NEW APPRECIATIONS

THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

RENDEZVOUS

Nazism and Stalinism

A Suitable Case for Comparison?

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THE VOICE FOR HISTORY

Dedication

To Joseph

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Peter Acton, Vladimir Andrle, Roy Davison, Ian Farr, Peter Gatrell, Michael John, Ian Kershaw and Christopher Read for the time and trouble they took to read an earlier version of the manuscript and for their valuable comments.
The blemishes that remain are no fault of theirs.

E.D.J.L.D.A.

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The Historical Association

EDITOR
Malcolm Crook

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION
Kerina West

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Chronology

The Nazi Regime

1914		Outbreak of World War I
1918		Germany surrenders
1919	Jan	National Assembly elections
	June	Versailles Treaty
1920		Founding Programme of National Socialist German Workers' Party
1923		Hitler's Munich *Putsch* and imprisonment
1925-26		Publication of *Mein Kampf*
1929		Onset of the Great Depression
1932	July	Nazis win 37% in Reichstag election and become largest party
	Dec	Resignation of Strasser
1933	Jan	Hitler appointed Chancellor
	Mar	Enabling Act; 'Co-ordination' of German society
1934		Night of the Long Knives
1935		Nuremberg Race Laws
1936	Mar	Reoccupation of the Rhineland
	Oct	Introduction of Four Year Plan
1937		Resignation of Schacht
1938		Dismissal of Blomberg, Fritsch and Neurath
	Mar	*Anschluss* with Austria
	Sept	Munich agreement on Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia
	Nov	*Kristallnacht* pogroms
1939	Aug	Nazi-Soviet Pact
	Sept	Invasion of Poland; Britain and France declare war
1941	June	Invasion of USSR
1942	Jan	Decision on detailed implementation of the 'Final Solution'
1944	July	Officers' unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hitler
1945	Apr	Hitler's suicide
	May	German unconditional surrender

The Stalinist Regime

1917		October Revolution
	Nov	Constituent Assembly elections
1918-21		Civil War
1921		Introduction of New Economic Policy (NEP)
1922		Stalin appointed General Secretary
1924		Death of Lenin
1927		Defeat of Trotsky and 'left opposition'
1928		Introduction of First Five-Year Plan
1929		Defeat of Bukharin and 'right opposition'
1929-33		Start of forced mass collectivisation; exile of 'kulaks'
1932-33		Famine in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, South Russia, North Caucasus
1934		Assassination of Kirov
1936-38		Great Terror
1939		Nazi-Soviet Pact
		Invasion of Eastern Poland
1939-40		War with Finland
1940		Annexation of Baltic States
1941		Invasion by Germany
1941-45		Exile of minority nationalities accused of collaboration
1945		Soviet victory in 'Great Patriotic War'
1953		Death of Stalin
1991		Fall of CPSU and USSR

Introduction

Is it legitimate to compare the Nazi and Stalinist regimes? There might seem little room for doubt. It is often taken as self-evident that the two regimes were variations of a common type. They are bracketed together in school and university courses, as well as in textbooks, under labels such as 'The Age of Totalitarianism' and 'Europe of the Dictators'. Supporting roles are played by Mussolini and Franco, but centre-stage are Hitler and Stalin, the malign Tweedledum and Tweedledee of modern European history. To quote Michael Mann, one of the most penetrating post-war comparative historians, "to their victims and probably to most of humanity, the two regimes belong together. It is only a question of finding the right family name."[1]

Yet the legitimacy of the comparison has been passionately contested. Those who make the comparison, its critics have argued, deliberately stress only what the two regimes share and play down the differences between them. They fail to follow the spirit of the time-honoured examination rubric — 'compare *and contrast*'. Controversy over the issue began while the two regimes were in power, in the 1930s and 1940s. At that time, to emphasise common features between them was widely regarded as perverse. After all, despite the short-lived Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939, each regime saw the other not only as a hate-filled enemy but as its ideological negation. Following Hitler's invasion of the USSR in June 1941, virtually every corner of the globe found itself allied with one against the other, and on the Eastern Front millions went to their death seeking to destroy one in the name of the other. To many of those victims, the notion that they 'belong together' would have seemed not merely absurd but obscene.

After Nazism's demise, the subject became caught up in the ideological conflict surrounding the Cold War. Those most convinced that the USSR was irredeemably repressive and expansionist saw a very close parallel between it and the Third Reich. Western social scientists developed the theory that both belonged to a new regime-type which they labelled 'totalitarian'. Definitions of the term varied, but all highlighted aspects — such as a radical official ideology, a single party headed by a cult dictator, terrorist police control, the party's monopoly of mass communication and weapons, and central control of the entire economy — which were taken to be characteristic of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, among others.[2] Totalitarian theory lent itself admirably to anti-Soviet cold-war rhetoric and became identified with moral condemnation of and resolute opposition to the USSR.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, however, the term lost much of its credibility and the comparison fell somewhat out of fashion. Increasing doubt was cast on how far the two regimes in reality conformed to the totalitarian model and how helpful the model was in explaining the origin, structure or development of either. This was made possible by the less polarised atmosphere of *détente*, but it also reflected more research into the inner working of the two regimes: specialists tended to be much more wary of bracketing them together than did non-specialists. Detailed knowledge brought home the complexities in the two regimes which the totalitarian model ignored, the precision needed to describe either properly, and profound dissimilarities in terms of the values, purpose and appeal of their ideology, the social composition of their supporters and victims, and the economic and social structures they sponsored. "Despite superficial similarities in forms of domination," writes Ian Kershaw, Britain's leading expert on the Third Reich, "the two regimes were *in essence* more *unlike* than like each other."[3]

Since the early 1980s, however, the issue has been caught up in two further fierce political controversies. In 1986 a furious dispute broke out among German historians (the *Historikerstreit*) over the relationship between Nazism and the Stalinist regime. At issue was the question of how an increasingly prosperous and potentially influential West Germany was to view the Nazi past. A number of German historians shared the view of right-wing politicians and journalists that it was time to move on from a constant feeling of guilt and to encourage an attitude which would restore German national pride — not least to brace the country against a supposedly resurgent Communist threat.

At the core of the controversy lay two arguments identified in particular with Ernst Nolte, a senior German academic. First, prime responsibility for Nazism, Nolte implied, lay not with its supporters but with the evil which provoked it, namely Soviet Communism. Nazism, like other fascist movements, was called into being by the mortal threat which Communism posed to Western civilization. In this sense it was defensive — not only in origin but throughout. Hitler and the *Wehrmacht* saw the war with the Soviet Union as a preventative war in defence of Western values against Communist barbarism, while Auschwitz, argued Nolte, "was above all a reaction born out of the anxiety of the annihilating occurrences of the Russian Revolution." Second, it was the monstrous regime of Lenin and Stalin which first resorted to a vast network of concentration camps, mass terror and wholesale massacre. The Nazis learned their horrific methods from the Communists. ""Class murder" by the Bolsheviks," Nolte suggested, "[was] the logical and real precondition of "race murder" by the Nazis."[4] Rather than being a uniquely evil phenomenon for which Germans must forever acknowledge guilt, the Nazi dictatorship was the product of and modelled on a Soviet original. It was its mirror image.

For most historians, in Germany and elsewhere, this line of argument, or bundle of assertions, reeked of special pleading designed to soften Nazism's image. They saw the suggestion that Nazi genocide was no different in kind from Stalinism's murders, or those of regimes such as Pol Pot's in Cambodia, as an attempt to 'normalise' that genocide, to relativise it, to render it 'a Holocaust like the others,'[5] and as a refusal to confront the full horror of the Nazi regime and its programme of racial extermination. And, in a polemical war, they denounced Nolte and his defenders for lending credibility to far-right views including those which sympathised with Nazism and even denied the occurrence of the Holocaust.

A major sub-text to the *Historikerstreit* was division over right-wing demands that the question of German reunification be restored to the political agenda. The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989, the abrupt melt-

ing away of the Communist threat, and the peaceful absorption of East Germany by West Germany, all transformed the international situation and the context in which the *Historikerstreit* had flared up. But the re-emergence of a united Germany has ensured that the underlying issue of the impact which different views of the Third Reich have upon German national identity remains highly sensitive.

The most recent twist has come from within the former Soviet Union itself. In the heyday of the USSR, of course, the view that the era during which Stalin had headed the party shared anything of importance with the Nazi regime was anathema. However, during the Gorbachev period, as the Soviet government slackened censorship and came under increasingly direct attack, both the equation between the two regimes and the specific term 'totalitarian' were enthusiastically embraced.

