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Opinion

23352 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

Steve Barnaby editor/477-5450

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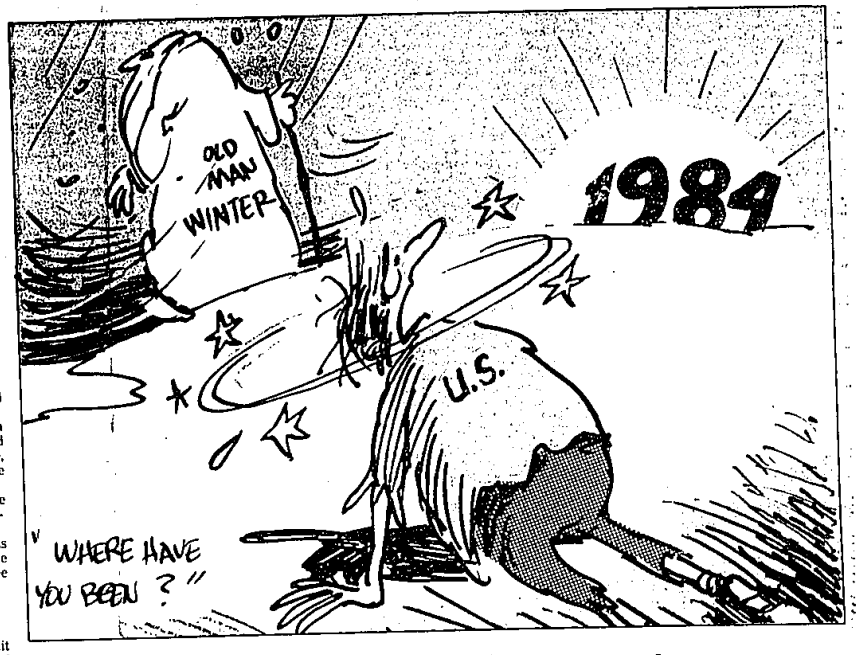
'1984'

IT'S ALMOST here, 1984. The most famous and nervously anticipated year since 1000 AD, which, at the time, was expected to bring the end of the world.

George Orwell (1903-50), a British novelist and political essayist, made the year famous in his novel "1984." It was an example not of Utopia, the perfect society, but of a negative Utopia. And because Orwell picked a specific year when he wrote the book in *1948, his novel has been* more memorable than such similar works as "We" and "Brave New World."

Orwell's tale is about a Londoner named Winston Smith, 39, who rewrites historical documents in the Ministry of Truth's Department of Records. Smith rebels, both politically and in a romantic fling with Julia. His rebellions are discovered. Before being vaporized, he is brainwashed into loving Big Brother, the Stalinesque chief of state and symbol of the Party.

Well, how true were Orwell's series of warnings and predictions?



Orwell correct on surveillance . . .

ORWELL'S CHIEF claim to fame as a prognosticator rests on his warning that television could be not only a method of spreading information but a means of surveillance.

Ordinary Party members in "1984" could never switch off the camera watching their apartments, and inner Party members could turn it off for only 30 minutes. Even in the countryside, microphones everywhere allowed the Thought Police to keep tabs on people.

Modern stores are loaded with surveillance cameras. A few years ago there was a celebrated case in the metro area where department store "security" people even watched women in dressing rooms.

Public buildings such as the Federal Building and Frank Murphy Hall of Justice in Detroit have security checks for weapons and metallic objects before one can enter. Airport terminals have had such measures for years. Chiefly, they are a reaction to bombings and shootings. On balance, they are probably as protective of the public as they are onerous.

THE MOST annoying security precautions, however, occur not at governmental establishments, which Orwell dealt with, but at private sector establishments. The guards at apartment and condominium complexes are well known. The security system at an office building like Detroit Edison's downtown headquarters is nothing short of obnoxious. And industrial espionage is a booming industry.

It's true, cable television can enable a householder to have sensor devices linked to TV cables. When one isn't at home, cable TV can be used to scan the home every few seconds for intruders.

Yet the critical point is that the private citizen hires it done and pays for it voluntarily; Big Brother doesn't require it.

Technologically, Orwell's predictions have come true. In practice, however, the American citizen is still wonderfully free to live his own life in his own home.

IT IS ALMOST commonplace to credit Orwell with exposing the manipulation of language through *doublespeak*. He wrote at a time when our government was changing the name of the War Department to the Defense Department and when retailers were urging us to save money by spending it. It continues today as advocates of unilateral disarmament call themselves the Peace Movement.

