid., 74.
talents only in pacifistic or Communistic political circles. Intellectuals abandoned British nationalism and, instead, assumed that patriotism and intelligence could not co-exist in the same person. They issued strident criticism of the Empire, further contributing to the decline of the patriotic middle class and English morale. Orwell's understanding of the intellectuals as alienated from their own culture supports his previous commentary well.\footnote{Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," The Collected Essays, 2:74-75.}

The complex effect of Imperialism's decline, both as a cause and as a symptom of the British society's general decline, suggests that it is an example of the vital social system proposed in Gramsci's hegemony: "an order in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations."\footnote{Williams, "The Concept of 'Egemonia,'" 587.} British society's perception of itself, especially in the vital and expanding middle class, as an imperial power validated the existence of the ruling class's dominant status, its hegemony. The dubious status of the ruling class could not help but degrade the imperial system, and in turn disrupt all of British society.

Orwell and Gramsci, having discounted much of European socialism's theoretical foundation, faced the task of
establishing an alternative means to advance socialism. In doing so, they both tapped the concept of national distinctions as an important social factor. An acceptance of national differentiation informs their judgments about proper socialist theory. The two specific concepts they reject, the inevitable fall of capitalism, and the suitability of class warfare for all nations, both imply applicability on an international scale. Orwell and Gramsci both examine the social dynamics of individual nation-states to discover a key to socialism's development and abandon theory within an international scope.

Many of Gramsci's ideas suggest the importance of socialism within national parameters. His motivation for establishing a new model for the advancement of socialism--hegemony--relates to his belief that what worked in Russia was inappropriate for other nations in Europe. He follows the trend of national differentiation further by noting that the political environment in each state varied according to its degree of integration into the capitalist system. Nations more extensively integrated into the capitalist system, such as France, exhibited socio-political characteristics different from Russia and in turn needed different approaches to socialism. His own efforts to combat Fascism, just before his imprisonment, narrowed to
issues within Italy alone. The essay "The Southern Question," already cited, is an example of Gramsci's nationalist focus.

Gramsci's emphasis on national factors within the European socialist community did not become extreme. Gramsci never completely rejected the outside direction of the Soviet Union under Stalin which warped the lives of his Italian leftist contemporaries. He did, however, conclude that loyalty to any international socialist movement had to include discussion and compromise. Gramsci came to these conclusions isolated inside an Italian prison.

Orwell, in contrast, stepped directly into a storm of Soviet influence by serving as a combat soldier on the left in the Spanish Civil War. There he experienced personally the violence and disinformation the Soviet Communists marshalled to silence dissenting leftists. Orwell, fleeing Spain in 1937, shortly concluded that Fascism and Communism represented the same variety of totalitarian evil.

Orwell's rejection of Communism bears comparison with a more general trend among socialists. Many individuals,

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43 Adamson, Hegemony and Revolution, 88-89.

44 Joll, Antonio Gramsci, 86.

after the First World War and the collapse of the Second International, found the possibility of an international socialist movement, framed in a rigid Communistic dogma, and backed by the brutal power of the Soviet Union, an attractive option. Disillusionment and reaction came later.  

Orwell never adopted an allegiance to Communist leadership. He certainly reacted against their brutality. It is possible to single out Orwell from many British leftist contemporaries because he simultaneously embraced socialism and rejected the international Soviet political apparatus. The comparison with Gramsci and their common nationalist approach to leftist theory, however, makes clear that Orwell is not an entirely original figure when examined within a European context.

Orwell applies his justification for rejecting international Communist influence. He does so by attacking the idea of an international political movement. In The Lion and the Unicorn Orwell attacks internationalism indirectly by criticizing British leftists for their rejection of a national culture: "There is little in them except . . . irresponsible carping . . . emotional


47 John Rodden, "On the political sociology of intellectuals: George Orwell and the London Left intelligentsia of the 1930s," Canadian Journal of Sociology, 15:3 (Summer 1990), 263.
shallowness . . . . And underlying this is . . . their severance from the common culture of the country.\textsuperscript{48}\!

