

1984

REVISITED

Totalitarianism in Our Century

EDITED BY Irving Howe



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dedicated to the memory of
Henry Pachter

he has come to hate as enemies—are enacted for him by servile functionaries and masses of often deluded men, women, and children.

Perhaps a better name for it would be Big Brother's "fantasy state." The fantasies are enacted for him in the most diverse settings and forms: in courtrooms where purge trials take place and the victims, after confessing their crimes, abase themselves by paying a final public tribute to him, their murderer, upon pronouncement of the death sentence; in theaters where idealized versions of his fantasied hero's life are performed for him by talented artists; in mass rallies where people by the tens of thousands enact their adoration of him; in schools where children are taught to thank him for their happy lives and, if need be, to denounce even their parents as his enemies; in concentration camps where hated ones are destroyed in awful ways for whatever he fancies their crimes have been; and perhaps on battlefields where soldiers go into battle for his greater glory.

It is his fantasies that are being enacted by contrivance of the organs of the state; and he, in whose mind the fantasies arose, is not only the author but also the appreciative spectator of the performance, because he believes it. When he dies or is displaced, the show is over. What's left behind is death and misery, guilt and the denial of guilt, wasted lives, memories of horror, another authoritarianism with its army, police, and other institutions—the ruins of the fantasy state.

This, it seems to me, is the message to us of psychological understanding and history, including the now no longer so mysterious history of those two indubitable cases—Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia.

Michael Walzer

7 On "Failed Totalitarianism"

I

George Orwell's *1984* was first published in 1949. By then, many of its major themes had been anticipated, both in conservative literature and in the internal debates of the democratic left (and in earlier anti-utopian novels, like Zamyatin's *We* and Huxley's *Brave New World*). Yet, in another sense, Orwell was a forerunner: the major theoretical works on totalitarianism as a political regime—on its origins, history, and internal character—all appeared in the early and middle fifties. It is as if *1984* released the flood, and writers of all sorts (many of them, unlike Orwell, refugees from totalitarian states) hurried forward to complete or revise Emmanuel Goldstein's *Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*. Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* appeared in 1951, Jacob Talmon's *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* in the same year; Czesław Miłosz's *Captive Mind* came out in 1953; C. J. Friedrich's *Totalitarianism*, an important collection of essays, appeared in 1954 and marked the academic arrival of the new theory; Zbigniew Brzezinski published his *Permanent Purge* in 1956, and Friedrich and Brzezinski's *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* came out in the same year.

These books are often treated as if they were so many volleys in the developing cold war—efforts to draw the line between the

Author's note: Some paragraphs of this paper are drawn from my essay on J. L. Talmon and the theory of totalitarianism, prepared for a colloquium in Talmon's memory held in Jerusalem in June 1982, under the sponsorship of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

free world and Communist tyranny and to define the Russian enemy as the very embodiment of evil. Perhaps they played that role; certainly their arguments, in vulgarized form, made useful propaganda. But the collective effort to understand what had happened in Germany and Russia was immensely serious, and the level of analysis in the books I have listed was very high. Nor was the distinction between freedom and tyranny their central point. The major theoretical argument of Orwell's book and of all the books that followed is the startling novelty of totalitarian politics. Totalitarianism is a new kind of regime, different not only from liberal democracy but also and more importantly from every previous form of tyranny. "By comparison with that existing today, all the tyrannies of the past were half hearted and inefficient"—thus Orwell's Goldstein.¹ "Modern totalitarian democracy," Talmon wrote a few years later, "... is completely different from the absolutism wielded by a divine-right king or by a usurping tyrant."² *Completely different*, something new under the sun, the terrible creation of our own contemporaries.

