Introduction

Orwell is one of the great English writers of the twentieth century. To adapt a phrase that became famous in 1940, one could claim that he found a unique register in which to 'speak for England'. The England he spoke for was a nation notoriously preoccupied with 'class' – it was 'two nations', as Orwell acknowledged, ruefully but also hopefully. It is hardly surprising, then, that his published work dwells on class so frequently and fruitfully, or that this theme provides more than enough to fill the present volume with a diverse and distinctive selection of his writings.

What made Orwell unique was not his preoccupation with class: it was his ability to instil the topic with compelling human interest. It was commonplace for left-wing intellectuals in the 1930s to discover class as the key to the social and political crises of their day. Marxism seemed an attractive ideology in a world sliding from an economic slump into dictatorship and war. In an ossified and schematic form, and with tenuous fidelity to the insights of the historical Marx, Marxist economic determinism offered a textbook analysis of what was wrong with bourgeois society. It simultaneously explained why capitalism was bound to fail, why it fostered imperialism abroad and fascism at home, why it could not be reformed but only replaced, and why the proletariat was the appointed agent of revolutionary transformation. What distinguished Orwell was that he had so little use for the proletariat as a category – viewed distantly through the wrong end of a telescope – and instead insisted on discovering for himself the realities of how the poor lived.

Class has been conceptualized in many different ways. In his sweeping historical analysis, *Class in Britain*, David Cannadine suggests that a (misleadingly) similar language of class in fact discloses the persistent rivalry of three implicit models of the social structure. One is a continuously

ranked hierarchy, making sense of social inequalities by locating individuals on rungs of a ladder. Another is a triadic structure of upper, middle and lower orders, which implicitly makes a middle or middling class the key mediating group. The third is a polarized, adversarial and self-conscious dichotomy between the oppressors and the oppressed, the exploiters and the exploited – clearly the form of class consciousness on which Marxism seizes in identifying class struggles as the motor of history.[1]

Here is a robust, versatile and useful taxonomy of class. Tested against it, Orwell is open to the stricture that 'when he tried to describe the social structure of his native land, his efforts were disappointingly confused, and dismally commonplace'.[2] The trouble is that, like many others, he slid between the different categories in this conceptual scheme, sometimes dwelling on the historic chain of hierarchy, while at other times discriminating finely between the social gradations of the middle classes, as in his famous self-identification as 'lower-upper-middle class'. And yet – with an incoherence that is bound to offend the canons of clear-cut social analysis – he reverts time and again to a split between 'us' and 'them' as the prevailing sense in which he understood class.

Orwell did so, however, not in a top-down, theory-driven way but as bottom-up lived experience. Historically, this is what saved him. One result was that he was not at the mercy of an *a priori* concept of class, like many of his left-wing contemporaries who constructed their understanding of the world in conformity with a prefabricated design and found themselves increasingly in denial about its structural flaws. Orwell's house of class had been built brick by brick, with tolerance for curious nooks and crannies. Thus it is hardly adequate to speak simply of the weakness of his theoretical understanding of class: this was exactly what liberated him from idealization of the proletariat and from the illusion that a rigorous class analysis was all that was necessary for political salvation.

Instead, he relied upon immersion and intuition. His immersion in the daily struggle of actual working-class life gave him a kind of first-hand experience very different from the abstractions of 'the class struggle'. His intuition as an imaginative writer guided him in developing a language and a literary genre in which he could carry reports between 'two nations', divided as much by mutual incomprehension as they undoubtedly were by material differences.

Orwell became a foreign correspondent in the class war. He could never forget that he was an Old Etonian roughing it; he did not really believe that his immersion would be permanent. The tools of his trade remained the notebook and the typewriter, with his writing as the ultimate objective and justification of his 'down-and-out' adventures. In a review printed in this volume, he makes the point that there were very few books 'which come from genuine workers and present a genuinely working-class outlook'. Yet he claimed: 'If all of them could get their thoughts on to paper, they would change the consciousness of our race.'[3]

Vicariously, Orwell became the voice of the inarticulate, of 'a normally silent multitude'. For though individuals might be able to talk well enough, the process of writing introduced alien conventions and inhibitions that thwarted effective communication. Orwell realized his own vocation as a writer in using his acquired skills to translate the experience of the poor into a truth that would live on the page.

Down and Out in Paris and London was his first triumph, in more senses than one. 'As for the truth of my story,' he writes in the preface to the French edition, 'I think I can say that I have exaggerated nothing except in so far as all writers exaggerate by selecting.'[4] In fact, Orwell took rather more liberties than he publicly acknowledged at the time, as we can now see. The annotations printed below in a friend's copy of *Down and Out* supply some illustrative detail of his methods.[5] Some episodes are transposed, collapsed or conflated. Some of the marginal notes – 'This all happened', 'Quite true' – may perversely raise doubts about the veracity of the rest.

Plainly, Orwell should not be relied upon, still less held accountable, for the literal accuracy of his reporting. Nor can his accounts of low life and degradation be regarded as representative of contemporary working or living conditions, even in the depths of the slump. Many working-class people, whose trades escaped structural unemployment, enjoyed the 1930s as an era of rising living standards, as historians have long made clear. Orwell's gallery of engaging or exotic characters, eking out an existence on the brink of destitution, plainly cannot serve as a proxy for the working class as a whole, either in France or Britain. But to pursue such a line of criticism risks missing the point entirely.

Orwell gives us poverty with a human face. His concern in these pages

was not with the swathe of upwardly mobile workers whose consumption patterns prefigured the 'affluent society' of the postwar period – though he wrote elsewhere, notably in his novel *Coming Up for Air*, of this emerging, suburbanized, homogenized, Americanized England. Still less did Orwell's quest lead him to depict the immiserization of a solidaristic proletariat as a school of heroic resistance presaging the overthrow of capitalism. The individuals whom he describes are neither stock figures nor two-dimensional emblems of the oppressed and dangerous classes.

Instead, Orwell shows us people essentially much like ourselves – but down on their luck. At times he makes this explicit. 'The mass of the rich and the poor are differentiated by their incomes and nothing else, and the average millionaire is only the average dishwasher dressed in a new suit,' he tells us, and then confides: 'Everyone who has mixed on equal terms with the poor knows this quite well.'[6] But most of us, as he well knows, have not done this, and therefore we do not know it; that is the whole trouble, and it is no good simply telling us. The challenge for Orwell's art is to show us.

Hence his characteristic indirect strategies. By catching our attention with an anecdote, by seizing on an unexpected detail, by enlisting our sympathies in small things, he wins our credence in building up the big picture. The poor are not dull or uninteresting in his account; they are not extras in a drama where only the rich have speaking parts. Their stories will sometimes make your hair stand on end, and even if you can hardly believe that it is all true, you rarely doubt that these are real people. Orwell conveys a palpable sense of recognition: that we have met people like this even though we may never have lived ourselves in such circumstances. Only having secured the ground of our shared intuitions about particular individuals and experiences does he venture any generalizations; and these, rather than sticking out as didactic intrusions, carry the persuasive force of germane common sense.

Because Orwell's best work is so easy to read, it does not mean that it was easy to write. His overflowing wastepaper-basket, his pile of rejection slips, his burnt draft novels of the early 1930s, all testify to his own painful apprenticeship. But with the publication of *Down and Out in Paris and London* we can identify the voice of a maturing writer who was finding his *métier*. This was literally the beginning of the career of George Orwell

(rather than a struggling writer hitherto known only as Eric Blair). Deceptively simple in style and exposition, none of it was as artless as it seemed.

