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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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1984, 1950.



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"NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR"

By George Orwell

Sunday, January 8, 1950

Men have always longed to look into the future. Men have always been intrigued with the idea of constructing, if only in a literary form, the ideal society of tomorrow. Among writers, the practice began very long ago. The eminent Greek philosopher, Plato, wrote down his conception of the ideal society in his "Republic". With the discovery of America and the opening of new vistas for the human race, many writers were intrigued to write down their conception of the perfect society which might be established somewhere in the New World. Sir Thomas More wrote his famous "Utopia". Francis Bacon wrote the "New Atlantis".

In the 19th century, with the opening up of new horizons for man as a result of the amazing discoveries in the fields of science, many a writer wrote down a blueprint of the perfect society of tomorrow. Samuel Butler, in his "Erewhon", Edward Bellamy in "Looking Backward", and a few of the writings of H. G. Wells, and many others.

It is interesting to note that most of these fantasies and novels which were written in the past were inspired by a great hopefulness and a great confidence in the future. Sir Thomas More, for example, in his "Utopia" envisioned a world where many would enjoy intellectual and moral freedom, an ideal community where there would be no excessive labor, no want, no poverty, no idleness, no luxury - the kind of society which the humanist movement of that age dreamt of. Bacon's "New Atlantis" likewise was based on the confident expectation that science would be the key to universal happiness.

That was true of most of the treatises and novels of forecast, but with the turn of the century and in the last few decades, a note of scepticism begins to creep into these works. There is less confidence here that science would actually bring about either the good society or the happy society. There is a growing fear reflected in these books of the approaching mechanistic age where the machine would



come to enslave man and make of man a robot, the sort of fantasy reflected, you may recall, in the play, R.U.R. A note of apprehension, a warning note appears with increasing emphasis. The new civilization which is to emerge may not at all bring peace and prosperity and freedom to mankind. On the contrary. It may bring to mankind all the things that man dreads, fears. And in the last two or three decades, with the triumph of totalitarianism, Fascism and Naziism, which were stopped by the Second World War, and Communistic totalitarianism which is far from having been stopped, with the triumph of these systems of life which are maintained by terror, brutality, cruelty - with the destruction of democracy in many parts of the world, with the evidence of two disastrous World Wars coming at the peak of an era of amazing scientific advance, a great fear for the future has taken hold of the imagination of man and of writers, and the forecasts of today are not at all inspired by optimism, but by the apprehension of doom and collapse.

There is an apocalyptic quality in the writings and in the writings of our day, the apocalypse of doom. Our Bible knows of such an apocalyptic mood, Our Bible knows of two kinds of visions of the future. The one is a very optimistic one, the one of "the end of days when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea, when nations shall beat their swords into ploughshares and not learn war anymore, and every man will live under his vine and under his tree and none shall make him afraid". There is that most hopeful and most glowing vision of the future found in our Bible among our prophets. On the other hand, there is also a very dark vision of the future found among those prophets who lived in eras of great tragedy and catastrophe or uncertainty. And when they speak of the Day of God which is coming, they speak of it as the great and terrible day of the Lord, when the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood. The prophet Zephaniah speaks of "that day". "That day", he said, "is a day of wrath, a day of



trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of horn and alarm, and I will bring distress upon me that they shall walk like the blind."

It is of this latter kind of apocalypse, it is to this latter kind of literature that the book "1984" written by George Orwell belongs. It is a terrifying book, a book full of prophetic menace. It is, of course, a fantasy - a novel - an imaginary work, but it is not one which is constructed out of thin air. All the symptoms of which this book is the fuller development are already here in our society, in our everyday life upon this globe. All that Mr. Orwell does is to follow through relentlessly the logical unfoldment of what already exists in parts of our world today.

