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The 60th Anniversary of Orwell's 1984

Sixty years following its first publication and twenty-five since the fateful year, George Orwell's 1984 remains a mystery to the experts. They convene often in exotic places to agree that Orwell wrote a dystopia on the communist take-over of Britain and America. They concur how he reversed the final two digits of the year he wrote the book — 1948 — to arrive at the title 1984. They write that Orwell was not a prophet and few predictions fill his volume. These consensus beliefs on 1984 by the experts still shape the views of tens of millions of citizens who read Orwell's work in the public schools and colleges.



Experts can often befuddle. They sold the banking world on using derivatives. Experts in real estate failed to warn about the consequences of zero-down mortgages sold to non-qualified home purchasers. Again and again experts lead us to believe they are more competent than they really are. They want us to stand in awe of their pronouncements and never to challenge them. But following steep declines in the domestic economy and the mortgage industry, few people today doubt that the experts can be fallible, and never more than when collectively they agree about the facts pertaining to the Orwellian masterpiece.

What better time than now, twenty-five years since the fateful year 1984, to correct the errors of the consensus experts? Do not the media provide copious coverage of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the terrorist explosion killing 237 marines in Beirut? Then why not celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Orwell's fateful date to provide a retrospective, and answer whether or not Orwell wrote about the future conquest of Britain and America by the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin? Or whether Orwell arrived at his title by reversing the final two digits of 1948, the year when ostensibly he wrote *1984*? Or whether we can confirm that the book contains no predictions?

As we shall see, *1984* is, in fact, not a vilification of the Soviet dictator Stalin. Nor was the title chosen by reversing the final two digits of the year in which the book was written. Rather, the book is satire of the highest order written against Fabian socialists. They are the breed of English socialists seeking to reform the British economic system, favoring public ownership of the means of production. They also favor state-controlled schools, nationalization of land ownership, and the welfare state. Their foreign policy is internationalist. Orwell wrote his powerful satire to show how Fabian socialism could reform the world until it resembled Stalin's Soviet Union, even if it took 100 years. Moreover, Orwell's scenario is chock full of "predictions" — 137 of them — that describe the daily life of citizens in Anglo-America living in a socialist state modeled after the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin.

How legions of *1984* experts fail to decipher these basic truths remains a mystery even now, 60 years since Orwell's masterpiece burst on the scene in Britain and America.

Orwell on Stalin



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When George Orwell wrote *Animal Farm*, published in 1945, he delivered much vitriol against the Soviet government — Soviet leaders were cast as the pigs. Americans who acquired the rights to *1984* from Orwell's widow and second wife, Sonia, would have us believe — along with many Orwell scholars — that Stalin is Big Brother in *1984*. This is wrong. Published in 1949, Orwell's *1984* states clearly that Big Brother is merely a televised image. Though Stalin may be a distant benefactor, Big Brother symbolizes the rise of super agencies in Britain and America staffed by intellectuals on the political Left. A letter from George Orwell to the author Sidney Sheldon that has recently come to light confirms this hypothesis. It states that *1984* is an exercise in “trying to imagine what communism would be like if it were firmly rooted in the English speaking countries, and was no longer a mere extension of the Russian Foreign Office.”

Similarly, Orwell hardly meant for the satire to be a repudiation of all breeds of socialism. He further stated to Sheldon, “What I most particularly did not intend was an attack of the British Labour Party, or on a collectivist economy as such.” Orwell states that the book is not “a sermon on what Socialism in England must lead to.” He is informing readers that by the year 1984, the respected socialist leaders of his day, like Clement Atlee who defeated Winston Churchill to become Prime Minister in 1945, would be retired. Then younger socialists born in 1945, the first year of the Labour Party's post-World War II tenure in office, would be 39 years old, prepared to replace the earlier generation. Having been raised under state socialism, the bullies among them handed the reins of power could establish a state so totalitarian that it would destroy every vestige of democratic thought. Orwell was sure that the Atlee government meant no harm — although on Atlee's watch Big Brother super-agencies emerged capable of regulating every aspect of citizen life.