The argument that totalitarianism represents a radical break even within the long history of unfreedom has recently been revived by a group of conservative intellectuals.³ They are right, it seems to me, to stress the importance of the argument. But the distinction they go on to draw between totalitarian and "authoritarian" regimes plays a part in their work that the theorists of the fifties never intended: it functions very much like and often simply replaces the cold war distinction between communism and the free world. Indeed, it is one of the purposes of conservative intellectuals to revive the spirit of the cold war. The shift in terminology suggests a certain loss of confidence in the idea of a free world—a loss that helps to explain, perhaps, the increasing stridency with which we are called upon to defend not only free but also tyrannical regimes, so long as they are not totalitarian. Still, the argument for novelty is interesting and deep, and I mean to consider it here at some length. I shall adopt the conservatives' terms, using "authoritarian" to refer

to all the forms of unfreedom—tyrannies, oligarchies, military dictatorships, colonial regimes, and so on—save for those that resemble Nazism and Stalinism.

II

Three factors above all mark the novelty of totalitarian regimes as they are described in the theories of the 1950s. The first is the political mobilization of the masses. Totalitarianism, we are told, is incompatible with passivity; it draws its special power from a disciplined, active, engaged population; it requires people who *march*.⁴ In a sense, then, totalitarianism is the heir of all those democratic and Socialist movements that first brought the people into the political arena. But it is a strange heir who disowns his heritage, and it might more easily be said that totalitarianism represents the demobilization of democratic parties, movements, and unions—the transformation of political action into ritual performance and of arguments into slogans. What is necessary is that the people be present and accounted for, available for demonstrations and mass meetings. But discipline, action, and engagement are required only from the members of the new elite, the totalitarian party. Orwell saw this clearly, more clearly, I think, than theorists transfixed by the idea of totality. The collectivism of the Ingsoc regime of 1984 derives indeed from English socialism, but the institutional structures that the Socialists built have been dismantled, and the "proles" they organized have been returned to a state of apolitical quiescence. Popular mobilization consists only in this: that insofar as the people have any public life at all, it is planned and run by party officials.

The second mark of totalitarianism is its extraordinary sense of purpose. Authoritarian rulers aim only to stay in power; but the totalitarian party aims at the creation of a new humanity and a perfect regime. Talmon called this commitment "political messianism" because it suggested the possibility of reaching the end of days through sheer political willful-

ness. If the people are to march, they must march somewhere, and where else but to the promised land, the messianic kingdom? No other goal could possibly sustain the spirit of the marchers. Here again, totalitarianism appears as the heir of the left, building upon revolutionary aspiration as church officials once built upon eschatological hope. But others can build here too. *Novus ordo seclorum*, a new cycle of the ages: these words are engraved on the Great Seal of the United States and suggest that a non-totalitarian and a secular politics can also be founded upon revolutionary aspiration. The theorists of the fifties must have thought that the special mark of totalitarianism was to take revolutionary aspiration seriously and to use state power to enforce its ends. But we might follow Orwell and describe this use of power as an example of *doublethink*, simultaneously genuine and deeply cynical. It only intermittently determines the policies of the totalitarian party; most often it serves purely hortatory and legitimizing purposes, like other and older ideologies. Power is actually used with other ends in mind.

The third mark is the decisive one. Totalitarianism involves a systematic effort to control every aspect of social and intellectual life. Thus the Nazi *Gleichschaltung*, the top-down coordination of economy, politics, education, religion, culture, and family.⁵ Radical control, control in detail: perhaps earlier rulers dreamed of such a thing, but it became technically feasible—this is one of the central themes of *1984*—only in the twentieth century.

Orwell suggests that control has two forms, negative and positive. The proles are merely pacified, like a colonial population; it is enough if they neither think nor act in an oppositionist way. But Party members are conceived to have made a profound commitment to political life (again, the model derives from the revolutionary movement) and to have accepted the discipline of the collective. So their lives are carefully shaped and directed; their every movement is watched; they are allowed no private thoughts or feelings, no respite from political

enthusiasm. They are expected to live, writes Orwell's Goldstein, "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."⁶ One might think that this intense and pervasive discipline is somehow functional to the stated purposes of the Party, much as worker solidarity is functional to the purposes of trade unionism. But the only purpose of Party discipline, Orwell argues, is greater discipline. Totalitarianism is the exercise of power for its own sake. Hannah Arendt makes a similar point when she writes that the totalitarian regime finds its perfect form not in the messianic kingdom but in the death camp.⁷ We never control a man so totally as when we kill him. Orwell had already taken the argument one step further: Winston Smith is alive at the end of *1984* and ready at last to acknowledge that he loves the leader of the Party. We never control a man so totally as when we seize his soul.

