

Letters on “Revisiting George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 2010”

19 June 2010

On “*Revisiting George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four in 2010*”

I just reread Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* last year and noted many of the same quotes you cited in your article. Another you may recall is “doublethink is a vast system of mental cheating”. This comes to mind every time I tune in to late night talk show “entertainment” including the filthy Glenn Beck.

There’s a certain demoralization that comes across in Orwell’s book; no doubt he was deeply shaken by the Stalinist purges of the late 1930’s and lacked the outlook offered by Trotsky to put it in perspective.

Some of the same demoralization was apparent in an Alternet interview with Noam Chomsky entitled “A Warning From Noam Chomsky on the Threat Posed By Elites, an interview by Alternet’s Fred Branfman”.

The interview closes with this “exchange”:

Branfman: “Noam,” I said, “I’ve just realized who you really represent to me. Do you remember how Winston Smith [the “1984” character] realized that his highest obligation to humanity and himself was just to try and remain sane, to somehow commit the truth to paper, and to hope against rational hope that somewhere, some time, future humans might come to understand and act on it? To me, at this point in time, you’re Winston Smith.” I will never forget his reaction. He just looked back at me. And smiled sadly.”

This is a pathetic—and typical—left-liberal response.

Events developing so quickly at this moment, offering so many possibilities for the working classes to grasp the necessity for socialism.

Read Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by all means, but keep in mind that the “proles” are the ones who have the power to overthrow Capitalism. If you doubt this, look at the photo on the back fly cover of the book “Red Star Over Russia”. These are the revolutionary Bolshevik workers. The look of resolve and purpose on every one of

their faces is anything but pathetic.

Randy R
California, USA

18 June 2010

Richard Mynick’s essay on Orwell was perfect. I had been led to believe that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was aimed at the Soviet Union until I read it and was surprised how much it related to life in “the West”. I’d just like to emphasize that the most important “prop” in the propaganda campaign is the need for war—any war whether real or imagined. Hence Cheney’s grotesque comment about the “war on terror” not ending in our lifetimes. He was so desperately keen to have it this way. And the media were so willing to let him get away with it.

George M
Scotland
12 June 2010

Richard Mynick’s article on George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—indeed among the most significant fiction works of the twentieth century—can only be characterized as an attempt to belatedly claim the novel in the name of socialism. Most of the article consists not of analysis of Orwell or of the historical basis of his book, but of wide-ranging points comparing phrases and concepts in the novel to modern day capitalism in the United States. In the sense that it tries to counter this “correct” interpretation to the traditional anti-communist one the article can be considered either primitive or dishonest and throughout it is unforgivably uncritical of Orwell’s political evolution, ties and his political philosophy. The article quickly dismisses out of hand the major divergences between the author’s interpretation and the actual ideas presented in the book. Above all, the fact that the 1984 regime is post-capitalist, which is not an

insignificant aspect of the book as the author of the article suggests.

On the contrary, Orwell must be approached as a product of the Bureaucratic Collectivist school, which explains *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and its ideas. Yet James Burnham's name is not mentioned in the article. In the novel, the ideology is featured prominently under the barely altered name Oligarchical Collectivism, which Orwell (through Goldstein) uses to describe the type of non-socialist, non-capitalist society he has imagined. Orwell read and was inspired by Burnham's *Managerial Revolution* (1941), which explained that capitalism was being overtaken by a new type of class society based on bureaucratic power and cited Roosevelt's New Deal, Hitler's Third Reich and Stalin's Soviet Union as examples. Burnham, who was briefly aligned to the Fourth International in the 1930s, was deeply pessimistic about the chances of socialist revolution and called into question the legitimacy of socialist philosophy and politics. Leon Trotsky famously sparred with Burnham and his developing theory of Bureaucratic Collectivism in *In Defense of Marxism*, a work of which the ICFI has been the outstanding defender. Burnham's crude, ahistorical conception was completely disproved by events during the remainder of the century, and Burnham himself went on to become a neo-conservative icon revered in reactionary circles to this day—even winning a medal from Ronald Reagan in his old age.

Even without the error of excluding this critical association, the author of the article could have explored the pessimism of the novel and the right-wing direction of Orwell, which led him to work with the British spy agencies to expose radicals before his death. Finally, by dismissing the unanimous hailing of the novel as an anticommunist classic, the author of the article is explaining a cultural phenomenon as the product of ultimately subjective rather than of objective factors—the vagueness, pessimism and considerable anti-socialist elements and themes in the book itself.

Terrence M
Massachusetts, USA
12 June 2010

Thank you, Mr. Mynick, for this mindful comparative essay. It is cogent, clear, considered. As Flaubert wrote in *Bouvard and Pecuchet*, it is not knowing the words that is the root of all problems. Be they true and obscured by policy, or false and elevated by policy, MMX.

I look forward to reading your words more.

“Trust those who are seeking the Truth. Doubt those who find it.”—Andre Gide

Jeffrey A
Georgia, USA
12 June 2010

Thank you, Richard for writing an insightful and accurate comparison between Orwell's novel and his warning about authoritarian/totalitarian government, and what has been “implemented” in the United States by the ruling-elite. So many people in the peace and justice movement are still aligned with Obama and the Democrats, making excuses for his policies, and the expansion of the Bush/Cheney agenda.

As a retired trade unionist, I fault the union leadership at the top for their unswerving loyalty to the Democratic Party, which has betrayed Labor almost every step of the way, going back decades.

But the parallels in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the US circa 2010, are striking. Doublespeak works, with the average person. Again, thanks for the article!

Frank L
13 June 2010

This article was beautifully written, and reads as truth from start to finish. I myself have been drawing parallels in the strange way society and culture has developed in the last 10 years with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and most of my ideas, and a lot more were presented in this article. It's very depressing to read, but at the same time, it's somehow encouraging and lends a little hope to know that this type of conversation is still going on out there. Thank you.

Dave F
Canada
13 June 2010



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