

editorial

Eye on business

In keeping with the groupthink spirit, we can't resist tackling some of the issues raised in George Orwell's classic novel *1984*. We mention the term "groupthink" because it seems as if every journalist or would-be journalist everywhere has been moved to tackle the same issues in recent weeks—all because a page of the calendar has turned, and the "year of Orwell" has arrived.

In the archetypal media report on the coming of 1984, as in Orwell's novel, big government is cast (quite naturally) in the role of Big Brother. Many of Orwell's "predictions" have come true in this area, it is often claimed. Governments are seen more and more as agents of collectivization, enforcing compliance to the dictates of a central authority.

Yet big business can prove an equally grave threat to our personal freedoms. The IBM Corporation itself commands assets exceeding the gross national product of medium-sized nations like Belgium and Chile.

But is that endangered species—the individual—anywhere to be found in the corporate preserve of free enterprise? Does the business sector that preaches the virtues of individualism tolerate real dissent or unorthodox activity within its confines?

One has only to look at the uniforms of business—suit and tie for men, suit (no slacks) for women—to see the answer. Those who do not acquiesce to the unspoken culture of the corporation in Western society have little chance of advancing upward.

Corporations also have the capacity to collect stores of information. Mailing lists are bought and sold, and applications for, say, credit cards demand a great deal of personal data. And since the corporation "owns" this information, it's difficult to verify just what those stores of information consist of.

We believe big business should come under the same scrutiny government has been receiving (and will likely continue to receive) in the surveillance and privacy debates abounding this new year. Orwell was a novelist and essayist, not a prophet. His novel dealt with complete and total power of government. In today's world, the control is less complete, but in its insidiousness is every bit as terrifying as the Orwellian nightmare.



Excalibur attempts to print as many letters as space allows. Please be brief—letters over 250 words are subject to editing for length. All letters must include the author's name, address, and phone number for verification purposes. Pseudonyms may be used upon request.

letters

excalibur

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Rebuttal to Porn letter

Editor:

Re: the most recent letter from D. Hooper ("Porn Rebuttal," *Excalibur*, 1 Dec 1983).

It is apparent that much confusion prevails regarding pornography. It is clear, however, that pornography cannot be limited to that which depicts physical abuse directed toward women and children, for violence comes in many forms (political, emotional) and is not always easily recognized. Perhaps there is a greater need for eroticism in our society as one way of generating genuine sexual freedom. Pornography, on the opposite hand, is a tactic for subjugation, not liberation. It does violence to women by tearing away their humanity and presenting them as vehicles for political and sexual exploitation by men.

Mr. Hooper's perception of these issues is pitifully narrow. In order to excuse his social myopia he makes a distinction between "the stationary [sic] sold in the Oasis Variety Store" and

something else he calls "pornography." But while he draws the line, Hooper does not explain what it separates.

It is absurd to measure pornographic material in degrees of exploitation. Pornography is only one of a multitude of ways by which women are degraded, and as such, it is part of a much larger problem: the way men are taught to look at and think about women. It is this ideology of dehumanization that so-called "soft-porn" promotes with alarming success.

Hooper also falls into the error of assuming that men and women are accorded equal access to power by drawing an equivalence between *Playgirl* and "mens" magazines. This is a common fallacy. As Susan Brownmiller writes in *Against Our Will*:

There can be no "equality" in porn, no female equivalent, no turning of tables. . . Pornography, like rape, is a male invention, designed to dehumanize women, to reduce the female to an object of sexual access.

Hooper conjectures that willingly posing for these magazines constitutes endorsement of this ideology. In fact, it is an act of acquiescence that is then turned by male readers into generalizations about all women.

Hooper would not accept this reasoning, however: "I hope you're not suggesting that these women are suppressed and forced by men to do what they do." Hooper applies male standards in his analysis and appears to feel that force can be no more subtle than gunpoint capitulation. But coercion cannot be reduced to such a one-dimensional view. Ours is a society in which the tradition of male domination and female submission is the accepted norm. Women are forced to act in male-approved ways because both sexes have been indoctrinated with these values. Hooper's muddled thinking is proof of the effectiveness of this training.

I must agree with Hooper, though, that the labels "dumb" and "shallow" are

uncalled for. Hooper only expresses what he has been taught to believe, and the blame for attitudes like his must be cast over a wider area. A successful battle against pornography and sexism will be waged only after the patterns of exploitation and oppression that inform virtually every fact of our culture are recognized.

—Gary McCarron

Alumnus returns

Editor:

It's fascinating for alumni types to return to the York University campus; to see the changes or the lack thereof. It's especially interesting to watch the goings-on at Downsview's most feared sword of journalism (I think perhaps even moreso for myself, having worked a number of years on the editorial staff of *Excalibur*).

Though some things haven't changed, such as cutbacks and tuition's propensity towards inflation, I am pleased to see other things have definitely changed. *Excalibur* is one of the pleasant surprises.

Let me applaud your work so far this year. *Excalibur's* layout production has taken a quantum leap forward, the photography has improved (pat on the back to Mario and Angelos), and most other aspects of York's main student newspaper have a dramatically more polished result. I think with the exception of "The Question" column, and the lack of independent student funding, *Excalibur* is probably one of the best student newspapers in the country.

—Gregory Saville

Thanks Excal

Editor:

Thank you very much for your article on the Career Centre's "Careers Related to Law" talk in your 1 December 1983 issue. We appreciate and look forward to further coverage of our events.

—Ronni Kives