

Britain at Work

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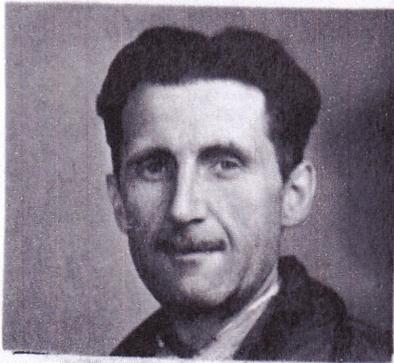
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This is to certify that
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Member's Sig.

JUNE 9, 1944.

TRIBUNE

AS I PLEASE: by George Orwell

ARTHUR KOESTLER'S recent article in *Tribune* set me wondering whether the book racket will start up again in its old vigour after the war, when paper is plentiful and there are other things to spend your money on.

Publishers have got to live, like anyone else, and you cannot blame them for advertising their wares, but the truly shameful feature of literary life before the war was the blurring of the distinction between advertisement and criticism. A number of the so-called reviewers, and especially the best known ones, were simply blurb writers. The "screaming" advertisement started some time in the nineteen-twenties, and as the competition to take up as much space and use as many superlatives as possible became fiercer, publishers' advertisements grew to be an important source of revenue to a number of papers. The literary pages of several well-known papers were practically owned by a handful of publishers, who had their quislings planted in all the important jobs. These wretches churned forth their praise—"masterpiece," "brilliant," "unforgettable" and so forth—like so many mechanical pianos. A book coming from the right publishers could be absolutely certain not only of favourable reviews, but of being placed on the "recommended" list which industrious book-borrowers would cut out and take to the library the next day.

If you published books at several different houses you soon learned how

in America even the pretence that hack-reviewers read the books they are paid to criticise has been partially abandoned. Publishers, or some publishers, send out with review copies a short synopsis telling the reviewer what to say. Once, in the case of a novel of my own, they misspelt the name of one of the characters. The same misspelling turned up in review after review. The so-called critics had not even glanced into the book—which, nevertheless, most of them were boosting to the skies.

A PHRASE much used in political circles in this country is "playing into the hands of." It is a sort of charm or incantation to silence uncomfortable truths. When you are told that by saying this, that or the other you are "playing into the hands of" some sinister enemy, you know that it is your duty to shut up immediately.

For example, if you say anything damaging about British imperialism, you are playing into the hands of Dr. Goebbels. If you criticise Stalin you are playing into the hands of the *Tablet* and the *Daily Telegraph*. If you criticise Chiang-Kai-Shek you are playing into the hands of Wang Ching Wei—and so on, indefinitely.

Objectively this charge is often true. It is always difficult to attack one party to a dispute without temporarily helping the other. Some of Gandhi's remarks have been very useful to the Japanese.



George Orwell joined the BBC in 1941 to do 'essential war work', as a temporary talks producer in the Empire Department. The BBC building in Portland Place was possibly the model for 'Mini Truth' in the novel '1984' although Senate House in Bloomsbury is equally likely. The above picture shows Orwell at the BBC's 'Voice' programme in the Eastern Service, left to right, sitting: Venu Chitale, JM Tambimuttu, TS Eliot, Una Marson, Mulk Raj Anand, C Pemberton, N Menon; standing: George Orwell, Nancy Barratt and William Empson.

Orwell became literary editor of the *Tribune* in November 1943, shortly after leaving the BBC. He had been writing reviews for it since March 1940 and had the backing of Nye Bevan, who was the *Tribune* editor. He also wrote a regular column called 'As I Please' which allowed him to explore many literary and political topics. Orwell described the *Tribune* as 'the only existing weekly paper that makes a genuine effort to be both progressive and humane—that is, to combine a radical socialist policy with a respect for freedom of speech and a civilised attitude towards literature and the arts.'

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK: WORKING LIVES AND TRADE UNIONS IN WEST LONDON 1945-1995 is a 200-page book featuring over 100 oral history interviews carried out by the Britain at Work London Group, chronicling the working lives and trade union activities of people in West London during the years 1945-1995, covering an area stretching from Hayes in the west to Paddington and from Harrow in the north to the River Thames. Price £10 plus £2.80 p&p. Please make cheques payable to Britain at Work London Project. contact Rima rima@britainatworklondon.com phone 07946 284089 or write to Britain at Work, 15 Wellington Road, Norwich, NR2 3HT.

