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“The road from Mandalay to Wigan is a long one and the reasons for taking it aren’t immediately clear”:

A World-System Biography of George Orwell

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Abstract

George Orwell is one the best known and highly regarded writers of the twentieth century. In his adjective form—Orwellian—he has become a “Sartrean ‘singular universal,’ an individual whose “singular” experiences express the “universal” character of a historical moment. Orwell is a literary representation of the unease felt in the disenchanted, alienated, anomic world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This towering cultural legacy obscures a more complex and interesting legacy. This world-system biography explains his contemporary relevance by retracing the road from Mandalay to Wigan that transformed Eric Blair, a disappointing-Etonian-turned-imperial-policeman, into George Orwell, a contradictory and complex socialist and, later, literary icon. Orwell’s contradictory class position—between both ruling class and working class and nation and empire—and resultantly tense relationship to nationalism, empire, and the Left makes his work a particularly powerful exposition of the tension between cosmopolitanism and radicalism, between the abstract concerns of intellectuals and the complex demands of local political action. Viewed in full, Orwell represents the “traumatic kernel” of our age of cynicism: the historic failure and inability of the left to find a revolutionary path forward between the “timid reformism” of social democrats and “comfortable martyrdom” of anachronistic and self-satisfied radicals.

Keywords: world-system biography, Old Left, sociology of intellectuals, sociology of culture



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The day after Edward Snowden, Glenn Greenwald and *The Guardian* exposed the pervasive surveillance of electronic communications by the U.S. National Security Agency and British Government Communications Headquarters, sales of *1984* on Amazon.com shot up 6,021 percent in just twenty-four hours (Bamford 2013). It's not surprising that Orwell's dystopic world of total surveillance, constantly warring super-states, misinformation and manipulation expresses our contemporary anxieties. Smart phones, social media, ubiquitous computing and "big data" make telescreens seem quaint. With global politics dominated by intractable conflicts throughout the Middle East and scores of forgotten insurgencies in places like Northeast India, Eastern Congo, or the Southern Philippines, "war is peace" is as fitting a motto today as it was during the first days of the Cold War. When NSA Director General Keith Alexander can tell Congress, four months before the Snowden leaks, that the NSA *does not* spy on U.S. citizens, Orwell's neologism doublethink—"To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies"—seems to capture the logic of contemporary security discourse (Greenberg 2012; Orwell 1950/1961: 32).

This renewed interest in Orwell speaks to his deeper impact on the politics and culture of historical capitalism. Sixty years after his death, Orwell still stands as a towering cultural figure. The numbers speak for themselves: Orwell's famed anti-authoritarian satires, *1984* and *Animal Farm*, have sold 50 million copies, more than any "serious" or "popular" author (Rodden & Rossi, 2012: 10). He is also the only author whose name has become common cultural referent outside of the literary world.¹ The term "Orwellian" evokes images of debased world where surveillance and suspicion pervade all social relationships and misinformation passes for truth. In adjective form, Orwell is transformed into a "Sartrean 'singular universal,' an individual through whom the 'universal' spirit of an age finds expression and from whose 'singular' experiences the character of the age is forged" (Rodden 1989: 11). Orwell represents a literary expression of the unease felt in the disenchanted, alienated, anomic world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

George Orwell holds such enduring cultural power because his life and work help illustrate a momentous change in the attitude and outlook that animates historical capitalism as a social system: the shift from utopian dreams to dystopian disquiet. *1984*, along with Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), forms a "trilogy of negative utopias." They are the historical foil of the utopia, a genre which emerged at the dawn

¹The other contenders—Shakespearean, Rabelaisian, Swiftian, Johnsonian, Byronic, Joycean, Kafkaesque—will all occasionally appear in popular discourse but "even though many would recognize the *names* behind the adjectives of several of these authors, it is likely that relatively few people who are not literary-minded would grasp these adjectives allusive meanings" (Rodden 1989: 33, original emphasis).

of the capitalist epoch with Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Johann Andrea's *Christianopolis* (1619) and Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1623). These works are an early expression of the faith in humankind's individual and social progress that successively characterized Renaissance humanism in fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Enlightenment philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and nineteenth century socialism (Fromm 1961: 258). For much of capitalist history, this utopian thinking framed "a brilliant horizon visible to everyone around the world, shining with promises at certain times: modernity, rationality, progress, liberalism, nationalism, socialism" (Quijano 2002: 75). The twentieth century marks this horizon's eclipse: the senseless slaughter of the First World War, the horrors of fascism and Stalinism, the unrealized promises of decolonization and integration, the defeat of socialism, and the triumph of a cynical, unrestrained, and increasingly illiberal capitalism.

While remembered for his anti-authoritarian satires, it is the road from Mandalay to Wigan that transformed Eric Blair, a disappointing-Etonian-turned-imperial-policeman, into George Orwell, a contradictory and complex socialist and, later, literary icon. Three generations previous, his family had married into the landed gentry but, by Orwell's time, the family's fates were mixed up in the dirty work of empire. Orwell followed his father's footsteps into the Indian Civil Service. Emerging out of his experience in Burma, Orwell's self-conscious reinvention as a socialist writer took on a uniquely important and enduring significance. Orwell's own contradictory class position—relative structural subordination in Britain and structural dominance in Burma—personified these dilemmas and led him to confront three unpleasant realities put that him at odds with the dominant currents of the early 20th century Old Left: (1) the structural implication of the British Left and industrial working class in imperialism; (2) the tension between the cosmopolitan interests and identities of the Left intelligentsia and the more locally rooted concerns of "ordinary people"; and (3) the often retrogressive nature of "progress."

Orwell was unable resolve to these structurally determined tensions. In the first instance, Orwell was a product of particular moment, the hegemonic decline of the United Kingdom, and a member of a particular intellectual formation, the Old Left in Britain. Orwell's contradictory class location and resultantly tense relationship to nationalism, empire, and the Left makes his work a particularly powerful exposition of the tension between cosmopolitanism and radicalism, between the abstract concerns of intellectuals and the complex demands of local political action. In the second instance, he was an active agent in an important historical process, the mid-century collapse and fragmentation of the global Old Left. Orwell's development represents an internal critique with lasting implications for Left politics that are obscured by his enduring power as a cultural icon, the singular universal of our age of cynicism.

Viewed in full, Orwell represents the “traumatic kernel” of our age of cynicism: the historic failure and inability of the Left to find a revolutionary path forward between the “timid reformism” of social democrats and “comfortable martyrdom” of anachronistic and self-satisfied radicals (Orwell 1941: 93-94). Rather than culminating development of a political position, *Animal Farm* and *1984* represent Orwell’s personal failure to answer his own critiques and the recuperation of his concerns in the form of satire. Indeed, Orwell’s politics, however guided by a few steadfast commitments, shifted in relation to personal and historical circumstances: his upper class socialization, his colonial experience, his self-conscious reinvention as a socialist writer, his service in the Spanish Civil War, and his increasingly visible participation in public debates before, during, and immediately after World War II. Orwell’s politics are important not for their programmatic unity but for what they reveal about his own historical conjuncture and its continuing repercussions. While Orwell’s life tells us the most about the exhaustion and fragmentation of the Old Left, his enduring popularity speaks to his continuing relevance to a world where imperialism, nationalism, and development have become more complicated but no less salient realities.

