

Blind Summit Theatre and BAC 1984 Resource Pack

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Introduction

Welcome to the BAC and Blind Summit Theatre *1984* Resource Pack. This pack is aimed at KS4 teachers and students and contains information about the production and activities to try out. You'll find insights into the work of Blind Summit Theatre, the puppetry and staging choices they made for this production, a short synopsis and background to *1984* and it's modern relevance, questions to consider (which are underlined throughout the pack), as well as puppetry and devising workshop plans. In addition, in acknowledgment of the many relevant human rights themes *1984* contains, we've included information on the work of Amnesty International and some activities you can do to explore the issues of human rights further. There's also some useful website links so you can continue to follow up any of these areas and find out more.

Blind Summit Theatre

Blind Summit Theatre was founded in 1997 by designer and puppet maker Nick Barnes and actor and director Mark Down. Over the past 12 years, Blind Summit has established itself as a leader in high quality puppet theatre for adult audiences. Previous productions include the award winning *Low Life*, as well as collaborations with the Birmingham Rep Theatre and West Yorkshire Playhouse (*His Dark Materials*) and The English National Opera and Metropolitan Opera, New York (*Madam Butterfly*). The production of *1984* marks a new phase in the work of Blind Summit Theatre, bringing actors and puppets together as equal elements on stage for the first time, developing the work they have done in their collaborations with other theatre companies.

Battersea Arts Centre

BAC (Battersea Arts Centre) is renowned for making some of the most cutting-edge new work in the UK. Their mission is to invent the future of

theatre by nurturing the creation and development of theatre, music, visual arts, live art, and multimedia performance from talented emerging artists.

Their Participate programme offers people of all ages and backgrounds creative opportunities to take part in the theatre making process. YPT, their Young People's Theatre, gives 13 - 25 year olds the opportunity to create their own work with exciting artists and perform on a professional stage.

Housed in a Grade II* listed old town hall, BAC have many different, unique and unusual performance spaces, alongside more traditional black-box studios. Relaxed and informal, BAC aims to be a home for artists, staff and audiences. Come along to BAC, peek behind doors to explore the building, and experience the future of theatre before everyone else.

1984

Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell, published in 1949, is a futuristic novel about life in Britain, now called Airstrip One and incorporated into the super state of Oceania. Here, everything and everyone is controlled by Big Brother and the totalitarian regime of the Party. The party enforces control through continual surveillance of the population by tele-screens, Thought Police and a number of 'sacred principles', including the development of a simplified language 'Newspeak' and the re-writing of history. The main character, Winston Smith, works in the Ministry of Truth re-writing old newspaper articles in order to make them conform to the official version of events. Winston secretly yearns for the overthrow of the Party and finds new hope when he falls in love with a young woman called Julia. Their subsequent rebellion against the party inevitably leads to arrest, torture and 'conversion'.

1984 is one of the best known and most frequently cited books in the world and its language has even become part of our vocabulary.

- [What do you understand by the phrases Big Brother? Room 101?](#)

Published shortly after the Second World War the book reflects the historical and political concerns of its time. The rise of Nazism and an Eastern Europe controlled by communist Russia. It is a warning of the dangers of all forms of totalitarianism, dictatorial one-party states that seek to control every aspect of their citizens' lives. It is a satire which takes the typical features of totalitarian states and imagines them developed to new extremes.

Sixty years after its publication *1984* remains relevant. There are still many one-party states in the world which try to control every part of society. Freedom of expression and the right to information is still under threat in many places. In the U.K. surveillance technology, CCTV cameras are everywhere and we are one of the most surveyed countries in the world. Language is still used by politicians, journalists and advertisers to manipulate and distort the truth.

"The main message of the book is perhaps that 'The Truth' is always in danger and that is timeless." Mark Down, Director

You can find the full interview with director Mark Down on the Blind Summit website www.blindsummit.com

- [Do you think 1984 has any particular relevance to you? How?](#)

From Page to Stage

One of the first challenges for Blind Summit was to adapt the novel into a theatre script.