Totalitarianism can be described as the absolute reversal of radical politics: popular movements are demobilized and replaced by a disciplined elite party; revolutionary hope is turned into an ideology of domination; social control is intensified to the point where commitment and self-discipline lose all meaning. To a significant degree, obviously, the reversal is self-inflicted—at least in the sense that revolutionary movements destroyed or fatally weakened the old authority structures and then were unable to replace them with democratic institutions. (Whenever the replacement was successful—even when, as in France, it was precariously successful—totalitarian politics had little appeal.) Totalitarianism is parasitic on failed revolutions; this is so when its agents are themselves revolutionaries, like Stalin, and when they are counterrevolutionaries, like Hitler. Ingsoc is parasitic on English socialism, which it defeats and replaces. And the novelty of totalitarianism is tied, backhandedly, to the novelty of radical politics—to the hopes it engendered, the discipline it taught, and the people it organized.

III

But I don't want to concede that novelty, for the argument looks rather different today from the way it did in 1949 and the years immediately following. What struck Orwell, Arendt, Talmon, Milosz, and the others was the sheer success of totalitarian politics. Nazism had been defeated only by overwhelming external force. Inside Germany it seemed to have overcome all opposition, and its officials had actually carried through the systematic murder of millions of people. Stalinism was triumphant not only in Russia but in eastern Europe, and then in China, too. Milosz's captive minds were really captive. If 1984 was a piece of political science fiction, it hardly required any great imaginative leap. The speeches of Stalinist officials were already written in something very much like Newspeak, and I don't think Orwell doubted that the two-way television set would actually be in use by 1984, if not sooner.

Compared with all this, merely authoritarian regimes can indeed be made to look like a kind of small-time thuggery: amateurish, corrupt, inefficient. Perhaps, as Orwell's Goldstein says, "the ruling groups were always infected to some extent by liberal ideas" (though it's not hard to list authoritarian rulers of whom that can't plausibly be said); in any case, they "were content to leave loose ends everywhere."⁸ They were not ambitious, or they did not have the resources to realize their ambitions. Most of their subjects lived, as they had always lived, more or less at peace.

It was never the intention of the theorists of the fifties to celebrate authoritarianism, but perhaps the celebration is a natural step once the contrast has been drawn in this way. Contemporary conservatives have taken the step with calculated ease. Since authoritarian rulers aren't even touched by messianism, since they neither seek nor pretend to seek social transformation, since all they want is to hold on to their power and prerogatives, not to exercise greater and greater power, they

don't produce the terrible upheavals of totalitarian politics. They don't attack the traditional social structure, or turn millions of their subjects into refugees, or systematically murder men, women, and children because of their ethnic identity or their class standing: so we are told. The human costs of their rule are hardly worth noticing.

But this is to make both politics and political theory a great deal easier than they are. The contrast between totalitarianism and authoritarianism makes sense if we imagine Hitler's and Stalin's regimes as permanent political systems (or as theoretical ideal types). But the contrast makes less sense if we focus on the regimes that are today called totalitarian, that is, if we query the permanence of the totalitarianism described by the theorists of the fifties. The query is appropriate because it is one of the points of the contrast—emphasized heavily by contemporary conservatives—that totalitarianism is stable in a way that authoritarianism is not. The brutality of old-fashioned tyrants is temporary, a brief eruption; authoritarian regimes come and go. But the totalitarian state, because of the deep transformations it brings about and the intense control it exercises over its subjects, is something entirely different; totalitarianism is a long dark night.⁹ Is this an accurate account of contemporary politics?

