

ORWELL'S NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR 20 YEARS ON

'The war on terrorism', 'doublethink' and 'Big Brother'

MICHAEL HEAD

Regrettably, one important anniversary passed last year with little attention. It was 20 years since 1984, the year immortalised by George Orwell. His dystopian vision has proven prescient. There is no other way to describe adequately the indefinite 'war on terror' proclaimed by the Bush administration, joined by many governments in the world, other than as Orwellian. Features conjured up by Orwell — doublethink, thought crimes, guilt by association and 'Big Brother is watching' — seem to be present. Under the banners of 'freedom' and 'democracy', invasions have been launched while, domestically, unprecedented state surveillance has been authorised. Insidiously, the 'war' has provided a blanket under which many aspects of the totalitarianism postulated by Orwell have been introduced, often extended and made permanent fixtures of the legal system. Measures that would have been unthinkable to many people two decades ago are becoming the norm.

It is worth noting at the outset that Orwell located his dystopia in Oceania, the evolution of an Anglo-American Alliance. Despite criticisms from civil liberties groups, both the British and American governments have introduced severe anti-terrorism measures, including detention without trial and proscription of organisations.² To no avail, Amnesty International has condemned the Bush administration for breaching the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international protocols against arbitrary detention and inhuman treatment of prisoners.³

In Australia, as reviewed below, the Howard government and the Labor Party opposition have combined to introduce secret interrogation and detention without trial, and prescribe lengthy jail terms for refusing to disclose information (which can include ideas) requested by the security authorities. They have also outlawed 'association' with a member or supporter of a proscribed terrorist organisation. Those detained or questioned are prohibited from informing anyone, even family members, of their detention or the reasons for it. If charged with a 'terrorist' offence, they can be tried semi-secretly, partly on the basis of evidence that they are forbidden to view or hear.

Further draconian measures have been placed on the political and legal agenda. Like its British and American counterparts, the Australian government has seized upon the July 2005 terrorist bombings in London to foreshadow another expansion of police-state powers. Prime Minister John Howard has spoken of the inadequacy of '19th century' laws to combat

21st century terror. He has advocated the widespread installation of surveillance cameras and suggested the introduction of identity cards.⁴ Attorney General Philip Ruddock has called for a review of the anti-terrorism legislation, which would consider proposals such as outlawing views that endorse terrorism and stripping citizenship from foreign-born Australians suspected of links to terrorism.⁵

These developments appear to be deeply Orwellian in a double sense. In the first place, they resemble the doctrine of 'doublethink', which insists that one must suppress one's memory of the past in order to embrace a new 'reality' — including the nostrum that 'everything changed' with the events of September 11, 2001. Secondly, they embody the 'Big Brother is watching' regime in which 'Thoughtcrime is death'.

The war on terrorism: 'doublethink' in action

In many ways, much of the language employed in the current 'war' is eerily reminiscent of Winston Smith's explorations of the wonders of doublethink in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed — if all records told the same tale — then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who commands the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.'⁶

Under George W Bush's doctrine, the 'war on terror' is an endless state of war on an abstract concept. 'Terrorism' is not a tangible enemy, nor even an ideological or political cause. It is, at most, a set of tactics, to which resort can be had by a multitude of disoriented and disaffected political currents. Moreover, the classification is susceptible to abuse for political purposes. Today's primary 'terrorist' targets — al-Qa'ida-linked groups — were yesterday's 'freedom fighters' in the guerilla war against the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan. One must suspend all recall of the billions of dollars siphoned into Osama bin Laden's Islamic fundamentalist movement by the administrations of Carter, Reagan and George Bush Senior until as recently as the early 1990s.⁷ Likewise, one's knowledge that Saddam Hussein was also once a close ally of Washington, particularly during