In analysing Orwell's literary strategy in this way, of course, we are simply turning his own critical method back upon himself. 'The Art of Donald McGill', reprinted here, was a pioneer exercise in analysing one example of popular culture – British seaside postcards – that had simply been taken for granted. If this was worth doing, then the art of George Orwell is surely also worth exploration, as is well attested today by the burgeoning interest in his literary oeuvre, captured in the magnificent twenty volumes of *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, the source for this selection.

What needs to be remembered is that Orwell is, above all, a political writer. In making this point, I will cite below some of his introductory comments from a lecture which is not reprinted here, 'Culture and Democracy', in which he offered some unusually explicit comments on the relationship of class to politics, as he saw it. The lecture dates from November 1941; it was given as part of a series organized by the Fabian Society and was subsequently published in a version to which Orwell objected; so the text itself may not represent him faithfully.[7] But the substance of his remarks may be worth retrieval in framing the concerns and explicating the sub-text of many of the pieces collected in *Orwell and the Dispossessed.*

By 1941 Orwell was famous as the author of *The Lion and the Unicorn.* It was, of course, a tract for the times: making its immediate case with half an eye upon sceptical American readers who needed persuading that Britain was indeed fighting for democracy. It was also, as a thousand subsequent acts of plagiarism testify, a moving affirmation of English patriotism. The right can happily make a cliché of 'the old maids biking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn mornings' while the left prefer to relish the image of 'a family with the wrong members in control'.[8] What is crucial is the tension between Orwell's long-held sense of the stupid injustice of the British class system and his commitment, at this moment of crisis, to 'my country right or left'.[9] Yet he did not abandon a left-wing analysis that gave priority to class in favour of a patriotic version that edited class divisions out of the story.

It was through democracy that Orwell sought to resolve these conflicting emphases. Rather than simply restricting democracy to mean 'a form of society in which power is in the hands of the common people', Orwell pointed to another sense, in contrast with totalitarianism, as 'a form of society in which there is considerable respect for the individual, a reasonable amount of freedom of thought, speech and political organization, and what one might call a certain decency in the conduct of the government'. The point was, as he put it, 'I don't need to debunk the first definition' since the common people were plainly not in power; but, he continued, 'particularly in left-wing circles, I think it is necessary to say that democracy in the other sense – freedom of speech, respect for the individual and all the rest of it – does have a reality, an importance, which cannot be made away with by mere juggling with words.'[10]

It is, in fact, Orwell's rejection of crude class determinism that is the key to his political position. Whereas it was a conventional Marxist ploy to 'unmask' the capitalist realities behind western democratic rhetoric, Orwell went further:

> Nothing is easier, particularly if you have a screen of battleships between you and danger, than to prove in words or on paper that there is no real difference between totalitarianism and 'bourgeois' democracy. I haven't the slightest doubt that each of my readers has said that. I have said it frequently . . . Everybody knows that line of thought. It is impossible to go into a left-wing gathering anywhere without hearing it put forward. But I think it is necessary to recognize that it is not only nonsense, but nonsense that can only be uttered by people who have a screen of money and ships between themselves and reality.[11]

This passage works on several levels. It turns a more sophisticated class analysis back upon the left-wing intelligentsia itself, virtually accusing it of its own kind of false consciousness. Moreover, there is a visceral quality in Orwell's antipathy towards the stereotyped reflexes – 'political correctness' would be an anachronistic term – that he found among his own ostensible political allies on the left. He was certainly an awkward comrade. And it is easy to see how he achieved an international reputation as the author of a critique of totalitarianism, first in *Animal Farm* and then in *Nineteen Eighty-Four.*

Orwell's ironical fate was to be hailed by the political right in the

cold-war era. Today it is easier to make sense of his abiding concerns. The nub of his argument was that, so long as formal democracy survived, the possibility of beneficial change remained open; and that unless, in the wider sense, democratic values survived, change would be for the worse. The somewhat imprecise phrase for which he persistently groped in identifying these values was 'a certain decency'. Though explicitly disclosed during the Second World War, it was a humanist perspective long apparent in Orwell's earlier dispatches from the class war. It would be false, therefore, to suppose that he retreated in any significant way from his indictment of the way that the poor were condemned to live in a supposedly civilized society. The range of his writings in this volume, extending into the late-1940s, shows him as alert and unforgiving in this respect, as in the days when he was himself down and out.

Peter Clarke

1. David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (Yale University Press, 1998), esp. pp. 19–20.
2. Cannadine, p. 144.
3. See p. 228, below.
4. See p. 221, below.
5. See pp. 60–61, below.
6. See p. 152, below.
7. See *CW*, XIII/*884* and *885*.
8. *CW*, XII/*763*.
9. The title of an essay published in the autumn of 1940, *CW*, XII/*694*, reproduced in *Orwell's England* in this series.
10. *CW*, XIII/*885*.
11. *Ibid.*

Editorial Note

In the main, the items reproduced here are given in the chronological order in which they were written or published. However, the order of events is sometimes better represented by not following this practice. It will be obvious, from dates and item numbers, where the chronological order has not been followed. Letters are typewritten unless stated otherwise. The titles used for Orwell's essays and articles are not always his own but this distinction is not noted unless there is a special reason to do so.

All the items are drawn from *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, edited by Peter Davison, assisted by Ian Angus and Sheila Davison (Secker & Warburg, 1998). Some explanatory headnotes and many footnotes have been added, amplified and modified. The *Complete Works* did not provide biographical notes of authors of books reviewed but, for this selection, these have been added if the author had a link with Orwell or if they might illuminate the context of Orwell's review. Item numbers from the original edition are given in italics within square parentheses, and a list of volumes in which these items can be found is given in the Further Reading.

Where the text was in some way obscure, the original edition does not modify but marks the word or passage with a superior degree sign (°); in most instances such passages have been silently corrected in this edition but in a few instances the degree sign has been retained, for example, where one of Orwell's idiosyncratic spellings occurs: e.g., 'agressive' or 'adress'.

References to items in the *Complete Works* are generally given by volume, forward slash and item number in italic: e.g.: XV/*1953*; page references to *CW* are given similarly except that the page number is in

roman: XII/387; page references to this present volume are given as 'p. 57'; references are also made to the companion three volumes: *Orwell in Spain*, *Orwell and Politics* and *Orwell's England*. References to *Down and Out in Paris and London* are given to this edition by page and, within square brackets, by the *CW* volume number (IV) and page (the page numbers in *CW* and Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics are identical for the text): e.g., p. 101 [IV/49].

The following works are designated by abbreviated forms:

Complete Works and *CW*: *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, edited by Peter Davison assisted by Ian Angus and Sheila Davison, 20 vols. (1998); volume numbers are given in roman numerals, I to XX. Vols. X–XX of a second, enlarged and amended, edition are being published in paperback from September 2000.

CEJL: *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols. (1968; paperback, 1970)

Crick: Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (1980; 3rd edn, 1992)

A Literary Life: P. Davison, *George Orwell: A Literary Life* (1996)

Orwell Remembered: Audrey Coppard and Bernard Crick, eds., *Orwell Remembered* (1984)

Remembering Orwell: Stephen Wadhams, ed., *Remembering Orwell* (1984)

S&A, *Unknown Orwell*: Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell* (1972)

S&A, *Transformation*: Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation* (1979)

Shelden: Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorised Biography* (1991)

The Thirties: Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Thirties* (1940; 1971); reviewed by Orwell, XII/*615*

A fuller reading list is given in Further Reading.

