

Would-Be Tyrants Capture Language to Control Thought

Newspeak is a crucial instrument of totalitarian power.

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Today's counter-revolution against liberty is being fought on a number of fronts in American society. One is on college and university campuses across the country, where the ideology of "political correctness" is strangling freedom of speech and smothering intellectual controversy and debate. Critical to this campaign is the capture of language.

It is through our language that we think about ourselves, our relationships to others, and the social order surrounding us. Words do not merely delineate objects, individuals, events or actions. Words also create mental imageries, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs that color how people see themselves and the world around them.

The Nazi Manipulation of Minds Through Language

For an example of this, we may turn to Victor Klemperer (1881-1960). Klemperer was a German Jew who survived in Nazi Germany outside of the concentration camp system, because his wife, who was not Jewish, defended him throughout the Second World War. Several years after the defeat of Hitler, Klemperer wrote a book called *The Language of the Third Reich* (1957). A professor of romance languages at a university in Dresden before Hitler's rise to power in 1933, he was especially attuned to the uses and nuances of words and their contextual meanings.

He kept a detailed and truly fascinating diary about daily life during the Nazi era in Germany, the full contents of which, long after he passed away, was published under the title, [*I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years*](#) (1995). He drew upon these meticulous observations in writing *The Language of the Third Reich* in the 1950s. Klemperer argued that virtually everyone in Hitler's Germany was a Nazi – whether or not they considered themselves to be National Socialists – including many of the victims of the regime (including German Jews).

Why? Because they had adopted in their thoughts and beliefs the ideas and ideology of their Nazi masters. They found it difficult to think about life and morality independently of the terminology and political phrases reflecting Nazi conceptions of man, "race," and society. In their minds, Klemperer was suggesting, they were no longer self-governing human beings, but slaves of the regime since they thought and acted in terms of the lexicon and logic of Hitler's National Socialism. Said Klemperer:

“Nazism permeated the flesh and blood of the people through single words, idioms and sentence structures which were imposed upon them in a million repetitions and taken on board mechanically and unconsciously...

Language does not simply write and think for me, it also increasingly dictates my feelings and governs my entire spiritual being the more unquestioningly and unconsciously I abandon myself to it... Words can be like tiny doses of arsenic; they are swallowed unnoticed, appear to have no effect, and then after a little time the toxic reaction sets in after all.”

Klemperer said that it was not that the Nazis made up very many new words, though they did in some cases with intentional design. But what was far more insidious, he argued, is that through their own particular uses of existing words, over and over again in their propaganda, speeches, and publications, they changed the meanings and contexts of these taken-for-granted words of the German language.

The Nazis, through this method, made words have only one meaning, the collective or shared meaning serving the Nazis’ purposes. “Making language the servant of its dreadful system it procures it in its most powerful, most public and most surreptitious means of advertising,” Klemperer explained, and went on:

“The sole purpose of the [Nazi use and form of language] is to strip everyone of their individuality, to paralyze them as personalities, to make them into unthinking and docile cattle in a herd driven and hounded in a particular direction, to turn them into atoms in a huge rolling block of stone . . . Where [Nazi language] addresses the individual . . . where it educates, it teaches means of breeding fanaticism and techniques of mass suggestion.”

The Soviet Control of Thought Through Language

The communist regime in Soviet Russia also used this ideological technique of bending language to their purposes. Russian historian Mikhail Heller (1922-1997) highlighted this aspect of the socialist planned society in his insightful work, [*Cogs in the Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man*](#) (1988).

From the rise of Vladimir Lenin with the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917 through the near twenty-five-year reign of Josef Stalin, to the Soviet leaders at the end of the regime in 1991, language was made to serve the objectives of the socialist system. Heller explained:

“Lenin developed a special way of writing that made it possible to establish the ‘formula-slogan’ in the mind of the reader or listener . . . Then, as the most important compositional element, there is the use of repetition, by means of which a rectangle is formed which concentrates the attention, narrows the field of possibilities, and squeezes thought into a tight ring from which there is only one exit . . .