Is it, for that matter, an accurate account of the history of authoritarianism? The easy contrast surely misconstrues the impact of old-fashioned tyranny on its subjects and victims. Consider the tyranny of conquest and imperial rule: the Spanish destruction of Aztec civilization, for example, or the terrible cruelty of the early years of Belgian rule in the Congo. Hannah Arendt begins her own account of the origins of totalitarian politics with the last of these (and with European imperialism generally), though the three features that make for the novelty of totalitarianism are none of them present. Or consider the history of religious repression: Louis XIV's destruction of French Protestantism, for example. The Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Night may represent a brief eruption of brutality,

but Louis's campaign was sustained over many years, and it was largely successful, a triumph of authoritarian rule. Or consider the history of ethnic persecution: the slaughter of Armenians by Turks in the early 1900s or the killings of Bengalis in what was then East Pakistan in 1971. In both these cases, there is considerable evidence of planning and coordination. Or consider the history of political terror: the proscriptions of the late Roman republic and the early empire, when the political elites of the city were systematically slaughtered, first by one military faction, then by another, and finally by the early emperors and their henchmen, seeking not total but absolute power; or the more far-reaching terror of the Zulu emperor Shaka, which has been powerfully evoked in Victor Walter's well-known study and which sounds indeed like a primitive totalitarianism—except, again, that none of the special features of totalitarian politics are present.¹⁰

I don't mean to compare any of these examples of authoritarian brutality with the Holocaust or the Gulag. But the list makes an important point. Old-fashioned authoritarianism is neither petty nor benign. It was the peace that tyrants brought, after all, that was once called the peace of the grave.

Mark! where his carnage and his
conquests cease!

He makes a solitude and calls it—peace!¹¹

Seizing power and staying in power can both be a brutal business. Aristotle certainly understood this when he advised the tyrants of his own time on how to maintain their position: break up traditional patterns of association, cut off the natural leaders of the people, sow distrust and mutual suspicion.¹² It is not an unambitious program, and it doesn't support the radical distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Even the least efficient of authoritarian rulers makes some gesture toward a program of this sort. And what is totalitarianism as an ideal type but a superbly successful Aristotelian tyranny?

IV

Hitler and Stalin briefly approached the "ideal," and so they encouraged theoretical idealization. But I shall attend more closely to the epigones of Hitler and Stalin, the men who come after, the heirs and imitators. Mass mobilization, political messianism, and intense social control are supposed to produce a new age and a new human being. Totalitarianism does not build upon an existing social base; it creates the material and moral foundations of its own existence. But is there any evidence that any totalitarian regime has accomplished anything like this anywhere in the world?

The place to begin is with the elite movement or party that replaces all the demobilized movements, parties, unions, cooperative associations, sects, factions, and so on. Totalitarianism in the theory of the fifties is more clearly a kind of movement than a kind of state. It requires agitation, disturbance, crisis—the "continuous frenzy" that Orwell describes. Political (as distinct from religious) messianism is an impossible creed without a lively sense of motion, the constant overcoming of material obstacles and, what is probably more important because more dangerous and stirring, of human enemies. The movement must move, the members must march, toward the end of days. In the course of the struggle for power, the movement cultivates this sense of motion, and can't relinquish it afterwards. In power, too, the movement requires permanent revolution, permanent war, or what Brzezinski called "permanent purge," else enthusiasm flags and the new regime, committed in principle to total transformation, is itself transformed into something less than total. When things slow down, when patterns emerge and institutions and relationships take on some sort of stability, totalitarian rule becomes impossible.

Social control, too, at least in the heightened form that Orwell gives it, is dependent upon continuous upheaval, crisis, struggle, and instability. All those together breed uncertainty

and distrust among the people or among the members of the Party, and mutual distrust (as Aristotle said) is the key to all the forms of tyrannical rule. The greater the distrust, the more total the tyranny. The totalitarian movement-state strives to break up every sort of loyalty among individuals, from class solidarity to friendship and family love, and then to focus undifferentiated loyalty on the Party or the leader of the Party: thus Orwell's Big Brother, whom no one really knows. Every more specific brotherhood is systematically attacked.

