



GEORGE ORWELL'S WRITING STYLE AND HIS WORKS ABOUT SOCIALISM

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Abstract. This article examines George Orwell's early socialist views during the period before World War II (1928-1939). Through analysis of his early writings, correspondence, and biographical accounts, the study identifies three key experiences that shaped his political development: his time in Burma, his experiences with poverty, and his involvement in the Spanish Civil War. The analysis explores how Orwell's conception of socialism, emphasizing moral and humanistic aspects, democratic principles, and clear language, differed from mainstream socialist movements of his time. Finally, the article demonstrates how these early socialist views were reflected in his pre-war works, laying the foundation for his later critiques of totalitarianism.

Keywords: biography, socialism, Orwell, social classes, political literature, imperialism.

George Orwell (1903-1950), born Eric Arthur Blair, remains one of the most influential political writers of the 20th century. His works, such as *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949), are widely regarded as powerful critiques of totalitarianism. However, Orwell's political philosophy was complex and developed significantly throughout his life. This article examines Orwell's early views on socialism, focusing particularly on the period before World War II (1928-1939). During this formative period, Orwell developed the basic socialist principles that would later influence his famous works (Ingle, 2006). Understanding his early socialist thinking provides crucial context for interpreting his later literary contributions and political positions.

This analysis addresses three main research questions: (1) What experiences shaped Orwell's early socialist views? (2) How did Orwell's conception of socialism differ from the major socialist movements of his time? (3) How were Orwell's early socialist views reflected in his pre-war writings?

Methodology





This study employs qualitative textual analysis of Orwell's early works, correspondence, and autobiographical writings from 1928-1939. Primary sources include *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), and selected essays from this period. These texts are analyzed using a historical-contextual approach that situates Orwell's works within the wider political and social environment of interwar Britain and Europe.

Additionally, this analysis incorporates biographical research based on Orwell's personal correspondence and contemporary accounts to identify key experiences that influenced his political development. Secondary sources from Orwell scholars provide an interpretive framework for understanding the evolution of his thought. This methodology allows for a comprehensive examination of the content and context of Orwell's early socialist views.

Formative Experiences

Three key experiences profoundly shaped Orwell's early socialist views. First, his service as an Imperial Policeman in Burma (1922-1927) instilled a deep antipathy towards imperialism and class structures. In "Shooting an Elephant" (1936), Orwell wrote that imperialism was "an evil thing" that forced him to "wear a mask" and act against his better judgment (Orwell, 1936/2000, p. 156). This experience exposed him to the realities of colonial administration, where he witnessed firsthand the oppression and exploitation inherent in imperial rule. His position as an enforcer of colonial policy created an internal conflict that would influence his political thinking for the rest of his life. The guilt and discomfort he felt in this role are vividly portrayed in his essays about Burma, where he describes the psychological burden of representing a system he increasingly came to despise. This experience strengthened his lifelong commitment to anti-imperialism, which became integrally connected to his socialism.

Second, Orwell's experiences of poverty and working-class life, documented in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), had a profound impact on his political development. After returning from Burma, Orwell made a conscious decision to immerse himself in the world of the poor and dispossessed. In Paris, he worked as a dishwasher in the kitchens of luxury hotels, experiencing the harsh conditions and exploitation faced by those at the bottom of the labor hierarchy. In London, he tramped with homeless men, staying in lodging houses and experiencing the indignities of poverty. These experiences were not merely





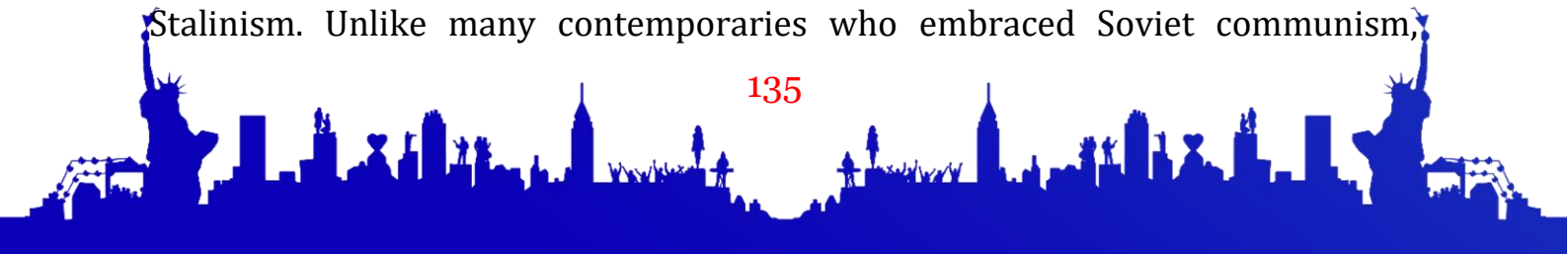
journalistic research but represented a conscious rejection of his privileged background and demonstrated his commitment to class solidarity. As Williams (1971) notes, these experiences "transformed his theoretical objections to class inequality into deeply felt moral convictions" (p. 62). Orwell's direct contact with poverty gave him insights into working-class life that many socialist intellectuals of his time lacked, enabling him to critique both capitalism and the theoretical abstractions of left-wing orthodoxy.

