8-1-2010

George Orwell's "Depression" Novels: Laying Bare the Emotional Cost of the Great Depression in Britain

Sonja Hathaway

GEORGE ORWELL'S "DEPRESSION" NOVELS: LAYING BARE THE EMOTIONAL COST OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION IN BRITAIN

by

Sonja Hathaway
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2006

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillments of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota
August
2010

This thesis, submitted by Sonja Hathaway in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conception and development of this thesis owes much to the author's faculty advisor, Dr. Iseminger, the faculty of UND's History Department, and the members of her Thursday night book club. The author especially appreciates the comments, direction, and support of her committee members, Dr. Iseminger, Dr. Mochoruk, and Dr. Porter.

Thanks again for all of Your help & guidance. I Couldn't have done this without You!

SH

ABSTRACT

The economic hardships that many people are facing in this the first decade of the twenty-first century have led politicians, historians, economists, and others to re-examine the 1930s in an attempt to understand their own time. The decade of the Great Depression was one of severe worldwide economic crisis and has been well documented, especially in Britain. Records compiled during the period by historians, statisticians, and social investigators have led to studies on the economic, political, and social conditions of the time. People are not, however, only physical, economic, and social beings. The challenge in studying the interwar period in Britain is how to investigate the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of those who lived during the period. Statistical studies may identify who was affected by unemployment and poverty, but they cannot reveal how these twin evils shaped people's feelings, their thoughts, and even their personalities.

I decided to focus my thesis on this question of how to explore the minds and emotions of those faced with the adverse circumstances of the Great Depression. Having learned as an undergraduate English major that well-crafted novels often reveal much about the period in which they are written, I began my research in George Orwell's depression novels. Historians' questions regarding the accuracy and validity of Orwell's depression novels as primary sources stem from questions on the representative nature of the novels or the perspective of the author. Because these are reasonable questions, it is necessary to have some way of determining whether Orwell accurately portrayed the period in which he lived and wrote. The respected historian Max Beloff lists three criteria

that are useful in judging whether Orwell's depression novels do what historians demand of them: 1) Do they make the event more intelligible? 2) Can they convey what these events meant to the participants and as well as their wider significance? 3) Have they captured people's true feelings? I believe that Orwell's depression novels more than fulfill Beloff's criteria.

Before analyzing Orwell's writings, keeping Beloff's criteria in mind, I introduce some of the studies of the 1930s and some uses of novels as primary sources. By discussing the works of several psychologists and sociologists and their analyses of grief and loss, I provide a basis from which to evaluate the authenticity of Orwell's characters and their responses to unemployment and poverty. I also provide an introduction to and contextualization of the period, taking special note of social and political events. This material helps to connect Orwell's novels, experiences, and observations to the period in which he lived and wrote.

After providing context, I examine Orwell's treatment of unemployment and poverty in his five depression novels, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), and *Coming up for Air (*1939). Setting these within the context of studies on grief and loss provides a compelling picture of the emotions, feelings, and thoughts of those experiencing the depression in Britain in the 1930s. Indeed, Orwell deepens our understanding of the depression by laying bare the emotions of those faced by unemployment and poverty as well as the possible long-term impact on individuals, on social and political structures, and, perhaps, on foreign policy.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

NOVELS AS PRIMARY SOURCES

The interwar period in Great Britain, 1919-1939, was one of transition. As a result of World War I and the Great Depression, the Victorian ideals and values that had given meaning and a sense of purpose and stability to peoples' lives were shattered, to be replaced by paradoxes, uncertainties, and despair. Nationalism and isolationism stymied the activities of the League of Nations. Rearmament programs contradicted the agendas of disarmament conferences. In Britain, Conservative governments pursued socialistic and egalitarian policies and members of the Labour Party espoused conservative policies. A marked improvement in the standard of living of some contrasted sharply with the persistent unemployment and poverty of others.[1]

It is sometimes difficult to justify the study of one event or period over another. Interest often plays a part in what is studied and my own interest in British history resulted from a fondness for British literature and a desire to learn more about a country in which I have lived and studied. A period's importance, however, is often linked to its impact on later events or its comparisons with the present. The interwar period in Britain clearly has ties to the present as decisions made during that time continue to affect the

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[1] A. J. Youngson, Review of *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940*, by Charles Loch Mowat, *The Economic Journal* 66 (1956): 349.

country. The needs, desires, and beliefs of the people and the principles and struggles of the major political parties of that time laid the foundations for the British Welfare State.

Today, the United States and other countries face struggles similar to those faced by Britain during the interwar years. Economic decline and job loss haunted interwar Britain. Even as new technologies developed, many industries were collapsing, leaving workers without jobs or financial resources. Thousands in our own time and country face these same grim realities. The 1930s, therefore, are no longer just a symbol of decline and personal hardship; they provide a glimpse of the struggles our own society may face and allow an exploration of possible responses to our present struggles. John Stevenson and Chris Cook acknowledged this in 2010 in a revised edition of *The Slump*, their study of the depression in Britain originally published in 1977.[2] In a new forward and conclusion, they compare and contrast current economic conditions with those of the 1930s. They are not alone. Ben Bernanke, the Federal Reserve Chairman of the United States, sees what occurred in the 1930s as a means by which to understand depression economics and as a guide when devising economic policy.[3] In an article in a recent issue of *TIME* magazine, he described the study of the Great Depression as "the holy grail of macroeconomics."[4]

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[2] John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *The Slump: Britain in the Great Depression,* 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2010).

[3] Before being named the chairman of the Federal Reserve, he was a professor of Economics at Princeton and a leading scholar on the Great Depression. Michael Grunwald, "Ben Bernanke, The 2009 *TIME* Person of the Year," *TIME*, December 28, 2009, 46.

[4] Grunwald, "Ben Bernanke," 50.

"To understand geology," he advised, "study earthquakes; to understand the economy, study the Depression."[5]

These ties to the present lend added importance and justification to a study of the interwar period, but they do not tell one how or what to study in the period. Historical studies of economic decline, government incompetence, changing trends, growing affluence, and economic cycles dominate reconstructions of the British experience during the depression. Though these studies document the political, economic, social, and cultural costs of the depression, they do not fully explain how events influenced people's thoughts, emotions, and attitudes and, hence, they may only explore part of the reality of the 1930s.

The reality of any experience has a physical as well as a mental or emotional aspect. The physical part of reality, which many historical studies explore, is easy to understand and document as it is observable and measurable. The emotional or mental aspect of an experience - the feelings, values, and thoughts - is more difficult to document. Literature, especially novels, can be a valuable source with which to explore the reality of an event as they allow an assessment of the emotional and mental or human cost. George Orwell's novels, because of his experiences, choice of topics, and writing style, are an especially valuable means by which to explore the experiences of the unemployed and impoverished in Britain during the interwar period.[6] He shows how

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[5] Grunwald, "Ben Bernanke," 54.

[6] Historians write in the past tense as all their subject matter is in the past. Novels, however, are generally referred to in the present tense. Because of this, there may be seeming inconsistencies in my use of verb tense. Because Orwell lived in the past and the events I cover occurred in the past, when discussing them, I will use the past tense. When referring to novels and their characters, I will use the present tense.

unemployment and poverty influenced the outlook of individuals and how personal struggles often led to apathy and fatalism. In this, he explains to readers the changes in the attitudes, values, and beliefs during the period.

Orwell is not the only possible source that connects thoughts and feelings to experiences. Oral interviews with those who lived during the depression are helpful in showing its effect on individuals.[7] Oral histories, however, generally have two filters, the individual interviewed as well as the one recording, editing, and compiling the history. Each influences how the material is presented and, by extension, how the reader interprets it. That oral histories are often constructed around a viewpoint, a subject, or a period also influences their interpretation and assumed meaning. One must account for the purpose, context, and bias or filters of the collection, as well as those of the one recording the history.

Oral history also depends on memory, which is selective and, often, unreliable. Alessandro Portelli discussed how traumatic events, especially, challenge one's concept of reality and identity.[8] After a traumatic event, people attempt to construct a narrative that explains the present and which creates or maintains identity. This "mis-remembering" may also be an attempt to protect the individual or society from an unpleasant truth. As the psychologist Elizabeth Loftus observed, "any lived experience

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[7] One of which is Nigel Gray, ed. *The Worst of Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression in Britain* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1985). This book was a response to revisionist histories that focused on economic growth. As such, its selections focus on the plight of the unemployed.

[8] Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

can acquire meaning only to the extent that it is reflected upon after it occurs."[9] This statement highlights the constructed nature of memory; it is not an initial impression, but a reflection that changes with time. This is not to say that oral history is not a valid and important source, simply that its use is problematic.

The use of literature is problematic for some of the same reasons. Authors generally have biases or contexts in which they are writing that may be revealed in selection, topic, organization, or content. Because of this, it is also important to discern and understand the contexts or biases of the authors as well as the authors' proximity to their subjects. Though proximity to an event limits perspective, it also allows for a more immediate recording of feelings and thoughts and their connections to the time. The further removed from an event the more likely the author is to organize the content of the literature to reflect what the event has come to mean rather than what it meant at the time.

Though literature may also have to negotiate the same limitations as oral history, it differs in that it condenses social viewpoints and experiences into those of a few representative characters and often explains how or why characters respond to circumstances within the context of their time. Novels written during the period may reflect what authors see as they see it – a *reflection of* the period, - while an oral history may be a *reflection on* the period. Reflections *on* help to show the meaning that an individual or a group saw in an event and how this has or has not changed over time. It

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[9] Elizabeth F. Loftus, "Tricked by Memory" in *Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience*, ed. Jaclyn Jeffery and Glenace Edwall (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), 31.

may also hint at the feelings and thoughts of the time, but it may not be able to capture the full reality of past events.

The use of literature demands some account of literary theory or approaches. Some approaches focus on audience perceptions of the work while others focus on the author's intent. Some seek to show the unity of the text, while others look for the disorder. Though there are some general categories for analysis, most literary theorists practice a number of approaches at once, making it more important to know how the literature is being used rather than the specific theories being drawn upon. This study will be looking at the emergence of the themes of unemployment and poverty, especially the reactions to these, as they are revealed in Orwell's depression-era novels. This approach has links to historical literary criticism in that it strives to connect the literature to the period in which it was written.[10] Literary critics often consider the historical aspect in order to further their understanding of the text; however, I will use the text to gain a better understanding of the period. More than just seeing history as an explanation for literature and vice versa, this study sees them as interconnected- they share a similar context, but they express it differently.

To some extent, this study also draws upon the technique of new historical criticism that reminds both the reader and the critic that language is not stable nor are one's perceptions of events. It insists that there is no objective historical reality and seeks to explore the changing language, ideas, and perceptions in conceptions of history and

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[10] For a brief explanation of the main school of literary theory see Steven Lynn, *Texts and Contexts: Writing About Literature with Critical Theory* 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2001).

literature.[11] Whether or not we can fully know the reality of any period, it is still necessary to have some basis upon which to evaluate one's conceptions of a period or interpretation of a literary work.

There are several ways to evaluate Orwell's writings, among them, checking his descriptions of the emotional or mental impact of the experiences of unemployment and poverty against other sources, examining historical descriptions of the period, and accounting for his bias as well as his access to the material. The mental and emotional effects of unemployment and poverty will be examined in chapter two. For now, it is enough to state that studies on unemployment or job loss and studies on grief show results and responses similar to those portrayed in Orwell's writings. These experiences and reactions are not limited to Orwell's novels. Writers in other countries expressed similar observations and recounted similar experiences of those facing unemployment and poverty. That these widely divergent authors' works express similar experiences lends additional credence to Orwell's credibility as an analyst of the period. In chapter four, I further explore the credibility of the author through the technique of biographical criticism, that of connecting authors to their writings. This will help to account for the author's bias by explaining his background and what influenced his writing, but it will also present his credentials as one capable of addressing the topic.

Other resources against which to measure Orwell's credibility and increase understanding of the period are materials dating from the period in which Orwell wrote.

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[11] In this, it relies upon the same concepts as narrative theory, a concept I will explore later in this chapter.

Sociologists, psychologists, historians, and writers painstakingly documented the interwar period. The developing practice of social history during the era produced large amounts of primary sources and provided the statistics for detailed studies of social and economic norms.[12] Projects such as Mass Observation collected data through a combination of observations and accounts of events and provided data on all aspects of British society in the late 1930s.[13] Many of those investigating social and economic conditions sought to identify social problems and seek remedies for them. There were also many government- and organization-sponsored studies on unemployment, health, and housing.[14]

In addition to materials written during the period, many historians and economists have studied the period. Scholars' views of the depression, especially those of historians, like an individual's memory, have changed over time. The British depression's paradoxical nature - growing affluence for some and stagnant or deepening poverty for others - has led to two main schools of thought. Some, focusing their studies on the unemployment and poverty that dominated much of the political debate, provide a

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[12] Andrew Thorpe discusses this and how it influenced the definition of poverty in chapter three in Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992).

[13] Mass Observation archives, housed in the University of Sussex library, contain records and reports from 1937 through the 1950s. Authors of many books and anthologies have used these resources to explore topics such as gender, health, sex, work, and leisure arts.

[14] George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, commissioned by the Left Book Club, is one of these. Some of these studies, however, are limited to quantifying and making general assessments of the physical and economic cost of the depression; they cannot fully explain the effect that the depression had on people or express how people felt. More than being limited in their ability to express thoughts and emotions, statistics are not always reliable. Statistics on unemployment during the 1930s have been subjected to keen scrutiny. Alan Booth and Sean Glynn point to the near impossibility of determining the number of unemployed in Britain by using statistics alone because different regional standards, seasonal unemployment, and underemployment blurred definitions. Alan Booth and Sean Glynn, "Unemployment in the Interwar Period: A Multiple Problem," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10 (1975): 617.

negative picture. Others see the depression as negatively affecting only a small segment of the population, while the majority experienced an improvement in living standards.

Salwyn Schapiro, a historian living and writing during the 1930s, noted that unemployment was a driving economic and political force. "The great problem," he wrote, "that had confronted the Conservative ministry, as it had confronted every preceding ministry since [World War I], was unemployment."[15] Schapiro, as did R. C. Birch and Charles Mowat, focused on labor and the struggles of workers wracked by persistent unemployment and poverty, which dispelled hopes for a higher standard of living. [16]

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[15] Salwyn J. Schapiro, *Modern and Contemporary European History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1934), 800-801. R. C. Birch noted that "the wealth and greatness of Victorian Britain had been built on these triple foundations [coal, iron/steel, and cotton], and their decline is the key to her post-war difficulties." R. C. Birch, *Britain and Europe 1871-1939* (NY: Pergamon Press, 1966), 199.

[16] Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann devoted their study to the aspects of daily life in Britain and focused on the struggles of laborers, the unemployed, and social radicals. Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971). Keith Laybourn took a similar approach, directly challenging the revisionist history of John Stevenson and Chris Cook. He presented the case of the workers who suffered during this period and challenged those who would seemingly ignore them by focusing on the growing affluence. Keith Laybourn, *Britain on the Dole: A Social and Political History of Britain Between the Wars* (London: Alan Sutton, 1990).

A. J. P. Taylor, however, took a different approach and focused his study on the rising standard of living in Britain during the 1930s.[17] The gradually improving lifestyle offset the disillusionment resulting from the war and from mass unemployment. For him, the period took on a positive glow as the English people, the heroes of his narrative, "come into their own." W. R. Breech also viewed the 1930s as an ultimately positive period. "British people," he wrote, "suffered less, except in the depressed areas, in the 1930s than most countries."[18]

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[17] Taylor believed that historians exaggerated the seriousness of the British depression and believed that recovery occurred more quickly than has been thought. A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). The regional pattern of unemployment is emphasized in positive assessments of this period, as it emphasizes that unemployment was limited to specific, chronically depressed areas, the centers of old and declining industries. J. D. Tomlinson challenges these views on cyclic unemployment, the measurement of unemployment, and Keynesian policies in "Unemployment and Government Policy Between the Wars: A Note," *Journal of Contemporary History* 13 (1978): 65-78. Booth and Glynn responded with "Interwar Unemployment: Restatement and Comments," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15 (1980): 761-68. The last installment of this debate comes in a joint article, J. D. Tomlinson, Alan Booth, Sean Glynn, "Interwar Unemployment: Two Views," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17 (1982): 545-55. For an analysis of interwar economics, see Derek H. Aldcroft, *Interwar Economy: Britain 1919-1939* (London: Betsford, 1970) and *British Economy Between the Wars* (Oxford: Phillip Allan, 1983); Sidney Pollard, *British Economy, The Development of the British Economy, 1914-1950* (London: Arnold, 1962). For a look at Britain's place in international politics and depression see Phillip Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government. British Politics, the Economy and Empire 1926-32* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Paul Warwick, "Did Britain Change? An Inquiry into the Causes of National Decline." *Journal of Contemporary History* 20 (1985): 99-133; and Roy Douglas, *World Crises and British Decline, 1929-56* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

[18] The "except in depressed areas" is an admission that many individuals struggled through the depression. His focus, however, minimizes the effects of this suffering on society. R. W. Breach, *A History of Our Own Times: Britain, 1900-1964* (NY: Pergamon Press, 1968), 140. Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow attempt to highlight and blend the many conceptions of the 1930s by recounting the distressed circumstances that many remember, but they also legitimize the revisionist-stressed economic progress and affluence. Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow, *Interwar Britain: A Social and Economic History* (London: George Allan & Unwin. 1976). John Stevenson and Chris Cook's attempt to account for Britain's lack of those extreme political views and actions, to which Germany turned, focused on the regional nature of unemployment and on the growing affluence of the middle class and of those workers who were able to keep their jobs. They note that unemployment was limited to particular areas, especially those former heavy industries in the north. Many who were unemployed remained both apathetic and stationary in these areas because of their dependence on the dole. The growing affluence of the middle class, combined with the appeasement of the unemployed through the dole, helped diffuse political extremism. John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *The Slump: Society and Politics During the Depression* (Jonathon Cape: London, 1997).

No explanation of the 1920s and 1930s is free from the social and political context in which the historians wrote and as such contain some of the biases of their own time. "Condemning the Thirties," noted Andrew Thorpe in the 1990s, "became a left-wing virility symbol," used either to negate or to justify the policies and actions of leaders in the present through comparison with the techniques and conditions of the past.[19] John Baxendale and Christopher Pawling, like Thorpe, believed that historical accounts are influenced by the context, social and political, in which they are written.[20] Working within the framework of what is known as Narrative Theory, Baxendale and Pawling provided a close reading of historians' texts and demonstrated that authors constructed histories that reflected the values, views, and needs of their own time, as this is what lent importance to the topic.[21] They note that every work to some extent is a product of its time; it reflects the author's views, context, and intentions.

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[19] Thorpe, 2-3. He believed that negative views of political leaders of the 1930s arose from the absence of defenders of the National Government. Early treatments of the period admit to rising living standards and other positive aspects, but they maintain a pessimistic view of political leaders. Taylor quotes Charles Mowat as noting that "pygmies" ruled the period. Economic historians, such as Robert Skidelsky, faced with the popularity of Keynesian policies, criticized the governments of the 1930s for their unwillingness to implement these policies during the depression. Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump* (London: Macmillan, 1967). Thorpe shows that these views changed after the government archives were opened in the 1960s. He believes that these sources revealed the National Government's innovative policies and programs that were designed to deal with the economic and political issues of the period. His work led to a reevaluation of and a growing appreciation for the political figures of the interwar period.

[20] John Baxendale and Christopher Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties, A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (New York: St. Martin, 1996).

[21] Narrative Theory developed within the communication field. It has, however, been applied to various areas, including history. The basic concept of this theory is that humans explain and understand their world through stories. When applied to history, it focuses on how historical accounts are constructed and who or what determines the content and form. Some in this field focus on the language used or the content, while others focus on the form or how the narrative is constructed. Through both the content and form, historians reveal their views, values, or cultural framework. For a summary of the possible historic fallacies that may appear in historians' accounts, see (especially chapter five) David H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970). One of the foundational writers on Narrative Theory in history is Hayden White and, specifically, his work *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

Baxendale and Pawling examine the 1930s through a close reading of the literature of "movements" such as Mass Observation and the works of prominent writers such as J. B. Priestly and George Orwell.[22] They believe that through their involvement in the culture, Mass Observation and these writers' works helped to identify the period by guiding readers' perceptions and understanding of the period while at the same time influencing and reflecting on the experiences and perceptions of their readers. Contemporary accounts, then, were interrelated; they influenced members of society even as they were influenced by them. Baxendale and Pawling, like Breach, believed that "the bad reputation of the thirties derives partly from the hopelessness engendered by the long-term unemployment of a relatively small number and because able writers aroused the social conscience."[23] If they are correct in their assertion, writers spread the fear of unemployment, while at the same time making readers aware of it through their works. Because these accounts increased social awareness of the unemployment existing during the 1930s and raised peoples' fear of sinking into it, Baxendale and Pawling's close reading of texts is important in examining and understanding the period.

University Press, 1973). Other resources include, Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: The Historian and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004); Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History?': From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Hans Kellner, "Narrativity in History: Post-Structuralism and Since," *History and Theory* 26, (1987): 1-29; Hans Kellner, "A Bedrock of Order," *History and Theory* 19, (1980): 1-29; Satya Mohanty, *Literary Theories and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivism, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1985); Paul Roth, "Narrative Explanations: The Case of History," *History and Theory* 27, (1988): 1-13; Maurice Mandelbaum, "A Note on History as Narrative," *History and Theory* 6, (1967): 413-19; Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of the Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History," *Past and Present* 85 (1979): 3-24.

[22] Baxendale and Pawling provided a close reading of some of Orwell's writings, but limited their analysis to pieces like *Burmese Days* which focus on imperialism. For a writer's account of the depression, they use the works of J. B. Priestly.

[23] Breach, 132.

Baxingdale and Pawling, together with other historians, emphasize the importance of the writers of the 1930s in creating an image of the period and their role in presenting the beliefs and emotions of the people living in the period. Using literature as a source, especially novels, is a technique frequently used by historians. Jay Durgin, for example, a University of North Dakota graduate student in history, used Thomas Hardy's novels to document the effects of the late nineteenth-century agricultural depression on farm laborers in England's southwest counties. Hardy's Wessex novels are a valuable historical source because he was intimately acquainted with farm laborers and their experiences and he wanted to record their way of life before it vanished. "It was not Hardy's intention," noted Durgin, "that a true mode of perception be found *in* the writing but that true perception, the insight into the real, be produced *by* the writing in the mind of the reader who perused it."[24] In other words, Hardy was not only striving to provide observations on the culture of the laborers, but also to explain and exemplify their views and values. Durgin believed that Hardy "conceived of the Wessex novels as a revelation of an *essential reality* through the description of a non-realistic world where the real is made not only more visible but more meaningful for readers."[25] Hardy's Wessex novels cannot be fully understood without the historical context, to be sure, but they can deepen one's understanding of the context by providing a window into the feelings and the perceptions of those living in the period.

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[24] Jay C. Durgin, "The Decline of Provincial Culture in Dorset and Somerset Counties as Reflected in Thomas Hardy's Wessex Novels," (master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 2006), 2.

[25] Emphasis added. Durgin, 29.

Literature, especially historical novels, not only offer a reflection of their time, they also provide a combination of and a distillation of experiences. A particularly good example of how novels can be used to further one's understanding of a period is Paul Scott's *The Jewel in the Crown.*[26] The historian Max Beloff noted in his review of *The Jewel in the Crown* that the British in India were "a product of a great many personal experiences of civilians and soldiers, of businessmen and reporters, of missionaries and policemen."[27] Beloff believed that historical fiction provides a helpful bridge between historical research and the feelings and experiences of those living at the time. "The novelist" wrote Beloff, "has the freedom both to present the circumstances of the case, and through symbolic reference, the complex feelings, physical and moral, that go to make up the experience as a whole."[28] He believed that a historian must answer three questions when evaluating a novel: 1) Has the novel made the event more intelligible? 2) Can it convey what these events meant to the participants and does it explain their wider significance? 3) Has it captured the true feelings?[29]

Beloff was referring to historical novels in general, but novels written by novelists living in the period that one is studying provide an even better perspective on the period because novelists generally write closer to the event than historians do. Although this

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[26] Paul Scott, *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[27] Max Beloff, "The End of the Raj: Paul Scott's Novels as History," *Encounter,* 46 (1976): 65.

[28] Beloff, 66. Beloff believes novelists have an advantage because they do not have to rely on statistics or other records and can use their imaginations to bridge gaps in knowledge or experience. Historians, on the other hand, may be handicapped. They are far removed from the event and may attempt to interpret it through a particular historical school or analytical framework. Beloff, 70.

[29] Beloff, 66.

may limit novelists' ability to evaluate events, it often means that their observations and experiences have not been disconnected from the emotions, thoughts, and values that are often lost or shuffled around as one gains perspective. The more removed the novelist is from the period, the greater the likelihood that the novelist is reflecting on the period, rather than reflecting the period.

Beloff believes that Paul Scott's novels in the *Raj Quartet* meet his three criteria, as the series makes the last years of the Raj or British rule more intelligible to readers by conveying the feelings and experiences of those living during that tumultuous time. Using novels as a lens through which to view Indians' experience and as an instrument to show British attitudes about India is not a new technique. E. M. Forster and Rudyard Kipling, among others, have done this and their works have been studied to see how writers treated such topics as British views of those over whom they ruled, the creation of a British identity in response to empire, and innocent or overt expressions of racism.[30] Those studying Paul Scott's novels have analyzed them for the same reasons, but the studies have failed to see Scott's characters as representations of ideas, not just types of people. Scott wrote the *Raj Quartet* to portray the India of the 1940s, but he also used metaphors to explain how India appeared to those who lived during the period: how they lived, how they felt, and what they believed. The first book, *The Jewel in the Crown,* contains the quartet's dominant metaphor, that India and Britain were locked in an

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[30]See Allen J. Greenberger, *The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism 1880-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination 1880-1930* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); Michael Gorra, *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Patrick Swinden, *Paul Scott, Images of India* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1980).

"Imperial Embrace."[31] To highlight the metaphor, Scott's main characters, Hari, the Indian, and Daphne, the English woman, fall in love and were, indeed, locked in an "imperial embrace." This image goes far in explaining the role of relationships in the British Raj.

Max Beloff was not alone in his belief that novels are a valuable historical resource. Many history professors use them in their courses to capture students' interest and help them focus on the human element in history.[32] For those studying the American Civil War, and especially slavery, slave narratives and fictional accounts of slaves' experiences are not only an interesting means with which to expand one's knowledge of slaves' living conditions, but also an effective way to help students grasp the emotional and physical hardships that slaves endured. Novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Clotel, Our Nig,* and *Iola Leroy*, are good examples.[33] Beverly A. Bunch-Lyons considers novels an especially effective way to examine relationships. She used them as texts in a history class that explored African-American women's history, especially the interaction between race, class, and gender.[34] Sharon Bannister used novels as a "Window" or a

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[31] Scott, 3.

[32] Robert W. Blew and Josephine McLean, "American History and Literature: Team-Teaching High School History," *The History Teacher* 9 (1976): 556-65; Alexander C. Kern, "American Literature in the Teaching of American History," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 30 (1943): 243-45.These teachers like the emotional appeal and vividness of the stories that provide a "whole" or consistent narrative, rather than bits and pieces as history textbooks do.

[33] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851; repr., NY: Bantam Dell, 2003); William Wells Brown, *Clotel or, The President's Daughter* (1853; repr., NY: Penguin Books, 2004); Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859; repr., NY: Penguin, 2005); Francis E.W. Harper, *Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted* (1893; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1893).

[34] Beverly A. Bunch-Lyons, "A Novel Approach: Using Fiction by African American Women to Teach Black Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 86 (2000): 1700-1708.

"Mirror" to show how traditions and customs can provide a basis for interpreting and understanding historical periods.[35]

It should not be surprising that novels are used as required reading in history courses because they and history texts are alike in the way they are structured. Both depend on narrative and both tell a story. David Kennedy compared novels to history texts and predicted that once historians master the techniques of the novelist, like plot and characterization, there will be no need for novelists.[36] Whether or not this is true, George Orwell's novels provide a picture of the 1920s and 1930s that helps to connect the physical reality to the mental and emotional experiences of those living in the period about which he writes. His novels do not, however, exist in a vacuum nor should they be allowed to. To evaluate his novels on the criteria that Beloff recommends, it is necessary to examine the context in which he wrote and compare his views with those of others who have analyzed the period.

Orwell provides an understanding of the frame of mind of those faced with unemployment and poverty, an understanding that is comparable to and expands on studies on both unemployment and grief and loss. In fact, research on loss and grief are

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[35] Sharon Bannister, "Images of Society: An Experimental Interdisciplinary Course Using Historical Novels," *The History Teacher* 6 (1973): 365-74.

[36] David M. Kennedy, "The Art of the Tale: Story-Telling and History Teaching," *Reviews in American History* 26 (1998): 462-73. Because novels tell a story, they can also promote literacy and a love of learning because they appeal to student interest. Paul Otto, "History as a Humanity: Reading and Literacy in the History Classroom," *The History Teacher* 26 (1992): 51-60. The debate over using novels in the classroom has given way to debates about the use of graphic novels in the classroom. Maryanne Rhett states that "the power of the simple graphics and the emotionally charged story line is exactly the kind of useful work a world history class strives to exploit." They are easier for students to understand and they appeal to several learning styles. Maryanne Rhett, "The Graphic Novel and the World History classroom," *World History Connected* 4, (2007). http://www.historycooperative. org/journals/whc/4.2/rhett.html (accessed April 28, 2010)

often linked to the experience of unemployment. The second chapter of the thesis provides a brief treatment of Kübler-Ross's popular and often-cited research on grief and of Viktor Frankl's never-out-of-print analysis of how abnormal situations and crisis events affect individuals. Added to this is a brief comment on the prominent concepts and themes used in research on unemployment. This provides not only a basis on which to evaluate Orwell's works, but also a structure around which to organize his observations. In addition to this, chapter two also deals with the many themes and responses that surface in the works of other authors dealing with unemployment and poverty. Together, these provide a means by which to evaluate Orwell's observations on how people in his time experienced unemployment and poverty.

The third chapter of the thesis provides a brief chronological history of the interwar years and shows the general attitudes toward and attempts to deal with economic and financial crisis and unemployment and poverty. Though Orwell's writings are understandable in themselves, this chapter connects his narrative to the wider context and explains in greater detail some of the physical and emotional hardships faced by the unemployed and those in poverty.

The fourth chapter summarizes the content of George Orwell's depression novels and explains their connections to the author and his connections to his time. A novel's validity depends to a degree on the author's credentials or on his ability to reflect the period about which he writes. This chapter not only shows how Orwell's experiences influenced much of his writings, it also attempts to account for his choice of topics and, hence, his biases. It is not a biography in the true sense, but a brief recounting of Orwell's

life from birth through the interwar years, focusing on some of the details of his life and on the development of his literary career.

