

George Orwell as a Democratic Socialist

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Democratic socialism is a political ideology that advocates political democracy alongside social ownership of the means of production, often with an emphasis on democratic management of enterprises within a socialist economic system. The term "democratic socialism" is sometimes used synonymously with "socialism"; the adjective "democratic" is often added to distinguish it from the Marxist–Leninist brand of socialism, which is widely viewed as being non-democratic in practice. Democratic socialism is also sometimes used as a synonym for social democracy, although many say this is misleading because democratic socialism advocates social ownership of the means of production, whereas social democracy does not.

Democratic socialism is distinguished from both the Soviet model of centralized socialism and from social democracy, where social democracy refers to support for political democracy, nationalization of key industries, and a welfare state. The distinction with the former is made on the basis of the authoritarian form of government and centralized economic system that emerged in the Soviet Union during the 20th century, while the distinction with the latter is made on the basis that democratic socialism is committed to systemic transformation of the economy while social democracy is not. That is, whereas social democrats only seek to "humanize" capitalism through state intervention, democratic socialists see capitalism as inherently incompatible with the democratic values of liberty, equality and solidarity; and believe that the issues inherent to capitalism can only be solved by superseding private ownership

with some form of social ownership. Ultimately democratic socialists believe that reforms aimed at addressing the economic contradictions of capitalism will only cause more problems to emerge elsewhere in the economy, that capitalism can never be sufficiently "humanized", and that it must therefore ultimately be replaced with socialism.] Democratic socialism is not specifically revolutionary or reformist, as many types of democratic socialism can fall into either category, with some forms overlapping with social democracy, supporting reforms within capitalism as a prelude to the establishment of socialism. Some forms of democratic socialism accept social democratic reformism to gradually convert the capitalist economy to a socialist one using pre-existing democratic institutions, while other forms are revolutionary in their political orientation and advocate for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the transformation of the capitalist economy to a socialist economy.

Democratic socialism is defined as having a socialist economy in which the means of production are socially and collectively owned or controlled alongside a politically democratic system of government.

Some tendencies of democratic socialism advocate for revolution in order to transition to socialism, distinguishing it from some forms of social democracy. For example, Peter Hain classifies democratic socialism, along with libertarian socialism, as a form of anti-authoritarian "socialism from below" (using the term popularised by Hal Draper), in contrast to Stalinism, a variant of authoritarian state socialism. For Hain, this democratic/authoritarian divide is more important than the revolutionary/reformist divide.] In this type of democratic socialism, it is the active participation of the population as a whole, and workers in particular, in the management of economy that characterises democratic socialism, while nationalisation and economic planning (whether controlled by an elected government or not) are characteristic of state socialism. A similar, but more complex, argument is made by Nicos Poulantzas. Draper himself uses the term "revolutionary-democratic socialism" as a type of socialism from below in his *The Two Souls of Socialism*.

Orwell's pre-occupation with the social vision lends a distinctive flavour to his works like *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As a social novelist, Orwell is

less interested in man than in the society that has moulded him. So his characters exist as social animals and are indicated in terms of status, race, caste, tradition, and their place in the scheme is more important than what they in themselves are.

Orwell's novels prior to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) present an openly anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist attitude from a liberal humanist stance. He has attacked in his novels, the dehumanizing influences of these systems rather than their exploitative aspects. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* rejects the alternative political model that claimed to be socialistic but which Orwell regarded to be in diametric contrast to his vision of a socialistic state. Orwell's fictional works categorically reflect his social vision and his own point of view.

Orwell being a dreamer and idealist wants to evolve a society which may be conducive to the welfare of an ordinary man. In his age, capitalism, colonialism and socialism were the chief political ideologies taking over the world. Naturally, he had to choose from amongst them, although he liked socialism, he was

against socialists. He was favourably inclined toward socialism. The reason was that capitalism was unacceptable to him because of its being exploitative.

Though he chose socialist system as an alternative, he found the universally acclaimed and accepted Soviet Socialist model unpalatable. He himself failed to devise some variant of democratic socialism because whenever he tried, he found himself in the quagmire of contradiction—between collectivization, industrialization and centralized control on the one hand and democracy and individual liberty on the other. Maybe, it is this ideological confusion that does not let him offer a solution to the problems posed in *Animal Farm*.

His wish to evolve some socially relevant vision for the society continue till the end. Orwell found every revolution inspired by idealism and communal energy, but the tragedy of every revolution is that these ideals are thwarted in course of time. No political party is honest for more than a few months and these few months represent the prosperity. But the selfish and unscrupulous politicians take over and re-establish the same

kind of evil and political system which the revolution had overthrown. All revolutions are failures, but they are not all the same failure.

His last novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in which he has presented the horror of the human condition with all its subtlety and complexity, is an angry outcry of a humanitarian socialist who sees no hope of an overthrow of the cruel authoritarian order which is emerging in all modern societies. In the words of Keith Aldritt, Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "deals with nightmarish situations in which modern methods of communication and the perversion of the English Language itself can prevent an apprehension of the factual, objective truth of a given event and thereby betray the human mind to the worst of Orwellian heroes, a web of unrealities".¹

Nineteen Eighty-Four presents a horrible spectacle of power represented through the Inner Party. There we witness a gradual suppression of Winston's personality, who is found guilty of 'Thought crime' and whom the members of the Inner Party like O'Brien torture and punish until he believes that power is the

reality of life. After a gradual disintegration in Winston's personality, in the course of the story, we witness his sudden 'reintegration' into society after he accepts the supremacy of power and drops the idea of revolt against the Party.