Third, Orwell's involvement in the Spanish Civil War (1936-37) crystallized his commitment to democratic socialism. In December 1936, Orwell traveled to Spain to fight against Franco's fascist forces, joining the POUM militia (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) on the Aragon front. During his time in Barcelona, he experienced what he considered a genuine revolutionary situation, where traditional class hierarchies had been temporarily overturned. However, he also witnessed the betrayal of revolutionary principles by Stalinist forces, as the Soviet-backed Communist Party suppressed other left-wing groups, including the POUM. Orwell himself became a target in these purges and was forced to flee Spain. This experience, detailed in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), cemented his opposition to totalitarian implementations of socialism while reinforcing his commitment to democratic socialist principles. The Spanish Civil War provided Orwell with a practical political education that shaped his understanding of how revolutionary ideals could be corrupted by power politics and dogmatic ideology (Bowker, 2003).

Distinctive Features of Orwell's Socialism

Orwell's early socialism had several distinctive features that set it apart from mainstream socialist movements of his time. First, Orwell emphasized the moral and humanistic aspects of socialism rather than economic theory. In *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), he criticized socialist intellectuals who "talked about a classless society" while "retaining in their hearts the secret belief that 'the lower classes stink'" (Orwell, 1937/2001, p. 152). For Orwell, socialism required not only economic restructuring but also a moral revolution that would eliminate class prejudice. He was deeply skeptical of "parlor socialists" who embraced radical politics without abandoning their class prejudices. This moral emphasis distinguished Orwell from many of his contemporaries, who focused primarily on economic analysis and theoretical orthodoxy.

Second, Orwell was deeply skeptical of orthodox Marxism, especially Stalinism. Unlike many contemporaries who embraced Soviet communism,





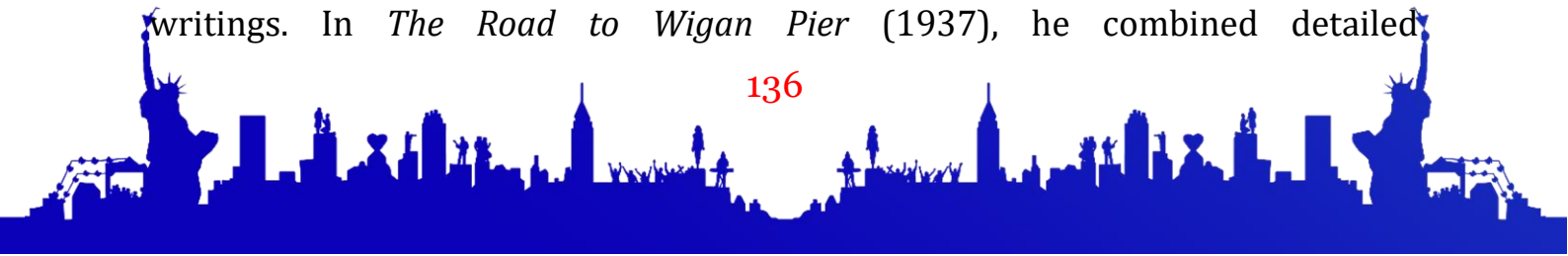
Orwell advocated for a democratic socialism that preserved individual freedom. His experiences in Spain had shown him how Marxist theory could be distorted to justify totalitarian practices. Crick (1980) argues that "Orwellian socialism was not theoretical but fundamentally moral" (p. 175), prioritizing human dignity over ideological purity. Orwell rejected the deterministic aspects of Marxism, emphasizing instead the importance of individual conscience and moral choice. He was particularly critical of intellectual defenders of Stalinism, whom he saw as betraying socialist principles in the name of political expediency.