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Acknowledgements

George Orwell's (Eric Blair's) work is the copyright of the Estate of the late Sonia Brownell Orwell. Most of the documents in this edition are held by the Orwell Archive (founded by Sonia Orwell in 1960) at University College London. Gratitude is expressed to the Archive, and particularly its Archivist, Gill Furlong, for the help given the editor. Thanks are also gratefully extended to the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, The New York Public Library, and the Astor, Lennox and Tilden Foundations, for permission to reproduce Orwell's letter to Leonard Moore of 19 November 1932; and to the British Broadcasting Corporation for 'Answering You' and 'The Proletarian Writer'.

Over thirty years ago it was my privilege to spend a day at the Shakespeare Institute, Birmingham, with two colleagues discussing the presentation of the New Penguin Shakespeare series (to which I contributed editions of *1* and *2 Henry IV*) with the great typographer and designer, Hans Schmoller. Now I am indebted to his daughter, Monica, for sensitive and expert guidance in the preparation of these four volumes for this new Penguin series. I am most grateful, and delighted that, as it were, 'my end is in my beginning', if I might adapt Mary, Queen of Scots, and T. S. Eliot.

'This is . . . a book for those who want to see the notorious "two-nations" of England made into one.'

(Orwell, Foreword to *The End of the 'Old School Tie'* by T. C. Worsley)

'I was told that an impassable gulf divided the Rich from the Poor; I was told that the Privileged and the People formed Two Nations, governed by different laws, influenced by different manners, with no thoughts or sympathies in common; with an innate inability of mutual comprehension. I believed that if this were indeed the case, the ruin of our common country was at hand . . .'

(Charles Egremont in *Sybil*, by Benjamin Disraeli, 1845, Book IV, ch. 8 (1998), 245)

'[The people of England] no longer believe in any innate difference between the governing and the governed classes of this country. They are sufficiently enlightened to feel they are victims. Compared with the privileged classes of their own land, they are in a lower state than any other population compared with its privileged classes. All is relative, my lord, and believe me, the relations of the working classes of England to its privileged orders are relations of enmity, and therefore of peril.'

(A Chartist delegate to Lord Valentine, *Sybil*, p. 227)

[793]

Foreword to The End of the 'Old School Tie' *by T. C. Worsley*

May 1941[1]

The Searchlight Books[2] have been planned to deal with the immediate rather than the distant future. Certain problems, however, are bound to arise in an urgent form as soon as the war is over and are likely to be dealt with in some shoddy makeshift way unless they are thought out in detail beforehand. Of these the educational problem is the most important, and T. C. Worsley's book is a preliminary sketch towards its solution.

What he says will not please the defenders of the existing system. Neither will it please the more 'advanced' experimentalists or the people who imagine that nothing can ever be achieved in England unless we rip down the whole social structure and build again from the bottom. The subjects he deals with in most detail are the need for some kind of uniform educational system for all children up to the age of eleven, as a basis for genuine democracy, and the special position of the Public Schools. He is not so uncompromisingly hostile to the Public Schools as most people of Left-wing opinions. He recognizes that much of the trouble in the England of the last twenty years has come from the divorce between toughness and intelligence, leaving us on the one hand with an official and military class who do their duty according to their lights but whose lights are still those of the pre-1914 world, and on the other hand with an intelligentsia who can see what is happening but lack all training for action. Part of his theme is the importance of not simply attacking the Public Schools, but of trying to incorporate what is good in them in a new system set free from class privilege.

The one thing certain about the British educational system is that if we do not ourselves change it after the war, it will be because Hitler is changing it for us. Indeed it is changing already, thanks to the dispersal

of the child population, the impoverishment of the middle classes and the ever-growing need of the age for technicians. It is in our power to decide whether the change shall be made consciously, as part of a movement towards full democracy, or haphazardly, with vested interests of all kinds fighting rearguard actions and holding up the course of history. This is, therefore, a book for those who want to see the notorious 'two-nations'[3] of England made into one, and with as short a transition stage as possible. It is written for the general public, but educational specialists will find much in it to interest them.

1. This book was first printed in April 1941 but 'destroyed by enemy action' (bombing). It was reset in May and published in June 1941. Orwell dated his Foreword May 1941.
2. Searchlight Books were planned by Fredric Warburg (1898–1980), Tosco Fyvel (1907–1985) and Orwell during the summer of 1940 'in the lush garden of Scarlett's Farm', the home of the Warburgs near Twyford, Berkshire: 'while German bombs . . . began to fall on London; and while above our heads . . . the Spitfires and Hurricanes of the RAF accomplished their decisive air victory of the war, we talked about the future' (Tosco Fyvel, *George Orwell: A personal memoir* (1982), 106; ch. 10 gives a good account of the genesis of the series). Seventeen Searchlight Books were planned; nine were published in 1941 and two in 1942; the remainder did not appear. Orwell began the series with *The Lion and the Unicorn* (XII/*763*; and see, in this series, *Orwell's England* for part I, and *Orwell and Politics* for parts II and III). He also wrote forewards for two books, this one and Joyce Cary's *The Case for African Freedom.*
3. Orwell is referring to the novel, *Sybil,* by Benjamin Disraeli (1845) in which Charles Egremont says, 'I was told that an impassable gulf divided the Rich from the Poor; I was told that the Privileged and the People formed Two Nations, governed by different laws, influenced by different manners, with no thoughts or sympathies in common; with an innate inability of mutual comprehension. I believed that if this were indeed the case, the ruin of our common country was at hand . . .' (245) Egremont, a member of the landlord class with a set of chambers in Albany, Piccadilly, discovers how people live in a rural slum, Marney, 'where penury and disease fed upon the vitals of a miserable population', and an industrial town, Wodgate. Disraeli paints both in the worst light. Thus, of the people of Wodgate, he writes: 'It is not that the people are immoral, for immorality implies some forethought; or ignorant, for ignorance is relative; but they are animals; unconscious; their minds a blank; and their worst actions only the impulse of a gross or savage instinct. There are many in this town who are ignorant of their very names; very few who can spell them. It is rare that you meet with a young person who knows his own age; rarer to find the boy who has seen a book, or the girl who has seen a flower' (51 and 164). Orwell, in his descent into 'the lower depths', has much in common with Egremont.