Intellectuals alienated from their larger community, as usual, attract Orwell's attacks.

An essay published in the February 1942 edition of \textit{Horizon} makes a directly anti-internationalist point.\textsuperscript{49}\!

Orwell states that left-wing parties in industrialized nations are hypocritical because they claim internationalist goals. "They have internationalist aims, and at the same time they struggle to keep up a standard of life with which those aims are incompatible."\textsuperscript{50}\!

The reliance on colonies specifically undermines left-wing internationalism. "We all live by robbing Asiatic coolies, and those of us who are 'enlightened' all maintain that those coolies ought to be set free; but our standard of living . . . demands that the robbery shall continue."\textsuperscript{51}\!

Orwell's experience as a colonial official provided him with useful ideas for his antagonistic commentary on leftist internationalism.

\textsuperscript{48}\! Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," \textit{The Collected Essays}, 2:74.

\textsuperscript{49}\! Ibid., "Rudyard Kipling," \textit{The Collected Essays}, 2:197.

\textsuperscript{50}\! Ibid., 187.

\textsuperscript{51}\! Ibid.
Orwell's attack on leftist internationalism boils down to dissatisfaction with alienation; a failure of the left's leadership to understand the outside world and their position in it. The leftist leadership was, in Orwell's view, alienated from both their own responsibility to Britain and their own responsibility to the masses suffering under colonialism. They occupy a position similar to that of the native intellectuals alienated from their own people, detailed in the second chapter of this thesis. Orwell's concern with alienation is the shadow of his desire for a tightly-knit social system wherein intellectuals would communicate with their wider community and in turn act responsibly. Orwell's interest in an organic community survived the war.

Gramsci's commentary on the intellectual's alienation from the common people of Italy in "The Southern Question," although it does not attack leftists specifically, reflects a similar dissatisfaction. Gramsci describes the southern intellectual's alienation from the peasantry. "[T]he intellectuals derive a strong aversion for the peasant laborer whom they look on as a living machine that must be worked to the bone and can easily be replaced in view of over-population."\(^{52}\) Intellectuals in turn pick up "a habit

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of refined hypocrisy and a most refined skill in deceiving and breaking the peasant masses."\textsuperscript{53}

In Gramsci's description—as in Orwell's—alienation from social responsibility led to injustice. Orwell's commentary, however, singles out an alienated leftist leadership and makes clear his specific aversion to the Marxist-Leninist socio-political model. An essay first presented in a BBC broadcast on 30 April 1941, "The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda," directly mentions Soviet Marxism as the enemy of developing British intellectuals.\textsuperscript{54} War between the left and right pushed intellectuals into alienation from British society. "The only system of thought open to them . . . was official Marxism, which demanded a nationalistic loyalty towards Russia and forced the writer . . . to be mixed up in the dishonesties of power politics."\textsuperscript{55}

Orwell's hatred of Marxist-Leninist thought contributes significantly to his conservative image. He displays an uncomfortable awareness of that image's presence in his political criticism. In \textit{The Lion and the Unicorn} Orwell

\textsuperscript{53} Gramsci, "The Southern Question," \textit{The Modern Prince}, 43.


\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 126.
specifically confronts the idea that nationalism implies a conservative stance. He attempts to transform his call for a specifically nationalistic socialism into a form of radicalism. "Patriotism," Orwell argues, "is actually the opposite of Conservatism, since it is a devotion to something that is always changing and yet is felt mystically the same." Orwell's comment suggests a division between perception and reality. Patriotism escapes the label of conservative because it implies devotion to a national tradition constantly in flux. Patriotism only appears to be conservative because nationalistic tradition seems to be outwardly static. An immediate attack on this statement would be to state that, if perception alone cannot determine the static, conservative nature of something, how can anyone determine what is radical or conservative?