According to the author of "1984", the horrors which await mankind tomorrow do not derive from science or from the mechanization of life; they do not spring from war or from a possible destruction of mankind through the atomic bomb; from a different source do these horrors spring. They spring from the concentration of absolute power in the hands of a few, of a collected group. And the exploitation by this group possessed of this power, of all the resources of science and of war and of every conceivable device of regimentation and of espionage and of terror, the pollution of education, the debauching of science, the falsification of history, the creation of myths, of all these devices to perpetuate themselves and their power. The menace of tomorrow, as Mr. Orwell sees it in "1984", is a tyranny the like of which mankind has never seen before, a tyranny which knows no bounds and no limits, a collective tyranny, a party tyranny which has no moral scruples, which knows how to control and dominate and subvert and corrupt the human kind so as to render it incapable of resistance or incapable of any independent thought or judgment in order to help that party, that group, to remain indefinitely in power. And that party wishes to remain in power not for the sake of achieving any ideal society for mankind,



but simply for the sake of power - power for its own sake. Mr. O'Brien, who is represented in this book as the arch-inquisitor of the party, who is engaged in a process of breaking Mr. Winston Smith, a party member, who has shown some signs of resistance, of independence which are fatal in the new society of 1984. Mr. O'Brien proceeds to instruct with the aid of torture this Mr. Winston Smith in the purposes and the objectives and the real motives of the party. "The power seeks power," he says, "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 long life or happiness - only power, pure power." "What pure power means, you will understand presently. We are different from all the oligarchies of the past in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. 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~~ pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just round 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 with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. ~~Now~~

"We are the priests of power," continues Mr. O'Brien. "God is power. But at present power is only a word so far as you are concerned. It is time for you to gather some idea of what power means. The first thing you must realize is that power is collective. The individual only has power in so far as he ceases to be an individual. You know the Party slogan: 'Freedom is Slavery.' Has it ever occurred to you that it is reversible? Slavery is freedom. Alone - free - the human



being is always defeated. It must be so because every human being is doomed to die, which is the greatest of all failures. But if he can make complete, utter submission, if he can escape from his identity, if he can merge himself in the Party so that he is the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal. The second thing for you to realize ~~is~~ that power is power over human beings. Over the body - and above all, over the mind. Power over matter - external reality, as you would call it - is not important. Already our control over matter is absolute.

"How does one assert his power over another? By making him suffer. Obedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own? Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing. Do you begin to see, then, what kind of a world we are creating? It is ~~the~~ exact opposite of the stupid hedonistic Utopias that the old reformers imagined. A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but more merciless as it refines itself. Progress in our world will be progress toward more pain. The old civilizations claimed that they were founded on love or justice. Ours is founded upon hatred. In our world there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. Everything else we shall destroy - everything. Already we are breaking down the habits of thought which have survived before the Revolution. We have cut the links between child and parent and between man and man, ~~and between~~ No one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer. But in the future there will be no wives and no friends. Children will be taken from their mothers at birth, as one takes eggs from a hen. There will be no loyalty, except loyalty toward the Party. There will be no love, ~~except~~ the love of the Big Brother (the Master or the head). There will be no laughter except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. There will be no art, no literature, no science. When we are omnipotent, we shall have no more need of science. There will be no distinction between beauty and ugliness. There will be



no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. All competing pleasures will be destroyed, but always do not forget this - always there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler. Always, at every moment, there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless. If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face - forever."

That sounds extreme? Of course, it is extreme. Remember what Lord Acton said several years ago. "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Naziism, Fascism of our day, Communism are grounded in the concept of absolute, unchallenged, unquestioned, uncriticized power. You have seen that with your own eyes. The Communists, who still pay lip service to a liberal tradition of years gone by, maintain that their dictatorship, which is absolute, which is ruthless, which approaches very closely to this absolutism of which this author speaks - the Communists still maintain that their dictatorship is only a passing, transitory stage, that as soon as their Revolution has been made secure, dictatorship will disappear, peacefully pass over into democracy, to a democratic structure. The fact of history is that no dictatorship ever surrendered any of its power and ever peacefully passed over into a democracy. And modern dictatorship is far more protected against uprisings, against undergrounds, against revolutions than any dictatorship in the past.