From Burma to Paris

George Orwell served in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma from 1922 until 1927. He returned to England on leave on 12 July 1927 and, having left his ship in Marseilles and travelled home through France, arrived back in England in August. While on holiday with his family in Cornwall in September he decided not to return to Burma. His resignation took effect from 1 January 1928 and entailed the loss of almost £140 (approximately £5,500 in today's values). By the time he left Burma he was earning £696 a year (roughly £28,000 today), to which were added bonuses for learning Hindi, Burmese and Shaw-Karen. He would not earn nearly that much again in the next fourteen years until he joined the BBC in 1941 (£640). It is likely, from what we know of clothes he had made for him on his return[1] *and the style in which he lived for most of his time in Paris, that he had saved a fair amount of his pay. During the rest of his leave he rented a cheap room in the Portobello Road in Notting Hill, London W11. He began to make expeditions to the East End of London in the autumn of 1927. The order of the events in* Down and Out in Paris and London *should therefore be reversed; indeed, the proof of the title-page, printed before he had chosen the name 'George Orwell' and when he wished to be known completely anonymously, has 'Confessions of a Down and Out in London and Paris by X'. In the spring of 1928, Orwell went to Paris and took a room at 6 rue du Pot de Fer in the Fifth Arrondissement, a working-class district near Monge Métro station. He set himself to becoming a writer and had a modest success in getting articles into small-circulation, left-wing journals. He also wrote either one or two novels and a number of short stories, none of which survive. The article reproduced here, 'Unemployment' (translated from the French version by Janet Percival and Ian Willison), is one of three from 'An Inquiry into "Civic Progress" in England: The Plight of the British Workers', published by* Le Progrès Civique *in 1928 and 1929. A second article, 'A Day in the Life of a Tramp', is reprinted in a companion volume in this series,* Orwell's England. *For each he was paid 225 francs (about £1.80 – some £70 in today's values). He also wrote articles on John Galsworthy, the exploitation of the Burmese people and on censorship in England, for French journals. An article on the French journal* Ami du Peuple, *written in Paris and published in English in* G.K.'s Weekly, *29 December 1928,*

is reproduced below. The Complete Works *print all the articles, with their French originals. The article on unemployment printed here was also published on 29 December 1928 and is the first in the series on the plight of British workers. These articles draw on Orwell's experiences soon after his return from Burma and before he went to Paris. The very short paragraphs are not typical of Orwell. Orwell wrote in English (in a version that has not survived) and the French translator, Raoul Nicole, is almost certainly responsible for breaking Orwell's prose into short bites. For about ten weeks in the late autumn of 1929, Orwell worked as a dish-washer and kitchen porter in a luxury hotel and restaurant in Paris. This was the only time he was seriously poor and served as the basis for the Paris section of* Down and Out.[2]

1. See *A Literary Life*, 36.
2. Ibid., 34, and, generally, Crick, 172–4; S&A, *Unknown Orwell*, 213–16; Shelden, 135–43.

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'Unemployment'

Le Progrès Civique, *29 December 1928*

The prices and measurements given in French in the original have been retained, despite a certain incongruity (with old-style English equivalents where helpful), so that where the original French uses English denominations, such as shillings, this will be clear. There were twenty shillings to a pound (so a shilling corresponds to 5p). For approximate contemporary values, multiply by forty. There were 124 francs to the £ when Orwell was in Paris.

England! Unemployment! You cannot speak of one without raising the ghost of the other.

Unemployment is one of the realities of postwar English life; it is also the reward given to the British worker for his war service.

Before the war, unemployment was certainly not unknown, but the relatively small number of the unemployed was of negligible significance. They constituted what could be termed 'the reserve army of labour', and

acted as a brake on the over-rapid rise in wages; they were also sometimes used as stopgaps when there was a labour shortage.

At that time the economic mechanism ran, or at least seemed to run, fairly smoothly.

Public opinion viewed things calmly, assuming that the machinery could never go far wrong.

But war came and suddenly everything did go wrong. Competition, the very foundation of modern trade, which forces the industrialists from one country into cut-throat rivalry with those of another, was to blame. In all competition there must be a winner and a loser. Before the war England was the winner; today she is the loser. That, in a nutshell, was the cause of all the trouble.

***[1]

The war put an end to England's industrial supremacy. The countries which did not fight, notably America, gained possession of most of her export markets for their own profit. But, even worse, the rest of the world was becoming industrialised more quickly than she was.

The very fact that she had led the way in the race to industrialise told against her.

Her capital was tied up in obsolete machinery, which was unsuited to new methods, but which had cost too much to allow it to be scrapped.

Other countries, which had started later in the race, were better equipped for modern needs. England's main industries, coal and steel, are among those which have suffered most.

At the present time, the coal mines are the hardest hit. They are in such a deplorable state that many of them can only be run at a loss under the present system.

In England, the system of dual property rights in the mining regions gives rise to an enormous waste of fuel, labour and machinery.

Exorbitant rates are paid to the owners of the ground under which the coal seams lie. In addition, each mine is devoured by its own collection of hangers-on: the shareholders, whose demands for dividends push up the price of coal accordingly.

Given all these disadvantages, can we be surprised that English coal no longer finds a market?

To remedy this state of affairs, the capitalists have attempted to force

the miners to work for inadequate wages. Their efforts here have failed, but in the meantime Polish coal is selling at a price some 10 or 15 francs [1s 8d or 2s 6d] below the lowest price which England can offer under the present system.

It is the same in steelworks and cotton mills. Today England is paying dearly for her former industrial supremacy.

Result: one and a quarter million, one and a half million, sometimes nearly two million unemployed in England.

With one or two million people starving in a country, there is a threat of imminent revolution, so it was realised from the outset that the state had a duty to come to the aid of the unemployed.

With the end of the war there came an end to the misleading and short-lived prosperity of wartime. The soldiers returning home had been told that they had been fighting for civilisation and for a country 'fit for heroes to live in', as Lloyd George put it;[2] in short, that postwar England would be an Eldorado where riches would go hand in hand with a higher standard of living.

Alas! As Eldorado did not materialise, it was necessary to think up something at once, before the ex-servicemen had time to find out that they had been deceived and realised that, in the end, they had fought for nothing after all.

And that is why the Government rushed through the Unemployment Insurance Act in 1920; under this act any worker in regular employment could choose to pay a sum of money which would indemnify him should he lose his job. These payments would give him the right to claim benefit in the case of forced unemployment – a wise precaution against the starvation and revolution which would inevitably result.

Here is a brief summary of the clauses of this act:

Each week the workers pay a premium of 3 francs for men and 2 francs 50 for women. In return, if they have made at least thirty payments, they can, if necessary, draw the special unemployment benefit.

This benefit amounts to an allowance of 18 shillings (110 francs) a week for a total of twenty-six weeks of unemployment. This period can be extended in certain exceptional circumstances.

Besides this, if the unemployed man is married, he receives a weekly

allowance of 5 shillings (30 francs) for his wife, and of 1 shilling (6 francs) for each of his children. For unemployed women and young persons under twenty-one the allowances are even smaller.

It should be pointed out straightaway that this has nothing at all to do with charity. It is, in fact, a kind of insurance, and the majority of workers receive nothing in return for their payments.

It must be added that these subsidies for the unemployed have become an absolute necessity as a result of a decline in the English economy for which the workers are by no means responsible.

It is also worth noting that the unemployment benefits do not err on the side of generosity.

One shilling per week is not much to keep a child on. Even with 18 shillings a week a grown man has difficulty in making ends meet.

This needs to be stressed, because there is a ridiculous story in the Conservative press which states that unemployment is due only to the laziness and the greed of the workers.

According to this story, the sole aim of the British worker is to avoid all tiring labour in order to live in idleness on his 18 shillings a week.

And the inventors of this story have coined the word 'dole' for unemployment benefits.[3]

'Dole' is a wicked word, an expression full of disdain evoking the idea of money paid out by charity to unworthy scroungers.

The belief that the unemployed represent a veritable army of sybarites enjoying themselves on money begged from the charity of the taxpayers is widely held by the comfortably-off in England.

In fact, the lot of the unemployed is in reality far from enviable. How, after all, can one live on 18 shillings a week? The reply is simple: one does not live, one just avoids dying.

Take, for example, the case of an unemployed married man with a wife and two young children. His total weekly income amounts to 25 shillings (150 francs).

Could anyone believe for a minute that he could buy many luxuries with this sum, and that the poor devil would not prefer any job, however arduous, which would bring in more?

