

- The Nature of Totalitarianism
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Focus Questions

1. What are the distinctive features of a totalitarian state?
2. What motivated Stalin to make terror a government policy? What motivated Communist bureaucrats to participate in Stalin's inhumanities?
3. What were the essential features of the fascist movements that arose in Europe after World War I?
4. What were Hitler's attitudes toward liberalism, war, race, the Jews, and propaganda?
5. In what ways did Nazism conflict with the core values of both the Enlightenment and Christianity? Why did the Nazi regime attract so many supporters?
6. What lessons might democratic societies draw from the Nazi experience?

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Western Civilization (2007, 8th ed.) by Marvin Perry, et al.

In the 1930s, the term totalitarianism was used to describe the Fascist regime in Italy, the National Socialist regime in Germany, and the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. To a degree that far exceeds the ancient tyrannies and early modern autocratic states, these dictatorships aspired to and, with varying degrees of success, attained control over the individual's consciousness and behavior and all phases of political, social, and cultural life. To many people it seemed that a crises-riddled democracy was dying and that the future belonged to these dynamic totalitarian movements.

Totalitarianism is a twentieth-century phenomenon, for such all-embracing control over the individual and society could be achieved only in an age of modern ideology, technology, and bureaucracy. The totalitarian state was more completely established in Germany and the Soviet Union than in Italy, where cultural and historic conditions impeded the realization of the totalitarian goal of monolithic unity and total control.

In *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956), Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski viewed fascist and communist dictatorships as "historically unique and sui generis"¹—different in nature from ancient oriental despotisms, the Roman Empire, the tyrannies of the Renaissance city-states, or the absolute monarchies of modern Europe. "Broadly speaking, totalitarian dictatorship is a new development; there has never been anything quite like it before." They contended further that "fascist and communist totalitarian dictatorships are basically alike."² True the ideological aims and social and economic policies of Hitler and Stalin differed fundamentally. However, both Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany shared the totalitarian goal of total domination of the individual and institutions and employed similar methods to achieve it. Mussolini's Italy is more accurately called *authoritarian*, for the party-state either did not intend to control all phases of life or lacked the means to do so. Moreover, Mussolini hesitated to use the ruthless methods that Hitler and Stalin employed so readily.

THE NATURE OF TOTALITARIANISM

Striving for total unity, control, and obedience, the totalitarian dictatorship is the antithesis of liberal democracy. It abolishes all competing political parties, suppresses individual liberty, eliminates or regulates private institutions, and utilizes the modern state's bureaucracy and technology to impose its ideology and enforce its commands. The one party-state determines what people should believe—what values they should hold. There is no room for individual thinking, private moral judgment, or individual conscience. The individual possesses no natural rights that the state must respect. The state regards individuals merely as building blocks, human material to be hammered and hewed into a new social order. It seeks to create an efficiently organized and stable society—one whose members do not raise troublesome questions or hold unorthodox opinions.

Nevertheless, the totalitarian dictatorship is also an unintended consequence of liberal democracy. It emerged in an age in which, because of the French and Industrial Revolutions, the masses had become a force in political life. The totalitarian leader seeks to gain and preserve power by harnessing mass support. Hitler, in particular, built a party within the existing constitutional system and exploited the electoral process in order to overthrow the democratic government.

Unlike previous dictatorial regimes, the dictatorships of both the left and the right sought to legitimize their rule by gaining the masses' approval. They claimed that their governments were higher and truer expressions of the people's will. The Soviet and Nazi dictatorships established their rule in the name of the people—the German Volk or the Soviet proletariat.

A distinctive feature of totalitarianism is the overriding importance of the leader, who is seen as infallible and invincible. The masses' slavish adulation of the leader and their uncritical acceptance of the dogma that the leader or the party is always right promote loyalty, dedication, and obedience and distort rational thinking.

Totalitarian leaders want more than power for its own sake; in the last analysis, they seek to transform the world according to an all-embracing ideology, a set of convictions and beliefs that, says Hannah Arendt, "pretend[s] to know the mysteries of the

whole historical process—the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future."³ The ideology constitutes a higher and infallible truth based on a law of history or social development that, says Karl Dietrich Bracher, "reduce[s] the past and the future to a single historical principle of struggle, no matter whether by state, nation, people, race, or class."⁴ The ideology contains a dazzling vision of the future—a secular New Jerusalem—that strengthens the will of the faithful and attracts converts. "This utopian and chiliastic outlook of totalitarian ideologies," declare Friedrich and Brzezinski, "gives them a pseudoreligious quality. In fact, they often elicit in the less critical followers a depth of conviction and a fervor of devotion usually found only among persons inspired by a transcendent faith."⁵ Like a religion, the totalitarian ideology provides its adherents with beliefs that make society and history intelligible, that explain all of existence in an emotionally gratifying way. A distinguishing feature of both communist and Nazi ideologies was the dogmatic belief that conflict—between classes for Marxists and between nations and races for Nazis—was the driving force in history.