"When you change a novel into a playscript you lose the author's voice and the characters have to tell the story. In the case of 1984 the author's voice is very powerful and a great deal of the drama in the book takes place in the head of the main character Winston Smith. That is why we came up with the idea of a cast of agit prop players making Winston act out his story". Mark Down, Director

Agit-Prop Theatre

Agit-Prop is short for 'agitated propoganda'. It is a type of theatre used to 'agitate' the public into taking action on political and social issues.

This type of theatre developed following the revolution in Soviet Russia. Small-scale theatre groups would tour performances to explain current events and government policy in a popular, clear and entertaining way to the peasant workforce. They were known as the Blue Blouse 'Sinyaya Bluza' after the workers' blue overalls which the actors wore for their performances. They would perform anywhere; on the backs of lorries, in bars, beer houses and community halls and with just a few simple props. A tradition of holding up signs and pictures to help make the messages clear also developed. Performances sometimes took place in front of audiences of several hundreds and therefore had to be highly visual, entertaining, energetic and direct.

Agit-prop theatre spread to Europe and America in the late 1920's and in particular developed in Germany through the work of playwright and director Bertolt Brecht (1898 -1956).

In the Blind Summit production of *1984*, the actors are imagined to be a cast of agit-prop players in Orwell's super state of Oceania. The agit-prop players are making Winston Smith act out his story as a warning to others. The language of the play is direct; the agit-prop players use only simple cardboard props, signs and puppets and work as an ensemble manipulating basic furniture and the set to create many different locations to tell their story.

"George Orwell's ambition with 1984 was to write something that combined art and politics. We wanted a form of theatre that did the same thing and Agit Prop was the obvious choice. We also felt that it was quite possibly a style of theatre that they would have in Oceania in 1984" Mark Down, Director

- [On seeing the production do you think it was useful to present the piece using the style of Agit-prop theatre? Why?](#)

The Puppets

Puppets have played a significant part in Blind Summit's work.

“At a time when theatre is so under threat from the proliferation of new media, we think that puppetry is one of the areas which offers a unique live experience for audiences. We see puppetry as a radical part of the reinvention of theatre in our time. Our work aims to challenge people's attitudes to puppetry. Our puppets are modern and our shows tackle contemporary issues that concern us.” Mark Down, Director

Most of the puppets that Blind Summit make and use are a combination of two particular types of puppets: The Japanese Bunraku puppet and a type of puppet known in France as the “marionette porte”, literally translated as the “carried marionette”. Bunraku puppets require three people to manipulate them fully, one on the head and the left hand, one on the right hand, and one on the feet. Marionette porte is very simply a puppet which is carried by a handle on the back of the head with a second handle on the puppet's back. Otherwise, it is controlled directly by the puppeteers holding the puppets wrists and ankle joints.

There are other types of puppet in the production too and many of them are made either partly or entirely of cardboard.

“We chose cardboard because essentially the show is being presented by a group of agit-prop players. Agit-prop is quite a direct, rough style of theatre so we wanted a material that would reflect that and would have a rough feel to it. Something that would look as if it had been grabbed and turned into something very quickly. Obviously, we still wanted the puppets to be beautiful to look at.” Nick Barnes, designer and puppet maker

However, it's not just the puppets that are manipulated during the show. The actors also manipulate objects, the furniture, the set and each other. In a story where everything is being manipulated by the Party to control the population the use of puppetry techniques in the staging of the play is an interesting device.

“The main puppet metaphor in the novel is perhaps the language – Newspeak- which is being manipulated to control people’s thoughts. In Agit-Prop theatre there is a tradition of holding up signs and pictures to make messages clear – using this we are literally able to make language a puppet.”

Mark Down, Director

- [On seeing the production do you think the use of puppets helped to tell the story?](#)
- [When and how were they most effective?](#)

You will find below suggested activities for two workshops; one focused on Devising and one focused on Puppetry.

DEVISING WORKSHOP

This is a one hour workshop but may take longer if students spend time showing their work to each other. The aim of this workshop is to explore through devising activities and scenes the key themes and ideas that *1984* explores.