REFERENCES

1. Based on a paper presented to the 'Traumas of Law' conference, the 12th International Conference of the Law & Literature Association of Australia, held at Griffith University and the Queensland University of Technology, 9–11 July 2004. This article also draws on material originally published by the author on the *World Socialist Web Site*.
2. For a comparison of the US and British legislation, see N Hancock, *Terrorism and the Law in Australia: Supporting Materials* (Canberra, Parliament of Australia, Department of Parliamentary Library, Research Paper No. 13 2001–2002) 2–8.
3. *Amnesty International's concerns regarding post September 11 detentions in the USA*, Amnesty International March 2002.
4. Editorial, 'The debate we must have', *Herald Sun*, 25 July 2005.
5. Philip Ruddock, Interview, Sydney Radio 2GB, 21 July 2005 <http://152.91.15.12/agd/WWW/MinisterRuddockHome.nsf/Page/Interview_Transcripts_2005_Transcripts_21_July_2005_-_Transcript_-_Interview_Sydney_Radio_2GB> at 14 October 2005.
6. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (2003) 40.
7. W Blum, *Rogue State: a guide to the world's only superpower*, (2002) 155.

“And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed — if all records told the same tale — then the lie passed into history and became truth.”

Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell

the fratricidal Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, must be annihilated.⁸

The requirements of official amnesia do not end there. For all their claims to be introducing democracy to the Middle East, Washington and its allies have for decades financially, diplomatically and military propped up dictatorships such as the Saudi monarchy and Gulf kingdoms, in the interests of controlling access to the region's oil wealth.⁹ Finally, whether or not the Bush administration knew in advance of plans for terrorist acts on September 11 — and that question still has to be answered¹⁰ — the outrages in New York and Washington provided the pretext for the implementation of plans prepared much earlier — during the 1990s — for the conquest of Afghanistan and Iraq.¹¹

To return to Winston Smith:

His mind slid away into the labyrinthine world of doublethink. To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully-constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them; to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy; to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and, above all, to apply the same process to the process itself.¹²

In 2004, similar thought processes are required. One must embrace the world of media spin and accept it as objective reality, no matter how ludicrous and self-delusional. The undemocratic installation of essentially puppet governments in Iraq and Afghanistan through the use of military might becomes ‘the transfer of sovereignty,’ if repeated often enough in the mass media. An absurd premise becomes the rationale for all the talk of self-rule, democracy, freedom and empowerment: namely, the notion that the US military occupiers and their allies represent the Iraqi people, that is, those being occupied, and, conversely, all those who resist the US-led occupation are, ipso facto, enemies of the people and, by definition, ‘terrorists’.

Oceania's three central slogans were: War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery and Ignorance is Strength. The Ministry of Love was responsible for law and order; the Ministry of Peace for war; and the Ministry of Truth for propaganda. Emmanuel Goldstein (loosely modelled on Leon Trotsky) was the Enemy of the People. Today's slogans could be War is Security, Invasion is Liberation,

and the Free Market is Freedom. Defence departments administer ‘pre-emptive intervention’; departments of homeland security fuel fear and xenophobia; and justice departments justify indefinite detention, torture and military trials. Various personalities, notably the ‘Axis of Evil,’ Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, have functioned as enemies of the people.

A lesser-known elaboration of doublespeak involves Australian Attorney General Philip Ruddock. In an address to the Sydney Institute, delivered in the Mallesons Conference Room on 20 April 2004, Mr Ruddock outlined what he termed a ‘new framework’ for considering terrorism and the rule of law:

The war on terror is like no other war in living memory. This is a war which may have no obvious conclusion, no armistice and no treaty. Victory in this war will not necessarily be measured by territory gained or regimes toppled. In this war victories will be measured by disasters averted and democracy strengthened. This war's victories will be measured by citizens feeling safe in their homes...

Our *Constitution*, one of the world's oldest and most stable, provides us with a mechanism to protect our country and at the same time protect civil liberties through human security laws. In enacting such laws we are not only preserving traditional notions of civil liberties and the rule of law, but we are recognising that these operate in a different paradigm. If we are to preserve human rights then we must preserve the most fundamental right of all — the right to human security.¹³

Orwell would recognise this logic immediately. While insisting that the government is upholding the *Constitution*, civil liberties and the rule of law, the minister explained that these now operate in a new paradigm: the right to human security, which is said to be the most fundamental right of all. Thus, in the name of defending civil liberties and the rule of law, they have been subsumed under another concept, human security. Making ‘citizens feel safe in their homes’ has become the chief criterion of political liberty.