For radical critics of the Communist establishment, there was no more dramatic way to signal utter repudiation of the whole Communist experiment than by labelling Stalin's regime 'totalitarian' and bracketing it with that of Hitler. They endorsed the totalitarian model wholesale — complaining only that its Western proponents had *under*rated the full horror of Stalinism. And after the fall of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU), Russia's post-Communist Ministry of Education moved quickly to embed the term and the Nazi-Stalinist equation in the history syllabus in particular and the educational system in general.[6] This would underscore the morally repugnant nature of a regime whose counterpart was the Third Reich, and convey that Russia had not been alone in deviating from the 'normal' path of historical development and was now returning, as other post-totalitarian societies had already done, to the high-road of capitalism and liberal democracy.

Something of a backlash soon followed among Russian historians, partly as a result of scholarship in the former USSR becoming integrated with international debate on the issue and partly because, for many Russians, conditions during the 1990s were so grim that in retrospect some features of the fallen Communist order seemed positively attractive. But in his campaign for re-election in 1996, the Russian President Boris Yeltsin made free play of 'totalitarian' to warn against the risk involved should victory go to his Communist rival, Gennady Zuganov, and the term continues to enjoy widespread usage.

An Agenda

The comparison is highly-charged, then, because it seems to imply from the outset what many would hotly deny — a general similarity between the two regimes. Here, therefore, no *a priori* assumption is made about whether or not they share common ground. Instead, the point of departure is simply recognition that the two regimes diverged sharply from an ideal-type modern liberal democracy. In itself, however, the fact that both departed from that 'norm' proves nothing whatsoever about their similarity. Frost and fire both diverge from room temperature: it hardly follows that they 'belong together'. Only after examining what each regime put in place of liberal-democratic practice is it possible to assess the extent to which they themselves conformed to a common pattern.

Attention will be focused on six of the defining features of liberal democracy flouted by both:

- Contrary to liberal democracy, the two regimes expounded ideologies which were explicitly and virulently hostile to the basic principles of that order;
- Contrary to liberal democracy, where the decision-making power of the head of government is constitutionally limited, in both regimes that power became concentrated in the hands of an unchallengeable, semi-deified leader;
- Contrary to liberal democracy, where the state is constrained by legal processes and by independent institutions and socio-economic groups, under both regimes the state broke free from such constraints and achieved an unprecedented measure of autonomy;
- Contrary to liberal democracy, in both regimes the state sought to establish monopoly control of education, information, the media, culture and public comment, and thereby to remould popular consciousness in line with official ideology;
- Instead of relying on the bureaucratic procedure and legal-rational order characteristic of liberal-democratic states, each regime subjected its civil, police and military apparatus to a host of political, institutional and disciplinary pressures and generated acute administrative malfunction;
- Both regimes terrorised their own subjects and committed mass murder of those under their authority in defiance of the most fundamental precepts of liberal democracy.

It should be emphasised that this agenda is concerned with the character and structure of the state under Hitler (1933-1945) and Stalin (1928/29-1953). It leaves to one side issues of foreign policy and the war-effort mounted by the two regimes. It also risks seeming to minimise the significance of the distinctive economic, social, cultural, ethnic/geographical conformation of the societies from which the two regimes emerged and in which they operated. The risk is made all the greater by the fact that at a very general level there were many parallels between those two societies. Both were European, shared a Christian heritage, and had a long history of mu-

tual cultural influence; both had embarked upon industrialization and rapid urbanization during the nineteenth century, endured the maelstrom of World War I, and suffered defeat; and both had abolished monarchy and generated highly authoritarian regimes at very much the same time. In fact, however, the differences between the two societies were profound and it is essential that they are borne in mind. For once institutions and structures of power are lifted out of context, bogus analogies may all too easily be taken for the real thing, and, perhaps, genuine similarities overlooked. Before taking up the agenda, therefore, it is necessary to note the contrast between the two societies at the moment that the Stalinist and Nazi regimes took shape in the late 1920s and January 1933 respectively.

Soviet and German Society on the Eve of Stalinist and Nazi Rule

Economically, Weimar Germany (population 66 million) was much more advanced than the USSR (population 153 million). Its gross domestic product per head was 2.5 times that of Russia in 1928 and still twice Russia's at the depth (1932) of the slump which overtook Germany during the great depression.[7] By the 1930s the German economy was predominantly urban and industrial, with a developed banking and commercial system, a substantial service sector, and an elaborate transport infrastructure, and less than 30% of its labour force was employed in agriculture. The Russian economy, on the other hand, was overwhelmingly agrarian, with peasants constituting almost 80% of the working population in 1928.

The contrast in terms of social structure was even greater. In Germany, the landed elite and industrial bourgeoisie in 1933 still constituted a traditional upper class marked out by private wealth and an elevated social status. The ranks of medium-scale entrepreneurs and merchants, professionals, teachers, white-collar employees and specialists of various kinds had continued to grow alongside the more traditional elements of the urban *Mittelstand* — independent artisans, shopkeepers and petty traders. In the countryside, a majority of the peasantry (predominantly in the south and west) belonged to small-holding families who owned and worked their own farmsteads, while a substantial minority (accounting for about a quarter of the agrarian labour force) were landless labourers. As before the war, the proportion of the labour force engaged in industry and handicrafts remained at 40%.[8]

In Russia, on the other hand, the great social upheaval of 1917-18 had swept away the old elite. The peasantry had driven estate owners from the countryside and the legal category of nobility had been abolished. Major industrial enterprises and the banks had been nationalised, a state monopoly imposed on foreign trade, the merchant guilds disbanded, and private trade, banned altogether during the civil war (1918-21), was tightly restricted. By the late 1920s a new elite had emerged, composed of officials and administrators, managers and specialists.

Lower down the hierarchy, the change in the Soviet social structure (apart from the drastic fall in the number of domestic servants) had been much less marked. The urban 'middling strata' had become an ever paler shadow of their German equivalent, in terms of numbers, wealth, status and political significance. Where the peasantry was concerned, apart from sheer numerical weight, two distinctive features merit particular emphasis. First, the great majority belonged to village communes, a traditional peasant social and administrative unit with no modern German equivalent. Private landownership, long frowned upon by the majority of peasants, was now illegal and it was the commune which held the land, periodically redistributing it among the households in the village according to the number of mouths to feed and/or able-bodied adults

available to work it. Second, whereas German farms, large and small, were geared to the market, in Russia many peasants operated little above subsistence level: a mere 17% of agricultural output left the village in the mid-1920s and hired labour was a marginal factor in the rural economy. The working class remained much smaller than that of Germany, with only some 13% of the working population engaged in industry.

Culturally, even before the Russian revolution, Russian public discourse — in government, amongst the cultural elite and in the universities, within the Orthodox Church, in the revolutionary movement and in the peasant commune — had been distinguished by collectivism, hostility to capitalism and bourgeois values, and indifference to law. In 1917, in the only (almost) free nation-wide elections of the period, radical socialist parties won over 80% of the vote for the Constituent Assembly. In pre-war Germany, by contrast, each of these currents of opinion had been decidedly on the defensive, outside the socialist movement and the working class. And when Germany, in turn, held elections for the National Assembly of the new Republic in 1919, the country's (much more moderate) socialist parties won less than 46% of the vote — and they never again reached even that figure in the years to 1933. Particularly striking in Germany was the prominence and stridency of authoritarian, imperialist and nationalist attitudes not only among traditional elites but in the educational establishment, among school teachers as well as university lecturers and students, at all levels of public service, and in the countryside.

Communist rule in the 1920s, while quickly beginning to narrow the gap between Russia's pre-war 40% literacy rate and Germany's 90%, immeasurably widened the cultural differences between the two. Censorship, though less heavy than it would become in the 1930s, severely restricted the opportunities for non-Marxist, still less anti-Marxist scholarship, literature and public debate. A state determined to spread Marxist and atheist values confronted a rural population whose world view was for the most part deeply religious and, among the Slav majority, predominantly Russian Orthodox. By contrast, Weimar Germany encompassed a cacophony of vigorous political, social, religious and artistic outlooks — communist and racist, socialist and liberal, nationalist and feminist, Protestant and Catholic.