The ideology—a "grand transcendent fiction [or] *metamyth*" in Brzezinski's apt phrase—promises to transform the social order in accordance with an ultimate and exclusive truth propagated by the party, thereby satisfying a human yearning for complete certitude.⁶ Like a religion, it creates true believers, who feel that they are participating in a great cause—a heroic fight against evil—that gives meaning to their lives. During World War II, a German soldier fighting on the eastern front wrote to his brother that the battle "is for a new ideology, a new belief, a new life! I am glad that I can participate. . . in this war of light and darkness."⁷

Also like a religion, the totalitarian party gives isolated and alienated individuals a sense of belonging, a feeling of camaraderie; it enables a person to lose himself or herself in the comforting and exhilarating embrace of a mass movement. The radical Russian anarchist Bakunin had sensed the seductive power of the community when he stated: "I do not want to be I, I want to be We."⁸

Not only did the totalitarian religion-ideology supply followers with a cause that claimed absolute goodness; it also provided a Devil. For the Soviets, the source of evil and the cause of all the

Chronology 30.1 ♦ Totalitarianism

November 1917	Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, take command in Russia
1918-20	Civil war and foreign intervention in Russia
March 1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
July 1918	Nicholas II of Russia and his family are murdered
March 1919	Communist International is formed
1921-28	New Economic Policy
1922	Stalin becomes general secretary of the Communist party
1922	Mussolini rises to power
1923	Hitler's failed Beer Hall Putsch and subsequent imprisonment
January 1924	Lenin dies
1924	Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics takes effect
1928	First Five-Year Plan starts rapid industrialization in Russia
October 1929	The Great Depression begins
1929	Stalin in sole command in Russia; collectivization of agriculture begins
1933	Hitler elected chancellor of Germany
1936	Stalin constitution: socialism achieved
1936-38	Stalin's terror purges
1936-39	Spanish Civil War
November 1938	Nazi pogrom— <i>Kristallnacht</i>
1939	Hitler invades Poland; World War II breaks out
June 1941	Hitler invades the Soviet Union

people's hardships were the degenerate capitalists, reactionary peasants who resisted collectivization, the traitorous Trotskyites, or the saboteurs and foreign agents, who impeded the realization of the socialist society. For the Nazis, the Devil was the conspirator Jew. These "evil" ones must be eliminated in order to realize the totalitarian movement's vision of the future.

Thus, totalitarian regimes liquidate large segments of the population designated as "enemies of the people." Historical necessity or a higher purpose demands and justifies their liquidation. The appeal to historical necessity has all the power of a great myth. Presented as a world-historical struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, the myth incites fanaticism and numbs the conscience. Traditional rules of moral-

ity have no meaning; seemingly decent people engage in terrible acts of brutality with no remorse, convinced that they are waging a righteous war.

Totalitarians are utopians inspired by idealism; they seek the salvation of their nation, their race, or humanity. They believe that the victory of their cause will usher in the millennium, a state of harmony and bliss. Such a vision is attractive to people burdened by economic insecurity or spiritual disorientation. The history of the twentieth century demonstrates how easily utopian beliefs can be twisted into paranoid fantasies, idealistic sentiments transformed into murderous fanaticism, and destructive components of human nature mobilized and directed by demagogues.

Unlike earlier autocratic regimes, the totalitarian dictatorship is not satisfied with its subjects' out-

ward obedience; it demands the masses' unconditional loyalty and enthusiastic support. It strives to control the inner person: to shape thoughts, feelings, and attitudes in accordance with the party ideology, which becomes an official creed. It does not rule by brute force alone but seeks to create a "new man," one who dedicates himself body and soul to the party and its ideology. Such unquestioning, faithful subjects can be manipulated by the party. The disinterested search for truth, justice, and goodness—the exploration of those fundamental moral, political, and religious questions that have characterized the Western intellectual tradition for centuries—is abandoned. Truth, justice, and goodness are what the party deems them to be, and ideological deviation is forbidden.

The totalitarian dictatorship deliberately politicizes all areas of human activity. Ideology pervades works of literature, history, philosophy, art, and even science. It dominates the school curriculum and influences everyday speech and social relations. The state is concerned with everything its citizens do: there is no distinction between public and private life, and every institution comes under the party-state's authority. If voluntary support for the regime cannot be generated by indoctrination, then the state unhesitatingly resorts to terror and violence to compel obedience. People live under a constant strain. Fear of the secret police is ever present; it produces a permanent state of insecurity, which induces people to do everything that the regime asks of them and to watch what they say and do.

COMMUNIST RUSSIA

In 1918, Lenin's infant Communist government was threatened with civil war. Tsarist officers had gathered troops in the south; other anticommunist centers rose in Siberia, and still others in the extreme north and along the Baltic coast. The political orientation of these anticommunist groups, generally called *Whites* in contrast to the communist *Reds*, combined all shades of opinion, from moderate socialist to reactionary, the latter usually predominating. The Whites received support from foreign governments, which freely intervened. Until their own revolution in November 1918, the Germans occupied much of southern

Russia. England, France, and the United States sent troops to points in northern and southern European Russia; England, Japan, and the United States also sent troops to Siberia. At first they wanted to offset German expansion, but later they hoped to overthrow the Communist regime. In May and June 1918, Czech prisoners of war, about to be evacuated, precipitated anticommunist uprisings along the Trans-Siberian Railroad, bringing the civil war to fever pitch.

