



Journalist Facing Fine For 'Controlling Minds'

Referenced George Orwell's '1984' in article

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The Goodreads online resource says George Orwell's "1984" is growing "more haunting as its futuristic purgatory becomes more real."

The classic novel is the author's nightmare of a "totalitarian, bureaucratic world" that is a "thorough vision of hell."

It portrays a world in which thoughts are punishable.

And now the book itself may get a Russian journalist fined.

DailyMail.com reported the Russian government is accusing Mikhail Romanov of trying to "control minds" by referencing "1984."

Romanov, who reports for the weekly Yakutsk Vecherniy, wrote on a case alleging torture of an academic.

Police in the Republic of Sakha, in northeastern Russia, then accused Romanov of "trying to tap into the readers' subconscious."

"This is a story about how anyone can be squashed by the government machine," ala "1984," reported Romanov's editor.

"It's also about how Big Brother is watching, reading all comments on online forums."

DailyMail.com said it could be the first time a journalist is facing trial under new Russian laws that punish the directing of information to "the human subconscious."

Fines for the offense could range up to about \$800.

The Russian Union of Journalists, DailyMail.com reported, argued the author only referenced the novel, written in 1949.

A Russian-language report said, through a translation program, that the "abuse of freedom of information" case was moving to a city court.

It said a military official found in the article a fragment that appeared to be aimed at impacting people's subconscious.

The report said police officers arrived at the journalist's office demanding answers to questions about his writing.

His article centered on the case of Anton Ammosov, who allegedly was kidnapped and tortured for comments on social media networks about an explosion set up by an anarchist student organization.

Matthew Feeney explained at the Cato Institute's site that the core message of "1984" is how language can be used by governments to subjugate and obfuscate.

"The authoritarian government of Orwell's Oceania doesn't merely punish dissent severely – it seeks to make even thinking about dissent impossible," he wrote.

"When Inner Party member O'Brien tortures '1984's' protagonist, Winston Smith, he holds up his hand with four fingers extended and asks Smith how many fingers he sees. When Smith replies, 'Four! Four! What else can I say? Four!' O'Brien inflicts excruciating pain on him. After Smith finally claims to see five fingers, O'Brien emphasizes that saying 'five' is not enough. 'No, Winston, that is no use. You are lying. You still think there are four.'"

He concluded: "Orwell was not a prophet, but he identified a necessary feature of any successful authoritarian government. To control you effectively, it can't merely threaten death, imprisonment or torture. It's not enough for it to ban books and religions.

"As long as the state doesn't dominate your consciousness, it's under constant risk of overthrow," he said.