

AV Festival 2016

Sat 27 February – Sun 27 March 2016

Preview: Fri 26 February 2016

Extra Preview: Thu 25 February 2018

Sat 5 March – Sat 2 April 2016

Preview: Fri 4 March 2016

Extra Preview: Thu 3 March 2016

'Meanwhile, what about Socialism? We are living in a world in which nobody is free, in which hardly anybody is secure, in which it is impossible to be honest and to remain alive.' (George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*)

The curatorial framework for the next two editions of AV Festival in 2016 and 2018 is inspired by George Orwell's polemical book *The Road to Wigan Pier*. In 1936 Orwell was commissioned by left-wing publisher Victor Gollancz to write on the depressed areas of the North of England. He left London on 31 January and spent the next two months travelling and living in England's industrial North. He returned to London on 2 April 1936. The dates of AV Festival 2016 mark the 80th anniversary of Orwell's journey to the North, reflecting the Festival's commissioning process of inviting artists to North East England to research and make new work.

The Road to Wigan Pier is a searing account of Orwell's first hand observations of working-class life in the industrial heartlands of Yorkshire and Lancashire in the 1930s. His graphically unforgettable descriptions of social injustice, cramped slum housing, dangerous mining conditions, squalor, hunger and growing unemployment are written with honesty, fury, wit and great humanity. The experience crystallized Orwell's ideas about socialism and creativity, and remains a powerful portrait of poverty, inequality and class divisions in Britain.

Part 1 of the book is descriptive and based on his first-hand observations of living in the North. Part 2 is an argumentative critique of English socialism and especially the socialism of the earnest middle class. In order to articulate his own approach to socialism, it had been necessary for him to witness first hand what mass-unemployment in the North was like at its worst. He also writes extensively of his experience working for the colonial administration in Burma and the political rise of Fascism in Europe, demonstrating how this international context informed his attitude to class and inequality in England. At the end of Part 2 Orwell concludes that socialism is not about class but about equality and fairness.

He delivered the manuscript for *The Road to Wigan Pier* on 15 December 1936 and it was published on 8 March 1937 in a Left Book Club edition and simultaneously in a higher-priced trade edition. Part 1 was also issued separately in May 1937 by the Left Book Club as a supplementary volume for 'propaganda distribution'. By 28 November 1939, 44,039 copies, and 890 copies of Part 1 only, had been printed: a total of 47,079. The book was not reissued in Orwell's lifetime although a daily newspaper, the *News Chronicle*, published a short section on 10 June 1937. It was first published by Penguin Books in 1962.

The original edition was illustrated with a section of 32 photographic plates. These were excluded from all subsequent editions until they were reintroduced in 1986. Orwell did not choose the photographs and the idea for their inclusion may have come from the architect Clough Williams Ellis, and also the suggestions for likely sources. The inclusion of these images in the new edition is important as they reinforce the place of the book in the English documentary tradition, eg: in comparison with Edgar Anstey's 1935 film *Housing Problems*.

The book has lost none of its political impact over time. Since its publication *The Road to Wigan Pier* has been referenced in other writing on contemporary inequality and searches for genuine socialism. The writer, feminist and broadcaster Beatrix Campbell published *The Road to Wigan Pier Revisited* in 1984 and Stephen Armstrong's book of the same name followed in 2012. Much has been made of the parallels between the national economic downturn and Conservative policies of the 1930s and today.

Thematic Structure of the Festival

The book is written in two parts. The Festival will mirror this structure with Part 1 taking place in 2016 and Part 2 in 2018. Both editions of the Festival will be unique and standalone, with no requirement for audiences to have attended 2016 in order to have an understanding of 2018. The theme will enable audiences to navigate the Festival through a series of 'chapters', which will journey across artforms and venues over the Festival month.

As the working class that Orwell visited in the North of England during the 1930s were primarily coal miners, the Festival theme allows a logical progression from our geological edition in 2014 to a more social and political reading of the impact of industrialisation on the world in 2016 and 2018. This presents a movement from 'extraction' to 'production' and the social world of work, labour and capital. It also enables us to continue looking at the legacies of colonialism and contemporary globalisation through the evolution of capitalism and the rise of wealth.