In July 1918, Communists murdered Nicholas II and his entire family. In August, a noncommunist socialist nearly assassinated Lenin, while White forces in the south moved to cut off central Russia from its food supply. In response, the Communists speeded the buildup of their own Red Army. Recruited from the remnants of the tsarist army and its officer corps, the Red Army was reinforced by compulsory military service and strict discipline; Trotsky reintroduced the death penalty, which had been outlawed by the Provisional Government. Threatened with death if they refused, many tsarist officers served in the Red Army. They were closely watched by Trotsky's ruthless political commissars, who were also responsible for the political reliability and morale of the troops. Trotsky ordered the formation of "blocking units" to machine-gun retreating soldiers. The civil war was brutal; both sides butchered civilians and their own comrades.

In November 1918, thanks to the Allied victory and the American contribution to it, the German menace ended. Yet foreign intervention stepped up in response to the formation of the Communist International (Comintern), an organization founded by Lenin to guide the international revolutionary movement that he expected to issue from the world war. Lenin sought revolutionary support from abroad for strengthening his hand at home; his enemies reached into Russia to defeat at its source the revolution that they feared in their own countries. At the same time, the civil war rose to its climax.

Hard-pressed as Lenin's party was, by the autumn of 1920 it had prevailed over its enemies. The Whites were divided among themselves and discredited by their association with the tsarist regime; the Communists had greater popular support, the advantage of interior communications, and superior political skills. The war-weary

foreign interventionists called off their efforts to overthrow the Communist regime by force.

The communist victory in the civil war exacted a staggering price. Reds and Whites alike carried the tsarist tradition of political violence to a new pitch of horror (some of it later described in novels by Boris Pasternak and Mikhail Sholokhov). The entire population, including the Communist party and its leaders, suffered in the war. Some 1.2 million combatants on both sides perished. In addition, the Communists killed some 250,000 peasants who resisted grain requisitions and executed tens of thousands of political opponents. Adding to the death toll were some 100,000 Jews, victims of pogroms perpetrated largely by the Whites. Compounding the nation's anguish was the famine of 1921-22, which claimed some five million victims.

War Communism and the New Economic Policy

Besides the extreme misery brought on by the world war and civil war, the Russian people had to endure the rigors of the policy known as "war communism." It was introduced in 1918 to deal with the plummeting agricultural and economic production, rampant inflation, and desperate hunger in the cities. Under war communism, the state took over the means of production and greatly limited private ownership; it conscripted labor and, in effect, confiscated grain from the peasants. War communism devastated the economy even further and alienated workers and peasants. The state-run factories were mismanaged, workers stayed away from their jobs or performed poorly, and peasants resisted the food requisition detachments that the government sent to seize their grain.

There was even open rebellion. In March 1921, sailors at the Kronstadt naval base and workers in nearby Petrograd—people who in 1917 had been ready to give their lives for the Revolution—rose against the repression that had been introduced during the civil war; they called for the establishment of socialist democracy. Trotsky ruthlessly suppressed that uprising, but the lesson was clear: the Communist regime had to retreat from war communism and to restore a measure of stability to the country.

In 1921, the Communist party adopted the New Economic Policy (NEP), which lasted until 1928. Under a system that Lenin characterized as "state socialism," the government retained control of finance, industry, and transportation—"the commanding heights" of the economy—but allowed the rest of the economy to return to private enterprise. Peasants, after giving part of their crops to the government, were free to sell the rest in the open market; traders could buy and sell as they pleased. With the resumption of small-scale capitalism, an air of normal life returned.

One-Party Dictatorship

While the Communists were waging a fierce struggle against the Whites, they instituted a militant dictatorship run by their party. Numbering about five hundred thousand members in 1921, the Communist party was controlled by a small, intimate group, the politburo (political bureau), which assumed a dictatorial role. The key leaders—Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and a few others—determined policy, assigned tasks, and appointed important officials. The party dominated all public agencies; its leaders held the chief positions in government. No other political parties were tolerated, and trade unions became agents of the regime. Never before had the people of Russia been forced into such compulsory unity and abject dependence on their government.

Impatient with the endless disputes among righteous and strong-willed old revolutionaries, Lenin, in agreement with other top leaders, demanded unconditional submission to his decisions. He even ordered that dissidents be disciplined and political enemies be terrorized. No price was too high to achieve monolithic party unity. Believing that they were creating a new and better society that would serve as a model for the rest of humanity, the Communists felt no moral objection to the use of force or even terror, including executions and forced-labor camps. The dreaded Cheka, a ruthless secret police organization, executed some two hundred thousand people from 1919 to 1925. The means Lenin employed for ruling his backward country denied the human values that Marx had taken from the Enlightenment and put into his vision of a socialist society. Lenin was perfectly

willing to use state terror to promote the class struggle.

The Communists abolished the power of the Orthodox church, which was the traditional ally of tsarism and the enemy of innovation. They were militant atheists, believing with Marx that religion was the "opium of the people"; God had no place in their vision of a better society. Above all, they wiped out—by expropriation, discrimination, expulsion, and execution—the educated upper class of bureaucrats, landowners, professional people, and industrialists.

The Communist party promised "to liberate woman from all the burdens of antiquated methods of housekeeping, by replacing them by house-communes, public kitchens, central laundries, nurseries, etc."⁹ But traditional values, particularly in the Asian parts of the Soviet Union, hardly favored equality between the sexes, especially in political work. The practical necessity of combining work with family responsibility, moreover, tended to keep women out of managerial positions in the party and the organizations of the state, but the ideal remained alive.