The fifth chapter combines material from the earlier chapters with a discussion of how Orwell's characters dealt with unemployment and poverty. Employing Viktor Frankl's three stages- -admission, entrenchment, and release- -I discuss the attitude of the unemployed and those in poverty toward their circumstances, themselves, and their futures. Using Orwell's novels as a window through which to peer into the peoples' minds and emotions, we gain a deeper understanding of the interwar period and the depression's human cost. Thus prepared, we can appreciate the long-range impact that unemployment and poverty had on people, an impact that lingered long after economic recovery provided better employment opportunities and more adequate diets. In the concluding chapter, I place the observations on Orwell within the larger context of the period and suggest the effects that poverty and unemployment must have had on the minds and emotions of those who endured the circumstances that Orwell witnessed and experienced.

CHAPTER II

EMOTIONS LAID BARE IN THE NOVELS OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

> Like many others these days, we recently learned that my husband would likely be laid off within the next month.... My husband is devastated; in addition to the impact this has had on his professional ego, he feels as though he is letting his family down by not being able to support us until he finds another job.... How can I make him understand that where "taking care" of his family is concerned, there's no one better, paycheck or not.
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> -- "Ask Amy," *Grand Forks (North Dakota) Herald,* March 2, 2010.[37]

The period of the Great Depression in Britain has been described as "the long weekend," "years of the locusts," and "the devil's decade," phrases used by historians to lament the wasted opportunities of the 1930s. Anyone attempting to calculate the cost of the Great Depression must consider how people responded to this "waste," that is, the mental and emotional cost. To do so requires that one consider how people respond to crisis events, especially loss, as the interwar period was one of loss for many. People lost jobs, homes, health, family, and self-respect. Consequently, people experienced some of the same emotional problems that in our own day cause people to seek help from psychiatrists and psychologists- depression, withdrawal, anxiety, apathy, anger, and grief.

Examining and understanding the emotional and mental cost of events is necessary because traumatic experiences affect people, not only at the time they occur, but also long afterwards. Colin Murray Parkes expressed this through his concept of life space, or the world we inhabit, and the accompanying notion of assumptive world, or the

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[37] Amy Dickinson, "Ask Amy: Wife Can Help Husband Handle Job Loss," *Grand Forks (North Dakota) Herald*, March 2, 2010.

conceptions and perceptions that explain or give meaning to one's life. He noted that a change in life space, such as a job loss, leads to a change or reevaluation of the assumptive world and that a change in the assumptive world alters one's construction of life space.[38] It is not only important, therefore, to understand the changes in the life space (or physical realities) of individuals in the 1930s, but also the assumptive world (or mental and emotional realities), as these together created and explained one's everyday experiences.

The changing circumstances of the interwar period help to explain why, even at the close of the 1930s, when Britain was on the way to economic recovery, peoples' optimistic attitudes and beliefs held prior to the depression did not return.[39] Historians have provided many descriptions of the life space or physical realities of this period. Accounting for the assumptive or mental and emotional reactions of people and their connections to the physical world, however, is difficult. It requires that one look beyond statistics and records of the physical realities. One way of doing this is to study Orwell's novels. It is necessary, however, to evaluate the accuracy of Orwell's perceptions. One technique for this is to compare his writings with those of his contemporaries, which I will do later in the chapter. One can also evaluate Orwell and his contemporaries by comparing their perceptions and observations to studies on grief, loss, abnormal situations, and unemployment. The psychologist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her book *On*

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[38] Colin Murray Parkes' concept as presented in John Hayes and Peter Nutman, *Understanding the Unemployed: The Psychological Effects of Unemployment* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1981): 9-10.

[39] I will explore this in chapter three when I discuss the history of the period and the attitudes and values held by those who lived in the period.

Death and Dying provided one popular and commonly cited study of how people deal with loss or grief.[40] Though most of her work focused on the experiences of the terminally ill, the stages she identifies when examining grief and loss also appear in studies on the experience of unemployment. She divided the experience of grief into five stages: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

The first three stages are similar; they are immediate and intense emotional responses to crisis. The first stage, denial, may also include individuals attempting to conquer death or illness by placing themselves in dangerous situations. This stage also leads to isolation because of patients' inability, or the inability of those around them, to accept the serious nature of the illness or impending death, and the inability of others to understand and appreciate the seriousness of the situation. The next stage is often characterized by patients displacing their anger at their circumstances on those around them. This response tends to increase isolation. When the anger begins to fade, patients often begin bargaining with doctors, family, or God, in hopes of gaining a little more time to live.

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[40] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (NY: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1969). Kübler-Ross's observations on death and dying began with students' requests for assistance on a project to examine "crises in human life" (they considered death the greatest). This led Kübler-Ross, with the students, to conduct interviews with terminally ill patients in order to document their struggles and study how they dealt with them. It may seem a stretch to compare the situation of the terminally ill to that of the unemployed, but many psychologists have used grief models to explain and examine the psyche of the unemployed. Others who have studied long-term unemployment have noted peoples' inability or unwillingness to move beyond their depression and believe in a future, much as the terminally ill cannot see a future. Viktor Frankl describes suffering as having similar properties to a gas. "If a certain quantity of gas is pumped into an empty chamber," he wrote, "it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the 'size' of human suffering is absolutely relative." Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946; repr., Beacon Press: Boston, 2006), 44. Hayes and Nutman also note that job loss may lead one to exhibit behavior similar to that of the newly bereaved. John Hayes and Peter Nutman, *Understanding the Unemployed: The Psychological Effects of Unemployment* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1981): 105-107.

These responses are not only common to the experience of death or illness, but they are also evident in many, if not all, crisis events. For Britain's unemployed, there was a period of denial, of confidently searching for another job, of refusing to identify oneself as one of the unemployed, of keeping up appearances.[41] There was also displaced anger, anger at friends and family who did not understand and at a society that seemed not to care. The inability of others to understand or respond to the unemployed with sympathy encouraged isolation.[42] The unemployed often bargained with a possible employer, God, or the government, begging for an opportunity to work.

With the passing of the first three stages, the patient may experience depression, which Kübler-Ross divides into two responses, reactive and preparatory grief. Reactive grief is a response to loss, such as loss of a job or identity. Preparatory depression is a response to impending loss; it anticipates one's loss of job, identity, or life. The emotional stress is draining and leads to apathy, which people use as a defense to conserve energy, while also banishing thoughts of loss. Both of these types of grief bring with them an emotional withdrawal or apathy that protects the individual from the unpleasant truth and its corresponding emotions. Only when one moves beyond being emotionally overwhelmed and suppressing emotion can one reach the last stage, that of acceptance.

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[41] For more on this, see chapter 5, 114-18.

[42] For more on this, see chapter 5, 125-27.

Many in Britain, when faced with the crushing reality of their situations, became depressed and became apathetic to conserve their energy and preserve their sanity.[43] Often the emotional strain and the strain of trying to survive left them with little energy to think beyond the present. The inability to look beyond the present was also an aspect of apathy, which strove to insulate one from overwhelmingly hopeless situations. Those researchers who have proposed other models of the loss and grief cycle have identified four types of grief: anticipatory, acute, chronic, and disenfranchised.[44]

Anticipatory grief, like anticipatory depression, is a response to a possible or impending loss. It may lead to "a premature detachment" from what one is losing.[45] Acute grief occurs after the actual loss and may cause functional disruption, as the grief may prevent one from thinking and functioning normally.[46] Chronic grief occurs when people are unable to let go of their grief. It may be a normal "shadow grief" that brings periods of relapse into acute grief on anniversaries or on important dates. This type of grief can cause people to become maladjusted or dysfunctional when they are unable to adjust and remain crippled by grief. The last type of grief, disenfranchised, is when one is unable to acknowledge a loss or when others will not acknowledge or cannot understand the loss.

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[43] See chapter 5, 119-33; Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 148, 136-39.

[44] Priscilla Ebersole, Patricia Hess, Theris Touhy, and Kathleen Jett. *Gerontological Nursing & Healthy Ageing* (St. Louis: Elsevier Mosby, 2005): 523.

[45] Ebersole, 526.

[46] Kübler-Ross would place this in her reactive depression stage.

Even for those not directly facing unemployment, the fear that they might be unemployed at some time in the near future often led them into a state of anticipatory grief or fear of impending poverty.[47] This is especially true of many lower middle-class families that struggled to maintain their status on a tight budget.[48] Acute grief led to apathy and often limited one's ability to think or one's desire to work or look for work, a frequent theme in Orwell's works. When these responses continue for an extended period, the acute grief becomes chronic. Because the situation that many unemployed faced was chronic, it is important to note that, at times, grief could impair normal functioning, unless the situation was accepted and an outlet for the grief was found.[49] The last type of grief, disenfranchised, applied to the unemployed more in the 1920s than it did in the 1930s, but, significantly, many in the society of the 1920s faulted the unemployed as being responsible for their own situations.[50] As more people experienced unemployment, however, it became clear that many were unemployed through no fault of their own. As a result, the unemployed could express their grief, not only to one another, but also to a more receptive society.[51]

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[47] See chapter 5, 113-16.

[48] See chapter 5, 113-15, 116-17.

[49] Frankl commented on what he termed a "provisional existence of unknown limit" that is similar to chronic grief in that it seems never ending and impairs one's ability to live a normal life. He links this not only to inmates' experiences in concentration camps but also to the experiences of the unemployed, especially miners, because members of both groups developed a warped sense of time. Frankl, 70-71.

[50] Orwell expresses this in *The Road to Wigan Pier,* 86. See also, Mirra Komarovsky, *The Unemployed Man and His Family – the Effect of Unemployment Upon the Status of the Man in Fifty-nine Families* (New York: Dryden Press, 1940): 123; Bentley B. Gilbert, *British Social Policy 1914-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970): 205; Beales and Lambert, 68.

[51] See chapter 5, 107-08, 111.

The psychologist Victor Frankl shared these observations on crisis or abnormal situations. He, however, framed and explained them through his own experience in a Nazi concentration camp. He was concerned, not just with the experiences of one who was a camp inmate, but also the effect, and its longevity, on the individual's psyche. When introducing *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl notes that his book was not merely an account of one's physical struggles and hardships, but rather one's mental and emotional responses to his situation.[52] He uses his own experiences and observations as a lens through which to view human nature and peoples' responses to even the most difficult abnormal circumstances. His intention was to present not only the experience but also the cost of dealing with the suffering that abnormal situations create.

Frankl divides an abnormal situation into three stages: admission, entrenchment, and release. For Frankl, the admission stage began while he was being transported to the concentration camp. This stage corresponds to Kübler-Ross's first three stages. He passed through many emotional and psychological stages, but the greatest were fear, shock, and denial. After Frankl was admitted to the camp and his fear and shock had died away, he was left with the challenge of surviving. The realization and understanding of what this entails marks the beginning of the entrenchment stage, the stage that is characterized by

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[52] Because of his clearly stated explanations of universal themes of human behavior, Frankl's book has never been out of print since its original publication in 1946.Though Frankl is writing specifically about concentration camp experiences, the focus of his book is not the mental and emotional experience of the concentration camp. As the title implies, it is about man's struggle to find meaning in life and the possible results if he is denied this meaning or reason to live. Frankl realizes that though he is dealing with concentration camps, the mental and emotional responses are similar in other abnormal situations including that of unemployment. See Frankl, 70-71. Though some might question Frankl's account as being biased, he was, however, a trained psychologist. While in the concentration camp, one of his ways of coping with circumstances was to study the effect that incarceration had on him and those around him. He wrote this book, not only to recount his own experiences, but also to use his experiences as a basis to explain a theory that he developed in order to study the situation in which he and his fellow inmates found themselves.

the survival mechanism of apathy that is created by both physical and emotional or mental circumstances. This stage corresponds to Kübler-Ross's fourth stage, depression.

Release, the last stage, deals with the difficulties faced by those attempting to adapt after living under drastically changed circumstances and loss of previously held values. It also provides an examination of how one can survive suffering by finding meaning in it. Though chronologically this stage corresponds to Kübler-Ross's stage of acceptance, Frankl believes that not all accept their situation and he wondered why some survived the concentration camp experience while others did not.[53] He states that many gave up; they no longer took an interest in anything. Frankl notes that while people were in a prison camp, they discounted all aspects of culture, save politics and religion. These two elements may have retained their importance because they dealt with an individual's external (physical) and internal (mental or emotional) survival. Politics were important to external survival because whoever was in power generally influenced the physical elements of food and accommodation and determined how difficult or easy they would be to obtain.[54] Religion focused on bolstering the psyche. One can be released from a situation and survive it, physically; however, Kübler-Ross's acceptance stage and Frankl's search for meaning focus on the internal (mental, emotional) survival rather than just on the physical. Frankl believes that survival depends on one's having a reason to live that extends beyond the situation or depends on finding meaning in suffering.

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[53] John Garraty remarked that the stages of unemployment led to apathy and ended with a type of adjustment to one's circumstances. John A. Garraty, *Unemployment in History: Economic Thought and Public Policy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 176-77.

[54] See also, H. L. Beales and R. S. Lambert. ed. *Memoirs of the Unemployed.* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd, 1934), 170.

Those producing studies of the unemployed have observed many of the same stages that psychologists have noted and utilized in their studies.[55] John Hayes and Peter Nutman published a compendium of theories of unemployment's psychological effect in 1981.[56] They condensed many of the stages noted by other psychologists into three main stages, each of which included many phases. The initial stage included shock or immobilization and denial or forced optimism. The next stage focused on the realization of the need to change one's values and beliefs to fit with changing circumstances. This perceived attack on the individual's identity often led to depression and withdrawal, but concluded with the search for and assumption of a new identity. The last stage focused on readjustment or the assumption of new standards of comparison or evaluation. The authors provided a summary of the studies of many psychologists in a table showing how their stages were similar. I have expanded this table, not only to show how the stages correspond with one another, but also to reflect the stages noted by Kübler-Ross and Frankl. Hayes and Nutman noted the variety of responses and provided a way to view them, but they also show how most are similar in both the stages and experiences observed by Kübler-Ross and Frankl.

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[55] In fact, "all models recognize similar physical and psychological manifestations of acute grief (when it is first felt), a middle period in which the manifestations of grief (e.g., despair, depression) affect the person's day-to-day functioning, and an ending phase where the person learns to adjust to life in a new way without that which has been lost. At the same time, it is also realized that the grieving process is not rigidly structured and a predictable pattern of responses does not always occur." Ebersole, 523. So, though there are many common responses, the way in which they manifest themselves differs, which probably accounts for the variety of theories as well as the similarity of the theories.

[56] The same conclusions were noted in a later study of unemployment, Thomas J. Cottle, *The Hardest Time: The Trauma of Long- term Unemployment* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001). This study examines long-term unemployment in America. The author's concern is not with statistics, but with the psychological response or, rather, the human cost. He emphasizes the effect that job loss has on both the mental and physical welfare of a man and his family.

Table 1. Psychological response to unemployment: a table coordinating theorist's stages of grief

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1969)	Denial, isolation, anger, bargaining	Depression	Acceptance
Viktor Frankl (1946)	Admission	Entrenchment	Release
B. Hopson and J. Adams (1976)	Immobilization, minimization	Depression, test, accept reality	Search for meaning, internalization
R. Harrison (1976) (P. Eisenberg and P. F. Lazarsfield (1938)	Shock, optimism	Pessimism	Fatalism
J. Hill (1977)	Initial Response (trauma, denial)	Intermediate phase (depression, accept reality)	Settling down to unemployment (adaptation)
K. H. Briar (1977)	Job loss (shock, optimism)	Joblessness as a way of life (self-blame, depression)	Inertia

Source: Data adapted from Nutman and Hayes (17) with added material from Kubler-Ross and Frankl.

One's conception of work plays an important part in one's response to job loss. Workspaces are not only where one earns income, they often act as a structuring mechanism of one's life. Work provides income, a structure for time, social interaction, a form of activity, opportunities for creativity and mastery, and a sense of purpose and identity.[57] The loss of a job, consequently, alters how one conceives of income, time, social interactions, creativity, purpose, and identity-it alters one's sense of reality. Though work does not provide the only source of identity, people often identify themselves first by the type of work they do. It is on this that Hayes and Nutman focused their examination of unemployment. More than this, one often evaluates identity by social and cultural values or people's perceptions of how others are evaluating them. Hayes and Nutman noted that many studies of the unemployed have shown that those out of work worry about people questioning their ability or even their desire to work. This

[57] Hayes and Nutman, 38; Pilgrim Trust, 149-50.

fear of social approbation leads many to hide their unemployment in an attempt to keep up appearances.[58] Because of this social factor, Hayes and Nutman noted that people may experience anticipatory grief if they even so much as fear losing their jobs.[59] The more that people rely on someone or something, the more its loss affects or challenges their identity and the greater the adjustment they must make to their sense of reality.[60]

Accounting for the emotional or mental aspect becomes especially important in traumatic times and in abnormal situations. Interwar Britain was just such a time. The high unemployment rate affected large segments of the population. Grief affects not only the person who is directly experiencing a loss, it also affects the person's friends, family members, and acquaintances. In this way, unemployment affected more than those directly experiencing it. It affected the attitude of an entire nation and it influenced political debates and policies and, possibly, foreign policy as well.

Many writers strove through their works to raise a social awareness of the effect of unemployment and poverty and they attempted to document the lives and feelings of the people around them. [61] Beyond this, many novelists, such as George Orwell, "sought to engage with the social reality of their times."[62] The novelist, Edward Upward, writing in the 1930s, expressed this when he wrote, "The writer's job is to create new forms now,

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[58] Hayes and Nutman, 83-104.

[59] Hayes and Nutman, 103.

[60] Hayes and Nutman, 107.

[61] This is especially true of much working-class literature; see Carole Snee, "Working Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?" and Peter Widdowson, "Between the Acts? English Fiction in the Thirties" in Jon Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies, and Carole Snees, eds., *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979).

[62] Widdowson, "Between the Acts?" 134.

to arrive by hard work at the emotional truth about present reality."[63] In his article on the writers of the 1930s, Peter Widdowson noted that the primary characteristic of the writers was a consciousness, a self-consciousness, a class consciousness, a consciousness of changes.[64] This multi-layered consciousness expressed itself though the novels of the 1930s, as authors attempted to make sense of their world through their writing. This was true not only of British writers; other authors recorded similar experiences in their countries. In Germany, Hans Fallada wrote *Little Man, What Now?* and Frank McCourt described the suffering of Ireland's unemployed in *Angela's Ashes.*[65] John Steinbeck gave heart-rending accounts of people struggling with unemployment in the American classic *The Grapes of Wrath.*[66]

In *Little Man, What Now?*, Fallada describes the experiences of Johannes and Emma (Bunny) Pinneberg from the time of their marriage through the birth of their first child and the loss of Johannes' job. Pinneberg was of the white-collar, office-clerk class, a cut above one of the working class, but, in the depth of the depression, he lost his position. As Pinneberg reflected on his circumstances, he realized that paying his debts would take all that he received from the dole. He did not know how he would be able to feed his family or keep them warm from week to week. And, to borrow Frankl's phrase, this "provisional existence of unknown limit," went on and on,

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[63] Quoted in Widdowson, "Between the Acts?" 136.

[64] Widdowson, "Between the Acts?" 137.

[65] Hans Fallada, *Little Man, What Now?* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1933); Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

[66] John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939; repr., New York: Penguin, 2002). The original publication date is 1939.

> for weeks and weeks, months and months. That was what was so ghastly—it just went on and on. Had he ever thought that it would end? The appalling thing was that it always went on, on and on, just the same … future there was none.[67]

The struggle for survival limited Pinneberg's thoughts to the present and he dismissed all thoughts of the future.

Pinneberg took pride in his collar and he wore it as a status symbol. It remains important to him, until the end of the novel, when someone pointed out to him how ridiculous it is, considering the shabby state of his clothing and the wretched circumstances of his life. Angry and disgusted by his circumstances, he rips the collar off. Shortly thereafter, he attempts to attract the attention of someone working in a food store that had closed for the night so that he could buy butter and bananas for his child. A policeman warns him off. Pinneberg is so shocked, he can think of nothing to say or do. Pinneburg tried to speak, wrote Fallada, then, looking at the policeman,

> his lips quivered, and he looked at the bystanders. A little group was standing round the window, well dressed people, respectable people, people who earned money. But, in the mirror of the window still stood a lone figure, a pale phantom, collarless, clad in a shabby ulster and tar smeared trousers. Suddenly Pinneberg understood everything; in the presence of this policeman, these respectable persons, this gleaming window, he understood that he was outside it all, that he no longer belonged here and that he was rightly chased away; he had slipped into the abyss and was engulfed. Order and cleanliness; they were of the past. So too were work and safe subsistence. And past too were progress and hope. Poverty was not merely misery, poverty was an offence, poverty was evil, poverty meant a man was suspect.[68]

As Pinneberg turns to leave, the policeman knocks him into the gutter and then follows him down the street. Pinneberg realizes that his unemployment and poverty have

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[67] Fallada, 339-40.

[68] Fallada, 368-70.

made him suspect and cut him off from those who do not understand and or care about his sufferings and who believe that he is responsible for his own difficulties. Fallada's book ends with Pinneberg standing dumbly outside his cottage. His wife realized that "something had happened." "There stood her husband, the boy whom she loved, in the darkness, like a wounded beast not daring to come into the light. They had got him down at last."[69] All that could sustain him was his wife's support and her promise to view him always as a man.

Angela's Ashes is Frank McCourt's memoir of his childhood. Though born in America in 1930, he moved with his family to Ireland when he was still a young child. He grew up in a wretchedly poor home. His father was often unemployed and, just as often, drunk. The family depended on charity or the dole for its existence. They were only one of many families that strove to find jobs and survive in the slums of Limerick.

The book's focus is the physical struggle of those living in poverty. There was never enough money to buy food for the family and to provide proper clothes and medical care. The children, especially, suffered as inadequate food, poor housing, and lack of medical care made it difficult to avoid becoming ill and even more difficult to recover when one did. McCourt lost one sister and two brothers to illness when he was still very young. He contracted typhus when he was ten years of age and it was marveled at that he recovered.[70] When he was eleven, he had an eye infection that continued until

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[69] Fallada, 381-83. Many unemployed men expressed how important it was to them that their spouse and children could see them still as a man and father as they often felt that they were nothing more than a burden. See Chapter 5, 108-110

[70] McCourt, 190-203. Though McCourt did not enjoy being ill, he almost hated to leave the hospital as he was provided good food, a warm bed, clean clothes, baths, and a place to read.

he was at least nineteen. Aside from sickness, the physical deterioration caused by poor diet showed most clearly in rotten teeth. By the time McCourt was seven, his parents both had false teeth and, by the age of nineteen, McCourt's teeth were crumbling.[71]

Besides describing the physical struggles associated with poverty, McCourt also comments on the lengths to which those in poverty went in attempts to maintain their dignity. Like Pinneberg, McCourt's father believes that his collar and tie are marks of respectability, "A man without collar and tie," he insisted "is a man without respect for himself."[72] Another sign of respectability was never to beg or admit to being in poverty. McCourt's mother always hoped that her husband would bring potatoes, cabbage, turnips, or carrots home from the farmhouse where he sometimes worked. But, she complained, "he'll never bring home anything because he'd never stoop so low as to ask a farmer for anything." It was all right for McCourt's wife to beg at the St. Vincent de Paul Society for food, but he would not stoop to putting a few potatoes in his pocket. It was different for a man, McCourt's father said. "You have to keep dignity. Wear your collar and tie, keep up the appearance, and never ask for anything."[73]

Because begging for charity was McCourt's mother's job, she started by asking for help at the St. Vincent de Paul Society, but workers there tired of helping her and she had to apply to the dispensary, which provided free aid, especially medical. Doing so was considered only a step above begging on the street and was made the more humiliating by

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[71]McCourt, 138, 338.

[72] McCourt, 94.

[73] McCourt, 95.

the men who dispensed charity. They mocked those who came for help and announced loudly why they were requesting it. Adding to the struggle to maintain dignity, this was taking place during the war when many Irish families were sending their men to English factories where they were making more money than they ever had before. As many in their lane were able to maintain a better standard of living, the McCourts felt the shame of their own circumstances the more keenly. As McCourt neared the end of his schooling, not only was he embarrassed because of his family's circumstances, he was also embarrassed that his mother was begging for money on the street. They were, he realized, as low as they could go, and he determined that he would make enough money to enable him to get to America where he could make a decent living. The book ends with McCourt's arrival in America at nineteen years of age.

In *The Grapes of Wrath,* Steinbeck traces the experiences of the Joad family as they lose their place on an Oklahoma farm and are forced to move to California, where they believed they would find work. Through the Joad's experiences, Steinbeck shows people's attitudes and responses to abnormal situations and loss of position and dignity. Steinbeck, however, especially focuses on the forces that break down a man's identity and self-respect, how far a man can be pushed before he is broken, and how these circumstances both destroy and create communities. He expresses this at the beginning of the novel by stating that the "women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole." They knew that as long as the fear on the faces of the men could fade to thinking or anger, they had not yet broken.[74]

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[74] Steinbeck, 4, 434-35.

People also felt disconnected and isolated from others, especially those who did not or could not understand their loss. As the Joads leave from one of the many gas stations at which they stopped on their way to way to California, one of the attendants remarks to another:

> Well, you and me got sense. Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain't a hell a lot better than gorillas.[75]

This disconnectedness and isolation takes on a violent dimension in California, as those with land and power not only began to see people like the Joads as different and less than human, but also as constituting a danger. People such as the Joads not only became desperate, they also formed camps and communities for mutual support and understanding. The *I* turned into *we* and the *We* proved to be more difficult to control, especially as the men became desperate to support their families.[76] "How can you frighten a man," states the narrator, "whose hunger is not only in his own cramped stomach but in the wretched bellies of his children? You can't scare him- he has known a fear beyond every other."[77]

The animal-like traits that many attributed to the Okies, such as dirt, filth, and lack of common sense, were, of course the result of their circumstances. They were on the road day after day with limited supplies of food and water. These conditions led to

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[75] "Okies" is a name given to migrant American workers. Many were from Oklahoma originally, but it was not the origin, but the condition of the people when they arrived in California that identified them as a part of their economic group. Steinbeck, 221.

[76] Steinbeck, 193-200.

[77] Steinbeck, 236-37.

physical weakness as well as desperation. More than just the physical, there were emotional consequences as well. Ma cried out at one point,

> We ain't never been dirty like this. Don't even wash potatoes 'fore we boil 'em. I wonder why? Seems like the hearts took out of us.[78]

Later, Pa adds even more mournfully and meaningfully,

> I ain't no good any more. Spend all my time a-thinkin' how it used to be. Spen' all my time thinkin' of home, an' I ain't never gonna see it no more.[79]

The Joads' focus on present necessity and their fading memories limited their fear of the future. This focus was necessitated by the struggle and the determination to survive.

In much the same way, authors such as Walter Greenwood, J. B. Priestly, and George Orwell recorded what they observed and experienced when living and working in interwar Britain. Walter Greenwood was an unemployed miner and, as such, shared the struggles of many of the northern workers who were unemployed. In his novels, he strove to create a picture of the mental and emotional struggles experienced by those who were out of work. With its Dickensian flair, Greenwood's classic novel *Love on the Dole* captured the mind and emotions of many in Britain.[80] It was so popular that it was made into a play that was performed before receptive audiences throughout the interwar period.[81] Though the novel provides a helpful source for examining the mind and

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[78] Steinbeck, 215. A young unemployed Blackburn woman similarly remarks, "I don't know how it is, but these last few years since I've been out of the mills, I don't seem to be able to take trouble, somehow. I've got no spirit for anything. But I didn't used to be like that." Pilgrim Trust, 148.

[79] Steinbeck, 422-23; also, 173.

[80] Greenwood, Walter. *Love on the Dole,* (1933; repr., New York: Penguin, 1984).

[81] George Orwell saw this play while still a student at Eton. *The Road to Wigan Pier,* 86; Branson, 267. The screenplay was written by Richard Gow and published in 1935 by J. Cape, London.

emotions of an unemployed northern miner, *Love on the Dole* presents a limited view of the time, as it focuses only on the working-class experience.

J. B. Priestley was the son of a successful teacher and he once worked as a clerk for a company dealing in wool in the north. While still working as a clerk, in 1910 he started writing and publishing articles. Historians and other commentators on the 1930s often refer to his book, *English Journey* because of the insights it offers on interwar Britain.[82] *English Journey* is a sympathetic socialist travelogue that examines conditions in England and it ends by asking whether the conditions are acceptable. Unemployment and poverty have a presence in the book, but Priestley's comments on them express the sympathy and the commentary of an outside observer. The author does not explore the depression's mental or emotional cost.

George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier,* like Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole,* has often been used to introduce students to the Great Depression. Like *Love on the Dole, The Road to Wigan Pier* focuses on the experiences of the working class in northern England. Orwell's accounts differs from others, however, in that it provides a more nuanced view of how poverty and unemployment affect individuals in both the working and middle classes. Coming from the middle class, Orwell tended to view and understand poverty through this lens. He had experienced poverty, however, and had spent time among the poor and destitute in an attempt to understand their thoughts and

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[82] J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: W. Heinemann, 1934). Many historians reference Priestly, as well as Orwell, in passing, Baxendale and Pawling, however, provide a more in depth look at these authors' commentary on the period as well as their impact in *Narrating the Thirties.*

feelings.[83] Commenting on the quality that sets Orwell apart from other writers of the period, John R. Hammond held that one does not find in Orwell's works profound studies of human nature or conduct, because, "his strength does not lie in these fields." Rather, Orwell's strength lies,

> in the vivid presentation of location and background, in the description of the physical memories, the sounds, the smells and the surfaces of things; in the illumination of moods and environments ignored by writers who had not undergone his own experiences of poverty and humiliation.[84]

Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), taken together with his social documentaries and his depression novels; *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), and *Coming up for Air* (1939), reflect the realities of his time, his experiences, and his observations.[85] Rather than studying them for their literary value, most researchers study these works for their insights into poverty, a poverty that at times was closely linked to unemployment.[86] Having been "down and out" himself and having lived and worked in the country's industrial north, Orwell could document with keen perception and genuine sympathy the

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[83] John R. Hammond, *A George Orwell Companion: A Guide to the Novels Documentaries and Essays* (London: Macmillan press, 1982): 85.

[84] Hammond, 39. Orwell's focus was descriptions of poverty and unemployment until 1936. After Orwell returned to England from the Spanish Civil War, poverty was no longer the main topic of his works, but rather the background. His experiences in Spain intensified his interest and awareness of politics and led to a focus on political writing. The first explicitly political piece he wrote was his documentary of the Spanish Civil War, *Homage to Catalonia*, from this it was only a short distance to *Animal Farm* and *1984*.

[85] Original publication dates are in parenthesis. In my research, I used later reprints. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937; repr., New York: Harcourt, 1958); *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933; repr., New York: Harcourt, 1961); *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935; repr., New York: Harcourt, 1936); *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936; repr., New York: Harcourt, 1956); *Coming Up for Air* (1939; repr., New York: Archeion Press, 2005).