You will need to work in a large clear space such as a school hall or drama studio. You will need to make copies of the following text for your students;

- The Dialogue from *1984* – Appendix 1
- The Extracts from *1984* – Appendix 2

Activity 1: Bomb and Shield (5mins)

Everyone walks around the room finding their own path and filling the space. Each individual chooses one other person in the room (without letting anyone else know), the bomb, from whom they must try to stay as far away as possible from, as everyone continues to walk around the room. Now everyone chooses another person, the shield, who they have to make sure is at all times between them and their bomb.

- [How difficult is this?](#)

Imagine that you are trying to complete this task secretly but you think you may be being watched and followed.

- [How does this change the rhythm of the exercise?](#)

Activity 2: The Canteen (10mins)

In groups of five or six create a canteen. Imagine people queuing up and serving food, sharing tables to eat, collecting dirty trays etc. Include CCTV cameras which follow the activity in the canteen and listen in on conversations. Add in sounds, whispers and the following pieces of text;

'Big Brother is watching you'

'Thoughtcrime is death'

'We thank big brother for our new and happy life!'

- [What kind of atmosphere did you create?](#)

Activity 3: The Secret Meeting (10mins)

With a partner have a go at the piece of dialogue from *1984*. Create an atmosphere of tension and paranoia but try not to act suspiciously. You may be being watched and listened to!

Activity 4: Big Brother and The Ministry of Truth (10mins)

In groups of three or four read the two extracts from the novel and discuss the questions.

Activity 5: Re-writing the Truth (10mins)

In groups of four or five create a still image/photograph of a current or imagined news event or a scene from *1984*. Give your image a headline and brief story. Using exactly the same image now create a completely contradictory headline and story interpreting the picture in an altogether different way.

Activity 6: Freedom of Expression and the Right to Information (15mins)

In groups of four or five imagine you are putting on a performance campaigning for *Freedom of Expression and the Right to Information*. Present your argument in an entertaining and instructive way. You could use one of the scenarios below as a starting point;

- A nuclear leak is covered up 'to prevent mass panic'.
- A government decrees that works of art and literature have to express the values of 'the people'.
- A civil servant leaks information on contamination in food to the press.
- The media can only report from military briefings in time of war.

- [How would you ensure people could express what they wanted, when they wanted?](#)
- [Should the public be entitled to such information?](#)

APPENDIX 1 - Dialogue from 1984

A 'What time do you leave work?'

B 'Eighteen-thirty'

A 'Where can we meet?'

B 'Victory Square, near the monument'

A 'It's full of tele-screens'

B 'It doesn't matter if there's a crowd'

A 'Any signal?'

B 'No. Don't come up to me until you see me among a lot of people. And don't look at me. Just keep somewhere near me.'

A 'What time?'

B 'Nineteen hours'

A 'All right'

1984 by George Orwell, 1949, Penguin Books

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from *1984*

WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

He took a twenty-five cent piece out of his pocket. There, too, in tiny clear lettering, the same slogans were inscribed, and on the other face of the coin the head of Big Brother. Even from the coin the eyes pursued you. On coins, on stamps, on the covers of books, on banners, on posters and on the wrapping of a cigarette packet – everywhere. Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed – no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull.....

.....As soon as all the corrections which happened to be necessary in any particular number of *The Times* had been assembled and collated, that number would be reprinted, the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed on the files in its stead. This process of continual alteration was applied to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons, photographs – to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance. Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. In this way every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct; nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record.'

1984 by George Orwell, 1949, Penguin Books

- [What three words best define the society that is being described?](#)
- [What are your immediate thoughts and reactions to the slogans?](#)
- [How is control maintained?](#)

- Why would it be a struggle to keep 'the few cubic centimetres inside your own skull' your own if you lived in a society like this?
- Can you think of any societies that have been/are like this?
- Are there any ways in which our own society is like this?
- What are the best ways to prevent a society from becoming like this?

PUPPETRY WORKSHOP

'Things have a life of their own' the gypsy proclaimed with a harsh accent. 'it's simply a matter of waking up their souls.'

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude

This is an hour and a quarter workshop but may take longer if students spend much time showing their work to each other. The aim of this workshop is to explore different types of puppetry and the dramatic qualities they portray.

It is best to work in a large clear space.