Already we have seen in our own day the symptoms of what came to be developed, according to this author's vision, imagination in "1984". We have seen the ruthless totalitarianism of the Nazis which, when they found that certain people stood in their way, without any compunction, without any moral scruples, took 6,000,000 human beings and asphyxiated them in gas chambers. I suppose if 50 years ago someone had written that kind of a fantasy and had mentioned something like that, people would have said, "Why, that's impossible." These are the wild imaginings of an



irresponsible dreamer, poet, visionary. Well, they happen in our own day. We have seen in our own day dictatorships set up - the regimentation of their people, the coordination, the "dreischaltung" - so that every movement of man was spied upon, and every deviation from the line of the Party was cruelly punished with torture and with death. We have read about the workings of the Gestapo and of the Russian Secret Police. We have seen how a people can be quarantined and isolated by an Iron Curtain so as to shut out the rest of the world. We have seen how children are indoctrinated so that they become far more loyal to the Party than to their own parents. We have seen how history is deliberately falsified, how text books are re-written and re-cast so as to make the past serve the interest of the Party in power. We have seen how ~~even~~ even science is being subjected to the same kind of Party approval; the science which serves the ideology of the Party receives the Party label of approval. Every other science is rejected. So that we have already in our society today all the seeds planted which may blossom into the kind of a society mirrored in the book, "1984".

This books takes us into the year 1984 which is not far off, into the England of 1984. Great revolutions have already taken place in the world which have carried mankind beyond the stage of Naziism and Communism - the ultimate stage - to the stage of power for its own sake. Amoral power for its own sake. In 1984 the world is divided into three power constellations - Oceana, Eurasia, and East Asia - three super-states, aggregate of states. England is "Air Strip One" of the Anglo-Saxon group called "Oceana".

Now, these three super-states are permanently at war with one another. There is a constant fluctation as to who is fighting whom. Sometimes it is Eurasia and East Asia against Oceana; sometimes it is Oceana and Eurasia against East Asia - the groupings change, but they are always fighting. They are always fighting even though they all realize no victory is possible for any one of them. They have reached a point of balance of power and strength so that in no war anyone can actually defeat



the other or any two can defeat the third. Just as realize today that it is impossible for the Soviet bloc to defeat the Western bloc or the Western bloc to defeat the Soviet bloc; yet we're all talking about the Third World War and preparing for it. Nevertheless, they are at war continuously. And why? In order to destroy the surplus products of the machine, to keep down the standard of living, because to distribute the wealth which the machine can produce is to raise the standard of living, to raise people to higher levels of education and culture, and therefore, to higher levels of independence, and that is not good for the kind of a society which the men in power wish to maintain, the rigidly constructed hierarchical society which is built upon power and upon the domination of the many by the collective few.

Now, to restrict the output of the machine artificially is also not desirable for that might entail military weakness. The problem, then, is how to keep the wheels of industry turning without increasing the real wealth of the world. Goods must be produced but they must not be distributed. That sounds fantastic until one realizes that that is exactly what we did in this country, too. When much of the things which we raised from a fertile soil we automatically destroyed and when many of the things which the machine produces are kept away from a wide-scale distribution among the masses of people. Well, the way they found in Oceania to solve~~xx~~ their problem, therefore, was that of continuous warfare which consumes many of the things the machines produce. And the second purpose of continuous warfare, of course, is to keep the people agitated, tense, emotionally astir all the time, to maintain that peculiar mental atmosphere among the people which this kind of a society needs. You have to keep the people aware that somebody is trying to destroy them all the time, to keep them loyal to the Party. They even create the myth of an imaginary enemy, Emanuel Goldstein, very reminiscent of Trotsky, who is made the scapegoat of all the evils and of all the misfortunes of the state. And every day a period of two minutes of hate is instituted during which time, by all the devices of the screen, television, radio and music and harangues, the hate of the people against this mythical Emanuel



Goldstein, who never existed, is aroused to a frenzy of passion.

Well, in this Oceania, whose government the author calls "Ingsoc" - English Socialism - there are three classes - the inner and the outer Party, members of the Party who together represent about 15% of the population, and the Proles - the proletarians, who represent some 85% of the population. The business of these proletarians is simply to work, eat, breed and die. They don't count at all. And the Party has no especial concern or no especial worry about them. They are kept at a low level of education, they are crushed by drudgery, they are drugged by low amusements and entertainments - any one that seems to indicate some independence or some extraordinary capacity in the Proles is quickly, to use the term of the author, "vaporized". He's not only destroyed; he's just wiped out of existence completely as though he had never existed. He is vaporized. All memory of him disappears from the records of man.

