

1984 against
totalitarianism and for
democratic socialism



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“ In the essay *Why I Write*, Orwell explains that all the serious work he wrote since the Spanish Civil War in 1936 was “ written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism. “[12] Indeed, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an anti-totalitarian cautionary tale about the betrayal of a revolution by its defenders. He already had stated distrust of totalitarianism and betrayed revolutions in *Homage to Catalonia* and *Animal Farm*. *Coming Up For Air*, at points, celebrates the personal and political freedoms lost in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Much of *Oceanic* society is based upon Stalin’s Soviet Union. The “ *Two Minutes’ Hate*” was the ritual demonisation of State enemies and rivals; Big Brother resembles Joseph Stalin; the Party’s archenemy, Emmanuel Goldstein, resembles Leon Trotsky (both are Jewish, both have the same physiognomy, and Trotsky’s real surname was ‘ Bronstein’). Another suggested inspiration for Goldstein is Emma Goldman, the famous Anarchist figure. Doctored photography is a propaganda technique and the creation of unpersons in the story, analogous to Stalin’s enemies being made nonpersons and being erased from official photographic records; the police treatment of several characters recalls the Moscow Trials of the Great Purge. Biographer Michael Shelden notes these influences: the Edwardian world of his childhood in Henley — for the golden country; being bullied at St.

Cyprian’s — empathy with victims; his policeman’s life in the Indian Burma Police — the techniques of violence; and suffering censorship in the BBC — capriciously-wielded authority. 13] Specific literary influences include *Darkness at Noon* and *The Yogi and the Commissar* by Arthur Koestler, *The Iron Heel* (1908) by Jack London; *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley; <https://assignbuster.com/1984-against-totalitarianism-and-for-democratic-socialism/>

We (1921) by Yevgeny Zamyatin, which Orwell read in French and reviewed in 1946;^[14] and The Managerial Revolution (1940) by James Burnham, predicting permanent war among three totalitarian superstates, broadly equivalent to those in Nineteen Eighty-Four. Orwell told Jacintha Buddicom that he would write a novel stylistically like A Modern Utopia by H. G. Wells.

World War II acts as the grounding for Orwell's more fantastic elements. Most of the novel contains direct parallels, and occasional outright pastiche, of the rhetoric and politics surrounding the end of the war and the changing alliances of the nascent Cold War. The overseas service of the BBC, controlled by the Ministry of Information, was the model for the Ministry of Truth. The Ministry of Love's ultimate weapon against dissidents, Room 101, is named after a conference room at BBC Broadcasting House where Orwell used to sit through tedious meetings.

15] The Senate House, where the Ministry of Information was housed, is the architectural inspiration for the Ministry of Truth. Nineteen Eighty-Four's world reflects the socio-political life of the UK and the USA, i. e. the poverty of Britain in 1948, when the economy was poor, the Empire dissolving, while newspapers reported imperial triumphs, and wartime ally Soviet Russia was becoming a peacetime foe.

Oceania is a metamorphosed future British Empire that geographically includes the United States, and whose currency is the dollar. As its name suggests, it is a naval power, with much militarism focused on venerating sailors serving aboard floating fortresses greater than Dreadnoughts.

Moreover, most of the fighting by Oceania's troops is in defending India (the

“Jewel in the Crown” of the British Empire). The term “English Socialism” also has many precedents in Orwell’s wartime writings. In *The Lion and the Unicorn* of 1940, Orwell stated that “the war and the revolution are inseparable (..

.) the fact that we are at war has turned Socialism from a textbook word into a realizable policy”. The reason for that, according to Orwell, was that the outmoded British class system constituted a major hindrance to the war effort, and only a Socialist society would be able to defeat Hitler. Since the middle classes were in process of realizing this, too, they would support the revolution, and only the most outright reactionary elements in British society would oppose it — which would limit the amount of force the revolutionaries would need in order to gain power and keep it. Thus, an “English Socialism” would come about which “..

. ill never lose touch with the tradition of compromise and the belief in a law that is above the State. It will shoot traitors, but it will give them a solemn trial beforehand and occasionally it will acquit them. It will crush any open revolt promptly and cruelly, but it will interfere very little with the spoken and written word”. Orwell’s words in this and other writings at the time leave no doubt that in 1940 he regarded “English Socialism” as highly desirable and was actively trying to bring about its victory.

Yet in the nightmare world he envisioned eight years later, the same term – contracted to “Ingsoc” – is the monstrous ideology of a totally oppressive regime, far from the relative moderate revolution which Orwell foresaw in 1940. When the vision of “*The Lion and the Unicorn*” is compared with that

of “ Nineteen Eighty-Four” it is evident that Orwell saw the regime presided over by Big Brother not only as a betrayal and perversion of Socialist ideals in general, but also as a perversion of Orwell’s own specifically and dearly cherished vision and hope of Socialism – “ English Socialism”. “