Can there be a World System Biography?

There is a large literature on Orwell. It includes a number of biographies (Woodcock 1966/2005; Crick 1981, Sheldon 1991; Meyers 2001; Brooker 2004; Taylor 2004; Colls 2013) and series of critical reflections, ranging from the more explicitly political and polemic (Williams 1971; Hitchens 2002; Lucas 2004) and the more academic and disinterested (Newsinger 1999a; Ingle 2006; Clarke 2007; Bounds 2009). Much of this writing is concerned with the institutionalization of Orwell in political discourse. He is alternatively praised as “the wintry conscious of a generation” (Meyers 2001) and reviled as a self-appointed “policeman of the left” (Lucas 2003; 2004). To his defenders, he is an independent and insightful defender of democratic socialism (Crick 1981; Newsinger 1999a). To critics, he variously depicted as an ultra-Left dilettante (Williams 1971), an anti-feminist (Patai 1984) and “a sick counterrevolutionary” (Belllow 1970/2004: 40). His is claimed on the far Left by anarchists (Woodcock 1966/2005; Richards 1998); while, on the far Right, neoconservatives maintain that Orwell anticipated their politics (Podhoretz 1983). In the last three decades, more dispassionate scholarship has separated Orwell from the polemics of those who claim or denounce him (Rodden 1989; Newsinger 1999a; Ingle 2006; Clarke 2007; Bounds 2009).

Where most accounts of Orwell consider him within the British national context or wider world of Anglophone culture, the world-historical coordinates of Orwell holds unique significance that eludes conventional biographers. Specifically, world-system biography centers

the analysis of the “complex triangulations” among social processes that animate different temporalities: the historical long term, the generational conjuncture and cacophony of events (Derluigian 2005: 82-83). On the level of historical structure, Orwell is unavoidably shaped by the decline of Britain as world hegemonic power. For the intermediate era of Orwell’s generation, politics were forged in the crucible of sharp ideological debates around Stalinism, fascism, the threat of war and the hope for revolution. Orwell’s political trajectory is also shaped by the immediate associations and events that defined his life on a more quotidian basis. While such decisions that look random or fateful, the product of chance or charisma, Orwell’s position in the political and literary field structured his reaction to events.

In the “dust” of events, world-system biography reverses the traditional methodological imperatives of historical social science. A focus on biography can reveal the way individual agents internalize and mediate long-enduring global structures, transforming the weight of history into resources practically mobilized in concrete struggles to reshape the world. The generational time of the conjuncture becomes paramount. Orwell’s politics are only meaningful when considered in relation to his contemporaries. To this end, a series of “incorporating comparisons” (McMichael 1990) between Orwell and other intellectuals— “Auden & Co.,” Raymond Williams, and James Burnham— can reconstruct the Anglo-American Old Left, its exhaustion, and its impact on New Left. These comparisons break the structural determinism that is seemingly implicit in world-systems analysis. They place Orwell—however conditioned by structural forces—in a shifting web of associations with contrasting political trajectories.

True to the biographic form, this article proceeds chronologically. First, I explain Orwell’s position in global power relations and his reinvention as socialist in light of his contradictory position between *both* ruling class and working class *and* nation and empire. I develop an incorporating comparison between Orwell and Auden and Co. to identify Orwell’s lasting politicization and subsequent role as an internal critic of the Old Left. Second, I reinterpret Raymond Williams’ influential analysis, comparing Orwell and Williams’ modes of dissent within the specificities of their times in order to parse out the tensions between cosmopolitanism and radicalism that complicate the work of Left intellectuals and confound the work of revolutionary transformation. Third, I develop Orwell’s thought in relation to his contradictory class location and detail the content of Orwell’s critique of the Old Left. Fourth, I explain Orwell’s political development in relation to wider shifts in the Old Left, and use James Burnham put in in relief Orwell’s anti-communism and ambiguous drift toward the Right. Finally, I argue that Orwell’s continuing popularity is a result of the enduring contradictions of Left politics that he himself identified.

Orwell's World-Systemic Position and the Old Left

The long-term decline of British power formed the backdrop of Orwell's life. Born in 1903, Orwell's youth was bracketed by the signal and terminal crises of British hegemony: the Long Depression of 1873 to 1896 and the 1931 collapse of the British pound's link with the gold standard (Arrighi 1994: 179, 221). Orwell's family experienced the decay of British hegemony as a crisis of class reproduction. Eric Blair, the man who would adopt the penname George Orwell, was born into a downwardly mobile genteel family, what he described as "the lower-upper-middle class...a sort of mound of wreckage left behind when the tide of Victorian prosperity receded" (Orwell 1937/1958: 121). In the late 18th century, Charles Blair (1743-1820), Orwell's great-grandfather, was an absentee landlord of Jamaican slave plantations that married into landed gentry. Orwell's branch of the family, however, received very little of this wealth (Crick 1981: 45-50).

Thomas Richard Blair (1802-1865), Orwell's grandfather, the tenth-born son of Charles Blair, "was under the disagreeable obligation of having, as that last child, to earn his living" (Crick 1981: 46). Distant from a chance to inherit family fortune, Orwell's grandfather opted to for colonial service, a path both Orwell and his father would eventually follow. The Blairs thus joined "the superfluous men" that combined with "superfluous capital" or the "alliance between the mob and capital" that formed the social basis of imperialism (Arendt 1951/1973: 147-157). Unlike Arendt's iconic account, however, this turn to colonial service did not represent a release of "the reserve army of labor" through safety valve of empire. Instead, colonial service was an attempt to reproduce their privileged position in Britain's class hierarchy and reaffirm their status.

This strategy worked for the first generation. Orwell's grandfather, Thomas Blair, an Anglican priest, preached in Calcutta and Tasmania, before returning to England in 1854 to become the Vicar of Milborne St. Andrew in Dorset. It was the last aristocratic patronage post that Orwell's branch of the family held. Richard Walmesley Blair (1857-1903), Orwell's father, followed the same path but with less social capital to mobilize. One of twelve children, Richard Blair was homeschooled to save money. Orwell's father joined the Indian Civil Service and, lacking the connections normally made at elite public schools or a prestigious university, found the low status appointment in the Opium Department, where he remained throughout his unremarkable career (Stansky and Abrahams 1972: 5-12).