The Communists never ceased to stress that they worked strenuously for the welfare of the vast majority of the population. They received much acclaim for their emphasis on providing housing, food, and clothing and making education, theater, and other cultural activities, previously reserved for the elite, available to the masses. Although the Communists were not opposed to some private ownership of property, they outlawed income-producing property that enabled capitalists to employ (or exploit, as the Communists said) others for their own profit.

For Lenin, socialism meant reeducating the unruly masses to higher standards of individual conduct and economic productivity that would be superior to capitalism. In the spring of 1918, he complained that Russian workers had not yet matched capitalist performance: "The Russian worker is a bad worker compared with the workers of the advanced, i.e., western countries." To overcome this deficiency, Lenin urged competition—socialist competition—and hammered home the need for "iron discipline at work" and "unquestioning obedience" to a single will, that of the Communist party. There was no alternative: "Large-scale machinery calls for absolute and

strict unity of will, which directs the joint labors of hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of people. A thousand wills are subordinated to one will."¹⁰

In those words lay the essence of subsequent Soviet industrialization. The economy was to be monolithic, rationally planned, and focused on pursuing a single goal: overcoming the weaknesses of Russia so disastrously demonstrated in the war. Allowing workers to make their own decisions, Lenin held, would perpetuate Russian backwardness. Instead, he called for a new "consciousness," a hard-driving work ethic expressed in the Russian Marxist revolutionary vocabulary.

In attempting to transform their Soviet Russia into a modern industrialized state that would serve as a model for the world, the Communists imposed a new autocracy even more authoritarian than the old. In order to survive, Russia would be rebuilt against the people's will, if necessary. In the view of the party leaders, the masses always needed firm guidance. The minds of the people, therefore, came under unprecedented government control. In education, from kindergarten through university, in the press, on radio, and in literature and the arts, the Communist party tried to fashion people's thoughts to create the proper "consciousness."

The party made Marxism-Leninism the sole source of truth, eliminating as best it could all rival creeds, whether religious, political, or philosophical. Thinking was to be as reliably uniform as a machine process and totally committed to the party. Moreover, thoughts were to be protected against subversive capitalist influences. Soviet Russia, the party boasted, had risen to a superior plane of social existence and would attract other revolutionary states to its federal union until eventually it covered the entire world. Lest Soviet citizens doubt their new superiority, the party prohibited all uncontrolled comparison with other countries.

Lenin molded Soviet Russia into an international revolutionary force, the champion of anticapitalism and of the liberation of colonial peoples. The Russian Revolution inspired nationalistic ambitions for political self-determination and cultural self-assertion among a growing number of peoples around the world, especially in Asia. It appealed particularly to intellectuals edu-

cated in the West (or in westernized schools) yet identifying themselves with their downtrodden compatriots.

To have a political tool for world revolution, Lenin created the Communist—or Third—International (Comintern). The most radical successor to earlier socialist international associations, it helped organize small Communist parties in western Europe, which in time became dependable, though rather powerless, agents of Soviet Russia. In Asia, where no proletariat existed, Lenin tried to work closely with incipient nationalist movements. Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution gained the admiration and instinctive loyalty of colonial and semicolonial people in what would come to be called the Third World.

In 1923, a new constitution laid down federal guidelines for Soviet Russia, henceforth officially known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) or the Soviet Union. Having captured the attention of the world, the Soviet Union now stood out as the communist alternative to the capitalist West.

The Stalin Revolution

Lenin died in 1924, and the task of achieving the goal that he had set was taken up by Stalin. The “man of steel” was crude and vulgar, toughened by the revolutionary underground and tsarist prisons and by the roughest aspects of Russian life. Relentlessly energetic but relatively inconspicuous among key Bolsheviks, Stalin had been given, in 1922, the unwanted and seemingly routine task of general secretary of the party. He used this position to his own advantage, building up a reliable party cadre—apparatus men, or *apparatchiki*, as they came to be called—and dominating the party as not even Lenin had done. When he was challenged, particularly by Trotsky and his associates, in the protracted struggles for the succession to Lenin, it was too late to unseat him. None of Stalin’s rivals could rally the necessary majorities at the party congresses; none could match Stalin’s skill in party infighting or in making rough and anarchic people into docile members of the Communist party apparatus.

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Primary Source: Stalin’s Rise to Power: A Biased but Accurate Analysis

Industrialization. To Stalin, Russia’s most pressing need was not world revolution but the fastest possible buildup of Soviet power through industrialization. The country could not afford to risk near-annihilation again, as it had done in the world war and then in the civil war. Communist pride dictated that the country be made as strong as possible. Stalin set forth the stark reckoning of Russian history in a speech delivered in 1931, three years after launching a program of massive industrialization:

Those who fall behind get beaten, But we do not want to be beaten. No, we refuse to be beaten. One feature of the history of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered for falling behind, for her backwardness. All beat her—for her backwardness, for military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, for industrial backwardness, for agricultural backwardness. She was beaten because to do so was profitable and could be done with impunity. . . . You are backward, you are weak—therefore you are wrong, hence you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty, therefore you are right, hence we must be wary of you. Such is the law of the exploiters. . . . That is why we must no longer lag behind.¹¹

Stalin decided on all-out industrialization at the expense of the toiling masses. Peasants and workers, already poor, would be required to make tremendous sacrifices of body and spirit to overcome the nation’s weaknesses.