Again, historical knowledge must be suspended. In this instance, it is the record of centuries of political struggle for basic democratic rights. In Anglo-Saxon law, civil liberties — such as habeas corpus, the presumption of innocence, the requirement of proof beyond reasonable doubt for a criminal conviction, freedom of association and free speech — were substantially forged in the conflict against the absolutist monarchy, from the Magna Carta of 1215 and culminating in the English Civil War of the 1640s and the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688.¹⁴ Among these fundamental rights is freedom from

8. *Ibid.*, 133–34, 145–46.

9. S. Shalom, *Imperial Alibis: Rationalizing US Intervention After the Cold War* (1993) 63–88.

10. The report of the US national commission investigating the terrorist attacks of September 11 was filled with criticisms of the Bush and Clinton Administrations and the performance of the government agencies responsible for intelligence, national security and emergency response. But the commission attributed all of these failures to incompetence, mismanagement, or ‘failure of imagination’. The fundamental premise of its investigation was that the CIA, the FBI, the US military and the Bush White House all acted in good faith. The report thus excluded, a priori, the most important question raised by the events of 9/11: did US government agencies deliberately permit — or actively assist — the carrying out of this terrorist atrocity, in order to provide the Bush Administration with the necessary pretext to carry out its program of war in Central Asia and the Middle East and a huge build-up of the forces of state repression at home. See *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004).

11. A. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (2002), N. Beams, ‘The political economy of American militarism’, *World Socialist Web Site*, 10 July 2003 <<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/jul2003/nb1-10.shtml>> at 14 October 2005.

12. Orwell, above n 6, 40–41.

13. P. Ruddock, ‘A New Framework: Counter Terrorism and the Rule of Law’, Address to the Sydney Institute, 20 April 2004 <http://www.ag.gov.au/agd/WWW/MinisterRuddockHome.nsf/Page/Speeches_2004_Speeches_20_April_2004_-_Speech_-_A_New_Framework:_Counter_Terrorism_and_the_Rule_of_Law> at 14 October 2005.

14. See, for example, W. Blackstone, *Commentaries* 3:129–137 and the *Habeas Corpus Act* 1679 (UK).

detention without trial, as the US Supreme Court, by a 6–3 majority, commented in June 2004, in ruling that Guantanamo Bay detainees could seek writs of habeas corpus in US courts.¹⁵ The majority judgment, delivered by Stevens J, suggested that at stake were democratic conceptions dating back nearly 800 years to the Magna Carta of 1215:

Executive imprisonment has been considered oppressive and lawless since John, at Runnymede, pledged that no free man should be imprisoned, dispossessed, outlawed, or exiled save by the judgment of his peers or by the law of the land. The judges of England developed the writ of habeas corpus largely to preserve these immunities from executive restraint.¹⁶

Likewise, in *A & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department*,¹⁷ a decision of the British House of Lords, Lord Bingham referred to

[T]he long libertarian tradition of English law, dating back to chapter 39 of Magna Carta 1215, given effect in the ancient remedy of habeas corpus, declared in the Petition of Right 1628, upheld in a series of landmark decisions down the centuries and embodied in the substance and procedure of the law to our own day.¹⁸

Controversially, the House of Lords ordered the release of eight individuals who had been certified and detained for more than two years under the *Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001* (UK).

The ‘counter-terrorism’ laws: Big Brother is watching

Let us now turn to the second aspect of Orwellianism to observe how far these protections against tyranny have been subverted in the name of human security. Life in Oceania was dominated by posters featuring the handsome, moustachioed face of a dictator. ‘It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.’¹⁹ Regular police patrols, snooping into people’s windows, were not the primary threat to freedom of political thought. ‘Only the Thought Police mattered,’ because every whispered conversation could be detected by a telescreen.²⁰ Winston Smith wrote: ‘Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death.’²¹ Those suspected of harbouring opposing thoughts routinely disappeared without any official explanation.