[86] Hammond, 106, 120.

hardships that people faced. Better than statistical analyses, Orwell's novels present a world unknown to the more fortunate who had never stood in breadlines or lived the life of a tramp. He provides readers with a picture, not only of unemployment and poverty, but also of the cost, both physical and emotional, of the Great Depression.

CHAPTER III

"YEARS OF THE LOCUST": THE INTERWAR YEARS IN BRITAIN

> Of course, the novelist is not obliged to write directly about contemporary history, but a novelist who simply disregards the major public events of the moment is either a footler or a plain idiot.
>
> -- George Orwell, "Inside the Whale." [87]

Accounts of the interwar period make for dreary reading. These years of depression, breadlines, chronic unemployment, grinding poverty, despair, and utter hopelessness have been described in such uncomplimentary terms as "the long weekend" and "years of the locust," phrases suggesting a time of futility and wasted opportunities. Britain's three major political parties- Conservative, Labour, and Liberal – and their leaders appeared unable or unwilling to devise programs or initiate measures that would deal with the problems facing the country. David Lloyd George, leader of the Liberals and known as the "Welsh Wizard," exhibited streaks of brilliance, but he was often erratic and controversial in his programs.[88] Stanley Baldwin, Conservative leader, by temperament and personality, may have been in the wrong profession. Patient, modest and trustworthy, perhaps to a fault, and professing "tranquility" as his goal, he committed

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[87] George Orwell, "Inside the Whale" in Orwell, Sonia and Ian Angus, eds. *An Age Like This, 1920-1940,* vol. 1 of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell.* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968): 494. The term footler is synonymous with *trifler*, meaning one who wastes time.

[88] Official site of the Prime Minister's Office, History and Tour, "David Lloyd George," http://www.number10.gov.uk/history-and-tour/prime-ministers-in-history/david-lloyd-george (accessed June 8 2010).

himself to no particular policies calculated to deal with such issues as poverty and unemployment. The National Government, formed in 1931 to deal with the economic crisis, was an expedient, allowing party leaders to adopt a policy of "sitting it out" until the crisis passed and a grim situation somehow righted itself.[89]

The interwar period, Orwell reminded readers in *Homage to Catalonia*, began with people hoping and believing that the end of World War I would usher in better living conditions and greater opportunities.[90] From the end of the war and after, however, Britain faced housing shortages, underemployment, and unemployment that fluctuated between approximately ten percent to over twenty percent.[91] By the start of World War II, many wondered what, if anything, was worth fighting for. This chapter explores the political, economic, social, and physical changes that account for the shifts in outlook and values, the shifts that George Orwell reflected in his works.

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[89] Charles Loch Mowat. *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940.* (London: Methuen, 1955), 413.

[90] George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1982): 243-45; *The Road to Wigan Pier,* 139-40.

[91] Many, if not all, commentators on the interwar period note the difficulty of arriving at accurate unemployment figures. Most estimates are taken from the unemployment register, but this register was generally kept only for those who were insured against unemployment. Not all may have registered. Also, this rate does not account for the dependents of the unemployed person.

Table 2: Percentages of total unemployment according to Feinstein and of those registered for National Insurance in the United Kingdom and the number of Unemployed in Britain in thousands

Year	Feinstein's Estimate	National Insurance	Wholly Unemployed		Temporarily Stopped		Total
			Men	Women	Men	Women	
1918	0.8	0.8	---	---	---	---	---
1919	3.4		---	---	---	---	---
1920	2	3.9	---	---	---	---	---
1921	11.3	16.9	---	---	---	---	---
1922	9.8	14.3	---	---	---	---	---
1923	8.1	11.7	---	---	---	---	1,250.6
1924	7.2	10.3	---	---	---	---	1,112.8
1925	7.9	11.3	---	---	---	---	1,228.1
1926	8.8	12.5	737.6*	131.6	288.3	152.3	1,385.2
1927	6.8	9.7	640.6	111.7	215.9	76.6	1,109.3
1928	7.5	10.8	719.9	129.8	232.7	89.9	1246
1929	7.3	10.4	728.1	154.2	191.6	87.3	1,239.9
1930	11.2	16.1	1010	307.7	352.2	187.8	1954
1931	15.1	21.3	1,499.6	439.7	417.9	167.5	2,647.1
1932	15.6	22.1	1,759.9	318.1	352.2	187.8	2,744.8
1933	14.1	19.9	1,695.2	283.3	338.6	112	2,520.6
1934	11.9	16.7	1,460.7	248.9	258.7	105.1	2,159.2
1935	11	15.5	1,385.5	260.5	215.4	83.8	2,036.4
1936	9.4	13.1	1,188.4	243.8	176.2	70.8	1755
1937	7.8	10.8	1,000.8	216.9	132.3	68.6	1,484.4
1938*	9.3	12.9	1,067.8	286.1**	235.5	136.4	1,790.7
1939	5.8	10.5 (9.3)***	982.9	315	137.2	78.5	1,513.6
1940	3.3	6	507.7	295.2	100.6	59.2	1,513.6

Source: Adapted from B. R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 124, 127. He relies on Feinstein's estimate of total unemployment, though he does note that there was much uncertainty about the statistics at the time and Feinstein is thought to overestimate the extent of unemployment. See, Mitchell, 94-96; C. H. Feinstein, *National Income, Expenditure and Output of the United Kingdom, 1856-1965* (Cambridge, 1972). For National Insurance, see Department of Employment and Productivity, *British Labour Statics: Historical Abstract, 1886-1968* (London, 1971).
*The numbers for this year did not include coal miners absent from work due to the 1926 strike
** Casual workers were no longer included after 1938.
*** These are before and after figures. In 1938, the government stopped counting unemployed people who had ceased to register or who were no longer included in the percentage of unemployed.

The Restless Hope, 1917-20

As World War I ended, Britain's leaders pondered the changes that would come with the transition to peace. During the war, many important social issues had been pushed to the side and would now have to be addressed. The government realized that to create a better peacetime situation people needed to feel that they could achieve more comfortable and satisfactory lives.[92] Beyond this, many leaders felt duty bound to maintain or create better opportunities for employment, health, and welfare for those who had fought in the war.[93] Many people believed these promises of greater freedom and new opportunities for all. Though people had been marked by the horrors of war, they were optimistic and believed that society would be rebuilt better than before with more and better homes "fit for heroes."[94] Given what they had sacrificed for the war effort, they believed they had earned it.

Some in Britain realized, however, that serious difficulties lay ahead. Winston Churchill gave voice to this, stating that Britain had moved from World War I to "a war against nature, a war to extract from this bounteous world the good gifts of the creator,

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[92] Pollard, *British Economy,* 87-88.

[93] Horatio Bottomley, representative for Hackney South, spoke of this need to honor the "sacred contract" that Parliament had with those who had given up so much in order to protect their country. "Parliament: House of Commons," *London Times*, February 13, 1919.

[94] "The later phrase 'homes fit for heroes' expressed a general hope that out of the horrors and deprivations of war there should emerge a new social order more worthy of the sacrifices it had demanded in its defense." Pollard, *British Economy,* 87-88. Orwell through his character George Bowling described the attitudes of the early twenties as "pep, punch, grit, sand. Get on or get out. There's plenty of room at the top. You can't keep a good man down." *Coming Up for Air*, 133.

and to share them among all His children."[95] The economy had to move from wartime production to production in the staple industries, yet many of these industries faced serious problems. New industries needed to be started. Prices had to be lowered and stabilized. The uncertain economic conditions, changing industries, high cost of living, and high taxes exacerbated prewar problems of unemployment (or underemployment) and its close relative, poverty. This reality jarred against the belief in, and expectation of, the better lives that the government had promised and for which people hoped.[96]

Workers had high expectations after the war and insisted on their immediate fulfillment. The Archbishop of York, when the House of Lords was discussing labor unrest in 1917, expressed the belief that the rewards after the war should be comparable to the sacrifices made during the war. The rewards that the workers had received to that point were 1) increased wages, but only nominally above prices, 2) poor living conditions and inadequate housing with increasing rents 3) and the dehumanizing of industry, as the workers had no control of or share in production.[97] Both the Labour Party and the government, though having different ideas on how to accomplish these goals, attempted

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[95] "Comradeship in War and Peace: Mr. Churchill on the New Era," *London Times*, January 4, 1919. Others shared this idea of moving from one war to another. See, "Industry in Peace," *London Times,* November 14, 1918. "Opening of Parliament," *London Times,* February 12, 1919.

[96] The *London Times* conjectured that the government's reception of the union's requests for shorter hours would test the sincerity of its proclaimed desire to create a better postwar society. "Shorter Hours: A General Demand," *London Times,* January 14, 1919; "The King's Speech," *London Times*, February 12, 1919. Noting a few years later that public expenditure and subsidies were too large, James Grant, MP from Southern Derbyshire, complained that the Exchequer had to borrow to cover its debts. According to him, "at the General Election many honorable members had made a large number of promises, very few of which could be carried out. The sooner the electors were allowed to know this the better it would be for the nation." "Parliament: House of Commons," *London Times,* June 5, 1919.

[97] "Parliament: House of Lords" *London Times*, November 17, 1917.

to meet the expectations and concerns of the British people.[98] By 1917, the government established a commission to explore postwar problems. This commission focused on potential changes to industry, investment, wages, prices, and employment.

The Labour unions, as representatives of the workers, and Labour leaders called for a new social and economic order.[99] The publication of the New Labour Constitution in June 1918 at a Labour Party conference was one such call. Sidney Webb, a Fabian, wrote most of the constitution and expressed in it the party's belief that the war had destroyed the old civilization rooted in capitalism. "What this war is consuming," stated the constitution, "is not merely the security, the homes, the livelihood and the lives of millions of innocent families, and an enormous proportion of all accumulated wealth of the world, but also the very basis of the peculiar social order in which it has arisen."[100]

The constitution further laid out "four pillars" upon which to build the new civilization.[101] The first was "Universal Enforcement of the National Minimum," the belief that the government should guarantee work, support, or training when one was unable to find work, and that all jobs should provide a decent standard of living. The

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[98] Pollard, *British Economy,* 87-88.

[99] Though workers called for more immediate action, Labour Party leaders hoped to arrive at a new social order through slow steady progress. "Shorter Hours: A General Demand," *London Times,* January 14, 1919. Labor unions made significant gains during the war both in membership and in solidarity, as many new workers were mobilized. The shared experiences and dreams of the workers created a solidarity and vision that drew them to unions after the war. The influence of the Labour Party, as an expression of the interests of the Labor unions, also grew during this period. The Labour Party received 2,400,000 votes and gained fifty-nine seats in the House of Commons in the election of 1918. J. F. C. Harrison, ed., *Society and Politics in England, 1780-1960: A Selection of Readings and Comments* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 372. Birch, 195.

[100] Harrison, 373.

[101] Harrison, 374-83.

second pillar, "Democratic Control of Industry," insisted on government control of all industry to provide for society's betterment rather than that of private individuals who enjoyed profits at the expense of others. The third pillar was "Revolution in National Finance," which meant that taxes would not be levied on food, on necessary items, or on those who were least able to pay. The fourth pillar, "The Surplus Wealth for the Common Good," expressed the intent to redistribute the profits of industry so that all could share in them.

The *London Times* on November 14, 1919, published the Labour Party's "20 Demands" for its "New Social Order."[102] The Labour Party, like Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George and other government leaders, believed in keeping wages high and in providing financial support for demobilized soldiers and war industry workers as well as extending those provisions to all workers who were displaced during the transition to a peacetime economy.[103] The Labour Party also demanded universal suffrage and increased representation in local government. Unlike Lloyd George and the Liberal Party, the Labour Party also wanted the government to remain involved in key industries, especially by nationalizing the energy, coal, iron, and transport industries. By these means, Labour leaders hoped not only to maintain, but also to improve, the standard of living.

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[102] "Labour and the 'New Social Order,'" *London Times*, November 14, 1918.

[103] "Industry in Peace," *London Times,* November 14, 1918. By the date of the article, the government had been working for seven months to place 1,300 to 1,400 workers while 2,000 were studying at their own expense for placement after demobilization. "Parliament: House of Commons," *The London Times*, November 20, 1919. In February 1920, the government expanded the responsibilities of the Ministry of Labour to buy and provide locations and materials for training, especially for disabled men. "Parliament: House of Commons," *The London Times*, February 17, 1920.

The desire for a new social order and the resulting unrest stemmed at least in part from a changing view of what constituted poverty. Samuel Mencher, a researcher on social welfare, observed in 1967, "Poverty, particularly in the advanced industrial democratic nations where the bare physical wants have been met, is a matter of deviation from social and economic norms."[104] In other words, once subsistence needs were met for the general society, the measure of poverty was either a normative (what was reasonable or common in the society) or a relative (based on comparison and a concept of inequality) standard. Because relative poverty characterized much of the unrest of the 1920s, Churchill and others pleaded for cooperation between labor and capital, between those who had wealth and those who did not. Without this cooperation, Churchill believed, "grosser evils of poverty" could not be eliminated, nor could wealth and opportunities be shared among the classes.[105]

For a long time, poverty, and its close relative unemployment, had loomed large in reformers' minds, but attitudes towards and programs to deal with poverty changed

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[104] As quoted in R. M. Hartwell, "Consequence of the Industrial Revolution in England for the Poor," in Institute of Economic Affairs, *The Long Debate on Poverty* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1972), 12; Gilbert, 51, 118-37.

[105] "Comradeship in War and Peace." This view was expressed many times from before the war ended and into the 1920s. In 1917, Lord Salisbury expressed a similar view. "Parliament: House of Commons," *London Times,* November 7, 1917. Lloyd George, in 1919, also called for brotherhood and asked "Why should war always get the best out of mankind? And peace always gets the worst? Why? War brought forth unselfishness in millions, comradeship, brotherhood – there was nothing like the brotherhood of these men who faced death together.... Is peace going to call forth nothing but grasping, greed, avarice, faction, timidity, indulgence?" He believed that the new spirit of the age was fair play. "What is Fair Play? A sense of right – Yes, but it is a good deal more. It includes a sympathy for the weak who are harshly treated. It is a compound of justice and mercy, and therefore it is one of the greatest words to be found in the world. I am proud of the fact that it is always associated with the British character. It sometimes is discouraged and overcast, it is sometimes misled as to its facts, but it is there always deep down in the British heart." "Mr. Lloyd George on the New World: Comradeship of the Peoples," *London Times,* September 18, 1919.

dramatically by the end of World War I.[106] The Victorian ideal of self-help and the threat of the Poor Law's workhouse were no longer sufficient to deal with poverty. Changing attitudes toward unemployment began to reflect a belief that the individual was not responsible for being unemployed, rather it was flaws in the capitalist system.[107] Also, rather than become a legal pauper and lose one's identity and rights under the Poor Law, many workers subscribed to friendly societies that, after the worker made a number of weekly payments, provided insurance for a worker against unemployment or sickness.[108]

In 1911, the government had begun providing its own version of sickness and unemployment benefits through the National Insurance Act.[109] It functioned like the friendly societies, by requiring a set number of worker contributions to receive a set amount of aid. This Act, however, was meant to deal with casual (part-time, temporary,

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[106] Lloyd George notes this in a speech. "Mr. Lloyd George on the New World: Comradeship of the Peoples," *London Times,* September 18, 1919; See also, Institute of Economic Affairs, 18-19; C. G. Hanson, "19th-Century Attitudes to Welfare," in Institute of Economic Affairs, *The Long Debate on Poverty* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1972),12.

[107] J. D. Tomlinson believed this conceptual shift marked a move away from the tenets of Social Darwinism and eugenics. He wrote that "in the 1880's, when the word unemployment became widely used, the basis of poverty (not pauperism) was seen as essentially environmental – the degeneration brought about by exposure to the physical and moral pressures of city life. The unemployed were mainly those whose condition of life made them likely to fall victim to these degenerative influences – which meant mainly casual labourers." Policies dealt less with casual labor and focused on the long-term unemployment resulting from "a large number of changes in the economic, ideological, social and political conditions of the period." J. D. Tomlinson, *The Problem of British Economic Policy 1870-1945,* (London: Methuen, 1981) 15-16, 62; See also, José Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study of English Social Policy 1886-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 14-16; Institute of Economic Affairs, 18-19.

[108] Friendly societies were self-financing; the money paid in by the large base of workers provided for individual members who needed it.

[109] The Act had two parts. Part I provided medical or sick benefits while Part II provided limited unemployment benefits. Neither made allowances for dependents. It was a compulsory donation for those earning under £250 a year and was taken directly out of workers' wages. This Act was based on an unemployment rate of 4.5 percent (at the time the act was passed the rate was 3 percent). Because of this lower rate, the fund built up a surplus that became important with the extension of benefits in 1921-22.

or seasonal) labor and as such covered only the trades of building, engineering, and shipbuilding.[110] During the war, unemployment benefits were extended to include munitions workers. The Labour exchanges were also reorganized and became the focus of government intervention in unemployment. Between the Armistice on November 11, 1918, and November 20, 1919, the exchanges placed 3,000,000 workers in positions and reabsorbed 1,500,000 into peacetime industries.[111]

By November 1919, Robert Horne, Member of Parliament (here after MP) from Glasgow Hillhead, estimated that the number of unemployed was half the average number for the fifteen years before the war.[112] Because of this, some, such as Robert Horne, wondered if unemployment benefits would soon no longer be needed.[113] Few MPs, however, suggested ending unemployment benefits, as they did "not want to see a return to the old conditions for unskilled labor." "The health statistics," James Bell, MP from Ormskirk, reminded his colleagues, "showed that the old level of living was

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[110] "Begun in 1911 for a minority (about 2.25 [million]) of workers particularly prone to cyclical unemployment, unemployment insurance was extended in 1916 and then again in 1920 to cover the great bulk of manual workers, though excluding many 'low risk' categories, so weakening of the financial basis of the scheme." (The term "scheme" was commonly used during this period to describe legislation and is synonymous with our present use of plan, proposal, or plot.) Tomlinson, *British Economic Policy,* 71; A. J. Youngson, *The British Economy, 1920-1957* (London: Allen & Unwin. 1960), 59-60; Gilbert, chapter 2.

[111] By September 26, 1919, those receiving unemployment donations (a fund set up by the government and drawn directly from the exchequer to help with economic transition after the war) were down to 403,000: 302,000 demobilized men, 65,500 civilian men, and 35,000 civilian women. "Parliament: House of Commons," *London Times,* November 20, 1919. In May, it had been 64,000. "House Building and Unemployment," *London Times,* May 5, 1919. By November, the number had increased, due to railway and ironmongers' strikes. Though the strikers themselves were not eligible for the unemployment donation, there were many others out of work in dependent industries.

[112] "Unemployment as tabulated by the Trade Unions today was roughly one half [4.3 vs. 2.6 percent of the population] of the average unemployment for fifteen years before the war." "Parliament: House of Commons," *London Times,* November 20, 1919.

[113] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 125 (1920), col. 1740.

weakening the essential strength of the nation" which could prove disastrous. [114] It was necessary then, from the standpoint of both national security and stability, to maintain the palliative of unemployment benefits.[115]

Though based on earlier unemployment bills, the Insurance Act of 1920 reflected a growing concern with the "dangerous social and political implications" of poverty in "the 'ideological' conditions of the time."[116] The benefits were extended to include most workers earning less than £250 per year. [117] Workers' contributions increased to 3d per man per week, while the benefits increased to 15s per week.[118]

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[114] "Parliament: House of Commons," *London Times,* November 20, 1919.

[115] Palliative was a common term used in the period to denote attempts to sooth unrest.

[116] By ideological concerns, the members were referring to the growing support for Communism and Socialism that encouraged people to expect a better standard of living. John Clynes, MP for Manchester Platting, remarked, "The rich man paid his guineas to his club for reasons of pleasure and convenience, which he did not question at all; the poor man paid his shillings to his club for essentials, merely to guarantee himself against conditions of distress which were certain to occur." "Parliament: House of Commons," London Times, February 26, 1920; Tomlinson, *British Economic Policy*, 67.

[117] The Insurance Act of 1920 covered 12,000,000 rather then the previous 4,000,000. Though originally scheduled to take effect October 31, the date was moved back to November 8 to allow for more time to prepare for the large influx. Domestics and agricultural laborers were excluded, as they experienced low rates of unemployment and, hence, had little need for insurance. For the original terms of the bill including rates and exemptions and the debates surrounding them see, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 125 (1920), cols. 1739-81; For the continued debate see, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 131 (1920), cols. 915-33, 1895-96; Youngson, *British Economy,* 59. Gilbert believed that the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920 had three main weaknesses: 1. It made exceptions for different industries 2. It assumed income would pay benefits [which did not work out, as the surplus in the fund began to decrease] 3. No real information about unemployment or industry, which led to a low estimate of the unemployment rate. Gilbert, 51-79.

[118] Shilling is abbreviated as "s" and pence as "d." There are twenty shillings in a pound. Rates of contribution: 3d (previously 2 ½ d) per man per week; 2d and 1 ½ for boys and girls. The employer added 3d per man and the government contributed 2d (1/3 of the total from the worker and employer). Benefits: 15s Men; 12s Women; 7s 6d Boys; 6s Girls. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 133 (1920), cols. 1995-96. The number of contributions necessary to receive benefits and the length of time on benefits both changed as well. Under the new Act, a four-week contribution entitled one to eight weeks of insurance. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 133 (1920), col. 1725. This act also extended the unemployment donation used mainly for military personnel and others that because of their duties may have been unable to make the necessary contributions, yet still found themselves unemployed. "Uninsured

During 1919-1920, the British economy experienced a mild boom which resulted in an increase in workers' restlessness and agitation as they waited for and demanded immediate changes in their circumstances after the war. [119] The workers expressed their impatience through strikes and threats of strikes. Labour leaders and laborers demanded higher wages and decreased hours.[120] In 1920, Prime Minister David Lloyd George explained,

> Trade was good, the export trade was reviving. The very fall in the exchange, which in many ways hit us very hard as great purchasers of American produce, was in itself a great bounty to our export trade, and was bringing orders to our parts which otherwise would never have come here. We wanted to take full advantage of that; we wanted to expand all our means of production to the utmost capacity.[121]

The government, maintaining selective control of industry until 1921, insisted that the best way for the economy to recover was to increase production levels, a goal that did not seem to go with the demands for shorter hours.[122]

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workers will not receive any State payment when unemployed, unless they belong to the classes entitled to out-of-work donation, namely, ex-service men or women, or merchant seamen. These classes will be entitled to out-of-work donation under the further extension recently announced, which will operate to 31st March next. Under this extension, as under all previous extensions, the waiting period is six days ..." *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 134 (1920), cols. 836-37.

[119] Youngson linked the boom to government efforts to move the economy to peacetime production, "while its character was determined by the combination of easy money, a facile post-war optimism, and the inevitable uncertainties encountered in a major economic reconstruction. For the postwar world was something new. Peace at last was to set men free – or so they hoped – to build and cultivate the plains and cities of their dreams. But they underestimated the difficulties. The chief of these, in the immediate post war years, was the complete absence of reliable information about what could be sold and at what prices." Youngson *British Economy*, 24-25; Birch, 198.

[120] The *London Times* provides a list of the requested reductions of hours for each trade, see "Shorter Hours: A General Demand," *London Times,* January 14, 1919.

[121] "Parliament; House of Commons." *London Times*, February 17, 1920.

[122] The circumstances of the war years changed the economic organization, placing industries, supplies, and transport under either direct or indirect government control. By 1921, the government had

Among the major problems facing the postwar economy was the attempt by those involved with Britain's old staple industries such as textiles, steel and iron, and coal, to recover the position they had held before the war.[123] Though there was a demand for these products, by the mid-1920s the decrease in trade exacerbated the problems facing these industries. Many of Britain's markets for these goods had been lost, either because of high cost or the inability of former customers to pay. Other countries, including some of Britain's colonies, developed their own staple industries and began to compete directly with Britain.[124] As J.B. Priestly observed of the textile trade in the 1930s,

> We used to sell textile machinery to other countries and send out managers and mechanics with those machines. You cannot expect to teach other people to make goods and then expect them to go on still buying those goods from you. The war was a sharp break in this process of decline, a brief golden age of profits, then reality broke in again in the early nineteen-twenties. The export trade, dependent on the trades that had not the money to spend, rapidly dwindled.[125]

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almost completely withdrawn its control of the economy. It continued controls in some areas through the Railway Acts, Gold and Silver Act of 1920 (embargo on bullion and going off the gold standard), increased income tax (1913-14= 1s 2d and 1920-21= 6s) and import duties (Safeguarding of Industries Act of 1921). Youngson, *British Economy*, 58.

[123] These are Britain's primary export industries and are significant in its economic policy. Tomlinson, *British Economic Policy*, 72-73; Birch, 199. *The Road to Wigan Pier,* chapter 2.

[124] India especially began challenging the British cotton industry. Between 1909 and 1913, India imported 2,741 million square yards, but only produced 1,141 million. By 1938, India only imported 258 million square yards and producing 4,250 million. Aldcroft, *Interwar Economy,* 156; Birch 199; Herbert Heaton, *The British Way to Recovery: Plan and Policies in Great Britain, Australia, and Canada* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1934), 22.

[125] Priestly, 128.

British manufacturing, especially in cotton, had to shift to specialty markets, leaving mills, such as those at Burnley, which produced rough, cheap cotton cloth, idle and their workers unemployed.[126]

The coal industry, one of the largest employers and a foundation of British wealth, was the focus of much concern.[127] Prior to 1914, the industry had been geared towards steady expansion. Between 1917-1919, the industry struggled to meet the demand for coal, and, between 1919 and 1920, the increased demand for coal produced profits. This initial prosperity encouraged workers to demand better pay and improved working conditions. Miners received increased wages during the war and, following the war, they desired a further thirty percent increase in wages, in addition to six-hour days and nationalization of the industry.[128] The government's response was to set up the first of many commissions to study conditions in the industry and to recommend steps to further its development and, especially, to calm the unrest.

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[126] Because of the closing of about 60 percent of its looms, almost half the workers in the town of Burnley were idle. There were approximately 32,000 inhabitants employed in the cotton trade and the weavers union lists around 20,000 as being unemployed. There was no starvation at Burnley, as "in spite of the depression in trade, the amount of actual poverty is small; the situation is saved by the out-of-work donation scheme." "Hard Times at Burnley: Looms Standing Idle," *London Times*, January 4, 1919.

[127] Orwell said of the industry, "the machines that keep us alive, and the machines that make machines, are all directly or indirectly dependent on coal. In the metabolism of the Western world the coal-miner is second in importance only to the man who ploughs the soil. He is a sort of grimy caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is *not* grimy is supported." *The Road to Wigan Pier,* 21.

[128] According to one reader of the *London Times,* railway employees and, especially, the miners took advantage of their position during the war to gain "extravagant wages and concessions," wages that could not be justified by the cost of living. More than this, miners were given precedence in demobilization (released from the military first). This reader believed that miners had already been given enough, but that their demands would never stop until the government with its perceived "deep pockets" withdrew control of the industry." "Labour Unrest and the Miners' Demands," *London Times,* February 3, 1919. Pollard, *British Economy,* 90; Mowat, Chapter 1.

In 1919, the government established the Sankey Commission to investigate and report on working conditions in the mining industry. The Sankey Commission recommended that hours be reduced from eight to seven hours per day for those miners working underground, with the hope of reducing hours even more, while those working on the surface should have their hours limited to forty-six and one-half per week. The Sankey Commission also recommended a wage increase of 2s per shift and some form of nationalization of the industry.[129] Nationalization was popular among many of the workers and union leaders as they believed this would eliminate the waste and inefficiency of competing firms and would lead to greater profits, better organization, and technological advances in production.[130] Though the government provided subsidized wage increases and enacted legislation to reduce hours to seven, it would not agree to nationalization. It was a controversial step that many feared would only increase the Labour leaders' power.[131] Miners, disappointed by the result, increasingly distrusted both the government and their employers, further breaking down the cooperation for which Churchill and others pleaded.[132]

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[129] One of the feared results of decreasing hours and increasing wages was that it would further increase the cost of coal to the consumer. The Commission, however, believed that these reforms could be implemented without increasing the price to the consumer if a careful reorganization of the industry was carried out. "Coal Commission: Full Text Report," *London Times,* March 21, 1919.

[130] The Commission also recommended that workers be allowed some level of participation in the decisions or direction of the industry. The Commission restated earlier calls for cooperation and communication as the key to attaining better lives and work relations. "Coal Commission: Full Text Report," *London Times,* March 21, 1919. Pollard, *British Economy,* 111. See also "Parliament: House of Lords," *London Times*, February 20, 1919.

[131] Youngson, *British Economy*, 36-37.

[132]James Gascoyne-Cecil, Lord Salisbury, expressed this growing distrust as early as 1917. He believed that "the impression which was left on the mind of every candid reader of the reports [by the *London Times* discussing the labor unrest] was that there was among the workers a feeling of distrust, not

The government responded to increasing workers' unrest through new social policies. Housing policies, it was hoped, would calm unrest by providing improved housing for working-class families and stimulating the economy through the demand for building materials, as well as for workers.[133] Because virtually no building had been done during the war, the housing shortages that had existed before World War I were much worse by the end of the war. Adding to the problem, rents soared as the need, which exceeded supply, increased. During the war, the government introduced rent controls that gradually decreased after 1923.

Rent controls also limited or discouraged private building.[134] By mid-1918, the government pressured local boards to develop and propose schemes for housing. The government attempted to speed up the process by creating a three-step approval process rather than approving the site, layout, and plans as a unit.[135] By May 1919, only 8,831 plans had been submitted, and, of those, only 3,576 had been approved. The number fell far short of the goal set in May 1918 of building 100,000 houses in twelve months. That

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only of employers but of the Government and of Parliament, but also of trade union leaders and the whole social system." He and others believed that this distrust was the root of social unrest during this period. "Parliament: House of Lords," *London Times*, November 17, 1917; "Parliament: House of Lords," *London Times*, February 20, 1919; Pollard, *British Economy,* 112.

[133] "House Building and Unemployment," *London Times,* May 5, 1919. In March 1919, Alfred Waterson, Member of Parliament for Kettering, encouraged the adoption of a building policy as a means to avoid unrest, an expression of the workers' desire to be free from the threat of unemployment and desire for better conditions. This policy would also relieve the pressure of housing, provide employment, and stimulate other industries through a demand for materials. He believed the government was duty bound to provide an alternative to the poor law system or unemployment donations as these led to bankruptcy for the government and demoralization and a sense of entitlement for the people. The government should supply the housing needs of the people while also providing them with work, not charity. "Parliament: House of Commons," *London Times*, March 22, 1919.

[134] Youngson, *British Economy*, 63.