In terms of national and ethnic composition, Germans constituted the overwhelming majority of Weimar's population, diluted only by small Polish, Jewish, and Sinti and Roma ('Gypsy') minorities. Russians, on the other hand, made up only just over half the population of the USSR in the late 1920s, alongside a host of minority peoples ranging from Ukrainians and Byelorussians (21% and 3% respectively in the late 1920s) to myriad smaller ethnic groups in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Moreover, significant German-inhabited areas lay outside the Weimar Republic: the Treaty of Versailles (1919) placed 3 million Germans in Czechoslovakia, 1 million in Poland and half a million in Yugoslavia, while union between Germany and Austria was forbidden. Although Russia, too, lost substantial territory at the end of World War I, none of it was Russian-populated and the nearest analogues to the native areas outside Germany were the Ukrainian and Byelorussian-inhabited areas forfeited to Poland.

The scale of the contrast — in terms of economic development, social structure and culture as well as national composition and ethnic/geographic position — does not preclude the possibility that the two societies would generate similar political regimes. But, as we turn to the six key respects in which those regimes diverged from the liberal-democratic norm, it does serve as a warning against assuming that they 'belong together'.

Ideology

Both regimes expounded and based their claim to legitimacy upon ideologies which specifically repudiated liberal democracy. Stalinist ideology as it crystallised by the late 1930s was based on ideas drawn from Marx and Lenin, who were credited with a scientific, indisputable understanding of the historical process. According to them, history is essentially the story of man gradually improving his productive power. As he does so, the social structure is compelled to change to make full use of newly developed skills, technology and raw materials. Each of these successive social orders (characterised by Asiatic despotism, slave-ownership, feudalism, and capitalism) is marked by a division between antagonistic classes, between those who control wealth and the means of production and those who do not and are forced to work for the ruling class. The ruling class does all it can to convince the labouring masses that this is natural, inevitable and just and, if that fails, relies upon state coercion to keep them in their place. By the late nineteenth century, all the advanced countries of Europe and North America had reached the final class-based society in which growing numbers of property-less industrial workers (the proletariat) confronted an ever smaller but more wealthy class of capitalists (the bourgeoisie), and by the turn of the century they had reached the highest and final stage of capitalism, imperialism.

According to Marxist-Leninist ideology capitalism was in deep crisis by 1900. It was confronted by intensifying class conflict and was buffeted by recurrent economic and social jolts arising from its inability to provide a sufficient and stable market for the huge, industrial productive power it had created. World War I, it argued, was a product of this crisis and of the desperate attempts by each capitalist power to secure fresh markets. The conditions were thus ripe for socialist revolution, for the proletariat to fulfil its destined historic task — to overthrow imperialist governments and the bourgeoisie; abolish private property and end the exploitation of man by man and the oppression of women; develop a new culture and consciousness imbued with Marxism-Leninism, socialist values, and solidarity among the workers of all nations; and construct a classless society based on public ownership, a planned economy and, ultimately, an ideal order in which the state and all forms of coercion have withered away and material abundance is sufficient to furnish the needs of all men and women, enabling them to develop their human capacities to the very fullest.

As the war took its bloody toll, socialist revolution had indeed broken out. It had done so first in Russia. In part, according to the Stalinist view, this was because Russia's rural backwardness and archaic tsarist regime made it what Lenin had called 'the weakest link in the imperialist chain'. But the decisive factor had been the presence of the Bolshevik (later Communist) Party. Unlike all the bogus 'socialist' parties in Europe (and

the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries in Russia) the Bolshevik Party had been truly committed to and guided by revolutionary Marxism. It had exposed the hypocrisy of bourgeois liberalism, the capitalist ideology which sought, by essentially vacuous talk of equal political rights, to reconcile workers to the reality of economic oppression and exploitation. In Lenin it had a leader of genius whose grasp of Marxism had enabled him to confront and defeat every deviation (notably that of Trotsky) from the true path, forge the party into the disciplined, centralised vanguard which alone could instil socialist consciousness into the proletariat and provide it with unerring tactical and strategic leadership.

The result had been the epoch-making socialist revolution of October 1917. Spearheaded by its Bolshevik vanguard, and supported by the overwhelming majority of the people, the proletariat had brought the first Marxist government to power and marked the opening of a new era in world history, the era of socialism. Stalinist ideology asserted that revolution in the rest of Europe had been (temporarily) delayed only because Western 'socialist' parties had betrayed the working class. But with ideological guidance and strategic support from the USSR, fraternal Communist parties would presently lead their respective revolutionary movements to victory. Meanwhile, the overriding priority of the world Communist movement was the security of the socialist homeland: all actions and developments — be they diplomatic, political, social or cultural — were to be judged progressive or counter-revolutionary according to the impact they had on Soviet interests.

For by the late 1930s the USSR had pioneered the path which all mankind would follow. It had successfully demonstrated that, as Lenin's faithful disciple and successor Stalin had proclaimed, it was possible despite the delay in world revolution to build socialism in one country. Completing what the October revolution had begun, the party had moved on from the New Economic Policy (NEP) and mixed economy of the 1920s to implement a series of Five-Year Plans (running from 1928, 1933 and 1938) which rendered the victory of socialism irreversible. In little more than a decade, the USSR had supposedly created a pulsating industrial base capable of providing both for defence against imperialist aggression and for raising popular living standards out of all recognition. Collectivization had transformed the countryside and marked 'the final victory of Socialism in agriculture,'[9] replacing the petty-bourgeois drudgery of primitive strip-farming carried out by countless separate households with the application of collective labour and modern machinery to consolidated fields, thereby opening the way to huge gains in productivity. Alongside the recasting of social and economic relations, the party had moulded a new socialist culture which, disseminated in the course of a tremendous drive for education and enlightenment, was bringing into being a new Soviet man.

The great breakthrough involved unremitting struggle against bitter opponents of socialism — imperialist agents, remnants of Russia's defeated classes, 'kulaks' (rich peasants), treacherous Trotskyites, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. These 'enemies of the people' had tried desperately to wreck the Soviet economy and spread vicious anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary fabrications but had been denounced by loyal workers and crushed by the vigilant security police of the mighty Soviet state. By the late 1930s, united under the leadership of the party, itself guided throughout by Stalin, 'the Lenin of today', the beloved *Vozhd'* (leader) and genius with unmatched mastery of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet people had, allegedly, put in place the essentials of socialism.

Let us turn now to Nazi ideology. Like Stalinism, it drew on nineteenth-century currents

of thought, in this case on those which celebrated the age-old virtues, innate solidarity and glorious destiny of the German *Volk*, proclaimed the crucial significance of racial differences and the unique evil of the Jews, and denounced liberalism, socialism and Marxism as inherently corrupt, divisive and treacherous. It combined these themes with an account of war-time and post-war events which bore out their wisdom and gave them immediate political relevance. The most authoritative statement was Hitler's own *Mein Kampf*, the *profession de foi* written in 1924 and 1925, a free copy of which was received by teachers, soldiers and newly-weds. It was autobiographical, impassioned and short on intellectual rigour but it conveyed Nazism's essential message with abundant clarity.

The concept at the very core of Nazi ideology was race. Racial analysis and recognition of the unceasing struggle between mutually hostile races, it argued, provided the key to history. The preservation of racial purity was the party's absolute and overriding political priority. The different races into which mankind was divided — Aryan, Chinese, Japanese, Slavs, Negroes, Jews — were set apart by different bloodstreams, each of which was complemented not only by distinctive physical features but also by distinctive psychological and spiritual characteristics. The race which in every respect was superior was the Aryan race whose dominant branch in the modern era was the German people.

According to Nazi ideology, the quintessential Aryan man or woman was the finest human specimen — in noble bearing, in fair colouring and facial features, and in wholesome good health. Aryans had a virtual monopoly of creativity — 'All the human culture,' wrote Hitler, 'all the results of art, science, and technology that we see before us today, are almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan'[10] — whereas other races only imitate.

Underpinning this physical and cultural superiority was moral superiority, the very essence of which was the ability of the Aryan to sacrifice his own individual ego and sectional interests in the wider interests of the race, to unite under one leadership. The result had been cultural and military pre-eminence, probably since the beginning of time.

History, however, had shown that superior races can forfeit their superiority, can degenerate — as in ancient Greece and Rome. It could happen to the Germans. And it could happen in precisely the same way that it happened earlier: by the Aryans becoming diluted, by the pure German bloodstream being contaminated by lower races with the inevitable result that their physical, moral and cultural strength would be eroded and ultimately the race destroyed altogether. Moreover, this was no vague, theoretical danger: there was a mortal threat to the German people of precisely such contamination. And it came from the Jews.

