



George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*: A marxist study

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Abstract

It seems that Marxism is the best approach to interpret George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Marxists accept as true that literature is a reflection of culture and that culture in turn can be influenced by literature, which can raise consciousness of revolution. However, the main aim of this research is to shed light on Orwell's criticism of the class system and the weaknesses of socialism in English society. Three different classes are presented in the novel: the ruling class, which is represented by the Inner Party; the middle class, which is represented by the Outer Party; and the working class, which is represented by the Proles. Although some critics think Orwell is expressing his fear of socialism, which they believe aids in the expansion of dictatorships in European countries, he is actually warning of real, destructive war in which the atomic bomb is the most dangerous weapon in the hands of totalitarian regimes. In the novel, Orwell leads a movement that helps proles fight and eradicate the regimes intent on dehumanizing the proles. Orwell's book was published as a political statement to the world about what would happen in 1984 if national governments continued to transform into totalitarian powers.

Keywords: marxism, socialism, the party, proles, big brother, capitalism

Introduction

By expressing their ideologies, the characters in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* lead readers to consider Marxism as the best way to interpret the novel. Marxist criticism views literary works as reflections of social institutions, and Marxists explain that even literature itself is a social institution with a specific ideological function based on the background and ideology of the author. Terry Eagleton has defined Marxism in literature and believes that Marxist criticism is not merely the sociology of literature concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Rather, he aims to explain the literary work more fully by giving sensitive attention to its forms, styles, and meanings. It also means grasping those forms, styles, and meanings as the product of a particular history (Eagleton 3).

The novel centers on Winston Smith, who struggles in Oceania, where the Inner Party controls and dehumanizes anyone who tries to think differently. Big Brother is the absolute ruler of Oceania and watches everyone. Winston, who works in the Records Department in the Ministry of Truth, begins to keep a diary of his thoughts, which is considered a "thought crime" according to the Party. These criminal activities bring Winston under the watchful eye of the Party members.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Oceania is separated into three classes: the Inner Party, the Outer Party, and the Proles. Big Brother is watching all of the classes. The Inner Party members make up 2 percent of Oceania's population—yet they are the real owners of Oceania. They make policies, decisions and run the whole city. The Inner Party is commonly known as the Party and they are the upper class. They have rights different than any other such as being capable to momentarily switch off their telescreens, live in luxurious homes, and have good food and drink, having personal servants, use helicopters and automobiles. It is not too easy for anyone to enter their buildings without a clear

reason.

The Outer Party makes 13% of Oceania's population and enjoys the administrative jobs there. Winston Smith is a member of the Records Department in the Ministry of Truth where his job is to rewrite historical documents. The Outer Party belong to the middle class and "no voices other than cigarettes and Victory Gin"(Orwell 23). They are allowed to eat and drink food of low quality, and they only can buy their necessities from the Proles market or the black market that steals from the Inner Party members. So, the Outer Party is the most miserable among other parties and that was intentional. It is believed that middle-class members can be more dangerous if they have limited power mixed with intellectual ability, and Winston is the perfect example of this belief. With a diary and some ink, he tried to attract others to plan and make rebellious actions against the Party. The last class system in Oceania is the Lower class that is mentioned in 1984 as the Proles. They make up 85% of Oceania's society. They are treated badly by the Party members, they serve them with alcohol, gambling, sports, fabricated novels, and pornography. Karl Marx believes that Proletariats are the most dangerous class in the capitalist society and they would one day revolt against the capitalist government and communist age would begin. These ideas exist in Winston's mind since he writes in his diary: "If there is any hope, it lies with the Proles."(Orwell 72).He insists that the Proles make a great part of Oceania's population and they could fight with the Party and make the change.

An English researcher called Olsen asserts that "Orwell explores the communist society in his novel through what appears to a utopian civilization, but it is, in reality, a dystopic totalitarian society "(Olsen). A totalitarian world where the party tries to control everything and the Big Brother watches everyone. To be free and different or to have the right to think was a crime. Olsen thinks that there are two principles of the Marxist theory, number one is that:

"reality itself can be defined and understood "(Bressler 211). Big Brother influences those who follow him blindly and they accept what he told them. The Outer Party works for the government as history changes, but it doesn't mean that they are aware that they rewrite history (Olsen). The other principle according to his study: "Society shapes our consciousness "(Bressler 211).The party utilizes techniques like *Doublethink* and the *Newspeak* to control and shape their minds that the party wants it to be like.

