

Class Struggle according to George Orwell

A PRESENTATION BY THEO PAVLIDIS

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A Synopsis of Orwell's View - 1

- In "1984" George Orwell has included a book within a book called "The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism by Emmanuel Goldstein" where it is observed that "there (always) have been three kinds of people in the world, the **High**, the **Middle**, and the **Low**."
- **Revolutions are not the actions of the Low against the High but those of the Middle against the High.**

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A Synopsis of Orwell's View - 2

- Both groups try to obtain the alliance of the multitude of the **Low**.
- If the **Middle** succeeds in obtaining the alliance of the **Low**, a successful revolution occurs.
- On the other hand, the **High** can forestall revolutions by turning the **Low** against the **Middle**.

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A Clarification

- "1984" is best known for its description of totalitarian rule but this is not what we focus on.
- Instead, we discuss the means that the **High** uses to keep the **Middle** down.
- "Goldstein's Book" on the Web:
<http://www.notbored.org/goldstein.html>

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Who is Who

- For most of human history, land was the main source of wealth, so the **High** were the big landowners (feudal lords) who also formed the “nobility.” This began to change after the industrial revolution and today is hard to identify the members of the **High**.
- The **Middle** consists of government officials, parts of the military (especially the troops guarding the **High**), senior clergy (bishops), physicians, technologists, merchants and entrepreneurs, etc.
- One worrisome fact of current U.S. politics is that in the public perception the **Middle** is often confused with the **High**.

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The Top 1% is not the **High** - 1

- Certainly, the top 1% includes the **High**, but not everybody in the top 1% is in the **High**. People in the top 1% but not in the top 0.1% are certainly not parts of the **High**.
- Consider three individuals and their annual income :
 Tony (\$60,000, close to the US median)
 David (\$500,000, a bit over the 1% threshold), and
 Nelson (\$11,000,000, a bit over the top 0.01% threshold).

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The Top 1% is not the High - 2

- David earns \$440,000 more than Tony. But David earns \$10,500,000 less than Nelson. So, the income gap between Nelson and David is more than 20 times the income gap between David and Tony.
- Think also of the travel modes of these three: when Tony travels, they fly coach, David flies first class, and Nelson in their own private plane.
- David's interests and experience seem much closer to that of Tony than to that of Nelson.

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Why Tony Resents David, but not Nelson

- Unfortunately, for David, there is a downside to their proximity to Tony. Tony may not be aware of Nelson's existence, and it is unlikely they will ever meet. But Tony is aware of David. For example, David may be their family doctor.
- The result is that any resentment Tony has against the "rich," it is going to be expressed against people like David. The Low may resent the Middle (the top 1%) because they are people they know.

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How the **High** keeps the **Middle** in place.

- Throughout the world and for thousands of years the functions of the **Middle** have been assigned (by the **High**) to “outsiders” who could never ally themselves with the **Low**.
- The more authoritarian the rulers, the stricter was this policy.

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The Ancient Empires

- The Persian and other “Middle Eastern” rulers (including some kings of Israel) used **eunuchs** to fill government positions. That policy lasted well into the 15th century (when the Roman Empire fell) and continued in some form (in the Ottoman Empire) into the 20th century.
- In China eunuchs held many government positions from about 3000 BCE to 1912. (The last surviving imperial eunuch, Sun Yaoting, died in 1996.)

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Why Eunuchs?

- Besides been alienated from the general population, eunuchs cannot have children, so they will be dependent on their master to look after them in their old age.
- At least that is what the rulers thought.
- The reality was different. Eunuch “cliques” took care of the old age support issue and eunuchs became all powerful.

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Foreign Troops

- The shrinkage of the Roman Empire resulted in the rise of several ethnic states in proximity of each other and made possible the use of **foreign troops** to guard the **High**. Notable examples include:
 - The Varangian Guard, bodyguards of the (eastern) Roman Emperor, who were mostly Scandinavians or Anglo-Saxons.
 - The Swiss guards of the Pope, an institution that has survived into our times.

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Celibate Clergy

- Celibate clergy (priests, monks, or nuns) are another pool of safe candidates for the **Middle** because they share with the eunuchs the inability to have children. (At least legally.)
- In many medieval states, they were the only ones who knew how to read and write.