The Jews, in the Nazi view, were the lowest race, the most degenerate, indeed barely human at all. Their physical ugliness was matched by their moral depravity: they were idle, dishonest and malign egotists. Left to their own devices, they would fight like rats and drown in filth and offal. This noxious bacteria, these parasites, these eternal bloodsuckers were mingling with the *Volk*. By marrying off their daughters to misguided German men and seducing innocent German girls, they were poised to infect the German race.

Moreover, claimed the Nazis, the Jews were plotting to establish their own world domination. On the one hand, they relied upon the power and influence which flowed from their wealth and domination of fi-

nance capital. On the other, they propagated ideas and values deliberately crafted to undermine the unity and strength of their racial enemies. They were in large measure responsible for the cultural decadence that disfigured the cities of Weimar, the absurdities of modern art, the foppish fashions that denatured men, and the scandalous lifestyle and unnatural career ambitions of 'emancipated' young women which drew them away from their role as homemakers, wives and mothers. Jewish intellectuals encouraged the individualism, liberalism and parliamentarianism which had done so much to divide and sap the vitality of their enemies; they encouraged pacifism and cosmopolitanism and did all they could to deride manly respect for courage, force and violence.

The most corrosive, the most insidious Jewish product was Marxism. The Jews had used it to destroy the Russian state and unleash the vicious repression imposed by the Bolsheviks who, in the Nazi view, were Jewish-led. And unless the people were alerted and mobilised, the Jews would do the same to Germany. Already during the war they had undermined the glorious national unity of 1914 and managed to incite a proportion of the German working class into strikes and demonstrations to sabotage the war effort — thereby opening the way to the 'stab in the back' of the army by liberal and Social-Democratic politicians, the criminals responsible for Germany's surrender and the outrageous terms which Versailles had imposed on the people.

It was to halt and defeat for all time the Jewish threat, to reunite the *Volk* in a harmonious national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), bring all Germans within one Reich, win for them the additional *Lebensraum* (living space) they needed, and restore them to their rightful position of world supremacy, that Hitler had committed his life. Hitler's own person occupied a central role in Nazi ideology. He was the man destined to unite the German people, defeat their enemies, and restore them to greatness.[11] He was a man of the people but at the same time a leader of world-historic stature, the personification of the vision, wisdom, and unflinching valour of the true German. The concentration of authority in one man complemented the Germanic virtues of obedience, duty, honour and willingness for self-sacrifice for the good of the race. The *Führerprinzip*, the principle of firm leadership and unquestioning obedience, became embedded in Nazi ideology as the model for relations within the party, within the state, and between state and people.

Under Hitler's leadership, according to Nazi ideology, the party had mobilised the people, swept to power, and wielded the full force of the state to turn the tide. It had stamped out political division. It had driven Jews out of public life, and forbidden intermarriage between Jew and Aryan. It had restored women to their primary role in the home. It had purged German culture and the education system of its degenerate and unhealthy elements and redirected it to lift morale, renew the people's consciousness of belonging to a national community, and "burn the racial sense and racial feeling into the instinct and the intellect, the heart and the brain of the youth entrusted to it."[12] It had taken measures to weed out and halt breeding among the mentally and physically defective and, committed as it was to 'Blood and Soil', it had acted to guarantee the future of the healthiest German stock, the rugged peasant farmer rooted in the beloved countryside of the fatherland. To transcend differences between social classes and win workers back to their national loyalties, it had brought them and employers together in the German Labour Front, teaching both

sides of industry to unite in common effort. It had restored the German economy and prepared the country for war.

Abroad, it had faced down feeble Western resistance to the reoccupation of the Rhineland, brought both Austria and the German areas of Czechoslovakia into the greater Reich, and regained the lands stolen by Poland. The way was now open to smash the Jewish-Bolshevik USSR, subordinate the Slav *Untermenschen* (subhumans) to Aryan rule and secure the *Lebensraum* on which Germans would settle, thereby entrenching their European and world supremacy.

Both the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, then, depicted the world in terms of a momentous struggle in which they were the chief protagonists of the forces of good against those of evil. Each claimed that it was thus justified — indeed duty-bound — to ride roughshod over civil liberties and where necessary to resort to violent measures. But it is difficult to push the analogy between them any further.

'One People, One Reich, One Führer'
Picture postcard of 1938
Peter Newark's Historical Pictures

The two ideologies were utterly dissimilar in terms of coherence and the sources upon which they drew. In its rhetoric and appeal, Stalinism descended from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which had fused two ancient currents of Western political thought: the search for the good life and faith in the power of reason and scientific method to understand, master and transform the material and social world. It claimed to deliver the liberty, equality and fraternity which the French Revolution had promised. And it was based directly upon a reading (albeit a very partial one) of the ideas of Marx and Engels, the most powerful intellectual product of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution

and one of the formative influences upon twentieth-century intellectual development across the globe.[13] Nazi ideology, on the other hand, explicitly repudiated the goals of universal liberty, equality and fraternity, and rejected much of the Enlightenment tradition. It drew far more from Romantic and irrationalist currents, elevating the will-power and imagination of (one) man over logic and reason. Its greatest debt was to racist theories which, judged in terms of their impact on twentieth-century intellectual development, were negligible.

For Stalinism, the struggle was between classes: property relations and the socio-economic structure were crucial whereas race was a very minor matter. For Nazism, class differences were of minimal significance and property relations were to be approached pragmatically, whereas the common racial bond and the clash between races was all-important. The key values proclaimed by the two world views were entirely at variance. Where Stalinism looked forward to an egalitarian social order, Nazism saw elitism and hierarchy as inherent in human nature. Where Stalinism preached equality of political status and economic opportunity for women, Nazism drew a firm line between the public male sphere and the private female sphere. Where Stalinism preached an internationalist creed and projected the USSR as a model for all humanity, Nazism was ultra-nationalist and said little and cared less about the fate of the *Untermenschen* who populated most of the globe.

Nor were the two ideologies commensurate in terms of the range of questions which they purported to answer. Stalinist ideology constituted an all-embracing philosophy of life. It denied the existence of God and took a materialist view of existence. It presented a tightly-drawn and detailed explanation for economic, social, political and cultural developments throughout the entire course of human history. Its scope was total: it claimed to be able to decipher the class content and significance of every institutional structure, social custom, human relationship, literary, artistic, musical or scientific product.

Nazi ideology, on the other hand, was much more selective about the issues it addressed. Beyond its core ideas and values — the racial purity, genetic good health and unity of the German 'national community', German supremacy in the relentless struggle between races, and Hitler's messianic leadership — there was a penumbra where the Nazi view was much more vague, ill-defined and contradictory. It contained distinctly anti-Christian elements and yet in public Hitler repeatedly affirmed his Christian commitment. It contained fiercely anti-capitalist motifs, but also celebrated the contribution to be made by loyal Aryan businessmen and entrepreneurs. It played upon anti-industrial and anti-urban themes, and yet paraded the power and dynamism of German industry.

This distinction was epitomised by the way in which the two ideologies projected the future. Stalinism promised that beyond the class struggle lay Utopia. All the problems which had beset humanity — material want, economic injustice, oppression and war — would be resolved and social harmony would be combined with the full development of every individual. Nazism projected no final destination. The 'Thousand-Year Reich' assumed the permanence of racial struggle; the inescapable fact that one race will dominate another; and the need for the Aryan race to be ever vigilant, united in readiness for conflict, and hierarchically organised behind an elite marked out by its racial purity, physical prowess and qualities of loyalty and leadership.

Nonetheless, it by no means follows from these ideological differences that there is a

corresponding contrast between the two regimes. For there was a further difference: whereas Hitler meant every word of his ideology, there was a yawning gulf between Stalin's actions and his rhetoric. The central tenets of Nazi ideology were precisely what guided the Third Reich. Indeed, as time passed the regime actually became more overtly, brazenly and ruthlessly true to its ideological values and vision.[14]

The reverse was true in the case of the USSR. The values and vision of Marxism-Leninism became ever less relevant to the regime's practice. A key to the power of Stalinist ideology was that it conferred legitimacy on the regime as the embodiment of historical progress while committing it to virtually no specific policy. Having identified the CPSU as the vehicle destined to realise the socialist dream, it left the leadership remarkably free to 'move the goal posts', redefine key terms, turn policy upside down, suspend supposed principles and indefinitely postpone supposed goals.[15] It is conceivable that Stalin and his acolytes came to identify their own interests so closely with the cause of socialism and 'the world proletariat' that they were unconscious of any hypocrisy. Nevertheless, the Stalinist regime was a travesty of the ideology it preached.