At first light, it may seem an exaggeration to assert that similar processes are under way in today’s political and legal climate. Thankfully, we do not have ubiquitous posters of government leaders, figuratively watching

our every move. But it is instructive to review four essential features of the raft of ‘counter-terrorism’ legislation passed, with the Labor Party’s support, over the past three years. The legislation (1) defines terrorism in sweeping terms; (2) permits the banning of political groups; (3) allows for detention without trial; and (4) shrouds the operations of the intelligence and police agencies in secrecy and provides for semi-secret trials.²²

As defined by these measures, terrorism extends to acts or threats that advance ‘a political, religious or ideological cause’ for the purpose of ‘coercing or influencing by intimidation’ any government or section of the public. It is punishable by life imprisonment. ‘Advocacy, protest, dissent or industrial action’ is exempted but not if it involves harm to a person, ‘serious damage’ to property, ‘serious risk’ to public health or safety, or ‘serious interference’ with an information, telecommunications, financial, essential services or transport system.²³

This definition could cover any demonstration or strike action in which a person was injured or felt endangered, given that the purpose of many protests and strikes is to apply pressure to a government, employer or other authority. Nurses taking strike action that shuts down hospital wards in support of a political demand for greater health spending, for example, could be accused of endangering public health and thus be charged as terrorists. Demonstrators who block roads or entrances to government buildings or financial institutions, such as the stock exchange, could be charged as terrorists, as could computer hackers.

Terrorist intent is not necessary. The legislation imposes jail terms ranging from life to 10 years for preparing, planning or training for ‘terrorist acts’ and for possessing documents or other objects used in the preparation of such acts. A person can be jailed for possessing such a ‘thing’ even if they did not know it was used for terrorist purposes, but was merely ‘reckless’ as to that fact.

Organisations can be outlawed as terrorist by purely executive decision — via regulations — under amendments passed in 2004. Any person who directs or provides support to the activities of a terrorist organisation, knowing it to be terrorist, can be jailed for 25 years or, if they are ‘reckless’ as to whether the organisation is terrorist or not, for 15 years. A member of a banned group faces up to 10 years imprisonment. Membership is defined to include ‘informal

15. *Rasul v Bush; Al Odah v United States* (2004) 542 U.S. (Cases no. 03–343, 03–334)

16. Quoting Jackson J in *Shaughnessy v. United States ex rel. Mezer*, 345 U.S. 206, 218–219 (1953) (dissenting opinion).

17. [2004] UKHL 56.

18. *Ibid* at [36].

19. Orwell, above n 6, 3.

20. *Ibid* 4–5.

21. *Ibid* 33.

22. For full details see M Head, ‘“Counter Terrorism” Laws: A Threat to Political Freedom, Civil Liberties and Constitutional Rights’ (2002) 26 *Melbourne University Law Review* 666 and M Head, ‘Another threat to democratic rights: ASIO detentions cloaked in secrecy’ (2004) 29 *Alternative Law Journal* 127.

23. Criminal Code 100.1.

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membership' or taking 'steps to become a member'. It is a defence to have taken 'reasonable steps' to cease membership 'as soon as practicable' after knowing the organisation was terrorist, but the burden of proof lies on the defendant. If current prosecutions are any guide, these provisions may be applied retrospectively against individuals who are linked to organisations that were only subsequently designated as terrorist.²⁴ Under further amendments passed in 2004, anyone can be jailed for three years for simply knowingly 'associating' with a member of, or a person who promotes the activities of a banned organisation. Limited exceptions exist for family members, religious ceremonies, humanitarian projects and the provision of legal advice.²⁵