[135] "Parliament: House of Lords," *London Times*, April, 8, 1919.

construction fell short of the goal was not due to difficulties in gaining approval or in obtaining materials, rather it was because many investors waited in hopes that the high costs of material and labor would go down.[136] In 1919, the government passed the Housing and Town Planning Act.[137] This act provided government subsidies, made local authorities responsible to guarantee building, and focused on providing general housing rather than on slum clearance.[138]

Table 3: Housing Acts of the Interwar Years

The Act:	Also Called:	Provisions of:
Housing Act of 1919	Addison Act	Provided subsidies, focused on general housing, made building compulsory for local authorities
Housing Act of 1923	Chamberlain Housing Act	Replaced the Act of 1919, provided the limited subsidy per house of £6 per year for twenty years, allowed for slum clearance, utilized mainly by private builders, abolished in 1929
Housing Act of 1924	'Wheatley' Housing (Financial Provisions) Act	Ran concurrent with the Act of 1923, increased the house subsidy to £9 per year for 40 years (with a higher subsidy for agricultural parishes), utilized mainly by Local Authorities, abolished in 1933
Housing policies of the 1930s		Focused on slum clearance and provided government-sponsored housing for low income families

The housing situation from 1919 through the 1920s was characterized by a shortage of working-class homes at the controlled rent rates, artificial rates (either controlled or subsidized) on a large proportion of houses, and a widening gap between

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[136] "Parliament: House of Lords," *London Times*, April, 8, 1919.

[137] Also known as the Addison Act. Pollard, *British Economy,* 255-56.

[138] This scheme constructed almost 200,000 houses. This total can be broken down to 155,000 houses built by local authorities, 44,000 by private builders using the subsidy. Private builders built 54,000 houses without subsidies. The subsidy gave local authorities little incentive to practice economy in negotiating housing contracts, allowing builders to raise prices and pocket the money. A house without a parlor in March 1921 was built for £838; by January 1923, the same house was being built for £371. Pollard, *British Economy,* 256.

what renters paid and what they expected in their accommodations.[139] The government estimated that there was a need for at least 800,000 houses.[140] The expectations and attitudes coming out of the war made the need for houses not just an economic or practical consideration, but also a social and political necessity.[141]

Growing Unrest in 1921-25

Unrest grew among workers from mid 1920 to mid 1922, as Britain faced an economic depression. Though the cost of living was decreasing, Labour leaders were still agitating for something better.[142] The threat of unrest and revolution that poverty-stricken workers represented (as had already been seen in Russia) encouraged Parliament's reconsideration of unemployment benefits.[143] By the time the Act of 1920 went into

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[139] Pollard, *British Economy,* 255.

[140] Youngson, *British Economy*, 61.

[141] Politicians initially viewed this problem as temporary, but it became a "corner stone of public policy." Pollard, *British Economy,* 255-56; "Parliament: House of Lords," *London Times*, April, 8, 1919.

[142] Between mid-1921 and mid-1922, the cost of living decreased by 20 percent so that real income increased. Labour leaders argued that this increase was not much better than prewar standards. The irregular prices and wages of the early 1920s added to Labor unrest. Not until 1923 would wages and prices stabilize. The return to the gold standard in 1925 made the fall in prices and wages worse. The increase in real income in the late 1920s came through deflation. Real wages also fell in some trades. This is especially true of coal as it moved from the highest paid industry to the lowest paid industry, further adding to grievances. Youngson, *British Economy*, 65-68.

[143] "Certainly until the defeat of the general strike and the miners' lockout in 1926, this fear led the Government to tread carefully in relation to the unemployed, though this had the most effect on the conditions for receiving unemployment relief, rather than on any attempts to decrease unemployment. After the mid-1920s the threats to order in Britain are small, and retrospectively, one is more surprised by the quiescence of the population than by the revolutionary intents which Governments apparently so much feared." Tomlinson, *British Economic Policy*, 74.

effect, the four percent unemployment level upon which its calculations were based had risen to around ten percent.[144]

The Insurance Act of 1920 was already under debate by the end of the year and the debates in 1921 included discussions of increasing the insurance rates, benefits, and period of benefits. The benefits for 1921 were intended to begin immediately, while the increased contributions needed to fund this began in July 1922.[145] Previous to 1921, Unemployment Insurance was self-sustaining, and the contributions were greater than the benefits paid out. During the war, increased employment rates and, hence, greater contributions, led to a surplus in the fund. To pay for the increase in benefits and the added burden of providing benefits for demobilized servicemen, the government in 1921 drew on this surplus, marking a distinct departure from the original intent that the insurance scheme be self-sustaining.[146]

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[144] Pollard, *British Economy,* 248.

[145] Under this new bill, demobilized soldiers who had formerly been on a government grant or the out-of-work or unemployment donation were included in the insurance scheme. This non-contributory scheme stopped for civilians in November 1919 and for military personnel in 1921. Pollard, *British Economy,* 248. These new amendments added many who had never made contributions, while others continued to receive contributions past their original terms of benefits. Throughout the rest of the 1920s, the government increased contributions from industries and loans from the Exchequer to provide for the increasing number of people who were on "uncovenanted" or extended benefits. Throughout the 1921 debates, Major M. Wood and other members asked if the Unemployment Insurance Bill was initiated to stop unemployment or simply to mitigate the evils arising from it. Others believed that the insurance provided a safety net for the workers who were worried about the effect of over-production on their jobs. This was a major concern as limited markets created overproduction in many industries, which already resulted in unemployment or short hours for many. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 133 (1920), cols. 568-69.

[146] The government continued to provide benefits and made it easier to get them. The Unemployment Act of 1927 (went into effect in 1928) required only thirty weeks' contributions in two years. Many, however, could not pay the thirty weeks' contributions, leading to the new condition that one provide eight contributions within a two-year period or thirty at any time. This scheme assumed an unemployment level of 6 percent, which reflected the higher levels of employment from 1927-1929. By March 1930, the unemployment rate had reached 13.6 percent, and, by 1928, the insurance fund was in debt by £25 million. In 1928-29, contributions provided £11.8 million of the unemployment insurance,

One *London Times* reader stated that it was now time for the government to develop two distinct policies to deal with unemployment, one to create jobs and the other to provide for the unemployed. Although the government continued to offer palliatives to the unemployed, it also began initiating changes in economic policy. Originally, the government focused on increasing production and reviving international trade as the means of improving the economy, a focus that some MPs insisted was the key to the unemployment problem. [147]

The focus on increasing trade led some MPs to insist on the necessity of establishing trade credit with other countries, especially those in Eastern Europe, many of which were in desperate need of goods. These countries' monetary systems and industries, however, had been decimated by the war, limiting their ability to trade using goods or currency. Consequently, they came to depend on loans or credit from other countries, but foreign banks were unwilling to lend money, because of the unstable currency and political situations. The British Government along with those in other countries, worked toward an international credit system that would encourage trade, while allowing each government to maintain control over its capital reserves. [148]

Several MPs called for public works programs, so as to avoid providing a simple "dole." Though Britain never implemented public works schemes on the same level as

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while the other £11.4 million came as loans. In 1930-31, it was £14.9 million contributed and £56.7 million borrowed. Tomlinson, *British Economic Policy,* 72; Pollard, *British Economy,* 251-52; Youngson, *British Economy*, 60.

[147] "Parliament: House of Lords," *London Times*, November 17, 1917.

[148] One scheme was the Ter Meulen Bond which would have provided credit through commercial channels against a security. "Unemployment and Finance," *London Times*, September 14, 1921.

countries such as the United States did in the 1930s, the government funded projects such as roadwork and deforestation on which the unemployed could work.[149] More often, the government provided grants to local authorities for local public works projects. The Unemployment Grants Committee spent £69.5 million between December 1920 and January 1932 on such projects.[150] For the most part, the program was limited by its dependence on local authorities to propose the projects.[151] London officials noted this during a meeting with the Prime Minister in 1921.[152] They provided what work they could on the local level, from painting buildings to minor road repair, but they ran out of projects. They believed that nationalizing the program would allow for large-scale construction projects. After 1926, however, a belief in the recovery of export industries combined with attitudes following the General Strike led to a toughening policy toward unemployment and restrictions in grants.[153]

Housing remained a major policy issue during this time. The Housing Act of 1919 was replaced by the Housing Act of 1923.[154] This act attempted to cut the excesses of the earlier act by limiting the subsidy per house to £6 per year for twenty years. Though this encouraged economy in building, the subsidies remained too low to allow workers to

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[149] For reasons of economy, the programs were cut in 1931. Pollard, *British Economy,* 254.

[150] This is a rather miniscule amount when compared with the £600 million spent on benefits and relief. Pollard, *British Economy,* 254.

[151] Youngson, *British Economy*,78.

[152] "Help for the Unemployed" *London Times*, September 28, 1921.

[153] Youngson, *British Economy,* 78-79.

[154] Also known as the Chamberlain Housing Act, Pollard, *British Economy,* 257; Youngson, *British Economy,* 63.

afford the rent. The act also provided for slum clearance, but the lack of housing made it almost impossible to tear down condemned houses.[155] In 1924, Parliament passed yet another housing act that ran concurrent with the Act of 1923.[156] This act increased the subsidy to £9 per year for 40 years, with an even higher subsidy for housing concentrated in agricultural parishes. Under the Housing Act of 1923, private business provided most of the housing and the Act of 1924 left such a slim profit margin that private businesses preferred to continue operating under the terms of the Act of 1923. Under the Housing Act of 1924, local authorities provided most of the housing, which was intended mainly for skilled artisans.[157] Neither of these acts had much effect on the need for low income housing as the rents charged for them were too high.

Though numbers of housing units continued to increase, the economy was faced with new challenges when, in 1925, the government decided to return to the gold standard. During the war, the government had traded on a credit basis and the Gold and Silver Act of 1920 made this official policy. The act provided for easy credit that, when added to the backlog of demands for goods due to war restrictions, led to the 1919-1920 boom, but also to inflation, soaring prices, and, hence, demands for increased wages.

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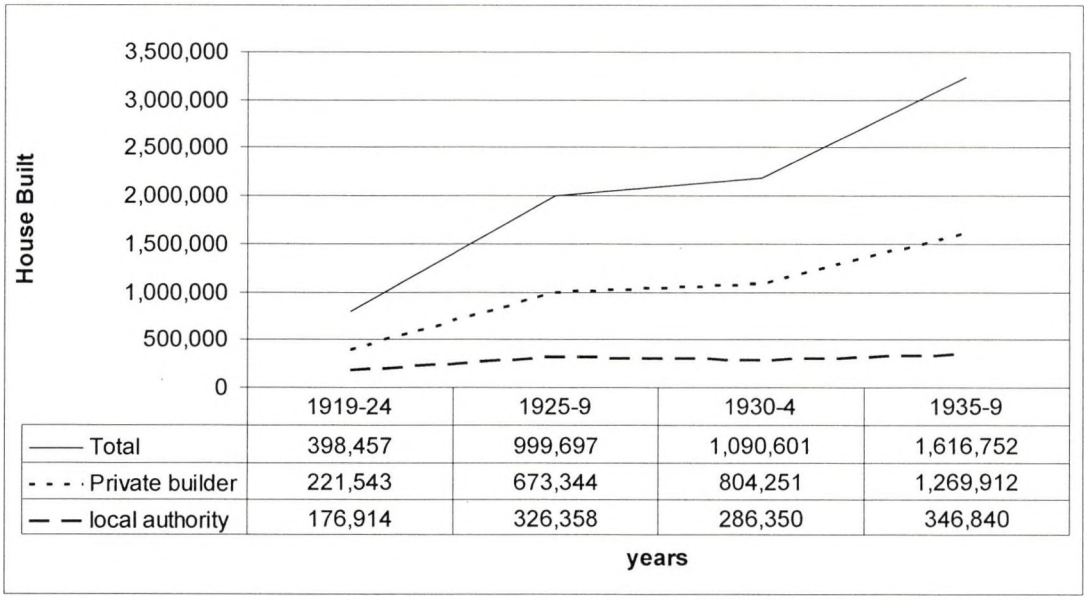
[155] The idea behind this was a "filtering up" policy. Middle-class people would move into new homes, leaving the older cheaper housing for those of the working class. For more on this, see Gilbert, 198.

[156] Also known as the ('Wheatley') Housing (Financial Provisions) Act of 1924. Pollard, *British Economy,* 257; Youngson, *British Economy,* 63.

[157] "Parliament: House of Lords," *London Times*, April, 8, 1919.

Figure 1. Housing built in five-year periods 1919-39, England and Wales



	1919-24	1925-9	1930-4	1935-9
—— Total	398,457	999,697	1,090,601	1,616,752
- - - Private builder	221,543	673,344	804,251	1,269,912
— — local authority	176,914	326,358	286,350	346,840

Source: Figure adopted from A. H. Halsey, ed., *Trends in British Society Since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), 310-311.

By April 1920, the government made attempts to restore sound financial practices and decrease inflation, to balance the budget, to eliminate risky foreign investment, and to restore the trade balance. These attempts culminated in the return to the gold standard, which caused deflation and stabilized prices. [158] "The return to the gold standard," the historian Sidney Pollard stated, "without a doubt gave investors more confidence and so stimulated their activity while also decreasing prices and the cost of living."[159] The gold standard also reduced government debt, leaving the monetary policy simpler and increasing the stability of the treasury after 1925. Though the prices of British goods had

[158] After steadying in 1923-25, prices gradually decreased until 1933. If 100 is the level in 1913, by March 1919 prices were at 210. They reached their peak of 310-340 in mid 1920. By March 1921, prices were down to 190-210 and by February 1922 they had reached 160-170. They remained steady between 160-180 until the resumption of the gold standard in 1925 when the Gold and Silver Act of 1920 lapsed. The return to the gold standard seemed to promise stability. Pollard, *British Economy,* 214-17; Youngson, *British Economy,* 33-41; Tomlinson, *British Economic Policy*, 69.

[159] Pollard, *British Economy,* 33.

decreased, producers found it increasingly difficult to maintain competitive prices with the high value of the British pound, the high costs of production, and the increased competition from other countries.[160]

Industries faced not only decreased demand, but also the relaxing of wartime government subsides and controls.[161] Some industries experienced increased trade and investment, while others, such as coal, depended on government subsidies to maintain higher wages and sooth unrest. By 1921, Winston Churchill stated that there had been strikes and stoppages in all branches of industry. These continuous "stabs" had only increased economic distress and sapped the government's ability to deal with distress. Churchill noted this especially in the case of the coal strike of 1920.[162] Not only did this strike cost time and money, but it also disrupted the "slow and steady improvement" in economic conditions, while increasing unemployment and depleting union funds.

Many strikes occurred as the result of a desire for increased wages and a belief that employers were keeping profits for themselves. One *London Times* writer, however, reminded readers that economic difficulties kept employers' profits minimal, and therefore, they were forced to cut wages. [163] Increased wages would result in rising costs

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[160] Youngson, *British Economy,* 33.

[161] The Minister of War, in commenting on government reductions in military spending, explained that withdrawal of government controls and subsidies would cut expenditure and stabilize the economy. The Geddes Committee was appointed to recommend areas for cuts. "Smaller Army: The War Minister on Next Vote," *London Times,* February 24, 1922.

[162] He is referring to the coal strike that began October 16, 1920, over wage disputes. "Ruinous Strikes," *London Times,* September 24, 1921.

[163] "Strikes and Wages" *London Times* June 14, 1924.

to the very people who were requesting higher wages. For industries producing luxury items, the demand for increased wages would increase costs, stifle demand for finished items, and lead to increased unemployment. The article concluded, "output, and therefore the capacity of industry to pay good wages, depends on enterprise and confidence; and these will not recover so long as every flicker of trade improvement is the signal for a rush of uncoordinated wage demands which either increase costs or lead to stoppages." Though the article has an ideological tinge, it expresses the concerns that many had about the prevalence of strikes and their effect on communities.

Many of the strikes during this period were unauthorized, as union leaders did not call them and the strikes were often spontaneous, poorly organized, and disruptive to trade and the functions of the community. The government and union leaders alike considered unauthorized strikes both dangerous and ineffective.[164] These "strikes against the community," as Viscount Edward Grey, a Liberal MP, termed them, attempted to disrupt the community in order to attract public or government attention.[165] Many

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[164] John Clynes, MP for Manchester Platting, believed that the unauthorized strikes inconvenienced the community and produced limited returns and, hence, limited public sympathy for the strikers, decreasing the strikes' effectiveness. "Folly of Sudden Strikes," *London Times*, June 16, 1924. Julius L. F. Vogel agreed with both Clynes and Churchill on strikes when he remarked, "Improved wages and a higher standard of living are only possible if prosperity of the country as a whole increases, and this is effectively prevented by these constant strikes." "Unauthorized Strikes" *London Times,* June 9, 1924; "Unofficial Strikes Condemned" *London Times,* July 19, 1924.

[165] "Strikes Against the Community" *London Times,* August 24, 1925; "Socialism and Strikes" *London Times,* April 4, 1924; "Prevention of Strikes" *London Times,* May 15, 1924. Sir Francis Joseph gave a paper at Selwyn College in Cambridge in July 1925 in which he blamed strikes on the employers. Harsh working conditions led to the formation of unions in the 1800s. During the war, unions consolidated and workers gained a prominence and power that they were now loath to give up. The strikes reflected an increased class consciousness, sponsored by the unions. He and others believed that the strikes must be controlled and that increased knowledge of industrial conditions on the part of the public and the workers would help limit strikes and improve relations between workers and employers. Beyond this, he believed that there should be arbitration before a strike. "Strikes and Public Opinion" *London Times,* July 11, 1925. Though most still believed that cooperation and good will were necessary between the employer and workers, there was an increasing desire for legislation that would ensure negotiation before a strike

believed that government policy in the face of these strikes should be to prepare the community to provide for itself. The Emergency Powers Act of 1920 was the first step in doing just this. Though it did not make strikes illegal, it gave the King the power to call Parliament into session and appoint ministers to secure needed food and supplies for the community. Because the needs of the community could thereby be met, both leaders and the community would not be at the mercy of the strikers. This policy was to become especially important during the General Strike of 1926, when all industry shut down.

Coal provided an example of both the difficulties facing industry and the effectiveness of strikes during the period. In 1920 and 1921, coal miners went on strike and received the increase in wages they requested because of the importance of the industry.[166] Britain's staple industries, however, faced increased competition from abroad as other countries introduced new equipment and procedures. In 1923, the French occupation of the Ruhr reopened old markets and led to a boost in demand for a year, leading many to hope that the industry would regain its old markets and thus enjoy increased production levels and profits.[167] Until 1925, industry attempted to retrench, with the hope that demand would eventually increase. Employer's attempts to maintain

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occurred. "Strikes and the Public," *London Times,* June 16, 1924; "Danger of Strikes," *London Times,* January 5, 1925.

[166] When coal miners again went on strike March 31, 1921, the government proclaimed a state of emergency and, by April 4, coal rationing began. The strike ended on April 28, as the miners had little support from other trades. Birch, 200-201.

[167] Youngson's figures show a slight decrease in coal production, but an increase in employment. Coal experienced a lower level of unemployment than the national average up until 1924. Part of the problem with the coal industry was that it had more men than any other industry who could not profitably be employed. In 1925-29, unemployment in coal was 16 percent and the available work force fell from 1,259,000 to 1,069,000 between 1924-1930. By 1930, unemployment was around 180,000 or 20 percent (4 percent higher then the overall unemployment rate). Youngson, *British Economy,* 37, 40.

the levels of employment and production led to some workers being shorted hours while others were expected to work longer shifts and accept wage cuts. This led to increased unrest, strikes, and threats of strikes.

Strikes, the economic slump, and unemployment affected not only industries, workers, and their unions, but also political parties and their policies and programs. After the war, Parliament was under the strong leadership of David Lloyd George, leader of the Coalition government. In 1922, however, the challenge of Bonar Law and the Conservatives to Lloyd George's leadership led to the General Election of 1922. The Coalition government fell in the election and Law was asked to form a new Government.[168] Law, through his charisma and policy of "calmness and steady progress," gained voter's confidence.[169] Unfortunately, after only a few months in office, throat cancer forced Law to resign, leaving the Conservatives without a clear leader.[170]

Stanley Baldwin replaced Law as Prime Minister and proposed a high tariff policy as a means of protecting industries from overseas competition.[171] Desiring national support for his policies, Baldwin dissolved Parliament on November 13, 1923, and called

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[168] This election marked a return to the two main-party system, though it was not to be the traditional two main parties. "New Session," *London Times,* February 13, 1923.

[169] "The Government and the Country," *London Times,* April 2, 1923.

[170] "Mr. Bonar Law's Resignation," *London Times,* May 21, 1923; "A Notable Career: Mr. Bonar Law as a Statesman," *London Times,* May 21, 1923.

[171] "The King's Choice," *London Times,* May 22, 1923. "The Unionist Conference: Mr. Baldwin to Speak Today," *London Times,* October 25, 1923; "Unionist Party Conference: Empire Preference Policy," *London Times,* October 26, 1923; "Unemployment Remedies," *London Times,* November 23, 1923.

for a General Election in December of that year.[172] Ramsey MacDonald and other Labour leaders challenged Baldwin's policy of protection as the answer to unemployment.[173] They believed that unemployment could be alleviated only through international cooperation and increased trade. The election of 1923 became a testing ground between Conservatives and Labour for the direction of unemployment policy in Britain. Though the Conservatives maintained their plurality, representation in Parliament was almost a three-way split. Liberals returned only 158 members, while the number of Conservatives decreased from 346 to 258. Labour, however, now had 191 members, compared to the previous election in which they had 142. On December 24, MacDonald declared that the Conservative government would fall, and, when this happened, he was willing, if asked, to head a Labour government, because he believed that only the Labour Party had the ideas, programs, and public support to deal with the issues facing the country.[174]

Table 4: Governments of the 1920s

Reason for change	Party forming government	Prime Minster
General Election 1918	Coalition government	David Lloyd George
General Election 1922	Conservative	Bonar Law Replaced in May 1923 by Stanley Baldwin
General Election 1923	Conservative Resulted in hung government and dissolution	Stanley Baldwin
Dissolution of Conservative Government 1924	Labour From January 1924 to November 1924	Ramsey MacDonald
General Election of 1924	Conservative	Stanley Baldwin

[172] "Dissolution this week" *London Times,* November 13, 1923; "Three Days Session," *London Times,* November 13, 1923.

[173] Many complained that Baldwin did not have concrete programs, especially in comparison to the Labour Party. "The Unionist Conference: Mr. Baldwin to Speak Today," *London Times,* October 25, 1923. "Mr. Henderson on Protection," *London Times,* October 27, 1923. "Labour Attitude to Protection," *London Times,* November 1, 1923; "TUC and Labour Representatives," *London Times,* November 2, 1923; "Protection No Remedy," *London Times,* November 2, 1923.

[174] "Labour Hopes: Mr. MacDonald's Appeal." *London Times,* December 28, 1923.

In early 1924, the Labour Party, with the support of the Liberal Party, formed a government. MacDonald's government passed some social legislation, including higher unemployment benefits, and it extended diplomatic recognition, negotiated trade agreements, and extended loans to the now-made-respectable Soviet Union. After only ten months in office, however, the Labour government fell, as the liberal party withdrew support because of lack of confidence in Labour Party's policies and on questions of their sympathy with Communism.[175] The defeat of MacDonald's government led to the General Election of October 29, 1924, and the defeat of the first Labour government. The Conservatives regained control of Parliament with 415 members and promised stability. Labour, however, still maintained its position as the official Opposition with 152 members to the Liberal's 42. This election reflected a change in people's attitudes. The Conservative party's platform of "sane, commonsense Government" no longer reflected the heady hopes of the early 1920s, but rather a desire for stability.[176]

A Deep Breath: A Slight Recovery, 1926-29

The late 1920s seemed to promise renewed hope for improved conditions or at least a level of stability. The mid-to-late 1920s marked a period of increased expansion of new industries and the reorienting of the British market as the limited international

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[175] Alfred F. Havighurst, *Twentieth Century Britain* (Elmsford, NY: Row Peterson and company, 1962), 183-85.

[176] Havighurst, 190-91.

markets encouraged the development of the home market. Unemployment also fell between 1927-1929.[177]

The last of the major industrial strikes came in 1926, after which strikes were less prevalent and received less public support. The General Strike of 1926 came in response to the demands of coal miners for higher wages and better hours in 1925. In response to the increased strike threats by coal miners, the government created the Samuel Commission in 1925 to negotiate between miners and employers. Though the Commission was against nationalization or government-subsidized wages, it recommended voluntary reorganization of industries, immediate wage reductions, and employer-provided fringe benefits. [178] These half-hearted attempts did not satisfy the miners, and, on May 1, they called a strike. On May 4, when they were joined in a general strike by other unions, industry in Britain came to a standstill, as miners and their supporters refused to work if wages were cut.

During this time, the Emergency Powers Act was implemented, not only because industry was at a standstill, but also because all unionized workers, including transport operators refused to work. Though many people not associated with the unions volunteered to help maintain essential services, the threat that a strike of that magnitude

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[177] The National Unemployment Insurance Act of 1926 reflected this falling rate through its assumed calculation of six percent unemployment. Gilbert, 94-95. Under the terms of the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1927, contributions decreased from 18s to 17s while increasing dependents' benefits slightly. Benefits for all were made identical and the "genuinely seeking work" clause was used in an attempt to limit claimants to those who could prove eligibility. Though the unemployment rate decreased, it never dropped below 10 percent. Birch, 209.

[178] Ultimately, the workers hoped for nationalization of the trade, which they believed would resolve many problems. Birch, 206.

represented became clear not only to politicians, but, also to the general public, leading to increased concern about the effect of strikes as well as decreasing support for them.

By May 12, the General Strike was called off because of the resumption of talks among government, employers, and miners. The miners, however, refused to give in on their demands and continued the strike until savings were drained, union funds were exhausted, and they were forced back to work on the employers' terms. This series of strikes marked the end of much of the labor agitation of the 1920s, as the government and the public lost sympathy for the strikers.[179]

Though coal, cotton, and other staple industries continued to flounder, new industries developed or expanded. Two of the main ones during the 1920s, especially in the later years, were the electric and motor industries.[180] Electrical production and use was haphazard before the war, but, by 1925, there were 28 stations providing 50 percent of the nation's electric power, 88 stations providing 39 percent, and 322 providing the remaining 11 percent.[181] The Electricity Act of 1919 attempted to encourage the combining of some of these companies; however, it had no effect. It was not until after the Weir Committee Report of the Ministry of Transport in 1925 that the government was able to take effective action. The Electricity Act of 1926 established an Electric Control Board that controlled and maintained the production of electricity, which it sold to private

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[179] Added to this, many miners left the industry, so that by 1930 the industry's work force was reduced from 1,197,000 in 1924 to 931,000 in 1930. Youngson, *British Economy,* 44.

[180] "No other new industries provided as much additional employment in the course of the 1920's as motor (including cycles and aircraft) and electrical (including products and supply)." Youngson, *British Economy,* 49.

[181] Pollard, *British Economy,* 100.

companies for distribution. The production of electricity was concentrated in fewer stations in order to increase efficiency and limit the cost of production. More people could afford electricity and more electrical appliances were developed which, in turn, led to increasing numbers of consumers (from 730,000 in 1920 to 2,844,000 in 1929) throughout the 1920s and 1930s.[182]

The motor industry also grew dramatically during this period. As with electricity, production and supply had been haphazard before the war. The mass production techniques used to produce military vehicles during the war were applied to producing automobiles after the war, leading to increased output and affordability.[183] Just as with electricity, the development of the motor (especially the auto) industry led to fewer producers controlling the market. By 1929, only three companies controlled 75 percent of auto production.[184] The motor industry continued to grow, especially as demand for aircraft increased in the 1930s.

Many other new industries also experienced advances, such as the chemical industry (which included everything from rayon to explosives), glass making, rubber, and plastics. Still, the new industries could not fully compensate for contraction in the staple industries. They could not absorb other industries' unemployed workers, nor were they

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[182] Pollard, *British Economy,* 100.

[183] In 1923 there were only 95,000 cars in Britain, but in 1937, at the height of the industry's production, there were 511,000 produced per year.

[184] Out of these three, two companies controlled 60 out of the 75 percent. In 1922, there were 96 producers and by 1939, there were only 20. Pollard, *British Economy,* 100, 102.

able to recapture Britain's share of world markets.[185] Though attempts were made to expand exports, the new industries were producing primarily for the home market.[186]

The Housing Industry also seemed to have improved. By 1927, the government believed that the housing crisis was over and began to reduce subsidies. The demand for middle-class homes had generally been met. Many policy makers hoped that this would alleviate overcrowding as the vacated homes of middle-class homeowners became available for working-class families. Though some "filtering up" may have occurred, not all workers could afford the rents of these vacated homes.[187] Parliament abolished the Housing Act of 1923 in 1929 and Housing Act of 1924 by 1933. By the end of 1930, 1 ½ million homes had been built and from 1926 on, 200,000 were built per year. Housing policies then shifted to focus on slum clearance and relieving overcrowding.[188] Although these signs of recovery and growth seemed to hold out some hope of stability,

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[185] Pollard, *British Economy,* 99-110; Youngson, *British Economy,* 35-54.

[186] One of the reasons for this change is the high cost of production and rate of exchange that made British goods more expensive than those of other countries.

[187] For more on this, see Gilbert, 198.

[188] During this period, building profits increased from both the growing need for homes and the abolition of many rent controls. Some of the negative aspects of the building boom were jerry building (cutting corners) and urban sprawl as housing regulations were relaxed. Pollard, *British Economy,* 258. Building societies and ribbon developments (housing that stretched unplanned along roads) increased as did jerry building. George Orwell describes this in *Coming up for Air* through the observations of George Bowling. Bowling lives in the typical semi-detached home for workers who earned £5-to-10 a week in the Hesperides housing estate. He believes that the societies were a swindle. They encouraged people's patriotism through home ownership, but the houses were generally leasehold rather than freehold, so that even when paid off, they were still only nominally the possession of the householder. These companies also managed to gouge the purchaser, not only in the price of the home, but also on the cost of builders and materials by supplying their own. Regardless of the disadvantages, people applied to building societies to gain their piece of "suburban bliss." *Coming Up for Air*, 14-17, 182-83, 203-204.

unemployment benefits increased government debt, while many industrial problems remained unresolved.[189]

Plunging Under: World-Wide Economic Depression, 1929-1935

By 1929, many in Britain were weary of high unemployment and demanded solutions to the problem.[190] The election in 1929 reflected this concern in party platforms and slogans. In a speech on the Conservative Party's policy in the upcoming election, Baldwin expounded on his Government's achievements in providing housing, education, cheap electricity, enfranchisement to women, and support to widows and orphans. He reminded voters that Labour, the "socialist party," focused on the interests of a few rather than on the good of the many. The Conservative government's slogans were "trust Baldwin" and "safety first," reminding voters that their support would allow the Conservatives to stabilize and gradually improve the economy.[191]

The Liberal Party, in speeches and pamphlets, demanded an aggressive policy of government works projects.[192] Labour promised full and adequate support for those out of work and work for all who were able to.[193] Although party leaders did not provide

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[189] Birch, 209; Gilbert, 162.