Total power over the Word gives the Master of the Word a magical power over all communications. Soviet speech is always a monologue because there is no other party to talk to. On the other side is the enemy. In the Soviet language there are no neutral words – every word carries an ideological burden . . . That is why in Soviet language the same words are repeated over and over again, until they become a signal that acts without any effort of thought. The effect of set phrases and slogans is also assured by their always being repeated in absolutely the same form . . .

The Soviet language became the most important means of preventing people from acquiring more knowledge than the state wished . . . Soviet speech lost its freedom. The language was put together out of slogans and quotations from the Leader [Stalin] . . . The

crushing, unquestioned authority of the Leader's word is the result to a large extent of his right and power to name the Enemy . . . The word that signifies the enemy must be striking, easy to remember, implying condemnation by its very sound, and always imprecise, so that everyone who at a given moment does not please the Leader can be included under it rubric . . ."

From "Socialism" to "Liberalism" to "Progressivism"

The same totalitarian-ization of words and ideas can be seen at work in the language of the progressive and radical "left" in America today. Just how successful this has been can be seen in getting people both to forget the past and accept the title "progressive" for all those who desire a further collectivization of contemporary society.

The fact is, those who have taken on the mantle of "progressivism" today were the socialists of a hundred or more years ago. They were confident that Marx's "laws of history" were making a socialist planned society inevitable and inescapable. But "socialist" soon came to possess too many negative connotations such as central direction and command of everyone in society under what was likely to be a dictatorial political regime.

All of which serves as a linguistic trick to prevent anyone from taking such a critic seriously.

So, socialists undertook the linguistic sleight-of-hand to transform themselves into the new and "true" or "progressive" liberals, wishing merely to fulfill the unfinished political program of the old, nineteenth-century "individualist" liberals who only spoke of "negative" freedoms from coercion and interference by other private individuals or governments.

The unfinished new "progressive liberal" agenda required the fulfillment of "positive" freedoms through governmental guarantees to a wide variety of redistributed benefits for the "needy," the "exploited," and the toilers of the earth who were the "real producers" of all things, but who were unjustly treated and abused by "the rich," the "capitalist owners," the greedy profit pursuers who cared nothing about the "little guy" on whose back these capitalist exploiters rode to their unethically acquired wealth.

And when "liberal" became, itself, a criticized and unpopular word due to negative attacks by political conservatives and others, the word "liberal" was jettisoned and replaced with simply "progressive," meaning a person looking forward for the achievement of more "social progress," connoting what used to be considered a "socialist" program of a hundred years ago – welfare redistribution, and extensive government control and regulation of economic and social life. (See my article, ["Barack Obama and the Meaning of Socialism"](#).)

But to accuse a "progressive" of being a socialist or interested in advancing portions of a traditionally socialist agenda, has been made into a demonstration that the proponent of such an argument is a "right-wing extremist," a "hater of the poor," an opponent of "social justice," if not worse. All of which serves as a linguistic trick to prevent anyone from taking such a critic seriously in terms of the logical and historical basis of his argument because to take it seriously shows that such a person, himself, has fallen victim to "reactionary" ideas outside of legitimate and acceptable political debate. Discussion closed.

From “Class Warfare” to the New Race Collectivism

The core social concept in traditional Marxian political economy has been the notion of the “class struggle.” Society is divided into two main “social classes” defined as and identified by whether an individual is or is not an owner of the means of production. If he is such an owner, then he is a member of the capitalist “exploiting class.” If he is not such an owner, then he is a member of the exploited and oppressed and victimized workers’ class.

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Property ownership determined the social status and place of any and every individual person in the society. What the individual believed, how he personally acted in his social and economic interactions with others were essentially meaningless. You were praised or condemned based upon your “class status” in the society. You were either a “class enemy” or a “social comrade.”

Today, the Marxian conception has been modified and transformed into the new notion of irreconcilable social conflict: the beneficiary of ‘white privilege’ versus the sufferer of “white oppression.” Instead of your status relative to the ownership of productive property determining your classification of social “saint” or social “sinner,” there is the new race collectivism.

Being “white” condemns a person as an implicit and explicit beneficiary of a social and economic system (“capitalism”) that has been placed at the service of a limited segment of the human community to gain power, position and wealth for itself at the expense of all those other “people of color” everywhere else around the world.