The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has been given the power to detain and question people without charge or trial. ASIO and Federal Police officers can raid anyone's home or office, at any hour of the day or night, and forcibly take them away, interrogate and strip-search them and hold them incommunicado, effectively indefinitely through the issuing of repeated warrants.²⁶ Detainees need not be suspected of a terrorist offence, or any other criminal offence. The Attorney General can certify that their interrogation would 'substantially assist the collection of intelligence that is important in relation to a terrorism offence,' even if no act of terrorism has occurred. This power could be used to detain journalists and political activists, as well as the children, relatives or acquaintances of supposed terrorism suspects. More fundamentally, it is directed against the possession of incriminating information, which can include information that a person has in their mind, that is, thoughts and ideas. If ASIO alleges a person has information or material that would assist its work, the onus is on the individual to prove otherwise. Any detainee who refuses to answer ASIO's questions is liable to five years imprisonment.

Amendments passed in December 2003, again supported by the Labor Party, effectively gag all public protest against, or even reporting of, the use of the new powers.²⁷ It is now a crime, punishable by up to five years jail, to publicly mention any operation involving ASIO's powers during the full 28-day period of a warrant. Even if ASIO itself breaks the law, for example by detaining someone for more than seven days without obtaining a new warrant, any journalist who reports the case could be imprisoned. A further two-year prohibition was imposed on the public

disclosure by anyone of 'operational information' that was obtained, directly or indirectly, from the questioning process.

In effect, these measures can outlaw political campaigns against arbitrary or illegal detentions. If someone sees a person being hauled away by ASIO or Federal Police for questioning, they cannot disclose that fact to anyone—not even a family member, friend, civil liberties group, member of parliament or political party. If a detainee's family or associates somehow find out about the detention, they cannot publicly comment on it in any way.

It is now possible for ASIO to cloak virtually all its operations in secrecy, simply by obtaining a questioning warrant from the Attorney General. For that reason alone, the latest legislation increases the danger that ASIO's detention powers will be abused for political purposes. ASIO has a long record in this regard. Since the Chifley Labor government established the intelligence service in 1949, it has been used by successive governments, Labor and conservative alike, to monitor, disrupt and harass a wide range of political opponents, including Labor Party members, trade unionists, anti-war activists, students and socialists.²⁸

Moreover, the High Court has, in effect, refused to call into question ASIO's assessment of what constitutes a threat to security. In 1982, in *Church of Scientology v Woodward*²⁹ the court rejected an attempt by the Church of Scientology to challenge ASIO's assessment that the church presented a possible threat to security. A similar result was reached two years later in *A v Hayden*,³⁰ with regard to the operations of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), ASIO's overseas sister agency.³¹ ASIO and ASIS are part of an extensive security and intelligence network, which includes the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO), the Defence Signals Directorate (DSD), the Office of National Assessments (ONA) and special state police units (formerly called Special Branches).

The potential for the security agencies to act as a law unto themselves has been increased by the passage in late 2004 of the *National Security Information (Criminal Proceedings) Act*, which permits trials to be held in complete or partial secrecy. Closed court sessions can hear charges, censor evidence, allow government witnesses to testify in disguise via video and, in some circumstances, exclude defendants and their lawyers from trial proceedings. To activate the process, the Attorney General simply has to issue a certificate

24. Two Muslim men, Izhar ul-Haque and Jack Thomas, have been committed for trial in Australia for activities related to Lashkar-e-Toiba, a Kashmiri group that was later proscribed.

25. *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth) s 102.8.

26. *Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act 1979* (Cth) ss 34A to 34Y.

27. M Head, 'Another threat to democratic rights: ASIO detentions cloaked in secrecy' (2004) 29 *Alternative Law Journal* 127.

28. This record has been documented in several works and official inquiries. See, for example, D McKnight, *Australia's Spies and their Secrets* (1994), R Hall, *The Secret State*, (1978), F Cain, *The Origins of Political Surveillance in Australia* (1983), F Cain, *ASIO, an Unofficial History* (1994), J Hocking, *Beyond Terrorism, The Development of the Australian Security State* (1993), Commonwealth of Australia, *Royal Commission on Intelligence and Security: Fourth Report* (1977) vols 1 and 2.