A poor family, in the situation I have just described, lives herded

together in one room in some stinking slum in London, Manchester, or perhaps some Welsh mining town.

They probably pay 7 shillings (42 francs) a week in rent alone. The remainder must suffice to feed and keep four people.

Given this sort of income, what can their meals consist of? Bread and tea, tea and bread, week in, week out.

This is wretched sustenance: bad bread, white and lacking nutriment, and very strong tea is the staple diet for very poor people in England.

In winter, it is almost impossible to heat the one shabby room properly. The man cannot afford to buy tobacco. Beer is out of the question.

Even the children's milk is rationed. Spare clothes and the less essential pieces of furniture make their way one by one to the pawnbroker's. Dismal day follows dismal day without bringing an end to unemployment.

So 'idleness in luxury', as the Conservative newspapers say in righteous indignation, turns out to mean, on closer inspection, 'a state of near starvation'.

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It may be that the unemployed man is single. Then he will take up residence in one of the enormous barracks known as 'lodging-houses' reserved for very poor people. By doing this he will be able to save a shilling or two on his weekly rent.

These lodging-houses are run by large companies, which make a significant income for them.

The lodgers sleep in enormous dormitories where thirty or forty campbeds – like those of soldiers – are lined up about three feet apart (90 centimetres).

They spend their days in underground kitchens, built under the street, where they can cook their food, if they have any, in a frying pan on a coke fire.

Most of the unmarried down-and-outs in England – the unemployed, beggars, newspaper-sellers and the like – live in these lodging houses; overcrowded, insanitary, comfortless places. The beds, usually revoltingly filthy, are crawling with vermin.

And it is here that the unemployed man takes his meals, consisting of bread and tea. He sits in a blank stupor in front of the fire for those long hours when he is not searching for some kind of work.

Apart from this constantly frustrating search for work, he has nothing at all to do. One can understand that in his situation he desperately hopes to work, to accomplish any task at all, however disgusting and poorly paid, for this completely empty existence, with no entertainment or distraction of any kind – and where hunger is never far away – is one of monotony and crushing boredom.

The unemployed man has just about enough money to meet the essential necessities of life, and the idleness which is forced upon him is a hundred times worse than the worst possible task.

Moreover his unemployment benefit will not be paid to him for ever, and even collecting it is not exactly easy.

He has to go to the Labour Exchange every day to see if there is any work and must often wait there for several hours before anyone has time to attend to him.

To draw his weekly allowance, he has to appear in person and again wait around. Thus one can see at any hour of the day long queues of shabbily dressed, haggard men crowding round the doors of the Labour Exchange. Passers-by look at them with pity or contempt. The officials whose job it is to pay them are at pains to make them aware of the inferiority of their situation. They will not let the unemployed forget for a minute that they are outcasts, living at public expense, who must therefore behave humbly and submissively in all circumstances. The officials are within their rights in refusing payment if the unemployed present themselves drunk or even smelling of drink.

Then comes the dreaded day when the 'dole' runs out. The twenty-six weeks have passed and the unemployed man, still with no work, finds himself with no money either.

What can he do now? Perhaps he has saved a few shillings which will carry him on for a day or two longer. He could give up his four-franc bed and spend his nights in the open, reduce his meals to the bare minimum which will just allow him to stay alive. What is the use? If the longed-for job does not materialise, he must make the choice between begging, stealing, or dying of poverty.

He will probably decide to beg. He will ask for money in the street or else he will seek the assistance reserved for paupers from the local rates under the terms of the Poor Law. Perhaps he will have himself admitted

to the workhouse where the poor, treated more or less like prisoners, are kept at public expense.

If he is lucky he will obtain, under that same law, a weekly payment of 10 shillings (62 francs), on which he will have to exist as best he can.

He could also become a 'tramp', and wander up and down the country looking for work on the way and seeking bed and board in a different workhouse[4] every night.

But there are so many of these unfortunate creatures that the whole edifice of the Poor Law is in danger of crumbling. It was conceived to cope with normal conditions, and cannot bear the additional weight of the thousands of jobless who, since they no longer receive unemployment pay, are often obliged to go on being supported by the community.

In South Wales, where the failure of the pits has thrown half a million men onto the streets, the relief funds for the needy paid from the local rates have now gone bankrupt.

⁂

These are the conditions of unemployment in England. To remedy this state of affairs, the present Conservative government has done nothing except make optimistic pronouncements.

At the beginning of this year, when Mr Baldwin[5] was asked to make subsidies from the public purse on behalf of South Wales, the Prime Minister replied that he was 'counting on private charity' to help the miners deep in destitution.

Tentative projects were proposed aimed at creating an artificial demand for labour by undertaking wide-scale public works, such as the building of roads or canals, but as it would have needed new taxes to set up the project, nothing very much has been achieved.

The mass emigration of the unemployed has also been encouraged, but the conditions offered were not very attractive. What is more, Canada and Australia have their own industrial problems to solve, just like their mother country.

They have no use at the moment for surplus English miners, and have made this quite clear to the miners themselves.

Thus it seems unlikely that emigration will smooth over the difficulty.

The government has striven to hide its mistakes by varnishing the truth. The official unemployment statistics have been drawn up quite

deliberately to give an erroneous impression. They only count the *insured* unemployed, omitting the tens of thousands of people who have never had a regular job since the war. Wives and children supported by the jobless do not appear in these lists either.

The real number of those in need is thus grossly underestimated. The Conservative press avoids mentioning unemployment as much as possible: when it is mentioned, it is with dismissive allusions to the 'dole' and to the laziness of the working classes.

So the comfortably-off middle-class Englishman, who knows nothing – and prefers to know nothing – of the life of the poor, learns nothing which might shake him out of his complacent indifference.

And how, we ask, will all this end? What solution can be envisaged?

One thing alone seems certain. Efforts will be made to prevent most of these poor creatures from actually dying of hunger. For example, no government would dare to make a stand against half-a-million starving miners. Whatever happens, to avoid revolution they will make sure that the unemployed can receive subsidies from somewhere.

But apart from that, any great improvement seems impossible. Unemployment is a by-product of capitalism and large-scale industrial competition. As long as this state of affairs persists, poverty will hold the workers in thrall, now in one country, now in another.

For the moment, the English worker is the scapegoat. He will no doubt continue to suffer until there is a radical change in the present economic system.

Meanwhile his only real hope is that one day a government will be elected which has sufficient strength and intelligence to bring about the change.

E.-A. BLAIR[6]

1. These 'spacers' appear in the original French text. They *may* indicate Orwell's original paragraphing.
2. David Lloyd George (1863–1945; Earl Lloyd George of Dwyfor, 1945) was Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1905–15, and Prime Minister, 1916–22. He proved an effective wartime leader and after the war, unsuccessfully advocated a reasonable peace settlement with Germany. In a speech at Wolverhampton on 24 November 1918, two weeks after the Armistice, he posed the question, 'What is our task?' It was, he said, 'To make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in.' The old-age pension was once often familiarly known as one's 'Lloyd-George'.

