

A comparison between “1984” and 2009

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1 Introduction

Due to spreading attempts to increase surveillance, censorship and incapacitation of citizens, this report will deal with the similarities and differences between modern UK and the so called **Orwellian State** described in George Orwell's novel "1984".

This report only deals with UK, because it is also the setting of "1984" where Winston suffers from being observed all the time. Nevertheless, other European countries have nearly the same aims and use the same explanations.

This report does not claim to be a complete list of all conditions in the UK, but it tries to give an overview of different facts - both political and social - that influence life. It therefore is not to be seen as a scientific report, but as an informational text.

Those who would give up Essential Liberty to purchase a little Temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.

Benjamin Franklin

2 The novel

“1984” is a novel written by George Orwell in 1946/1947 and released in 1949. It describes a world in which the state observes and controls its citizens all over. “1984” is often quoted in discussions about surveillance state (therefore often called the “Orwellian State”) and even the following quotation exists:

1984 was not supposed to be an instruction manual.

2.1 Short Summary

Winston is a member of the Outer Party in Oceania, which means that he works for the Party, but is not involved in all actions. “The Party” is the only political instance in Oceania combining all power on one imaginary person called “Big Brother”. The Party is eager to hold all power and create a world in which it can remain this power without any resistance. Oceania is one of the three superstates ruling the world. They are in continuous war with each other, but often change alliances and enemies.

Winston is the typical victim of the Party’s surveillance, because he hates the current state. He nor wants to be oppressed, neither accept the will of the Party. Dreaming of a world in which there is no surveillance and hatred anymore, he writes his thoughts into a diary.

Since he works in the Ministry of Truth - one of four Ministries in Oceania - in the Records Department, Winston has to alter all records from the past containing any information that is not part of the Party’s opinion. For example, the Party claims that they have invented the airplane - which is obviously not true - and Winston has to remove all clues on other inventors from news paper articles, books and other media. He also has to alter information when the Party changes its opinion.

The Party itself sends propaganda material to all telescreens which are positioned at every public place and in every persons house (except in the houses of the “proles”¹). These telescreens combine surveillance camera and monitor in one device and they give you the feeling - actually in some way it is also true - that there is always somebody around.

The Party probably even fakes every information which is streamed, because they send good news when there is need for good news and bad news when there is need for bad news. Winston also states that many proles have no shoes even though the Party claims that they have produced millions of shoes the current year.

The reader gets to know all methods to control and observe the citizens through Winstons experiences. Due to his liberal opinion Winston always has to work in secret. Yet, even the apparantly secret places in Oceania are well observed by the Party resulting in Winston being captured. . .

¹unimportant people who are not intelligent enough to rebel against the Party

2.2 Methods of the Party

censorship: The Party censors media and even changes written information according to their will. Therefore, you can never be sure what is true and what is false. Winston even does not know if it really is the year 1984 or maybe 1983 or 1985.

torture: Political enemies are tortured in the Ministry of Love. In the Ministry of Love there are no windows; that's done to achieve time disorientation. Besides, prisoners are humiliated and do not get enough food. They are hurt (punches, kicks, electric shocks) and confronted with their worst fears in "Room 101".

newspeak: To achieve the deletion of all emotions and thoughts the Party invents a new language called "newspeak" (in opposition to "oldspeak") which reduces vocabulary to a minimum. The Party claims that this makes language more efficient, but even people who work on "newspeak" say that it is destruction of language.

To reduce the number of words needed in newspeak opposites are removed and replaced by the prefix *un-* and comparative degree is constructed by adding exaggerating words (e.g. something really bad would be "double-plusgood"). Newspeak sentences are not real sentences, but instead seem to us more like a chain of unconjugated words.

doublethink: An important feature of members under the whip of the Party is that they are capable of "holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them" [10]. For example, when O'Brien shows a picture to Winston and then destroys it, he really believes - after the destruction of the image - that there has never been such a picture. Yet, doublethink can also be contained in simple terms: The Ministry of Love deals with torture, the Ministry of Truth spreads lies, the Ministry of Plenty starves people and the Ministry of Peace leads the war against Eastasia or Eurasia.

surveillance: Each citizen of Oceania (except the proles) is observed by the Party and might be imprisoned due to the smallest sign of non-conformity. It is a duty of each citizen to stop thinking; as soon as you look as if you were thinking ("facecrime") you might be arrested.

Children are even educated to spy on their parents and report if they say or do something that does not fit into the Party's ideology.

uniformity: All Party members wear the same overalls to feel as one group of people. This can be regarded as the realisation of the Party's slogan "Freedom is Slavery", which implies that being hold in a big group as slaves makes this group stronger than individuals would be.

hatred: The Party thinks that hatred is the only emotion needed to rule a country. They want to abolish all feelings except for hatred, because hatred is needed to create collegiality (compare **uniformity**) and national pride.

3 Comparison

3.1 Politics: Governmental Actions in Modern UK

3.1.1 Surveillance

On about 100 pages several researchers have shown in what ways the UK may be called a “surveillance society”. They have found out that the UK contains about 4.2 million surveillance cameras. [2]

These cameras are not only used by another human to observe some places from distance, but many of them have also been prepared to record cars with the help of a computer reading all numbers of cars driving by. The gathered data will then be used to find both tax dodgers and dangerous criminals. The government can thereby follow the movements of all British citizens driving a car. Yet, this is not enough. They are planning to develop a system that can even recognize faces and track them. [4]

Currently, the Home Office is working on a plan to allow police to hack into citizens’ computers. This shall be legal as soon as there is the believe that this action might be needed to detect a crime which could lead to more than three years of prison. The control of a judge shall not be required which can lead to heavy surveillance - in Austria each day 22 mobile phones have been localized and information about the owners was taken without asking a judge. [8]

