

Orwell: Neocon icon

Written by Eric Walberg Эрик Вальберг/ Уолберг □□□□□ □□□□□□
Sunday, 18 August 2019 17:38



How do you explain the fact that the John Birch Society used 1984 as its main office telephone number in the 1960s? Or that both *Animal Farm* and *1984*, are force-fed to virtually the entire western world in people's formative years in their teens, even as Big Brother jacks up repression and surveillance, and pursues ever more cruel and senseless wars?

A look at Orwell's weaknesses reveals how Big Brother turn the tables on him, getting the last laugh.

Both *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949) are listed on the Random House Modern Library [100 Best Novels](#) of the 20th century (#31 and #13), and have been translated into more than 60 languages, more than any other novels. Orwell "helped prevent the realization of the totalitarian world he described", according Jeffrey Meyers in *Orwell: Wintry Conscience Of A Generation* (2001). We are taught in school to revere his warnings against "Thought Police" and the supreme importance of individual rights and freedom of thought.

An antihero's vaccine

On the surface, he looks oddly heroic—a scholarship to Eton, disdaining Cambridge to serve as a policeman in Burma; his gritty apprenticeship as a writer bumming around Paris and across Britain; escaping death by a whisker fighting fascism in Spain; writing his political allegories as he wasted away from the 'poor writer's disease'. The unrelenting pessimism of his work reflects

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his “inner need to sabotage his chance for a happy life”, observers Jeffrey Meyers in Orwell: Wintry Conscience Of A Generation (2001).

It is as if he wanted to suffer, and make his one love, his first wife Eileen, suffer along with him, first in an isolated, decrepit cottage in Wallington and then exposed to death in Barcelona. She predeceased him in a botched hysterectomy while he was reporting from liberated Germany in 1945, himself fatally ill. Within weeks of her sudden death, he was proposing to various women, but they rejected the clearly very ill Orwell, who insisted in living on a cold, rainy Hebrides island, Jura, miles from the nearest town, without electricity, in conditions guaranteed to kill him.

His identification with the poor and downtrodden, plus his sado-masochistic neurosis (colonial policeman, believer in the strap as teacher, willful destroyer of his own health, bungler in love) resulted in *Animal Farm* and *1984*, which were immediately promoted by his own 1984 Oceania power zone—the US/British empire—as a powerful ideological weapon to fight the other zones—Eurasia (the Soviet Union and Europe, which Orwell assumed would be taken over *in toto* by a now-'imperial' USSR following the nuclear WWII) and Eastasia (China and Japan).

In *1984*, the 'hero' Winston Smith ends up an alcoholic, brainwashed into loving Big Brother. In our Oceania power zone, Orwell's message is mangled, its dystopian reflection on modern society limited to the Soviet Union, which at the time was under Stalin's harsh dictatorship. The novel was/is taught as a warning not about East and West, but only the East.

This is not what Orwell intended at all. *1984* was a parody of 1948 Labor Britain, now seen by Orwell as just another Soviet Union. Oceania ruled the world, and there was no hope left, East or West. There is no 'happy ending' in 1984.

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So his message (a pox on both your houses) was lost, and the novel proved to be a devastating weapon only aimed at Oceania's rivals, not at Oceania itself. Did Orwell help "prevent the realization of the totalitarian world"? Not by a long shot. Oceania is alive and well!

Even as schoolchildren are indoctrinated by Orwell's gloomy social fables, "Newspeak" and "Thought Police" are more widespread than ever, and we remain under their control.

Orwellian indoctrination, using Orwell as a kind of vaccine, helped Oceania not only to defeat communism, but to move decisively against the remaining enemies after 2001, invading the disputed Middle East/ Central Asia, with nary a peep from the proles. It seems that rather than waking people up to their chains, Orwell's novels, and their incorporation into mass commercial culture, have acted as a kind of inoculation, inuring people to the totalitarian 'dis-ease' even as it metastasizes. How did this remarkable psychosomatic phenomenon come about?