You will need:

- Lots of old newspapers
- Rolls of masking tape
- A variety of everyday objects (such as paper cups, rulers, pencils, pens, pencil cases, rubbers, empty plastic bottles).

Remember a puppet is anything that is moved in a way that suggests that it has a life of its own.

Activity 1: Warm-up (5mins)

Movement is the essential attribute of any puppet and movement defines what puppetry is. So to begin with we need to think about how we move.

Start by walking around the space. Now imagine that you are very happy, sad, afraid, confused, old, shy.....

- How did the way you walk change?

Try the exercise again but now focus on not only the way your walk changes but how your breath changes.

- Do you sigh when you are sad, take short breaths when you are afraid, breath with difficulty when you are old?

The breath is very important in puppetry. Breath creates the illusion of life.

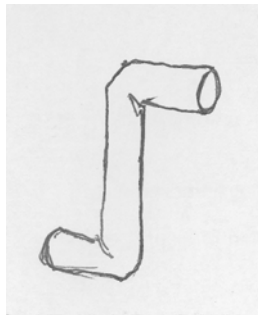
Activity 2: Puppetry of the hand (10mins)

Place your hand on a flat surface. Concentrate on your breathing. Slowly bring the rise and fall of your breath into a gentle movement of your hand. So that your hand appears to breath. Your hand is now a puppet.

- Try breathing as if your hand puppet is asleep, snoring, then starting to stir and yawning it begins to move until the puppet is fully awake.
- Experiment with different breathing rhythms connected to an emotional or physical state eg. panicked, shocked, sighing, yawning, relaxed, excited.
- Explore the boundary between the puppet as a dead object and when it is alive. How much or how little movement is required to animate the puppet?
- Each of your hands is now a puppet but with very different, distinct 'characters'. Find the different way each hand moves. Does one hand walk energetically on two finger legs whilst the other shuffles slowly like a spider on all five bent fingers? Find a different sound/quality of breath that each puppet has. Make the different characters very defined. Act out a little scenario with your puppets. Maybe one puppet is sleeping and snoring and the other one wakes him up. What happens next? Remember to keep each hand alive all the time, at the same time.

Activity 3: Bringing a piece of Newspaper to life (10mins)

Take one sheet of newspaper and roll it up into a tube. Fold the tube an inch from one end so that it can stand on one foot. At the other end of the tube make another fold an inch away from the end to make a head. Hold the puppet at the foot fold with one hand and the head fold with the other. Now slowly bring your newspaper to life.



- Give it breath.
- Now think about your puppet's eyes. [Where is the puppet looking?](#) Be very specific.

The eyes of the puppet establish an essential communication with the audience and let the audience know what the puppet is thinking or feeling.

- Experiment with looking at three different points of focus in the room. Remember your focus as the puppeteer is the puppet and not what it is looking at.
- [How does your puppet move/walk?](#)
- [How can your puppet express different emotions?](#)
- [What voice emerges?](#)
- [Can your puppet jump, dance, fly?](#)

Activity 4: Object Manipulation (15mins)

Object manipulation is the technique of animating an inanimate object by the puppeteer and in so doing transforming the object into a puppet.

Choose an everyday object to bring to life.

- Look at your object carefully. What does the physical form of your object tell you about your puppet character before it has even moved?
- Experiment with what your puppet can do. How can it walk, sit, lie, do handstands.....
- How can your puppet express different emotions?
- What voice emerges?
- Allow two different objects to meet and interact. Do they like each other? Are they shy? Afraid? Excited?
- Allow a third object to join and make a creature. Eg. a character with a rubber for a head, a pencil case for a body and paper cup legs. Work together to bring your combined puppet creature to life.

Activity 5: Bunraku Puppetry (15mins)

Bunraku is a Japanese form of puppetry. Three puppeteers operate one puppet. The master puppeteer operates the head with his left hand and the right arm and hand with his right hand. The master puppeteer leads the movement with a breath and the head has the eyes and the specificity. The first assistant puppeteer operates the left arm and hand. The second assistant puppeteer controls the feet and gives the puppet its sense of weight and gravity.