29. [1982] 154 CLR 25.

30. (1984) 156 CLR 532.

31. M Head, 'ASIO, Secrecy and Lack of Accountability' (2004) 11 *Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law* (December 2004).

stating that evidence given in the trial is likely to 'prejudice national security'. If the judge agrees, lawyers who refuse or fail to obtain an Attorney General's Department security clearance can be barred, possibly leaving the accused unrepresented.³²

Taken together, with their four principal features of concern outlined above, the measures introduced since 2001 represent a chilling advance toward a 'big brother' state. As in Oceania, surveillance can be pervasive; detention and interrogation can be secretly undertaken on vague grounds; and people can be convicted and imprisoned, perhaps for life (possibly after semi-secret trials) for allegedly possessing 'information' deemed relevant to terrorism, even if no terrorist activity has taken place.

Orwell and the purposes of war

Among the most thought-provoking sections of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the extract from the mythical Emmanuel Goldstein's banned work, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, which falls into the hands of Winston Smith. It includes an analysis of the continuous state of war undertaken between Oceania and its two super-state rivals, Eurasia and Eastasia, each of which had become unconquerable. The Orwell/Goldstein account suggests that this climate of war

was inextricably bound up with the maintenance of a domestic police-state. Goldstein writes:

War, it will be seen, is now a purely internal affair. In the past, the ruling groups of all countries, although they might recognise their common interests and therefore limit the destructiveness of war, did fight against one another, and the victor always plundered the vanquished. In our own day they are not fighting against one another at all. The war is waged by each ruling group against its own subjects, and the object of the war is to make or prevent conquests of territory, but to keep the structure of society intact. The very word 'war', therefore, has become misleading. It would probably be accurate to say that by becoming continuous war has ceased to exist.³³

In Goldstein/Orwell's vision, a state of perpetual war had arisen, not primarily driven by external threats but the requirements of domestic political control. While the ruling elites maintained the 'war' in the name of combatting foreign enemies, their actual targets were their own subjects. Indeed, continuous war had become necessary to ensure the political survival of their regimes. For all the apparent supremacy and omnipresence of the ruling groups, they operated with a siege mentality, constantly fearing the outbreak of mass discontent. As the source of the brooding popular hostility, Goldstein pointed to the existence of stark social inequality, which could not be overcome without generating new, even more dangerous, contradictions.

For if leisure and security were enjoyed by all alike, the great mass of human beings who are normally stupefied by poverty would become literate and would learn to think for themselves; and when once they had done this, they would sooner or later realize that the privileged minority had no function, and they would sweep it away. In the long run, a hierarchical society was only possible on a basis of poverty and ignorance... If human equality is to be forever averted — if the High, as we have called them, are to keep their places permanently — then the prevailing mental condition must be controlled insanity.³⁴

The collapse of the falsifications used to justify the United States-led invasion of Iraq — 'weapons of mass destruction', and Saddam Hussein's supposed links to terrorism — have underscored the magnitude of the lies told to divert attention away from the real motives of the 'war on terror', both domestically and internationally. In terms of external motives, the Middle East and Central Asia, as is well known, contain the largest proven concentrations of oil and natural gas reserves in the world.

Domestically, there is no more justification to believe the official script that the same governments are

32. *National Security Information (Criminal Proceedings) Act 2004* (Cth) ss 24–39.

33. Orwell, above n 6, 228–229.

34. *Ibid.*, 219.



