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ENG3U5

January 9, 2017

An Inevitable Descent

Democracy is something that much of the world enjoys today, largely due to the people upset over the two World Wars, and imperialism in general. However, the wars did not only cause people to turn towards democracy, but also towards totalitarian ideologies as well. Many of these, notably, the Soviet Union with communism, and Germany with fascism, promised a utopian future through their respective ideologies. Although they employed differing ideologies, both fell as a failure. In the novel 1984, George Orwell tells a frightening story of a socialist society, kept together by a mind-controlling government. By reading through the Marxist lens, Orwell gives a reason for the failure of these totalitarian states: a totalitarian regime's need for power supersedes the good of the people, and therefore, no matter its intentions, will be destined to become a dystopia. This can be seen through the stagnation of human advancement, the dehumanization of the population, as well as the removal of the awareness of class struggle, all intentionally caused by Party policies.

One of the core tenets in Marxism is that humans will inherently work. As work is done, goods are produced, making it inevitable for the standard of living to grow and the advancement of technology. This is still the case in 1984, however many of the Party's policies cause stagnation of development and decrease the standard of living in an effort to keep the population ignorant. This is because the Party must have the population on the edge of poverty, to be able to have the possibility of manipulating them, ensuring their ignorance. If the standard of living were to be raised, the Proles would become literate and "would sooner or later realize

that the privileged minority had no function, and they would sweep it away." (Orwell 133). Since the production of goods cannot be stopped, the Party uses continual war as a method of destroying goods. The Party is not interested in the possession of wealth or goods, but would only like to assure their control. Put in the words of O'Brien, "We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power" (Orwell 177). As there is a lack of critical thinking and knowledge, technological progress is also stopped. By counteracting human advancement and lowering the standard of living, the Party is putting its own power above the greater good. However, in the Party's eyes, counteracting development is not enough to ensure the ignorance of the entire population.

The society in 1984 has been dehumanised through hegemony, where their only emotions are simple and reduced to those of patriotism and hatred of the enemy, in order to reduce their individuality. Humans are distinguished from other animals by their ability to experience a variety of complex and advanced emotions, which the Party has killed off. Throughout the story Orwell shows propaganda everywhere in Airstrip One, especially during Hate Week, where videos and music were played unavoidably. The world is filled with leagues and organizations that keep people from acting out of line, and when someone does step out of their walled garden, Big Brother is always watching, and the Thought Police will vaporize them. Another form of propaganda used is the changing of history itself. History books and old newspaper articles are modified in an attempt to control the population, depicting Oceania as a wealthy and successful state. The world before the Revolution is depicted as "a dark, dirty, miserable place where hardly anybody had enough to eat" (Orwell 50). The Party also modifies published works, when the current state of things changes, to make sure that their predictions and forecasts are always correct. How could the Big Brother have made a mistake? As well, the Party exploits the lack of education and knowledge to keep the population ignorant, even

creating a new language called Newspeak. By modifying English with shortened words and removal of words, the Party makes it impossible to express certain thought, limiting thinking and creativity. "Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller" (Orwell 36), reflects Syme, a specialist in Newspeak. Effectively, the Party has reduced the population of Oceania to mindless drones, whose sole purpose is to serve Oceania. The goal of all of this is making everyone believe that they are essentially the same, so they should get along and work together peacefully.

Marxist thought states that the struggle between the classes is what drives the world. Class Struggle is present in the world of 1984, but the Party has made it in a way that no class is aware of their situation and therefore counteracts the struggle. Every policy of the Party is an attempt to stop change in the world, and keep their current society intact. The class structure of 1984 fits almost perfectly into the standard High, Middle and Low structure, with the Inner Party, Outer Party, and Proles respectively. Each class is bound by different rules to ensure their ignorance. In 1984, Winston remarks that "If there was hope, it MUST lie in the proles" (Orwell 48), due to the overwhelming majority that they pose. This follows Marxist thought, where the proletariat, who are the overwhelming majority, overthrow the bourgeois to install a new government. However, in 1984, the Party uses multiple methods to avoid class struggle, whether by destroying goods, or propaganda. The Proles in 1984 are deprived of historical backgrounds and a greater view, and therefore, are not able to become class conscious. Without this, they are only aware of the present, and are unable to control the future through revolution. A Party slogan, repeated throughout the story reflects this, "Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." (Orwell 199). Inside the Party itself, the members are exposed to the inner workings of everything. Because of this, they are watched very carefully, every hour of the day, every day of the week. They are made to participate in

organizations and activities, removing time for them to reflect individually. By removing the ability of the people to develop their class consciousness, the Party's power is secured even further, through the use of policies limiting the freedom of the people.

Totalitarian states are doomed to become a dystopia, even if it was intended to be a utopia, due to the fact that the regime is more interested in keeping itself in power than the greater good of the people. Orwell shows this in 1984 through the stopping of human advancement, the degradation of the population, as well as the removal of the ability for the population to become class conscious. This pattern is not just shown in 1984, but throughout human history as well, especially during the 20th century. The government in 1984 is a bit different however: they learned from the mistakes of the governments before them, patched up all the holes that led to their fall, ensuring that the rule of the Party is forever, entrapping the entire population of Oceania in their dystopian rule forever.

Works Cited

Orwell, George, and Erich Fromm. 1984: A Novel. New York, NY: Signet Classic, 1961. Print.