Arrested development

Penniless, scruffy Orwell, so adamantly devoted to (his) personal freedom, so disdainful of capitalism with its commodity fetishism. As he lay dying in an elite London hospital, he fumed against an ad for a sock suspender on the leg of a classical hero: "Physical beauty is a sacred thing and should be shielded from the vile devices of advertisers," he lectured Malcom Muggerridge. He had witnessed friends like Cyril Connolly sell out to live a sybaritic lifestyle.

Yet he turned against the only group that stood firmly against capitalism, his communist acquaintances. On his deathbed, he married a cynical Connolly groupie, Sonya Brownell bequeathing her his new, very lucrative name. A lifelong republican, he embraced the monarchy. A lifelong atheist, he pleaded for a church funeral and burial. Where and how did the ascetic, working class hero lose it?

Orwell's neurotic, depressive character, his outsized ego, his repressive public school

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upbringing and cold, almost fatherless family life, are all there in his writing. He was a loner, and could never work with anyone, let alone a movement, for long. He refused to join any political group, and as the communists rallied around the dictator Stalin in defense of 'real existing socialism', it became impossible for him to work with his natural allies against fascism.

In his occasional teaching jobs in the 1930s, he was remembered as 'liberally' using a switch to poke and punish students, sometimes on the slightest account. At the same time, he taught some how to make explosives. So he was alternately a dictator and a naughty teenage gang leader thumbing his nose at authority. No room here for a social movement to unite people to overthrow capitalism.

He was haunted by his father's career as a supervisor in the Indian Opium Department, preparing the deadly narcotic for export to China, and yet stubbornly pursued a similar career, as a policeman in Burma in service to empire, instead of going to university in 1922. He was forced to search out and repress activists in the Burmese national liberation movement, and defend what he came to see as a massive protection racket, under the phony pretext of forcibly civilizing backward natives.

His strongly anti-imperialist *Burma Days* (1934) was banned there. He got this right, but his uneducated revulsion against capitalism/ imperialism ultimately led him to his simplistic depiction of the world in *1984* of supposedly interchangeable empires brainwashing their masses into subservience, using "doublethink" and Thought Police. But they were not really interchangeable. Orwell's anti-imperialism was skin deep. 'Our empire' was good; theirs—bad.

Even worse, Orwell sketched a future where the perpetual war between the "super-states" was purely for propaganda purposes, ignoring the real post-WWII struggles for national liberation, supported by Orwell's Eurasia/ Eastasia (Soviet Union/ China).

Most damnable of all, what can only be called Orwell's vindictive hatred of communism led him down the slippery slope of McCarthyism, providing names to British intelligence of people he

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thought were communists, even as he protested their dismissal by the post-WWII Labour government, Washington's willing servant.

Like Salvador Dali, he casually exposed communist friends. Dali did this thoughtlessly to Bunuel in his 1942 autobiography. Bunuel was immediately fired from the Museum of Modern Art in New York and deported at the very moment he was delicately trying to acquire US citizenship. Orwell enthusiastically joined in the witch hunt in his 1949 list of 35 cultural figures who he considered crypto-communists for the Foreign Office's Information Research Department, people who Orwell felt "should not be trusted as propagandists".

They included (with Orwell's comments in brackets): Charlie Chaplin, Michael Redgrave, Orson Welles, Nancy Cunard (silly), Sean O'Casey (very stupid), Paul Robeson (very anti-white), John Steinbeck (spurious writer, pseudo-naïf) Shaw (reliably pro-Russian on all major issues), Kingsley Martin of the New Statesman (decayed liberal. very dishonest).

Can you believe this? Orwell playing the role of Big Brother's Thought Police. Biographer Myers uncomfortably excuses him, saying this was "necessary, even commendable", and incongruously states that Orwell "strongly supported civil rights".

His analysis of the world was as simplistic, rudderless as that of his cardboard characters in 1984 :
Communism = Thoughtcrime.