By the time Orwell was born in 1903, the family had settled into a "contradictory class location," an ambiguous position in-between classes (Wright 1985). Within the national class structure of the UK, Orwell was part of the "dominated fraction of the dominant class," or the middle classes with aesthetic taste similar to the bourgeoisie but political and economic interests

more congruent with the working classes (Bourdieu 1984). Wealthy enough to grasp at a fading gentility but too poor to make the claim enforceable, Orwell inherited a contempt for the poor, while, simultaneously, developing deep insincerities from his exposure to his upper-class peers (Stansky and Abrahams 1972: 23-79, 139-144).² In his own description, he was “an odious little snob” in his youth (Orwell 1937/1958: 137). Orwell’s contradictory position in Britain is further complicated by his inherited strategy of class reproduction through colonial service. As a result, Orwell sat between both ruling class and working class *and* nation and empire: relative structural subordination in Britain *and* structural dominance in Burma.

Personally, Orwell felt British hegemonic decline and his own family’s downward mobility as pressure to “make good” and re-establish the Blairs’ flagging wealth and status.³ Family connections and his academic performance secured him opportunities to study at prestigious schools, even though his family could not afford them. Orwell attended St. Cyprians, a private preparatory school, and later Eton College, the elite public school. These elite institutions of class reproduction inculcated students in habitus of the ruling class and the patriotism of “War, Empire and Kipling” (Crick 1981: 85). Orwell’s time at Eton, however, was also the period of World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and intensified postwar labor unrest (the coal miners’ strike of 1919). The “general revolt against orthodoxy and authority,” was even felt at “Old Eton,” where Orwell and his fellow “public schoolboys” idolized Lenin and “derided the [Officers Training Corps], the Christian religion and perhaps even compulsory games and the Royal Family.” No doubt, there were limits to this moment of discontent. In his words, Orwell and his fellow Etonians “retained, basically, the snobbish outlook of our class, we took it for granted that we should continue to draw our dividends or tumble into soft jobs, but also it seemed natural to us be ‘agin the government’” (Orwell 1937/1958: 138-139).

Orwell’s performance at Eton was disappointing. He missed his opportunity to study at Oxford or Cambridge and “tumble into [a] soft job.” Instead, he followed his father’s footsteps, joining the Indian Imperial Police. Here, Orwell departed from the standard, methodologically-nationalist accounts of contradictory class locations. As one of 90 police officers deployed to Burma, Orwell was “overseeing life-and-death matters for [Moulmein/Mawlamyine, a city with]

² Orwell’s autobiographically detailed these experiences in the posthumously published essay “Such, such were the joys” (Orwell 1952); although the veracity of his claims about public school life has been disputed (Buddicom 1974; Pearce 1992).

³ The term “make good” comes from Orwell’s self-parodying novel, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Gordon Comstock, the protagonist, shares Orwell’s predicament as the heir of respectable family whose wealth has disintegrated. An aspiring but struggling poet, Comstock leaves his position at an advertising agency to pursue his artistic ambitions. Comstock feels pressure to “make good” from his family, girlfriend and, in a convoluted way, his own neurotic and petty war against “the money god” of commodity fetishism and middle class respectability (Orwell 1956).

a population which was equal to that of medium-sized European city” (Shelden 1992: 105; Newsinger 1999a: 3-6). In the in 1920s, revolutionary nationalism in Burma escalated from student protests to tax strikes. British rule was contested and Orwell was a visible authority figure. “I was hated by large number of people,” he later reflected (Orwell 1936/2000: 235).

After five years in the Indian Imperial Police, Orwell resigned and, in a self-conscious act of penitence, submerged himself into the world of poverty in Paris, London and elsewhere in Southern England. From 1932 to 1935, he worked a series of jobs including teaching at prep school and clerking in a book store. Thereafter, writing provided his primary means of income. During this period, Orwell wrote many essays, *Down and Out in London and Paris* (1933/1961), a *roman à clef* concerning urban poverty, and three novels, of which *Burmese Days* (1934/2000) is the best known. From 1936 to 1948, Orwell published his best known political works: *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937/1958), an exposé on coal mining and an idiosyncratic diatribe against the Old Left; *Homage to Catalonia* (1938/1969), an anti-Stalinist account of the Spanish Civil War; *The Lion and The Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (1941), his audacious call to turn war mobilization into revolution; and his two best known works, *Animal Farm* (1945/1995) and *1984* (1950/1961).

Orwell’s position at the intersection of the literary and political fields, however, was never a comfortable one. As a writer, Orwell always remained apart from “the dominant literary movement of the 1930s... ‘Auden & Co.’: W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis, Louis MacNiece, Christopher Isherwood, John Lehmann, Rex Warner and Edward Upward” (Stansky & Abrahams 1972: 180-182). Where “Auden & Co.” spent their early twenties ensconced in the university, Orwell had a different education in the periphery of the world-system. His time in Burma radicalized him in a unique way. “Auden and Co.” drifted toward the Left along with a wider generational movement that saw fundamental political shifts in Britain: Lloyd George’s fall from power in 1922 and the subsequent decline of the Liberal Party; the first, brief Labour government in 1924; and the May 1926 General Strike. Whereas “Auden and Co.” were mere carriers of the Old Left, who drifted in and out of the movement in step with the fashions of the time, Orwell’s enduring commitment to socialist transformation was life long and, through his reflections on his position and experience, he articulated an important internal critique that made him a producer of the exhaustion and fragmentation of the Old Left.⁴

⁴During Orwell’s life, the Old Left in UK was dominated by the social democratic Labour Party and the Stalinist Communist Party of Great Britain. The main debates were of the Left in the UK were structured by the dominance of these parties. They centered on the struggles of organized labor, the fight to form a Labour government, and questions about the nature of the Soviet Union. These parties were surrounded by a series of smaller, more radical organizations. Orwell was closest to one of these, the Independent Labor Party (ILP), a loose party founded in 1893 that lacked any strong theoretical orientations and

Orwell's Double Vision, Tory Anarchism, and British Hegemonic Decline

For Raymond Williams (1971), Orwell's rejection of imperialism and reinvention as a socialist writer did not overcome the contradictions of his position. While Orwell's contradictory class location invested him with a "double vision, rooted in the simultaneous positions of dominator and dominated" (18), it also left him alienated and unable to express meaningful solidarity with oppressed peoples. He always saw "other people...as an undifferentiated mass beyond." His double vision made him a contradictory and confused socialist: "When, however, in any positive way, he has to affirm liberty, he is forced to deny its inevitable social basis." A closeted liberal, "the only dissent" Orwell offers "comes from a rebel intellectual" (Williams 1983: 310-313). For Williams, Orwell is an ultra-Left dilettante who eventually "reverts to type." The terminus of this return to form is *1984*, in which "all modern forms of repression and authoritarian control" were attributed to a single political tendency, socialism, which Orwell misrepresents" (77). In contrast, I argue that a world-system biography views Orwell's double vision as the embodiment of the structural contradictions that defined his social position. Instead of a "return to form"—via a methodological nationalism—it is the point of departure for a life of political engagement.