In the same year he printed The Lion and the Unicorn--1941--the essay "Fascism and Democracy" also appeared in print. In it Orwell comments on what is necessary for a British socialist revolution with an emphasis on revering the past. The emphasis on continuity with the past strikes an unambiguously conservative chord. "[N]ational sentiments and traditions have to be respected if revolutions are not

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56 Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," The Collected Essays, 2:103.
to fail."\textsuperscript{57} He continues the tone by stating "the English people . . . will produce a version of Socialism more or less in accord with their past, or they will be conquered from without, with . . . horrible results."\textsuperscript{58} Orwell’s ideas, given the definition of conservative thought as an acceptance of the past as having a positive value, fit the description.

Orwell’s faith in both the necessity of and possibility of a socialist revolution, clear in "Fascism and Democracy," was not a permanent facet of his ideology after 1941. Its persistence can be traced by examining his essays for the Partisan Review, a United States magazine. Orwell accepted a commission to write reports for the publication on British political and social trends. His writing first appeared there in the spring of 1941.\textsuperscript{59}

For a time Orwell’s "Letter from England" looks and hopes for a conjunction of military setbacks and political developments capable of spawning revolution. His essay dated 8 May 1942 is especially explicit. "The basic fact is that people are now as fed up and as ready for a radical

\textsuperscript{57} Orwell, "Fascism and Democracy," ed. by Victor Gollancz, The Betrayal of the Left, 214.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 215.

\textsuperscript{59} Shelden, Orwell, 333-334.
policy as they were at the time of Dunkirk, with the
difference that they now have . . . a potential leader in
Stafford Cripps."  

Sir Stafford Cripps (1889-1952) was a member of
Parliament active in left-wing circles even before the
Spanish Civil War. Early in the Second World War, because
of his leftist credentials, he served as British ambassador
to the Soviet Union. He may have helped influence Winston
Churchill (1874-1965) to announce a policy of committed
support for the Soviet Union when that country came to face
Germany's attack.  

A period of heightened political uncertainty in
Britain, between February and December of 1942, saw Cripps
return from the Soviet Union and play a major political
role. Cripps relied on a constituency of leftists outside
of the Labor party unhappy with the war effort. The same
period saw Orwell's interest in Cripps as a potential
revolutionary leader grow.

After a period of notoriety Cripps, in the wake of
Japanese success in the Far East, went to open talks with

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60 Orwell, "The British Crisis: London Letter to

61 A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford:

62 Ibid., 542-543.
the dissident Indian Congress on 22 March 1942. He was not successful, and Indian passive resistance to British rule spread. Luckily the Japanese did not advance into India to take advantage of the situation. Cripps returned to Britain politically weakened.\textsuperscript{63}

Orwell's next "London Letter," dated 29 August 1942, does not give up hope for revolutionary change. "We are still in the same state of frozen crisis as we were three month ago."\textsuperscript{64} Orwell also notes a decline in Cripps's status: "[He] is . . . gradually losing credit with the left but believed by many to be waiting his moment to leave the Government and proclaim a revolutionary policy."\textsuperscript{65}

Orwell's next "London Letter," dated 3 January 1943, reflects a complete loss in his faith that revolution was a realistic expectation.\textsuperscript{66} Cripps's weakness combined with a string of military successes both point, Orwell states, to an end for potential revolution. He admits "we may all have under-rated the strength of capitalism and that the Right

\textsuperscript{63} Taylor, English History, 544-546.


\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.

may, after all, be able to win the war off its own bat without resorting to any radical change."^67

Orwell's admission marks the destruction of his faith in a fusion of nationalism and socialism. His linking of capitalism and Fascism as the enemy of the British nation and his portrayal of socialism as its savior loose impetus with a realization that Britain can survive without revolution. Orwell's rejection of internationalism and corresponding cultivation of socialism within a British national tradition all become moot without the justification of revolutionary change.