3. 'Dole' as a gift of food or money goes back at least to the fourteenth century. It is used by Langland (anything but a 'Conservative' writer) in *Piers Plowman.* Its pejorative use, especially in the twentieth century, is ironic, because employees as well as employers contribute to unemployment insurance, which is the source of unemployment benefits. The idea was first put forward in England by Lloyd George, a Liberal, in his budget for 1909, which the House of Lords rejected.
4. The French text renders 'workhouse' as *l'asile* and adds the English word, in italics in parentheses, immediately after. Several words are given in both English and the closest French equivalent, or simply in English in italics. Thus, 'tramp' appears in italics and also translated as *vagabond.*
5. Stanley Baldwin (1867–1947; Earl Baldwin, 1937) was Conservative Prime Minister three times, 1923–4, 1924–9 (when Orwell wrote this article) and 1935–7. He successfully negotiated the crisis occasioned by the abdication of King Edward VIII on 11 December 1936, but much of the blame for Britain's failure to prepare adequately for the Second World War is often laid at his door.
6. The pen-name 'George Orwell' was first used in January 1933 for *Down and Out in Paris and London,* but it was not regularly used for reviews and articles and so on until December 1936. Unless the pen-name is used, the form used for individual publications is given at the end of each item – E.-A. Blair, E. A. Blair, Eric Blair, E. A. B., E. B., and typographic variants. For much of his time at the BBC (1941–3) he was known as Eric Blair.

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[80]

'A Farthing Newspaper'

G. K.'s Weekly, *29 December 1928*[1]

The *Ami du Peuple* is a Paris newspaper. It was established about six months ago, and it has achieved something really strange and remarkable in the world where everything is a 'sensation', by being sold at ten centimes, or rather less than a farthing the copy. It is a healthy, full-size sheet, with news, articles and cartoons quite up to the usual standard, and with a turn for sport, murders, nationalist sentiment and anti-German propaganda. Nothing is abnormal about it except its price.

Nor is there any need to be surprised at this last phenomenon, because the proprietors of the *Ami du Peuple* have just explained all about it, in a huge manifesto which is pasted on the walls of Paris wherever billsticking is not *défendu.* On reading this manifesto one learns with pleased surprise that the *Ami du Peuple* is not like other newspapers, it was the purest public spirit, uncontaminated by any base thoughts of gain, which brought it to birth. The proprietors, who hide their blushes in anonymity, are emptying

their pockets for the mere pleasure of doing good by stealth. Their objects, we learn, are to make war on the great trusts, to fight for a lower cost of living, and above all to combat the powerful newspapers which are strangling free speech in France. In spite of the sinister attempts of these other newspapers to put the *Ami du Peuple* out of action, it will fight on to the last. In short, it is all that its name implies.

One would cheer this last stand for democracy a great deal louder, of course, if one did not happen to know that the proprietor of the *Ami du Peuple* is M. Coty, a great industrial capitalist,[2] and also proprietor of the *Figaro* and the *Gaulois*. One would also regard the *Ami du Peuple* with less suspicion if its politics were not anti-radical and anti-socialist, of the goodwill-in-industry, shake-hands-and-make-it-up species. But all that is beside the point at this moment. The important questions, obviously, are these: Does the *Ami du Peuple* pay its way? And if so, how?

The second question is the one that really matters. Since the march of progress is going in the direction of always bigger and nastier trusts, any departure is worth noticing which brings us nearer to that day when the newspaper will be simply a sheet of advertisement and propaganda, with a little well-censored news to sugar the pill. It is quite possible that the *Ami du Peuple* exists on its advertisements, but it is equally possible that it makes only an indirect profit, by putting across the sort of propaganda wanted by M. Coty and his associates. In the above mentioned manifesto, it was declared that the proprietors might rise to an even dizzier height of philanthropy by giving away the *Ami du Peuple* free of charge. This is not so impossible as it may sound. I have seen a daily paper (in India) which was given away free for some time with apparent profit to its backers, a ring of advertisers who found a free newspaper to be a cheap and satisfactory means of blowing their own trumpet. Their paper was rather above the average Indian level, and it supplied, of course, just such news as they themselves approved, and no other. That obscure Indian paper forecast the logical goal of modern journalism; and the *Ami du Peuple* should be noticed, as a new step in the same direction.

But whether its profits are direct or indirect, the *Ami du Peuple* is certainly prospering. Its circulation is already very large, and though it started out as a mere morning paper it has now produced an afternoon and late evening edition. Its proprietors speak with perfect truth when

they declare that some of the other papers have done their best to crush this new champion of free speech. These others (they, too, of course, acting from the highest altruistic motives) have made a gallant attempt to [have] it excluded from the newsagents' shops, and have even succeeded as far as the street-corner kiosks are concerned. In some small shops, too, whose owners are socialists, one will even see the sign 'Ici on ne vend pas *l'Ami du Peuple*' exhibited in the windows. But the *Ami du Peuple* is not worrying. It is sold in the streets and the cafés with great vigour, and it is sold by barbers and tobacconists and all kinds of people who have never done any newsagency before. Sometimes it is simply left out on the boulevard in great piles, together with a tin for the two-sou pieces, and with no attendant whatever. One can see that the proprietors are determined, by hook or by crook, to make it the most widely-read paper in Paris.

And supposing they succeed – what then? Obviously the *Ami du Peuple* is going to crowd out of existence one or more of the less prosperous papers – already several are feeling the pinch. In the end, they will presumably either be destroyed, or they will survive by imitating the tactics of the *Ami du Peuple*. Hence every paper of this kind, whatever its intentions, is the enemy of free speech. At present France is the home of free speech, in the Press if not elsewhere. Paris alone has daily papers by the dozen, nationalist, socialist, and communist, clerical and anti-clerical, militarist and anti-militarist, pro-semitic and anti-semitic. It has the *Action Française*, a Royalist paper and still one of the leading dailies, and it has *Humanité*, the reddest daily paper outside Soviet Russia. It has *La Libertà*, which is written in Italian and yet may not even be sold in Italy, much less published there. Papers are printed in Paris in French, English, Italian, Yiddish, German, Russian, Polish, and languages whose very alphabets are unrecognizable by a western European. The kiosks are stuffed with papers, all different. The Press combine, about which French journalists are already grumbling, does not really exist yet in France. But the *Ami du Peuple*, at least, is doing its gallant best to make it a reality.

And supposing that this kind of thing is found to pay in France, why should it not be tried elsewhere? Why should we not have our farthing, or at least our half-penny newspaper in London? While the journalist exists merely as the publicity agent of big business, a large circulation,

got by fair means or foul, is a newspaper's one and only aim. Till recently various of our newspapers achieved the desired level of 'net sales' by the simple method of giving away a few thousand pounds now and again in football competition prizes. Now the football competitions have been stopped by law, and doubtless some of the circulations have come down with an ugly bump. Here, then, is a worthy example for our English Press magnates. Let them imitate the *Ami du Peuple* and sell their papers at a farthing. Even if it does no other good whatever, at any rate the poor devils of the public will at last feel that they are getting the correct value for their money.

E. A. BLAIR

1. This was Orwell's first writing to be published professionally in England. 'G. K.' was G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), essayist, biographer, novelist and poet, remembered particularly for his comic verse, the Father Brown detective stories (1911–35) and *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908). He was converted to Roman Catholicism in 1922. He founded his weekly in 1925 and edited it until his death, when it was taken over by Hilaire Belloc; see *214, n. 1.* See Crick, 192; S&A, *Unknown Orwell*, I, 215. For the journal, see *G. K.'s Weekly: an Appraisal* by Brocard Sewell [1995?].
2. François Coty (1874–1934) built a famous perfumery business, the name of which long outlasted its founder, and became one of France's wealthiest men. He subsidized *L'Ami du Peuple* and *Gaulois*, both of which pursued nationalist and anti-left policies. The title *L'Ami du Peuple* was, ironically, that of the inflammatory radical newspaper edited by Jean-Paul Marat (1743–93), so influential in the cause of the French Revolution.