Poster celebrating the triumphant completion of the First Five-Year Plan: Stalin's immaculate leadership makes the USSR impervious to the worst efforts of clerics, capitalists and traitorous social-democrats
British Museum

The Dictator

Liberal-democratic regimes characteristically accord primacy to one post, be it premier or president, but the decision-making power of the holder is limited by a variety of formal constitutional and informal institutional devices. Under the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, however, decision-making power became concentrated in the hands of one leader elevated to a point of arbitrary authority.

In the first place, each acquired unchallenged supremacy within his own ruling party. Hitler had dispensed with collective leadership as soon as he established his primacy in the early 1920s. At will he ignored the views of his most senior lieutenants, a key instance being in 1932 when Gregor Strasser, the second most prominent Nazi, was driven to resign from the party in exasperation because Hitler contemptuously ignored his insistence that von Papen's offer of the post of Deputy Chancellor be accepted. Hitler ruthlessly repressed attempts by elements within the party to pursue policies that conflicted with his own. The most dramatic instance of this was the 'Night of the Long Knives' in 1934, the blood-bath he visited on Ernst Röhm and the leadership of the SA, the party's paramilitary wing, who yearned for a wholesale purge of the old elites and aspired to replace the traditional army. Never again would a Nazi organization overtly buck the Führer's authority. On any issue that he cared to assert himself — be it on questions of personnel or of policy great or small — his word was decisive.

Stalin's route to personal control of CPSU policy was much more tortuous. As General Secretary from 1922 he had acquired control over appointments to senior party posts, thereby gaining influence over the make-up of the Party Congress, of the Central Committee it elected, and, in turn, of the Politburo itself. Taking care to support policies which found favour among the upper echelons of the party, he had emerged as the pivotal figure in the Politburo. But it was only with the support of allies in the Central Committee that by 1927 he had defeated critics on the 'left' (Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev) and by 1929 those on the 'right' (Bukharin, Tomsky, Rykov). Thereafter he was able to promote his own supporters into the Politburo and, through his personal secretariat and the Secret Department of the Central Committee, to secure an unrivalled grip on communications within and information about the party hierarchy. Even so, he was still at times thwarted. In 1932 his demand for the execution of Riutin, author of a secret memorandum denouncing him and his policies, was rejected and in the mid-1930s headstrong allies such as Ordzhonikidze would not flinch from arguing against him over policy issues. It was only in the aftermath of the Great Terror (1936-38), which

devastated the party elite (70% of the Central Committee elected in 1934 were arrested and many of them shot), that collective leadership atrophied, the Politburo met on an increasingly *ad hoc* basis, and his word, like Hitler's, became unchallengeable.[16]

Second, both leaders ensured their domination of the key executive, legislative, judicial and administrative bodies of the state. In Hitler's case, this was secured by combining the posts of President and Chancellor; by reducing the Reichstag to a Nazi rubberstamp; by appointing loyal acolytes to key posts at cabinet level, and, from 1934, discontinuing cabinet meetings altogether. The federal structure inherited from Weimar was erased, the elected assemblies of the *Länder* (states) were abolished (1934), and their governments subordinated both to newly created Governorships (generally held by Hitler's faithful regional party chieftains, the *Gauleiters*) and to the Ministry of the Interior in Berlin. The judiciary was stripped of its independence and lost much of its jurisdiction to new courts set up by the party and affiliated organizations, or were bypassed by arbitrary police action. The measure of independent influence on policy initially exercised by established specialists within the state apparatus was whittled away. As Hitler's confidence in his own will and judgement swelled, civil and military leaders who demurred were abruptly replaced — Finance Minister Schacht in 1937, Foreign Minister Neurath, Defence Minister Blomberg and General Fritsch in February 1938.

In Stalin's case, by the time he consolidated his leadership, the party's own domination of the state machinery was already firmly established, in the form of the *nomenklatura* system giving the party control over important appointments at all levels of public life. At the summit, the legislature, the Supreme Soviet and its Central Executive Committee provided automatic endorsement of Politburo decisions. The cabinet (*Sovnarkom*) served to execute Politburo policy and on the eve of war (1939) Stalin took over its chairmanship, combining it with his leadership of the party. Here, too, the judiciary was made utterly subservient to political authority — and freely bypassed altogether. Any hint of independence and *esprit de corps* on the part of the military hierarchy was extinguished by the mass purge of its leadership in 1937, control over officers being further buttressed by the reintroduction of political commissars to monitor their every move.

Finally, the authority of both leaders was confirmed, celebrated and underscored by the cult that surrounded them, by the hyperbolic praise heaped upon them at every public occasion. Each occupied a central role in the mass rallies and ritual with which the respective regimes sought to rouse public opinion. Both were elevated to super-human status, and were credited with intellect and foresight of genius, immeasurable moral superiority, heroic personal dedication, and leadership qualities of world-historic proportions. And in both cases, the cult served to provide the focus for emotional loyalty beyond the ranks of the party; both leaders were exempted from much of the resentment that other senior figures and the parties themselves attracted; and their personal popularity did much to shore up the regime — in Hitler's case this was true throughout, while in Stalin's it became true after the tide in the 'Great Patriotic War' had turned and he was seen to be leading the country to victory.

However, these striking analogies need to be seen alongside qualitative differences in the position of the two leaders. In the first place, Stalin took a much more direct interest in the details of policy than did Hitler. During the 1930s Stalin was intimately involved in the work of the numerous *ad hoc* sub-

committees into which the Politburo increasingly descended, and argued vigorously over detailed issues of foreign and armaments policy, the security police, ideology, personnel, and above all economic policy. Hitler, on the other hand, soon began to restrict his direct intervention more and more to foreign and military policy. This is not to deny that in one sense Hitler influenced the outcome of every policy conflict; whoever could demonstrate most convincingly that he was 'working towards the Führer', pursuing the line that conformed most closely to the Führer's will, was best placed to prevail.[17] There were occasions when he did give clear directives on disputed issues: on cultural policy, for example, he intervened in 1934 to damn modern art conclusively; on the question of the employment of women, he was adamant that they were unsuitable as lawyers.[18] But over a whole range of policy and personnel matters it became increasingly difficult for his acolytes to secure any explicit decisions from him.

Second, the similarities in their cult status should not disguise the fact that Stalin's position was far more vulnerable until the very end of the 1930s — and even then he could never enjoy Hitler's security. Stalin was acutely suspicious of the senior figures who had surrounded Lenin and at one stage or another opposed his emergence as successor, and he ensured that these figures were swept away in the Great Terror of the later 1930s. Hitler had no cause for such a sense of insecurity. The closest analogy to Stalin's assault upon loyal Stalinists was the Night of the Long Knives, but in terms of the number of victims, there is no comparison between that and the havoc Stalin wreaked on the hierarchy of the CPSU. Stalin may have exaggerated the threats to his own position but what is certain is that, despite numerous assassination plots, most famously the officers' bomb plot of July 1944, Hitler neither experienced comparable fears nor had reason to do so.

The third point is related. Hitler's charismatic leadership was an essential feature of Nazism. Faith in the Führer was an integral element of Nazi ideology. The regime's ability to reproduce itself without Hitler, though untested, since at the time of his suicide it was in any case imploding in the face of total military defeat, must be extremely doubtful; indeed Ian Kershaw has argued that he was irreplaceable.[19] In the USSR, on the other hand, the Communist Party established its dominance before Stalin gained control of it and it outlived him by decades. Indeed, whereas the death of Hitler might well in itself have been fatal to Nazism, Stalin's death became the precondition and the opportunity for the party to readjust and prolong its hold on power.

The Autonomous State

The two regimes were distinguished not only by their leaders' personal control of state policy, but also by the extent to which they escaped constraints exercised upon their freedom of manoeuvre from outside the state. In liberal-democratic (as well as liberal-constitutional and monarchical) states, such constraints have characteristically been exercised by foci of power, be they classes, interest groups or independent institutions — political, economic, social, cultural, minority-ethnic, religious — on which the state depends for support or whose opposition it is unable to ignore. *En route* to power, of course, the two parties in question had depended upon a measure of popular support: in the Bolshevik case, this had been strongest among the working class, in the Nazi case among the urban and rural lower-middle classes.[20] But once in power, neither rested upon an identifiable social base in the sense of a particular class or stratum outside the state whose demands it implemented or whose interests it defended against other classes. The Soviet regime stripped workers of their independent organizations, subjected them to harsh economic conditions and political repression, and rode rough-shod over their protestations. In Germany, the lower-middle classes, urban as well as rural, were bitterly disappointed by the Nazi regime's failure to protect them against competition and depressed prices or to privilege them against large-scale enterprise.

