

# Nineteen Eighty-Four – George Orwell

## Context

### Post World War II

- Rise of two superpowers – the Soviet Union and the USA
- Europe was divided into a US-led Western Bloc and a Soviet-led Eastern Bloc
- United Nations formed – global organisation for international cooperation and diplomacy, outlawed wars of aggression in an attempt to avoid a third world war
- Increased rate of decolonisation – India, Indonesia, the Philippines and a number of Arab nations gained independence
- Rise of the People’s Republic of China as the Chinese Communists emerged victorious from the Chinese Civil War in 1949

- European economy had collapsed, industrial infrastructure destroyed. In London, there was a desperate need for large-scale rebuilding. Architects and planners saw the opportunity for remodelling – high rise buildings replaced housing lost during the war and London’s slums

## Stalin

- Leader of the Soviet Union from the mid 1920s until his death in 1953. Communist – he was effectively the dictator of the state
- Launched a period of industrialisation and collectivisation that resulted in the rapid transformation of the USSR from an agrarian society into an industrial power
- Imprisonment of millions of people in Gulag labour camps, initial upheaval in agriculture disrupted food

production and contributed to the catastrophic Soviet famine of 1932-33

- Between 1934 and 1939, he organised and led a massive purge of the party, government, armed forces and intelligentsia, in which millions of “enemies of the working class” were imprisoned, exiled or executed, often without due process

## Hitler

- Leader of the Nazi Party from 1933 to 1945
- Dictator of Nazi Germany, central figure of World War II in Europe and the Holocaust
- Promoter of pan-Germanism, anti-Semitism and anti-communism
- Led a one-party dictatorship based on totalitarian and autocratic ideology of National Socialism

## Mussolini

- Italian politician, journalist and leader of the National Fascist Party, ruling the country as Prime Minister from 1922 until his ousting in 1943
- Ruled constitutionally until 1925, when he dropped all pretence of democracy and set up a legal dictatorship
- Founder of fascism

## Trotsky

- Marxist revolutionary and theorist, Soviet politician and the founding leader of the Red Army
- Joined the Bolsheviks immediately prior to the 1917 October Revolution and eventually became a leader within the Communist Party
- After leading a failed struggle against the increasing role of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and the policies and rise of Stalin in the 1920s, Trotsky was removed from

power, expelled from the Communist Party (1927) and finally exiled from the Soviet Union (1929)

- As head of the Fourth International, Trotsky continued to oppose the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. On Stalin's orders, he was assassinated in Mexico in 1940

## Franco

- Spanish general (1936-1975)
- Conservative monarchist – shocked when monarchy was removed and replaced with a republic
- Looking to overthrow the republic, Franco and other generals staged a partially successful coup, which started the Spanish Civil War
- Won Spanish Civil War in 1939 – established an autocratic dictatorship

- Led a series of politically-motivated violent acts – concentration camps, forced labour and executions

## Winston Churchill

- Prime Minister of UK from 1940-45 and 1951-55
- Promoted European unity
- Led Britain to victory in WWII over Nazi Germany

## Arthur Koestler

- Hungarian-British author and journalist
- In 1931, he joined the Communist party of Germany until, disillusioned by Stalinism, he resigned in 1938
- Published novel 'Darkness at Noon' – an anti-totalitarian work that gained him international fame

## Totalitarianism

- Political system where the state recognises no limits to its authority and strives to regulate every aspect of public and private life wherever feasible
- Totalitarianism regimes stay in political power through an all-encompassing propaganda campaign, which is disseminated through the state-controlled mass media, a single party that is often marked by political repression, personality cultism, control over the economy, regulation and restriction of speech, mass surveillance and widespread use of terror

## Fascism

- Governmental system led by a dictator having complete power, forcibly suppressing opposition and criticism, regimenting all industry, commerce etc and emphasising an aggressive nationalism and often racism

## Marxism

- The political and economic philosophy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in which the concept of class struggle plays a central role in understanding society's allegedly inevitable development from bourgeois oppression under capitalism to a socialist and classless society

## Communism

- The political and economic doctrine that aims to replace private property and a profit-based economy with public ownership and communal control of at least the major means of production and the natural resources of a society
- Form of socialism – distinction rests largely on the Communists' adherence to the revolutionary socialism of Karl Marx



## Spanish Civil War

- Military revolt against the Republican government of Spain, supported by conservative elements within the country
- The Nationalists (the rebels) received aid from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany
- Republicans received aid from the Soviet Union, as well as from International Brigades composed of volunteers from Europe and the United States

## Cold War

- State of political and military tension after World War II
- Split the temporary wartime alliance against Nazi Germany, leaving the USSR and the US as two superpowers with profound economic and political differences: the former being a single-party Marxist-

Leninist state operating a planned economy and controlled press and owning exclusively the right to establish and govern communities, and the latter being a capitalist state with generally free elections and freedom of association to its citizens

- Capitalism (USA) vs Communism (USSR)
- Development of weapons of mass destruction, espionage

## Tehran Conference

- Meeting between US President Franklin Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin in Tehran, Iran in 1943
- Coordinated military strategy against Germany and Japan and made a number of important decisions concerning the post World War II era

## George Orwell

- Educated as a scholarship student in England
- Felt oppressed and outraged by the dictatorial control that the schools he attended exercised over their students' lives
- Anti-fascist
- Democratic socialist
- Against Soviet-style communism
- Fought in Spanish Civil War
- Brilliant, insightful, ahead of his time
- Wrote essays on politics and his perspectives
- Worked for the British minister of information writing propaganda
- Social and political background in keeping with workers' rights

## Content

### Ideas and Perspectives

- The dangers of totalitarianism
- Psychological manipulation
- Power of language
- Technology
- Suppression of humanity

### Thesis Statements

- Orwell criticises Russian Communism and the rise of Fascism in Europe through his condemnation of a totalitarian regime.
- Orwell condemns the use of language and media to control society, emphasises prevalent modernist fears about the future in the dystopia he constructs in 1984.

- Orwell expresses the importance of humanity and condemns the dehumanisation of individuals under a totalitarian rule.
- Orwell highlights the role of an individual in defying the ideologies of monocratic powers and ultimately emphasises the futility of rebellion against a totalitarian government due to their ability to control all aspects of an individual's life.
- Orwell warns against the rise of destructive absolute power as it is accompanied by psychological manipulation.
- Orwell denounces prevalent power structures that essentially results in suppression of the human spirit by autocratic powers and coercive apparatus.