

Trends of '1984' were reversed in the '50s

By Tim Richard
staff writer

To futurist Alvin Toffler, "1984" came closest to occurring in the late 1950s.

"We have been moving from a 'mass' to a de-massified society," said the one-time journalist whose books have turned "The Third Wave" and "Future Shock" into household words.

George Orwell's 1949 novel, "1984," pictured a society consisting of three super-nations constantly fighting limited wars over a small, undeveloped segment of the world and its supply of slave labor. The Americas and the United Kingdom had become the chief elements in one super-nation called Oceania. In Oceania's strictly stratified society, 85 percent of the people constituted a mass called "the proles."

Orwell's 1984 was a projection of trends that were in place in 1948, at the close of World War II. But Toffler, in a recent lecture at Schoolcraft College, said those trends reversed themselves in the late '50s and early '60s.

WHAT ORWELL was witnessing

was the peak of the world's second revolutionary wave (agriculture was the first), Toffler said.

"Despite the differences between societies like Japan and Sweden, the U.S. and the USSR," he said, "there were certain parallel forms."

In the second wave, there was mass production, made possible by "brute force" technologies and high-energy inputs.

There was mass distribution of this mass production — through supermarkets, giant department stores, chain operations.

There was mass education. No matter what the curriculum and the nation, children learned three fundamental things: punctuality, obedience and how to perform repetitive work by rote. "These skills are required for an industrial labor force,"

There were mass media — three nationwide television networks in the U.S. and a growing influence of a few metropolitan daily newspapers.

There was a mass rhythm to society — rush hour traffic, prime time television, bedtime.

There were nuclear families as con-

trasted to the extended families of farming days, and children rarely witnessed work. The elderly were sent off to institutions.

No longer.

"THE WORLD we've known is coming apart at the seams," Toffler said. The third wave of revolutions began with literary criticism of conformity in such novels as "The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit" and such sociological studies as "The Organization Man."

"Because of computer controls, there has been a shift to customization of production," said Toffler, who with his wife visits factories all over the world while other tourists visit cathedrals.

"Factories no longer turn out a million of this and 200,000 of that but 30 of this, 15 of that and 27 of the other," he said.

As for mass distribution, he found "the supermarket is obsolete" — attested to by the financial troubles of such major local chains as Great Scott, Kroger, Chatham and Packer. "Now it's a bunch of boutiques," he said.

Toffler's poll of the audience showed 85 percent recently had purchased

something by mail or telephone. He visualized the day when customers would order a product by telephone and, while punching in the order, activate the technology to custom-produce whatever they ordered.

The third wave has hit the media particularly hard, Toffler said. "Until 1977 there were only three networks. Today there are an increasing number of cable channels for every conceivable group in society."

In the print media, there are special interest magazines — 15 flying magazines alone. There is even a specialized newsletter to the survivors of those lost in particular plane crashes.

In politics, this customizing is seen in the number of single-issue candidates.

In the military, customizing is evidenced by precision targeting of weapons — a far cry from the trench warfare and military draft of the second wave, or of Orwell's "1984."

WHERE WE work shows we are farther than ever from the society of "1984," in which hero Winston Smith worked anonymously in the 100-story office building of the Ministry of Truth.



"Commuting is anti-productive and one of the dumbest things we do," said Toffler. "It once made sense in the days of factories."

"When the cost of transportation rises, employees need a raise. We need to have highways, traffic police, cafeterias — a major drag on the American economy."

"Today when a majority of the work force handles data, paper, numbers, it is no longer necessary to concentrate masses of people under the same roof." (In fact, the number of white-collar workers in America exceeded the number of blue-collar workers for the first time in history in 1957.)

MDOT taking i-696 job bids

The Michigan Department of Transportation will take bids Wednesday for 24 construction and improvements projects for state highways, roads and airports totaling an estimated \$17.1 million.

Planned for Oakland County by May 1985 are the resurfacing and pavement replacement on six miles of I-696 Freeway from the west city limits of Wixom, east to the interchange with I-275 in Novi.

Construction of a railroad bridge to carry the Grand Trunk Railroad over new I-696 Freeway and a temporary rail runaround in Royal Oak and Pleasant Ridge in October 1985.

Also planned for Oakland is the construction of an airport beacon at the Oakland-Troy Airport at Troy this March.

GOP women to hear Viet vet

Birmingham Republican Women will have as their guest speaker Michigan Christian College Prof. John Robert Todd at their monthly meeting Tuesday.

Todd, a Vietnam veteran decorated many times, is a graduate of the University of Michigan and has a law degree from Georgetown University in Washington. He was blinded in the war and is involved in a network of volunteer groups to aid Vietnam veterans.

The meeting will start at noon in the Birmingham Community House, 280 S. Bates. Reservations may be made by calling club officers at 644-8782.

Short tenure

The shortest presidential term in U.S. history was served by William Henry Harrison.

Inaugurated in March 1841 as the ninth president to hold the office, Harrison caught pneumonia during the cold, drizzling rain of inauguration day and died in April. He was succeeded by Vice President John Tyler.

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