Orwell foresaw how the coming generations of younger Fabians building on the precedent of universal healthcare would employ the emergent welfare state, then, bloated by obedient Left intellectuals intent on increasing governmental power, could become dictatorial. In *1984*, instead of bringing the promised peace, truth, love, and plenty, new Fabians would construct enormous ministries devoted to war, deceit, and hatred. In secret, this future generation of Fabians would create shortages, and use fears engendered by the shortages to impose Draconian governmental controls.

Indeed, Orwell while employed by the BBC and the Ministry of Information observed how “totalitarian ideas had taken root” in intellectual socialists. They often represented the tenured elite at universities and government, unable to be ousted whatever leadership took over. Claiming to be above politics, the new apostles of government power, Fabian socialists, believed that their university educations made them high-born. They could trace back their academic bloodlines to famous socialists of the past, much as we Americans look back on Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln.

Becoming apostles of the adviser to Ren-aissance princes, Niccolo Machiavelli, who taught them cunning and deceit in politics, the Fabian socialists determined to conquer their competitors regardless of time and cost. Through collectivist political teachings, contrived crises, and central planning, they expected that like a ripe fruit, the control of government in Britain and America would fall into their hands. They planned by committee to seize power by citing the good works of famous Fabian socialists like Beatrice and Sidney Webb, H. G. Wells, and George Bernard Shaw.

1984's Satirical Targets

The targets for Orwell's blistering, boisterous satire in page after page of *1984* are members of the London Fabian Society. That organization, whose public face was Beatrice and Sidney Webb, created the organized socialist groups rooted in universities like University College London and the London



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School of Economics. They constructed curricula based on the premise that technological knowledge is power. George Bernard Shaw inflamed the popular imagination to believe that rule by an educated elite would become the political ideal. Their combined ideas powered the movement leading to the requirement that at least four years of university training filled with socialist indoctrination be required before students could graduate, then enter into learned professions.

Beatrice and Sidney Webb became Orwell's targets because they demanded that socialist ideals benefit the power elite more than mere commoners. Even fellow Fabian socialist H. G. Wells attacked the Webbian excesses. They became Victor and Altiora Bailey in his cruel satire, *The New Machiavelli*. He disparaged their penchant to hold dinners for the super-rich and super-powerful who then were fed Fabian teachings and advice on how to rule more efficiently. The aim of these dinners was to permeate society with expanding socialist control over the people, rather than power shared by the people. Victor and Altiora promised social reform and a louder voice for citizens in government, while they courted believers in imperialism.

Through numerous allusions, Orwell tipped us off that the rulers in *1984* are Fabians of the younger generation. Book characters are named after obscure and esteemed socialists from the past. Party members quack to each other in duckspeak, bringing to mind webbed feet. Most significantly, Sidney Webb appears as Goldstein, who split with Big Brother. Brilliantly, Orwell transforms Goldstein into a sheep among the bleating flock. Webb, because of his goatee and whining voice, was called Nanny by parliamentary opposition, who were known to bleat in the back benches when he spoke. These are some of the obvious allusions. The most biting satire of all, however, is found in the title of Orwell's book.

The title Orwell chose, *1984*, provides the cornerstone for the biting satire against the Fabians. The symbol of the Fabian Society was a turtle, reflecting slow movement toward objectives that might take a hundred years. This fixation of "a hundred years hence" appears in a famous Fabian pamphlet devoted to the centenary of the French Revolution. This suggests one reason why Orwell chose his book title. A collector of pamphlets, he knew how the Fabian Society of London was founded on January 4, 1884.

The first Fabian pamphlet was published on April 4, 1884. The first day mentioned in *1984* is April 4. While Orwell was searching for a title, the *Times* reported that the London Fabian Society was celebrating its 60th anniversary in 1947, three years late, delayed because of the war. Orwell's first wife, Eileen, formerly a student at University College in London, penned a poem entitled "End of the Century, 1984." It was published in the *Sunderland Church High School Magazine*. We can easily imagine how, sharing a pillow, George and Eileen spoke about Webbian Socialism and what form it might take a hundred years ahead during calendar year 1984.