This is not to deny the support which the Stalinist regime enjoyed from radical Marxist intellectuals, upwardly mobile sons and daughters of workers and peasants, enthusiastic young workers and, episodically, from wider strata of workers glad of guaranteed employment, nor to overlook the change in popular attitudes towards the Soviet regime resulting from the ordeal and outcome of the war. Nor is it to deny the widespread approval and at times popularity of the Nazi regime, especially for its economic success and foreign policy triumphs, before military reversals began to take their toll. But arguably these two regimes achieved a greater measure of 'autonomy' in domestic affairs[21] — that is, independence from the pressures, demands or effective resistance of different sections of society — than any others in modern European history.

Both closed off all avenues for organised opposition. They banned rival political parties, halted competitive elections, and ensured top-down control of policy within the ruling party itself. They deprived major public institutions, from universities to trade unions, of their independence and subjected those that remained to close supervision — the Nazis in the process of the 'co-ordination' of society after they came to power, the Communists through the blanket coverage of the *nomenklatura* system. Both imposed rigid censorship over the media, brought the newspapers (with the minor exception of a few

carefully monitored 'independent' papers tolerated in Germany until 1943) under direct party and state tutelage, used intimidation and force to choke open criticism, and overrode legal and civil rights at will. By the outbreak of war in 1939, 225,000 people in the Third Reich had been convicted for political offences; in the same year there were 2.9 million offenders (probably one-third of whom were 'politicals') in Soviet forced labour camps, colonies, prisons and 'special resettlement areas'.[22] Millions more had and would pass through or die at the hands of the SS and NKVD. In short, both regimes prevented pluralist participation in policy formation and, in many respects, insulated themselves from independent sources of pressure and/or resistance.

Clear differences in the position of the two regimes emerge, however, when attention turns to the extent to which each exercised this autonomy to confront whole classes, popular opinion and non-state institutions. The Stalinist regime clashed head-on with the great bulk of the peasantry by enforcing collectivization, stripping individual households of their land, and abolishing the village commune: between 1930 and 1933 there were up to 6 million victims of 'dekulakization', 2.1 million of them sent to forced labour settlements run by the security police, as many if not more exiled within their own region, and 1-1.25 million abandoning their homes and fleeing. Peasant resistance did compel a brief pause and retreat in 1930, and extracted the concession that each household could retain a very small plot of land for its own use. But the regime broke the most basic rhythm in the lives of the majority of its citizens, destroyed the measure of dignity and independence they derived from farming under the traditional communal system, and launched a massive campaign against their entire culture and religion. Furthermore, in 1932/33 up to 7 million peasants, predominantly in the Ukraine, died in a famine brought on by the dislocation of collectivization (exacerbated by adverse weather) and by the ruthless extraction of grain regardless of basic peasant needs. The working class, too, were subjected to periods of extreme hardship. Between 1928 and 1933, as a result of policy deliberately pursued by the government, real wages fell precipitately as food and goods were tightly rationed, overcrowding reached degrading proportions and family life became virtually impossible. Petty traders were deprived of their livelihood, non-party intellectuals were silenced, and the institutional life and collective worship of the churches of all denominations drastically curtailed. The Stalinist state transformed the economic life, the social and cultural profile, the physical landscape of the country: it imposed a programme in social and economic engineering without precedent in human history.

Moreover, in the process, the boundary between state and society was radically redrawn and the state's reach enormously extended. Private enterprise was virtually eliminated and almost all the means of production were brought into the hands of the state. Enterprise managers, technical specialists, accountants and engineers became in effect public officials, whose position was not unlike that of officials in the state's civil, cultural, military and police apparatus or those in the upper reaches of all secular public institutions. Senior personnel in industry, mines and on the railways, in state and collective farms alike took their instructions from the political authorities; they were dependent on those authorities for their prospects — promotion, demotion, relocation, dismissal; and they were directly subject to the sharp shifts in state policy — the succession of efficiency drives, purges and orchestrated campaigns

of denunciation. The key role in conditioning the goals of enterprises, which had previously been played by the market and the profit motive, was now assumed by the assignment of targets and the allocation of goods by the planning agencies of the state.

By these standards, the Nazi regime appears almost sensitive to sections of popular opinion. This is not to deny that it prioritised military-related expenditure at the expense of civilian, as no liberal democracy had ever done in peace-time.[23] But it was markedly more willing to adapt in the face of resistance from outside the state. It showed distinctly greater anxiety over popular morale and support, and was much more cautious than was Stalin's regime in the extent to which it reduced living standards. Although workers lost their political rights, their independent trade unions and their ability to engage in collective bargaining, the regime would on occasion back down in the face of clear signs of intensifying worker discontent — notably over proposed food-price rises in 1938 and wage cuts at the beginning of the war.[24] Although the scope of government regulation grew dramatically in the late 1930s, the bulk of private enterprise retained its freedom to operate in the market, while pressure exerted via the Ministry of Finance stymied the efforts of the German Labour Front's leadership to gain significant leverage over employers.[25] The Nazi regime also proved much more ready to draw back in the face of public protest over other aspects of its policy, particularly those which most offended conventional morality and religious sensibilities. Public pressure, petitions, mass-meetings and other forms of protest secured the reversal, for example, of the arrest and dismissal of Bishop Meiser, head of the Bavarian Lutheran Church, in 1934, and of the official order to remove crucifixes from schools in Oldenburg (1936) and Bavaria (1941); and checked, though failed to halt, the murder of the mentally and physically handicapped (1941).[26]

By the same token, the Nazi regime did not match the Stalinist extension of the state's reach. In Germany, the market remained central to economic life. Certainly there was a wide-ranging increase in regulation — over agricultural production, against small-holders dividing their farms, to control prices and wages, as well as foreign trade, and to prioritise military-related production — but this measure of intervention did not approach that of the command economy of the USSR. In Nazi Germany private enterprise remained overwhelmingly preponderant not only in agriculture, retail and wholesale trade but in industry and finance, and the great majority of the economically active were either employed by independent enterprises or self-employed, financially dependent on profits not on the state. Here commercial incentives remained crucial in conditioning economic behaviour: the market continued to mediate myriad relations which, in the USSR, were now mediated directly by and within the state.

The scope of the 'veto' which elements in German society could exercise over the regime's policy should not be exaggerated. For the most part, it was restricted to limited issues of particular concern to major sections of society. It offered no protection to the Jewish minority demonised in Nazi ideology — be it from successive waves of state-sponsored violence, intimidation and boycotts, epitomised by the terror of *Kristallnacht* in 1938, from increasing social exclusion, or from the 'Final Solution'. Nor did it prevent the persecution of other minorities such as homosexuals, vilified as degenerate and sterile, 50,000 of whom were convicted and up to 15,000 condemned to concentration camps.[27] Moreover, the evidence of 'cumulative radicalization' in the regime's later years suggests that its autonomy, its willingness and

ability to ride roughshod over every restraint, was increasing.[28] Besides the increasingly violent measures against Jews, this is suggested by the adoption of the Four-Year Plan (1936); the tightening of controls over private enterprise; the growing disregard for export-oriented industries and insistence on the use of domestic raw materials regardless of higher costs; the readiness to develop state-owned enterprises to achieve strategic goals; the medium term commitment to economic preparation for total war in defiance of pressure from sections of private industry[29]; the increasing use of direct coercion against workers[30]; and greater restrictions upon the churches and their bloody repression in occupied Poland. It points towards a combination of determination and ruthlessness capable, given time, of crushing the interests and sensibilities of *all* social groups.

It remains true, however, that in domestic matters Hitler never put the full measure of his autonomy to the test. Hitler's regime never attempted to match in scale the social transformation launched by that of Stalin; it implemented no programme designed drastically to recast the economic and social position of virtually every family; it undertook no initiative which had to be imposed by overt coercion of the vast majority of the population.

The Propaganda State

The Nazi and Stalinist regimes sought to establish a monopoly of public communication in order to remould popular consciousness in line with their respective ideologies. Developments in mass literacy, education and the media have enabled the state in all industrialised societies to increase significantly its impact upon the consciousness of the citizen. But in liberal democracies law and custom have limited the state's use of compulsion, and its power has been blunted and diffused by freedom of speech and political and cultural pluralism. By contrast, these two regimes set out, in principle at least, to make the state's ideological reach all-encompassing.