Abandoning the NEP, Stalin decreed a series of Five-Year Plans, the first and most experimental one commencing in 1928. The industrialization drive was heralded as a vast economic and social revolution, undertaken by the state according to a rational plan. The emphasis lay on heavy industry: the construction of railroads, power plants, steel mills, and military hardware, such as



FORCED LABOR IN THE GULAG. All those accused of disloyalty to the party and not killed outright ended up in one of the gulags, or forced-labor camps. Forced labor was designed as a punishment and also as a means of obtaining raw materials from inhospitable regions in the far north. In this photo, deported peasants and political prisoners using primitive technology are engaged in constructing the canal linking Leningrad with the White Sea. Millions perished in the gulags. (David King Collection, London, England.)

tanks and warplanes. Production of consumer goods was cut to the minimum, and all small-scale private trading, revived under the NEP, came to an end—with disastrous results for the standard of living. Having just come within sight of their pre-1914 standard of living, Russians now found their expectations dashed.

A new grim age of drastic material hardships and profound anguish began. Harsh punishments, including denial of food cards and imprisonment, were meted out for lateness, slowness, or incompetence. Many people, however, particularly the young, were fired to heroic exertions. They were proud to sacrifice themselves for the building of a superior society. And many common factory workers had the opportunity to attend school and become engineers and administrators, tying them to the regime. When the Great Depression in the capitalist countries put millions out of work, no Soviet citizen suffered from unemployment; in the 1930s, gloom pervaded the West, but confidence

and hope, artificially fostered by the party, buoyed up many people in Soviet Russia. The first two Five-Year Plans dramatically and rapidly increased Russia’s industrial infrastructure as factories, mines, dams, and railroads were feverishly constructed. At no time, though, did the planning produce Western-style efficiency, and workers, who labored in a herculean way, actually suffered a decline in real wages. The regime concentrated on heavy industry, not consumer goods or improving the standard of living.

Collectivization. Meanwhile, a different and far more brutal revolution overtook Soviet agriculture: peasants were forcibly integrated into the planned economy through collectivization. Agriculture—peasants, their animals, and their fields—was subjected to the same rational control as industry. Collectivization meant the pooling of farmland, animals, and equipment to achieve effi-

cient, large-scale production. The Communist solution for the backwardness of Russian agriculture was for peasants to become organized like factory workers. But knowing the peasants' distaste for the factory, their attachment to their own land, and their stubbornness, the party had hesitated to carry out its ambitious scheme. In 1929, however, Stalin believed that, for the sake of industrialization, he had no choice. If the Five-Year Plan was to succeed, the government had to receive planned crops of planned size and quality at planned times. This could be accomplished, Stalin thought, only by destroying the independent peasantry and creating huge agricultural factories. With collectivization, the ascendancy of the party over the people of Russia became almost complete.

The peasants paid a ghastly price. Stalin declared war on the Russian countryside. He ordered that the *kulaks*, the most enterprising and well-to-do peasants, be "liquidated as a class." Many were killed outright, and millions were deported to forced-labor camps in the far north, where most ultimately perished from hunger, cold, or abuse. Their poorer and less efficient neighbors were herded onto collective farms at the point of a bayonet.

The peasants struck back, sometimes in pitched battles. The horror of forced collectivization broke the spirit even of hardened officials. "I am an old Bolshevik," sobbed a secret police colonel to a fellow passenger on a train; "I worked in the underground against the Tsar and then I fought in the civil war. Did I do all that in order that I should now surround villages with machine guns and order my men to fire indiscriminately into crowds of peasants? Oh, no, no!"¹² Typically, however, the local officials and activists who stripped the peasants of their possessions and searched for hidden grain viewed themselves as idealists building a new society that was in the best interests of a suffering humanity; they infused their own ruthlessness into the official orders. Their dedication to the triumph of communism overcame all doubts caused by the sight of starving people and the sounds of wailing women and children.

Defeated but unwilling to surrender their livestock, the peasants slaughtered their animals, gorging themselves in drunken orgies against the days of inevitable famine. The country's cattle herds declined by one-half, inflicting irreparable secondary

losses as well. The number of horses, crucial for rural transport and farm work, fell by one-third. Crops were not planted or not harvested, the Five-Year Plan was disrupted, and from 1931 to 1933 millions starved to death.

The suffering was most cruel in the Ukraine, where famine killed approximately six million people, many after extreme abuse and persecution. In order to buy industrial equipment abroad so that industrialization could proceed on target, the Soviet Union had to export food, as much of it as possible and for prices disastrously lowered by the Great Depression. Let the peasants in the Ukrainian breadbasket starve so that the country could grow strong! Moreover, Stalin relished the opportunity to punish the Ukrainians for their disloyalty during the civil war and their resistance to collectivization.

By 1935, practically all farming in Russia was collectivized. The kulaks had been wiped out as a class, and the peasants, ever rebellious under the tsars, had been cowed into permanent submission. In theory, the collective farms were run democratically, under an elected chairman; in practice, they followed as best they could the directives handed down from the nearest party office. People grumbled about the rise of a new serfdom. Agricultural development had been stifled.

