

## Why Did George Orwell Wrote Ninety Eighty-Four?

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### Abstract

**Orwell's dystopian novels have been causing debate both in literature and political realm. This Essay focus on the motivation behind his works, to be specific, the Ninety Eighty-Four. When the work was being written, British was already stably built with a democratic structure. The life for a British citizen should be totally different with the life described for living in Oceania. This leave us to question why exactly did George Orwell write his dystopia works. Many research done on this topic suggest that he got his inspiration from Soviet Union. However, this essay suggest that Orwell gained his understanding toward socialism, totalitarianism and democratic through his survey in Spain during the Spain Civil War. He wrote this as a warning to many countries, including Britain, which he thought a socialism revolution is not to be avoided.**

### Keywords

**Dystopian novels; George Orwell; Spanish Civil War; Totalitarianism; Ninety Eighty-Four.**

### 1. Introduction

George Orwell is a famous English novelist. His novels are characterized by biting social criticism, opposition to totalitarianism, and strong politic satire. Orwell's most famous books, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, showed his avant-garde understanding towards totalitarianism. Orwell considered the overwhelming propagandize of nationalism and the supreme power of leader a dangerous threat to people's creativity and free-thinking. But how can we explain Orwell's motivations? He was writing in a stable, democratic Britain. What exactly was he afraid of? In this paper, I will suggest that the answer can be found in his 1930s experience in the Spanish Civil War. Most research regarding this topic believed that the inspiration for Orwell came from the Soviet Union's totalitarianism, but in my essay I would suggest a different point of view. His experience in Spain and what he used to experience in British were such different that it promoted George Orwell to write his dystopian novels, not as a warning specific to British but as a warning to the world.

### 2. Orwell's Experience During Civil War

Orwell set out on Spain on 23 December 1936 to serve in the republican army. "I've come to fight against Fascism", that was what he believed first decided to fight.[1] Orwell's first impression to Spain was great. He believes he has come to a perfect place for revolution. In his book *Homage to Catalonia*, he described Barcelona as a place where "a town where the working class was in the saddle". "Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists ...Nobody said "Señor" or "Don" or even "Usted"; everyone called everyone else "Comrade" or "Thou""[2] Most of the things are commandeered. There were no more private cars or buildings, everything was now controlled by government. Revolutionary posters are in every corners of the street, boosting people's enthusiasm. Orwell encountered an atmosphere in which the Spanish working class was engaged in a sweeping social revolution. The resulting period has been labeled "the greatest experiment in worker self-management Western Europe has ever seen."

However, Orwell's fascination over the revolutionary atmosphere did not stay long. He soon realized such complexity of political situation in Catalonia. At that time, the Republican government was supported by many factions with conflicting aims. These parties include the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification and the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia.[3] To Orwell, these factions didn't appear to be very different. He believes these factions are all socialist, and revolutionary, but he didn't anticipate the strife inside the republican party. One month after the war start, which was in August, the republican started to slaughter prisoners in every city. The word "Paseos", which originally means "going for a walk", changed its meaning to "mass organization pulling out prisoners from prison randomly, dragging them to truck for 'paseos', but killing the prisoners during the ride". These executions need no judicial procedure; according to reporters, 90% of death rows didn't even knew their sin when they die, most of them were only "bourgeoisie" under the standard of revolution.[4] George Orwell joined the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), which is also the target of the Great Purge. After almost being killed during the Great Purge, Orwell realized that "fighting for democracy" was a sheer lie. "No one who was in Barcelona then, or for months later, will forget the horrible atmosphere produced by fear, suspicion, hatred, censored newspapers, crammed jails, enormous food queues and prowling gangs of armed men." [5] Orwell believed it is very hard for him to convey that atmosphere clearly, mainly due to this atmosphere never exist in England. "If I were a coal miner, I would not care to be known to the boss as a Communist". Orwell missed the normal atmosphere in England, and he wanted to be back as soon as possible. Stalinist totalitarianism, which allowed no individual will, only strengthened Orwell's faith in socialism, or indeed democratic socialism.

### 3. The War's Influences on Orwell's Belief

Orwell's experience in Spain directly influenced his works' thesis after it. In his article Why I Write, he described Spanish Civil War as the turning point of his life. "The Spanish war and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it." [6], He said. Most secondary sources that I found do not connect these directly, so I will use my primary sources to justify that. Orwell's dystopian works share similar themes such as unsuccessful revolution, extreme collectivism, strict class distinctions and the vanish of individuality. Many details in Ninety Eighty-Four directly correspond to some of Orwell's descriptions in his Homage to Catalonia. For example, just like what I mentioned in section above, Oceania does not have appellation for individual as well. They only use the word "comrade". In Nineteen Eighty-Four, Orwell wrote: "Mrs' was a word somewhat discountenanced by the Party -- you were supposed to call everyone 'comrade' -- but with some women one used it instinctively." [7] In fact, some detail are so similar that we can considered Barcelona during the civil war to be the prototype of Oceania.

As a socialist, Orwell wrote Nineteen Eighty-Four as a warning. He started working on this book in 1945, during the WWII. the beginning of WWII, when British just declared war on Nazi Germany, it controlled to various degrees of many crown colonies, protectorates, and the whole Indian Empire. During World War II, British forces contributed greatly to the Normandy landings of 1944, the production of Ultra signals intelligence, and the strategic bombing of German. Orwell thought that British democracy is not going to last though the war. He believes that the British class system was hampering the war effort. A socialist revolution is definitely needed for British to defeat Nazi Germany. In his opinion, only a socialist economy can defeat Hitler. "the war and the revolution are inseparable" [8], Orwell wrote in 1941. However, the

reality later proved him to be wrong. On June 6, 1944, 2.8 million ALLIED troops from the United States and Britain landed in Normandy, France, opening Europe's Second World War. Representatives of the Japanese government signed the instrument of surrender on the deck of the American battleship Missouri on September 2, 1945. At this point, the Second World War ended with the victory of the anti-Fascist Allied powers. Churchill waves to crowds celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany on Victory in Europe Day, 8 May 1945. British democracy indeed last though the war. In his later works, Orwell believed he made the mistake of assuming that the war and the revolution are inseparable.

So, we can conclude that Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* partially as a warning to British, He is afraid that the socialist revolution in Britain, which he assumed would happen sooner or later, will turn into a revolution of Stalinist totalitarianism. Because of his experience in Spanish Civil War, He is giving a warning about government control over media, propaganda, and political brainwash. Orwell became fully aware that the "democratic revolution" is only a lie just to fool people, the real purpose might be an absolute control over its citizens.

#### 4. Conclusion

Many suggest that *Ninety Eighty-Four* is based on the Soviet Union. However, Orwell has never been to the Soviet Union. After his serious injury in 1937, a bullet shot into his throat. He then received electrotherapy treatment and was declared unsuitable to go back to the army. Although many details in *Ninety Eighty-Four* do correspond to the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s, the true motivation behind this book is still the Spanish Civil War.

#### References

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