Orwell, sex and perpetual wars

Winston, reacting against the Party's desire to repress sex, mirrors Orwell's own life, not the policy of either the capitalists, fascists or communists). He admires Julia's promiscuity, the fact that she is not interested in loving one person but in freeing her animal instinct, liberating her "simple undifferentiated desire, the force that would tear the Party to pieces."

It seems Orwell was actually embracing Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1931), where promiscuity reigns.

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does not allow pornography and prostitution, whereas

Brave New World

relies explicitly on sex and drugs to be manipulated and serve the status quo.

Orwell's complaint to Malcolm Muggeridge about the sexy sock ad would have had greater resonance in his hated Soviet Union, where beauty was indeed considered sacred and where such ads did not exist. Soviet 'ads' exhorted workers to produce simple textiles cheaply and efficiently for mass consumption, without harnessing the proles' sex instincts in the service of profit.

In Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business (1985), Neil Postman argues in line with Huxley that our totalitarian social order doesn't need to deny human rights like free speech, but rather conditions us not to use our rights, by filling our minds with commercial images and harnessing sexual desire to commodities.

The post-WWII wars were by the empire, Orwell's Oceania, against communism (Orwell's Eurasia and Eastasia) in competition for Africa, the Middle East, India and Indonesia. The war fever indeed was/is used to keep all the proles in line, but there were clear ideological differences: the wars were wars of liberation of Oceania's colonies seeking freedom with the help of Eurasia (Soviet Union)/ Eastasia (China). Was this so difficult for Orwell, the anti-imperialist, to foresee?

What Orwell does best is intuit the logic of late capitalism, where war and war preparations by the military-industrial complex become the means to destroy the surplus produced by high tech industrial society, without allowing the proles to become too demanding and realizing that they don't need a parasitic elite to control them. They are kept in poverty, producing military equipment which is never used:

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In the long run, a hierarchical society was only possible on a basis of poverty and ignorance. A Floating Fortress has locked up in it the labour that would build several hundred cargo-ships. Ultimately it is scrapped as obsolete, never having brought any material benefit to anybody, and with further enormous labours another Floating Fortress is built. In principle the war effort is always so planned as to eat up any surplus that might exist after meeting the bare needs of the population.

Yes, 'eat up any surplus' but this is only the logic of Oceania. Orwell somehow forgot that the West was capitalist (based on surplus production and expropriation by the elite), and that the Soviet Union was not tied to this vicious circle of production/ destruction, that it was quite capable of distributing its surplus to its proles to improve their standard of living. 1984 posits three deformed ideologies (for Oceania, Ingsoc), where the proles inexplicably have to live forever in poverty. But the economic logic hered is capitalist, something that Orwell either overlooked or didn't really understand.

This is unforgivable, as capitalism was alive and well as he wrote, and we expect Orwell to be our "wintry conscience". America's commercial culture, full of sexy ads, was apparent to Huxley in the 1930s—Marcuse's [repressive desublimation](#) —the spider's web to keep the proles captive. Couldn't Orwell reflect on the sexy sock ad and put two and two together?

Hoisted with his own petard

Orwell's Big Brother and Inner Party were made to order for Oceania after WWII, when the threat of revolution in western Europe was very real. A vaccine against communism was urgent. In our pseudo-reality, it's okay to be cynical and critical about capitalism, as long as you don't get infected with the socialist virus. The Thought Police used Orwell to vaccinate potential revolutionaries.

Late capitalism's wars, while partly to keep the proles in line, do have other motives, primarily control of the world's resource, which Orwell dismisses as passe. And the Cold War meant

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something very different to the Soviet 'enemy' and the struggling third world, who were fighting for their existence, not just as a whim of their "Inner Parties".

Commodity fetishism (the real virus) and the ability of capitalism to manufacture desires (and sort-of satisfy them) eventually infected the Soviet Union and provided a powerful weapon to Oceania in its war to destroy Eurasia. Eastasia (China) abandoned its communist character before it could be destroyed, and has now swamped Oceania with commodities, threatening Oceania itself.