George Orwell Down and Out in Portobello Road



The Portobello Road literary tour star attraction is number 22, the George Orwell blue plaque house; where he set out from to go 'Down and Out in Paris and London'. In 'The Unknown Orwell' by Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, his situation in 1927 is described thus: 'He had his room in the house in Portobello Road, just enough money to live on, and all his time free. He began to write.' Eric Blair alias George Orwell had previously stayed at Notting Hill Gate in Mall Chambers when he was at Eton from 1918 to 21. Having spent 5 years in Burma as a military policeman, he became reacquainted with Ruth Pitter, a poet and potter from Mall Chambers, and inquired after a cheap lodging room. Portobello Road acquired its most famous landmark when she put him on to a room near her pottery shed at 22 (then number 10).

Apart from a landlady with aspidistra flying middle class pretensions, his time in Notting Hill doesn't seem to have influenced his writing and none of the 'cynical poems' from his 'Portobello period' have survived. But it was on Portobello Road that George Orwell found his first great subject—through a combination of coming to terms with his privileged upbringing and imperialist police past, and the struggle to be a writer. After Ruth Pitter pointed him in the direction of prose writing, in the winter of 1927 he began going 'down and out' on a series of expeditions from Notting Hill into the East End. He dressed as a vagrant in Ruth Pitter's pottery shed in Portobello Mews. In the spring of 1928, the still pre-Orwell, Eric Blair left his room in Portobello Road for the last time to go to Paris (where he first stayed with his theatrical aunt, Nellie Limouzine Adam, another former Notting Hill resident). There is an unsubstantiated theory that the title of Orwell's pub utopia article, 'The Moon Under Water', was influenced by the Sun In Splendour, and GK Chesterton's 'The Napoleon of Notting Hill' being set in 1984 is another notable psychogeographical coincidence.

In the 30s, as Orwell went to Spain to pay homage to Catalonia, refugees from the Spanish Civil War settled in North Kensington and local communists also went to fight the fascists—commemorated along Portobello Road by the Echoes of Spain 1936-39 mural under the Westway flyover. Tom Vague 150 Years of Portobello & Golborne Market Literary Tour bookandkitchen.com

London Transport Museum Campaign Against Arms Trade

London Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) have launched a campaign to get the London Transport Museum to stop taking money from an arms company. Thales, the 11th largest arms company in the world, has been a Corporate Member of the museum since December 2012. They have used the museum's premises to meet with and lobby the UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation, the government body responsible for promoting arms exports. The company has also sold arms and drone components to a range of brutal and repressive regimes; including Saudi Arabia, Russia, Colombia, Kazakhstan and the United Arab Emirates. All this gives a veneer of legitimacy to this destructive industry. London CAAT's campaign has taken many forms. We have carried out a number of banner drops inside the museum, disrupting their Friday late events and ensuring the museum know about the depth of opposition to their willingness to take money from Thales. There have also been regular colourful and eye-catching demonstrations outside the museum. An online day of action against the museum was a great success; the museum's online presence on Twitter and the like

was bombarded with messages opposing their deal with Thales. We have also produced travel wallets to raise awareness of the campaign. This campaign is part of CAAT's wider work against the involvement of arms companies with our public institutions. A previous campaign against the National Gallery's sponsorship arrangement with arms company Finmeccanica resulted in the Gallery ending their long-standing agreement with the company. Other institutions such as the Natural History Museum have said they will no longer host arms dealers. All this proves concerted campaigns such as the ones above can be successful and we ardently hope and believe this campaign can be successful as well. London CAAT meet every third Tuesday of the month at 6.30pm in the CAAT offices in Finsbury Park. Our next demo at the museum in Covent Garden is on January 31. Check our website <http://londoncaat.org.uk/> Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2430175232> or Twitter @londoncaat for more info. You can also email the museum's director via the CAAT website at <https://www.caat.org.uk/campaigns/public-institutions/london-transport-museum> **The next protest at the Museum is on March 28 at 2pm.**

Dear Girl by Tierl Thompson

Dear Girl: the diaries and letters of two working women 1897-1917, edited by Tierl Thompson. What makes a historian and how do historians make sense of the past—can we ever really know it? Much of it is detective work—piecing together information and interpreting as best we can. Perhaps one of the best ways into the past is by first-hand accounts of events that took place. I had the good fortune, some 30 years ago, to come across an astonishing first-hand account of the early years of the 20th century as recorded by two working women from East London—Ruth Jones and Eva Slawson.

