

A peace that is no peace

By Bill Kilpatrick

On Oct. 19, 1945, four short years before the Russians blew up their first atomic bomb, George Orwell, wrote a short story entitled *You and the atomic bomb*. At this point the bomb was new and one of the main questions that he had was how much money it was to build one and the other was how long it would take the USSR to develop their own bomb. However, despite his prediction that the world might be blown to bits in as little as five years, he also made another prediction about how the bomb would impact society, and with the rise of such dictators like Donald Trump, Viktor Orban, and Vladimir Putin, it seems that his prediction is now coming true. The oligarchs are taking control of the world.

Orwell argued that "The great age of democracy and of national self-determination was the age of the musket and the rifle." He says that it was these easy-to-use weapons that allowed revolutions to happen and people to fight against oppression because they were easy to produce and it put people on a relatively equal playing field when it came to weaponry. However, as weapons got larger power shifted to "the state as against the individual, and the industrialised country as against the backward one."

For Orwell the development of the atomic bomb was the ultimate shift of power away from workers into fewer and fewer hands. He says, "we have before us the prospect of two or three monstrous super-states, each possessed of a weapon by which millions of people can be wiped out in a few seconds, dividing the world between them. It has been rather hastily assumed that this means bigger and bloodier wars, and perhaps an actual end to the machine civilisation. But suppose "and really this the likeliest development " that the surviving great nations make a tacit agreement never to use the atomic bomb against one another? Suppose they only use it, or the threat of it, against people who are unable to retaliate? In that case we are back where we were before, the only difference being that power is concentrated in still fewer hands and that the outlook for subject peoples and oppressed classes is still more hopeless." One cannot help but reflect on Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons on the Ukraine when one reads this passage.

Here we are some 80 years later when the world is dominated by the United States, Russia, and China and things are getting worse and worse for the working classes, whose wages are declining along with their purchasing power. More and more people are one pay cheque away from financial ruin and homelessness, health-care is getting worse along with education. We are in a serious economic and social decline and people are anxious, angry, confused, and scared. In her book "At a loss for words: conversations in an age of rage," Carol Off speaks about this decline and what it means for freedom when people can no longer provide for themselves and their loved ones. She says, "If you have a house, money, employment, education, you have the means to be independent. If you lack them you can't be free."

When people think of Orwell's dystopian vision they often think of 1984, where big brother is always watching, the vernacular is dominated by double-speak, and no one knows what's true anymore. While much of what he predicted in 1984 has come true on some level, his prediction in *You and the Atomic bomb*, when combined with 1984, paints an even worse picture for the future of humanity.

Orwell cites an author by the name of James Burnham who, in 1941, wrote a book entitled *The Managerial Revolution*. In that book, says Orwell, Burnham pictured a world where "More and more obviously the surface of the earth is being parcelled off into three great empires, each self-contained and cut off from contact with the outer world, and each ruled, under one disguise or another, by a self-elected oligarchy." The Trumps, Orbans, and Putins are just the beginning, as those who have all the resources and money continue to take control of all our social programs for their own enrichment. As Steven Staples points out in an article on [PeaceQuest.ca](#), "While American industrialists have long sought access to our country's natural resources, and reports of renewed interest in Canada's abundance of fresh water only reinforce this, an even larger prize is the profits to be gained from the privatization of social programs, the weakening of public safety regulations and the erosion of safeguards on our democracy. Canada's medicare system alone represents a \$300-billion annual public expenditure, offering boundless opportunities for those wishing to privately profit off public illness."

When we hear politicians such as Pierre Poilievre talk about wanting smaller government, less taxes, and a free market, what he means is that he plans on dismantling our social safety net and privatizing as much as he can to give tax breaks to the people who need it least, the wealthy. He will tell us that he is doing it for our benefit so we are free from an oppressive government and can bask in the glory of the power of the free market. This is nothing more than modern double-speak. As Orwell observed in 1945, "looking at the world as a whole, the drift for many decades has been not towards anarchy but towards the reimposition of slavery. We may be heading not for general breakdown but for an epoch as horribly stable as the slave empires of antiquity."

We are currently witnessing the hastening of what Orwell observed in 1945, the taking of Ukraine, the threats to Canada, Greenland, and Taiwan, these are what Orwell referred to as "The haggling as to where the frontiers are to be drawn," and further adds that it "is still going on, and will continue for some years, the general drift is unmistakable, and every scientific discovery of recent years has accelerated it." Imagine what Orwell would have thought if he would have been alive to witness the social and political impact of the internet?

While he concluded that atomic bombs, if they were cheap and easy to assemble, would likely have "plunged us back into barbarism" he adds that they are "likelier to put an end to large-scale wars at the cost of prolonging indefinitely a 'peace that is no peace.'" Poverty, poor wages, homelessness, inflation, and social instability are the hallmarks of that peace. Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said that "no one can freely make decisions, even vote, if they are hungry. Want is a form of slavery." And as a close friend of mine, Chris Houston, is fond of saying, and it's something we all need to remember and take seriously if we are to preserve our independence and freedom, "peace is not simply the absence of war."