There is no nonsense in this world of 1984 about human equality. That began to die even before this Party came into power. In our own day we saw the concept or the dogma of human equality rejected by the Fascists, by the Nazis, and the idea of superiority of one race over another and one group within a race over others. Ingsoc in 1984 followed through with the idea to its ultimate, logical or illogical conclusion. And it was with the rigid discipline of the upper 15% that the Party was greatly concerned. Here there was absolute regimentation. The slightest deviation was dangerous and fatal.

Ingsoc operated through four ministries; a Ministry of Peace, which concerned itself with war;; a Ministry of Truth which concerned itself with lies; a Ministry of Love which concerned itself with torture; and a Ministry of Plenty which concerned itself with starvation. The general structure of the Oceania society is described by the author as follows. And as I read this, please draw comparisons between this and what exists in our own day.



"At the apex of the pyramid of this society in 1984 comes Big Brother. Big Brother is infallible and all-powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery - all science, all wisdom, all knowledge, all virtue are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration."

Those of you who have followed the latest celebration of the 70th anniversary of Stalin will recall that that is not an extreme description of Big Brother.

"Nobody has ever seen Big Brother. He is a face on the hoardings, a voice on the telescreen. We may be reasonably sure that he will never die, and there is already considerable uncertainty as to when he was born. Big Brother is the guise in which the Party chooses to exhibit itself to the world. His function is to act as a focusing point for love, fear, and reverence - emotions which are more easily felt towards an individual than towards an organization. Below Big Brother comes the Inner Party, its numbers limited to 6,000,000, or something less than 2% of the population. Below the Inner Party becomes the Outer Party, which, if the Inner Party is described as the brains (the Politburo, as it were), may be justly likened to the hands. Below that come the dumb masses which we habitually refer to as 'the Proles'.

"The Party is not a class in the old sense of the word. It does not aim at transmitting power to its own children, as such. The older kind of Socialist, who had been trained to fight against something called 'class privilege' assumed that what is not hereditary cannot be permanent. He did not see that the continuity of an oligarchy need not be physical, nor did he pause to reflect that hereditary aristocracies have always been short-lived, whereas adoptive organizations such as the Catholic Church have sometimes lasted for hundreds or thousands of years. The essence of oligarchical rule is not father-to-son inheritance, but the persistence of a certain world-view and a certain way of life imposed by the dead upon the living. A ruling group is a ruling group so long as it can nominate its successors. The Party is not concerned with perpetuating its blood but with perpetuating itself. Who wields power is not important, provided that the hierarchical structure remains always the same.



"All the beliefs, habits, tastes, emotions, mental attitudes that characterize our time are really designed to sustain the mystique of the Party and prevent the true nature of present-day society from being perceived. Physical rebellion, or any preliminary move toward rebellion, is at present not possible. From the proletarians nothing is to be feared. Left to themselves, they will continue from generation to generation and from century to century, working, breeding and dying, not only without any impulse to rebel, but without the power of grasping that the world could be other than it is.

"A Party member lives from birth to death under the eye of the Thought Police. Even when he is alone he can never be sure that he is alone. ~~Wherever~~ Wherever he may be, asleep or awake, working or resting, he can be inspected without warning and without knowing that he is being inspected. Nothing that he does is indifferent. His friendships, his relaxations, his behavior toward his wife and children, the expression of his face when he is alone, the words he mutters in sleep, even the characteristic movements of his body, are all jealously scrutinized. Not only any actual misdemeanor, but any eccentricity, however small, any change of habits, any nervous mannerism that could possibly be the symptom of an inner struggle, is certain to be detected. He has no freedom of choice in any direction whatsoever.

"A Party member is expected to have no private emotions and no respites from enthusiasm. He is supposed to live in a continuous frenzy of hatred of foreign enemies and internal traitors, triumph over victories and self-abasement before the power and wisdom of the Party."