Third, Orwell stressed the importance of clear, understandable language in socialist discourse. He criticized the "nonsensical words" and "jargon" that characterized much leftist writing of his time (Orwell, 1946/2000, p. 348). In his essay "Politics and the English Language" (1946), he argued that political writing was often deliberately obscure, using complicated language to hide simple and often unpleasant truths. This linguistic concern reflected his broader commitment to making socialism accessible to ordinary people rather than an academic exercise. For Orwell, the corruption of language was intimately connected to the corruption of politics, as unclear language enabled dishonest thought and facilitated political manipulation. His insistence on clear expression was both an aesthetic preference and a political principle, reflecting his belief that socialism should be comprehensible to the working people it claimed to represent.

Fourth, Orwell's socialism was distinctly English in character, rejecting internationalist abstract theory in favor of a socialism rooted in national culture and tradition. In "The Lion and the Unicorn" (1941), he articulated a vision of "revolutionary patriotism" that combined radical social change with respect for English cultural traditions. This approach reflected his belief that effective political movements must connect with ordinary people's sense of national identity. Unlike many socialists of his era who embraced internationalism, Orwell recognized the power of patriotism as a political force and sought to reconcile it with socialist principles. This distinctive approach allowed him to critique both the orthodox left and the conservative right from a unique political position.

Early Socialist Views in Pre-War Writings

Orwell's early socialist views were distinctively expressed in his pre-war writings. In *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), he combined detailed

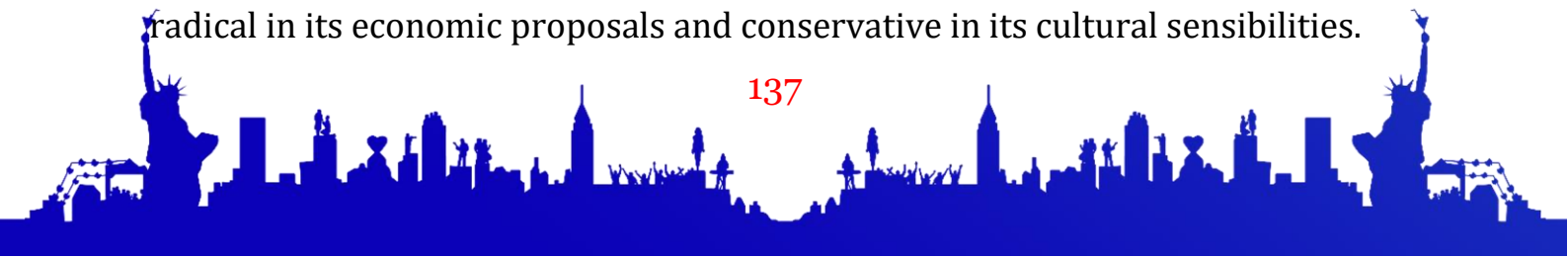




documentation of working-class conditions with critical analysis of socialist movements. The first half presents ethnographic observations of mining communities in northern England, describing the harsh living and working conditions with empathy and precision. Orwell documented miners' wages, housing conditions, and health issues with journalistic rigor, creating a powerful indictment of industrial capitalism. The second half of the book turns to a critical examination of socialism itself, challenging the alienation of socialist movements from those they claimed to represent. Orwell argued that middle-class socialists often repelled potential working-class supporters through their cultural peculiarities and theoretical abstractions. This structure demonstrates Orwell's distinctive approach: grounding political theory in lived experience and subjecting both capitalist society and socialist alternatives to critical scrutiny.

In *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), Orwell provided a firsthand account of his experiences in the Spanish Civil War. He described anarchist-controlled Barcelona as a place where "the working class was in the saddle" and the "revolutionary atmosphere" was "overwhelming" (Orwell, 1938/2000, p. 4). The book documents his time on the Aragon front, where he experienced the reality of trench warfare, and his subsequent involvement in the Barcelona street fighting of May 1937. However, the book also depicts the betrayal of revolutionary principles through political manipulation, propaganda, and Soviet-backed repression of non-Communist left-wing groups. Orwell's detailed account of how the Communist Party's pursuit of military efficiency and political orthodoxy undermined the revolutionary spirit reveals the tension between socialist ideals and their implementation that became a central theme in his later works.

Essays such as "Why I Write" (1936) and "The Lion and the Unicorn" (1941) further developed Orwell's unique vision of democratic socialism. In these works, he advocated for a distinctively English socialism that respected national traditions while implementing fundamental economic reforms. "The Lion and the Unicorn," written during the early days of World War II, argued for a socialist revolution as part of the war effort against fascism. Orwell proposed specific policies including nationalization of major industries, educational reform, and income limitation, while emphasizing the need to preserve English cultural traditions. This approach stood in opposition to both orthodox Marxism and mainstream English socialism of the time, offering a third path that was both radical in its economic proposals and conservative in its cultural sensibilities.





