

POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER**Nisha Rani¹(Research Scholar), Dr. Chhote Lal²(Research Guide)****Department of English****^{1,2}OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan (India)****ABSTRACT**

This research paper intends to examine the problem of poverty and unemployment in The Road to Wigan Pier. Orwell describes his personal idea of socialism and what socialism is like in England. In this book he describes the life of the miners. Their working conditions are very bad for they work underground. The work is also very dangerous because the coal-miners often handle dynamite and the tunnels aren't very stable. Orwell describes how he went down to see the working conditions underground there. He describes that the place where the coal workers work is not just right at the elevator but often lies some miles away from it. And the tunnel is often only three to four feet high. This means that the miners have to work under the hardest conditions. In The Road to Wigan Pier Orwell takes a look at the social situation of the average miner. The Road to Wigan Pier deals with unemployment also. In 1937 there were about two million unemployed. But this number only shows how many persons are receiving the dole. One has to take this number and multiply it by at least three to get the number of persons actually living on the dole. But there are a large number of people that have a work but who from a financial point of view may be unemployed because they are not drawing anything that can be described as a living wage. The general idea of Orwell is that socialism and communism are no longer movements of the working class. The movement is lead by the middle-class. But firstly he explains how the English class-system works. In Britain it isn't possible to determine the class of a person by simply looking at his income. In England the tradition plays a very important part. Another aspect of the class-system in Britain is the almost inherited rejection of the lower classes. Orwell here tells a story of his early boyhood when he felt that lower-class people were almost subhuman that they had coarse faces, hideous accents, gross manners and that they hated everyone who was not like themselves. Whole quarters were considered unsafe because of hooligans. But nevertheless the rejection of the lower-class also has physical roots. So the children of the middle-class were always taught that the working-class smelled. Class hatred, religious hatred, differences of education, of temperament, of intellect, even differences of moral code can be got over but physical repulsion cannot. Are there any changes in his habits, his taste and his manners, his ideology as it is called in the communist jargon? Is there any change at

all except that he votes Labour or Communist? It can be observed that the middle-classed communist still associates with the middle-class still lives among the middle-class and his tastes are those of a bourgeois person. The main thing Orwell criticises is that middle-class communists and socialists often speak against their own class but that they evidently have the behaviour and manner of a middle-class person. Generally Orwell says that socialism is a nearly impossible thing.

INTRODUCTION

Orwell's arguments are partly based on his direct experiences of people suffering under the effects of industrialized capitalism. But in other way his ideas are based on himself. Orwell was from a modest background economically. Orwell begins his critique on class and socialism in *The Road to Wigan Pier* with his personal experience of imperialism which he considers profoundly evil. Orwell describes the Brooker family. They belong to the so-called wealthy among the poor ones. In their house they have installed a cheap lodging-house and a tiny shop. Both Mr and Mrs Brooker are already pensioners and with the rent they get for the rooms they can afford at least enough to eat. Generally the people who live in this lodging house are unmarried or very old and also pensioners. Orwell himself spends a couple of weeks in this house during his researches. In this book he describes the life of the miners. Their working conditions are very bad for they work underground where it is very hot, dusty and where the miners have just a minimum of space. The work is also very dangerous because the coal-miners often handle dynamite and the tunnels aren't very stable. Orwell describes how he went down to see the working conditions underground there. He describes that the place where the coal is dismantled is not just right at the elevator but often lies some miles away from it. And the tunnel is often only three to four feet high. This means that the miners have to work under the hardest conditions. In *The Road to Wigan Pier* Orwell takes a look at the social situation of the average miner. First of all he looks at the hygienic situation of the miners. The situation in the homes of the miners is even worse. Only a couple of houses in the industrial region have bathrooms. The rest of the coal-workers have to wash in small basins. The miners also have very little time although they work only seven hours a day. *The Road to Wigan Pier* deals with the housing situation in those districts. Generally, the houses all look the same. The main problem is the housing shortage in this region. So people are ready to accept any dirty whole and bad landlords just to get a roof over their heads. And as long as the housing shortage exists the local authorities cannot do anything to make the existing houses more liveable. The authorities can condemn a house but they cannot pull it

down till the tenant has another house to live in. But there is another problem resulting from this one. The landlord will surely not invest more money that he can help in a house that is going to be pulled down in the future. Orwell has made notes of dozens of houses in this region. Another problem in these regions is that whole rows of houses are undermined and the windows often are ten to twenty degrees off the horizontal. Because of the bad housing situation there are also so-called “caravan dwellers”. In the whole of Britain there might be around ten thousand families living in caravans. The worst thing about those caravans is that the people who live in such a place don't even save money because the rent can make up to ten shillings! The next problem in *The Road to Wigan Pier* deals with unemployment. In 1937 there were about two million unemployed. But this number only shows how many persons are receiving the dole. One has to take this number and multiply it by at least three to get the number of persons actually living on the dole. But there are a large number of people that have a work but who from a financial point of view might as well be unemployed because they are not drawing anything that can be described as a living wage. In this book Orwell takes a look at the food of a family living on the dole or on a very low wage. Generally the food of an average family costs fifteen shillings a week including fuel for cooking. Of course these families could live on even less money but especially in the poor families' one can see the trend not to buy the cheapest and most nutritious things but rather to buy something tasty in order to forget one's dull life. This trend results in physical degeneration among the poor people. In industrial towns the mortality is at a very high level. Another fact that can be observed is that hardly anyone, except children of course has his own teeth.

REFERENCES

1. Orwell, George. *The Road to Wigan Pier*. New Delhi: Penguin Books Ltd., 1997.
2. Orwell and the Dispossessed. London: Penguin, 2001.