

# Doublethink, Cognitive Dissonance and Peace Mythology

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In his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell developed the concept of “doublethink,” which he described as:

“The power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.... To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient.”<sup>1</sup>

This mental process has also described as a form of:

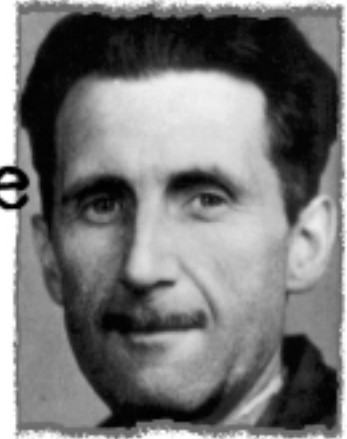
“trained, willful intellectual blindness to contradictions in a belief system. Doublethink differs from ordinary hypocrisy in that the ‘double-thinking’ person deliberately...forgets the contradiction between his two opposing beliefs—and then deliberately forgets that he has forgotten the contradiction.... Orwell describes it as ‘controlled insanity.’”<sup>2</sup>

Some psychologists have since described a mental process by which to escape this cognitive straitjacket. The idea is that when confronted by evidence exposing the contradictions within a belief system, people will experience a disquieting response called “cognitive dissonance.” When this phenomenon arises, there is an “uncomfortable feeling or stress caused by holding two contradictory ideas simultaneously.” The theory holds that people

“have a fundamental cognitive drive to reduce this dissonance by modifying an existing belief, or rejecting one of the contradictory ideas.”<sup>3</sup>

So, for example, Canadians who strongly believe that their government refused to participate in the Iraq war, will experience cognitive dissonance if they encounter facts running counter to their deeply-embedded belief. To reduce mental discomfort, some will simply dismiss the unwanted news. The evidence of Canada’s involvement in Iraq may then be rejected as either untrue, or perhaps argued away as an insignificant aberration within their overall belief system. By constructing rationalisations to defend their erroneous beliefs, an individuals disturbing in-

Freedom  
Strength  
War is Peace  
Slavery  
Ignorance  
1984  
George Orwell



ner discord will be reduced, and Canada’s mythological juggernaut can continue to lumber forward unscathed.

However, although unsettling data can be shoved aside and forgotten temporarily, the feelings of cognitive dissonance will emerge again and again as further contradictory facts are encountered. If a large enough body of evidence is presented to expose the truth about Canada’s very real participation in the Iraq war, it is hoped that most will eventually reject the deceptive official narrative that Canada stayed out of this horrendous war.

Unfortunately, the deception about Canada’s supposed noninvolvement in the Iraq war is just one facet within a much larger mythology that paints Canada as a global champion for peace, human rights and democracy.

Countering such prevailing mythological belief systems is not an easy task and there is no simple solution. When revealing and presenting the unpleasant truth that Canadian foreign policies deliberately encourage and perpetuate war as a means to generate corporate profits, anti-war activists will inevitably encounter resistance from those who are still caught in the doublethink of the official narrative. Canadians, quite understandably, do not want to give up their comfortable self-image as a global peacemaker.

Equally important is the fact that no one wants to believe that they have been conned, deceived, duped or entrapped by false prophets of peace. This resistance will be even greater within those who have hitched their careers and reputations to the prevailing mythology. Those who have, perhaps un-

wittingly, helped to ensnare others using the yarns spun by the masters of government propaganda, will prefer to discount inconvenient facts rather than admit that they themselves have helped to perpetuate untruths.

So, those in Canada’s peace movement who can free themselves from the powerful peace mythology that grips this nation’s psyche, are faced with an extremely difficult task. Exposing our friends, families, coworkers, communities and fellow peace activists to concrete evidence that debunks a popular Canadian myth, such as the deception that Canada refused to join Iraq war, is indeed a challenging task. However, by taking up this struggle, we may be able to provoke the kind of cognitive dissonance that leads to paradigm shifts within enough individuals that eventually the truth will percolate out and become common knowledge.

This issue of *Press for Conversion!* uses official government and military sources to prove Canada’s involvement in the Iraq war. The data presented here cannot therefore be discredited as emanating from sources that are biased against the official narrative. This resource will hopefully provide anti-war activists with a useful tool in the struggle to ensure that we can reject future propaganda efforts that aim to subvert and weaken the peace movement.

## References

1. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1949, p.220.
2. Doublethink  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doublethink](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doublethink)
3. Cognitive dissonance  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive\\_dissonance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_dissonance)