Orwell has come somewhat into his own only with the collapse of his hated Soviet Union and especially since 911 and the invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.

All that is needed is that a state of war should exist. ... It is often necessary for a member of the Inner Party to know that this or that item of war news is untruthful, and he may often be aware that the entire war is spurious and ... is being waged for purposes quite other than the declared ones: but such knowledge is easily neutralized by the technique of DOUBLETHINK.

Missing the point

That Orwell misread political developments is an understatement. He was politically tone deaf. After returning from Spain in 1937, he adhered to the Independent Labour Party's pacifism, refusing to support efforts for a common front with the Soviet Union against fascism.

When the Soviet Union was finally a war ally, like the anti-communist Churchill et al, he was briefly pro-Soviet, while broadcasting pro-empire BBC propaganda to India (his first full-time job since he was a policeman in Burma) and writing his anti-communist screeds. His hatred of the Soviet Union now meant opposing the end of empire, as the colonies would turn to the Soviet Union as a model, and like Churchill, Orwell preferred they remain British colonies.

The staunch republican became a fervent monarchist, as protection against the possible rise of a dictator, fearing the totalitarian values of Hitler/ Stalin. But were these dictators the real problem? We can now see that these regimes, which relied overtly on terror, were not so sturdy as Orwell's dystopia leads us to believe, that human values survive under fallible dictators. The real totalitarian threat was/is the rule of money and commodity fetishism.

Orwell failed to see that the final brick in totalitarianism's wall was an ideology not of hate and fear, but of sexy legs and smiling models enticing prole-consumers into pursuing will-o-the-wisp happiness in endless consumption. Big Brother's Victorian strictures are no match for repressive desublimation, especially when the proles are vaccinated by a healthy dose of Orwellian criticism. Orwell's anti-communist ravings fit the post-WWII West to a T.

Orwell became a model for writers such as Ray Bradbury (Fahrenheit 451 (1953)), Angry-Young-Men John Osborne (Look Back in Anger (1957)) and Alan Sillitoe (The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1959)), Anthony Burgess (Clockwork Orange (1962)), Paul Theroux, John le Carre, and ex-communist Doris Lessing, all of whom had an Orwellian critical view of contemporary society where there is no exit, but—just as important—no alternative.

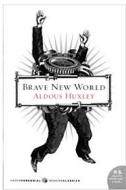
The perfect 'free' culture for capitalism, proudly secular, postmodern, but where TINA (there is no alternative) rules, as famously coined by Margaret Thatcher. Orwell's legacy proved flexible enough to allow neoconservatives to cite him as they invade countries where dictators are called 'totalitarian', or for liberals and leftists to cite him to support their (bland and hopeless) struggles for 'human rights'. Any evidence of Orwell's socialism has long been swept under the carpet.

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When 1984 hit the stands in 1949, I Anisimov wrote in Pravda of Orwell's "contempt for the people, his aim of slandering man." James Walsh in Marxist Quarterly criticized his "neurotic and depressing hatred of everything approaching progress." Indeed, as Orwell depicts them, the various non-pig animals in Animal Farm and the proles in 1984 are easily misled and cannot be relied on. Only individuals, misfits like Winston/ Orwell can see through the cant, and the possibility of their prevailing is nil. They have no alternative.



As dystopian novels go, Aldus Huxley's Brave New World (1932, Modern Library's #5) wins hands down as relevant today, taking Wells's insight that it's unbridled technology under capitalism that drives dystopia, and capitalism would use sex as a means of social control. Rebels Lenina Crowne and Bernard Marx, a psychologist, travel from the World State to see native Americans living at Savage Reservation, the last remnants of people unprogrammed in the World State, where people are kept under control by the drug soma.