Williams is correct in his insistence that Orwell is a paradoxical and contradictory figure, yet he refuses to acknowledge much creativity or conflict in Orwell's politics and work. Instead of reproducing inherited biases, Orwell adopted a dissenting position that, however shaped by his place and time, was not crudely reducible to his social position. Orwell is a "Tory anarchist" or a "cultural dissent[er], out step with and opposition to many features of the modern world."⁵ Tory anarchists share common values and practices: "the use of satire...artistic ambition...respect for privacy and the liberty of the individual; a fear of the state...a nostalgic and melancholy temper...criticism of social conformism and a pervasive sense of pessimism" (Wilkin 2013: 199). Structurally, Tory anarchism is "a reaction to profound changes in Britain's place in the modern world-system." Personally, it is rooted in "the experiences of a group of relatively

drifted between the social democracy of the Labour Party to more libertarian wings of the radical Left. By 1930s, when Orwell was a fellow of traveler of the ILP, the party had taken a "Quasi-Trotskyist path" (Bounds 2009: 24). All these parties, however, shared a common two-step strategy: seize the state apparatus and use it to complete the transitions to socialism. In this way, they can be usefully called "Old Left" parties to contrast from the post-1968 "New Left," which rejected both its predecessor's vertical forms of organization and tactical focus on attaining state power (Arrighi, Hopkins & Wallerstein 1991).

⁵Wilkin comes to the term Tory anarchist from Orwell's own writings and biography. Orwell (1946/2000a) used the term to describe Jonathan Swift: "He is a Tory anarchist, despising authority while disbelieving in liberty and preserving the aristocratic outlook while seeing clearly that the existing aristocracy is degenerate and contemptible" (216).

privileged men who have been coming to terms with the loss of...power and wealth” associated with the decline of Britain as a world-hegemonic power (Ibid: 200).

Peter Wilkin defines Tory anarchism as a particularly English counter-hegemonic practice, what Raymond Williams (1977) in his elaboration of hegemony, would call the production of “traditions” or the “shaping a past and pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification” (113). This attempt at counter-hegemonic tradition-making is clear in Orwell’s writing on working class decency and his wartime efforts to recuperate English patriotism as the basis of a revolutionary movement (Clarke 2007: 13-62; 98-145). In *The Road to the Wigan Pier*, Orwell (1937/1958) romanticized the proletarian household as reaching “perfect symmetry” (117, 178). In the practices of the working class, Orwell saw the true worth of socialism—“justice and common decency.” Revolutionary appeals need to be rooted in “a vision of present society with the worse abuses left out, and with interests centering around the same thing as at present—family life, the pub, football and local politics” (Ibid: 176-177). In *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941), “Notes on Nationalism,” (1945/2000) “The English People” (1947/2000), Orwell explored the specificities of English national character to identify a revolutionary way forward for the UK. While “the English intelligentsia...[ook] their cookery from Paris and their opinions from Moscow,” Orwell worked to define a “specifically *English* Socialist movement” (Orwell 1941, 48, 111; See also Clarke 2007: 98-146).

Williams could not acknowledge Orwell’s counter-hegemonic character arguably because Orwell’s Tory anarchism speaks to deeper a dilemma that left intellectuals, Williams included, have to confront. Tory anarchism is a culturally and temporally specific accommodation to the competing pressures of “*embourgeoisement* and radicalization” or the tension between the cosmopolitan ideas of the global Left and the local and immediate concerns of actually existing communities. Specifically, Orwell’s Tory anarchism meant a rejection of dominant theories of revolution that saw modernization—understood generally as industrial development and scientific progress—as means to liberation. This also meant an ambiguous—and a potentially reactionary—embrace of nationalism and existing working class culture. Orwell thus tried to avoid *embourgeoisement* by abandoning the effort to reverse his family’s downslide from nobility into the new emerging professional middle class. At the same time, his radicalism was grounded in a nostalgic effort to recuperate English nationalism as the basis of revolution.

Where Orwell’s politicization is well known, Williams’ own development is a less dramatic version of Orwell’s transformation. As John Rodden explains: “For just as Orwell dropped ‘Eric Blair’ to become the writer and democratic socialist ‘Orwell,’ Williams dropped his childhood nickname ‘Jim’ at Cambridge to become ‘Raymond,’ the Left Leavisite and then moved steadily left in the 1960s and 1970s—further away from ‘Jim.’” Like Orwell, Williams broke with his

past and reinvented himself along with his politics, “renouncing his youthful empiricism in exchange for ideology and social theory, his inherited Welshness and acquired Englishness for Europeanness and his young man’s Bevanite socialism for New Left Marxism” (Rodden 1989: 197-198). In this way, Williams serves as Orwell’s foil. The son of a railway worker, Williams became politicized at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he joined the Communist Party of Great Britain. Academia was the primary site of his politics. For Williams, radicalization and *embourgeoisement* were complementary movements. For Orwell, they were contradictory, and produced the creative tension at the heart of his work.

These transformations are responses to the problem of affiliation that confronts Left intellectuals. Through both their individual process of political becoming and their social integration into specific fields of cultural production and political struggle, Left intellectuals attempt to move away from their particular position and articulate a universal discourse for human liberation. In his political writings, Orwell consistently discussed the way class distinctions complicated the relations among the Left intelligentsia, the rising professional middle class, the industrial working class, and the “down and outers.” Indeed, “George Orwell” was more than a penname. It was a political project, “the vehicle through which Blair could hone and develop his democratic socialist ambitions, his struggle against the class prejudices of his upbringing” (Wilkin 2013: 201). Today, such class divisions are again as sharp as they were during the 1930s. While changes in capitalism have altered the specific dynamics of class formation, the cultural coordinates of class and the symbolic violence associated with the naturalization of class distinctions still confront Left intellectuals concerned with the legitimacy of their voice. Orwell is a powerful literary exposition of this dilemma.

Orwell’s Politics

While the questions Orwell approached were the questions of his time, the answers he offered were rooted in his contradictory class location, I argue. This included structural domination in Burma and relative structural subordination in Britain. His position separated Orwell from many of his colleagues and forced him to reckon with three unpleasant realities: (1) the structural implication of the British left and working class in imperialism; (2) the tension between the cosmopolitan interests and identities of the Left intelligentsia and the more locally rooted concerns of “ordinary people”; (3) the often retrogressive nature of “progress.” Orwell thus advocated for a politics that was both socialist and libertarian, both anti-colonialist and anti-communist, global in ambitions but sensitive to “traditional loyalties” of specific cultural systems.