Again, the point is that government alone does not manipulate the language. The private sector — and even social groups such as teen-agers — redefine words to suit their own interests.

Today's brand of doublethink is a pain to those of us who are language purists, but hardly a threat to human freedom.

. . . but off on bomb, bigness, economy

ORWELL WROTE at a time when bigness was "in." Cities, companies, machines, bombs, office buildings — bigger was automatically assumed to be better. He carried the trend to its logical conclusion in constructing his world of "1984."

And it hasn't turned out that way.

Orwell wrote of three supernations: Oceania, which included the Americas and the United Kingdom plus South Africa; Eurasia, which comprised the northern part of the land mass from Portugal to the Bering Sea; and Eastasia, including China, Japan and the Far East.

SINCE THE 1960s, fragmentation, not supernations, has been the rule.

Africa has become a Babel of tiny states. Great Britain has been threatened by a Scottish nationalist movement eager to hang onto North Sea oil. Canada undergoes tremendous stresses between Quebec and the western provinces. Pakistan fell apart, and Nigeria almost did.

Fragmentation continues in southeastern Michigan. After a wave of school consolidations in the 1940s and '50s, the propensity of people to hang onto tiny units of government exerted itself more strongly than ever. Rochester and Avon Township, Farmington and Farmington Hills, Northville city and township, Plymouth city and township, the balkanized multiplicity of governments around Birmingham and Royal Oak — all attest that the trend to bigness which Orwell assumed would continue indefinitely is dormant or dead.

We are unable to put together a regional system to handle water and sewerage services. The regional parks authority, founded in 1940, has given up trying to get more millage since then. SEMTA, the regional transportation system, is falling apart before our eyes because it can't win approval of any kind of local tax mechanism.

IN ECONOMICS, Orwell went entirely awry. His economic system was based on the thinking of the 1930s, which held that consumption could never equal production without all sorts of governmental programs to stimulate consumer demand.

Orwell predicted the supernations would absorb excess production by engaging in perpetual, limited wars. "The problem was how to keep the wheels of industry turning without increasing the real wealth of the world. Goods must be produced, but they need not be distributed. And in practice, the only way of achieving this was by continuous warfare," he wrote.

In America, at least, no one is talking about underconsumption any more except possibly a few old UAW zealots. Modern America is overconsuming and underinvesting, with the lowest rate of personal savings in the industrialized world, economists say.

And the national defense budget is smaller as a percentage of our gross national product than in the early 1960s.

Orwell saw the supernations fighting wars for the labor power of northern Africa and southern Asia — "a bottomless reserve of cheap labor." It hasn't occurred.

But he wrote not a word about the battle for resources of the last 20 years — the oil and natural gas of the Middle East and Latin America, the industrial metals of South Africa, the key waterways of Suez, Panama, Gibraltar and the St. Lawrence.

THE SOCIETY Orwell envisioned frowned on marriage and sex except for reproduction. Party members' energies were to be channeled into patriotic fervor and hate-the-enemy rallies.

Instead, today's permissive society tolerates almost any kind of non-marital sex, branding it an "alternative lifestyle."

Orwell had expected a full scale atomic war between the supernations during the 1950s, and on this point was of course totally wrong. Yet he was strangely prophetic when he predicted that no nuclear bombs would be used after the 1950s.

The opportunity to wipe out hundreds of millions of the enemy never comes in "1984," not because such a war is too horrible to contemplate but because Orwell's supernations become so militarily cautious that they are psychologically incapable of delivering the knockout blow.

On that final point, we can all hope George Orwell was a prophet.

— Tim Richard
editorial page editor

'Newspeak' hits home towns

Leonard Poger

GEORGE ORWELL'S fictional "1984" has come true in some ways for those who study changes in institutional and political vocabularies.

Orwell wrote of the Big Brother government's use of "newspeak." The plan was to change the vocabulary so that thoughts which the Party considered unfavorable to itself would be impossible.

Today much of that vocabulary trickery is evident in local government and business. The words are standard English, but their meanings have been twisted or obscured.

For example, companies used to have "employment" offices where workers would ask questions about their paycheck deductions. Later they were retitled "personnel," and now have become "human resources" offices.

PUBLIC EDUCATION is a gold mine for phrases which tend to give an opposite impression of the truth.