Losing his way

Orwell, the literary traveler/ adventurer, liked to compare himself to DH Lawrence, who also died young of consumption after a repressive upbringing and an unhappy struggle as a writer, but he is in fact closer to TE Lawrence. Lawrence of Arabia and Orwell were both ambivalent towards imperialism, suffered from sado-masochistic neurosis due to their troubled upbringing, and were harnessed to the needs of empire.

DH Lawrence, at least, struggled to overcome his British stiff upper lip, anticipating hippiedom's 'free love' of late capitalism. This is far from Orwell's experience; he scorned the "bearded fruit-juice drinking sandal-wearers of the roll-in-the-dew-before-breakfast school." The Arabian Lawrence, like Orwell, unwittingly supported empire and succumbed to self-destructive feelings

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of guilt and personal inadequacy, famously dying in a motorcycle accident in 1935, consumed by remorse for how his legacy was perverted by empire. Lawrence and Orwell were both 47 when they died.

Like Orwell, Koestler was an adventurer, promiscuous and a cold fish, who also turned against his erstwhile communist comrades and turned out a stream of pessimist screeds that the empire picked up and promoted in its post-WWII Great Game against communism and third world liberation. Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940, #6 on the Modern Library list) and "The Yogi and the Commissar" (1945), like Orwell's *1984*, effectively supported our own Big Brother, who really didn't need their talents to prevail anyway. Koestler's suicide pact with his wife in 1983 recapitulates the despairing end of both TE Lawrence and Orwell.

They all lost their way on the imperial map, unable to chart a new course, or better, to draw a new map free of the imperial boundaries. Orwell almost got it right in Burma, but stumbled on his own neurosis, his lack of a clear (Marxist) analytical framework. He rejected any "smelly little orthodoxy" and ended up with a half-baked analysis of a complex political reality.

1984 'bad', Animal Farm 'good'

Orwell got things horribly wrong in 1984. Stalinism withered and the Soviet Union embraced humanism by the mid-1950s. It was not some totalitarian monster at work, but capitalism, which took over the world, and became ever more poisonous, despite nice, but harmless, critics in the "Outer Party" like Winston/ Orwell (today, Zizek, Chomsky, et al). Capitalism is the real totalitarian genius, fusing political and economic mechanisms in a system where infinite power can be amassed via money, which penetrates all aspects of life including Orwell's precious "undifferentiated desire".

This is in contrast to (albeit, failed) communist ideology, which rejected money as the social foundation, and thus had only a limited control over people, never reaching the level of soul and the unconscious, as does the West's market-driven consumerism. There was no effective Soviet vaccine against the dis-ease of capitalism.

Unlike 1984, Orwell's *Animal Farm* has survived as a compelling critique of socialism/communism. There, the 'proles' (animals) have a revolution against the capitalists (humans), and are briefly liberated. Yes, the pigs begin to ape the humans and are seen as no better. This eventually happened, the British Labour Party's welfare socialism, and later, the communist elites in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. But the 'pigs' (Labourites, communists) were overthrown, and the 'humans' (Thatcher, Russian oligarchs) took back the farm. A cautionary tale about 'power corrupting'.

Israel Shamir takes *Animal Farm* to its post-communist logical conclusion. ["Animal Farm revisited"](#)

documents how Stinky, the head pig, sells out the inefficient animal-run farm to a slick farmer bearing Marlboro cigarettes and nylons, and the "excess" animals are promptly carted off to the slaughter house. The few remaining escape to the woods and remember even their porcine tyranny fondly.

Shy and clumsy with people, Orwell was easily manipulated, didn't really believe in 'the people', and never thought much about souls until the atheist panicked on his deathbed, calling for a Church of England funeral. His communist foes at least stuck to their belief in 'the people' as a force that would prevail. Oceania (the US) faces genuine countervailing powers (Russia, China, Iran, et al). The resurgence of Islam, and of socialism in the heart of the beast, are signs of a post-1984 alternative reality based on morality and social justice taking shape.