Analysis and Significance

Orwell's early socialist views represented a unique synthesis of moral conviction, democratic principles, and practical experience. Unlike many socialist intellectuals of his time, Orwell approached socialism not primarily as an economic system but as a moral imperative based on human dignity and equality. This moral orientation distinguished his thinking from dominant left-wing traditions in Britain, such as orthodox Marxism and Fabian socialism. While Marxists emphasized class struggle and historical materialism, and Fabians focused on gradual reform through expert administration, Orwell insisted on the ethical dimensions of political change and the importance of personal integrity.

The tensions in Orwell's early socialism—between theory and practice, between individual freedom and collective action, between patriotism and internationalism—reflect broader problems within socialist movements. His experiences in Burma, among the poor of London and Paris, and in revolutionary Spain provided a unique empirical basis for his political thought. As Woodcock (1966) notes, "Orwell stands out among socialist writers in his consistent testing of theory against the experience of life" (p. 213). This empirical approach enabled him to develop a socialism that was both principled and pragmatic, avoiding the dogmatism that characterized much left-wing thought of his era.

Orwell's emphasis on plain language and intelligible expression in socialist discourse anticipated later criticisms of left-wing academic jargon. His insistence that socialism should be understandable to ordinary people reflected both democratic principles and pragmatic concerns about political effectiveness. In "Politics and the English Language" (1946), he argued that clear language was essential to honest politics, establishing a connection between linguistic and political corruption that would become central to his dystopian vision in *1984*. This linguistic commitment paralleled his broader belief that socialism should serve human needs, not abstract ideological goals.

The development of Orwell's socialist thought from the late 1920s to the outbreak of World War II provides crucial context for understanding his major works. The critiques of totalitarianism in *Animal Farm* and *1984* emerged from his experiences with Stalinism and his disillusionment with aspects of the socialist movement. However, these works represent not a rejection of socialism but an attempt to reclaim its democratic and humanistic core from totalitarian distortions. Orwell remained committed to socialist principles throughout his





life, even as he became one of the sharpest critics of self-proclaimed socialist regimes.

Conclusion

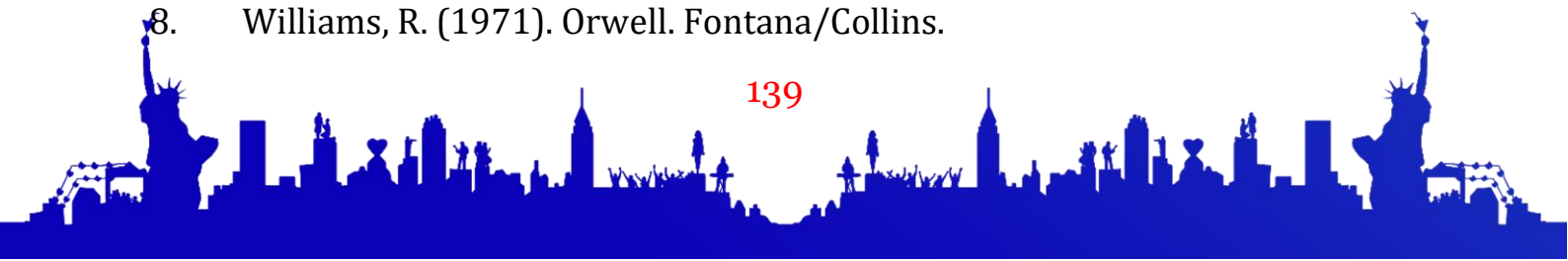
Orwell's early socialist views were forged through direct experience with imperialism, poverty, and revolutionary politics. His distinctive brand of socialism emphasized moral values, democratic principles, and clear communication over theoretical orthodoxy. These early views provided the foundation for his later critiques of totalitarianism while maintaining a commitment to social justice and equality.

The development of Orwell's socialist thought demonstrates the importance of connecting political theory with lived experience. His work continues to offer valuable insights for contemporary discussions about the relationship between socialism, democracy, and individual freedom. By examining Orwell's early socialism, we gain a deeper understanding of the intellectual journey that produced some of the most powerful political literature of the 20th century.

Limitations of this analysis include its focus on a relatively short period in Orwell's intellectual development and the difficulty of separating Orwell's actual views from his literary persona. Future research could explore the continuities and discontinuities between Orwell's early socialism and his later political thought, particularly his complex relationship with the British left during and after the Second World War.

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