The differences between the classes in Oceania utilized as a mean of allowing the Party and its associates more power and control, and people under the Party's rule are physically and psychologically submitted. Besides, the variation of classes in Oceania helped the Party provide those at the top of the government more power than the average citizen, leading to their oppression. By being forced into poverty, the people of Oceania have been placed into a lower class and oppressed by those at the top of the Party. "Winston wrenched his body out of bed – naked, for a member of the Outer Party, received only three thousand clothing coupons annually, and a suite of pajamas was six hundred – and seized a dingy singlet and a pair of shorts that were lying across a chair." (Orwell, 33). The tiny amount of currency provided by the Party to its citizens does not allow people to purchase quality supplies and resources, demoralizing the public and allowing them to easily become oppressed victims of social classes. Even those who work for the government are politically deprived and have no idea that their work is helping to further strengthen those who are already politically powerful. Edward Pankowski claimed that "Orwell depicts the real world and he writes out his fears of dictatorship and the capitalist societies. He also held an attack on Socialism and socialist parties"(Pankowski 28). Furthermore, children are a very important tool in the hand of a totalitarian society. Spies that follow anything told to them by the Party, even to inform the Party of every single information about their parents, while the parents of these children are convinced into believing that their children are taught to be loyal and devoted to the ruling system .Mr. Parson was a victim of his daughter, but he was proud of her he says: "It was my little daughter with a sort of doleful and pride "(Orwell 245). Through the use of organizations such as the Ministry of Truth and Junior Spies, the Party has made the Proles sure of their intentions to dominate every small aspect of their life.

Another point of view about the novel and the Marxist tendency comes from an essay written by Alex Miller who contends that, "In Nineteen Eighty-Four, the headline message is a socialist revolution, even if it were to happen in an advanced capitalist country, would be bound to degenerate because of the innate helplessness and lack of intelligence of the working class"(Miller 3). This point is clear in 1984 especially when we discover many scenes in it that guide readers to the naiveté of Oceania's people such as, The two minutes hate and the week hate where they gathered and scream and shout on Goldstein as well as Winston's stupidity because he thinks O'Brien a friend even he is torturing him . For that reason, Orwell warns in his novel of revolutions in the capitalist societies because the Proles do not have sufficient experience, intelligence, and tools to subdue the Party and even the Bourgeoisies.

He also thinks that there are deeper differences between Orwell's philosophy and Marx. Miller adds that: "Orwell believes that power, independently of the specific social

circumstances in which it is realized, is governed by a logic that inevitably leads to corruption and exploitation"(Miller 6). In Marx's approach, according to which power can only be studied meaningfully as embodied in concrete social and economic structures.

what is more obvious in 1984 that the working class is overly dominated by Party propaganda, in which they convince them that it exists to inform them about the Party work and Oceania's situation in their war against enemies. So, the proles believe that it is a high-quality thing and it is for their benefits. While the real purpose of propaganda was to increase the Party control over citizens of Oceania," The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power, pure power". Thus, this propaganda allows the class distinction since it helps as a mean of imposing control and power over people, and Orwell wants to point out the ways that are used in a totalitarian government that turns people into commodities in their hands.

The Marxist theory believed in the socialist societies to remove the proletariat class from their poor economic situation and a socialist revolution must occur to eradicate the ruling class from their positions. Winston attempts to find a real society that owned by its people, not a party member who rules everything in even their way of thinking and the language they speak. "Although the society in 1984 was a socialist, the author finds that it's mostly unrealistic and irrelevant "(Orwell). It appears as another form of oppression. In the novel, Orwell sees that the only solution to the economic misery is by ending capitalism through "immediate appropriation of factories and other means of production, collectivized planning of the economy and confiscation of all land from the rich "(Orwell 337).

Orwell highlights the rules of society in the book that O'Brien gave to Winston. It could be compared to the real book to Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*. All these works depict the political atmosphere and suggest a change in government policy. Goldstein wrote the book to speak out against the government in 1984, to explain in real-world terms the consequences of the limits to privacy, truth, and freedom imposed by the government.

As stated by Karl Marx: "literature reveals how the authors, readers, and characters demonstrate an awareness of their economic and social situations"(Eagleton). All of the readers are confident that Orwell sends a message in 1984 to the British capitalist society and to be conscious of its consequences. Also, they sympathize with the author for his points that he wanted to share with all human beings. Marxism is believed to reflect the class struggle and materialism in society, it investigates how literary works can work for social change or as a reaffirmation of existing conditions. Consequently, Paul O Flinn explains that: "1984 has become one of the ideological touchstones of Western society from its first appearance in 1949. It installed a level of public awareness. So it in the US and Britain sold 400,000 copies in the first year and ten million in English alone" (Flinn 1). He contends that: "1984 is a direction in which the world is going the trend lies deep in the political, social and economic foundations of the contemporary world situation"(Ibid).