[190] Though the economy showed promise of recovery and unemployment had decreased, the unemployment rate remained at about one million until it soared in 1931 to 2.7 million. It reached its highest point in 1933 at 2.9 million. This number, however, may be inaccurate, as some unemployed gave up registering with the labour exchange. Branson, 20, 29.

[191] "The Coming Election," *London Times*, September 28, 1928.

[192] Breach, 146; Pollard, *British Economy,* 225.

[193] "Labour Party Conference," *London Times*, October 2, 1928. The Labour Party may not have had time to formulate policy as it was focused on expelling the extreme wings of its party. Labour lost support in 1924 because of accusations of its being overly friendly with Communists, which led to a determination to unite the party under a moderate socialism, an imperative that even Baldwin was to note.

many plans for achieving these goals, they inspired many to vote Labour. Labour gained almost as many seats as the Conservatives lost. Even with these gains, the Labour Party still depended on the cooperation of the Liberal Party to govern and implement programs.

Table 5: Governments of the 1930s

Reason for change	Party forming government	Prime Minster
General Election 1929	Conservative Resulted in hung government and dissolution	Stanley Baldwin
Dissolution of Conservative Government 1929	Labour	Ramsey Macdonald
Dissolution of Labour Government 1931	National Government	Ramsey MacDonald
General Election of 1931	National Government	Ramsey MacDonald
General Election of 1935	National Government	Stanley Baldwin Replaced in 1937 by Neville Chamberlain

Ramsey MacDonald formed his second government in 1929 and though the Labour Party had campaigned on promises of new approaches, it actually continued many of the Conservative government's programs.[194] It did increase unemployment benefits, while making it easier for recipients to receive the funds, which helped to bring on the financial crisis of 1931. With the collapse of the New York Stock market in October 1929, investment funds throughout the world were frozen and many banks, including some in which British banks had invested, collapsed. The strained export

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"The Coming Election," *London Times*, September 28, 1928; "Labour Party Conference: Mr. Lansbury on Disunity," *London Times*, October 2, 1928.

[194] Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, the Minister of Labour under the Conservative government, criticized the Labour government for adopting his polices when they had so severely criticized them, criticism which he believed had cost him the election. "The Government and Unemployment," *London Times*, October 30, 1929.

industry lost more ground, while the numbers of unemployed increased. This increase in unemployment placed a greater strain on the unemployment fund and increased its debt.

As international finance collapsed, the Labour government had difficulty floating loans to cover its costs. American financiers insisted that the British government prove its financial stability through a balanced budget, a feat that could be achieved only by cutting programs. The May Committee, appointed by the government and headed by George May, analyzed expenditures and recommended many places for cuts, including unemployment benefits.[195] Members of MacDonald's cabinet could not agree to such cuts, as they would seem a betrayal of the working man and of Labour Party principles. Rather than betray the workers, most members of MacDonald's cabinet resigned. The King consulted MacDonald and the leaders of the Conservative Party and urged that a National government, which MacDonald would lead, be formed to deal with the financial crisis. Until after World War II, the National government, a coalition of all parties (though leaning heavily toward the Conservatives), controlled policy. [196]

The formation of the National Government in 1931 is the key to understanding the Britain of the 1930s and it ushered in the period about which George Orwell writes in his "depression" novels. It also marks the beginning of Churchill's "years in the wilderness." The National Government was not a coalition in the true sense of the word. An official communiqué published after the formation of the National Government declared that "the specific object for which the new government is being formed is to

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[195] Gilbert 162, 164-66.

[196] Birch, 224-25; Gilbert 173.

deal with the national emergency that now exists. It will not be a coalition government in the usual sense of the term, but a government of cooperation for this one purpose. When that purpose is achieved the political parties will resume their respective positions."[197] Stanley Baldwin agreed with this definition of the new government.

The National Government was to be based on all the parties working together, an idea that seemed antithetical to the very nature of the British governmental system. By design and practice, Parliament generally consisted of members of the Government party and the loyal Opposition party. The Opposition served as a check on legislation, encouraged debate, and raised the questions and concerns that the people of Britain had over policies. The Opposition was considered essential to the system, as it guaranteed debate and accountability.[198] The National Government, approved by the people of Britain in the General Election of 1931, had no official Opposition, no challenge or check to its policies. Because of this, some have questioned, both then and after, whether such an expedient had been necessary and, indeed, whether it was legal.

Even without an Opposition, the National Government's ability to function was limited. The Opposition rather than functioning as an external challenge to a government policy was now an internal challenge to the assumption of any policy. The General Election of 1931 was held to gain a vote of confidence or approval for the formation of the National Government. Parties were allowed to place their programs before the public, but this remained only their vision of what the government needed to do. The National

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[197] Quoted in Havighurst, 230.

[198] W. Ivor Jennings, *The British Constitution* (Cambridge University press, 1962), 84-93.

Government set no policy for its supporters to follow, nor could it do so if it wished to maintain the support of all the parties. Programs and policies were, therefore, no better than piecemeal attempts to deal with the problems facing the country.

Given the challenges faced by the National Government, why then was it formed and why was it allowed to remain in power throughout the 1930s? Could it have been devised largely to keep Churchill out of office? Was such an expedient necessary? Did MacDonald have the authority to form the National Government? There is no clear answer to these questions. What is clear, however, is that none of Britain's major political parties wanted to run the risk of being discredited by forming a government and by proposing programs that failed to deal with such nagging problems as unemployment, poverty, and housing shortages. By forming a National Government, no party or party leader had to assume responsibility, but it also meant that the country was doomed to floundering without a set policy.[199] The National Government was a "caretaker government," wasting opportunities while "sitting it out" until the grim situation had passed or somehow had resolved itself. Members of the government were so divided in political philosophy that they dared not try anything. Their hesitancy also influenced their foreign policy decisions. Government leaders watched helplessly as Japan defied the League by invading Manchuria, as Mussolini took over Ethiopia, and as Hitler rearmed in defiance of the Versailles Treaty and reoccupied the Rhineland.

Remaining focused on domestic issues and attempting to deal with the financial crisis and balance the national budget, the National Government approved many budget

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[199] Havighurst, 230, 233-34, 238.

cuts, including a ten percent pay cut for government workers, members of the civil service and military, and teachers.[200] It also reduced unemployment benefits by some ten per cent.[201] In order to maintain financial stability, the government not only cut unemployment insurance, but also restructured the program in an attempt to save it from collapse. This meant creating two different forms of insurance, the regular benefits to which one was entitled by paying into the system and the transitional benefits for those who no longer had a claim to the benefits. This expedient allowed Unemployment Insurance to again be self-sustaining, as the funds collected soon exceeded the funds paid out. The transitional payment was taken directly from the Exchequer and, in an attempt to limit claims, recipients were subjected to a means test.[202]

Distasteful and insulting to many, means tests had previously been used to assess the need of those unable to claim unemployment benefits and who, therefore, had to rely on the Poor Law for assistance.[203] Unemployment benefits, on the other hand, were deemed a right, as workers had paid into the scheme. Transitional payments that involved a means test smacked of dependence.[204] Not only was the means test degrading, but it

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[200] These cuts were not well accepted as they led to the Invergordon mutiny and many protests. Branson, 12-19.

[201] The cuts to unemployment benefits in 1931 that were closer to 20 percent than 10 percent led to many protests. Branson, 17.

[202] Gilbert 178-80.

[203] The poor law used a stricter means test to determine need, but the different conceptions of Poor Law and Unemployment Insurance led to discontent over its application. Insurance represented the *right* of the individual to benefits, while the Poor Law represented charity. Gilbert, 86, 186; see also, Pilgrim Trust, 185-86.

[204] Branson, 23-29.

also caused anger and led to the breaking up of many extended family units. In the latter regard, old age pensions and earnings of grandparents or adult children living in the home, savings, and the worker's earnings were treated as income when determining the family's eligibility for assistance.[205]

The means test was especially hated by those in the chronically "depressed areas," which, after 1934, were referred to as "special areas." Most of them were located in the industrial north or areas in which the old export industries were concentrated. In some of these areas, poverty and unemployment remained as high as forty percent.[206] As a result, people in these areas tended to be undernourished, more prone to sickness, subject to chronic ill health, and were shorter and lighter in stature.[207] All of which became glaringly clear when men were called up for military duty in World War II and when families, especially children, were evacuated from areas prone to attack by German bombers.[208] The large numbers of unemployed drained public funds and limited other social services, including road and building projects. Much of the working-class housing was slotted for demolition in slum clearance programs, but new housing could only slowly be provided.

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[205] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 8-9; Branson, 23-24, 228-32.

[206] Branson, 47- 61.

[207] Branson, 53-54.

[208] Madeleine Mayhew's study of the nutrition in the 1930s records that many young men, especially from depressed areas, were unfit for military service. By the late 1930s, many raised concerns about this and recommended solutions such as providing meals for young men at the job training centers. In addition to this, Mayhew comments on how surprised many were at the poor health and malnourishment of many of the women and children who were evacuated from many of the poor areas during World War II. Madeleine Mayhew, "The 1930s Nutrition Controversy," *Journal of Contemporary History* 23 (1988): 460-61, 462.

The housing polices of the 1930s, in contrast to those of the 1920s, focused on slum clearance.[209] Reformers thought that eliminating slums would alleviate poverty, because a better environment improved health and restored self-respect.[210] Because some of the worst slums were often those located in the industrial north where incomes were limited, many were on the dole, and overcrowding was rampant, workers found it difficult to find any, much less adequate, housing. Overcrowding was prevalent in London, but it was even worse in places like Wigan in the industrial north. In addition, much of the housing in Wigan and other industrial areas had been built in the time of the industrial revolution, before many thought of the need for adequate sanitation or comfortable lodging. The focus rather was only on providing roofs over workers heads.[211] Of one such area, Orwell wrote in *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

> As you walk through the industrial towns, you lose yourself in labyrinths of little brick houses blackened by smoke, festering in planless chaos round miry alleys and little cindered yards where there are stinking dust-bins and lines of grimy washing and half-ruinous w.c's. The interiors of these houses are always very

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[209] Branson, 189-192. There were few regulations on house building aside from government housing projects. This allowed for a boom of jerry-rigged houses and poorly planned ribbon developments. Some home owners found their houses were either of poor quality or isolated from stores, neighbors, and transportation. Branson, 70-72, 184-189.

[210] Wigan, 65.

[211] For those who were in such dire circumstances that they did not have money to pay for even a night in a lodging house or a kip, the only option was to live the life of a tramp, moving from one spike (a one-night government-funded lodging) to another or to live on the streets. Orwell's introduction to poverty and its effects led to his exploration of the life of tramps, a topic that emerges in several of his works. See *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *The Clergyman's Daughter*, "The Spike," and "Hop-picking." Orwell describes what a night on the streets would be like through one of his characters: Dorothy Hare. For Dorothy, it was better to live on the streets, as any charity she applied to might ask uncomfortable questions about her identity which might cause her father embarrassment. She spent several nights in London's Trafalgar square. The worst part was the mind-numbing cold and lack of sleep. It was too cold to sleep, and, even if one could, a police officer could come by at any time and arrest one for vagrancy. In any part of England, it is too cold and damp to sleep comfortably outside year round. *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 167-200.

much the same, though the number of rooms varies between two or five. All have an almost exactly similar living-room, ten or fifteen feet square, with an open kitchen range; in the larger ones there is a scullery as well, in the smaller ones the sink and copper are in the living-room. At the back there is the yard, or part of a yard shared by a number of houses, just big enough for the dustbin and the w.c.'s. Not a single one has hot water laid on. You might walk, I suppose, through literally hundreds of miles of streets inhabited by miners, every one of whom, when he is in work, gets black from head to foot every day, without ever passing a house in which one could have a bath. It would have been very simple to install a hot-water system working from the kitchen range, but the builder saved perhaps ten pounds on each house by not doing so, and at the time when these houses were built no one imagined that miners wanted baths. For it is to be noted that the majority of these houses are old, fifty or sixty years old at least, and great numbers of them are by any ordinary standard not fit for human habitation. They go on being tenanted simply because there are no others to be had. And that is the central fact about housing in the industrial areas: not that the houses are poky and ugly, and insanitary and comfortless, or that they are distributed in incredibly filthy slums round belching foundries and stinking canals and slag-heaps that deluge them with sulphurous smoke--though all this is perfectly true -- but simply that there are not enough houses to go round.[212]

Though council housing provided better living conditions for many, there were also drawbacks serious enough that some moved back into the inferior housing of the slums. Moving disrupted families, communities, and social life. Many who moved felt isolated in council housing because they were located farther from the city center and from friends. A major problem that the new housing could not resolve, and indeed may have made worse, was the difficulty of obtaining enough food. Because higher rents for

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[212] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 51. Orwell wrote that the lack of housing applied mainly to lower-class workers, as there was plenty of housing for those who earned at least £5 a week. One reason for the poor housing was that it could not be demolished until the tenant found different housing. Also, after the house was condemned, the owner seldom did anything to fix it up. *Road to Wigan Pier* 52, 64. Branson, 182-84.

council houses ate into limited finances, renters had to make reductions somewhere. This often meant spending less on food.[213]

Within stable working-class families on the dole, the diet was mainly tea, bread and margarine, and potatoes.[214] These rations might be supplemented with a few tins of beef or maybe a joint of meat per week. Social investigators noted the inadequacy of these diets and concluded that working-class families needed not only instruction on what foods were necessary to keep them healthy, but they also needed more money with which to buy the necessary foods.[215] Studies showed that one could have a balanced diet even while on a limited budget, but those making the calculations either did not calculate the cost of cooking the food or else they based their estimates on only the plainest food. When on the dole, the last thing one wanted was plain food. One wanted rather some cheap treat with which to spice up the diet.[216]

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[213] Charles Webster, in challenging the revisionist view of the depression, explored the dietary needs and provisions of those on the dole. He shows that, generally, the dole provided subsistence. It may have provided food, but, often, it did not provide for clothes or increasing rents, especially as one moved from slum to council housing. Charles Webster, "Health, Welfare and Unemployment During the Depression." *Past and Present* 109 (1985): 204-230. See also, Branson, 207.

[214] Dole rates differed from place to place. Orwell calculated that a family generally had 30s per week. A fourth went to rent. Food and fuel for two adults and one baby took 16s, leaving little for other needs. Many during the time debated how little a person could live on. One figure was 5s 9p per week. Another estimate was as low as 3s 11d, but this did not take into account the cost of cooking the food. Diets had to be limited to the plainest and most wholesome food. *Road to Wigan Pier*, 76-78, 92-104; Branson, 20, 204-19. Orwell refers to the diet of bread and margarine as the "perpetual tea and two slices." *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 132. See also Pilgrim Trust, 107-126.

[215] Orwell believed that there was an underfed population in Britain of at least ten million. John Boyd Orr placed the figure at two million. *Road to Wigan Pier*, 76; Branson, 146-47; Beales and Lambert, 35-37.

[216] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 89, 95-96.

Limited and poor diets often resulted in malnutrition and physical degeneration, evidenced by people having bad teeth (many lost their teeth by the age of thirty) and being shorter and lighter than normal.[217] Orwell noted especially the decrease in the physical size of males, the absence of great towering men. Malnutrition not only had long-range physical effects, it also sapped people's energies, limited their ability to work as effectively as they once did, and caused their skills to atrophy.[218] Equally deleterious was the effect of malnutrition on people's emotional health and their expectations for the future. Orwell graphically described this in one of his best-known passages. At the end of one of his visits to Wigan's slums, his train passed through one of the worst of them and this is what he glimpsed through the train windows:

> At the back of one of the houses, a young woman was kneeling on the stones, poking a stick up the leaden waste-pipe which ran from the sink inside and which I suppose was blocked. I had time to see everything about her--her sacking apron, her clumsy clogs, her arms reddened by the cold. She looked up as the train passed, and I was almost near enough to catch her eye. She had a round pale face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who is twenty-five and looks forty, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and it wore, for the second in which I saw it, the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever-seen. It struck me then that we are mistaken when we say that "It isn't the same for them as it would be for us," and that people bred in the slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her--understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe.[219]

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[217] Hayes and Nutman, 64-82; Cottle, see Introduction; Pilgrim Trust, 133-34.

[218] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 153; *Road to Wigan Pier*, 96-99. Orwell notes that hunger and boredom sap one's energy, strength, and ability to think. He calls this the redeeming feature of poverty, as the focus on survival and the inability to think eradicates the future. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 19-20, 38; *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 267; *Coming Up for Air*, 166. See also Branson, 205.

[219] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 18.

In some of these areas, the destitute, despairing, and unemployed drew attention to their conditions and the seeming unconcern of others with demonstrations. The hunger marches of the 1930s were expressions of people's desperate desire for a decent living standard and a plea for an understanding of how poor living conditions affected them. The Communist group, National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM), organized many of these marches. The marches to London called attention to the plight of the unemployed in the special areas, while demanding an increase in unemployment benefits and the elimination of the means test.[220] In addition to raising awareness of the struggles of the unemployed, these marches also led some to question the government's ability to maintain control should these groups turn violent.

Recovery

By 1934, there were signs that the economy was recovering.[221] Unemployment numbers decreased, and a push for a reinstatement of the benefits cuts of 1931 grew stronger. In July, the cuts were reinstated, mainly as a result of public pressure.[222] Shortly after this, the Unemployment Act of 1934 standardized benefits and the implementation of the means test, so that local authorities were no longer applying their own standards. Family savings and other assets were no longer counted as income, allowing families to keep retirement savings accounts and other resources. Transitional payments were

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[220] Branson 26-29.

[221] Some of this was due to the growth of the armaments industry. Branson 30-38.

[222] Branson, 3. Branson notes that there was an increase in industrial accidents, some of which can be traced to the diminished health or alertness among the long-term unemployed. Branson, 75-76.

eventually combined again with the regular unemployment benefits, as the fund was able to support this. The new home industries continued to thrive, as the rising incomes of many families increased their purchasing power. The growing fear of war acted as a further stimulus to industry, but it also left many with forebodings of doom.

Even with recovery, "distressed" or "special areas," in which residents struggled to provide a decent standard of living for themselves, remained evident into the war years, even though industries relocated to or developed in them. Families had been uprooted and fragmented as members had left to find work, while those who remained to subsist on the dole were less able to work because for years they had been undernourished.[223]

The economic and financial costs of the depression years are well documented and they clearly affected many members of the population, but so too did the mental and emotional costs. Values and beliefs changed, and it is these changes that permeate George Orwell's writings. Though Orwell was not trapped in poverty and unemployment as so many were, he still observed and experienced first hand the physical and emotional costs of poverty and unemployment. He consciously described the circumstances faced by the poor and unemployed. More than this, he lived in the world of the 1930s and his own experiences provided the basis and inspiration for much of what he wrote.

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[223] Branson, 65-66.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE ORWELL AND HIS DEPRESSION NOVELS: USING FICTION TO PORTRAY REALITY

> I do not think one can assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development. His subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in- at least this is true in tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own- but before he ever begins to write, he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape.
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> -- George Orwell, "Why I Write" [224]

George Orwell, the writer, was the product of a metamorphosis, one as remarkable, perhaps, as the one by which a monarch butterfly is produced. He began life as Eric Arthur Blair who was born in 1903 in Bengal into a typical lower-upper middle-class Anglo-Indian family.[225] When he was one year old, his mother moved with Eric and his two sisters to England in order to give the children educations and opportunities to improve their positions in society. The young Eric Blair seemed especially promising, as he was described as being intelligent and an avid reader.[226] One of his earliest memories was of dictating a poem about a tiger (he believed that it was inspired by William Blake's

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[224] George Orwell, "Why I Write" in *Collected Essays,* vol. 1, 3.

[225] Anglo-Indian refers to English families that were stationed in India or were employed in the imperial service. As for the term "lower-upper middle class," Crick defines this as "being the upper-middle class short of money, not really hard up, no discomfort, but not able to play the role expected of them by themselves and others both from the education they received and the status they still enjoy." Bernard Crick, *George Orwell; A Life* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 15.

[226] Crick, 37-38.

poem, "Tiger, Tiger") to his mother, an accomplishment that showed both intelligence and an early literary inclination.[227]

Because of Blair's intelligence and his parents' hopes for his future, his mother enrolled him in St. Cyprians prepatory school. Schools such as St. Cyprians prepared middle- and upper-class children for the more reputable public schools. Those administering St. Cyprians accepted the eight-year old Blair for half the usual fees, with the hope that his intelligence and, hence, his promise would enhance the school's prestige. It is difficult to determine how much effect the time Blair spent at St. Cyprians had on shaping the future George Orwell, but many, including his lifelong friend Cyril Connley, believed that this school experience was the key to understanding Orwell the writer. After assuming the name Orwell, Blair used a number of uncomplimentary terms to describe his experience at St. Cyprians, which was marked by his exposure to snobbishness, cruelty, punishment, unimaginative rote learning, and unsanitary conditions.[228] Those from wealthy families enjoyed more privileges and were subjected

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[227] George Orwell, "Why I Write" in *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, 1. He told one of his childhood friends and fellow literary enthusiasts that he was going to be not just an author, but a "FAMOUS AUTHOR." Crick, 42. His first poem was published while he was at St. Cyprians and was titled "Awake! Young Men of England." Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 61-62.

[228] It is difficult to determine whether this school was better or worse than any other, or if Orwell's description is an imaginative reconstruction that is meant to explain his identity. Schools of this nature were generally austere and often administered corporal punishment. Blair's letters home did not express any of his negative feelings toward the school, but this may be because he knew they were read before being sent. Crick, 17-24. More than this, his sister and other childhood friends who saw him on the holidays did not detect the level of unhappiness and hardship that he wrote about in his essay on his school experiences "Such, Such were the Joys." Crick, 39-40. Though this essay was supposedly based on his experiences, many of his fellow students disagreed with his comments. See Crick, 15-32. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *In Front of Your Nose,1945-50,* vol. 4 of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell.* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 330-69. Though Crick is unsure how much credit should be given to St. Cyprians for influencing Orwell, he believes that Orwell's experiences at prep school "prepared him to reject imperialism when he went to Burma and to side with the underdog, forever

to less punishment than the students from poorer families. Students on scholarships were also pushed harder with both punishment and guilt, because they needed to win scholarships that would provide a return on the school's investment in them.[229] Blair's classmates noted that he was generally out of favor with the headmistress and that he tended to be unemotional and isolated because of his intelligence and natural reticence.[230] Even at St. Cyprians, Blair showed some of the personality traits that played a large role in shaping George Orwell the writer.

By 1917, as the British Government began to consider peacetime conditions following the Great War, Eric Blair, a fifteen year old, was moving from the hated St. Cyprians to Eton. Orwell never wrote much about his four years at Eton, 1917-1921, leading one of his biographers to title a chapter on this period, "Resting on the Oars."[231] Though he enjoyed his time at Eton, Blair did not excel nor did he seem to take school seriously. He seemed instead to devote his time and energy to reading and other literary

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afterwards, with empathy and understanding" because at the school he was treated differently because of his "poverty." Crick, 31, 22.

[229] The headmistress of the school was said to be good at producing guilt and instilling a sense of shame and using both to encourage proper behavior or achievement. Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell,* 53. For Blair this guilt was especially effective as he was on a scholarship and, therefore, he felt obliged to do well, both for his parent's sake and to repay his debt to the school. Blair did not know that he was on a scholarship until shortly before he took the exams that determined what schools would accept him after he had finished at St. Cyprians. The head master told him, partly to goad him into working harder. Crick, 16.

[230] Though Blair tended to be unemotional, he states in "Such, Such were the Joys" that his emotions expressed themselves through bed wetting, a circumstance that led to punishment and embarrassment. He believes that his supposed lack of emotion or his inability to show affection to the headmistress as well as her capriciousness made it impossible for him to court her favor. He did, however, enjoy some moments of favor, one such came after the publication of his poem "Awake! Young Men of England." Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell* 37-38, 55-62. Crick, 25-62.

[231] Crick, 47.

pursuits.[232] Blair's personality did not significantly change during his time at Eton, other than that his experience there confirmed his cynicism and realism all the more.[233]

Blair's mixing with the elites of society and education at Eton seemed to be yet another step toward fulfilling his mother's goals for the family. Eton also isolated him from the hardships that many experienced during the war, especially those experienced by many after the postwar boom faded. Almost ten years after entering Eton, however, Eric Blair, in becoming George Orwell, chose to move from the world of the respectable middle class to the world of the tramps and down and outers.[234]

In December 1921, as Britain faced the first in a series of postwar depressions, Eric Blair finished his schooling at Eton. Though it was usual for one to enroll in a university after attending Eton, Blair chose to find a job. Whether through a desire for adventure, a longing to see the scenes from his mother's childhood in Moulmein, Burma, or to follow his father into the imperial service, Blair joined the Imperial Indian Police.[235] He served in Burma from 1922-1927 and during this time his knowledge of Britain's

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[232] Blair had read some authors such as Ernest William Hornung, Jonathan Swift, William Makepeace Thackery, Charles Dickens, Charles Reade, Ian Hay, and Rudyard Kipling before entering Eton, but now he also pursued his interest in the works of H. G. Wells, Samuel Butler, Laurence Sterne, George Bernard Shaw, and Jack London. Jack London's *People of the Abyss* was especially important in shaping Orwell as a writer, as his first real journey as a tramp was similar to the one described in this work. Crick, 42-43, 47. Not only did Orwell read voraciously, he fell in love with language during this period through the teaching of Aldous Huxley and the study of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Crick, 59, 63-65.

[233] One of his fellow students noted this, especially in Blair's strong criticism of his family. Crick, 49-50.

[234] Blair actually had his first experience of tramping while attending Eton. In a letter to a school chum, written during the July holidays in 1920, he recounted his first adventure as an "amateur tramp." Crick, 65-66. See also, *Collected Essays,* vol. 1, 11-12.

[235] Crick, 72-73, 78.

depressed economy and its effects on people came to him only through letters and newspapers. He was again isolated from the realities of unemployment and poverty; albeit this time by distance, not because he was attending a private school.[236]

In 1927, as the country's economy began to show signs of recovery, Eric Blair returned to Britain on leave from Burma. Giving no official reason, he resigned from the service in 1928. Only later did he reveal that he resigned because he hated the imperial system and the way it treated native populations, because he wanted to be a writer, and because his health was poor (he suffered from tuberculosis and late in his life he was in and out of hospitals as a result of this disease).[237] It was only on his return to Britain from Burma and his decision to become a writer that Orwell witnessed firsthand the prevalence of poverty and unemployment and came to appreciate the emotional cost they exacted. His hatred of oppression and his sympathy for the oppressed led him to identify with those he believed to be oppressed in his own country, those most affected by the twin evils of poverty and unemployment.

Late in 1927, a family friend and poet, Ruth Pitter, found Orwell a cheap room on Portobello Road in London and critiqued his first attempts to write. Pitter remarked that much of Blair's early writings were so bad that she had difficulty refraining from laughing when she read them. Blair was determined, however, and she offered what advice and support she could.[238] The most influential and lasting advice she gave Blair

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[236] Crick, 109.

[237] Crick, 100; Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell*, 215-23.

[238] Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell*, 223-37; Crick, 106-107.

was that he should write on topics with which he was familiar.[239] Though he was, as yet, unable to put his experiences in Burma into words, Blair began to seek out experiences which he could recount and he continued to do this throughout his career. On one journey, similar to that of Jack London in *People of the Abyss,* Blair went tramping in the East London slums, his first real experience as a tramp, but, definitely, not his last. [240]

In the spring of 1928, Blair left Britain for Paris, where he spent a year and a half. Not much is known about Blair's time in Paris other than that he wrote a great deal. Though little of what he wrote survives, he published a few journal articles.[241] He also worked sporadically as an English teacher. Neither writing nor teaching, however, provided him enough income on which to support himself. His savings from his service as a policeman in Burma, on which he had been living, were dwindling and during his last few months in Paris, Blair was left penniless after a thief robbed him.[242] Blair, though he could have asked his aunt in Paris or other family members for help, chose to experience what it was like to be down and out.[243] He found work as a *plonguer* (a kitchen worker), first in a large and fancy hotel and then in a small fashionable restaurant. These experiences of living a life of poverty in Paris are the basis of the first part of

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[239] Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell*, 225.

[240] Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell*, 228-32; Crick, 109-111.

[241] Crick, 111-23.

[242] It in not clear exactly how this robbery happened. In *Down and Out*, Orwell states that he was robbed, but in conversation with one lady he stated that a girl he picked up in Paris made off with all his possessions after being his mistress for a time. Crick, 121.

[243] Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell*, 250; Crick, 114. Orwell's experience in a pauper's ward of a Paris hospital led not only to a fascination with poverty, but also to a desire to understand and write about it. Crick, 118.

Down and Out in Paris and London, which is the only record Blair left of his time in Paris.[244]

At Christmastime in 1929, in the midst of the rapidly developing global depression, Blair returned to England (through the assistance of a loan from a friend or family member), still determined to be a writer. From 1930-1932, he lived in his parents' home in Southwold. Though, at times, he took jobs as a tutor or companion to several boys in the area, he spent most of his time writing.[245] He published several pieces, especially book reviews, in the *Adelphi Literary Magazine.* The tone and style of his writing set his book reviews apart, and he began to develop relationships with other writers and editors, especially at the *Adelphi.*[246] He also made the acquaintance of Mabel Fierz, who not only encouraged him to continue writing, but also introduced him to a literary agent. Fierz remained a loyal supporter throughout Orwell's writing career. During this period, Blair continued to write versions of what would later become *Down*

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[244] There is an argument as to how *Down and Out in Paris and London* should be classified and, indeed, how accurately it reflected Orwell's experiences. From what is known of Orwell's life during this period, it is clear that some rearrangement and exaggeration has taken place, but to what extent? The question asked by many is how this can be considered a documentary of his life when it is not completely accurate in details. Crick argues that the accuracy of the details is not as important to Orwell as conveying the feelings or rather the essence of the experience. See Crick, 112-13; Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell,* 247; Hammond, 79-87. These questions are again raised with regard to *The Road to Wigan Pier*. It is in the rather nebulous category of reportage or documentary. Either way, it is clear that there has been an artful rearranging of events and scenes. See Crick 188-89. Orwell, like Hardy, was striving for the essence of the situation. As such, the organization of the details had to express or explain the essential elements. So, if judged simply on accuracy, Orwell falls short, but that is not his focus. Rather, he must be judged on the accuracy of experience or perception. In 1935, Orwell defended the accuracy of *Down and Out in Paris and London* in the introduction to the French version. "As for the authenticity of my story," he wrote, "I can affirm that I have exaggerated nothing, except in the sense that every writer exaggerates: in selecting." George Orwell, "Introduction to *La Vache enrage*," in *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Jeffery Meyers (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

[245] Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell,* 257-89; Crick, 123-36.

[246] Crick, 124-26, 131.

and Out in Paris and London and he started to write *Burmese Days,* a novel that drew on his experiences in Burma.