The breed of socialism presaged by the Webbs, and embellished by their younger protege, William Beveridge, need not be inferred from obscure clues. In 1932, the Webbs visited the "new" Russia under Stalin. Upon returning to London, they regurgitated the information given to them by the Soviet Foreign Office. Obvious exaggerations and outright lies appeared in their big book entitled *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* This publication established Stalin as a "necessary hero." A second edition followed two years later with the title altered slightly: The Webbs removed the question mark. In 1942, Beatrice wrote *The Truth About Soviet Russia*, denying that Stalin was a dictator. Thus could Orwell, familiar with Beatrice and Sidney, hunch over his battered typewriter and pound out page after page of *1984*. The end result became the scenario in *1984* that combines the pro-Soviet vision of the Webbs with Big Brother government enacted by the arrogant new Fabians.

Orwell had earlier written satire against the Fabians. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he ridiculed Beatrice



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and her male Webbian followers, who wore beards, beads, and sandals. They also experimented with drugs, sex, and the secret religion. The Fabian beliefs in spiritualist teachings is spoken by O'Brien, who tortures *1984's* protagonist Winston Smith. O'Brien reflects the new Fabian socialism emerging in the 1940s, led by William Beveridge, who laid the foundation for Britain's National Social Insurance and National Health Service with *The Report on Social Insurance*, commonly known as the *Beveridge Report*. The goal of the new Fabians was Big Brother government offering cradle-to-grave security.

In parts of India where Orwell during his early years lived with his family, Big Brother means the close relative who provides financial support to the family. Orwell, remembering the 1942 Beveridge Report, which was used by Clement Atlee in 1945 as a campaign issue, knew that the full Beveridge package comprised more than a National Health Service. It included paid postpartum leave for mothers, child support, compulsory education until college, part-time vocational education, free lunches for students, pay raises for teachers, improved physical education, unemployment insurance, job priority for veterans, welfare for youth, training for the handicapped, government housing around parks, and even payment of funeral expenses. It was literally cradle-to-grave security.

It required new ministries to be built and filled with bureaucrats, in which government holds total power over its citizens. Orwell believed that power over citizens would grow annually until, by the calendar year 1984, Fabian socialists, who were always increasing their numbers through university education, would become sufficiently numerous to remain perpetually in power. No revolution could ever overthrow them.

Orwell saw firsthand how younger Fabians rose to power in proportion to their ability to engage in self-censure, teamwork, and shared journalism and broadcasting. They preferred comrades who tamed emotions and individuality, and showed loyalty to an international brotherhood. The new Fabians as a social class comprised professors, scientists, technologists, advertisers, journalists, public relations specialists, labor union leaders, and celebrities. They represented a collectivistic oligarchy always expanding their oppressive reach into private lives.

Orwell perceived as well how efficient men and women, once awarded Fabian credentials, permeated the schools step by step, as well as shops, homes, hospitals, churches, radio, television, and the cinema, bombarding the public with shared images. New Fabians in one voice taught citizens whom to fear and love. Their messages were embedded in newspaper stories and magazines, media programming, and school education. In their collective view, mammoth government ensured inevitable victory. They represented a monstrous organism too large ever to fail.

Simply stated, Orwell believed that two generations after the implemented *Beveridge Report*, a new civilization could arise in Britain and America. New Fabians would stock hollow-eyed agencies with obedient intellectuals. The future would belong to them, ruling by committees of equals. Then the university-trained propagandists, poster artists, pamphleteers, illustrators, lecturers, film producers, ghost-writers, broadcasters, teachers, literary experts, economists, psychologists, biologists, engineers, and mathematicians laboring in unison would rubber-stamp socialist decisions meant to allay any problems troubling the upper class.