The attack on the family is the most important of totalitarianism's internal wars; it has a characteristic form that we know from Russian history. Orwell provides a literal portrait in his account of the Parsons family, which concludes: "It was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children. And with good reason, for hardly a week passed in which the *Times* did not carry a paragraph describing how some eavesdropping little sneak—'child hero' was the phrase generally used—had overheard some compromising remark and denounced his parents to the Thought Police."¹³

The reference here is to a specific historical incident. In 1932, Pavlik Morozov, a Russian boy in his early teens and a member of the Young Pioneers, denounced his father to Stalin's secret police. Pavlik was killed by angry relatives and subsequently made into a martyr and "hero" by the Soviet press: the model of a child who put party and state above "old-fashioned" loyalties. But who could live with such a child? Home would become an unendurable place. And what is unendurable won't be endured, not for long at any rate; parents and children will find their way back to some more stable and trusting pattern of family relations. Recently, a Russian newspaper reviewed the brief history of "child heroes" and concluded: "There is something fundamentally unnatural in having a child . . . assailing the holy of holies—respect and love for father and mother."¹⁴ A society in which this "holy of holies" is recognized in the official press may be an awful society in many ways, but it is, again, something less than totalitarian.

Something less: the problems with the ideal type can be seen with special clarity in all those countries to which totalitarianism was exported by force of arms. It is as hard to reproduce as to sustain the sense of perpetual motion on which totalitarian politics depends. The "frenzy" of party members will seem especially peculiar and artificial if there hasn't been a local struggle for power. Political messianism doesn't follow the sword. Totalitarian states can acquire an empire, as the Russians have done in eastern Europe, and they can insist upon the supremacy of the party in the lands they conquer. But whereas in its own country the party is simultaneously the heir and the annihilator of revolutionary aspiration, in the countries of the empire, it is an annihilator simply—and then an agent of foreign rule. It doesn't generate any sort of enthusiasm; its captive minds are prisoners of necessity, not converts to a messianic faith. Among the demobilized people, it produces sullen resentment and sporadic resistance. The governments of eastern Europe, especially after the East German rising of 1953, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Czech spring of 1968, the rise and fall of Poland's Solidarity Union in 1980–81, all look like authoritarian regimes, dressed up, as it were, in the ideology of totalitarianism. They rule by brute force—not even their own brute force—and they are concerned above all with holding on. But this is what the leaders of the totalitarian homeland look like too, once the struggle for power has receded into the past; it is as hard to sustain as to export and reproduce the crucial sense of permanent crisis.

V

Stalin's epigones in Russia (and now Mao's in China) rule their own country like imperial bureaucrats; they resemble the puppets they have installed in neighboring states, and they share the same devitalized purpose. Stalinism might have endured had Stalin lived forever, a figure embodying and evoking terror, personalizing the seizure of power . . . and then the seizure of

more and more power. In another of the essays in this book, Robert Tucker explores the importance of personality and of the "cult of personality" in totalitarian politics. For reasons he helps us understand, the most intense social control has been achieved under the most heightened form of personal rule.¹⁵ Orwell recognized this fact earlier than anyone else (except, perhaps, the totalitarian leaders themselves), and he proposed to solve the succession problem by making Big Brother immortal: in 1984, the faceless Party rules permanently behind the mask of an eternal Stalin.

Only an extraordinary lack of ambition among the epigones, however, would make this a plausible solution. In fact, would-be leaders are always waiting for the Leader to die (and he does die). Conceivably, the first succession crisis is functional to the movement-state; it makes for struggles, denunciations, and purges. But the results are so frightening that the survivors are likely to decide, as Stalin's survivors decided, to do things differently next time. And then the charisma doesn't pass on. The installation of a totalitarian leader is unimpressive without the sacrament of blood. In the regime of the epigones, the frenzy ceases, enthusiasm fades. The end of days becomes nothing more than a rhetorical flourish. Ideological zeal is a sign only of conformity and not of conviction. Corruption and cynicism are common at every level of society. About China's rulers we know very little, but the leaders of Russia today are very much like old-fashioned oligarchs: heavy, suspicious, uninspired, brutal—and, like their counterparts in the empire, holding on.