I temporarily became a historian, when I was given access to Ruth and Eva's diaries and letters, to edit into a book which became 'Dear Girl'. My friend Margaret Johnson, then in her late 70s, inherited the collection from Ruth's husband Hugh. Margaret, Ruth and Hugh were Quaker activists in south London, who met while working with refugees during World War 2. After Ruth's death in 1953, Hugh found Ruth's substantial collection of diaries and letters and was astonished, having no idea that Ruth had documented the events of her younger life nor that she had written so eloquently over so many years. He felt great regret about this and asked Margaret to 'do something one day' with Ruth's writings. When that 'one day' came, some 20 years later, Margaret felt overawed by the task of creating a book and invited me to do it. I was delighted to take up the challenge.

When I first read one of the diaries I was profoundly moved, because here was something quite unique—the voices of working women describing some of the most significant events of the early 20th century, while at the same time describing the day to day events and personal struggles of what Ruth called her 'very ordinary life'. Ruth and Eva's writings take us into the heart of the socialist, suffrage and religious movements of the early 1900s—a time of tremendous change, activism and idealism. We see how the women gradually threw off the constraints of their upbringing and immersed themselves in new thinking, all the while working to support themselves and their families.

Despite working long hours, Ruth, Eva and their friends managed to attend rallies, demonstrations, discussion groups, political meetings (ILP and Women's Labour League amongst them) and work within their own communities to alleviate poverty. The diaries reveal much about working conditions at the time and about the opportunities available for women. Ruth left school age 14, to work in a 'druggists' in Southwark, followed by a period helping to run a post office run by her grandparents in Essex. This enabled her to get a job as a clerk at Kearley & Tonges—a grocery firm 'which has a bad name throughout the City for overworking its employees.' Eva, who had been a servant, taught herself typing and became a solicitor's secretary in

Walthamstow. Both women eventually studied at Woodbroke—a Quaker college in Birmingham which offered scholarships to working women. Ruth trained as a welfare worker while Eva died unexpectedly in her first year.

The following extracts from the book inform us about working life at the time: Ruth's diary December 9 1898 In spite of face ache, Friday saw Mother and I at Davy, Hill and Son, Yates and Hicks, wholesale and export druggists of 60 Park Street, Southwark, SE. We were not prepossessed with the appearance of the place. It looked quite different from other places of business. It is Spurgeon's old chapel enlarged. We went in and saw Mr Edwards the manager who said I was to start following Monday. I did not like it a bit but would not say so... worked till 8 O clock for the first time on January 13 and then pretty frequently not getting home til 9 and getting nothing extra.

Ruth's diary March 16 1916—describing her first job after Woodbrooke college at Rowntrees in York. The Cocoa Works are situated on the outskirts of the city, about a mile from the Minster and the distance between is covered with mean and ugly streets. There is a marked absence of trees and the flatness everywhere is depressing. The Works are of course enormous—great red brick structures which rear their heads boldly to the skies. There could be no mistaking them even if their towers did not bear inscriptions such as 'Elect Cocoa'. In many ways I feel exactly as if I had gone back to Kearley and Tonge's except that my surroundings here are much more crude. I climb stone steps to this room about the same in number as those which used to tire me so, years ago. On the whole the factory is well planned and equipped but I do feel somehow that most of this industry is rather disgusting. There are tiny boys here who spend their whole day preparing nuts and one poor little wretch sits in a cage cracking nuts all day! All the work is intensely monotonous and I wonder greatly what boys and girls think about as the hours pass by. If I get a chance to investigate this subject while I am here I shall certainly take it, but I fear it would be almost impossible to win a candid statement from the girls.