On the one hand, they banned novels, plays and films, art, philosophy and history, and even lines of research in the pure sciences which ran counter to official ideology. Intellectuals and artists had no chance of publishing or displaying their work unless approved for membership of official bodies, Unions in the Soviet case, Cultural Chambers in the Nazi. In addition, both regimes sought to restrict the activity and undermine the cultural influence of the churches. They resorted freely to violence, coercion and intimidation in their attempts to establish monopoly control of information and drastically curtailed foreign travel and contacts. They exploited new and more sophisticated methods of police surveillance and the introduction of a menacing party presence in the workplace, the residential block and every major secular institution.

On the other hand, each regime used every means available — newspapers and billboards, radio and cinema, ritual and symbol, mass meetings and public entertainments, triumphalist public monuments and state architecture — to bombard its citizens with propaganda designed to foster identification with its symbols, use its language, think in its terms. Both mounted elaborate campaigns to portray their respective parties as champions of unparalleled improvements in factory conditions and in workers' morale and quality of life. Each devoted enormous energy to composing, packaging and disseminating an account of news and current affairs at home and abroad tailored to corroborate their respective views of the world. They did all they could to ensure that artists and intellectuals, dramatists and scientists produced work which positively endorsed the ideology. Both sought to induce public acts of endorsement, epitomised by the 'Heil Hitler' greeting in Germany, open adulation of Stalin, and mass participation in celebrations on new holidays marking dates of key significance in the history of their respective parties.

Greatest attention was paid to education. In both countries, unsound teachers were purged and the remainder trained to exalt the values and inculcate the world view of the regime. In each the syllabus was reshaped, in the Nazi case concentrating upon the German language, biology, and history, in the USSR injecting a strong dose of Marxism-Leninism. In extra-curricula activities, too, in sport and leisure, the Nazi regime sought to foster racial pride, the competitive spirit, physical prowess and strictly gendered tastes while the Soviet regime sought to instil com-

mitment to Soviet patriotism and 'the building of socialism'. Both developed elaborate youth movements — headed by the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls in the Third Reich and by the Komsomol (Young Communist League) in the USSR — charged with working ideological indoctrination into every facet of youth activity.

Yet, striking though these common features undoubtedly are, the analogy holds good only so far. In the first place, because Stalinist ideology was intellectually more coherent and broader in scope, it was easier to systematise than was Nazism. Marxism-Leninism's internal logic was so tightly drawn as to be stultifying, but much of the Nazi outlook, beyond its racial-eugenic core, was blurred and confused. It was characteristic that whereas Stalinism purported to explain the entire course of world history and codified its ideas all too precisely in the *Short Course in the History of the CPSU (Bolsheviks)* (1938), the Nazi regime only began to publish new history textbooks at the end of the 1930s, and even then provided no distinctively Nazi version of much of the historical record.

In terms of cultural output more generally, the Stalinist regime had much greater success in sponsoring work which gave expression to the party line: it set in train, for example, a sustained tradition of 'socialist realism' in literature, cinema and the theatre which exuded optimism and wove into traditional narrative storylines the cardinal Soviet socialist virtues of loyalty to party and country, commitment to the common good, adherence to atheism, rejection of bourgeois individualism and faith in the future of socialism.[31]

The Third Reich, on the other hand, though able to make plain enough what kind of art, literature and scholarship it condemned (Marxist, socialist, liberal, pacifist, feminist, modernist and above all anything of Jewish provenance), had much greater difficulty in generating work with an ideologically consistent message. The effort it poured into establishing a scientific basis for racism was largely unavailing. Only a small proportion of films, books and plays had a clear and positive ideological message while its attempt to create a new form of theatre, '*Thing*-theatre', pageantry performed on specially constructed open-air stages and combining drama, dance, chorus and music designed to celebrate the 'national community', was an embarrassing failure.[32]

The fact that, as we have seen, the Stalinist regime's attempt to inculcate a new ideology was accompanied by an epoch-making social upheaval also distinguished it from the Nazi propaganda drive. While the countryside was thrown into turmoil by collectivization, forced-pace industrialization brought a hurricane of change upon urban Russia, its population rising by no less than 30 million in just over a decade (1926-1939). The number employed in industry, building and transport rose from 6.3 to 23.6 million; the number of white-collar workers more than tripled; the number of state administrators quintupled. The result was what Moshe Lewin has called a 'quicksand' society, a society caught up in a process of flux and change, in which whole regions were, with bewildering speed, uprooted as millions upon millions left their homes and villages for burgeoning shanty towns, building sites, mines and factories, some acquiring new skills, rising up the ladder of manual labour or into the myriad newly created administrative posts, some, too, suffering repression.[33] Much about the regime's account of this upheaval carried limited conviction and bore even less relation to reality. The 'building of socialism' was bedevilled by peasant apathy, neglect and petty insubordination on collective farms and by labour absenteeism, indiscipline and a disastrous turnover of industrial workers moving from one enterprise to another. But it was accompanied, too, by upward social mobility on a mass scale. For beneficiaries and victims alike, the upheaval generated the conditions for a shift in consciousness and identity in which the language it used — of socialism and capitalism, of planning and targets, of Stakhanovite workers and collective farms, of *kulaks* and Trotskyists, of wreckers and imperialist spies — could not fail to play a part.

In the Third Reich, by contrast, there was no remotely comparable departure from long term socio-economic trends: for the great majority of Germans, the measure of social change that accompanied the Nazi propaganda drive was decidedly limited. This is not to deny shifts in attitude under the Third Reich: traditional deference was to some extent undermined by the political subordination of employers and the old elites, and by a somewhat increased rate of upward social mobility especially among the lower-middle classes. But behind the facade of 'national community' and class harmony trumpeted by the German Labour Front, for example, worker-employer relations remained in many respects unchanged.[34] Despite the model of womanhood idealised by Nazi ideology — absorbed in the role of wife, mother and homemaker, nurturing tomorrow's generation of the *Volk*, and loyally supporting her husband in performing his duty in the larger, public male arena of political involvement, economic production and military preparation — the proportion of women employed in the late 1930s was exceptionally high by international standards. Nor was the pressure brought to bear upon the churches in Germany anywhere near as intense as the Soviet campaign to close places of worship, arrest priests, ban proselytization, and discriminate against known believers in the USSR.

1937 poster for an exhibition in Munich on 'The Eternal Jew'
Peter Newark's Historical Pictures

Neither regime, it should be stressed, came close to achieving its ideological goal. Both Germany's 'national community' and the USSR's 'socialist consciousness' failed dismally to overcome acute hostility between different social strata or elicit the enthusiasm they

1937 caricature of Trotsky washing his hands in blood as he plots with Nazi Germany against the USSR
David King Collection

sought; it was all but impossible to live under either regime without seeing the contrast between the propaganda image and everyday reality; and surveys of the public mood carried out by their respective police demonstrate that both were unable to destroy secular and religious dissent or eradicate vigorous and critical counter-cultures.[35]

Weighing which propaganda drive made the greater impact is complicated by the fact that Hitler was in power for only half as long as Stalin and that one regime was destroyed in the same military confrontation which transformed the standing of the other. Moreover, the absence of freedom of speech makes it difficult to measure changes in mentality in either country, especially since conformity in public was quite compatible with cynicism in private. Yet, it is clear that until the reality of defeat set in, the 'Hitler myth' was immensely powerful; economic recovery and foreign policy success ensured that the Nazi regime was for a long time manifestly more popular than that of Stalin; and the Hitler Youth could make a deep impression as was revealed most clearly amongst those who fought on the Eastern Front.[36] On the other hand, the impact of the Nazi propaganda drive appears to have peaked early and gone into decline even before the war started, and so central was Hitler's charismatic personality that it is difficult to see how it could have been maintained after his death. Nazi ideology seems to have made real inroads only where it went with the grain of traditional attitudes, primarily among the middle and lower-middle classes, and even here disillusionment appears to have been spreading by the late 1930s and to have become total in 1945.[37]

Stalinist propaganda, by contrast, appears to have made sustained headway, despite initially confronting an abyss between its ideology and the beliefs of the overwhelming mass of the population. It was, as we have seen, intellectually more compelling and easier to systematise. It lent itself to legitimising the regime however inconsistent its behaviour and regardless of changes in leadership. It was propagated in a society undergoing an incomparably greater socio-economic upheaval; was accompanied by much more extensive upward social mobility; and was projected by a state whose economic intervention gave it a pervasive presence which exceeded that of the Third Reich. Unlike Nazi ideology, Stalinist ideology could work almost any development, at home or abroad, into its narrative of class struggle, historical progress, and the pioneering role of the USSR, and succeeded in winning converts beyond Soviet borders. Unlike Germany, where there were substantial working-class and Catholic cultural enclaves which remained relatively impervious to the racist language of Nazism, Marxist-Leninist terminology became almost ubiquitous in Soviet public discourse and remained so for decades after Stalin's death.[38]