Is Russia today usefully described as a totalitarian regime? One way to answer this question is to talk in terms of a Weberian routinization: the end of days has been postponed, not forgotten; the party has settled in for the long haul; working for the cause has been transformed from a calling into a career. But I think that an argument of this sort misses the main point. When Weber talked about the routinization of charisma, he did not mean to describe the death of charisma. Christianity after

its routinization was still a vibrant faith. For all the weight of its new institutions and the frequent corruption of their personnel, its leaders still inspired awe; its central theological doctrines were still capable of evoking passionate belief, disinterested conduct, artistic and intellectual creativity. No one can say that of Soviet Marxism today. I suppose it isn't inconceivable that there could be a political messianist revival or even a Communist Reformation. But neither of these seems likely. The truth is that none of the totalitarian creeds was rich enough or resonant enough to sustain popular enthusiasm or official rectitude for long. Perhaps no this-worldly creed can survive the survival of this world. Totalitarianism is far more dependent than religious messianism upon a quick success. The revolutions, wars, purges, crises must have a visible end—and then they must have an end. And this suggests that the movement-state may not be capable of routinization but only of decay. Russia today is a dictatorship resting on popular apathy, the hollow shell of a totalitarian regime.

The oligarchs are still brutal, and political opposition is still a dangerous and most often a lonely business. There is no space for dissent or debate, no space for a free intellectual or cultural life. Bureaucratic and police control are probably more strict than in most historical and contemporary authoritarian states. But whether the strictness is an aftereffect of the Stalinist terror or some more lasting feature of the post-Stalinist regime remains unclear. The officials of the regime believe, and they are probably right, that their power can be maintained only by upholding the apparatus of the movement-state—*Gleichshaltung*, parallel hierarchies, party discipline, secret police, and so on—even if none of these serves any "higher" purpose, even if the movement-state doesn't move. Hence no political or cultural thaw can ever be allowed to usher in a genuine spring. Still, in describing the regime of the oligarchs, it is hard to strike the apocalyptic note so easily struck in the 1950s. One can imagine struggles for power, large-scale proscriptions, great cruelties still to come. But the ideological frenzy and the ideal-

ized savagery of the Stalin years look now like a moment in history and not like an historical era. The moment can be repeated in new places, as it has recently been repeated in Cambodia, but it can't be sustained.

I suspect that this conclusion is implicit in the literature of the 1950s, just as it is inherent in the phenomenon that literature attempted to explain. If totalitarianism finds its perfection in the death camps, then it can only be a temporary society. A regime that systematically murders its own people is in one respect at least like a utopian community whose members are pledged to celibacy: neither one of them can last indefinitely. Nor is there any such thing in human life as "continuous frenzy." Nor is there an imaginable political elite that will accept and live with the reality of a "permanent purge." Nor, finally, is it possible to conceive of an ongoing social system in which every participant radically distrusts every other (even if all of them love Big Brother). Totalitarianism as an ideal type cannot be realized in fact, or it cannot endure. That is true, of course, of all ideal types, but here the common truth has a special pointedness. For totalitarianism is the idealization of authoritarian rule. It is Weber's "typological simplification" ruthlessly put into practice: Aristotle's advice to tyrants brought to its logical conclusion, Shaka's terror turned systematic, the Roman proscriptions universalized, and so on. If the idealization doesn't work in the real world, then the theory of totalitarianism needs to be revised.

Orwell makes the most heroic and perhaps the most original attempt to defend the long dark night thesis. The crucial means of totalitarian endurance, he argues in his novel and more explicitly in the Appendix to the novel, is Newspeak, a language actively fostered by the Ingsoc regime, designed to replace conventional English. Totalitarian endurance is usually seen as an institutional problem; Orwell sees it as an epistemological problem. The solution lies in creating a language that serves "as a medium of expression for the . . . mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc" and that "makes all other modes of thought impossible."¹⁶ Not only explicitly oppositionist thought; every

form of irony, sarcasm, doubt, hesitation must be eliminated from the minds of the people, and this is to be achieved in the most direct and simple way: words simply won't be available to formulate, let alone express, ironic, sarcastic, doubtful, or hesitant thoughts. Were Newspeak established, Orwell writes, "ideas inimical to Ingsoc could only be entertained in a vague wordless form. . . ." This probably means that inimical "ideas" could not be entertained at all. Even vague feelings of unease about the regime, of the sort that "can't be put into words," probably require words before they can be felt—for otherwise they would be nothing more than sensations, and the connection to the regime could not consciously be grasped. Success here means that every inner thought and feeling, even vague thoughts and feelings, would be ideologically controlled. Moreover, to someone who knew only Newspeak, every past utterance would be literally incomprehensible. The break with the past would be definitive, and the projection of the present into the future would be permanent.