With three puppeteers and several different objects create one character eg. paper cup for head, rulers for legs, pencils for arms. Think about where your bodies are in relation to each other and the puppet. How will you negotiate

this to make it easy for the puppet to move? If you are the master puppeteer operating the head lead the movement with the breath.

- Can your puppet take a few steps, wave, look happy/ sad/ surprised/ angry, scratch his head/nose, rub his belly, dance, do acrobatics, fly?
- Take turns in being master puppeteer and first and second assistant.
- Meet another puppet and make up a short scene.

Activity 6: Newspaper Bunraku Puppets (20mins)

In groups of three make a Newspaper Bunraku Puppet by scrunching sheets of newspaper into balls for the head and body and rolling and scrunching newspaper tubes for arms and legs (making folds at the ends for hands and feet). Use masking tape to attach body parts making sure there is some flexibility in the joints and neck. Now work as a team to bring your puppet to life, meet other puppets, create a world they inhabit. Can you devise a story that involves all your puppets?

Blind Summit Theatre and BAC are working alongside Amnesty International on 1984

Amnesty International

Amnesty international is a campaigning organisation whose purpose is to protect people wherever justice, fairness, freedom and truth are denied. Founded in London in 1961 the organisation draws attention to human rights abuses and campaigns for compliance with international standards. Amnesty's vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the landmark document that provides an international set of principles relating to human dignity and justice. It is this defence of human rights and freedom of expression which Amnesty advocate, is exactly what Winston Smith in 1984 is also fighting for by being a thought-criminal. The freedoms that Amnesty is championing are what the world of Big Brother is not allowing.

On the following pages you will find an Amnesty International one hour classroom activity exploring issues of censorship and in particular recent internet repression in China.

AMNESTY ACTIVITIES

Resources

- A copy of the film *Over to you* (download the film on-line at www.amnesty.org.uk/humanrightsinfocus)
- Copies of the information sheet 'Internet Repression' – appendix 3
- Copies of the list of websites – appendix 4

Activity 1

Divide the class into small groups of 4 or 5 students. Tell them to imagine that they have become the all powerful rulers of a country. In this country, people are not allowed to disagree with the government and the military keep control of the people, often by force.

Tell them:

Your military intelligence reports that some of your citizens are using the internet to get information from other countries and using their computers and mobile phones to discuss the situation in your country with others. You feel that the security of your government may be under threat. Some of your people may be visiting websites and chat rooms abroad, which are critical of your government. They may even be writing 'blogs' which express anti government opinion.

Perhaps they are picking up foreign propaganda against your government or sending or receiving secrets that could threaten your country's safety?

Perhaps they are exchanging information or ideas that are politically dangerous or very rude or violent or against God or insulting to minorities or committing other thought crimes?

- How are you going to prevent your people using the internet to send or receive information or ideas which you consider to be dangerous?
- What material are you going to stop? How?
- How are you going to find out which of your citizens are misusing the internet to conspire with your country's enemies?
- If you catch any bloggers expressing opinions which oppose your government, what will you do to them?

Groups report back their ideas to the rest of the class.

Ask the class:

- Is this just fantasy, or could it happen in the real world?

Activity 2: (20mins)

- Give out copies of the information sheet: Internet Repression – appendix 3 and the Website List – appendix 4
- Get students to read it. Ask for any questions
- Now give out the website list.
- Ask students to tick which of these websites they think that people in China can visit.
- When students have made their guesses, inform them that the people in China will actually only be able to find **one** of these seven sites, **<http://en.Olympic.cn>**, the website of the Chinese Olympic Committee. All the other sites are blocked by the Chinese authorities.

Activity 3: (20mins)

- Tell the students about Shi Tao.

Shi Tao

In 2004 the Chinese journalist Shi Tao, 38, sent an email from his Yahoo! account to a Chinese website based in the USA in which he described the Chinese government's instructions to Chinese journalists on how to cover the 15th anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, in which the government opened fire on protesters. The Chinese police obtained Shi Tao's details from the American Internet company Yahoo! He was arrested, charged with 'illegally providing state secrets to foreign entities' and is currently serving a 10-year prison sentence in Hunan Province.