That so many “white people” either fail to understand this or oppose admitting it demonstrates just how embedded “white racism” really is in modern American society, the new race conflict advocates insist. Failure to accept this new race collectivist argument is taken to be, ipso facto, proof of the racist mindset that the “progressive” opposes and is determined to overthrow by virtually any means.

The Individual Lost in Collectivist Classifications

What is the individual’s own background? Did his ancestors ever own African slaves? Were any such ancestors “pro-slavery” or “anti-slavery”? Did those ancestors come to the United States after slavery had ended in America? Were they, themselves, immigrants escaping oppression and discrimination in the “old country” and advocates of equality of rights for all in their new land of America?

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How has the individual standing accused of “white privilege” merely due to the pigmentation color of his skin acted in his own personal life toward others? How has he earned his own place in society, through fair detailing on what remains of a free market in the United States or through “crony capitalist” favors and benefits from the government? These questions are never asked, and any attempt to offer answers to them is rejected as smoke screens and rationalizations for maintaining “white privilege.”

Individuals are submerged within and reduced to social categories defined and imposed by ideologists dreaming their own utopian dreams of a socially engineered world reflecting their notion of a new race- and ethnic-conscious society. This not only dehumanizes individuals who by accident of birth happen

to be the descendants of Caucasian parents, but this does it no less to those who may be black or Hispanic. You are a “victim” as a “person of color.” You are not able to transcend your own accident of birth to be a thinking, willing, acting individual guided by your own standards, benchmarks, and goals, and able to successfully traverse the trials and tribulation of life. You, too, are an inescapable captive of your race, with only a “progressive” government able to guarantee you a “just” place in society.

The Family Resemblances Between the Old and New Collectivisms

How familiar it all sounds to those Nazi assertions that everything undesired and undesirable in German life was due to the machinations and intrigue of “international Jewry.” The failure of so many others in the world to see the insidiousness of Jewish manipulation and exploitation demonstrated the extent to which “the Jew” had succeeded in his control of the social and economic affairs of the world, and how many others were either their unwitting victims or the degenerate accomplices of their attack on “civilization” and race purity.

And how similar to the Soviet method of debate and argument-stopping: He is a lackey and dupe of the capitalist exploiters, and therefore should be ignored or condemned. Her refusal to admit the justness of the socialist cause shows that she “must” be in the pay of the capitalist bosses, and thus her arguments should be rejected as special pleading. His arguments against communist and socialist planning should be discounted and ridiculed because he is simply a “red baiter” trying to demagogically arouse emotional resistance against those interested in “social justice” and “world peace.”

And on some American campuses now, how close to the techniques of the “Red Guards” during the Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao in China during the 1960s and 1970s. Mobs of shouting, bullying and physically attacking young thugs spouting meaningless and ideologically vacuous phrases from the “little red book” of quotations from Chairman Mao, to mentally and physically crush any and all who failed to parrot the Party Line or who were the objects of Chairman Mao’s political purges and personal vendettas against real and imaginary opponents.

And at the core of it, the same use of language, repeated and repeated, over and over again, in short, clear phrases connoting “bad things” that merely by being labeled as such stands as accusation, condemnation and implied deserved punishment due the “just wrath” of – the National Socialist German people, the Soviet Socialist toiling masses, the “unprivileged” race victims of “white privilege.”

Academia, the New Race Collectivism, and Word Tyranny

A distinct difference between the proponents of this new race collectivism compared to the twentieth-century episodes of German Nazism or Soviet socialism is that this linguistic totalitarianism and word indoctrination is being advanced and imposed without any direct coercive and monopoly apparatus of governmental power.

Instead, the “headquarters” and “front lines” are in academia, especially in some of those institutions of higher learning that are oases of intellectual autonomy from accountability or challenge due to heavily taxpayer-funded salaries, programs, and curricula. Freed from the world of market-based work and reward and blessed with lifetime tenure, those academics employed on these islands of educational

socialism have the “safe spaces” within which there can be cultivated, to use George Orwell’s phrase, “some ideas so absurd that only an intellectual can believe them.”