When not writing or working odd jobs, Blair went tramping. Though his family could accept his tramping from the standpoint that he was conducting research for articles, some of his friends wondered what the point was as he could never fully understand or experience the life of a tramp because he could at any time return to his middle-class surroundings.[247] His response was that, while a tramp, he strove to be a tramp, by cutting himself off from his own world and society in order to fully experience the life of a tramp.[248] In the fall of 1931, Blair made his longest tramp, from London to the hop fields of Kent. He spent a month on the road or working in the fields, gathering material that later appeared in his essay "Hop Picking" and, more importantly, as a passage in his novel *The Clergyman's Daughter.*[249]

By 1932, Blair had finished the manuscript of *Down and Out,* but it would be another year before it was published. He also continued his work on *Burmese Days*, a

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[247] Crick, 124.

[248]Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell*, 281-82. This is also one of the objections to using Orwell's books as a source for exploring the human cost of the depression. Whether he chose to live in poverty or not, he both experienced and studied it. Having lived in and studied poverty, he is more qualified than many social investigators to comment on the experience of poverty. He was aware of being raised in a middle-class family and the limitations that this might place on his understanding of the working class and he used it to include a wider perspective on poverty than just that affecting the working class and that documented by the social investigator. In fact, most of the prominent characters in his depression novels are from the middle class who have come on hard times. Only in *The Road the Wigan Pier* and *Coming Up for Air* is the focus on working-class experiences.

[249] Crick, 133-35. During this period, Orwell also attempted to get arrested and spend Christmas in jail. Though he was unsuccessful in the attempt, he was picked up for disorderly conduct and held in jail overnight, an experience that later was reflected in the arrest of Gordon Comstock in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying.* Crick, 135-36.

fictitious account of his time in Burma that had enough parallels with reality to require changes in order to avoid possible libel suits.[250] He also published several articles; he was still, however, far from being a well-known or self-supporting author. At the beginning of 1932, it was clear to him that he needed a job, preferably one that would allow him to continue writing. From 1932 to 1934, Blair taught at two different private schools, the Hawthorn and Frays College.[251] Again due to poor health, Orwell gave up teaching, but this experience, combined with his own memories of attending private schools, surfaced later in *The Clergyman's Daughter.*[252]

In 1933, the left-wing publishing firm of Victor Gollanz published Blair's *Down and Out in Paris and London.* The same firm published most of Orwell's books. With the publication of *Down and Out*, Blair not only established himself as a writer with potential, but he also renamed himself. He became George Orwell, the name by which most people know him.[253] Blair had chosen to publish *Down and Out* under a pseudonym because, he said, he was "not very proud" of the book and he wished to protect his family

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[250] Orwell had this problem with most of his novels. See Crick, 140, 156-57, 180; Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 52.

[251] Crick, 137-53.

[252] For middle-class children, it was considered a necessity to go to a privately run school rather than those run by local authorities. Orwell, in his books, severely criticized the education offered in some of these schools, because they were run as a business or a side business by people who did not know how to teach and who did not care about the students' educations. It is this picture of a private school that he presented in *The Clergyman's Daughter.*

[253] Though there were some doubts as to the authenticity of the book or experience, most reviews were positive. One reviewer, W. H. Davis, himself a professional tramp, exclaimed "This is the kind of book I like to read, where I get the truth in chapters of real life" and "it is all true to life, from beginning to end." W. H. Davis, *New Statesman and Nation,* Review 18 March, 1933, in *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Jeffery Meyers (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 43- 44.

from embarrassment.[254] Though these may be the reasons he gave to his agent and publisher for changing his name, it is difficult to believe that they were the real reasons. He had already published articles on kips, tramping, and picking hops under his given name.[255]

Very little is known about why Blair chose the name George Orwell, other than that George was a common English name and the Orwell is a river in southeast England of which he was fond. The name Orwell may be significant as a locative name, because it served to tie Orwell to a particular area of Britain much as the term "Wessex" served to tie Thomas Hardy to Dorset and Somerset, counties in southwest England.[256] The name George may also have a deeper meaning: granted, it is a common name, but it is also the name of England's patron saint, a patron saint who slew a dragon.[257] Though this is only conjecture, Blair may have chosen the name of George to link himself with the enormous

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[254] Each author who attempts to explain the change of name from Blair to Orwell chooses to emphasize a different aspect. So, though there are some common ideas, there is no consensus on Blair's adopting a pen name. Though Blair expressed a preference for the name George Orwell, he also used the names P. S. Burton (his tramping name), Kenneth Miles, and H. Lewis Always, leaving some commentators to wonder if he adopted his pen name on a whim. The names he considered, however, seem to have a deeper meaning. Two of them clearly link Blair to travelling, and, by extension, tramps, which may indicate that he was thinking of using the name only for this particular book or that he was choosing a name that would seem to have a closer association with tramping. Orwell's commentators agree that becoming George Orwell was a gradual transformation in his beliefs and values, one that can be traced in his writings. Crick, 138, 140-41, 147; Stansky and Abrahams, *Orwell*, 4-12; Hammond, 18-20. See Also *Collected Essays,* vol. 1, 84-85, 104-105, 106-107.

[255] Stansky and Abrahams, *Orwell*, 9-12.

[256] The river Orwell is located in southeast England, an area in which Orwell's family spent a good deal of time. His familiarity with and his nostalgic attachment to the area may explain in part his decision to make Orwell part of his name.

[257] Whether or not George Orwell was intending to link himself to England's patron saint, later commentators have made that assertion. In an essay in the *New York Times Book Review*, Geoffrey Wheatcroft likens George Orwell to a "later-day St. George of England" whose "heroic aura hasn't faded." Geoffrey Wheatcroft, "Why Orwell Endures," *New York Times Book Review*, February 14, 2010.

task that he had assumed. George Orwell would be a common man, one who could function at all levels of society, but, more than this, he would slay the dragons that oppressed the down and out.

Assuming a new name did not bring Orwell instant success; he had many years of struggle ahead of him before he could support himself as a writer.[258] To earn money, he taught at private schools from the spring of 1932 to late 1933. Though teaching kept him occupied, he finished writing *Burmese Days* and he began work on *A Clergyman's Daughter*. After being caught in the rain while riding on a motorcycle, Orwell became seriously ill and was forced to retire from teaching. By the time he recovered, he had finished *A Clergyman's Daughter* and had found work in a bookshop, a job that lasted until 1936 when he was at last able to live on the proceeds from his writing.

Orwell opened *A Clergyman's Daughter* by acquainting readers with the life of Dorothy Hare, the title character, as she faces the pressures of keeping up the work of her father's parish, maintaining a middle-class life style on a small income, and dealing with an overbearing and financially incompetent father. Inexplicably, she suddenly disappears from her home and awakens in London only to realize that she does not know who she is or how she got there. The novel describes her struggle to survive poverty, through tramping and picking hops, while trying to remember who she is. Once she remembers, she is still unable to return to her home, as her sudden disappearance and long absence have caused unsavory rumors about her to circulate. To survive, she takes a job as a

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[258] Crick remarks on this, noting that in December 1931 Orwell moved from inexpensive quarters located in a decent section of London to quarters in a slum. Crick, 137.

private school teacher, until all is put right when the one spreading the rumors about her is discredited. Though the novel's premise seems improbable, many of the descriptions, especially those of poverty, are based upon Orwell's experiences and observations.[259] Dorothy is the main character, but the book's focus is on poverty and unemployment.[260]

Orwell published *The Clergyman's Daughter* in 1935, by which time he was already at work on his next novel, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.[261] This novel details the struggle of Gordon Comstock, self-proclaimed poet, against the money system whose clutches one could not escape. Believing that he could not succeed in the money system, and despairing at the prospects of remaining in middle-class genteel poverty, he believed his only option was to rebel against the system. In an attempt to fight against money's overwhelming influence, Comstock accepts positions paying only enough to enable him to survive. Through Comstock's experiences, Orwell explores the psychology of middle-class genteel poverty, as well as the implications of living and socializing on a level just

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[259] The part of the novel that is most objected to is Dorothy's disappearance and amnesia. Many of Orwell's critics state that the story is ridiculous. The idea, however, may have come from an account in the *London Times*. In 1926, Agatha Christie disappeared from her home. For eleven days, a worried public and police wondered what had happened to her. She was discovered in a Yorkshire hotel registered under a false name. Though some wondered if it was a publicity stunt, two psychologists believed that her amnesia was the result of stress. Hayes and Nutman noted that one could take only a certain amount of stress. When an event or circumstance becomes too stressful, the individual may either avoid or blot out the event. Hayes and Nutman, 108-109.

[260] Many commentators on the novel have remarked on the unbelievable characters. One reviewer, however, described the novel as being realistic as judged "by a common verisimilitude founded in daily life." L. P. Hartley in *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Jeffery Meyers (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 58-64. Hammond remarked that *The Clergyman's Daughter* is studied, not for its literary value, but for its insight into poverty and deprivation. Hammond, 106.

[261] This novel received mixed reviews. Several of Orwell's friends reviewed it and although they credited him with being honest and having potential, they did not like the book. The characters and dialogue were said to be over or underdone while the scenes of London life were pronounced good. For more on this see Meyers, *George Orwell,* 65-90. Hammond, a later critic, believed that "it is this deeply human concern with the lack of many of its moral and physical consequences which infuses the novel with its poignancy and will ensure a readership for it for generations to come." Hammond, 37-38.

above that of poverty. In this novel, Orwell again draws on his own experiences, those of being a struggling writer from a less-than-supportive middle-class family and of working as a part-time assistant in a Hampstead bookstore from 1934 to 1935. Many commentators suggest that Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is autobiographical, and it may well be. This novel, as most of his writing, contains a strong autobiographical element that lends it a sense of immediacy and conviction. Orwell, however, never simply relates events, he draws on his experiences and his imagination to produce a coherent story.

In 1936, as Orwell sent the manuscript for *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* to Victor Gollanz, he was faced with a new challenge and a new opportunity. Gollanz commissioned him to write a book documenting the conditions of unemployment and poverty in northern industrial England.[262] For most of England, economic recovery was no longer a hope, but a fact. In northern England, however, many areas of chronic unemployment remained. Not only did this trip produce the *Road to Wigan Pier*, but it also helped to turn Orwell's sympathy for socialism into a thoughtful critique that focused on the workers' brand of socialism that insisted on social justice. Orwell had

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[262] Walter Greenwood, even then well known for *Love on the Dole*, remarked that "the first part of the book is a studied account of the conditions of the lives of the people in the areas mentioned, and it is authentic and first rate." Walter Greenwood, *Tribune,* 12 March, 1937, in *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Jeffery Meyers (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 99. Greenwood praised Orwell's descriptions, but believed that the inclusion of statistics left many readers bored. Hammond, however, praises the combination of statistics and description, because it compared reality to what reality looked like. Hammond, 120.

long counted many socialists and socialist sympathizers as friends or employers, but, with this trip to Wigan, his sympathetic treatment of poverty took on a more political tone.[263]

The first half of the book describes the lodging, food, work, and living conditions of working-class families in the industrial north. It especially focused on miners, as Orwell believed that these men provided the foundation of Britain's wealth.[264] He wrote that working-class life was decent only as long as one was employed. Orwell was not satisfied only with criticizing society's treatment of the unemployed, however, he also insisted on pointing out that many in these areas lived in poor conditions and with limited food, conditions that sapped one's health and ability to work. In the second half of the book, Orwell calls for social justice as the foundation for socialism.

Gollanz's commission made it possible for Orwell to make yet another dramatic change in his circumstances. Because the commission came with a £500 advance, Orwell quit his job at the bookstore and married his girlfriend, Eileen O'Shaughnessy. She, like Orwell, had socialist sympathies, but she distrusted many of the parties and their claims. She was a faithful support for Orwell during his most productive period and she contributed to the writing of *Animal Farm.*[265]

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[263] Many of his literary colleagues and publishers were socialist sympathizers. The owners of the bookstore in which he worked were also strong ILP (Independent Labour Party) supporters. Beyond these connections, Orwell also attended many political meetings and rallies while in the north, which helped him to define his own beliefs. His publisher remarked that "it was almost as if there's been a kind of fire smoldering in him all his life which suddenly sort of broke into flame." Crick, 162-64, 181, 186, 190-94.

[264] See Crick, 185.

[265] Crick, 199, 298, 310.

By the end of 1936, Orwell had finished the manuscript of *The Road to Wigan Pier* and, in December, he left for Spain, intending to write newspaper articles on the Spanish Civil War. Instead, he joined the militia of the quasi-Trotskyite POUM (Patido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista) and was wounded. Returning to England, he published *Homage to Catalonia,* an account of his experiences in Spain and an expression of his conviction that the political leaders had betrayed the Spanish working class. Indeed, Orwell believed that the Spanish Civil War represented the struggle of the working classes of the world to win a decent living for themselves.[266]

Orwell's experiences in Spain significantly influenced him and he wrote afterwards that he never thought of the Spanish Civil War without two memories coming into his mind. Perhaps the more poignant of the two was of meeting and shaking the hand of a young militia man in the Lenin barracks in Barcelona the day before he joined the POUM militia. Something in the man's face moved Orwell. It was, he wrote, "the face of a man who would commit murder and throw away his life for a friend."[267] The militiaman's face, which Orwell saw for only a moment or two, made clear to him what the Spanish Civil War was all about—the attempt of the working man to gain the decent life that he was entitled to.

Few passages in Orwell's writings speak more eloquently of his convictions than the following. "The question is very simple," he wrote in his conclusion to *Homage to Catalonia.* "Shall people like that Italian soldier," he asked,

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[266] *Homage to Catalonia*, 7.

[267] *Homage to Catalonia*, 7.

> be allowed to live the decent, fully human life which is now technically achievable, or shan't they? Shall the common man be pushed back into the mud, or shall he not? I myself believe, perhaps on insufficient grounds, that the common man will win his fight sooner and later, but I want it to be sooner and not later—some time within the next ten thousand years.[268]

Orwell's experiences in Spain and his exposure to the causes for which the POUM and organizations like it were fighting led to a marked change in his writing. He changed from being a writer who placed his books within the context of the 1930s, often with the theme of calling for social and economic reform, to being a prescient writer who stressed the attraction of socialism and the dangers posed by totalitarianism. This theme can be seen in his next and last two books, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Orwell never again made poverty and unemployment the focus of his works; rather he used both as the setting for the plot or the outcome of the action. Largely as a result of what he had seen and experienced in Spain, he was transformed from a middle-class boy to a mature political writer who dealt with the themes of revolution and totalitarianism.[269]

The now–more-mature Orwell combined these themes with his previous focus on gaining social and economic justice for the oppressed in the last of his depression novels, *Coming up for Air,* set in the late 1930s. Orwell devoted much of the novel to describing the childhood of George Bowling, who was born about the turn of the century.[270] The first section introduces the Bowlings, George, his wife Hilda, and their two children. George Bowling is a middle-aged insurance salesman who feels tied to a job that takes more out of him than he gets out of it. His wife, Hilda, was from a middle-class family.

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[268] *Homage to Catalonia*, 243-45.

[269] Crick, 235-36.

[270] See Crick, 242.

Though the Bowlings live comfortably, Hilda insists on buying the cheapest goods and searching for the best buys. Her entertainment and enjoyments are limited to what she can get at no cost. Her often-expressed fear is that they will end up in the workhouse.[271] One of her earliest childhood memories is a "ghastly feeling that there was never enough money for anything."[272] George and his wife are not close and after he had had several affairs while on business trips, his wife is naturally suspicious of what he might be doing whenever he is away from home.

The second part of the novel traces George's life from the "blissful" Edwardian days of his childhood, through his experiences in the military during World War I, to his postwar struggle to find a job. The last section deals with his attempt to reconnect with his childhood by taking a trip to his hometown of Binfield. Much of the novel deals with escapism, as George longed to relive the passion, excitement, and hope of his youth, now that his life had become dull and he had been overcome by a premonition that danger and war lay ahead. To his dismay, he discovers that he cannot regain the idealism of his youth, yet he is afraid to move on, because all that he can see in the future is war and destruction.

Coming up for Air, published in 1939, was written for and about Orwell's time. Orwell also grew up in the "blissful" Edwardian years, and he and George Bowling share similar experiences (though Orwell's family came from a slightly higher stratum of

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[271] *Coming Up For Air*, 10-11, 134-39.

[272] *Coming Up For Air*, 137. Gordon Comstock had a similar upbringing. As a child, he hated his family because of their "dingy homes, their dowdiness, their joyless attitude to life, their endless worrying and groaning over three pence and sixpences." *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 42; Branson, 151.

society). Orwell was also writing this novel during a time when many had experienced the events he described, events that were immediately accessible to him through the experiences of others. The events in the book, resembling a narration of fact, reveal people's sentiments, their belief that there has to be more to life than the daily struggle to survive. The book's despairing conclusion, however, is that the values, beliefs, experiences, and hopes have been irretrievably lost.[273]

For many in England, especially those who were unemployed, reduced to poverty, or despairing and without hope, the 1930s were, indeed, the years of the locusts, years of wasted opportunities. Psychologists, social investigators, historians and others have studied the period, documented the number of those who were unemployed and living in poverty, and offered analyses and explanations. George Orwell, however, did them one better. He placed his novels within a historical context, that of the Great Depression, and, with an understanding gained from his own experiences, he treated the mental and emotional cost that the depression inflicted on those who were unemployed and living in poverty. It was not a cost that could be measured in pounds sterling.

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[273] Hammond also comments on the sense of loss that permeates the novel, one that expresses the mood of many in England at the time. "An awareness that the values which had shaped the concern for the land- were being altogether destroyed by social and technological forces over which he had no control. This feeling of hopelessness in the face of overwhelmingly powerful and destructive forces is the dominant impression of the novel." Hammond, 153-55. In her review of the novel, Winifred Horrabin goes further. "In a hundred novels," she wrote, "the life and thought of our time is being expressed and, as in George Orwell's latest and in many ways best work, as finely expressed as in an accurate photograph." She believes that George Bowling's disappointment with life led him to seek solace in fantasy, the fantasy of his past. She sees the escape into fantasy as a common theme of her time. Winifred Horrabin, *Tribune,* 21 July, 1939, in *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Jeffery Meyers (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 155.

CHAPTER V

ORWELL'S NOVELS LAY BARE THE EMOTIONAL COSTS OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

> The age we live in … is an age in which every *positive* attitude has turned out a failure. Creeds, parties, programmes of every description have simply flopped, one after another. The only "ism" that has justified itself is pessimism.
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> - George Orwell, "The Limit to Pessimism"[274]

Many studies in the 1930s attempted to document the effects that poverty, substandard living accommodations, and inadequate diets had on people. Orwell's novels contain observations that are similar to those found in psychological studies, but he provides descriptions that connect emotions to physical realities. Orwell's descriptions of unemployment and poverty can be broken down much like Frankl's descriptions of life in a concentration camp. In the Admission stage, one loses a job or position and faces poverty. Intense emotional responses characterize this stage; two of the most evident are fear and secrecy. Some of Orwell's characters, especially those of the middle class, experienced anticipatory grief when faced with the threat, real or imagined, of unemployment and subsequent poverty. The second stage, Entrenchment, begins with the full realization of one's situation. The physical, mental, and emotional strain of the situation exhausts the individual and often leads to depression and apathy. Apathy acts as a protective shield, allowing the individual to think only of the present and so avoid

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[274] *Collected Essays,* vol. 1, 533.

troubling and draining questions about the future. Because of the narrowed range of focus, any distraction is absorbing.

The release from poverty brings new challenges for the individual. Frankl believed that introducing a released camp inmate back into society too quickly was dangerous as it could lead to mental or spiritual bends. He explained that the world of the inmate or the unemployed is different from that of one in society; different rules, standards, and beliefs apply. Some of these are necessitated by the struggle to survive, while others are the outcome of emotional stress. Some people were unable to adjust to changing circumstances, much like those who suffer from chronic grief. If people cannot adapt gradually to their society's rules, they may be unable to survive or they may be in constant conflict with societal expectations. For the unemployed, the effect could be desperation to get a job, a sense of entitlement to maintenance, or a loss of interest in life. The ultimate outcome depended on whether or not the inner man survived.

Orwell further deepened and complicated his accounts of unemployment and poverty by his discussion of class differences. Though he largely ignored the upper class, his works presented characters from the middle class, working class, and outcasts (tramps and beggars).[275] He focused his novels on middle-class attitudes and circumstances because of his greater familiarity with these. More than this, Orwell believed that the middle-class experience of poverty was worse than that of the working class, because a

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[275] Orwell's treatment of the upper classes and their appearance in his works limits their role to that of the sympathetic socialist (Ravelston) or a repressive class that because of their fear of losing their position insists on economic disparities. See *Keep the Aspidistra Flying,* 54, 90-99; *Road to Wigan Pier*, 122-24; *Down and Out in Paris and London,* 119-20. He typically defines class by money, but he also admits to exceptions. The educated and middle classes, regardless of their economic standing, generally side with the upper class. *Road to Wigan Pier*, 122-23.

"working man does not disintegrate under the strain of poverty as a middle-class person does."[276] Though the characters in Orwell's novels were generally middle class, he still studied and wrote about the struggles of the working class and outcasts. The pictures he presents of these groups show many similarities that will be explored later. He does point, however, to some differences, especially in family structure and interactions.

Orwell noted that the working-class family structure remained largely intact because of a willingness to marry and to raise families while on the dole. For males of the middle class, this was impossible, because they would not marry if they could not support a family. Regardless of their economic situation, they tried to maintain class distinctions rather than accept a life on the dole.[277] Orwell did not fully explain why working-class families seemed to be more stable, but he did point to the reality that unemployment and poverty altered the family structure and sometimes caused it to disintegrate. A reason for his belief in the stability of working-class families may have come from their enjoying greater community support or from their more ready acceptance of being unemployed. As unemployment increased, communities in which the majority of workers were jobless showed greater social acceptance of unemployment and placed less blame upon a man who was out of work.[278] Life expectations and definitions of success for a middle-class

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[276] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 87, 123, 124. George Bowling's wife, Hilda, is a good example of the mental and emotional struggles of many middle-class people when faced with poverty. She is from the poverty-stricken middle class. She grew up with the fear that there would not be enough money and her family would have to go to the workhouse. *Coming Up for Air*, 10-11, 14, 137.

[277] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 87, 225.

[278] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 85-87; Pilgrim Trust, 64, 127-28, 158-63, 287-88.

father may have placed more importance on his identity as the provider, and, hence, may have led to a greater chance of such families disintegrating when faced with a crisis.

Mirra Komarovsky's study, conducted in America in the midst of the Great Depression, focused on how unemployment affected the father's authority and on how his changed circumstances affected the family. The study emphasized a man's struggles to maintain identity, especially when he was no longer the provider, and the effects of this on his relationship with his wife and children.[279] This struggle might lead a man to become more domineering in the home in an attempt to assert his authority or to shore up his identity. For others, it produced a conciliatory response, offering to help around the house in order to show that they were valuable and contributing members of the family.[280] The nature of the family and especially the strength of the marriage before the man became unemployed also played an important role. Researchers noted that depression "tended to accentuate the psychological framework in which people lived

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[279] Komarovsky, 41, 61-62, 78.Orwell, as well as authors such as John Steinbeck and Hans Fallada, explore the dynamics of relationships especially between men and women in their works. At the opening and throughout *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck noted that the women knew everything would be all right and the family would stay together as long as the men's fear could still turn to anger or thought. When the men gave up and lost their sense of identity and purpose, they started to isolate themselves and the family slowly broke apart. Hans Fallada shows how the challenge to a man's identity can lead to isolation from the family in a scene quoted above. As Pinneberg stands outside his home, he feels isolated from everyone and everything and no longer sees value in himself. Because of his attitude and actions, his wife feels disconnected from him and so turns slowly away. As she does, Pinneberg comes to himself and realizes that to his wife he is still a man. Steinbeck, 4, 434-35; Fallada, 381-83. The loss of identity can also be tied to a loss of respect or position in the family.

[280] For some men, helping around the house was an attempt to fill time and, for others, it was expected. This was especially true if the wife went to work. Some men hated this, as doing "women's work" seemed a further challenge to or loss of their identity as men. Others, however, saw it as a way to prove their continued value. Mirra Komarovsky, 43-45.

before the depression. Well-coordinated families tended to draw closer together, whereas families in which difficulties had already appeared were likely to deteriorate further."[281]

Some government policies, unfortunately, encouraged the fracturing of families. It was difficult to maintain a family on the dole, even with added allowances for dependents. When children became old enough to work, they often provided added income for a time.[282] In some homes, the wife went to work to support the family, but she generally only worked while the man was out of work, as most married women believed their place was in the home.[283] For the wife or children to be working while the man stayed at home was not only a blow to the man's self-esteem, but it also altered how the family functioned. Often grandparents lived with the family to receive adequate care and

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[281] Paul F. Lazarfeld, introduction to *The Unemployed Man and His Family – the Effect of Unemployment Upon the Status of the Man in Fifty-nine Families,* by Mirra Komarovsky (New York: Dryden Press, 1940) xii.

[282] Adolescents at times found it easier to find work because they were paid lower wages. Some industries, like textiles, preferred hiring children and women because their smaller and nimble fingers were better at working the machines. The challenge to the father's identity intensified as those who were originally dependent on him and looked to him for support and maintenance were now supporting him. Adolescents, however, often lost their jobs once they reached the ages of 18 or 21, when they were entitled to receive a man's wages. In fact, surveys of the youth unemployment during the period often show that there was higher unemployment among youth than among adults. These surveys studied the employment of young men between the ages of 14-24. Between the ages of 14 and 16, many boys were hired in temporary positions or even as apprentices (though some apprenticeships were legitimate, others provided limited training and used apprentices as a source of cheap labor). Because employers had to start paying unemployment and health insurance contributions when workers reached the age of 16, many employers fired the 16 year olds and hired younger boys. The now-unemployed 16 year olds would often find it difficult if not impossible to find a good, steady job before they turned 24. Branson, 52; Komarovsky, 27, 92-115; E. Wight Bakke, *The Unemployed Man: A Social Study* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1934), 4-6; Kenneth Roberts, *From School to Work: A Study of the British Youth Employment Service* (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1972): 16-20, 34-41; Mark Casson, *Youth Unemployment* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1979); Beales and Lambert, 68, 73-76; Pilgrim Trust, 147-48.

[283] Some men expressed their concern over women taking their jobs and insisted that part of the answer to unemployment was to get women out of the work force. Once women were married, they generally stayed out of the workforce, at least while they had children at home. Young girls and unmarried women were often hired, partly because they could be hired for less than men and for certain jobs they were more suited. Bakke, 6-7; *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 135.

to bolster the family's finances with their old age pensions. The means test, however, counted additional sources of income against the family. The means test counted working children and elderly parents as renters and considered their wages and pensions as a part of the family income, leading to a decrease in or cessation of the allowance. Because of the means test, many elderly and adolescents were forced to find cheap lodging outside the home.[284]

A government transference scheme also encouraged the fracturing of families. Many members of the government believed that the transference or the moving of the unemployed from distressed areas to areas where laborers were needed was the answer to the unemployment problem.[285] Transference only led to a further fragmenting of families, however, as younger and unmarried members left in hopes of finding new opportunities. The result was that the older and less employable remained in the distressed areas, limiting the attraction of such areas for new businesses and increasing the burden on the local government, as there were fewer tax revenues with which to provide for the unemployed.

Changing family dynamics were only part of the challenges presented by unemployment and poverty. Whether of the middle class or working class, one's ability to survive, and to continue to live the semblance of a normal life, required the acceptance

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[284] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 8-9; Branson, 23-24, 228-32.

[285] Branson, 62-66; Bakke, 130-34.

of a lower standard of living.[286] This acceptance did not come without struggle and this struggle forms the first stage of the experience of poverty, Admission.

Admission

In *Down and Out in Paris and London,* Orwell wrote that "the English are a conscience-ridden race, with a strong sense of the sinfulness of poverty. One cannot imagine the average Englishman deliberately turning parasite, and this national character does not necessarily change because a man is thrown out of work."[287] Orwell's comment suggested that those who were unemployed were despised and considered to be parasites, an attitude reflected also in the philosophy underlying the country's poor laws and workhouses.[288] In *The Road to Wigan Pier,* Orwell describes unemployment as "a disaster that happened to *you* as an individual and for which *you* were to blame."[289] This observation reflected a cultural assumption, one that Orwell attributed especially to members of the middle class, that to find a job one needed only to look.

Workers themselves had a strong belief in and a desire to work. E. Wight Bakke in a study done on unemployed wage laborers (rather than pensioned workers which

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[286] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 87-88.

[287] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 202. Some unemployed were so ashamed of being out of work that they went to great lengths to hide their unemployment from their friends, family, and community. Though they realized it was "no fault of their own," they still associated it with a stigma. Pilgrim Trust, 64.

[288] The Poor Law had treated those in poverty much like criminals, as it blamed individuals for their unemployment and poverty. Before the turn of the century, attitudes and beliefs about unemployment and the treatment that the unemployed received were changing, leading to changes in the Poor Law. Though much progress was made by the interwar years, Orwell reminds readers that long-held cultural attitudes and beliefs do not change as quickly as government policies do. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 173-74.

[289] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 86. This belief to some extent encouraged a disenfranchised grief, or a situation that is not recognized by those around one, which leads to increased isolation of the individual who was unemployed.

tended to be middle class) in 1934 began with an analysis of the workers and their beliefs about their jobs. "The outstanding feature of plans for the future among the workers I studied," he stated, "was the apparent inability of either parents or children to conceive of any possibility for making a living outside the wage-earning sphere."[290] More than this, many unemployed men, though they were receiving an equivalent or better income from the dole, still preferred to work and this only changed for the great majority of them when their mental state had altered and they had begun to find activities, an identity, or a purpose outside of the wage-earning sphere.[291]

Through the character of George Bowling in *Coming up for Air*, Orwell showed the challenge one faced when searching for a job after World War I.[292] Of those males born between 1890-1900, most had served in World War I, and, after being discharged, they had difficulty finding jobs. New workers mustered for the war effort, those released before the Armistice, and those who had not fought already saturated the job market.[293] People knew that to get and keep jobs, they had to sell themselves to an employer.[294] Gordon Comstock fights against this in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* as he sees it as a part

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[290] Bakke, 31.

[291] Pilgrim Trust, 131-33, 158-64.

[292] *Coming Up For Air*, 86, 125-31.

[293] *Coming Up For Air*, 126-27. An additional reason for this may be the changing expectations of many of those who served in the war. They received higher pay and temporary titles of officer and gentleman, which raised their expectations. Dorothy Hare also finds it difficult to get a job. Her reasons, however, have little to do with the availability of jobs. She interviewed for many housemaid jobs, but was always refused as she was of "the wrong class to get a job." Many of the women who interviewed her were nervous about hiring her without references, especially because she had an educated accent. In the end, with her accent, Dorothy found it easier to beg than to work. *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 163, 201.