Amnesty International considers Shi Tao to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

- Explain that students in Hackney Free School in London decided to take part in a campaign to help Shi Tao.
- Show the first section of the film *Over to you* which shows students from Hackney Free and Parochial School taking action against Yahoo!

Discuss:

- Is the Chinese government justified in their actions to imprison Shi Tao?
- Why do you think Yahoo! gave Shi Tao's email address to the Chinese government?
- Are there any circumstances where you think a government *should* prevent people from sending emails or looking at certain internet sites?

For more information about Amnesty International and further education resources visit **www.amnesty.org.uk**

APPENDIX 3 - Internet Repression Information Sheet

New technology has given the world emails, text messages and the internet, providing people with free access to ideas, opinions and information on an enormous scale. But a growing number of governments are trying to control the internet. In China and more than 20 other countries, chat rooms are being monitored, blogs deleted, websites blocked and search engines restricted for political reasons. Internet users are being arrested and imprisoned for sharing information, criticising their governments, calling for press freedom, or discussing human rights abuses online. Internet use in China is huge. In 2008 there are over 215 million internet users in China – more than in the USA. The Chinese government promotes internet use for education and business, but it prevents people from seeing anything that it considers critical of China or indecent. Filters limit access to foreign websites.

Software stopping people getting access to 'harmful' material has been installed in all of China's 110,000 Internet cafes. Internet surfers are at risk. 30,000 cyber cops are monitoring them live. One website in 10 is being blocked. People emailing messages or trying to get hold of politically sensitive material from inside China risk arrest and jail.

In February 2008 the organisation *Reporters Without Borders* was campaigning for the release of more than 81 internet users in China imprisoned or held in labour camps for criticising their government in emails, including students, people in the Falun Gong spiritual movement, workers, writers, lawyers, teachers, civil servants, former police officers, engineers, and business people. Some of the biggest IT companies in the world that benefit a great deal from business in China, have built surveillance and censorship equipment for them. Yahoo! supplied private information about their email users to the Chinese authorities, leading to their prosecution and wrongful imprisonment. Microsoft, Nortel and Google also censor their Chinese customers.

APPENDIX 4 - Website List

Which of these websites can the people of China find on the web?

1. **www.amnesty.org.uk** (Amnesty International's website about human rights)
2. **www.youtube.com** (a site where people put up their own videos)
3. **www.chinatimes.com.tw** (a Chinese website based in Taiwan)
4. **http://en.olympic.cn** (a website of China's Olympic Committee)
5. **www.wikipedia.org** (a free encyclopedia)
6. **www.falundafa.org** (a website of the Falun Gong spiritual movement)
7. **www.rsf.org** (Reporters Without Borders — an international organisation which campaigns for freedom of the press)

Useful Links

www.bac.org.uk

BAC's website where you will find out more as to what is happening at the theatre.

www.blindsummit.com

Blind Summit Theatre website. Here you'll find rehearsal blogs and videos and even detailed instructions on how they make some of their puppets.

www.amnesty.org.uk

Amnesty International website. Here you'll find many more education resources and you can join TeachRights, Amnesty International's network for teachers who are interested in bringing human rights into their classroom. You can also download copies of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

www.indexoncensorship.org

Index on Censorship is Britain's leading organisation promoting freedom of expression. With its global profile, its website provides up-to-the-minute news and information on free expression from around the world. Events and projects put their causes into action. Their excellent magazine shines a light on these vital issues through original, challenging and intelligent writing.

www.george-orwell.org

George Orwell site

www.littleangeltheatre.com

Little Angel Puppet Theatre site. Lots of puppet shows and puppet making and performance courses for young people, children and adults

www.internationalpen.org.uk/

International PEN brings together writers, journalists, poets – all those using the written word to promote ideas – in the common belief that it is through this sharing that bridges of understanding can be built between peoples. These bridges cross-political, geographical, ethnic, cultural, religious and other divides. It is for this reason that the protection of the right to freedom of expression – the freedom to express ideas without fear of attack, arrest or other persecution – has been at the heart of International PEN's work since it was formed in 1921.

Also: You might want to watch the film version of *1984* directed by Michael Radford, released in 1984 and starring John Hurt and Richard Burton.