Stalin had hoped to create technically efficient "factory farms" that would provide inexpensive food for the massive industrial labor force. But in reality, collectivization stifled agricultural production. Resentful peasants had slaughtered half the country's livestock rather than turn it over to the state; mismanagement and unenthusiastic collective farmers resulted in a precipitous decline in agricultural production. For decades collective farming failed to achieve the levels of production previously reached in the 1920s.

Total Control. To quash resistance and mold a new type of suitably motivated and disciplined citizen, Stalin unleashed a third revolution, the revolution of totalitarianism. Only communist regimentation, he believed, could liberate Russia from its historic inferiority. Moreover, the totalitarian state accorded with his desire to exercise total control over the party and the nation. Stalin's totalitarianism aimed at a complete reconstruction of state and society, down to the in-



A COLLECTIVE FARM FESTIVAL, BY SERGEI GERASIMOV, 1936-37. This propaganda painting of a festival on a collective farm glorifies the new agricultural system that Stalin imposed on the Russian peasantry by force. (Galleria Statale Tret'jakov, Moscow/Art Resource, NY.)

nermost recesses of human consciousness. It called for "a new man," suited to the needs of Soviet industrialism.

The revolution of totalitarianism encompassed all cultural activity. All media of communication—literature, the arts, music, the stage—were forced into subservience to the Five-Year Plan and Soviet ideology. In literature, as in all art, an official style was promulgated. Called *socialist realism*, it was expected to describe the world as the party saw it or hoped to shape it. Novels in the social realist manner told how the romances of tractor drivers and milkmaids or of lathe operators and office secretaries led to new victories of production under the Five-Year Plan. Composers found their music examined for remnants of bourgeois spirit; they were to write simple tunes suitable for heroic times. Everywhere huge, high-color posters showed men and women hard at work with radiant faces, calling others to join them; often Stalin, the wise father and leader, was shown among them. In this way, artistic creativity was locked into a dull, utilitarian straitjacket of official cheerfulness; creativity was allowed only to boost industrial productivity. Behind the

scenes, all artists were disciplined to conform to the will of the party or be crushed.

Education, from nursery school to university, was likewise harnessed to train dutiful and loyal citizens, and Soviet propaganda made a cult of Stalin that bordered on deification. Thus, a writer declared in 1935:

*Centuries will pass and the generations still to come will regard us as the happiest of mortals, as the most fortunate of men, because we . . . were privileged to see Stalin, our inspired leader. Yes, and we regard ourselves as the happiest of mortals because we are the contemporaries of a man who never had an equal in world history. The men of all ages will call on thy name, which is strong, beautiful, wise, and marvellous. Thy name is engraven on every factory, every machine, every place on the earth, and in the hearts of all men.*¹³

To break stubborn wills and compel conformity, Stalin unleashed raw terror. Terror had been used as a tool of government ever since the Bolsheviks seized power. Lenin, who had provided theo-



MAP 30.1 THE UNION REPUBLICS OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS (U.S.S.R.) The Soviet Union consisted of many different nationalities whose nationalist aspirations were held in check by the repressive regime.

retical justification for terror in the struggle against tsarism, employed it after the Revolution (and the tsars had also used it, moderately and intermittently). After the start of the first Five-Year Plan, show trials were staged in which engineers who disagreed with Stalin's production timetable were denounced as saboteurs. The terror used to herd the peasants onto collective farms was even greater. Stalin also used terror to crush opposition and to instill abject fear in the ranks of the party and in Russian society at large.

Purges had long been used to rid the party of weaklings. After 1934, however, they became an instrument of Stalin's drive for unchallenged personal power. In 1936, his vindictive terror broke into the open. The first batch of victims, including many founders of the Communist party, were ac-

cused of conspiring with the exiled Trotsky to set up a "terrorist center" and of scheming to terrorize the party. After being sentenced to death, they were immediately executed. In 1937, the next group, including prominent Communists of Lenin's day, were charged with cooperating with foreign intelligence agencies and wrecking "socialist reconstruction," the term for Stalin's revolution; they too were executed. Shortly afterward, a secret purge decimated the military high command—almost half the country's seventy thousand officers were either shot or sent to the camps—for which the country paid a heavy price when Germany attacked in 1941.

In 1938, the last and biggest show trial advanced the most bizarre accusation of all: sabotage, espionage, and attempting to dismember the

Soviet Union and kill all its leaders (including Lenin in 1918). In the public hearings, some defendants refuted the public prosecutor, but in the end all confessed, usually after torture and threats to their family, before being executed. Western observers were aghast at the cynical charges and at the physical and mental tortures used to obtain the confessions.