In addition to the Festival commissions and exhibitions, each weekend of the Festival will focus on special events including film screenings, concerts and talks. Festival commissions will continue to work with artists to make new projects in relation to the theme and within the context of North East England.

The Road to Wigan Pier

The summary below gives an indication of the focus of each chapter in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The curatorial shape of the Festival will not directly follow this chapter structure, but instead will work more imaginatively with the themes and ideas across the book. Both parts of the book will be included and continued across both editions of the Festival.

Introduction / A Note on the Text

The introductory text in *The Road to Wigan Pier* provides background and context to Orwell's commission and his 'residency' period in the North. It also explains the editing process and the inclusion of 32 illustration plates suggested by the architect Clough Williams Ellis', placing the book in the English documentary tradition.

Part 1: Chapter 1 (Family / Industrial Landscape)

'The train bore me away, through the monstrous scenery of slag heaps, chimneys, piled scrap-iron, foul canals, paths of cindery mud criss-crossed by the prints of clogs.'

Chapter 1 is in two parts. The first part describes Orwell's first temporary lodging house on his arrival in the North and introduces ideas of overcrowding, poverty, unemployment, diet, and 'dirt'.

The second part describes his train journey and the industrial landscape he sees. It introduces the idea that it is industrialisation that caused the social conditions of the modern world and that it is not the peoples' fault.

Part 1: Chapter 2 (Work)

'More than anyone else, perhaps, the miner can stand as the type of the manual worker, not only because his work is so exaggeratedly awful, but also because it is so vitally necessary and yet so remote from our experience, so invisible, as it were, that we are capable of forgetting it as we forget the blood in our veins.'

Chapter 2 focuses on Orwell's first hand experience of being with workers at the coalface and going underground with them. He describes how the coal seams are worked, physical labour and working conditions.

At the end of the chapter he provides an analysis of the importance of the coal industry and the work of the miner to the whole of society; he then references all types of manual work and how 'the superior classes are oblivious to the workers... that it is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior.'

Part 1: Chapter 3 (Money)

'This business of petty inconvenience and indignity, of being kept waiting about, of having to do everything at other people's convenience, is inherent in working-class life. A thousand influences constantly press a working man down into a passive role. He does not act, he is acted upon. He feels himself the slave of mysterious authority and has a firm conviction that 'they' will never allow him to do this, that and the other.'

Chapter 3 focuses on Orwell's first hand experience of the living conditions of the miners / working class and issues of housing, food, wages, health and compensation.

At the end of the chapter he provides an analysis of class division and dignity and introduces the idea of dirt as a class issue. He concludes that the person of bourgeois origin goes through his life with some expectation of getting what he wants.

Part 1: Chapter 4 (Housing)

'Give people a decent house and they will soon learn to keep it decent. Moreover with a smart-looking house to live up to they improve in self-respect and cleanliness, and their children start life with better chances. Nevertheless, in a Corporation estate there is an uncomfortable, almost prison-like atmosphere, and the people who live there are perfectly well aware of it.'

Chapter 4 focuses on Orwell's first hand experience of housing in the industrial areas, and in particular the housing shortage and effect of poverty. He goes into detail on the different types of houses, rental values and quality of the living accommodation. He also provides an analysis of slum clearance and the effect of rehousing / housing estates on local communities and businesses.

Part 1: Chapter 5 (Unemployment)

'To study unemployment and its effects you have got to go to the industrial areas. It is only when you lodge in streets where nobody has a job, where getting a job seems about as probable as owning an aeroplane and much less probable than winning fifty pounds in the Football Pool, that you begin to grasp the changes that are being worked in our civilisation.'

Chapter 5 focuses on Orwell's first hand experience of speaking to unemployed people in the North. He goes into detail about the inadequacy of unemployment figure calculations and discusses the income of a typical family, the benefit system and the idea of a living wage.

He also talks about the different solutions to unemployment and the failure of 'occupational centres' since they are a device to 'keep the unemployed quiet and give them the illusion that something is being done for them.' Instead he describes the better work being done by the NUMW (National Unemployed Workers' Movement).

Part 1: Chapter 6 (Food)

'It is unfortunate that the English working class – the English nation generally, for that matter – are exceptionally ignorant about and wasteful of food.'