Orwell's political development began with a rejection of his experience in Burma. As such, his first works on colonialism mainly contain an individualist perspective.⁶ In his later political writings, however, Orwell confronted class and empire more systematically. *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937/1958) represents the maturation of his politics and his embrace of socialism. The result of a two month study of coalminers in Lancashire and Yorkshire, *The Road to Wigan Pier* was an important political polemic written in the mid-1930s when the Miners Federation was struggling against the scab Spencer Union in an effort to improve wages and secure national bargaining (Taylor 1996). With 44,000 sold, it was the most successful title of the Left Book Club, a socialist publishing group that peaked in the popular front period (Rodden & Rossi 2012: 56). The book is comprised of two parts: the first, a detailed study of conditions of coalminers and, the second, an idiosyncratic diatribe against the Labour Party, the world Communist Movement, and Left intelligentsia.

Orwell's double vision led him to approach coal mining from two perspectives. As member of the "lower-upper-middle class," he focused on the arduousness of mining and position of miners in Britain. Not only is their work "so exaggeratedly awful," coal mining was "vitally necessary and yet so remote from our experience, so invisible, as it were, that we are capable of forgetting it as we forget the blood in our veins" (34-35).⁷ Yet as a former servant of Empire, he also took a global view:

For in the last resort, the only important question is, Do you want the British Empire to hold together or do you want it to disintegrate? And at the bottom of his heart no Englishman...does want it to disintegrate. For apart from any other consideration, the high standard of life we enjoy in England depends upon keeping a tight hold on the Empire...Under the

⁶ "A Hanging" (1931/2000), "Shooting an Elephant" (1936/2000), and *Burmese Days* (1934/1962) all condemn colonialism as a dehumanizing system that debases both the oppressor and oppressed and allows only the most ruthless to prosper. Similarly, *Down and Out in London and Paris* (1933/1961) was successful as "sympathetic portrayal of itinerant poor" that "expos[ed] the iniquities of the workhouse systems" but it failed to "measure up to scale of the economic crisis." Focused on poverty at the individual level, the work showed no awareness of scope of the problem. At the time, three million workers were officially unemployed in Britain. While moving toward socialism, early Orwell wrote in the tradition of reformist liberalism (Newsinger 1999a: 30-31).

⁷ He elaborates further: "In a way it is even humiliating to watch coal miners working. It raises in you a momentary doubt about your own status as an 'intellectual' and a superior person generally. For it is brought home to you, at least while you are watching, that it is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior. You and I and the editor of the *Times Lit. Supp.*, and the Nancy poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of *Marxism for Infants*—all of us *really* owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel" (Orwell 1937/1958: 34-35, original emphasis).

capitalist system, in order that England may live in comparative comfort, a hundred million Indians must live on the verge of starvation—an evil state of affairs, but you acquiesce in it every time you step into a taxi or eat a plate of strawberries and cream. The alternative is throw the Empire overboard and reduce England to a cold and unimportant little island where we should all have to work very hard and live mainly on herrings and potatoes. That is the last thing that any left-winger wants. Yet the left-winger continues to feel that he has no moral responsibility for imperialism. He is perfectly ready to accept the products of Empire and to save his soul by sneering at the people hold the Empire together (Orwell 1937/1958: 159-160).

From this point onward, Orwell's writing on socialist strategy would be uniquely characterized by his global approach to class that led him to conclude that the British working class and Left was implicated maintenance of the colonial system. In *Adelphi* in 1939, he argued that "that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain but in Asia and Africa." On these grounds, he criticized the abandonment of anti-imperialism during the Popular Front period, equating it with opportunistic political posturing: "Quakers shouting for a bigger army, Communists waving Union Jacks, Winston Churchill posing as democrat" (1939/2000: 394, 397). In a later reflection on the UK's postwar Labour government, Orwell (1948) identified an "unsolved contradiction that dwells at the heart of the Socialist movement." Socialism promises both "better material conditions for the white proletariat" and "liberation for the exploited coloured peoples. But the two aims, at least temporarily, are incompatible" (Orwell 1948: 346).

In his Tory anarchist view, Orwell's politics also show a deep skepticism of the notion of progress and the Old Left's assumption that socialist modernization would deliver human liberation. Instead, Orwell insisted that "machine civilization" removes the aesthetic and emotive aspects of life. "If a man cannot enjoy the return of spring," he asked "why should he be happy in a labour-saving Utopia?" (Orwell 1946/2000b: 144). For Orwell, endorsement of "the idea of mechanical progress, not merely as a necessary development but as an end in itself" common to both fascists and communists was replacing traditional social norms but failing to create a new humanism. "In a healthy world," he writes in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, "there would be no demand for tinned food, aspirins, gramophones, gaspipe chairs, machine guns, daily newspapers, telephones, motor-cars" (Orwell 1937/1958: 205). Four years later, he wrote that to accept the contemporary world was to accept "concentration camps, rubber truncheons, Hitler, Stalin, bombs, aeroplanes, tinned food, machine guns, putsches, purges, slogans, Bedaux belts, gas masks, submarines, spies, provocateurs, press censorship, secret prisons, aspirins, Hollywood

films, and political murders.” For Orwell, technical development was retrogressive and dehumanizing: “*Progress and reaction* have both turned out to be *swindles*” (Orwell 1940/2000: 500, 527, original emphasis).

Orwell’s world-historical imagination and related anti-modernism, however, were not simply limited to critique. Orwell also envisioned socialism as a world order implicitly based in common sense and notions of basic decency:

And all the while everyone who uses his brain knows that Socialism, as a world-system and wholeheartedly applied, is a way out. It would at least ensure our getting enough to eat even if it deprived us of everything else. Indeed, from one point of view, Socialism is such elementary common sense that I am sometimes amazed that it has not established itself already. The world is a raft sailing through space with, potentially, plenty of provisions for everybody; the idea that we must all cooperate and see to it that every-one does his fair share of the work and gets his fair share of the provisions seems so blatantly obvious that one would say that no one could possibly fail to accept it unless he had some corrupt motive for clinging to the present system. Yet the fact that we have got to face is that Socialism is not establishing itself. Instead of going forward, the cause of Socialism is visibly going back (Orwell 1937/1958: 171).

His anti-modernism translated politically into a call to humanize socialism. He realized that the formation of a professional middle class, mass mediation and mass consumerism in a changing capitalism was making proletarian revolution an anachronistic strategy in place like Britain.⁸ As

⁸ “After twenty years of stagnation and unemployment, the entire English Socialist movement was unable to produce a version of Socialism which the mass of the people could even find desirable. The Labour Party stood for a timid reformism, the Marxists were looking at the modern world through nineteenth-century spectacles. Both ignored agriculture and imperial problems, and both antagonized the middle classes. The suffocating stupidity of left-wing propaganda had frightened away whole classes of necessary people, factory managers, airmen, naval officers, farmers, white-collar workers, shopkeepers, policemen. All of these people had been taught to think of Socialism as something which menaced their livelihood, or as something seditious, alien, ‘anti-British’ as they would have called it. Only the intellectuals, the least useful section of the middle class, gravitated towards the movement.