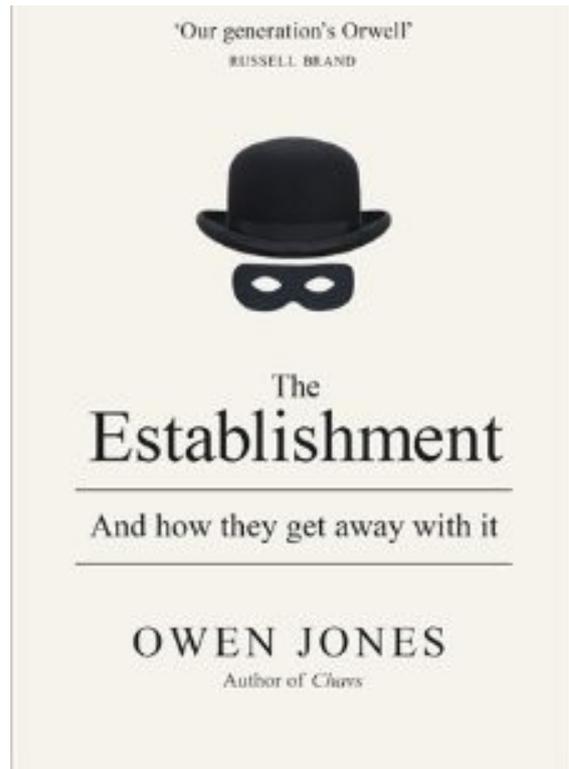
Ruth's diary June 16 1916 I met Miss Brown (a Quaker friend) and went with her to Queen's Hall to see the Sweated Industries Exhibition. The things we saw made our hearts ache, if it were possible that mine could ache more. Oh the terrible injustice meted out to hundreds and hundreds. Miss Brown seemed to know the history of all the workers (there were some working in the hall): brushmakers, artificial flower making, hook and eye sewing in cards, umbrella making—everything seemed tainted with this terrible thing. We came away feeling such an exhibition could not but bear fruit, though it may take ages to ripen.

The Establishment

The Establishment... And how they get away with it by Owen Jones (Allen Lane, 2014) With this exhaustively researched and incisive analysis of what constitutes the modern day 'establishment', Owen Jones has provided an invaluable 'know your enemy' guide for those who strive for an altruistic socialist alternative. The venality and naked self-interest that Jones details amongst the various components of it is truly astonishing. The shift away from the post-war political consensus in respect of the NHS and the Welfare State begins in the first half of the 70s, when various zealots for the free market set up think tanks such as the Centre for Policy Studies, and were funded by wealthy businessmen to promulgate their neo-liberal ideas. Jones highlights how these groups would have been dismissed as oddballs and naive back then, just as anyone challenging the new orthodoxy now is similarly regarded. The opportunity to implement their right wing dogma arose with the advent of Margaret Thatcher in Downing Street.

The political elite, the media, big business, the City and the police then came together to form the unholy alliances that represent 'the establishment'. Vested interests are the key to this. Politicians use their influence to promote the agendas of businesses that they have significant involvement in, and, therefore, stand to gain from. Accountancy firms help governments draw up tax policy and then advise clients how to get round the laws and avoid paying their taxes. Most of the newspapers are owned by a few powerful tycoons, who use them to promote their own right wing agendas, and to deflect attention away from the naked greed of those at the top—such as the reckless banks and City speculators who precipitated the 2008 economic collapse—by a relentless campaign to scapegoat those at the bottom claiming benefits and, as always, immigrants. With the smashing of union power, there is no effective means for dissenting voices to be heard. Jones reflects on how Thatcher 'bought' the police by immediately granting them a 45% pay rise when she came to power. They had an important role to play—as her impartial and politicised army that she would use to defeat the opposition.

The tone of the book is one of controlled anger at the cynicism of the current establishment, but Jones is particularly withering in his contempt for New Labour. In abandoning all socialist principles, they openly courted big business and the City, and in fact consolidated the new status quo rather than attempting to dismantle it. Jones is scathing about Labour politicians such as David Miliband, Patricia Hewitt and David Blunkett who used their positions as a launch pad for profitable careers outside of politics. Jones regards it as a damning



indictment of the Labour Party that they have failed to capitalise on the discontent and disillusionment with the coalition government, allowing the right wing populism of UKIP to become the focal point instead.

In the concluding chapter, Jones prescribes what amounts to his own socialist manifesto to depose the establishment. He advocates funding by the Trade Union movement to set up left wing think tanks, and praises disparate groups such as the trade unions, Uncut, Occupy and Disabled People Against The Cuts for providing the opposition to the coalition government. However, Jones recognises that the left is currently too fragmented and needs to work together as a broad front, pointing out the irony that those who 'preach a doctrine of rampant individualism' are often very disciplined in working together collectively in pursuit of shared goals; whereas, those who oppose them advocate solidarity but too often operate individually and act like mavericks. Jones doesn't indicate the vehicle for delivering his blueprint. He has, nevertheless, provided us with a penetrating, vital and timely exposition of the sickness at the heart of our democracy, which anyone concerned with the state of our country would do well to heed, especially with a General Election on the horizon. John O'Mahony

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