Chapter 6 focuses on food and diet, since 'A human being is primarily a bag for putting food into.' He reflects on how 'it is curious how seldom the all-importance of food is recognised', and goes on to analyse weekly budgets to make connections between diet, poverty, class and unemployment, and the 'minimum weekly sum on which a human being could keep alive'.

He then reflects on health more broadly; the signs of under-nourishment, death rates and infant mortality. To a certain extent industrialism is blamed, it is 'the modern industrial technique which provides you with cheap substitutes for everything. We may find in the long run that tinned food is a deadlier weapon than the machine gun.'

Part 1: Chapter 7 (North-South Divide / Nationalism)

'But when you go to the industrial North you are conscious, quite apart from the unfamiliar scenery, of entering a strange country. This is partly because of certain real differences which do exist, but still more because of the North-South antithesis which has been rubbed into us for such a long time past.'

Chapter 7 begins with a further description of the industrial landscape including slag-heaps, factories, waste ground and canals. However Orwell concludes that 'the beauty or ugliness of industrialisation hardly matters since its evil lies far deeper', an observation which is followed by an analysis of Northern snobbishness, stereotyping and nationalism.

The end of the chapter explores at the question of class, concluding that 'it is easier in the North than it would be in the South to meet working-class people on approximately equal terms'. Orwell goes on to discuss working class attitudes towards family, trade unions and education.

Part 2

'In the earlier chapters of this book I have given a rather fragmentary account of various things I saw in the coal areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire. I went there partly because I wanted to see what mass-unemployment is like at its worst, partly in order to see the most typical section of the English working class at close quarters. This was necessary to me as part of my approach to Socialism. For before you can be sure whether you are genuinely in favour of Socialism, you have got to decide whether things at present are tolerable or not tolerable, and you have got to take up a definite attitude on the terribly difficult issue of class. Here I shall have to digress and explain how my own attitude towards the class question was developed.'

In Part 2 Orwell moves from the descriptive focus and first-hand observations of Part 1, into an analysis of the English working class and Socialism with reference to his own biography.

Part 2: Chapter 8

'But it was not long before I was forbidden to play with the plumber's children; they were 'common' and I was told to keep away from them. This was snobbish, if you like, but it was also necessary, for middle-class people cannot afford to let their children grow up with vulgar accents.'

Orwell sets up his reasons for wanting to explore his own approach to Socialism and the class question, and why he spent the time travelling and living in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Here he reveals something of his own biography, and how his personal experience has informed his attitudes and decisions.

In describing class, although he makes references to income, his point is that class distinction is not entirely about a financial position, but has a lot to do with a perceived social position (issue of 'keeping up appearances' for the middle/lower-middle classes).

He continues with the idea of dirt as a class issue – the real impenetrable class barrier is that the lower classes smell and are inherently dirty. This attitude is not held towards people of other races, only working class British people.

Orwell also describes the problem of middle-class socialists not adopting the habits and manners of the working class. Even if they promote Socialism in their life and work, they still maintain their middle-class lives. The working classes hate the bourgeoisie – and they are becoming more subservient with the rise of unemployment.

Part 2: Chapter 9

'It was the first time that I had ever been really aware of the working class, and to begin with it was only because they supplied an analogy. They were the symbolic victims of injustice, playing the same part in England as the Burmese played in Burma.... It seemed to me then – it sometimes seems to me now, for that matter – that economic injustice will stop the moment we want it to stop, and no sooner, and if we genuinely want it to stop the method adopted hardly matters.'

He continues the description of his own upbringing – a scholarship boy at Eton where he was conscious of his own inferior social and financial position compared to others.

Then he goes on in detail to discuss his experience in the colonial administration in Burma, and how it informed his attitude to class and inequality in England. 'By the end of that time I hated the imperialism I was serving with a bitterness which I probably cannot make clear.' This led him to pursue an understanding of what it meant to be truly excluded from society, and to live on the streets in London with homeless people, the lowest of the low. This experience resulted in the book *Down and Out in Paris and London*.

Part 2: Chapter 10

'Not only the croyant et pratiquant Socialist, but every 'intellectual' takes it as a matter of course that he at least is outside the class-racket; he, unlike his neighbours, can see through the absurdity of wealth, ranks, titles, etc... And even liberal, socially conscious middle class people, despite everything they might say, are unwilling to see the class structure change, and for the British empire to end.'