Orwell has beautifully maintained the Inferno-Like atmosphere of the story. He depicts the picture of a world which is bereft of humanity. According to Fredrick Warburg, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is "a picture of man unmanned, of humanity without a heart, of a people without tolerance or civilization, of a government whose sole object is the maintenance of its absolute totalitarian power by every contrivance of cruelty. Here is the Soviet Union to the nth degree, a Stalin who never dies, a secret police with every device of modern technology".¹ This is by and large the system of a totalitarian state Orwell has presented in his book. He depicts here the essential horror of the human condition. And a theme like this has been a constant pre-occupation of Orwell as a novelist and as a thinker.

Thus, it would be appropriate to say that in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell satirizes the British Labour Party more than the Soviet Communist Party. Issac Deutscher is very right when he observes that "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a document of dark disillusioned not only with Stalinism but with every form and shade of socialism

Vice and folly are the twin targets of satire. As a satirist, Orwell highlights all the unsavoury features and sore-spots of the society. He picks up the dangerous portents of contemporary reality and exaggerates them for the sake of urgent attention and effect. Cruelty, fraud and deception are bad enough. But the totalitarian umbrella that shelters these vices and gives legitimacy of truth to lies is worse still. So, as a humanist, Orwell views with concern the totalitarian trends in modern society.

Orwell firmly believes that if totalitarianism is allowed to grow unchecked, it would swallow the freedom and dignity of the individual. After experimenting with different set-ups e.g. imperialism, capitalism etc, he realizes that socialism is the only

remedy for the intolerable conditions he has described in his books.

In the same book, he defines brilliantly the meaning of socialism by explaining that : Everyone who knows the meaning of poverty, everyone who has a genuine hatred of tyranny and war, is on the socialist side, potentially..... we have got to fight for justice and liberty, and socialism does mean justice and liberty when the nonsense is stripped off it.ⁱ

In this context, Richard Rees says that “at his best he (Orwell) was much more realistic, and indeed a better Marxist than the theoretical pundits of socialism and communism”.ⁱⁱ So, it is obviously true that Orwell is a believer in conformity as well as an equalitarian.

Though he measures social life in political terms in *Animal Farm*, his representation of the poor working-class is more or less in the tradition of Charles Dickens. As Dickens identifies himself fully with the poor boy, David, in his *David Copperfield* simultaneously attracting the sympathy of the readers, similarly Orwell invites sympathy of every reader for his noble

horse, Boxer. Like Dickens he fights against the evils of exploitation, tyranny and suppression in society. They both plead for the amelioration of the poor. Both are of the notion that ideal society people would not be cranky, affected and perverted.

According to Orwell, the biggest reason for the failure of socialist propaganda is that it takes too low a view of human nature, of course, this only shows his philistine incapacity to understand the complexities of Marxist thought. Socialism, for Orwell, is a drive towards brotherly love and honourable equality. He disregards the Socialism of Russia in the Preface of the Ukrainian Edition of *Animal Farm* and states that 'No-thing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original idea of Socialism as the belief that Russia is a Socialist country and that every act of its rulers must be excused, if not imitated..... I have been convinced that the destruction of the soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Thus, Orwell has a clear idea of Socialism in his mind which he wants to be conveyed through his work. But the negative

work of demolishing false myths had also to be undertaken. This is what he has supposedly done in *Animal Farm*. He believes that 'there can be no co-operation between classes whose real interests are opposed. The capitalist cannot co-operate with the proletarian. The cat cannot co-operate with the mouse; and if the cat does suggest co-operation and the mouse is fool enough to agree, in a very little while the mouse will be disappearing down the cat's throat. But it is always possible to co-operate so long as it is upon a basis of common interest'.^{iv}

Like any humanitarian socialist he believes that revolution by the oppressed lot of society is the only solution to change the system and to establish a region of 'equality, decency and fraternity'. But he wants to forewarn the oppressed about the dangers of being manipulated by the leaders who are going to mobilise them.

Orwell should rightly be regarded a man of democratic socialism. He is a militant socialist, and not a mere propagandist. His *Animal Farm* suggests that man is selfish, greedy and cruel by nature. He is power-hungry and after attaining absolute power he becomes a tyrant.

In *Animal Farm* power turns Napoleon's head and makes him mad. Orwell's thesis remains that in every society human beings should be treated with justice and a sense of decency and common brotherhood should mark their relations with each other. He strongly feels that imperialism and authoritarianism should not be allowed to gain ground. He calls for Socialism to be humanised, to be built upon the triple foundations of liberty, justice and common decency. This is Orwell's subject of propaganda, his philosophy of life, his theory of democratic Socialism and the theme also of *Animal Farm*.

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Relieving Slip

It is certified that Sh. Dinesh Kumar, Asstt. Prof. of English, Dyal Singh College, Karnal, Performed duty as Deputy Supdt. at Center No. A-48 in the U.G. Supplementry/Annual Examination from 20-04-2013 to 08-05-2013