A Socialist Party which genuinely wished to achieve anything would have started by facing several facts which to this day are considered unmentionable in left-wing circles. It would have recognized that England is more united than most countries, that the British workers have a great deal to lose besides their chains, and that the differences in outlook and habits between class and class are rapidly diminishing. In general, it would have recognized that the old-fashioned ‘proletarian revolution’ is an impossibility...Labour Party politics had become a variant of Conservatism, ‘revolutionary’ politics had become a game of make-believe” (Orwell 1941, 93-95).

such, he repeatedly condemned the sectarianism and abstruse theorizing of communist factions as counter-productive blustering. He called on the Left to stop antagonizing the “sinking middle class” before they turn to Fascism. “The job of the thinking person,” he concluded “is not to reject Socialism but to make up his mind to humanise it” (Orwell 1937/1958: 219).

While Orwell’s politics evolved in relation to events, he had developed a humanist conception of socialism by the mid-1930s that would remain constant throughout his career. As an item of faith, Orwell believed that “ordinary people” could understand and act upon the world outside of the parameters set by the state, party, media or other powerful institutions. As Stephen Ingle notes, “for Orwell, reality, the external world, could be discerned by the undeceived intelligence of the ordinary individual...ready to do battle with the collective state over the issue of truth” (Ingle 2006: 128). This attitude led him seek a revolutionary politics that was built on the prevailing notions of decency found among the working classes. “[T]rue values are not to be created nor old values ‘transfigured’ by the revolution or a in a new revolutionary consciousness.” Instead they can be found “already in the decency, fraternity, mutual aid, sociability, tolerance and skepticism towards authority of the working class” (Crick 1981: 33). These ideas are very attractive. Indeed, they foreshadow both the humanism of the New Left and the affirmation of subaltern identities seen in “new social movements.” Like these later movements, however, Orwell also found it exceedingly difficult to turn humanist notions of “common decency” into a workable revolutionary program.

Orwell and the Agonies of the Left

Orwell was more than an individualist dissenter in the mode of a “Tory anarchist.” Rather, he was part of a discrete intellectual tendency. Orwell entered the political and literary fields through communist cultural circles. His work was first printed in *The Adelphi*, the unofficial organ of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), an ideologically diverse left party that drifted toward Trotskyism during Orwell’s time, and *Monde*, connected to the Communist Party of France. On the other side of the Atlantic, Orwell wrote for *The Partisan Review*, a publication that started as the John Reed Clubs’ challenge to *New Masses*, the official publication of the Communist Party USA. After Stalin ordered the John Reed Clubs to disband in 1935, *The Partisan Review* “became the vehicle for the ‘literary Trotskyism’ of the New York intellectuals, showing a broad sympathy for Trotsky’s ideas, but eschewing any organisational commitment” (Newsinger 1999b: 25). In the 1930s, this formation centered on the Trotskyist wings of the communist movement but, by the late-1940s, it had evolved into what became known as “the non-communist left.”

Orwell's immersion in this intellectual formation shaped his both work and political development. While *The Road to Wigan Pier* represents Orwell's decisive move to the Left and his full embrace of socialism, the work "must be seen as an outgrowth from the whole complex of argument and acquaintance within *The Adelphi*-ILP Left" (Sedgwick 1969). Practically, Orwell's connections to *The Adelphi* and ILP gave Orwell the access to make his research possible. Intellectually, this milieu was the most dynamic intellectual force of the British Old Left:

In several directions its concerns closely foreshadowed those of the British New Left of 1957-60: working-class culture and community (this time as an actuality rather than a nostalgia), a broad Socialism scornful of pro-Russian and pro-Labour cant, anti-'literary' literary criticism, an ethical, early-Marxian 'Socialist humanism.' (Ibid).

Like his colleagues across the Atlantic who formed the American Workers Party in 1933 as "an authentic American party rooted in the American revolutionary tradition" to rival the CPUSA (Hook 1987: 191), Orwell was part of a larger group that presaged the New Left.

As a line of critique internal to the Old Left, this intellectual formation developed in relation to the agonies of the Left. During Orwell's years as a writer from 1927 to 1950, the Comintern moved from the aggressively sectarian "class-against-class" politics of the Third Period (1929-1933) to the broad anti-fascist coalitions of the "popular front" (1934-1939). The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact brought a period of revolutionary defeatism (1939-1941) before war with Germany brought renewed collaboration with progressives and liberals. After the war, the reformed Cominform (1947) directed communist parties to again return to a popular front strategy in order to co-opt nationalist and anti-American sentiment against the dollar diplomacy of the Marshall Plan (Claudin 1975). During the sectarian Third Period, the membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain contracted from over 10,000 to only 2,555. Membership rebounded to 6,000 during the popular front period, reached 16,000 at the start of the war and peaked at 56,000 in 1945 (Bounds 2009: 8). During these years, many communist and fellow travelers found it difficult to hold the party line and began to go different ways. For some, the Moscow show trials or Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was the point of divergence. For Orwell, the Spanish Civil War marked a clear break with the communist movement.

Whereas *The Road to Wigan Pier* marked Orwell's decisive move into the socialist camp, his service in Spain and his account of the episode, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938/1969), signaled his increasingly ardent anti-communism. Through his connections to *New Adelphi* and ILP, Orwell fought in the militia of the Trotskyist Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM).

Although his time on the frontlines was uneventful, Orwell defended POUM positions in street fighting during the sectarian Barcelona May Days. In May 1937, Communist Party of Spain and its Catalan wing, the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia, systematically uprooted the institutions of autonomous working class power that effectively governed Barcelona, dispersing revolutionary committees and disarming the National Confederation of Labor-controlled revolutionary police. The communists captured and executed many, including Andres Nin, POUM general secretary (Bolloten 1991: 489-511). After the POUM was banned in June 1937, Orwell and Eileen O'Shaughnessy, his first wife, narrowly escaped Spain, wanted as "known Trotskyists...linking agents of the ILP and POUM" (Shelden 1991: 295).