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concerned with protecting ordinary people from terrorism. Rather, there are good reasons to conclude that political considerations, notably the need to provide an overseas distraction from the growth of social discontent, loom large in today's political calculations, as they did for Big Brother. Even the inequality and social stratification described by Orwell/Goldstein pales by comparison with today's worsening chasm between the wealthy elites and the remainder of society, of which there is ample evidence.³⁵ According to the 2003 rich list published by *Forbes* magazine in early 2004, for example, the total net worth of the world's billionaires added up to a staggering \$1.9 trillion, equal to almost one fifth of the giant US economy. The world's mega-rich grew even richer over the previous year as their stock portfolios swelled, catapulting the total number of billionaires to a record 587.³⁶

Within Australia also, the evidence points to a widening gulf in wealth as well as income. *Levels, patterns and trends of Australian household saving*, a report by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) found that in June 2002, the top 20% of households owned more than half the total household wealth. The poorest 20% of households possessed almost nothing, while the bottom 40% owned just 8% of total household wealth. Significantly, after a decade of privatisation, the wealthiest group owned almost 90% of all shares.³⁷

With society deeply divided between an oligarchy of the fabulously wealthy and the masses of ordinary people struggling to pay their bills, it is increasingly difficult, as Orwell suggested, to maintain democratic forms of rule. War provides both a diversion from the hostility provoked by this polarisation and a means of strengthening the domestic apparatus for intimidating and suppressing dissent.

Among some commentators, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is taken as a parable for the Soviet Union, with Big Brother personifying Joseph Stalin and Goldstein representing Trotsky's voice in the Stalinist wilderness. But as Thomas Pynchon observes in his introduction to the 2003 edition, Orwell regarded his work as written against all forms of totalitarianism, including those found within the official 'socialism' of the post-World War II Labour government in Britain. After all, Oceania, with its Ingsoc (English socialism) political order was a future projection of the Anglo-American Alliance, whereas Eurasia rested on Russian rule over the

Eurasian landmass and Eastasia on Japanese hegemony over East Asia.

Although *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, like Orwell's *Animal Farm*, was treated as an anti-communist tract during the Cold War, Orwell considered himself a 'dissident left' and once identified, to a certain extent, with groups such as the Spanish POUM and the British Independent Labour Party that espoused socialism. His novels were intended as forewarnings of the tendencies that Orwell saw as immanent in the capitalist world as well as the degenerated Soviet Union. Yet, for all its bleakness, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* ends with an appendix that refers to Newspeak in the past tense, suggesting its demise before it was supposed to become general by 2050.³⁸ Perhaps it points to the future prospect of a genuinely democratic, egalitarian and fraternal society after the success of a social revolution from below. Properly understood, Orwell's masterpiece can help inform such a movement that will consign the official edifices of lies, half-truths and perversions to the historical past.

Postscript

The concerns raised in this article have been heightened by the outcome of the September 27, 2005 Council of Australian Governments 'counter-terrorism summit'. The eight state and territory leaders agreed with Prime Minister John Howard on a package of legislation that goes well beyond the already deep inroads made into essential civil liberties under the fraudulent banner of the 'war on terrorism'.

The unprecedented measures are truly Orwellian. They directly target fundamental democratic rights: the freedoms of speech, association and movement, and the right not to be detained without trial. In secret hearings, the Australian Federal Police will be able to apply for 12-month control orders imposing draconian conditions on individuals, such as house arrest, tracking devices, travel bans and association restrictions, simply because the security agencies accuse them of being 'terrorist risks'.

'Preventative detention' powers will enable the police to lock people away for up to 14 days without trial. Prisoners will be held not because they are accused of committing any offence, or even alleged to have 'information' relevant to terrorism (as with ASIO's already unprecedented detention power, established

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35. For example, E Wolff, *Top Heavy: A Study of the Increasing Inequality of Wealth in America*, (1995), Wolff, *Economics of Poverty, Inequality and Discrimination* (1997). See also <<http://inequality.org/>> at 14 October 2005.

36. *Forbes* billionaires list: <http://www.forbes.com/billionaires/free_forbes/2003/0317/087.html> at 14 October 2005.

37. National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, *Levels, patterns and trends of Australian household saving*, September 2002 <<http://www.fpa.asn.au/images/userimages/fpa/savingsreport0902.pdf>> at 14 October 2005.

38. Orwell, above n 6, xxiii-xxiv.