[294] *Coming Up For Air*, 128; see also, Bakke, 240.

of the money system. He is unwilling to allow money, whether in the form of currency or a good job, to dominate his life and thoughts; yet, he finds himself unable to maintain his resolve. The less money he has, the more that money occupies his thoughts and he repeatedly checks to make sure that the same amount of change remains in his pockets.[295]

Comstock and other characters reflect a middle-class upbringing and attitude. Hilda, George Bowling's wife, carries her fear of poverty into her marriage and is continually reminding her husband of the severity of small "disasters," such as an increase in the cost of butter. George's attitude toward money is quite different and he likened it to that of the "proles" or proletariat. He believes that money is to be spent and enjoyed because tomorrow one might be in the "soup."[296] George believes that the worst part of middle-class life and the part that separates it from working-class life is that middle-class men are never free of the worry of the boss or the wife and as such never have a free day.[297] Though this may be an exaggeration, the constant reminders of unemployment in the news and through the people one knew or saw may have left many feeling an almost unrelenting pressure about their job security.

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[295] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying,* 43-44, 104, 114, 237. Gordon believes that money or the money god has become the only religion. Right and wrong no longer exist, only success and failure. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 43-44; Beales and Lambert, 76.

[296] *Coming Up For Air*, 138.

[297] *Coming Up For Air*, 14. This sentiment is also recorded in Bakke's research on workers. Bakke, 240.

Dorothy Hare, in the *The Clergyman's Daughter*, is also caught up in this constant worry.[298] She is harassed by worries of where the money will come from; whether she has enough for the week; and, most painfully, whether she can pay the bills. She has large bills at most of the business places in town, the largest of which is with the butcher.[299] She dreads to visit the shop, but knows that she cannot take her business elsewhere as the butcher could call in the debt. When she does go to his shop, she laments that the butcher "speaks to me shortly and makes me wait after the other customers, all because our bill's mounting up."[300] She exclaims to her father that "even if it isn't actually wrong," to be in debt, "it's so hateful."[301] Constant shame and worry, together with overwork, and, quite possibly her poor diet, eventually take their toll and Dorothy has a breakdown that leads to memory loss.

Worries over money were often multiplied by the desire to hide one's poverty from public view. Bakke relates that workers in Greenwich, a district in southeast London, preferred to keep the realms of home and work separate. Only their closest friends and family members were allowed into their homes and these were the same

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[298] Part of the reason for her worry is her father's desire to live as a member of the middle class, when church attendance and revenues were decreasing. Articles began to appear in the *London Times* remarking on the poverty of the clergy. "'Passing Rich': Reflections of a Curate's Wife," *London Times*, March 20, 1919. See also, "Clerical Poverty," *London Times*, January 11, 1919; "Clerical Poverty," *London Times*, January 16, 1919; "Poverty of the Clergy: the Bishop's Call for Drastic Remedies," *London Times*, February 5, 1919; "The Church and the New Year: Parochial Paralysis," *London Times*, January 3, 1921; "Poverty of the Clergy", *London Times,* December 24, 1921; see also John William Bruce Tomlinson, "From Parson to Professional: The Changing Ministry of the Anglican Clergy in Staffordshire, 1830-1960," (diss., University of Birmingham, 2007).

[299] *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 8-9, 18-19, 31-32.

[300] *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 31.

[301] *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 31.

people to whom the unemployed worker turned in time of need. Workers were careful about allowing access to their homes, as this was one way to influence how their neighbors perceived them. They took pride in displaying a bright brass nameplate or door handle, a freshly scrubbed doorstep, and clean, starched, white lace curtains. "These three items," Bakke observed, "the brass, the white doorstep, the curtains, are the necessary marks of distinction which separate the good from the bad housekeepers, the established and respectable workers from the ones that 'don't care' in the eyes of the passer-by, and in the court of neighborhood gossip."[302] These marks of status were present in all but the poorest homes, indeed "one went very low in the income scale before all three of these marks of distinction disappeared. First, the brass was replaced by iron; then the lace was replaced by plainer material or none at all. The white doorstep, the result of daily scrubbing, failed to appear only in the very poorest of slum districts."[303] These objects represented the family to the public eye. The loss of them showed either that the family could not afford to or did not care to keep up appearances.

The fear and secrecy surrounding poverty stemmed from the desire to keep up appearances as an acceptable member of the community and from the fear of being perceived as a parasite.[304] Orwell noted that many, especially members of the middle class, when faced by shrinking income or impending poverty went out of their way to hide their circumstances. To some extent, this is reflected in the attitudes of George and

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[302] Bakke, 153-62.

[303] Bakke, 157.

[304] Hayes and Nutman, 83-92; Pilgrim Trust, 126-27.

Hilda Bowling, attitudes that could also be described as anticipatory grief. Although Hilda worries about where the money to maintain their lifestyle will come from, George would rather spend his time and money enjoying life.

The desire and attempt to keep up appearances on a limited budget was complicated, costly, and, sometimes, bordering on the comical.[305] One went to great lengths to allay suspicion and, in the process, spent more money than intended to avoid losing friends to unintended slights. In speaking of his experiences of poverty in Paris, Orwell details many of the ordinary aspects of life that turn into major challenges because of one's desire to hide his poverty:

> You discover for instance, the secrecy attaching to poverty. At a sudden stroke, you have been reduced to an income of 6 francs a day. But of course you dare not admit it-you have got to pretend that you are living quite as usual. From the start it tangles you in a net of lies, and even with the lies you can hardly manage it. You stop sending your clothes to the laundry and laundress catches you in the street and asks you why; you mumble something, and she, thinking you are sending clothes elsewhere, is your enemy for life. The tobacconist keeps asking why you have cut down your smoking. There are letters you want to answer, and cannot, because stamps are too expensive. And then there are your meals- meals are the worst difficulty of all. Every day at meal-times you go out, ostensibly to a restaurant, and loaf an hour in the Luxembourg Gardens, watching the pigeons. Afterwards you smuggle your food home in your pockets. Your food is bread and margarine, or bread and wine, and even the nature of the food is governed by lies. You have to buy rye bread instead of household bread, because the rye loaves, though dearer, are round and can be smuggled in your pockets. This wastes you a franc a day. Sometimes, to keep up appearances, you have to spend sixty centimes

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[305] The popular BBC sitcom "Keeping up Appearances" highlights the continuing cultural importance of maintaining appropriate appearances. This program ran from 1990-95 and has remained popular in reruns. It focuses on the character of Hyacinth Bucket (which she insists on pronouncing "bu-kay," as in bouquet- a play on her given name and those of her sisters, Rose and Violet) and her attempts to climb the social ladder and give the appearance of being a member of the upper class.

> on a drink, and go correspondingly short of food. Your linen gets filthy, and you run out of soap and razor-blades. Your hair wants cutting, and you try to cut it yourself, with such fearful results that you have to go to the barber after all, and spend the equivalent of a day's food. All day you are telling lies, and expensive lies.[306]

Nevertheless, keeping up appearances was important, especially for members of the middle class. Gordon Comstock lamented that in his own family "it was not *merely* the lack of money. It was rather that, having no money, they still lived mentally in the money-world- the world in which money is virtue and poverty is crime."[307] Yet, even Gordon went out of his way to look respectable for a literary tea party, a challenge because of his old and well-worn clothes.[308] More deceptive still is his putting a single cigarette in an empty packet. He does so to maintain his pride and, possibly, to avoid being considered a leech or a parasite. He could generously offer someone a cigarette and then, when he discovers that it is his last one, he could pass it off and instead be offered cigarettes.[309] Even in how he spends his money, Comstock tries to keep up appearances. When he is given a three pence piece (he refers to it as a joey), he dared not use it as it

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[306] *Down and Out in Paris and London,* 16-17.

[307] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 44. Pinneburg realizes this too, when, shamed by his shabby appearance before a crowd of "respectable" people, he is chased away by an officious policemen. Fallada, 368-70.

[308] Both Pinneberg and McCourt's father stress the importance of collars to maintaining one's appearance and, hence, status. Fallada, 368-70; McCourt, 94.

[309] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 62-63. Comstock's trick with the cigarettes is a good example of how people attempt to influence how others view them and, thereby, maintain status and identity. See also, Hayes and Nutman 84-85.

would be clear to anyone that it was his last. In the end, to avoid the appearance of being poor, he throws it away.[310]

A third element to Admission was disgust with one's situation. While Dorothy was tramping, she turned to begging and was neither afraid nor ashamed. She "had no remembered past, no standards of comparison to make her ashamed of it."[311] It is only after she regained her memory, hence the ability to compare her current actions with her past situation, that she is ashamed and fears being caught begging.[312] Orwell also observed this disgust in out-of-work miners. He noted that when he first started travelling among tramps, he was surprised to find that many of them were not parasites, but "decent young miners and cotton-workers gazing at their destiny with the same sort of dumb amazement as an animal in a trap. They simply could not understand what was happening to them. They were brought up to work, and behold ! it seemed as if they were never going to have the chance of working again."[313]

For the unemployed miners, the feelings of disgust and sense of failure were intense, especially if their neighbors all still had jobs. "Hence that frightful feeling of impotence and despair which is almost the worst evil of unemployment-far worse than

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[310] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 4, 71, 75.

[311] *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 108. The inability to compare makes it easier to deny one's fallen position. Komarovsky, 130.

[312] *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 149.

[313] *Road to Wigan Pier* 85-86. Orwell wrote that it is worse for those with little or no education to be out of work, as all they know is work. They have nothing to fill long hours, save dwelling on their misery. Bozo, too, told Orwell that one must take an interest in something beyond just food and survival. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 180.

any hardship, worse than the demoralization of enforced idleness, and only less bad than that physical degeneracy of [the miner's children], born on the PAC [Public Assistance Committee]."[314] Of course, when all of a person's friends and neighbors are in the same situation, there are none with whom to compare oneself. As hopes for a better life in the future fade, one retreats into apathy. "When people live on the dole for years at a time," Orwell explained, "they grow used to it, and drawing the dole, though it remains unpleasant, ceases to shameful."[315] Sinking into apathy marks the beginning of the Entrenchment phase.

Entrenchment

As the duration of unemployment lengthened and the number of unemployed increased, many of the unemployed moved from Frankl's first stage of Admission to the second stage, Entrenchment. Apathy, the inability to keep up appearances or the lack of energy to fear the future, is a primary characteristic of this stage. In fact, Orwell declared, poverty kills the future, people cannot think beyond themselves.[316] Apathy had two aspects, the physical and the mental or emotional, which many psychologists have noted are important to survival. The limited diets and poor accommodations of the unemployed or impoverished affected their health and their ability to function. Having food and housing, however, did not determine whether a person survived. Apathy created a

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[314] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 86.

[315] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 87.

[316] This response is seen time and again in Orwell's works. Sinking into apathy was generally marked by lowered expectations. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 20; *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 164-66; *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 195-97, 207-211.

numbness of mind and emotions that led to the discounting of anything beyond the struggle to survive and furthered isolation and the loss of identity.

Surviving takes all of one's effort, as Dorothy notes when she is tramping. The necessity of finding food often occupied all of her time and guided her actions.[317] Survival also meant a focus on the present, as hunger sapped her energy, her strength, and her ability to think.[318] Or, as Orwell rather inelegantly put it, "A human being is primarily a bag for putting food into; the other functions and faculties may be godlike but in point of time they come afterwards."[319]

As much effort as it takes to survive physically, it takes even more to survive emotionally. Bozo, a pavement artist, tells Orwell in *Down and Out in Paris and London* that many tramps care and worry less about the future than they care and worry about their survival in the present. But, he added, "you got to take an interest in something. It don't follow that because a man's on the road he can't think of anything but tea-and-two slices."[320] Orwell reminded Bozo that most tramps lose interest in anything beyond survival and that after one's money is gone, one is good for nothing.[321] "Poverty," Bozo

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[317] *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 107.

[318] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 19, 20, 38.

[319] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 91.

[320] Tea-and-two slices refer to the standard fare of many who were living at the starvation level in London at this time. Orwell wrote that tramps and others at the poverty line in London consumed a cup of tea and two slices of toast with margarine about every two hours, or as often as they could afford it. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 164, 134-36.

[321] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 164-65.

objected, cannot turn "you into a bloody rabbit-that is, not if you set your mind to it."[322] He believed that people had to have hope and peace of mind even when they found themselves in poor circumstances, but that they could only achieve this if they took an interest in something beyond their current circumstances. One unemployed man expressed it this way, "They have to take anyone in [the workhouse] who says he's destitute. There's some strong fellows in there, too. You'd be surprised. They're strong in arms and legs but there is nothing in here [indicating head] or here [indicating heart]. They've just surrendered, that's all. I didn't used to have any sympathy for them. But I'm beginning to see now how easy it is to slip that way."[323] This inability to see beyond one's struggle to survive indicates a shift from admission and anticipatory grief to acute grief or depression.

The challenge to maintain interest in anything beyond surviving was, as Dorothy Hare explains, that keeping body and soul together leaves little time for anything else and produces a narrowed range of consciousness.[324] Gordon Comstock said that poverty kills creativity and shrinks peoples' ability to see and enjoy the world around them.[325] "You don't suffer real physical hardship on two quid a week," he remarked, "and if you do it wouldn't matter. It is in the brain and the soul that lack of money damages you. Mental deadness, spiritual squalor--they seem to descend upon you inescapably when your

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[322] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 164.

[323] Bakke, 69.

[324] *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 134-39, 276.

[325] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 6, 49-50, 54, 57, 218.

income drops below a certain point."[326] George Bowling believed that the minute peoples' brains stop, they are dead. He explained that some individuals may acquire a bit of knowledge, but then "just keep moving backwards and forwards on the same little track, getting fainter all the time, like ghosts."[327]

Among the problems of unemployment was that it left one with more leisure time, more time to fill, more time to think, and more time to avoid thinking. "When there is added to this lack of adjustment the increased mental strain and worry," stated Bakke, the decreased sense of his own worth, the feeling that the recovery of his position is to a large extent out of his own hands, the rapid deterioration of the mind and spirit to say nothing of body under enforced idleness, it is seen that the use to which the leisure time of the unemployed is put is a matter of real importance."[328] A person's job or work generally focused, organized, and occupied a large portion of one's time. How one spent "extra leisure time" became important, as it reflected the person's mental state.[329] For some of the unemployed, this time was used to look for work. Others helped around the house or picked up new interests and hobbies. But, "whatever he may do," wrote Bakke, "it is

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[326] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 57.

[327] *Coming Up for Air*, 160. Orwell's noted the tendency of tramps' conversations in *Down and Out in Paris and London* and in the conversations at his first boarding housing to revolve around the same central topics. *The Road to Wigan Pier. Down and Out in Paris and London*, 151; *Road to Wigan Pier*, 17.

[328] Bakke, 178.

[329] See Hayes and Nutman, 38; Pilgrims Trust, 149-51.

something which is out of his ordinary use of those working hours. His habits and attitudes are not adjusted to the new attitudes."[330]

When not looking for work, many of the unemployed spent their leisure time trying to forget their circumstances. Dorothy, having spent all her money, is faced with having to spend the night on the streets. For a short while, she tried to forget the prospect of sleeping in the cold by looking at magazines in a library. Unable to think beyond the moment, she found each magazine advertisement to be thoroughly absorbing.[331] Gordon Comstock also looked forward to anything that would break the monotony of his life. Literary tea parties were among his favorite means of escape from his normal routine, and just the prospect of attending one renewed his enthusiasm and inspiration to the point where he could write again.[332]

In his research on Wigan, Orwell observed and commented on this desire for escape. Cheap luxuries added spice to life and often replaced more sensible and essential goods.[333] The cinema especially provided a means by which one could escape reality. In Wigan, a movie ticket cost four pence, or two pence at matinee houses.[334] Whether working or out of work, all members of the community attended the cinema; however,

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[330] Bakke, 177. This observation by Bakke resembles Colin Murray Parkes' concepts of life space and assumptive world.

[331] *The Clergyman's Daughter*, 166.

[332] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 64-65.

[333] For a summary of world trends on this see, Garraty, 176.

[334] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 80-81.

those who were unemployed could not attend as often as they wished.[335] The cinema, whether a person attended frequently or infrequently, still provided topics of conversation and a distraction from the present. Bakke quoted one unemployed man as saying, "the pictures help you live in another world for a little while. I almost feel I'm in the picture."[336] Another said that the pictures are his "first choice, because they make you think for a little while that life is all right."[337]

Other luxuries such as cheaply made, but smart-looking clothes allowed one to pretend for a moment to be like Greta Garbo or Clark Gable. They, however, provided little value, especially as they took away from one's ability to purchase practical and durable clothing.[338] Others who were unemployed saw gambling as a distraction and a source of hope, should they be lucky. Whether standing on street corners or gathering in pubs, people avidly discussed gambling. Newspapers covered horse and dog races and listed winners in the Irish sweepstakes. There were accounts of lucky 1 shilling bets and winning tickets bought with unemployment insurance money.[339] Even the poorest people staked small sums on games and races, and, in this way, purchased a few days of hope.

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[335] Bakke, 178-83.

[336] Bakke, 182.

[337] Bakke, 182.

[338] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 87-88. One of Orwell's reviewers agreed with this comment by George Bowling. He does, therefore, what we all do- take refuge in fantasy. Horrabin in Meyers's *George Orwell*, 155.

[339] Bakke, 189-90, 197-200.

Should they be lucky enough to win, they would be able to live as if at a higher income level.[340]

For some unemployed, the cinema, gambling, and inexpensive luxuries also provided an escape from feelings of isolation or loneliness. Gordon Comstock refers to the cinema as a drug for loneliness. When he was attending them, he did not think about being alone or his struggle to maintain friendships on a limited budget.[341] Without money, he could not go to the pub with others.[342] Comstock knew that if he did go, one of his friends would lend him the money, but he would be unable to repay him.[343] Besides, his first rule when destitute was never to allow another to buy him a drink.[344] Comstock believed that charity kills friendship, by making a person dependent on others. To hide his poverty, he rejected invitations, thereby isolating himself even more.[345] He also resorted to declining invitations from friends, because to accept them offered an opportunity to compare situations and the comparisons only made his poverty more

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[340] *Road to Wigan Pier*, 89; Bakke, 199-200. Some unemployed believed that gambling provided the "only fair shake" as the exchanges and employers would only give jobs to those they were partial to or to those who bribed them. Pilgrim Trust, 99-100.

[341] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 72, 64.

[342] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 25.

[343] Bakke quoted one unemployed man who spoke of intentionally walking on the opposite side of the street to avoid coworkers or friends, and, when invited out, shrugged off the invitation because he could not afford it. Some pubs had their own unemployment scheme. Workers could pay into an insurance plan that established credit for an unemployed man that would allow him to purchase drinks for friends and possible employers. Bakke, 73, 135. Others who were unemployed expressed a fear of sponging on their friends or of their friends believing that they were sponging on them. Beales, H. L. and R. S. Lambert, 39-42, 104-105.

[344] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 75.

[345] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 213, 26.

painfully obvious. Comstock once went to a tea party, only to discover that no one else was there. Rather than assuming that the host had forgotten to notify him that the date had been changed, he assumes that he has been snubbed.[346] Comstock's train of thought reflected the fears of many unemployed that their friends were fair-weather friends at best or disloyal at worst.[347] The sense of isolation experienced by the unemployed fed on itself and they limited their contacts to those who could understand their situation.[348]

Further adding to this isolation, unemployed men could not meet or spend time with women, at least not in many places, without spending money, and few women would look at men who were beneath them on the economic level.[349] Gordon Comstock tells his girlfriend Rosemary, "don't you see that a man's whole personality is bound up with his income? His personality is his income. How can you be attractive to a girl when you've got no money?"[350] What Comstock looked forward to the most when he anticipated attending literary tea parties was that he would be in the presence of women.[351] Even his opportunities to meet with Rosemary are limited. House rules forbid them to meet in either of their rooms, so their meetings took place in the street or, when

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[346] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying, 68-9;* Komarovsky, 123, 130.

[347] Komarovsky, 123.

[348] Komarovsky, 122-26.

[349] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 129, 147; *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 14, 71-72, 93, 114, 139.

[350] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 94. Komarovsky believed that unemployment may lead to a breakdown in the wife's respect for the husband because he can no longer provide a living. She acknowledges, however that this attitude may have been previously suppressed in the marriage, but now with the man's loss of identity or power over the finances, the wife is free to express her lack of respect. Komarovsky, 10-45.

[351] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 63.

they scraped the money together, at a cheap restaurant. Their time together and even their kisses are snatched in streets.[352] Comstock lamented that the only way for a poor man to be assured that his life will have a woman in it is to marry, but his scruples will not allow him to marry when he lacks the means to support a family.[353] He applauds, however, the working-class young man who "with four pence in the world, puts his girl in the family way," because at least he is "still living."[354]

Apathy, observed Frankl, also affected the individual by destroying his sense of identity. This was particularly destructive to the maintenance of one's inner stability, which both he and Orwell believed to be critical. The loss of identity meant the breaking down of character and the sense of personal worth. Although some unemployed and tramps sacrificed their integrity and chose to wallow in self-pity, there were those who maintained their integrity and who believed that one should always repay a debt. [355]

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[352] Because house rules prevented Gordon and Rosemary from sleeping together, they spent a day in the country with the intention of making love. Gordon's worries over money, however, ruin the day. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying,* 125-39; Frank McCourt also notes that some relationships and marriages began in the street. His parents' marriage began this way. On their first meeting, they were attracted to one another and "there was bound to be a knee-trembler. A knee-trembler is the act itself done up against a wall, man and woman up on their toes, straining so hard their knees tremble with the excitement that's in it." McCourt, 15. Komarovsky included an analysis of the effect of unemployment on marital sexual relations. She found that generally sexual relations decrease because of a fear of pregnancy, wives' loss of respect for husbands, husbands' loss of respect for themselves, and stress over unemployment. Komarovsky, 130-33.

[353] His reasoning is not only that he lacks the means of supporting a family; rather he sees marriage as being tied once and for all to the money system. He says that though men obey the money code, women actually believe in it and will drag their husbands into service of the money god. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 104, 139.

[354] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 44.

[355] A good example of this difference is a comparison of the tramps Bozo and Paddy. Bozo is interested in art, culture, and other topics that go beyond physical survival. As such, he is able to look beyond his own struggles and so maintain an optimistic attitude. Because Paddy focuses on his own survival and misery, this is his only topic of thought and conversation. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 151-52, 160-67.

Orwell saw this maintenance of integrity on one occasion when he gave a tramp a cigarette and the fellow made a point of returning the favor as soon as he could.[356]

Gordon Comstock's character and moral sense, however, break down the closer he drifts to unemployment and poverty. He has few friends, but one of his best is Ravelston, a rich socialist editor. Both knew that Comstock could not afford much, but it is a point of honor and a sign of their being equal that Comstock resists borrowing money from his friend and insists on paying for the first round of drinks when they go out together.[357] After he loses his job, however, Comstock is forced to depend on Ravelston's help. He is at first appalled at having to accept charity, but, when he gives up on finding a new job, he loses his scruples and his temporary stay at Ravelston's stretches to one of indefinite duration.[358]

Part of Comstock's insistence that he pay his own way springs from his need to maintain a sense of equality or worthiness. Maintaining a sense of worth has two elements: a desire to avoid feeling inferior and the desire to be seen as being human. Hayes and Nutman link these desires to the depression or apathy that one experiences during the Entrenchment period.[359] The perception of somehow being inadequate and having to decide whether to accept one's circumstances and restructure one's identity

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[356] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 200.

[357] As already noted, Gordon's first rule of being penniless is never to allow anyone to buy you drinks. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 75, 81, 87, 89.

[358] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 191.

[359] Hayes and Nutman, 26-30.

involves making a dramatic change that some may be unable to make.[360] When Comstock finally accepts Ravelston's charity, it almost destroys their friendship, as he can no longer consider himself Ravelston's equal and he begins to wonder whether Ravelston also considers him to be inferior.[361] He comes to hate both Ravelston and himself.

Comstock's response to accepting charity is one of struggling to maintain a sense of worth in the face of troubling economic circumstances.[362] Orwell recounted that one night before he entered a spike (a one-night government-funded lodging place), he and a group of tramps went to get free tea; the only requirement being that they had to attend a prayer service afterwards. Orwell wrote that he was sure that the tea "was given in good spirit, without any intention of humiliating us; so in fairness, we ought to have been grateful- still we were not."[363] He relates another experience of when he and other tramps were given a free meal at a church. The tramps were fed and were then expected to attend a church service. They attended, but did everything they could to disrupt it. Members of the congregation were "afraid of us," Orwell wrote, "and we were frankly bullying them. It was our revenge upon them for having humiliated us by feeding us."[364] For Orwell, this behavior was different from the "abject, wormlike way" in which tramps usually

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[360] See, Beales and Lambert, 40,144.

[361] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 189-98, 213. Hayes and Nutman show that the unemployed were concerned with how they viewed themselves, but also with how society and others viewed them. In fact, evaluation of oneself tends to be socially based; in other words, it is based on what people in society consider important. Hayes and Nutman, 83-84; Komarovsky, 125.

[362] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 198.

[363] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 140- 42.

[364] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 183, 182-84.

accepted handouts. He accounts for the difference by remarking that because there were more tramps than church members in attendance, they were not afraid.[365]

Orwell acknowledges, however, that at times tramps accepted charity and were genuinely thankful to those extending it. For example, a minister was passing out meal tickets and he expected nothing of the tramps, he just gave the tickets and left. The tramps were grateful and loudly hailed him as a "good fellow."[366] Dorothy Hare had a similar experience when she was picking hops. She had no money with which to purchase food and no pans in which to prepare it. One of the families that picked hops as a paid vacation often dropped off a pot of stew or a meal for her. Because the food was always presented casually in order to avoid any hint of charity, Dorothy could accept it with genuine gratitude.[367]

Though there were some who were willing to extend charity without expecting anything in return, others treated those in poverty as being less than human. Viktor Frankl described the dehumanizing treatment he received in the concentration camp as being often more painful than physical punishment. When looked at and treated as if he was no more than an animal, Frankl felt that his existence had been disregarded. The unemployed, though their circumstances were not the same as Frankl's to be sure, felt dehumanized as well. In a society in which identity and value are tied to work, the loss of

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[365] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 184. The actions of the tramps show displaced anger, see Chapter 2, 22-23.

[366] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 184-85.

[367] *A Clergyman's Daughter*, 132-33. One unemployed man stated that his neighbors would present him with food that they dared him to try and in doing so made it easier for him to accept the food. Beales and Lambert, 75.

a job not only leads to questions of one's identity, but also to questions of one's value as an individual and as a member of society.

During the 1920s and extending into the 1930s, some retained the belief that those receiving unemployment insurance were undeserving because they chose not to work. Some of the unemployed sensed this and expressed their feelings to Bakke this way, "if you can't find any work to do, you have the feeling that you're not human. You're out of place. You're so different from all the rest of the people around that you think something is wrong with you."[368] Whether the unemployed and poor were really despised or not, for men who had been brought up to value work and who saw dignity in labor, the lack of work and the dependence on charity or a government relief program were disheartening.[369] When Gordon Comstock is asked "do you think there is anything to be ashamed of in having no money?" He answers "of course there is! It's the only thing in the world there is to be ashamed of."[370]

Being treated as being less than human added to a growing sense of being inferior. Dorothy Hare found it difficult to get waited on in shops or receive good

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[368] Bakke, 63. One unemployed man described this as a feeling of being 'a race apart.' Beales and Lambert, 48.

[369] Hayes and Nutman noted that a person's attitude toward life and himself determined his relationship to the outside world. A confident demeanor helps a person to see the world as a less hostile place. Hayes and Nutman, 28-29. Morris Robb, a psychologist who dealt with many cases involving the unemployed, described a tendency among the unemployed to see the world as "alien" and hostile. He related that whereever one of his patients went, he believed that the people around him were always "looking at him, despising him, sneering and laughing at him." Any bump or jostle in a crowd became a "deliberate affront." Beales and Lambert, 279-80.

[370] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying,* 146-41.

treatment when she was poor.[371] "Poverty," Gordon Comstock said, "makes people insult or stamp on you."[372] Orwell relates that tramps were often cheated. The meal tickets given to tramps as charity were sometimes redeemed for less than their full value. The tramps were given less food than that to which they were entitled and yet they had no right to complain and no means of appeal because they were accepting charity. Gordon Comstock believed that people acted this way when extending charity because they not only despised poverty, but also those in it.[373] Comstock sees poverty as a humiliation that limits the ability of others to love him. He said that a man in poverty is seen as "a weakling, a sort of half man."[374]

Added to the loss of identity and being treated as less than human, the Entrenchment stage was often an existence of unknown duration, which Frankl discovered was one of the most depressing aspects of the concentration camp experience (and, by analogy, being unemployed).[375] Not knowing if he would ever be released prevented a person from making plans for the future. One is sustained with the hope that the period of incarceration or unemployment would last only a little while longer. The present was reality, apathy seemed the only way of surviving the hopelessness, and one ceased to have a goal towards which to work. Apathy may also produce a warped sense of time, in which a day stretches on endlessly, while a week, a month, or a year flies by.

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[371] *A Clergyman's Daughter*, 217.

[372] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 91.

[373] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 118.

[374] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 114, 14, 94, 99, 112.

[375] See Frankl, 70-71.

Time, which was once structured by work, becomes an uncertainty, adding to the feeling of a never-ending, unreal situation.[376] The rest of the world seemed to be out of reach, making the unemployed person feel even more isolated. The focus moved then to the past, to a fantasy, or to some distraction in an attempt to make the present bearable.

Bakke documented this sense of unreality and isolation in his description of a person looking for work.[377] After the initial shock of losing his job, the unemployed man is usually confident that he will soon find another. As time drags on and he has not found work, he becomes increasingly discouraged. The longer a person was out of work, the smaller the chance of finding work because competency diminished and employers wondered why, if he were capable, he had not been hired yet.[378] In the end, looking for work became a meaningless ritual. The man simply gave up and found other activities to occupy his time or he loafed. This process often encouraged a sense of unreality or an inability to influence the present, which led to a sense of fatalism or a belief that one's existence was pointless.[379] As one unemployed man said, "that's one thing that makes us human; we don't wait for things to happen to us, we work for them."[380]

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[376] Komarovsky, 81.

[377] Bakke, 64-70.

[378] Bakke, 50.

[379] Hayes and Nutman note this, especially after one repeatedly fails to find a job. Hayes and Nutman, 30-36.

[380] Bakke, 63.

Release or Acceptance and Adjustment

The final stage that Frankl documents has two possible outcomes: Release or Acceptance. As the economy improved and, especially as the threat of war demanded the production of weapons and war materiel, employment increased and more people found jobs. Some, however, had to wait for the outbreak of World War II to be hired. Long-term unemployment, six months or more, was not uncommon and it left one with a choice- accept the situation and find ways to adjust or slip into a state of apathy and fatalism.[381]

For many, the ultimate goal or hope was to find jobs and create better lives for themselves and their families. It is in this desire that the depression reveals some of its lasting effects. For many, there was the desperation to find or hold on to a job.[382] Work not only provided a purpose for life, but it also kept one off the streets and free from the humiliation of having to accept charity.[383] The fear of losing a job and the desperation to keep it often led people to put up with any slights, insults, or demands of the employer.[384]

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[381] Pilgrim Trust lists three groups of unemployed and how they handle their search for work: 1."those who think only in terms of work" 2."those who are beginning to accept unemployment as a normal state for themselves, though they still perhaps look for work, often as a matter of habit rather than with any conviction" 3."Those who have accepted unemployment as their normal state (sometimes because they have found satisfactory activities) and for whom it would be hard to take work were it available." Pilgrim Trust, 144.