The UK also holds the biggest database on DNA records. It includes the DNA records of more than four million citizens and not all of them have been convicted. The DNA will be saved - due to an alteration of law in 2004 - even if you are only taken to a police station and have to stay there for several days, but are then acquitted. The percentage of people being registered in this database (5.2%) is ten times higher than in the USA. Unlike in other countries, in the UK the DNA of juveniles will not be deleted as soon as they become adult. [12]

3.1.2 Torture

Even though torture is an instrument that is not accepted in modern society, MI5 agents have questioned people who had been tortured before [3]. Orwell shows in his novel that suspects who have been tortured will confess anything to avoid more pain and humiliation. Supporters of torture claim that possible terrorists are trained in not confessing anything at all until they suffer worse than death. Yet, you have to keep in mind that all these people are just **suspects** - if you torture somebody who is innocent, he will also confess, but not because he is guilty. He just wants to stop the pain.

According to “The Guardian” UK forces have used their knowledge of “resistance to interrogation” (R2I) training to support the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison. R2I is usually a training that has to be undergone by soldiers to know what will be done to them if they are captured by the enemy and not intended to be used as a method of attack. [7]

As if this was not enough, “The Guardian” has also revealed that UK soldiers have hooded prisoners. This means that a bag is put over their head to turn them blind which leads to disorientation. It can therefore be regarded as a method of torture. “The Guardian” also asks what must have been happened as soon as the cameras have been switched off and the suspects have been interrogated. [6]

3.1.3 Internet Censorship

Modern states - including the United Kingdom - seem to be eager to censor everything that might harm people. There are no controls if contents are really dangerous and better solutions are not considered due to a faster method, which then leads to harmful influence on freedom of information. Some states - again including UK [5] - introduced network filters against child pornography. This is a good aim, but the approach blocking several IPs is useless. The administrators will get another IP and all material will be reachable again. Due to the internal structure of server architecture, there is no need to move data from one server to another. The known IPs belong to front-servers which lead all traffic from and to the hidden data-servers (like a car driving through a tunnel).

Besides, governments tend to claim that more censorship is needed once the new technology has been implemented. This implementation was done without a legal basis in the UK, the Internet Service Providers had to sign an Act to stop material from being sent. This material is chosen by the so called “Internet Watch Foundation” (IWF) which has total power on blocking websites. They have been criticized for blocking one page of Wikipedia, on which you could see a CD-cover of the famous rock-band “The Scorpions”. According to the IWF the image could be classified as child pornography and therefore had to be blocked. Many users of Wikipedia received a 404-error (“page not found”) without getting to know what was the problem. Yet, the IWF made a big mistake. Due to the size of Wikipedia (they could not block the whole website), they used DNS-filters. This means that they submitted the URL of the website to all providers, but they used the URL of the article and not the one of the image. Therefore, you were still able to view the image! Some days later the IWF had to unblock the website (due to heavy resistance and the age of the picture) [9].

Such blacklists carry another danger within. On the one hand, as long as they are secret they might be abused, on the other hand, they might reach publicity and everybody can check for the domains that should be blocked. With the help of a proxy-server you can then gain access to these websites even if they are blocked in the own country. Both problems have been proved in other countries: The Norwegian list was released on Wikileaks in March 2009 and the Swedish list has been analyzed coming to the result that only 10% contained images of children and less than 1% was really illegal content. Most content on the Swedish list was gay or so called teen (18-19 years old actors) pornography. One website on the list even belongs to a critic of this method of censorship.

3.2 Society: Influence on the Citizens

3.2.1 Doublethink

Due to heavy usage of the same reasons for new laws over and over there is a big influence on the way people think about such incidents. Even though there are almost no terrorist attacks in Europe people carry this idea more in mind than being beaten up by a aggressive or drunken person in the street. There have been interviews with citizens showing that the ever-repeating warnings concerning terrorist lead to “doublethink” in current UK society. “Fool’s Philosophy” writes about this matter:

The most extreme example was a woman who believed “we should give up our liberty for freedom”, seemingly unaware that they are both the same thing! [11]

Yet, there are also other examples of “doublethink” in our society. The war against Iraq is called a “war for peace”. Even though we all know that leading war for peace is useless (because the opponent will strike back as soon as possible as a revenge) it is a nice idea to legitimate our deeds. Our conscience forces us to find legitimations even though we know that it is a lie.

3.2.2 Newspeak

In modern days many abbreviations are used to save small amounts of time, but we have to bear the consequence that they hide the real meaning of some words and therefore also will change how we think about these new phrases. This might not seem very serious, but with an ever-rising amount of abbreviations grammar will have to clear out in favour of short sentences.

Yet, the even bigger influence of “newspeak” in modern society is created by always finding new euphemisms for usual problems. Saying “Asian” about some people living in America is - according to Barb Alexander - considered bad behaviour. Instead, you have to use the term “Korean-American” (if he comes from Korea). [1] You can see this development with regard to blacks: *Negro*, *black*, *coloured*, *African-American* (of course these terms are slightly different, but they have developed because each term before was considered as being rude).

4 Conclusion

Considering all facts you might say that there is still a huge gap between life in Oceania in 1984 and life in the UK in 2009. Yet, many of the demanded laws have only reached their first stage. We have to fear that, as soon as they are established, different institutions and politicians will call for more access, more usage and more data to be saved. Currently, content industry is lobbying for total surveillance of all Internet traffic on EU-level. They do not even resist from demanding access to the records of telecommunications data retention which also include communication between private persons and aid organisations even though these were only said to be used against terrorists.

We have seen that also politicians demand further usage of once established surveillance technology. The problem is that if such technologies are implemented, it is much harder for the opponents to remove them again than for the defenders to expand their usage.

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