

Our Man Hoppe

If You Like 1973,
You'll Love 1984

Arthur Hoppe

CRITICS to the contrary, the White House does, too, have our interests and concerns at heart.

Take the case of Mr. Clay T. Whitehead, the White House telecommunications chief. Mr. Whitehead's been accused of pressuring the television industry to broadcast news more favorable to the administration.

In fact, some emotional critics claim his thinking is right out of "1984" — George Orwell's novel about a future dictator named "Big Brother" who suppresses all freedoms and dissent among a sheep-like citizenry.

Sound frightening? Not at all. As Mr. Whitehead told the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in a speech the other day:

"A great many people in '1984' liked what Big Brother was doing because he was doing it in their interest and concern."

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MR. WHITEHEAD'S absolutely right. Unfortunately, our progress toward this goal has been, up to now, minimal.

Take "Newspeak," the language used in the novel to make people feel better about what the government is doing. You can't find such phrases as "protective reaction raids" anywhere in Newspeak — even though it certainly sounds better than "blowing people up."

In the novel, the government was always at war, because this increased its authoritarian powers. And its allies and enemies constantly changed. But we haven't always been at war. We older citizens can remember when we were at peace.

That was between the time we and our gallant allies, the Russians and Chinese, fought the fiendish Germans and Japanese and before we got in The Cold War against the fiendish Russians and Chinese with the gallant Germans and Japanese backing us to the hilt.

But in the book, the government wasn't really at war. In 1984, ridiculous as it sounds, "war is peace and peace is war" — you know, like the way our dovish Senators' peace resolutions have prolonged the war and the administration's vigorous prosecution of the war has been the path to peace.

Naturally, Big Brother never publicly explained why he did what he did. An informed public is an unhappy public. On the other hand, we can count on Mr. Nixon to make the mistake of explaining what he's been doing — sooner or later.

But where we haven't made much ground is in the surveillance and jailing of troublemakers. Many members of the press, for instance, are still at large today. Nor was Big Brother ever forced to bug the headquarters of the opposition party, there not being any opposition party to bug.

In 1984, you not only watched television, television watched you, night and day. True, police in a few cities have begun setting up television cameras in the streets, but only to unsnarl traffic and prevent muggings and rapes.

But even this first rudimentary advance has caused protest. "Who," a lady I know protested, "wants to be raped on television?"

And despite massive efforts in recent years by numerous government agencies, the absolutely essential National Data Bank, containing complete dossiers on every citizen, is still far from complete.

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SO WE yet have a long way to go. But given the advances in technology and mass psychological manipulation, we certainly shouldn't give up hope.

After all, the most important step of all in reaching the 1984 society is to convince the public that it's in their interest and concern.

And you have to admit that Mr. Whitehead has taken us a giant stride forward.