[382] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 156.

[383] *A Clergyman's Daughter*, 245.

[384] *A Clergyman's Daughter*, 253, 259; *Keep the Aspidistra Flying,* 64-65; *Coming Up for Air*, 18; Branson, 80. Nutman and Hayes comment on how the fear of losing one's job is similar to anticipatory grief. Nutman and Hayes, 102-103.

In areas of high unemployment, some tried to adjust to their circumstances by finding ways to keep busy.[385] Some of the unemployed developed small jobs or hobbies that provided a supplement to the dole money.[386] The government sponsored clubs and groups to encourage the unemployed to develop new skills, such as carpentry, that could provide activity and income. These government clubs and training centers were created after many in the government recognized that the unemployed needed something to encourage them and contribute to their emotional stability. The NUWM (National Unemployed Workers Movement) was especially effective in organizing the unemployed for hunger marches. These marches filled men's idle hours, gave them a sense of purpose, reminded the larger society of their existence and needs, and provided them with a means of protesting their circumstances.[387] Some of the unemployed occupied themselves by continuing to seek employment and so maintain their self-respect. The search for employment became increasingly difficult and more futile, however, the longer they remained out of work.[388]

For youth who had only briefly or never had a job, J. B. Priestly notes an even more disturbing trend. On his visit to the Tyne, Priestly met a man who directed an unemployed men's choir. Many of the older men, though lacking musical talent, were punctual and attended choir practices diligently. The young men, however, were often

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[385] Komarovsky notes that idleness was one of the most dreaded aspects of unemployment. Komarovsky, 82; Branson, 61.

[386] Branson, 54-56.

[387] Branson, 56.

[388] Hayes and Nutman, 104-107.

late and showed little inclination to follow direction. "Sympathy," the choir director believed, "was wasted on most of them, because, unlike older men, who had known what steady employment and regular wages were, these youngsters did not 'fret' because they had no work. There was no loss of self- respect, no anxiety, with them."[389] He further described them as,

> Undisciplined and carefee, the dingy butterflies of the backstreets. They had no sense whatever of waste and tragedy in themselves. They were not at odds with their peculiar environment, which by this time had moulded their characters and shaped their way of living. They had little or no money but never having had any, they did not miss it. They cadged cheerfully from relatives, and so managed to find a few coppers for cigarettes and the pictures and a bit of betting .... They lived below the level of worry. They were not citizens, though some soon would be husbands and fathers. If the time ever came when they had to work hard and to obey orders, it would find them resentful and untrustworthy. Having grown up in one kind of world, they would be puzzled and probably annoyed by any other kind of world.[390]

Though some of this description may be a reflection of the disaffection of generations, it does highlight the otherworldliness of unemployment. Different value systems and behaviors dominated the lives of those who had grown up in a society, a life space, or a world that organized itself around unemployment and poverty.

For those who could not find a job and for those struggling to fill meaningless hours, it became especially important to find a purpose and identity apart from their work. When one discerns the futility of his suffering and sees life as meaningless, he easily succumbs to despair and resignation to his circumstances.[391] Purposelessness can

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[389] Priestly, 243.

[390] Priestly, 243.

[391] Viktor Frankl's writings focus on how one finds and retains meaning and purpose in life. Orwell also explores the role of purpose and meaning in life through Dorothy as she lay shivering and

also lead to physical deterioration. Those lacking concern for themselves often did not eat properly or they neglected hygiene, leading to physical impairment.[392] Whether or not the physical deterioration was from resignation or a result of malnutrition, it left one too weak to work.[393] The inability to work or to perform tasks as easily as one had been able to added to the breakdown of self-respect.

Inner strength was crucial, as this often aided in recovery and reintroduction into society. A critical element was finding a purpose or a meaning in suffering and working towards a goal.[394] Gordon Comstock loved his girlfriend and he gained a new lease on life because of his determination to take responsibility for making her pregnant.[395] In the end, Rosemary's love for him and her confidence in him restores his confidence in himself and makes him determined to live by society's standards rather than his own. She gave him a purpose in life, something to live for.

Dorothy Hare reflected at the end of *The Clergyman's Daughter* that people may change in many ways, but there is a part of their souls that never changes. This part

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hungry under a "dripping tree," trying desperately to remember who she is and how she got to this point. She hopes that the answer to this will move her beyond her present suffering. *A Clergyman's Daughter*, 119; *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 205. See also Pilgrim Trust, 131-33, 293.

[392] Hayes and Nutman present some circumstances which, though more research is needed on them, seem to point to a correlation between unemployment, its emotional effects, and declining health. Hayes and Nutman, 64-82.

[393] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 153. Branson notes an increase in industrial accidents in the later 1930s. She attributed part of this to the speedup at many plants, longer hours, and less training. The weakened health and lack of alertness of many of the unemployed who reentered the workforce were also factors. Branson 75-76.

[394] *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 205.

[395] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying,* 235-40.

insists on having faith in something or having a purpose in life. This faith or purpose brightens life and "there is no weariness in your heart, no doubts, no feeling of futility … every act is significant, every moment sanctified, woven by faith into the pattern, a fabric of unending joy."[396] Lacking faith or purpose, in "every detail of your life, if no ultimate purpose redeemed it, there was a quality of greyness, of desolation, that could never be described, but which you feel like a physical pang in your heart."[397] At the beginning of the novel, one of Dorothy's parishioners declared that her faith allowed her to bear her suffering and it gave her assurance that beyond this life there was a reward in heaven.[398] For this woman, suffering was only a temporary stage. The goal was to obtain a reward in heaven. Dorothy, unfortunately, could no longer believe in the faith that once animated her life and gave it purpose. She now found purpose only in everyday tasks.[399] But, if she finds purpose only in work, what if she has no work to do?

Identity, purpose, one's very life is tied to work, begging the question, what was the legacy of this period in which so many faced job loss and unemployment both directly and vicariously? The Pilgrim Trust, a group that provides funds for social work among other projects, reminded people that "unemployed men are not simply units of employability who can, through the medium of the dole, be put into cold storage and taken out again immediately they are needed- while they are in cold storage, things are

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[396] *A Clergyman's Daughter,* 315.

[397] *A Clergyman's Daughter,* 315.

[398] *A Clergyman's Daughter,* 61-62.

[399] *A Clergyman's Daughter,* 317.

liable to happen to them."[400] In a review he wrote in the 1940s, George Orwell shared his thoughts and feelings on the legacy of the interwar years. Reading Malcolm Muggeridge's book *The Thirties* (which he found both brilliant and depressing), he wrote that he remembered a cruel trick he had once played on a wasp. "He was," wrote Orwell,

> sucking jam on my plate, and I cut him in half. He paid no attention, merely went on with his meal, while a tiny stream of jam trickled out of his severed esophagus. Only when he tried to fly away did he grasp that dreadful thing that had happened to him. It is the same with modern man. The thing that has been cut away is his soul, and there was a period – twenty years, perhaps- during which he did not realize it.[401]

For years, many great thinkers and reformers had cut away peoples' beliefs, especially those on religion. This was necessary, Orwell wrote "as only by this cutting away could a new system of class justice be achieved." Orwell went on to note that the scalpel used in the cutting away of the soul may not have been thoroughly sterilized, as the "amputation of the soul isn't just a simple surgical job;" the "wound has a tendency to go septic."[402]

The belief in religion gave way to a belief in progress and social justice. Following World War I, many were enthusiastic and hopeful about achieving the better society and lives that they had fought for and had been promised. The harsh economic circumstances that many faced on a daily basis gave the lie to their hopes and expectations. "We are living in a night," Orwell believed, "more precisely *because* we have tried to set up an earthly paradise. We have believed in 'progress,' trusted to human

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[400] Pilgrim Trust, 67.

[401] Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *My Country Right or Left, 1940-43,* vol. 2 of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell.* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 15.

[402] *Collected Essays,* vol. 2, 16.

leadership, rendered unto Caesar the things that are god's – that approximately is the line of thought."[403] Even Marx, Orwell insisted, realized that people needed something to believe in,

> Marx did not say … that religion is merely a dope handed out from above; he said that it is something people create for themselves to supply a need that he recognized to be a real one. "Religion is the sigh of the soul in a soulless world. Religion is the opium of the people." What is he saying except that man does *not* live by bread alone, that hatred is *not* enough, that a world worth living in cannot be founded on "realism" and machine guns?[404]

Orwell realized that people lost something after World War I and that the loss could not be made good by providing them with only food and shelter. At the beginning of Orwell's novels, characters such as Gordon Comstock and Dorothy Hare had a belief in something greater than themselves, something that gave purpose and meaning to their lives. By the end of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *The Clergyman's Daughter*, Gordon's and Dorothy's belief system and ideals have been challenged, weighed in the balance, and found wanting. For Gordon, the more pressing needs were providing for a family and his ideals alone could not do that. For Dorothy, her experience could no longer allow her to believe in a good and powerful God. Instead, she strove to find her purpose in work, to find meaning in what she did from day to day.

The loss of soul or inner self is closely linked to one's identity. With no goal or belief system, one's identity depends on the values and circumstances that animate everyday life, such as work. Orwell provides readers with an account of how these values

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[403] *Collected Essays,* vol. 2, 16.

[404] *Collected Essays,* vol. 2, 18.

and beliefs break down as one is faced with unemployment and poverty. The outcome is not just an altering of beliefs and values, but also a challenge to one's identity, because those things on which identity were based no longer exist or no longer mean anything.[405]

The result, as Winifred Horrabin observed, was that a person may retreat into fantasy or develop a belief in fatalism.[406] Either one led to a withdrawal from society or the conviction that attempts to challenge or change society were futile. Orwell expresses this fatalism or futility most forcefully in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Comstock desires the destruction of a society he sees as meaningless, intolerable, and decaying. "Behind the grins and promises" is, he says,

> Desolation, emptiness and prophecies of doom. For can you not see if you know how to look, that behind that slick self-satisfaction, that tittering fat-bellied triviality, there is nothing but a frightful emptiness, a secret despair? The great death-wish of the modern world. Suicide pacts. Heads stuck in gas-ovens in lonely maisonettes. French letters and Amen Pills. And the reverberations of the future wars. Enemy aeroplanes flying over London; the deep threatening hum of the propellers, the shattering thunder of bombs. [407]

Orwell also expressed this pessimism through George Bowling in *Coming Up for Air*. When Bowling sees a bombing plane from his train window he comments that "you don't have to be a highbrow to think such thoughts nowadays. In two years' time, one year's

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[405] Like the concepts of life space and assumptive world, the circumstances surrounding one affect how one sees that world and, in turn, changed values affect how one lives. See chapter 2, page 20-21.

[406] Beales and Lambert list the progression of an unemployed person's attitude as beginning with optimism, moving to pessimism, and finishing with fatalism. Beales and Lambert, 26.

[407] *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 21. This novel was written before Orwell's experiences in the Spanish Civil War. The theme of airplanes and bomb runs appeared several times in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and seems a precursor to his descriptions in *Coming up for Air*. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 21, 160-61; *Coming up for Air*, 19, 29,150-53, 228.

time, what shall we be doing when we see one of those things? Making a dive for the cellar, wetting our bags with fright."[408] A little later, he adds,

> this kind of prophetic feeling that keeps coming over me nowadays, the feeling that war's just round that corner and that war's the end of all things, isn't peculiar to me. We've all got it, more or less. I suppose even among the people passing at that moment there must have been chaps who were seeing mental pictures of the shell bursts and the mud. Whatever thought you think there's always a million people thinking it at the same moment.[409]

Bowling imagines the street he is walking along in three to five years' time and describes the shops as being run down, dusty, and without goods. The soldiers will look like scarecrows and be in poor health. Children will cry to their mothers for bread and there is none, "I see it all," he says,

> the posters and the food-queues, and the castor oil and the rubber truncheons and the machine-guns squirting out of bedroom windows. Is it going to happen? No knowing. Some days it's impossible to believe it. Some days I say to myself that it's just a scare got up by the newspapers. Some days I know in my bones there's no escaping it.[410]

Later, George Bowling is confronted by a young man ardently expressing his belief that England will soon be at war and that all the young men should strike a blow against fascism.[411] Bowling tells him that many held these same attitudes in 1914, but that war was not the "glorious business" that they all believed it to be. "You think," Bowling says,

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[408] *Coming up for Air*, 19.

[409] *Coming up for Air*, 28.

[410] *Coming up for Air*, 29.

[411] *Coming up for Air*, 153.

> war's all heroism and V. C. charges, but I tell you it isn't like that. You don't have bayonet-charges nowadays, and when you do it isn't like you imagine. You don't feel like a hero. All you know is that you've had no sleep for three days and stink like a polecat, you're pissing your bags with fright, and your hands are so cold that you can't hold your rifle. But that doesn't matter a damn either. It is the things that happen afterwards.[412]

Bowling sees this young man's desire for war as reflecting a belief that his own life is insignificant or meaningless.[413]

Bowling's fear of the future leads him back to his childhood home. He believes that there he can find freedom from fear of the boss, the next slump, and the next war. He will be able to get his "nerve back before the bad times begin," because unless one had "the right feeling inside" himself, he would be unable to make it though the coming struggles.[414] In his attempt to retreat into the fantasy of his past, however, Bowling's fear of the future is confirmed, as a bomb falls on a house near him. He realizes that he cannot retreat into fantasy, but neither does he have hope for the future or a belief in his ability to influence it. He resigns himself to an unhappy, unfulfilled life and to muddling through it.

Orwell explores more than the physical challenges of unemployment and poverty and the disillusionment they brought, especially after the promises made during World War I by government officials and others. He shows how these influence the life style and beliefs of those affected. More than this, he shows how such experiences alter the

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[412] *Coming up for Air*, 153.

[413] *Coming up for Air*, 153. An unemployed skilled engineer believed that his job prospects were hopeless and the best that he could hope for or look forward to in life was that "something big" would happen before he died. Beales and Lambert, 76.

[414] *Coming up for Air*, 169.

assumptive world and, hence, how individuals come to see and interact with their world. He provides something that statistical studies of the period do not and cannot provide. For his readers, he lays bare the human cost of the depression. By doing so, he expands on the historical events of this troubling period of history.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: ORWELL'S PERCEPTIONS AND THE INTERWAR PERIOD

> If there is one thing future generations will never be able to say, it is that they do not know how we lived, or what we thought about- provided of course that the Fascist reaction does not destroy all written records. In a hundred novels the life and thought of the time is being expressed and, as in George Orwell's latest and in many ways best work, as finely expressed as in an accurate photograph.
>
> - Winifred Horrabin[415]

This passage from Winifred Horrabin's review of George Orwell's *Coming Up for Air*, written in 1939, affirms the value and reliability of novels as historical sources. She, as Orwell's contemporary, not only shared his sentiments on unemployment and poverty, as well as his fatalistic premonition of a war against Fascist forces, but she also believed in the accuracy of his "photograph" of the 1930s. Orwell's contemporary literary colleagues, as well as those conducting sociological and psychological studies, also agree with his perceptions. Writers from Germany, the United States, and Ireland, among others, also documented the emotions and experiences of those facing unemployment and poverty through their characters' circumstances. Studies on grief and loss such as those by Kübler-Ross and Frankl further affirm these perceptions. Orwell, therefore, not only accurately described the conditions of unemployment and poverty in Britain during the years of the Great Depression, but he also provided descriptions that are echoed in the experiences of many today who find themselves in similar circumstances.

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[415] Horrabin in Meyers's *George Orwell*, 155.

Accuracy is the last of the three criteria by which Max Beloff evaluates and justifies the use of novels as historical sources, but first they must make the event more intelligible to readers. The second criteria concerns the significance of the event to both the individual and society. The novel must convey what the events meant to the characters who experienced them and how these experiences fit into the wider context.

George Orwell's depression novels more than meet these demanding standards. They are not only accurate in their portrayal of the England of the 1930s, but they also present peoples' experiences in a way that is easier to understand than psychological or sociological studies. His clear, concise, and direct writing style allows for easy comprehension of his meaning and intent. More than this, he was both an observer and a participant in the poverty and unemployment that he documented. He also ties the events and circumstances his characters faced to changes in their beliefs, values, and attitudes. This may help to explain the changes that took place in Britain's policies, both domestic and international, during the 1930s.

Britain's foreign and domestic policies and the way in which they were implemented during the interwar period were uncharacteristic of this once-mistress of the seas that had always been able to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. The Britain of myth and legend, on whose empire the sun never set, whose people were always able somehow to muddle through, no longer existed by the 1930s. Rather than forcing Germany to abide by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and checking the aggression, real and threatened, of Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's Germany, and military-minded Japan, Britain allowed the fledgling League of Nations to implement the provisions of its Covenant. There are many reasons that the Britain that had played the lead in

international affairs in the preceding two centuries shrank from commitment in the 1930s and retired behind a policy of pacifism. Explanations, justifications, and excuses for this uncharacteristic, "un-English" behavior often focus on the larger economic, political, and social changes, but, they do not always account for the emotional and psychological impact of the interwar years, Orwell's novels, however, do treat this emotional and psychological impact.

Many historians point to the lingering effects of World War I on Britain, especially the deaths of 750,000 men that left the nation shocked and fearful of another war.[416] More than this, the loss of life was selective; the good died young and early in the war. The products of the public schools, graduates of universities, and sons of MPs and aristocratic families- -those who by birth and education were destined for leadership positions- often died first.[417] Twenty years later, 1934-1938, when crisis events called for the utmost in leadership skills, the leadership role fell by default to the Stanley Baldwins, the Neville Chamberlains, and the Ramsey MacDonalds, men who meant well, but who lacked the talent, the resolve, or the inspiration needed to deal effectively with the crises facing the country.[418]

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[416] This was out of a total of approximately 6,000,000 who wore a uniform. Of all those between the ages 20 and 45, about one in eleven died in World War I. Havighurst, 135.

[417] Havighurst, 135. J. B. Priestly remarks, "if thousands of better men had not been killed; and if they had been alive still, it is certain that I should be writing, if at all, about another and better England." Priestley, 131.

[418] J. B. Priestly asked, "Why has there been no plan for [the distressed areas], these people? The dole is part of the no plan; it is a mere declaration of intellectual bankruptcy. You have only to spend a morning in the dole country to see that it is all wrong. Nobody is getting any substantial benefit, any reasonable satisfaction out of it. Nothing is encouraged by it except a shambling dull-eyed poor imitation of life. The Labour Exchanges stink of defeated humanity." Priestley, 327-28.

Added to this loss of life and potential leaders was the loss of Britain's traditional sources of strength. Though the colonies still cooperated with Britain, the relationship between England and her colonies shifted to one of greater separation.[419] In 1914, Britain had declared the colonies at war, but, in 1931, the Statute of Westminster transformed former colonies into the Commonwealth of Nations. Dominions had long since been determining and following their own foreign and economic policies and many were competing with Britain in manufacturing and trade. Britain could no longer control the policies or demand the loyalty and resources of a vast empire.

The loss of colonies and the downturn in its economy meant that Britain could no longer take the lead in international economic and financial affairs. The United States emerged from World War I with the potential to be the world's strongest economic, industrial, and military power. Joined by newly industrializing countries, the United States challenged Britain's position as the world's financial and industrial center. It was humiliating that people in Britain could purchase American agricultural products more cheaply than they could produce their own. Nor did Britain's textile, coal, and steel industries have the leading edge over those in other countries.

Britain's postwar loss of markets and the difficulties of adjusting to a peacetime economy led to domestic unrest. Those who had fought, those who had worked, and those who had invested time and money in the war effort expected a great deal from their

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[419] The growing independence of the colonies did not mean a quick, clear separation from Britain. They had their own struggles during the interwar years and had to find their own solutions. Sometimes this meant greater independence from or competition with Britain. In spite of the differences, the colonies still supplied aid to Britain during WWII. T. O. Lloyd, *The British Empire, 1558-1995,* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 262-312.

government for the sacrifices they had made during the war. They believed Lloyd George when he promised during his reelection campaign of 1918 to build homes fit for heroes and to make Germany pay the entire cost of the war. Persistent unemployment, especially in the traditional industries of coal, steel, mining, and ship building- -and the occasional sight of veterans begging on street corners- -led to strikes, disappointment, and to demands that the government adopt policies to deal with unemployment and poverty and to implement programs to improve the standard of living.

The shock of World War I and the political and economic changes that added to the tense domestic situation help to explain the country's focus on domestic policy rather than on taking the lead in international affairs. International intervention only threatened to increase the problems Britain faced. Had Britain supported League action against Japan when it invaded Manchuria in 1931, it risked alienating a former ally and losing markets in the Pacific. Had the government enforced sanctions on Italy when Mussolini's forces occupied Ethiopia in 1935, it risked war and the loss of ships in the Mediterranean and the loss of a makeweight against Hitler's Germany. Not daring to risk a war, Britain refused to support the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, and when Hitler's forces reoccupied and remilitarized the Rhineland in 1936, Britain did nothing beyond lodging a feeble protest. The National Government's pacifistic policies and actions during the 1930s were, admittedly, no different from and possibly reflected the apathetic mood of the country's voters. Given the reality of depression, emotional as well as economic, the prevailing mood of the people is understandable. But, a complacent or apathetic society does not encourage investment in social activities, citizenship, or patriotism. After the patriotic fervor of World War I dissipated, many wondered whether

anything was worth fighting for. George Bowling expresses this sentiment when he remarked that many people based their patriotism on home ownership.[420] Their home was worth protecting, even if their country was not.

As they experience unemployment and poverty, Orwell's characters move from apathy to pessimism or fatalism. Their vision of the future includes death, destruction, and war. Orwell is not alone in this apocalyptic vision, many writers during his time feared the death of their society or culture and the destruction that war would bring. Some, such as socialists and Marxists, saw this as an opportunity to rebuild society on new and better foundations. Others took a sadistic pleasure in the prospect of society's destruction. While others, especially those who were afraid of losing the little they had, responded with fear and a stubborn striving for peace.[421]

If not symptomatic of a prevailing mood among Britain's populace during the 1930s, a number of events were at least symbolic and suggestive. The Oxford Union Debate was an annual event that attracted national attention.[422] Great was the dismay, therefore, in February 1933, when debaters resolved that "this house will not fight for

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[420] George Bowling is cynical about this, because many of those who think they own their houses do not. The mortgage company does. Even after the mortgage is paid off, the land on which the house sits remains the property of the company that owns the land. *Coming Up for Air*, 15. Beales and Lambert remark, "If hunger does not make rebels, it makes what is worse – criminals or listless unbelievers in the validity of our civilization." Beales and Lambert, 49.

[421] Richard Overy, *The Twilight Years: The Paradox of Britain Between the Wars* (New York: Viking Press, 2009).

[422] The Oxford Union Society is a debating society in Oxford City. It draws most of its membership from the University of Oxford. Because of its reputation for debate, this society is considered a good place in which to acquire political training.

King and Country."[423] The resolution was more a refusal to fight needless and bloody wars than a refusal to defend Britain, but the young men may well have been voicing the sentiments of many that war was a purposeless evil. More significant still was the Peace Pledge Union founded by Reverend "Dick" Sheppard. By 1936, it had enrolled 100,000 men as members and Sheppard was appealing for the same number of women members. The Reverend Sheppard was a radio preacher of immense appeal, a vicar of St. Martin in the Fields, and, a firm believer in the evilness and uselessness of war. In October 1934, he, as a leading advocate of peace, asked men to send him postcards on which they had pledged themselves to renounce all war.[424]

To gauge public sentiment on peace and international disarmament, the League of Nations Union, with the support of most of Britain's political and social leaders, asked voters to mark the so-called Peace Ballot. Before 1938 and the Munich Agreement, the Peace Ballot was the high watermark of pacifism and members of the National Government took note. The results, announced on June 27, 1935, were controversial and their significance debated, but they reflected the opinions of more then eleven million voters to five questions focusing on the League's role and rearmament. Around ninety percent of the voters believed in international disarmament. None of the questions was more controversial than question five, which asked if military measures should be used to check aggression and whether Britain should combine with others to attack aggressor states. Sixty percent believed that Britain should, while twenty percent said no and

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[423] Branson, 299-301.

[424] Branson, 301-302.

another twenty percent did not answer. The question did not ask whether Britain alone should go to war, but rather focused on disarmament and collective security. Voters were in no mood for war and, to insure that governments lacked the means to wage it, they endorsed reduction of armaments by international agreement. The historian Alfred Havinghurst believes that the Peace Ballot and the pacifism of the interwar period reflected a confused and muddled thinking about peace. It was a position that "came from timidity," he believed, "even outright fear," and more from a "lack of self-confidence than from pacifist views held by conviction. Aggression and force were abhorred, but why should they involve Britain?"[425]

No event better reflected the mood of those in the Britain about which Orwell wrote than the reception of the Munich Agreement signed by Hitler and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in 1938. Now considered the lowest point of Britain's appeasement policy and an event made infamous by later events, the Munich Agreement at the time was met with relief by those who dreaded even the thought of war. When Chamberlain returned from Munich, having concluded a "peace with honor" that provided "peace for our time," crowds of cheering people met him at the airport, thronged the streets through which he made his way to Number 10 Downing Street, and showered him with gifts and

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[425] Havinghurst, 241, 233-44; Branson, 303-307. During the 1930s, the British armed forces, and especially the army, were considered by military leaders to be "wholly inadequate" to their anticipated roles and missions. The onset of the Great Depression, the strong attachment by many in Britain to the principle of disarmament, and "the prevailing spirit of pacifism" combined to make the government reluctant to spend large sums on defense. Trevor N. Dupuy, David Bongard, and Richard C. Anderson Jr., *Hitler's Last Gamble: The Battle of the Bulge, December 1944- January 1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 339.

praise.[426] Editorials in the nation's leading newspapers lauded him for his accomplishment. Winston Churchill, however, still in his "wilderness years" and almost alone in his criticism, intoned like an Old Testament prophet that, by accepting the Munich Agreement, Britain –its leaders and its people- had been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Britain and Germany had come close to war in the summer of 1938, a war that the Oxford debaters and Dick Sheppard's pledge signers did not want to fight, and that a late-in-rearming Britain was not prepared to wage. Relief at its avoidance was palpable and real. Taken together, these events can be interpreted as revealing a fear of impending doom as well as a high level of cynicism among those of all classes and a distrust of the motives behind war. Victory in 1918 had not led to what people expected, nor had it brought them all for which they had hoped. Reading the British public's mood in the aftermath of the signing of the Munich Agreement, Hitler may have believed that this "nation of shopkeepers" would not resist his plans for the conquest of Europe, plans that were put into operation with his invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939.[427]

Appeasement, however, could work, at best, only for a time. Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939. The end of the "phony war," the fall of France, and the evacuation of Dunkirk in May and June of 1940, galvanized the British people into action. Winston Churchill was invited to come in from the wilderness and to become Prime Minister and people solemnly accepted his offer of "blood, toil, tears, and sweat."

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[426] Joachim Remak, *The Origins of the Second World War* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 84-91.

[427] Remak, 103.

Their spirits buoyed up by the voice of Vera Lynn, the Forces Sweetheart, they vowed with Churchill to defend their island and their homes "whatever the cost may be" by fighting on beaches, landing grounds, fields, hills, and streets. Like Churchill, they would never surrender.

By 1939, people knew what they were fighting *against*, but, having lived in and suffered through the Britain of the 1930s, they needed more than this. They had to have something to fight *for* or, as the philosopher Frederic Nietzsche put it, "he who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how."[428] This quest for the *for* or the *why* brings one back to George Orwell. Orwell's depression novels show readers what people would *not* fight for. The *for* was not broken promises, bread lines, spikes, and tea and two slices. It was not being down and out. It was not crushing poverty, inadequate diets, and poor housing. It was not the provisional existence of unknown duration of chronic unemployment. And, it was most assuredly not the pointless destiny of Wigan slum girls poking sticks up fouled drainpipes.

As early as 1940, people began to call for a postwar reconstruction plan, a challenge taken up by many organizations and groups. William Beveridge, a social investigator, provided much of the *for* with the publication of his report in 1941. The public received the publication of the *Beveridge Report* with excitement and hope, as can be seen by the sales figures, 256, 000 copies of the full report, 369,000 of the abridged, and 400,000 of the American edition.[429] The terms of the Atlantic Charter, framed by

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[428] Quoted in Frankl, 76.

[429] Havighurst, 325-26.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill in 1941, offered more of the *for*. Four years later, in 1945, voters made indelibly clear what the *for* was. Victory in sight, they turned Churchill and the Conservatives out of office and replaced them with the Fabian Clement Atlee and Labour ministers. After their experiences in the 1930s, voters did not trust the Conservatives to provide the postwar England that they were fighting for. The new Parliament met on August 1 and the King's speech from the throne announced an ambitious program that included nationalization of the coal industry and the Bank of England, a social security program, and a national health service. The content of the speech laid the foundation for the Welfare State, and, at least for the time being, voters preferred the promises of the Welfare State to the England peopled by the characters of Orwell's depression novels.

Orwell's novels not only laid bare the emotions of those who lived through the interwar period, but they also showed their attempt to find meaning or purpose in their hardships. Many faced the challenge of finding a purpose in their suffering, a meaning for their lives, or a hope for a future. Viktor Frankl realized that a concentration camp inmate who had lost hope and faith in the future was doomed to die. He had lost his spiritual hold and he was subject to mental and physical decay.[430] Those who believed they had nothing to live for were easily identified- -they smoked their own cigarettes. Cigarettes were more valuable than money; they could be traded for food, necessities, or favors. By smoking them, a man showed that he had given up; he no longer had anything to live

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[430] Frankl, 117-121.

for.[431] Orwell shows how close many in England had come to this state and how dramatically this had changed their views, attitudes, and actions, changes that could also alter a nation's course.

Orwell did not necessarily provide answers for the nagging questions of his day. His characters in some way found their own answers. Some surrendered to their circumstances. Dorothy Hare kept busy. Gordon Comstock focused on family. George Bowling muddled through. So, of what value can George Orwell's depression novels be to us? What can they tell us about our own experiences of economic downturn, unemployment, and dashed hopes for the future? George Orwell provides a photograph of the unemployment and poverty of another time that reveals how people responded to the grief and loss that followed in their wake. His descriptions resonate with those who today seek the help of psychologists and social workers, those in our own time who are unemployed and who face the threatened loss of homes and self-esteem. Orwell ably documented the effects that unemployment and poverty had on those who experienced them; his novels can help us to understand our own times and to appreciate that the emotional effects of unemployment and economic hardship can have long-term consequences for a people and their country.

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[431] Frankl, 11.

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