In the period between his service in Spain and his move toward the Labour Left in 1943, Orwell put forward his most radical and programmatic political positions in an attempt reconcile English patriotism with revolutionary socialism. In *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (1941), he put forward a program to this end: nationalization of industries with compensation, limits on income inequality, democratic educational reform, and "positive imperial policy [that] aim[ed] at transforming the Empire into a federation of Socialist states, like a looser and freer version of the Union of Soviet Republics" (90). Most immediately, he looked to transform the Home Guard into a popular militia and turn the British war effort into revolutionary warfare. It was Orwell's boldest political position, an attempt to navigate a course between the "timid reformism" of a Labour Party that never attempted "any fundamental change" and the outmoded "the nineteenth century doctrine of class war" still upheld by the radical left (92-94). *The Lion and the Unicorn* represents synthesis of *The Road to Wigan Pier's* critique of the Left with his positive experience in anarchist Barcelona. It was audacious and, of course, totally unrealistic.⁹

From 1943 to his death in 1950, Orwell's politics moderated and his overall outlook darkened. American intervention and the shifting fortunes of the conflict compelled Orwell to moderate his ultra-left call to transform war mobilization into revolution. In November 1943, he became literary editor of *Tribune*, a position he held until 1945. Founded in 1937 by Stafford Cripps, Atlee's eventual president of the broad of trade, *Tribune* was unofficially tied to the Labour Party. As the Atlee administration failed to destroy institutions of class privilege (e.g.,

⁹ He later realized that he "over-emphasised the anti-Fascist character of the war, exaggerated the social changes that were actually occurring and underrated the enormous strength of the forces of reaction" (Orwell 1944/2000: 297). More generally, Orwell was amazed by what he felt was the subdued reaction of the British people to the tremendous changes happening around them: "In the face of terrifying dangers and golden political opportunities, people just keep on keeping on, in a sort of twilight sleep in which they are conscious of nothing except the daily round of work, family life, darts at the pub, exercising the dog, mowing the lawn, bringing home the beer, etc" (Orwell 1945/2000: 384).

the House of Lords, the public schools and titles), undertook a measured program of nationalization with considerable compensation to owners, and increased the exploitation in the colonies to offset postwar depression (despite independence for India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), Orwell resigned himself to pragmatic support of Labour as the best Britain could achieve given the constraints of the time.

After 1947, Orwell moved away from the immediate politics of the Labour Left and retreated to the isolated island of Jura in the Inner Hebrides to write. His growing obsession with totalitarianism was related to his interpretation of contemporary events. Having abandoned the optimism of his ultra-left phase and disillusioned with the tepid reforms of the Attlee administration, Orwell became convinced that democracy was increasingly under threat. He feared that capitalism and liberal democracy would be replaced not by a libertarian and democratic socialism but state-capitalism and authoritarianism. By this point, his politics had moved away from proto-New Left idealism and toward the cynicism of the nascent Non-Communist Left. In 1945, Orwell founded the Freedom Defence Committee, a civil liberties organization formed to rival the communist-dominated National Council for Civil Liberties. The organization was a clear precursor to the CIA-financed Congress for Cultural Freedom, formed in 1950.

Here, Orwell was greatly influenced by James Burnham's *Managerial Revolution* (1941), which argued that World War II was "a major social revolution" displacing capitalism and socialism with "a managerial society", where a technocratic elite of "operative executives, superintendents, administrative engineers, supervisory technicians or, in government... administrators, commissioners, bureau heads" would control the means of production and lord over an order as "exploitative" as older class systems (71-95). Orwell both reviewed *Managerial Revolution* and, later, wrote an extended essay on the book (Orwell 1946/2000c; 1947/2000). Orwell and Burnham's political trajectory were also similar. Burnham was a Trotskyist in the 1930s and one of the founding members of the American Workers Party, which occupied roughly the same space in the U.S. Old Left that ILP inhabited in the UK. Like Orwell, Burnham also turned anti-communist, however, unlike Orwell, he renounced Socialism and moved decisively to the right.

Orwell's work with the nascent non-Communist Left also foreshadowed the covert methods of many of his colleagues who would come to wittingly collaborate with intelligence services during the Cold War. In March 1949, eight months before his death, Orwell turned over a list of thirty-five people he considered unsuitable to write for the Information and Research Department (IRD), the arm of the Foreign Office concerned with anticommunist propaganda. The event underscores the extent to which former radicals found themselves collaborating with the state in the name of anti-Stalinism. Two of Orwell's associates had come to work for IRD: T.R. Fyvel,

Orwell's co-editor for the publisher's Federic Warbug's "Searchlight" series, which included Orwell's *Lion and the Unicorn*, and Celia Kirwan, Arthur Koestler's sister-in-law and former editorial assistant at *Polemic*, a short lived publication of the anti-Stalinist left. At the time, the IRD—a government propaganda ministry—could be said to have "socialist credentials." The "declared purpose" of the IRD "was to oppose communism in the name of social democratic values." The IRD, after all, "was a creation of a Labour government which Orwell supported strongly" (Wilford 2003: 61).

While "Orwell's list" appears as a great blemish on his political legacy, the event is more significant for the way it demonstrates the agonies the Cold War imposed upon the Anglo-American Left. On both sides of the Atlantic, intellectuals struggled to find an independent space for radical politics. Frustrated with the narrowness of the Freedom Defence Committee, Orwell and Koestler, in 1946, sought to create an international association called "The League for the Freedom and Dignity of Man" to defend both political freedoms and social rights. The proposed organization, however, failed to generate much interest in a Left sharply divided by mounting Cold War Tensions. The Europe-American Groups, a similar effort by Dwight MacDonald, Mary McCarthy, Nicola Chiaromonte and Albert Camus to form "psychological communities" dedicated to pacifism, voluntarism and personal happiness, collapsed under the demands to take a stronger stance against Stalinism by William Philips and Philip Rahv, the editors of *The Partisan Review*, and their influential mentor, Sidney Hook (Wilford 1994: 215-216). Rising Cold War tensions were making autonomous political projects increasingly difficult. Many Left intellectuals, as Wilford (2003) explains, "had become so preoccupied with the threat of Soviet expansion that they had almost entirely lost interest in other political issues, including suggestions for new, positive leftist activity" (32).

Orwell, as a reflection of this larger tension, remained divided by his ardent anti-communism and his lifelong committee to democratic socialism and anti-imperialism. While Lucas (2004) uses "Orwell's list" to reinterpret his career as a self-conscious attempt to police the Left, the idea that Orwell would have supported a British McCarythism is directly contradicted by his opposition in 1946 to the ten year prison sentence given to Alan Nunn May, a nuclear physicist found to be spying for the Soviets. Two years later, moreover, Orwell wrote to George Woodcock urging that the Freedom Defence Committee take a stand on the Labour Government's attempt to purge communists from the civil service (Newsinger 1999a: 147). Orwell's anti-imperialism, furthermore, endured throughout his life. Orwell declined to join the anti-communist League for European Freedom, which remained silent on the question of the British Empire. At the same time, Orwell contributed to proto-New Left journals like Dwight MacDonald's *Politics* and Humphrey Salter's *Polemic*, both seeking to define a revolutionary

alternative distinct from both the moderation of Labour/New Deal reformism and Soviet-style Communism (Sumner 1996: 21-24; Meyers 2001: 239-241).