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[105]

Review of Hunger and Love *by Lionel Britton;* Albert Grope *by F.O. Mann*

The Adelphi, *April 1931*

Hunger and Love is not so much a novel as a kind of monologue upon poverty. Its central character, Arthur Phelps, is a youth of promise, born in the slums. He begins life as an errand boy on twelve shillings a week, then works his way up to be an assistant in a bookshop; when he has partially educated himself and attained an income of twenty-seven shillings a week, the war intervenes and finishes him. He is not a very nice youth, but he is as nice as you could expect him to be on twenty-seven shillings a week; and the peculiar merit of the book is that it does approach life

from the twenty-seven-shilling-a-week angle. Most fiction is written by the well-fed, about the well-fed, for the well-fed. This is the ill-fed man's version; the world as it appears to an unskilled workman – a workman, necessarily, with enough brains to grasp what is happening to him. There are plenty of these men about nowadays, and they are thinking night and day of the world they live in. This (it will also do to illustrate Mr. Britton's curious style) is the way in which they think:

> The little meannesses they subject you to, the incessant degradation, foulness – collar on jugular, little toe twisted ankylosed [*sic*] through pressure of shoe, get up in morning no bath, wear clothes till rot with body sweat, drain stink sink stink w.c. stink live in sleep in work in, mean little jobs consume life activity: can you go through life and be unaware of this great foul disease of humanity?

Such thoughts recur and recur – a sort of mental eczema, a perpetual restless irritation over mean things. To the well-fed it seems cowardly to complain of tight boots, because the well-fed live in a different world – a world where, if your boots are tight, you can change them; their minds are not warped by petty discomfort. But below a certain income the petty crowds the large out of existence; one's preoccupation is not with art or religion, but with bad food, hard beds, drudgery and the sack. 'Culture and love and beauty are so *damned* silly when you're out of work.' Serenity is impossible to a poor man in a cold country, and even his active thoughts will go in more or less sterile complaint.

This is a thing that wants remembering, and the virtue of *Hunger and Love* is that it rubs in the irritating, time-wasting nature of poverty; the nasty, squalid little things which by their cumulative effect make life on less than two pounds a week radically different from life on even three or four pounds. Arthur Phelps can hardly live an hour without being reminded that the world means to starve him. He wants comfort and cleanliness; he gets a stuffy slum bedroom, and fat men coughing into his plate in cheap eating houses. He wants leisure; he gets sixty or seventy hours a week at dull, unnecessary work. He wants knowledge; he gets a board school 'education',[1] and thereafter peeps into textbooks when the boss is not looking. He wants love, but love costs money; he gets moments with half-witted shop-girls, or prostitutes. However much he struggles he flounders back into his poverty, like a sheep floundering into mud. As a

social document, with its insistence on mean, recurrent troubles, this book is entirely sound.

Having said this, however, one must add that as a novel *Hunger and Love* is almost worthless. Obviously the thing to do with such important material – the world of an intelligent poor man – was to make it into a memorable story. Instead of this we have a book that is one long digression, telling, certainly, the truth about life, but making no attempt to be readable. The tricks of style, and particularly the repetitions, become very tiresome after a few chapters. (It must be several hundred times that Mr. Britton reminds us that the earth moves round the sun at 18.5 miles a second – this apropos of man's tininess amid the universe; it is worth knowing, but one does not want to read it every two pages.) No doubt Mr. Britton would say that his object was to tell the truth, not to compose an elegant novel; but even so, truth is not served by leaving out commas. A writer with any sense of selection would have cut this book down from 700 pages to 200, and lost nothing. If Mr. Britton had done this, while keeping a firm hold on the realities of his subject, *Hunger and Love* might have been a first-rate book instead of merely an unusual one. Still, it *is* unusual.

It is a far cry from *Hunger and Love* to *Albert Grope. Albert Grope* is also the story of a man born and bred in the slums, but these are picturesque slums, not the smelly variety. *Hunger and Love* is compounded of discontent and astronomy, with perhaps a touch of James Joyce; *Albert Grope* is Dickens – rather diluted. The hero begins life as a shop-boy, sets up as a bookseller, then as an advertising agent, and ends moderately rich and happily married. He is very like a faded portrait of David Copperfield, which is perhaps what the author intended. The pleasant and simple nature of the hero, and the eccentric characters whom he meets, are described with a competence worthy of something more original.

ERIC BLAIR

1. A basic education for everyone was established in 1870 by the Elementary Education Act, organized through local School Boards. Fees could be charged but these were almost completely abolished in 1891.

[110]

To Dennis Collings

Thursday night [27 August 1931] *Handwritten*

[A lodging-house in Southwark Bridge Road]

Dear Dennis,[1]

Please excuse pencil & bad writing, as I am writing this in a lodging house. It is a 7d[2] kip – & looks it, I may say – in Southwark, & I believe the only one at the price in London. We go down for the hopping tomorrow morning: 2d tram to Bromley, & hike the rest.

I have had an interesting 2 days camping in Trafalgar Square. It has, at this time of year, a floating population of 200 or so. You can make yourself fairly comfortable against the north wall & can get tea all day long, as a coffee shop nearby will give you boiling water free or 1d for a billyful (billies are called 'drums' by the way). I was there all yesterday & was to have spent the night in St Martin's Church, but as you had to queue up for an hour to get a decent place we decided to stay in the square. You take my tip & *never* sleep in Trafalgar Square. We were tolerably comfortable till midnight, except that once in 5 or 10 minutes the police came round waking those who were asleep & making anyone who was sitting on the ground stand up. Every ten minutes it would be, 'Look out, mates, 'ere comes the flattie (policemen). Take up thy bed & walk' etc.[3] And then the police: 'Now then, get off of that. If you want to sit, sit on the benches' etc. There were only benches for 40 out of the 200, but we got *some* rest, as we kipped down again the moment the policeman had passed. After midnight the cold was glacial. Perhaps a dozen people managed to sleep, the rest walked the streets, with an occasional sit-down for a rest – this for 4 consecutive hours. At 4 am someone managed to get hold of a big pile of newspaper posters & brought them along to use as blankets. ''Ere y'are, mate tuck in the fucking eiderdown. Don't we look like fucking parsons in these 'ere surplices? 'Ere, I got "Dramatic appeal from the Premier" round *my* neck. That ought to warm yer up, oughtn't it?' etc. We made ourselves into large newspaper parcels, & were comparatively warm, tho' still not warm enough to sleep, apart from the police. I doubt whether more than 10 or 20 of the 200 people slept a wink during

the night. At 5 we all went to Stewart's coffee shop in St Martin's Lane, where it is understood that you can sit from 5 am to 9 am for a 2d cup of tea – or even for less, for often 2 or 3 fellows who had only 2d between them clubbed together & shared a cup of tea. You were allowed to sleep with your head on the table till 7 am, after which the proprietor woke you up. This is the absolutely regular routine of Trafalgar Square 'sleepers'. Two of the fellows I was with had had 7 consecutive weeks of it & some people do it all the year round. They make up the sleepless night by naps during the morning. The rules about what you may & may not do in Trafalgar Square are curious, & should interest you as an anthropologist. Till noon you can do what you like (even shave in the fountains) except that the police wake you if they see you asleep. From noon to 9 pm you can sit on the benches or the pedestals of the statues, but are moved on if you sit on the ground. After 9 pm you are also moved on from the pedestals of the statues. Between 9 pm & midnight the police wake those who are asleep every 5 minutes, after midnight every half hour. For all this no ostensible reason.

