

EVERYBODY has been 1984'ing. I do not know of a newspaper or magazine that has not tried its hand at assessing the Orwellian vision of 1984 in the light of current realities.

Most agree that George Orwell's account in his novel "1984" was too grim. But right-wingers contend the left-wing has made it come true; and left-wingers say the right-wing has brought it about.

Some warn that certain elements are here that bear watching – for instance, computerized information – and Newspeak, the altering of language to suit official policy. The Communist world was very much around in Orwell's day (and he was well aware of its tendencies), and it is still very much with us today. But freedom of speech has not disappeared from the Western world.

However, one aspect of "1984" has not, to my knowledge, been brought out. When its leading character, Winston Smith, was tortured into conformity by the Ministry of Love, they were taking the trouble of dealing with him personally.

Today's world may not be as horror-laden, but everything is getting more impersonalized, more statistical, more computerized.

People are now talking about the year 2020, as that is the same distance from 1984 as this year is from 1948 (when Orwell wrote his cautionary tale).

Curious – 20-20 is also the symbol for perfect sight – "20-20 hindsight" is a term indicating how clearly one knows why things happened as they did; "20-20 foresight" is much more difficult and extremely rare.

The magazine *Science* 84 cited a large number of predictions, mostly technological, that previous generations foresaw for our day. Nearly all missed the mark, mostly in over-anticipating scientific marvels. Another big miss was in the economy – what a life of leisure we'd have, how little work would be needed, etc. The economic struggle is, alas, a pervasive reality in 1984.

IN THE U.S., the Reagan administration and various economists see a good year ahead for the economy.

Inflation has subsided, taxes have been held down, production is starting up, unemployment has tapered off. However, everything doesn't look all that rosy when some stubborn 1984 facts are pondered. Here are some of them:

- Besides the "1984'ish" aspects, the computerized economy has raised

1984: If you open both eyes, what do you see . . .



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a more immediate problem – scarcity of jobs. Fewer skilled persons will be needed and there's not much of a future for unskilled labour. (Why can't everybody work fewer hours? Shh!).

- Organized labour hailed the abolition of the "sweat shop" with its overworked and underpaid labour, as one of its great triumphs. But the sweat shop is now making a comeback with a great number of illegal immigrants who have no other option but to be overworked and underpaid.



● George Orwell

- In 1983, 28,000 businesses, mostly small, failed – more than at any other time since 1932. Big companies continue to swallow small ones.

- The homeless in America are on the increase. Estimates of those without any domicile run to two million, and there are many younger people among them. Discussions focus on how to provide shelters for them rather than why they are homeless.

- Edwin Meese, the Presidential aide who has been nominated for Attorney General, created a flap when he said he doubted there were hungry people in America. There was an outpouring of protest on the part of those who are trying to take care of the hungry. The ensuing debate was on how many food stamps the government was issuing and whether there should be more – not on why there is hunger and how to solve it.

- Despite talk of tax breaks, there is a huge and growing invisible economy that exists for the purpose of avoiding taxes. This "underground economy" – unreported and untaxed – is estimated to run to \$250 billion. Barter is becoming big business, and it poses the question: what, in the case of barter, is the "income" to be taxed?

- The *underground* economy is fairly benign (to all except Internal Revenue). Not so benign is the *underworld* economy, which deals in drugs and crime and is now the biggest business in the U.S.

SO THERE ARE dark shadows in our economy – maybe not as bad as the Orwellian forecast but not as good as the Reaganite prognostication.

If you close one eye, you can see just the good and if you close the other eye you can see just the bad.

With both eyes open it looks very much like a tale of *progress and poverty* – more than coincidentally the title of Henry George's book of more than a century ago.

The problems we have today are pretty much the same ones he pointed out. He showed the basic causes to be the monopolization of land that restricted economic opportunities, and he showed the solution to be the taxation of land values that would release land for use – an analysis that is more relevant today than ever.

If people don't want to bother with George's *Progress and Poverty*, they can turn to some choice reading in Robert J. Ringer's latest book, *How You Can Find Happiness During the Collapse of Western Civilization*.