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Religious/Ethnic Minorities

- The establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire created another pool of recruits for the **Middle** who could not threaten the **High**: Adherents of other religions, primarily Jews.
- The practice was adopted by Muslim states but not China. Of course, Muslim states had other religious minorities besides Jews, and they were also recruited for the **Middle**.
- In some states the **Middle** is an ethnic minority.

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What religious/ethnic groups are the **Middle**?

- The book *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* by **Thomas Sowell** (a historian at the Hoover Institute) contains a long chapter titled *Are Jews Generic?*
- Sowell observes that “Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Ibos in Nigeria, Marwaris in Burma, overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, and Lebanese in a number of countries” had similar “economic and social roles” as the Jews in Europe.

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Middleman Minorities

- Sowell has coined the term “Middleman Minorities” for such groups, but he does not discuss the reasons for their existence. He attributes their success to their work ethic, but he does not say why the majority lacks such an ethic.
- Of course, an alternative explanation is that the *majority was not allowed or discouraged from acquiring the needed skills* for the professions practiced by the minorities.

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The Ottoman Empire - oe 1

- Because the Ottoman Empire survived until 1922, we have detailed knowledge of how most of the population was kept in the dark.
- Education was the responsibility of religious authorities and in the early grades Muslim children were taught to memorize the Quran rather than how to read or write. As a result, most Muslims were illiterate.
- Jews, Greeks, and Armenians were educated properly and filled the needs for skilled people. But as religious minorities, they did not pose a threat to the regime.

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Control of the Printing Press - oe 2

- To make sure that most Muslims were uninformed, the printing press was banned in 1485 with the excuse that printing of Arabic characters was sacrilegious.
- However, a Jewish press was approved about 20 years later, on the condition it prints only texts in the Hebrew alphabet.
- An Armenian press was approved in 1567 and a Greek one in 1627, each limited to the respective alphabets.
- It was only in 1727, almost 300 years after the invention of the printing press, that printing in Turkish with Arabic characters was allowed.

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The result of not educating Muslim children - oe 3

Bernard Lewis provides examples of the results of the policy in his book *The Middle East*. He mentions a list of 40 private bankers in Istanbul in 1912. It included 12 Greeks, 12 Armenians, 8 Jews, and 5 Levantines, people of Western European origin. A similar list of 34 stockbrokers included 18 Greeks, 6 Jews, 5 Armenians but no Turks.

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The Janissary Army - oe 4

- Instead of recruiting adult foreign soldiers, the Ottomans created their own.
- Christian communities were subject to a levy providing the sultan with a certain number of young (early teens) boys each year. The boys converted to Islam and trained as soldiers for the *Janissary Army*.
- Because the boys had little memory of their original families and were treated very well in their new environment, they were a loyal army for the Ottoman emperor (the sultan).

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A Society Needs a Healthy Middle

History shows that restricting the **Middle** is not good for the welfare of a society.

The communist regimes in which merchants and entrepreneurs are severely restricted have all suffered weak economies.

The Ottoman Empire, that did not allow most of its population to achieve a **Middle** status, fell behind Western Europe and eventually collapsed.

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From the Crusades to the Renaissance - 1

- Gibbon [Chapter LXI] has written that the major effect of the crusades was "not so much in producing a benefit as in removing an evil."
- The crusades weakened the oppressive European feudal structure (the **High**). He goes on with a metaphor: "The conflagration which destroyed the tall and barren trees of the forest gave air and scope to the vegetation of the small and nutritive plants of the soil." (The **Middle**?)

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From the Crusades to the Renaissance - 2

- It is worth adding in this context that the king of England signed the *Magna Carta* in 1215, toward the end of the period of the crusades. And the start of the Renaissance is usually placed around 1300, right after the crusades. (The first crusade was in 1097 and the last one in 1272.)

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A Historic Cataclysm caused by Strengthening the Middle

- Before the year 1000 (and even later) the Middle East was far more advanced than Western Europe.
- However, by the year 1500 the situation had been reversed and the gap has been increasing ever since.
- And all this happened because the Middle in the West became stronger, and the Middle in the East became weaker.
- **The one who won the war lost in the long run.**

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