But Orwell's argument confuses vocabulary with language, and it confuses the writing of a dictionary with the establishment of a vocabulary. Indeed, the regime can control the dictionary, and it can control the teaching of language in the schools and the use of language in all published materials. There is no reason to think, however, that it can control ordinary conversations or that it can bar slang usages or dominate entirely the rhythms, intonations, juxtapositions, and so on that constitute what we can think of as the linguistic resources of any people who can speak at all. At least, it can't do these things through linguistic means, but only through social and political means: by listening in on every conversation and punishing anyone who speaks (or pauses in speech, or shrugs while speaking) inappropriately. The regime can't rest on Newspeak, then, because the success of Newspeak depends on the success of the regime. Social control is the precondition of linguistic control, and if social control is anything less than total, "ideas inimical to Ingsoc" will find expression.

These won't necessarily be oppositionist ideas. What is more

likely than opposition, as I have already suggested, is cynicism and corruption. The decay of the totalitarian regime will leave its mark in the language, as in the conduct, of the people—in the sardonic aside, the muttered reproach, the derisive joke, and at the same time, in the obsequious greeting and the overemphasized slogan. Here is the likely form of doublethink. It won't be a matter of simultaneously knowing and not-knowing, as Orwell thought, but rather of performing in a certain way while deriding the performance: a co-existence of opportunism and contempt. This is not a mental set consistent with the kind of political mobilization or messianic zeal described by the early theorists of totalitarianism, and while it represents an accommodation to social control, it is also an evasion of anything that can plausibly be called total control. Terror, wrote the Jacobin St. Just in his private journal, makes the heart grow cold.¹⁷ There is no merely linguistic remedy for this coldness, no way in which words alone, however rigorously they are defined, can heat the heart.

VI

What are we to call this regime of coldness, this government of opportunists and cynics? I suggest that we call it "failed totalitarianism." It is the living tomb of a utopian—or better, of an anti-utopian—project. One might think of it as an authoritarian state with a peculiar (and a peculiarly brutal) history. In fact, however, failed totalitarianism is one of the more common forms of the modern state, and it isn't necessary to go through a Nazi or Stalinist terror in order to achieve it. One can also achieve it by imitation. Proclaim the messianist creed and establish the disciplined elite. Failure is instantaneous: no one believes the creed; everyone evades the discipline. But the result can be repressive enough, for the imitation commonly extends to torture, censorship, prison camps, secret police, and so on. Hence the single-party states of the Third World, with their faked ideologies and their ideologically justified brutality. These regimes are the work of political leaders who have, per-

haps, the ambition but not the resources necessary for totalitarian rule; they can't quite manage the required upheaval, nor can they achieve a genuine *Gleichhaltung* of social spheres. Instead, they and their subjects enjoy what Veblen called the advantages of coming second: they escape the trauma of creation, the revolutionary crisis out of which totalitarian politics was born, and they inherit the most advanced, which in this case means the most decayed, form of the politics they imitate. The result is one or another variety of authoritarian rule, dressed up to look "total," in which this or that aspect of Communist or Fascist ideology is haphazardly acted out. A mixed regime, new but not importantly new—and that outcome may well suggest the future of those totalitarian states whose failure is more authentic.