Predictions Become "Predictions"

Experts on *1984* often proclaim that few predictions can be found in the book. Since Walter Cronkite wrote the preface to the Signet *1984* paperback edition, scholars can cite his preface to debunk the idea of predictions. Cronkite stated, "George Orwell was no prophet and those who busy themselves keeping



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score of his predictions and grading his use of the crystal ball miss the point." What Orwell did was write a novelistic essay on "power, how it is acquired and maintained, how those who seek it or seek to keep it tend to sacrifice anything and everything to keep it." Therefore, an executor of the Orwell estate suggested using the word "predictions" — in quotes — when referring to alleged future events. Cronkite did acknowledge that the book is "a warning: a warning about the future of human freedom in a world where political organization and technology can manufacture power in dimensions that would have stunned the imaginations of earlier ages." Orwell, therefore, was less a prophet than the satirist who established benchmarks for arrival of a totalitarian society. The items cited below can be viewed as "predictions" warning about the world's future when the norm becomes fighting perpetual war against foes, flying bombs crashing against buildings, and the response by Fabian leaders, as Cronkite observes, in meeting citizen demands for "greater security and comfort." In other words, during dangerous times, *1984* can become the preferred future.

We illustrate from a list of 137 Orwell "predictions." In *1984*, Orwell wrote about decisions made following atomic attacks on Great Britain in the 1950s. While the rubble cooled, government set up investigatory committees. Experts on the committees knew they had to exonerate the ruling class from blame and echo opinions of colleagues on investigatory panels. Orwell identified their mental mechanisms as *crimestop*, diverting attention from criminal deeds by anyone in a position of power; *blackwhite* meant agreeing with people in power that black is white when they want it to be. *Doublethink* was refusal to let facts get in the way of preconceived conclusions. In the name of making citizens feel more secure, such panelists in real life assured Americans that the murders of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King were the work of "lone nuts." But was this true in every instance? By implication, collectivists never could conspire to kill world leaders.

Following the kamikaze-like attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, in real life as in *1984*, the attacks are described as acts of terror. In *1984*, the leaders of Eurasia launch a surprise atomic attack against the Allies, leading to the establishment of dictatorial powers at home ostensibly to combat the threat from abroad. Today, the rise of terrorism leads to the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, a term that sounds like an invention by the Soviets under Stalin to scare the people.

In *1984*, warfare becomes continuous and is conducted against foes, fought in a rough quadrilateral with its corners at Tangier, Brazzaville, Darwin, and Hong Kong. In *1984*, this includes the Malabar Front in India. In real life, it perfectly brackets Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, cauldrons near and above the boiling point today.

Atomic, biological, and chemical weapons in *1984* remain in the hands of three major powers named Oceania, Eurasia, and East Asia. These comprise the United States and Britain (which together have gobbled up Central and South America); Russia incorporating Western Europe; and China holding hegemony over Japan and Korea. This scenario corresponds today to an aggressive America confronting the sword-wielding Russia and the armies of China.

In *1984*, captured by police as a suspected terrorist, Orwell's chief protagonist Winston Smith is declared "a minority of one," a mental illness. He is an intelligent person not restrained by threats of punishment. He is tortured by O'Brien. In real life, the DSM-V diagnostic manual due in 2012, sponsored by the American Psychiatric Association, according to critics comes close to pathologizing the entire American population. With government having taken full advantage of such expert opinion, tens of millions of Americans could be placed on the mental-illness watch list for just being moody, and



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declared to be too active or inactive.

Police surveillance in England has become as ubiquitous in real life as in Orwell's novel. Tens of thousands of hidden cameras, some hidden in wall panels, scan the faces and bodies of loyal citizens. Police seek facial expressions and body language as telltale signs of citizens capable of disloyal acts against the government. London is now a spider web with cameras recording millions of citizens conducting their daily business. America is moving in the same direction under the Homeland Security and Justice Departments.

Police establish checkpoints in *1984* and demand that citizens show papers. They also monitor all communications between people. Today citizens submit to random stops. Police searching for DUIs establish checkpoints. Luggage today is opened in transit. National Security Agency technicians read electronic transmissions sucked out of the skies. An article in *New Scientist* discloses how certified cellphone analysts can routinely extract names, passport and banking information, personal friends, credit card numbers, and travel information from devices we carry in pockets and purses. We drive automobiles that beam our locations up to spy satellites.