About 8 pm last night a woman came up crying bitterly. It appeared that she was a tart & someone had poked her & then cleared off without paying the fee, which was 6d. It appeared that of the dozen or so women among the 200 in the square, half were prostitutes; but they were the prostitutes of the unemployed, & usually earn so little that they have to spend the night in the Square. 6d. is the usual fee, but in the small hours when it was bitter cold they were doing it for a cigarette. The prostitutes live on terms of perfect amity with the other down & out women. In Stewart's coffee shop this morning, however, an old girl who had slept in Covent Garden was denouncing 2 tarts, who had earned enough to get a few hours in bed & then a good breakfast. Each time they ordered another cup of tea she was yelling, 'There's another fuck! That's for that fucking negro you let on for a tanner' etc.

Today went much as yesterday & tonight, as we have a long day before us, I decided on getting a bed. My mates have gone to St Martin's Church, preferring to spend their money on a meat breakfast. This place is an apalling° squalid cellar, as hot as hell & the air a sort of vapour of piss, sweat & cheese. A pale youth, some kind of labourer but looking

consumptive, keeps declaiming poetry in front of the fire. Evidently he is genuinely fond of it. You should hear him declaiming:

> A voice so thrilling ne'er was 'eard
> In Ipril from the cuckoo bird,
> Briking the silence of the seas
> Beyond the furthest 'Ebrides etc.[4]

Also speaks of himself as 'sicklied o'er with the pile cast of care'.[5] I should love to hear him recite 'O holy hope & high humility'. I have met other curious types of whom I will write to you when I have time. Also about the prevalence of homosexuality in London, & stowaways. The songs I have heard this time are 'Alleluia, I'm a bum', which I believe is American. Also one about

> Tap, tap, tapetty-tap,
> I'm a perfect devil for that,
> Tapping 'em 'ere, tapping 'em there,
> I've been tapping 'em everywhere.

Tap = beg. Perhaps an old music hall song?

I hope this letter has not been too inconsequent & illegible. I will write when I have further news & a more comfortable place to write in. If you don't hear within a fortnight it probably will mean I've been pinched for begging, as the mates I'm going with are hardened 'tappers' & not above petty theft.

Yours
Eric A Blair

1. Dennis Collings (1905–) was a friend of Orwell's from the time the Blair family moved to Southwold in 1921; Collings's father became the Blair family doctor. Collings grew sisal in Mozambique, 1924–7; read anthropology at Cambridge, 1928–31; and was appointed assistant curator of the Raffles Museum, Singapore, when he joined the Colonial Service in 1934. That year he married Eleanor Jaques (d. 1962), whom Orwell also knew well. He contributed to *Orwell Remembered* (76–83), and see Shelden, 156, 192. A later letter to Dennis Collings, dated 4 September 1931, sent while Orwell was hop-picking, is printed in X/227–8. Orwell uses his experience in Trafalgar Square in ch. 3 of *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935). Its heroine, Dorothy Hare, spends several nights there when poverty-stricken.

2. 7d ≑ seven pence in pre-metric currency, a fraction less than 3p, perhaps £1.00 in contemporary values. The letter 'd' stands for the Latin, *denarius* (plural *denarii*).

3. Jesus told the man who had been waiting by the Pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years for a cure, 'Rise, take up thy bed, and walk' (John 5:8).
4. A rough variant of the second four lines of stanza 2 of Wordsworth's poem 'The Solitary Reaper' (with 'April' for 'spring-time' and 'Beyond' for 'Among').
5. *Hamlet*, II.ii: 'pale cast of thought'.

[111, 113]

Hop-Picking Diary

25.8.31: On the night of the 25th I started off from Chelsea with about 14/– in hand, and went to Lew Levy's kip in Westminster Bridge Road. It is much the same as it was three years ago, except that nearly all the beds are now a shilling instead of ninepence. This is owing to interference by the L.C.C.[1] who have enacted (in the interests of hygiene, as usual) that beds in lodging houses must be further apart. There is a whole string of laws of this type relating to lodging houses,* but there is not and never will be a law to say that the beds must be reasonably comfortable. The net result of this law is that one's bed is now three feet from the next instead of two feet, and threepence dearer.

26.8.31: The next day I went to Trafalgar Square and camped by the north wall, which is one of the recognized rendezvous of down and out people in London. At this time of year the square has a floating population of 100 or 200 people (about ten per cent of them women), some of whom actually look on it as their home. They get their food by regular begging rounds (Covent Garden at 4 am. for damaged fruit, various convents during the morning, restaurants and dustbins late at night etc.) and they manage to 'tap' likely-looking passers by for enough to keep them in tea. Tea is going on the square at all hours, one person supplying a 'drum',[2] another sugar and so on. The milk is condensed milk at 2½d[3] a tin. You jab two holes in the tin with a knife, apply your mouth to one of them and blow, whereupon a sticky greyish stream dribbles from the other. The holes are then plugged with chewed paper, and the tin is kept for days, becoming

* For instance, Dick's café in Billingsgate. Dick's was one of the few places where you could get a cup of tea for 1d, and there were fires there so that anyone who had a penny could warm himself for hours in the early mornings. Only this last week the L.C.C. closed it on the ground that it was unhygienic [Orwell's note].

coated with dust and filth. Hot water is cadged at coffee shops, or at night boiled over watchmen's fires, but this has to be done on the sly, as the police won't allow it. Some of the people I met on the square had been there without a break for six weeks, and did not seem much the worse, except that they are all fantastically dirty. As always among the destitute, a large proportion of them are Irishmen. From time to time these men go home on visits, and it appears that they never think of paying their passage, but always stow away on small cargo boats, the crews conniving.

I had meant to sleep in St Martin's Church, but from what the others said it appeared that when you go in you are asked searching questions by some woman known as the Madonna, so I decided to stay the night in the square. It was not so bad as I expected, but between the cold and the police it was impossible to get a wink of sleep, and no one except a few hardened old tramps even tried to do so. There are seats enough for about fifty people, and the rest have to sit on the ground, which of course is forbidden by law. Every few minutes there would be a shout of 'Look out, boys, here comes the flattie!' and a policeman would come round and shake those who were asleep, and make the people on the ground get up. We used to kip down again the instant he had passed, and this went on like a kind of game from eight at night till three or four in the morning. After midnight it was so cold that I had to go for long walks to keep warm. The streets are somehow rather horrible at that hour; all silent and deserted, and yet lighted almost as bright as day with those garish lamps, which give everything a deathly air, as though London were the corpse of a town. About three o'clock another man and I went down to the patch of grass behind the Guards' parade ground, and saw prostitutes and men lying in couples there in the bitter cold mist and dew. There are always a number of prostitutes in the square; they are the unsuccessful ones, who can't earn enough for their night's kip. Overnight one of these women had been lying on the ground crying bitterly, because a man had gone off without paying her fee, which was sixpence. Towards morning they do not even get sixpence, but only a cup of tea or a cigarette. About four somebody got hold of a number of newspaper posters, and we sat down six or eight on a bench and packed ourselves in enormous paper parcels, which kept us fairly warm till Stewart's café in St Martin's Lane opened. At Stewart's you can sit from five till nine for a cup of tea (or sometimes three or four people even share a