

# Totalitarianism in Orwell's 1984 Politics Essay



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George Orwell's 1984 is about a man Winston Smith in a country called Oceania with a government called IngSoc. Winston lives in constant fear as he is arrested and tortured by members of the Party, people participating in IngSoc. Orwell shows how IngSoc is a controlling government. Also, he discusses the dangers of a government like IngSoc. IngSoc is a totalitarian government. Orwell denounces totalitarianism by creating a dystopia that has a totalitarian government.

Totalitarianism is the " form of government that theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of the individual's life to the authority of the government." When Orwell published 1984, "' totalitarianism' denoted a society in which political power was in the hands of a dictator or ' leader' and a nontraditional ruling elite; the mass of the population was not only politically powerless but deprived of all intellectual and cultural resources" (Gleason, 148). Totalitarianism is a tempting option for countries whose citizens are suffering. " The totalitarian states of Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler (1933-45) and the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin (1924-53) were the first examples of decentralized or popular totalitarianism, in which the state achieved overwhelming popular support for its leadership" (" totalitarianism" n. p.). In Nazi Germany, the citizens were overcoming a huge depression resulting from the loss in World War I. In the Soviet Union, the people overthrew an unproductive, uncaring Tsarist government.

George Orwell had many bad experiences with totalitarianism, and recounts these events in 1984. He experienced firsthand the effects of a fascist government in World War II. " In 1948, when Orwell's 1984 was first

published, World War II had just ended.” During World War II, mass murders were ordered by totalitarian leaders like Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin. “ Adolf Hitler, in Germany, had slaughtered his enemies... killing six million Jews plus nine million Slavs, gypsies, political dissidents, homosexuals, and mentally challenged people” (“ 1984” 242). Orwell, influenced by genocide caused by a single powerful man, prompted him to reflect upon the cause of so many deaths. He powerfully expresses his worries about the dangers of a totalitarian government by creating his own dystopia in 1984.

A totalitarian government works to control the mind of the people. One way to induce subservience is to control pleasure. The Party controls people by limiting and suppressing pleasure. To remove the pleasure from society diminishes the morale of the people, allowing the government to enforce its will. Sex is a social activity looked down upon by the Party through organizations like the Junior Anti-Sex League. Laurence Lerner suggests, “[Orwell] considers [sex] extremely important because of its concentration on pure pleasure and IngSoc is a society dedicated to the abolition of pleasure” (Bloom 73). Julia uses sex as a medium to rebel against the Party. Seeing Julia’s rebellious act, Winston joins her and expresses his desire for rebellion as well. “ Scores of time she had done it... Anything that hinted at corruption always filled him with a wild hope” (Orwell 125). Winston’s hope is exactly what a totalitarian government desires to destroy. Also, when O’Brien tortures Winston in Room 101, he reveals the motives of the Party: “ The sex instinct will be eradicated. Procreation will be an annual formality like the renewal of a ration card. We shall abolish orgasm” (Orwell, 267). By

removing the pleasures of sex and all pleasures of society, the Inner Party is free to exert its will upon the citizens of Oceania.

“ Under totalitarian rule, traditional social institutions and organizations are discouraged and suppressed” (“ totalitarianism” n. p.). Totalitarianism takes away freedom by installing surveillance and limiting activity. The Party uses the Thought Police, Spies, and telescreens to monitor the citizens of Oceania at all times. Winston buys a blank diary and writes in it while he is in his flat. However, Winston fears the Thought Police will catch him for Thoughtcrime. Winston “ had committed... the essential crime that contained others in itself. Thoughtcrime they called it” (Orwell 19). The Party can accuse anyone of committing Thoughtcrime, even without any evidence. Parsons was taken away by his own children for committing Thoughtcrime. Thoughtcrime also has the ultimate penalty: “ Thoughtcrime does not entail death: Thoughtcrime IS death” (Orwell 28). When free thought is a crime, the government can destroy any mode of thinking which is not its own. When Winston first sees Julia, he is worried that she is a spy. “ Whether she was really an agent of the Thought Police, or simply an amateur spy actuated by officiousness, hardly mattered” (Orwell 101). Winston lives in constant fear of being caught and tortured by the Party. The Spies are a group of children who are taught how to catch adults of committing Thoughtcrime. Parson’s children, members of the Spies, turn in their own father to the Party through dedication to the Party. Julia and Winston are in what they think is the last safe place, a room without a telescreen. However, the room hides a telescreens behind a picture, allowing the Party to spy on them while

engaged in “ private” activity. A government that can fully monitor its citizens instills fear and maintains full control.

The Party uses the media to confuse its citizens. On the telescreens pictures of “ the enemy”, Emanuel Goldstein, appear with other subliminal messages. A depiction of Goldstein shows “ a lean Jewish face, with a great fuzzy aureole of white hair and a small goatee beard- a clever face, and yet somehow inherently despicable” (Orwell 12). His despicable face incites anger in the population, even if directed at an imaginary figure. The anger is then redirected toward the true enemy, as the telescreens then show pictures of Eurasian soldiers, the country Oceania is at war against. Manipulating the media manipulates the attitudes citizens have. The Party uses Newspeak and doublethink to confuse the citizens of Oceania. “ NEWSPEAK is calculated to get rid of individuality by limiting the range of thought through cutting the choice of words to a minimum” (“ 1984”, 249). The Party restricts the words used to be only positive, preventing any negative comments towards the government. “ The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of IngSoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible” (Orwell, 299). To eliminate other modes of thought is to eliminate the inherent freedom of thought.

Totalitarianism leaders’ sole concern is gaining power. “ The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or a long life or happiness; only power, pure power” (Orwell, 263). Orwell intends to manifest the intentions of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, but to a more extreme level.

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“ The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended that ... there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it” (Orwell, 263). Orwell parallels the motives of the Party with the motives of the Nazis and Communists to a greater extent. The Nazis and Communists had original intentions of freedom and prosperity for their people, but were deluded by a thirst for power. In Oceania, the government has willingly accepted full power and a truly totalitarian government where Big Brother does indeed control all.

“ In Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union, whole classes of people, such as the Jews and the kulaks (wealthy peasant farmers) respectively, were singled out for persecution and extinction.” (“ totalitarianism”, n. p.). Totalitarianism blinds the citizens of Oceania. The proles, carrying a different view than the Party members, are branded as evil. “ The Party taught that the proles were natural inferiors who must be kept in subjection, like animals, by the application of a few simple rules” (Orwell, 71). The inferiority of the proles is compared to animals, which lack intelligence to humans. Although the proles have the power to rebel, the Party forces them to believe they are inferior to humans, causing them to live separate from the population.

Totalitarianism is a tempting option for countries overcome with poverty. Orwell advises to the citizens of those countries to not select that path. Countries like Germany, Italy, and Russia have instilled totalitarian government into their countries, causing many deaths, and many to lose

freedoms. Totalitarian leaders are only concerned with genuine power no matter how many people are harmed.