The great trials, however, involved only a small minority of Stalin's victims; many more perished in silence without benefit of legal proceedings. The terror first hit members of the party, especially the Old Bolsheviks, who had joined before the Revolution; they were the most independent-minded members and therefore the most dangerous to Stalin. But Stalin also decimated the cultural elite that had survived the Lenin revolution. Thousands of engineers, scientists, industrial managers, scholars, and artists disappeared; they were shot or sent to forced-labor camps, where most of them perished. Their relatives also suffered, often fired from their jobs, evicted from their apartments, exiled to remote regions, and even sentenced to labor camps. No one was safe. To frighten the common people in all walks of life, men, women, and even children were dragged into the net of Stalin's secret police, leaving the survivors with a soul-killing reminder: submit or else. "In the years of the terror," recalled one victim, "there was not a house in the country where people did not sit trembling at night."¹⁴

The forced labor camps to which Stalin's victims were deported played an important role in the Soviet economy. Slave labor constructed the White Sea-Baltic Canal, which the regime held up as a monument of Communist achievement. Mining, logging, and construction enterprises in remote parts of the country also depended on forced labor. It is estimated that from 1929 until the death of Stalin in 1953, some 18 million people were confined to the Gulag, as Stalin's system of concentration camps came to be known. Many perished from abuse, starvation, and bone-crushing labor in freezing weather. As in Nazi concentration camps, administrators and guards deliberately dehumanized and brutalized the prisoners, whom the regime designated as "filth" and "enemies of the people."

Stalin may have orchestrated the terror, but large numbers of party members believed that ter-

ror, which was decimating their own ranks, was necessary. The memory of the vicious civil war, when domestic and foreign enemies sought to overthrow the new Bolshevik regime, and the resistance of the kulaks to collectivization created a siege mentality among the Communist leadership. Everywhere they saw anti-Soviets plotting against the party; they defined these enemies as Trotskyites, former kulaks, Whites who had fought in the civil war, members of outlawed anti-Soviet political parties, foreign agents, and criminals—cattle and horse thieves, contraband smugglers, bandits, and so on. Party officials saw terror as a legitimate way both of protecting the party to which they were ideologically committed and from which they derived prestige, power, and material benefits, and of protecting the Soviet experiment, which they viewed as humanity's best hope.

The toll of the purges is reckoned in many millions; it included Trotsky, who in 1940 was murdered in Mexico. The bloodletting was ghastly, as Stalin's purge officials themselves followed each other into death and ignominy. Stalin, however, was untroubled by the waste of life. By showing party officials and the Russian masses how vulnerable they were, how dependent they were on his will, he frightened them into servility. No doubt, the terror was also an expression of his craving for personal power and his vengeful and suspicious, some say clinically paranoid, nature. He saw enemies everywhere, took pleasure in selecting victims, and reveled in his omnipotence. For good reason, Stalin has been called a twentieth-century Ivan the Terrible. Like the sixteenth-century tsar, for whom he expressed admiration, Stalin stopped at no brutality in order to establish personal autocracy.

But more than a craving for personal power motivated Stalin. He regarded himself as Lenin's heir, responsible for securing and expanding the Revolution and defending it against foreign and domestic enemies. The only way to do this was to create a powerful Soviet Union through rapid modernization. Stalin, who had passed through the hands of the tsarist police and participated in the carnage of the civil war, believed that without the total obedience of the Russian people the Soviet state and society could not be effectively modernized and that terror was necessary to compel compliance. Stalin, as much a Russian patriot as a Marxist, did not forget

the threat to Russia's survival after World War I. He was keenly aware of the political ambitions of Mussolini, of Japanese expansionism in the Far East, and eventually of German rearmament under Hitler. As he had said in 1931, if the Soviet Union did not make the utmost effort to strengthen itself within ten years, it could not withstand another attack; its peoples would perish under foreign domination. In Stalin's mind, totalitarianism was necessary to save Russia from foreign enemies that would devour it. Ten years after Stalin's warning of 1931, Hitler's armies invaded the Soviet Union, ready to exploit, enslave, and annihilate its citizens and seize its territory. The expansion of industrial capacity under Stalin was a key reason why Russia ultimately defeated the Nazi invaders.

THE NATURE OF FASCISM

Liberals viewed the Great War as a conflict between freedom and autocracy and expected an Allied victory to accelerate the spread of democracy throughout Europe. Right after the war, it seemed that liberalism would continue to advance as it had in the nineteenth century. The collapse of the autocratic German and Austrian Empires had led to the formation of parliamentary governments throughout eastern and central Europe. Yet within two decades, in an extraordinary turn of events, democracy seemed in its death throes. In Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Germany, and in all the newly created states of central and eastern Europe except Czechoslovakia, democracy collapsed, and various forms of authoritarian government emerged. The defeat of democracy and the surge of authoritarianism was best exemplified by the triumph of totalitarian fascist movements in Italy and Germany; with brutal frankness, their leaders proclaimed that individual freedom, a relic of a dying liberal age and a barrier to national greatness, would be dispensed with.

The emergence of fascist movements in more than twenty European lands after World War I was a sign that liberal society was in a state of disorientation and dissolution. The cultural pessimism, disdain for reason, elitism, romantic glorification of action and heroism, and contempt for liberal values voiced by many intellectuals and nationalists

before the war found expression after the war in the antidemocratic and irrational fascist ideologies, which altered European political life. Fascism marked the culmination of the counter-Enlightenment mentality inherent in the extreme nationalism and radical conservatism of the late nineteenth century and in the repudiation of modern Western civilization by disenchanting intellectuals.