An increasingly successful Orwellian-like thought police of politically correct “newspeak” is imposed on people in almost every circumstance of social life.

The assertion and repetition of “white privilege,” “the one percent,” “social justice,” “racist,” “gay-basher,” “LGBT-hater,” “gender insensitivity,” etc., have had numbing effects on private and public discourse. It has produced degrees of self-censorship out of fear that the wrong word, the misplaced phrase, the wrongly understood witticism, or an unintentionally offending double entendre will bring down an avalanche of criticisms and threats to one’s job, social status, or acceptance among professional and informal circles in society.

Similar to the robot-like, expressionless faces seen in the videos of crowds of people in some scenes from North Korea, the politically correct world of American progressivism and the new race collectivism threatens to drain human interaction of spontaneity, banter, and the real and relevant diversity of views, voices, and modes of expression and argumentation. Increasingly, people feel that they have to be “walking on eggshells,” never knowing who might take anything said or done as an offense against some ethnic or racial group or person; and the offender finding himself in the dock of social condemnation and ostracism.

Another technique of the new race collectivism and progressivism is to take what is normally accepted as reasonable and appropriate modes of polite and courteous behavior and turn them into a weapon to serve their own agendas. We all know and usually attempt not to intentionally say or do something that will offend or be embarrassing to someone we are associating with in some social setting. We just know it’s not the “right thing” to do. And if we see someone going out of their way to, in fact, act in this improper manner, we find it inappropriate and “not right,” even if we remain silent and don’t do anything in response to it.

The new race collectivists and progressives have learned to use this notion of proper etiquette and good manners that acts as a break on most of us in the social arena as a weapon to silence and beat down anyone or anything not consistent with their worldview and political agenda. Anything said or done inconsistent with their ideas and ideology is “hurtful” to some oppressed minority or subgroup in society. It shows an insensitivity and misunderstanding of that group’s experiences, history, culture or degree of suffering caused by – “white privilege,” or “the capitalist system,” or . . .

Made to feel guilty in thinking some thought, saying some word, or expressing some idea, and fearful about the consequences of doing so, an increasingly successful Orwellian-like thought police of politically correct “newspeak” is imposed on people in almost every circumstance of social life.

Making the Past Serve the Ideological Purposes of the Present

In George Orwell’s novel, *1984*, the anti-hero, Winston, works in the Ministry of Truth. His task is to go through the pages of old newspapers and rewrite the articles in them to make events and statements made in the past consistent with and supportive of the government’s current Party line. The words and events of the past are made to conform to the ideological “truths” of the present.

Here, too, is another trick and technique of the new race collectivists and progressives. Historical events and the people who lived in that past are remade to fit the “truth” of these new totalitarians. When Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence that all human beings are created equal and have certain unalienable rights among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, this was all “really” code words and rationales for a society of white racism.

The wit, charm, creativity, and humanity of words and the ideas expressed through them, must not be stunted and petrified.

If James Madison helped to author a constitution for the United States that had as a leading purpose restraints on the passions of potential individual rights-violating majorities that would threaten a free and prosperous society, this is “really” the institutionalization of the power of an oligarchy of the “the rich” to thwart the progressive will of the majority of “the people” for “social justice” against the exploiting “one percent.”

Oh, how similar to Stalin’s method of rewriting the actual history of the Russian Revolution to make himself, a relatively minor player in those events, into the right-hand comrade of Vladimir Lenin in assuring socialist victory. And what a family resemblance to the other Stalinist tool of making the past conform to the politics of the present, when following a purge those sent to the labor camps or to their death had all positive mention of them deleted from books and magazines, and all pictures of them airbrushed out of old photos.

Everyone who believes in freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of association, in freedom of exchange of ideas, must oppose and prevent this new race collectivism and its accompanying “progressive” linguistic totalitarianism from imposing a new dark age of diminished human discourse.

The wit, charm, creativity, and humanity of words and the ideas expressed through them, must not be stunted and then petrified by those who wish to reduce individual human beings to collectivist categories of ideological control and command. Liberty of thought, deed, action, and association is too precious to be lost to these latest coercing and intimidating thugs of the human mind.