We ought to distinguish, I think, between the moment of totalitarian terror and the regime that makes that moment possible. In our minds and memories the moment is (and should be) eternal: we can never forget it or give up trying to explain how it happened. But the regime has a short life, and we won't succeed in understanding it if we assign it a permanent place in the typologies of political science. That would be like sneaking the Apocalypse into a standard chronology. The end of days is not a date, and totalitarianism is not a regime. We might better think of totalitarianism as the name we give to the most frightening form of authoritarian rule. It is a form continuous with the other forms, but marked by a sense of secular willfulness that is immediately recognizable as a general feature of modern culture. Against a background of urbanization, economic development, nation-building, and large-scale warfare, tyrannical ambition is transformed: it reaches farther than ever before. But except in the matter of murder, it isn't notably successful. It doesn't produce a new man and a new woman; it doesn't produce a new language; it can't sustain the enthusiasm of its subjects or transform their primary loyalties. The thrust toward totality is so extravagant a version of willfulness that it is doomed to failure.

And failure brings with it what we can immediately recognize as a central feature of pre-modern culture: the rulers aim above all at maintaining themselves and serve no "higher" purpose. They repress their enemies, control their subjects, and look only for some marginal improvement in their domestic or international position. They make their peace with the family; their language is a bureaucratic version of Oldspeak; they make only the most routine ideological gestures. In a certain sense, they live off the memory of the totalitarian moment, but they have no intention of repeating that moment. They are the authoritarian autocrats and oligarchs of our own time, doing what autocrats and oligarchs have always done.

Failed totalitarianism, both in its authentic and in its exported and imitated versions, may well be one of the relatively stable forms of authoritarian politics. For its leaders, like the absolutist monarchs of the early modern period, have managed to create a fairly cohesive elite. The members of this elite are bound together more by place and privilege than by doctrinal commitment, more by personal than by ideological ambition, but they are bound together nonetheless; they don't break under pressure; they have too much to lose. It is not quite what Orwell imagined, though his juxtaposition of Party and proles does capture something of the class structure of failed totalitarianism. Djilas's *New Class*, which appeared just after the spate of books on totalitarian politics and which provides a useful corrective to their (anti-) utopianism, suggests what is probably a more accurate, and certainly a more conventional, sociology.¹⁸

Yet however cohesive the new class is, the regime it constitutes is not exempt from internal and unplanned transformations. That popular resistance is still possible has been demonstrated repeatedly in eastern Europe. "The proletarians will never revolt," O'Brien tells Winston Smith in 1984, "not in a thousand years or a million. . . . There is no way in which the Party can be overthrown."¹⁹

As an account of the internal politics of the movement-state, this is surely wrong, for we have seen both the decay of the

Party and the power of the proles. Recent events in Poland suggest that one way of dealing with these phenomena, one response to the ultimate failure of failed totalitarianism, is a military takeover and an overt return to authoritarian rule. The situation isn't very different in pre-totalitarian tyrannies, which are also open to unplanned transformations—one of which, of course, is the totalitarian seizure of power itself. Indeed, the routine repressiveness of authoritarian regimes helps to account for the secretive, disciplined, and elitist character of the party that seizes power—and also for its (shortlived) mass appeal. Totalitarian ambition is bred by authoritarian politics, and terror on the Stalinist or Nazi model seems more likely to figure in the future of old-fashioned tyrannies than in the future of failed totalitarianisms.

The line that marks off these two is hard to draw, and to insist upon its central importance doesn't serve any useful political or moral purpose. More accurately, that insistence serves a repugnant purpose: it provides an apologia for authoritarian politics. That apologia was no part of the original theory, whose terms were fixed by the Holocaust and the Gulag. Orwell and those who followed him were driven to explain what looked indeed, though not in the sense of the messianic faith, like the end of days. But we must come to grips with the return of tyranny after the failures of messianism, with the sheer persistence of regimes that are ugly enough, though neither utopian nor anti-utopian—with *non-ideal brutality*.

This is the real world of 1984. The dominant fact about politics today is the dominance of repression, censorship, torture, and murder, all of a largely traditional kind, though the traditionalism is sometimes masked by ideological pretension. Authoritarian rule has turned out to be the true legacy of totalitarian movements and parties. I suspect it is also their nursing mother. Those who defend authoritarianism because it isn't "total" have failed to grasp the historical connection between what they defend and what they decry.