As a Europe-wide phenomenon, fascism was a response to a postwar society afflicted with spiritual disintegration, economic dislocation, political instability, and thwarted nationalist hopes. A general breakdown of meaning and values led people to search for new beliefs and new political arrangements. Fascism was an expression of fear that the Bolshevik Revolution would spread westward. It was also an expression of hostility to democratic values and a reaction to the failure of liberal institutions to solve the problems of modern industrial society. Disillusioned with liberal government that failed to cope with massive social and economic problems, particularly during the Depression, many Europeans were tempted by authoritarian alternatives that would dispense with parliamentary government and the protection of individual rights. Anything seemed better than the ineffectual parliaments that appeared helpless in the face of mounting misery. Moreover, in many European lands, democracy had shallow roots. Having little familiarity with or appreciation of the procedures and values of constitutional government, people were susceptible to antidemocratic ideologies.

Fascist movements were marked by a determination to eradicate liberalism and Marxism—to undo the legacy of the French Revolution of 1789 and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Fascists believed that theirs was a spiritual revolution, that they were initiating a new era in history and building a new civilization on the ruins of liberal democracy. "We stand for a new principle in the world," said Mussolini. "We stand for the sheer, categorical, definitive antithesis to the world of democracy . . . to the world which still abides by the fundamental principles laid down in 1789."¹⁵ The chief principle of Nazism, said Hitler, "is to abolish the liberal concept of the individual and the Marxist concept of humanity, and to substitute for them the Volk community, rooted in the soil and united by the bond of its common blood."¹⁶ The fascists' uniforms, songs, flags, parades, mass rallies, and

cult of physical strength and violence all symbolized this call for a reawakened and reunited people.

Fascists accused liberal society of despiritualizing human beings and transforming them into materialistic creatures whose highest ideal was moneymaking. Regarding liberalism as bankrupt and parliamentary government as futile, many people yearned for a military dictatorship. To fascists and their sympathizers, democracy seemed an ineffective and enfeebled Old Order ready to be overthrown. Idealistic youth and intellectuals rejoiced in fascist activism. They saw fascism as a revolt against the mediocrity of the liberal state and modern mass society and a reaffirmation of the noblest human qualities: heroism and dedication to one's people. Fascists saw themselves as participants in a dynamic mass movement that would rectify the weaknesses and irresolution of parliamentary government and rid the nation of corrosive foreign influences. For them, the triumph of fascism would mark a new beginning for their nation and a new era in world history.

The fascist vision of a regenerated nation—a New Order led by a determined and heroic elite—arising from the ruins of a decadent Old Order had the appeal of great myth; it evoked belief, commitment, and loyalty. The myth of rebirth—a nation cured of evil and building a new and vigorous society—had a profound impact on people dissatisfied with liberal society and searching for new beliefs. The myth of the nation reborn answered a metaphysical yearning to give meaning to life and history. It provided an emotionally gratifying world-view at a time when many people had lost confidence in liberal-democratic ideals and institutions.

Fascists regarded Marxism as another enemy, for class conflict divided and weakened the state. To fascists, the Marxist call for workers of the world to unite meant the death of the national community. Fascism, in contrast, would reintegrate the proletariat into the nation and end class hostilities by making people at all levels feel that they were a needed part of the nation. Fascism thus offered a solution to the problem of insecurity and isolation in modern industrial society.

Attacking the rational tradition of the Enlightenment, fascism exalted will, blood, feeling, and instinct. Intellectual discussion and critical analysis, said fascists, cause national divisiveness; reason promotes doubt, enfeebles the will, and hinders in-

stinctive, aggressive action. Fascism made a continual appeal to the emotions as a means of integrating the national community. This flow of emotion fueled irrational and dangerous desires, beliefs, and expectations, which blocked critical judgment and responsible action. Glorifying action for its own sake, fascists aroused and manipulated brutal and primitive impulses and carried into politics the combative spirit of the trenches. They formed private armies, which attracted veterans—many of them rootless, brutal, and maladjusted men who sought to preserve the loyalty, camaraderie, and violence of the front.

Fascist ideology exalted the leader, who, it was believed, intuitively grasped what was best for the nation. It also called for rule by an elite of dedicated party members. The leader and the party would relieve the individual of the need to make decisions. Convinced that the liberal stress on individual freedom promoted national divisiveness, fascists pressed for monolithic unity: one leader, one party, one ideology, and one national will.

Fascism drew its mass support from the lower middle class: small merchants, artisans, white-collar workers, civil servants, and peasants of moderate means, all of whom were frightened both by big capitalism and by Marxism. They hoped that fascism would protect them from the competition of big business and prevent the hated working class from establishing a Marxist state, which would threaten their property. The lower middle class saw in fascism a noncommunist way of overcoming economic crises and restoring traditional respect for family, native soil, and nation. Furthermore, many of these people saw fascism as a way of attacking the existing social order, which denied them opportunities for economic advancement and social prestige.

Although a radicalized middle class gave fascist movements their mass support, the fascists could not have captured the state without the aid of existing ruling elites: landed aristocrats, industrialists, and army leaders. In Russia, the Bolsheviks had to fight their way to power; in Italy and Germany, the old ruling order virtually handed power to the fascists. In both countries, fascist leaders succeeded in reassuring the conservative elite that they would not institute widespread social reforms or interfere with private property and would protect the nation from communism. Even though the old elite often