Home economics classes have nothing to do with buying and selling homes. The term is a polite way of describing sewing and cooking classes. Now they are called "home and family living" and cover a wider variety of domestic problems.

We used to get book and movie projectors from the school "library." But now the books and audiovisual equipment are in the "media center" or "instructional materials center."

Students who had problems were put in the "special education department" while those with high IQs or skills were in the talented and gifted programs.

Educators now classify all of those students as "exceptional."

School district business managers long have given boards of education a periodic update on the budget, where the money was coming from and where it was going.

The administration and board talk about "budget alternatives" when they really mean slashes in spending to offset the governor's latest "executive order." Translated, it means a cut in state aid to the local district.

CHURCH PEOPLE have tried to keep up with Orwell's newspeak.

There is a "Jews for Jesus" which reminds us of the "Democrats for Nixon" in the 1972 presidential election.

About the time Orwell published "1984," Congress changed the name of the War Department to the "Defense Department."

More recently, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare became the Department of "Health and Human Services." Welfare, it seems, is a bad word.

During the Vietnam War, the military said its air force was "engaged in protective reaction," meaning its pilots were firing back at enemy planes.

City governments are falling into line with newspeak.

Ditch diggers and road workers became first the "public works department" and more recently "the public services department."

In the wonderful world of television news, riots became "civil disorders," and announcers reading weather reports became "meteorologists."

State prosecutors used to charge suspects with murder. In the publicized Vincent Chin beating death, the feds got into the act. But since they can't make a murder charge, the defendants are charged with "violating Chin's civil rights."

In merchandizing, clothes for the overweight or heavy women were dropped and overnight became clothes for the "full-figured woman."

Computer helps find lost dogs

Nick Sharkey

THE COMUTER age has dawned for everyone, even dogs.

At least it has for dog license tags due to the aggressive efforts of a Birmingham woman, Dee Heinzerling. In a few weeks, the computer terminals used in Oakland County police departments will include information on the license tags of every dog registered in the county. The same program could be adopted in Wayne County.

It started three years ago while the Heinzerlings were visiting relatives in Cincinnati.

Let her describe it.

"IT WAS during a snowy, dark evening of rush hour Christmas traffic that a tiny, black dog was stampering in traffic, darting wildly, trying to cross a busy intersection in Cincinnati. Realizing its plight, we stopped our car While my husband gave a resounding whittle to attract the pup, I dashed out and grabbed the bewildered little waif.

"He was dripping wet, and cold, but not totally lost due to a small tag (No. 2059) attached to a soggy, wet ribbon."

It was then that she found out about a program in Cincinnati where all dog license numbers are kept on a computer by local police. When she called the police, they checked the computer and returned the dog safely to the owner — all within 30 minutes.

DEE HEINZERLING is a longtime dog lover. For more than 10 years, she has been a member of the Oakland County Animal Advisory Board.

After her experience in Cincinnati, she decided to start the same program in this area.

Since then, she has had numerous meetings with many county officials, including Shan Topiwalla, director of computer services for the county, Hugh Dohany, county treasurer, and Carl Anderson, manager of the Oakland County Animal Control Office. The project was also supported by Dr. Robert Locey, director of the Oakland County Health Department, since it will assist in dog bite cases.

"They all gave full cooperation," Heinzerling said.

Dog licenses have had numbers for many years, but they were never put on a computer. Heinzerling explained how computers can help in the search for a dog owner.

"TAKE THE example of someone losing a dog," she said. "Sometimes, someone will find the dog and decide to keep it for a few days.

"In the meantime, the owner goes to the dog pound and can't find the dog. After a few days the person who has the dog gets tired of it and takes it to the dog pound. The owner and the dog never get together.

"With the use of a computer that doesn't happen."

Putting dog license numbers on the computer also helps when dogs are found late at night.

"I hate to say this, but sometimes when a stray dog is found injured during the night, it is destroyed," she said. "It's hard to find a veterinarian during the night. Now that injured dog will be returned to the owner."

ACCORDING TO Heinzerling, the new computer service has advantages for non-owners of pets.

"It will lower expenditures and ultimately taxes for the services of animal control by limiting the costs of impounding, feeding and destroying licensed dogs," she said.

Ms. Heinzerling calls dog licenses "like a phone call home from your dog."

The 1984 licenses are on sale at animal control shelters, township treasurers' offices and the county treasurer's office. The charge is $5 for spayed or neutered dogs and $7.50 for others. After March 1, a delinquent charge is added, and the price goes up to $15.