

# 'SOFT TOTALITARIANISM' AND THE EMPIRE OF IRRELIGION

The new model for social and political control



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The idea of so-called 'soft totalitarianism' has emerged from various speculative novels and political writings of the twentieth century.

While George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), portrayed a highly coercive society, in his "Appendix" to the novel, Orwell pointed out that semantic control (the control of vocabulary and language) was the key to the maintenance of the system—"Newspeak is Ingsoc, and Ingsoc is Newspeak." This may suggest that if semantic control could somehow be maintained through non-coercive means, an apparatus of coercion might become secondary for controlling people. [1]

Some on the Left have tried to characterize current-day society as "totalitarian" because of its all-pervasive, brand-and advertising-driven consumerism. Pope John Paul II had himself referred to a "thinly disguised totalitarianism" in the current-day West.

It has become almost universally accepted that so-called "hard totalitarianism"—typified by regimes such as those of Hitler and Stalin—is something very bad. At the same time, however, the notion of a "soft totalitarianism"—that may in fact arise in the most ostensibly free and democratic systems—has been given far less attention.

The three pillars of the current-day system are:

1. the mass media;
2. the mass education system (from Early Childhood Education to post-doctoral studies);
3. the juridical system (typified by so-called human rights tribunals).

Insofar as traditionalism is almost entirely excluded from the list, it can be seen to be rapidly disappearing from Canadian society. If most of only one generation of society has been deeply miseducated, social and cultural disasters are likely to follow for succeeding generations.

The facts are that Canadian society has reached a stage where anti-traditionalism and irreligion are rampant and regnant. The urgent tasks of renovation and restoration, of "redeeming the time," are extraordinarily difficult. The all-pervasiveness of the current-day system—and the virtual "impermissibility" of any traditionalist critiques directed against it—point to its totalitarian nature.

It may be recalled that Protestant England, although typically considered as the bastion of freedom and rights among the European countries, actually extended a harsh and punitive regime towards its Catholics over many cen-

turies—especially in Scotland and Ireland which England had conquered. Despite England's traditions of "the rights of Englishmen," legal and social instruments, such as the Test Acts, were put into place to harass Catholics. Current-day Canada—although it prides itself on being the "most free" and "most democratic" society on the planet—has put into place a variety of legal and social instruments that create difficulties for the real flourishing of those of its citizens who are sincerely-believing Christians.

## Footnote:

[1] In his speculative novel *Brave New World* (1932), and a preface to it, *Brave New World Re-visited* (written after World War II), **Aldous Huxley** sketched out a possible future society that would be mostly non-coercive, but at the same time embrace a thoroughgoing, totalitarian exclusion of traditional notions of religion, history, and family. In 1941, **James Burnham's** *The Managerial Revolution* raised the notion that a new caste of managers would control society regardless of whether a given society was ostensibly democratic or not. **Philip Rieff**, in his seminal work *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966), pointed out how a regime characterized by the so-called therapeutic model could work to exclude traditional understandings of the world. **Jacques Ellul**, in his critiques of the technological society, pointed to the technological system as an inhuman framework from which all more traditional notions were increasingly excluded. Canadian traditionalist philosopher **George Parkin Grant** enunciated a similar critique of technology. **Roland Huntford**, in his classic work, *The New Totalitarians*, drew attention to contemporary Sweden as a society that, while ostensibly democratic, could be characterized as socially totalitarian. **Christopher Lasch**, in a series of books including *The Culture of Narcissism*; *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*; and *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, pointed to an all pervasive current-day system that undermined traditional verities and meaningful democracy. **Paul Edward Gottfried**, in a series of books including *After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State*, and *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt: Toward a Secular Theocracy*, has amplified and updated the insights of Burnham into our contemporary times.

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