The fact that has got to be faced is that to abolish class-distinctions means abolishing part of yourself... What is involved is not merely the amelioration of working-class conditions, nor an avoidance of the more stupid forms of snobbery, but a complete abandonment of the upper-class and middle-class attitude to life.

Orwell further describes class difference and the difficulty of class relations. For example: working class people that middle class people meet are normally 'educated' and not typical; and working class people who have become educated struggle with that identity. The ultimate danger of class hatred is that it can take the bourgeois 'to flight, and if his flight is rapid enough it may carry him to Fascism.'

Part 2: Chapter 11

'Meanwhile, what about Socialism? We are living in a world in which nobody is free, in which hardly anybody is secure, in which it is impossible to be honest and to remain alive.'

'One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England. Essentially in the popular

imagination, Socialism has a bad press because it is associated with an 'alternative' or 'experimental' way of living that does not appeal to the general masses.'

Here Orwell articulates why he thinks that Socialism is the answer to the material problems described in Part 1, and the ideological problems outlined in Part 2. He discusses why Socialism is being resisted and is not more widespread and the inherent problems in popular Socialist propaganda.

He examines how different classes respond to the idea of Socialism and what it means for different people. For example the difference between a working class Socialist and an 'intellectual' Socialist: the working class Socialist is unlikely to be theoretically sound, but will inherently be a Socialist, while the intellectual will be theoretically rigorous, but inherently prejudice against the working class.

Because of this inherent problem Orwell suggests that artists can never be persuaded into the Socialist fold. He states that 'this is a disaster, not only for writers themselves, but for the cause of Socialism, which has great need of them.'

Part 2: Chapter 12

'They have never made it sufficiently clear that the essential aims of Socialism are justice and liberty. With their eyes glued to economic facts, they have proceeded on the assumption that man has no soul, and explicitly or implicitly they have set up the goal of a materialistic Utopia.'
'Socialism, at least in this island, does not smell any longer of revolution and the over throw of tyrants; it smells of crankishness, machine-worship and the stupid cult of Russia. Unless you can remove that smell, and very rapidly, Fascism may win.'

'In the highly mechanized countries, thanks to tinned food, cold storage, synthetic flavouring matters, etc., the palate is almost a dead organ... Mechanisation leads to the decay of taste, the decay of taste leads to the demand for machine-made articles and hence to more mechanization, and so a vicious circle is established.'

'Establish Socialism – remove the profit principle – and the inventor will have a free hand. The mechanization of the world, already rapid enough, would be or at any rate could be enormously accelerated.'

In this chapter Orwell discusses 'progress', industrialisation, and the machine as a modern and alienating invention. This sense of progress is inextricably linked to the early / Russian concepts of Socialism, which is why it meets resistance. This is followed by a discussion of Fascism and how the failure of socialism will drive people to Fascism.

Part 2: Chapter 13

'[D]istaste for 'progress' and machine-civilisation... is only defensible as an attitude of mind. It is not valid as a reason for rejecting Socialism, because it presupposes an alternative which does not exist... The job of the thinking person, therefore, is not to reject Socialism but to make up his mind to humanise it.'

'It is quite easy to imagine a middle class crushed down to the worst depths of poverty and still remaining bitterly anti-working class in sentiment; this being, of course, a ready-made Fascist Party.'

'Once again it is a question of sticking to essentials; and the essential point here is that all people with small, insecure incomes are in the same boat and ought to be fighting on the same side. Probably we could do with a little less talk about 'capitalists' and 'proletarian' and a little more about the robbers and the robbed... I am implying that different classes must be persuaded to act together without, for a moment, being asked to drop their class-differences...the central fact that poverty is poverty, whether the tool you work with is a pick-axe or a fountain pen.'

'All that is needed is to hammer two facts home into the public consciousness. One, that the interests of all exploited people are the same; the other that Socialism is compatible with common decency.'

In conclusion, Orwell outlines how to make Socialism work - how to make working people of all classes understand about oppression and inequality.

Overall he concludes that Socialism is not about class but about equality and fairness.