In a socialist system, means of production are owned by public enterprises or cooperatives. The value of production is enjoyed by all members of society on the principle of individual contribution. In a Marxist setup, means of

production are commonly owned and individual ownership is abolished. Production is organized to provide to the needs of the people. The proletarian revolution, as predicted by Karl Marx, is possible in a capitalist economy because the ownership classes manipulate the working classes with their full control over land, capital and entrepreneurship. This creates a class imbalance in society. But in a socialist economy, such class distinction is not possible because of the state ownership of the means of production. Therefore, the proletarian revolution is also not possible in a socialist country (Chakraborty). In Oceania, the Party owns everything the committees, the markets, shops and they even control the secret life of the individual's. Mr. Charrington who owns the room that Winston shares his secret emotions with Julia was a member of the Thought Police. The telescreens, microphones have been used to control proles, they have nothing to do with a negative socialist society. George Orwell thinks of positive socialism not what we read in *1984*, collective ownership to things that's what a socialist country means. Also, Gregory Claeys adds in his book *Dystopia: A Natural History* that Orwell predicts in a statement he released after the publication of *1984* that:

The danger lies in the structure imposed on Socialist and Liberal capitalist communities by the necessity to prepare for total war with the USSR and the new weapons, of which of course the atomic bomb is the most powerful and the most publicized. But danger lies also in the acceptance of a totalitarian outlook by intellectuals of all colors. The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: 'Don't let it happen. It depends on you.' George Orwell assumes that if such societies as he describes in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* come into being there will be several super states. This is fully dealt with in the relevant chapters of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Claeys 56).

The cruel, totalitarian government of Oceania is governed by a set of values branded as "Ingsoc," which means English socialism in the constructed language of the Party, Newspeak. The values and origins of socialism are purposely hidden by the Party, but it is common knowledge in Eurasia that a split within the ideology was the basis of Big Brother's rise to power and Emmanuel Goldstein's banish. The Ingsoc that developed after Goldstein's exile primarily focuses on how reality is constructed by the Party, as well as the necessity of submission to the Party. On the other hand, Goldstein's book, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, is a socialist text that warns against authoritarianism. Hence, Orwell represents one of the main leaders of the Bolshevik revolution Leon Trotsky who opposed Stalin's theory of socialism and calls for Proletariat self-emancipation and democracy. He was critical to the Bureaucracy during Stalin's rule which finally resulted in his exile. Trotsky and Stalin are both considered socialists, although their methods and ideologies for a communist world differed radically. Similarly, the Party and Goldstein are both proponents of Ingsoc, but Goldstein's ideology has nothing to do with the totalitarianism of the Party. Accordingly, Trotsky has paid his life for his beliefs of mass democracy and freedom to the Working class.

As a result, Orwell turns to be a leader of the working-class movement in most of his books. He politically became isolated due to his attitude towards the rise of totalitarian authorities in Europe such as the Nazis in Germany, the Fascism, and Stalinism in the USSR. It seems that he hurt

their feelings when he predicted many times in his novels about the danger of these systems' existence in the future and "to die hating them that was freedom. So, he elaborates in the following extract from *1984* his thoughts about those systems during that time:

We are different from the oligarchies of the past in that we know what we are doing...The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never dared to recognize their motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just around the corner 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 to relinquish it. Power is not a mean; it is an end (Orwell 212).

Therefore, the novelist tried in this book to highlight and shed the light on how socialism as a regime in England might slowly result into a ruler and ruled because he thinks that there is something in human nature that likes to be absolute over others and it is ready to do whatever is in its advantage. Although the party is a socialist in a name it remains oppressive as capitalism does to its citizens, there is a huge gap between the rulers and the ruled which led to an anti-utopian society. So he insists that the class divisions in English society should have vanished, but they have to go slowly because they are so deeply ingrained.

The civilization portrayed in Oceania throughout the novel *1984* is typical to our society today. Increased government activism is allowing a more brutal regime to emerge, thus causing major ramifications. Our blessed system of protecting individual rights has been eradicated, replaced by an overbearing government that is currently spying on its citizens to assert its influence. Fewer civil liberties equate to a stronger, more vicious government, as seen in the country of Oceania and are now being seen in many countries. Nowadays, People live in countries similar to Oceania where we can find class differences, and liberal, capital governments.

In the end, the novel deals with many aspects and theories and one of them is the struggle between the classes in Oceania. The best way to analyze novels like this novel is to use the Marxism theory to uncover the hidden messages of the author that he wants to make it clear to everyone who read this work of art. I rely on identifying the ideology of the novel and points out its worth's and weaknesses. The novel sheds the light on Orwell's socialist theory and how it differs from the socialist perspective of communism that leads Russia and the Soviet Union to this miserable life. In George Orwell's *1984* the ideas of Marxism are used to oppress proletariats. The Party tricks the citizens of Oceania into thinking that they are seeking for offering comfort and a worthy life. I believe that Orwell's book was published as a political statement to the world regarding what will happen in *1984* if the national governments continued to transform towards totalitarian powers. In 1949 the year this book was published, totalitarian powers and dictatorships were becoming more and more prominent in the world.

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