Orwell's accuracy as prophet is not as important as his significance as a historical marker of change in leftist theory. He shares a role with Antonio Gramsci as an example of how the rise of Fascism forced creativity on the part of leftists. The success of the Bolsheviks at the close of the First World War, and their Marxist-Leninist doctrine, came to be devalued by both men as the Germans and Italians spread their power. The even older idea that capitalism would fail by itself also fell into different degrees of disfavor for Orwell and Gramsci. Both instead looked

towards the individual nation state as the proper scope for leftist political activism. Their emphasis on consensus within the nation state as vital for the advance of socialism gives both men's theory, in comparison with Marxist-Leninist thought, a conservative content. Marxist-Leninists carried out change only by violence inflicted by a radical minority.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS ON ORWELL AS CONSERVATIVE
ON NATIONAL AND CONTINENTAL
LEVELS, 1934-43

George Orwell’s acceptance of nationalism at the beginning of the Second World War was not a rare event among British intellectuals previously hostile to patriotism. A whole group of previously antagonistic writers and artists accepted British nationalism as the German threat grew.¹ Orwell’s conversion especially should not be considered a surprise. His espousal of socially conservative thought as early as 1934 foreshadows his acceptance of an essentially conservative nationalism.

Orwell’s conservatism receives definition from its hostile relation to Marxist-Leninist radicalism and a general pessimism for contemporary social change. Orwell’s initial hostility to Marxist-Leninist thought appears in 1934 through his populist commentary on colonial society. He also attacks the direction of Marxist-Leninist thought with a pessimistic analysis of its social ramifications in

The Road to Wigan Pier. Orwell's pessimism, meanwhile, focuses on a variety of topics.

After the Spanish Civil War Orwell's conservatism competes with a previously muted--but suddenly outspoken--economic radicalism. His conservatism gains a new focus, meanwhile, as a reaction to the Marxist-Leninist-sanctioned disregard for the standard of individual rights. His replacement for the elitist Marxist-Leninist social model, expressed after a period of political despondency between 1938 and 1940, is a concept of a popular community derived from British religious values. Orwell's understanding of community is evident in Coming Up for Air and in the essay "Notes on the Way." Its presence reveals his interest in an organic, unified society.

The Second World War sees Orwell offering a politically activist commentary driven by the onslaught of the right: Fascism. He uses the corresponding failure of the left as a justification for further arguments modifying leftist concepts along a more conservative path. Orwell also refuses to abandon his radicalism. Much of his wartime commentary--best exhibited in The Lion and the Unicorn--supports a sometimes contradictory world view of radical and conservative components. He comes to believe by early in 1943, however, that the apparent political success of the right wing in Britain discredits the logic of his own hybrid of national political wants.
On a European continental scale Orwell's ideas have corollaries with three other writers: Frantz Fanon, José Ortega y Gasset, and Antonio Gramsci. All react against Marxist-Leninist thought, a mode of thought upon which Stalin's and Hitler's totalitarian rested. In doing so all deserve to some extent the label of conservative.

The rejection of the Marxist-Leninist model is a conservative act. It rests on two traditional concepts: first, that the individual has rights untouchable by the state, and second, that the general population of a nation should have a role in directing it. Orwell and Ortega support the idea of individual rights by defending the idea of nineteenth century liberalism. Orwell, Fanon, and Gramsci support the idea of general political participation by stressing leadership by popular consensus over any leadership by some militant revolutionary clique. Fanon and Orwell share populist ideas derived from their common experience in the colonial world. Gramsci and Orwell share a drive to discover a means of forwarding socialism by a national political consensus.

All of the intellectuals discussed in this thesis, by forwarding their positions, reject philosophical foundations of the totalitarian state. Taken together they suggest a

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conservative trend among European intellectuals. In standing against the totalitarian state, they stand against an institution unequaled in its power to impose radical change.
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