From this perspective, it must be remembered that *Animal Farm* and, especially, *1984* are satires, not prophecies. Despite this deep pessimism, aided, no doubt, by his increasingly poor health and the unexpected death of his first wife, Orwell believed that a popular movement could challenge these developments and realize a system worthy of the name socialism. Shortly before his death, Orwell was asked to comment on the political assumptions of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He made it clear that the novel's chief message was "Don't let it happen. It depends on you" (quoted in Bounds 2009: 28). Orwell's enduring commitment to democratic socialism is further underscored by his ongoing efforts to define a positive political project as exemplified in his efforts to move beyond the Freedom Defence Committee and his writing for *Politics* and *Polemic*. Regarding the revolutionary socialist intents of *1984*, Philip Bounds, author of a study of Orwell's relationship to British Marxists, puts it well: "he remained an unabashed radical who simply believed that worst-case scenarios should always be faced" (Ibid: 28). In this way, *Animal Farm* and *1984* are more accurately seen as the recuperation of Orwell's politics in the form of satire.

Orwell and the Enduring Contradictions of Left Politics

By the time of his death in 1950, Orwell's politics were a contradictory combination of libertarian socialism and revolutionary patriotism, colored by an anti-modernist distrust of progress. Orwell came to these opinions as a result of his own reckoning with his class position and its implication with imperialism. He was sensitive to the world-historic coordinates of class formation. Coupled with his concern for the cultural aspects of class, Orwell offered a conjoined analysis of the class and empire that reflected his contradictory world-systemic position and set him at odds with established Left parties and institutions. Despite flirtations with revolutionary communism, Trotskyism in particular, and social democratic reformism, Orwell rejected both dominant postures on the Left. Instead, he looked to traditional identities, the family, and nation to ground revolutionary politics that would be specific to its place and sensitive to the existing culture. In this way, he anticipated future trends in global Left: the humanism of the New Left and new social movements' affirmation of subaltern identities.

Today, Orwell's politics are more valuable as a reminder of the enduring malaise of the Left than they are of any revolutionary program. Indeed, Orwell thrice overestimated the viability of his revolutionary strategy. In 1941, he mistook the privation of World War II for a revolutionary situation and incorrectly predicted that Britain's early military defeats would drive the Churchill Government out of power, bring in a socialist government, and turn war mobilization into

revolution. After the war, he misunderstood the nature of Labour's reform, thinking that social democracy could deliver on its potential to be a parliamentary road to socialism rather than providing a state intervention needed to stabilize capitalism (Newsinger 1999a: xi, 141). In 1946, he failed to appreciate the way mounting Cold War tensions had eliminated the space for independent Leftist politics.

Through his political failures, however, Orwell's politics illuminate the structural tensions that still characterize Left politics in the capitalist core today. On a global level, the Left in the capitalist core is torn between a desire for revolutionary transformation and the more immediate demands and expectation of population accustomed to life as a labor aristocracy. Like Orwell's individual class position, Left politics in the capitalist core are complicated by their own implication in world-systemic relations of exploitation. To take a contemporary example, then, the Occupy Movement represents the return of class politics from the national perspective of the United States or the UK. From the perspective of the global South, however, Occupy is not a moment of unambiguous revolutionary ferment but, at least partially, the resentful protest of aspiring members of the professional middle class, whose prospects for class reproduction have been undercut by "the Great Recession."¹⁰

While Orwell's work represents a compelling exposition of this enduring tension, Orwell's solution to this dilemma—revolutionary patriotism drawn from the decency of the working class—is fraught with contradictions. While Orwell was correct in identifying the power of "traditional loyalties" over the cosmopolitan values preferred by the left (democracy, human rights and social justice), it is unclear whether "the family" or "the nation" can be the basis of revolutionary politics. Orwell, for his part, was uncritical of the proletarian and middle class families to which he looked for justice and common decency, the basis of his socialism. Feminist criticism of *The Road to Wigan Pier* rightfully rebukes Orwell's for ignoring women's reproductive labor and describing the existing gender relations as reaching "perfect symmetry"

¹⁰ Here, the demographics of Occupy Wall Street are instructive. The Occupy Research working group based in the original Occupy encampment in Manhattan surveyed occupiers and found that 80 percent were white and half identified their class position as middle class or higher (Occupy Research 2012). The Joseph F. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies at the City University of New York provide independent confirmation of the same basic picture. Researchers surveyed the participants at a joint Occupy-labor movement May Day rally in New York City. They found that two-thirds of those who described themselves as "actively involved" in Occupy Wall Street were white, while 80 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher (Milkman et al 2013). With this class and racial basis, Occupy's problems expanding from downwardly mobile middle class are not surprising. Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell, in an essay titled "A Critique of the Occupy Movement from a Black Occupier" argued the movement alienated people of color because it did not challenge white privileged and remained a movement organized by "white people have now decided to rail against capitalism *as it currently functions* only when it has proven adverse for their financial security" (Campbell 2011, 42, original emphasis).

(Campbell 1984).¹¹ More pervasively, Daphne Patai (1984) finds a gendered framework in Orwell's writing. While Patai's ultimate charge that "Orwell cares more for his continuing privileges as a male than he does for the abstractions of justice, decency and truth on behalf of which he claims to be writing" is an overreach (266), Orwell did not take feminism seriously. In this way, Patai's often vitriolic critique of Orwell "identifies the extent to which his texts encode, and indeed, reinforce a polarised model of gender" (Clarke 2007: 97). This matter is not simply an academic concern. The question remains: what is the basis of a revolutionary movement? The New Right's successful use of the "family" and "nation" to enlist the white proletariat in the work of his own domination raises the extent to which these identities can be divorced from relations of domination that have formed them.

Finally, there is Orwell's concern for authoritarianism and his anti-modernism. In the 1950s and 1960s, convergence theory, a derivation of modernization theory, argued that the seemingly opposing development strategies of the Soviet Union and United States were converging along the lines of other advanced states (Suny 2006: 19-20). Today, the Soviet Union and the United States have converged but, instead of integrating a socialist emphasis on social rights and a liberal emphasis on political rights, the opposite has occurred: the neoliberal attack on the social state has eviscerated the institutional accomplishments of the Old Left; meanwhile, as the 'left hand' the state (social security) retreats, 'right hand' (national security and fiscal discipline) advances (Bourdieu 1998). From the perspective of the current moment, then, the broader anti-modernism embedded in Orwell's anti-authoritarianism is easier to appreciate and resonates more strongly in the post-Cold War world. While the Global Left still struggles to find the illusive third path between the "timid reformism" of social democracy and the "comfortable martyrdom" of anachronistic radicals, the Orwell of *1984* endures as the Sartrean singular universal of our cynical world.

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¹¹ On a personal level, it must be mentioned that Eileen O'Shaughnessy, Orwell's first wife, gave up a career in educational psychology to support Orwell and his work (Ingle 2006: 111-113). She remains a largely unacknowledged influence on his work (Taylor 2005).

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