Now, they made sure - they made sure in Ingsac by systematic training that they would have this type of an individual. A member of the new society is trained early in various stages of discipline. The first one is called "Crime Stop"; that is, to learn to stop short on the threshold of any dangerous thought. The next stage is "Black White"; that is, loyalty, willingness to say that black is white when Party discipline demands. And the next stage is called "Double Think". That is the power



to hold two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously and accepting both of them; to tell deliberate lies when the Party wants you to while genuinely believing in them; to forget any fact that has become inconvenient to the Party, but then when it becomes convenient again, to draw it back and to believe in it again; to believe in such concepts as "War is peace" and "Freedom is slavery" and "Ignorance is strength"; to destroy all records of the past so that there be no standards of comparison; to re-write all history; to safeguard the infallibility of the Party.

Now, the Party has instrumentalities by which to keep its discipline always. There is the Thought Police, omni-present, omni-potent, to insure the rigid orthodoxy of the Party. The Thought Police which can pry into the most intimate moments in the life of a Party member. There is the telescreen which every Party member must install in his home, which can never be turned off, which not only transmits what the Party wishes to transmit to its members, but which is able to record everything which the member says or does at any time. There is the training of the children into a system of spying so that they will spy on their own parents, on their own brothers and sisters, and there is a new language given to Party members which the author called "Newspeak" to supplant old-speak English because, in order to destroy old concepts from older civilization, you must also destroy the words which represented those concepts, and by constricting and limiting the vocabulary of the new generations, you are constricting and limiting their thinking to the realities of the hour and not giving them any channels to other ideas and to other concepts which are dangerous to the society by which a member can make comparisons with the past.

Well, this is the world of Oceania in 1984, and in that world there is a man called Winston Smith, and the book is the story of Winston Smith, the humble Party member who pathetically tries to reach out beyond this world - this world, so drab, so seedy, poor in every way. This simple man who tries to reach out for something different, something reminiscent of his earlier childhood, something he has heard about, something better. And he proceeds to write a diary which is itself a capital



offense, and he dedicates the diary to the future, or to the past - "To a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone - to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone. From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of the Big Brother, from the age of Double Think - greetings."

Mr. Smith hopes that there exists somewhere in London some underground which he can join in order to destroy this system. He ~~meets~~ meets a Mr. O'Brien whom he believes to be at one with him in spirit, and for some strange reason comes to confide in him. Mr. O'Brien actually is the great inquisitor of the Thought Police who finally breaks Winston Smith. Winston falls in love with ~~Julia~~ Julia - a deep love, a romantic love, the kind of a love which is disdained and forbidden by the Party - and both of them are trapped - Julia and Winston Smith. And the story is how Winston Smith is broken by the exquisite torture of the Thought Police, broken so that he comes not only to confess everything which is incidental - they're not interested in his confessions because they know everything about him - broken so that he comes to accept all the program and all the dogma and all the techniques of the Party, and actually to believe in them, broken to the point where he comes to love the Big Brother. It is a frightening account - a work of pure horror where a machine takes hold of a human mind and a human spirit and kneads it into something altogether different, molds it into something the very antithesis of what it wishes to be.

Well, perhaps you will say, these things can't happen. The answer is that much of it has already happened. If we do not wish it to happen, we must be on the alert. When you're through reading this book, you come to realize how precious is the way of life which we are privileged to enjoy - how precious beyond words is that freedom which is ours, but which can be taken away from us at any time because before our eyes one country after another, one people after another, lost that freedom and dangerously approached the Oceania of 1984.



We must safeguard that freedom which means the rights of the individual man to live his life as a free man in a free society. Therefore, we must guard ourselves against the all-powerful State and against vesting increasing power in the hands of the State, for the more you ask of the State, the more you must surrender to the State, and the State in the long run means a hierarchy of domination and control. Freedom and liberty in our society is not an easy-going affair. It is something which must be jealously guarded and protected against the encroachment of power-seeking groups which speak in the name of equality and humanity and liberty, and actually are power-hungry.

That's the message of "1984" - a rather terrifying message, but as someone said, as necessary as a label - as necessary as a label upon a bottle of poison.