School education in *1984* made sure that open-minded intelligent rebels could never emerge again. The masses were granted intellectual liberty because "they have no intellect." Today in schools, grade inflation and favors to unmotivated yet affluent students are especially rampant in public and private high schools and colleges. The SAT was rewritten to lift the scores of students. Clearly, our culture that bombards viewers with staccato images induces shorter and shorter attention spans, particularly in impressionable youth.

Orwell foresaw large telescreens in *1984*. Arrayed in front of these monstrous instruments, he saw large audiences conditioned daily to fear and to hate. In *1984*, the Party members despise Goldstein the terrorist; they throw things at the huge telescreen when his face appears. Today increasingly large television screens, often depicting gore and brutality, inure children toward violence, including the horrors of war.

These comprise just a small part of the list containing 137 "predictions" for *1984*. Who can fail to see how power-hungry bullies, university trained and on the political Left, through advancing technology seem to stop at nothing in their pursuit of order and law. We have been conditioned to obey them. We take off shoes before we board an airplane. We expect orbiting satellites to read our license plates. We feel that day by day the media multiply our fears. We are alerted to real or perceived dangers of weapons loaded with uranium, anthrax sent through the mails, swine flu mutants, E. coli in our food, exploding gas tanks, killer bees, and explosives manufactured from fertilizer. This is our world today, propelled by the intellectual descendants of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, H. G. Wells, and George Bernard Shaw.

What We Must Do

The masterpiece *1984*, therefore, stems from decisions made in Fabian circles beginning in 1884 and continuing for a hundred years. The book may be called a dystopia about totalitarian Britain and America, but there is a great deal more to Orwell's purpose than that. It is a book warning about how socialism cast free of its moral anchors could eventually lead to an all-powerful state exercising totalitarian rule. Clearly *1984* is Orwell's projection of the *Beveridge Report* and Winston Churchill's fears during the 1945 elections of power-hungry younger Fabians getting their hands on the whip.

Their hands on the whip and the reins of power, they are the experts promoting consensus. Their



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methods involve using the mainstream news and peer science. Whether through nuclear winter or global warming, they deal in promoting fears. Meanwhile, America continues to build a more-Orwellian society, brick by brick. But how close we have come can be best understood by understanding why the nightmare of *1984* can happen here. The accumulation and use of government power began with a promise by Beveridge of a National Health Service, followed by government intruding into all areas of public welfare, and from there nationalization of banks and seizure of industry. As Walter Cronkite wrote: *1984* occurs when government experts prove they “may not be strong enough nor wise enough nor moral enough to cope with the kind of power they have learned to amass.”

Fortunately, America today still falls far short of the Josef Stalin monstrosity. We still do not gag all the critics to shut them up, as our right to free speech still largely prevails. Stalin’s state religion of leader worship falls short of adoption today. Purges and show trials remain in the future, if they occur at all. Visas to travel within the country are unnecessary. Truth as yet cannot be routinely falsified so long as we savor the fruits of free science. Firearms still hang on pegs in our safes. Murder of rich farmers to trigger famine in the United States appears extremely unlikely. And certainly tens of millions have yet to be exiled to the gulags.

The time is now to take George Orwell’s *1984* into our minds, when we elect candidates in 2010 and 2012 who run as non-experts willing to tell the truth and obey the U.S. Constitution. The emerging, supposedly more-sophisticated society must reject communism, socialism, and collectivism, and instead adopt freedom.

One final thought: How would George Orwell — based on his writings and what we know about him — avert *1984*? My guess is that Orwell, buried in a simple churchyard cemetery, would have relied on his lifelong beliefs in equality, charity, and truth. To live in accordance with these beliefs, Orwell abandoned London with his young son, Richard. They moved six hundred miles away to the island of Jura in the Inner Hebrides. When displaced from the London Fabian fog, George could seek more justice living in a freer society. What better way for George, the father, to live than to raise his son to be just and right, rich in integrity — and, for the impoverished and wealthy alike, giving every man his due.

This is Orwell’s breed of socialism.

David A. Goodman, Ph.D. is a specialist in brain research.

— *Photo of George Orwell: AP Images*



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