The Apparatus of State

A model liberal-democratic government relies for the implementation of its policy upon politically 'neutral' officials operating according to the legal-rational principles of modern bureaucracy, and carrying out the will of successive elected governments within the bounds of the constitution. The Nazi and Stalinist regimes, alike, rejected this approach. Both were sceptical about the loyalty of the officials they inherited: in Germany, on the grounds of their supposed legalistic pedantry and social snobbery; in the USSR, on the grounds of their supposedly bourgeois prejudices. Both were acutely suspicious of the tendency for bureaucrats to develop institutional interests of their own and to frustrate and distort the goals of their political masters when those interests are at stake. Above all, both expressed contempt for the supposedly time-wasting and purposeless rules and regulations of bureaucratic procedure: Aryan racial superiority, the sheer force of will-power, and the Fuhrer's inspiration would surmount all obstacles; socialist methods, proletarian *élan* and the genius of Stalin would ensure that "there are no fortresses the Bolsheviks cannot storm".[39]

At first glance, there was much in common about the two regimes' efforts to overcome bureaucracy's supposed defects — and about their manifest failure to deliver more effective administration. Both purged the apparatus of elements considered unreliable. Both mobilised rank-and-file activists to bring pressure upon officialdom. Both made party membership a virtual requirement of senior office and sought to ensure party control over appointments to responsible posts. Both looked to the party to monitor and goad civil and military officials. And in both cases, for a time at least, the state hierarchy which was allowed to accumulate greatest power was the security police. Moreover, the apparatus of both regimes was marked by a measure of disruption, malfunction, internal friction and division which was not only in complete contrast to the streamlined monolith to which they aspired, but also seems to have been markedly less efficient than the legal-bureaucratic model they so despised. Yet, closer examination suggests the apparent symmetry between the two is seriously misleading.

In the Nazi case, the only large-scale purge of the apparatus took place immediately after the seizure of power in 1933, where most of those dismissed were Jewish or known to be politically hostile to the new regime, but it was never replicated. In the USSR, on the other hand, there was an almost continuous purge, in one region or another, in one branch of the apparatus or another. Moreover, the two major Stalinist purges — in the early stages (1928-31) of the First Five-Year Plan, when supposedly 'bourgeois' specialists were denounced and dismissed in virtually every field, and during the Great Terror (1936-38) which cut a much larger swathe through every hierarchy — were incomparably larger than the Nazi 'equivalent', while the waves of unease sent through the officials who remained were much more intense and long-lasting. In the Soviet case, party

members came to dominate all parts of the apparatus as hundreds of thousands of men (and some women) were promoted into the rapidly expanding administrative, police and economic hierarchies.[40] In the Nazi case, on the other hand, party 'saturation' was achieved by the great majority of existing officials rushing to join the NSDAP after the seizure of power. Moreover, hard though they tried, the leaders of the Nazi party organization, Hess and Bormann, never established an equivalent of the Soviet *nomenklatura* system. Nor could they construct an equivalent to the CPSU's system whereby full-time party officials, from the departments of the Central Committee down to local party secretaries, shadowed and acted as the eyes and ears of the centre.

Hitler's own attitude — a mixture of complacency, scorn for and lack of interest in administrative detail, a social-Darwinist belief that struggle and competition between rival organizations and among his own acolytes would favour the most virile and effective, and a determination to avoid becoming dependent on any one deputy or agency — did not help. He protected the autonomy of his regional party chieftains, the *Gauleiters*, and allowed them to by-pass party headquarters and appeal directly to him. The crucial difference, however, was that whereas in the USSR the party became the pre-eminent pathway to joining the elite, and a post in the party's own inner apparatus offered the greatest opportunities for exercising power and securing material privileges, the Nazi party was in no position to offer similar inducements. It had a weaker hold over public appointments, was less well funded than the CPSU, and, above all, in contrast to the USSR, it faced steep competition from alternative avenues to power and material rewards, through birth, education, private wealth and private enterprise. At the humblest level, whereas members of the CPSU tended to be treated with a mixture of awe and resentment, rank-and-file Nazi members who were charged with keeping themselves informed about activity and the mood in their residence bloc or factory could encounter real contempt.

Unable to secure firm control of state appointments or to supervise the state apparatus effectively, the Nazi regime resorted instead to creating numerous new party-led agencies alongside the existing civil service. These competed with and encroached on the field of established ministries — Ribbentrop's office *vis-à-vis* the Foreign Ministry, Göering's Four Year Plan Office *vis-à-vis* the Economics Ministry, Ley's German Labour Front *vis-à-vis* the Ministry of Labour — and at the same time resisted the attempts of Bormann to subject them to the central party organization. The most significant and ultimately the most powerful of these semi-autonomous institutions was the party's elite paramilitary organization, the SS (*Schutzstaffel*), under Heinrich Himmler. Created as Hitler's personal bodyguard, the SS carved a unique role for itself when it alerted him to the potential sedition of Röhm and the SA leadership. Following the Night of the Long Knives, the SS succeeded gradually not only in developing its own cadres, but in asserting control over the regular police force and encroaching ever further into the Ministry of the Interior as well. By the time war broke out, it was beginning to organise its own regiments thereby vying even with the army.

The result of this situation has been labelled 'polycratic chaos'[41] by Martin Broszat. Much of the Third Reich's political and administrative energy was absorbed in struggles between and within competing party and state organizations, struggles which arose less from differences in substantive policy than from rivalry, in-fighting and confusion. The Nazi image of serried ranks observing absolute discipline and wheeling in perfect step to orders from above bore no relation to the reality. The regime was parasitic upon the (relatively) rationally organised, co-ordinated, well-qualified and strongly motivated administrative apparatus it inherited. As that legacy was gradually eroded and demoralised, the heightened efficiency promised by the *Führerprinzip* turned into an administrative nightmare.

In the Stalinist case, too, the machinery of state was anything but streamlined. Here, however, the ill-defined and overlapping responsibilities being entrusted to different parts of the party and state apparatus were a secondary problem. More important was the incomparably inferior apparatus the regime inherited at the end of the 1920s and the much lower general level of education: in 1937 something like three-quarters of regional and city party secretaries — the party's sub-elite — had no more than elementary education.[42] In part, too, administrative malfunction reflected the hectic growth and ceaseless flux of the economic, administrative, party and police bureaucracies; the fact that they were bedevilled by poor communications across a vast country embracing a hundred different ethnic groups; and the strong temptation of corruption and embezzlement created by low levels of pay. But the underlying problem lay deeper: it lay in the very nature of the command economy.

There was permanent tension between the leadership in Moscow and the regime's own officials. Whereas the leadership sought to maximise output and accelerate development by adopting highly ambitious economic plans, the aim of industrial and agricultural managers and officials was to secure low or at least feasible targets. Confronted by impossibly high targets, the latter bent the rules, struck illicit deals with suppliers of food and raw materials, and, in their desperation to maximise gross output, turned a blind eye to slipshod labour, tolerated monstrous waste and accepted the production of faulty or even useless goods. Moreover, regional party officials charged with monitoring the implementation of Moscow's orders became enmeshed in the same process. To ensure that their 'parish' looked good in the eyes of their superiors, they colluded in unofficial networks (lubricated by nepotism and bribery) designed to circumvent unwelcome directives, evade scrutiny from Moscow, conceal failures and claim success. The result was a flow of deliberately misleading information to the centre which made rational planning all but impossible.

In the minds of Stalin and his circle, the suspicion mounted that successive economic crises, crippling bottlenecks and disastrously poor quality output was the fault of officials' incompetence, embezzlement, deceit, contravention of directives and 'socialist legality', and deliberate sabotage. This friction between the centre and its own officials was a vital element in the Great Terror (1936-38) which, besides eliminating Stalin's old rivals and preempting the formation of any organised or military opposition to him, was also directed against the supposed 'wrecking' and treason of officialdom. The heaviest toll was among senior officials, predominantly party members, in every branch of the apparatus — in industry and agriculture, in the trade unions, the legal system and education, in the planning agencies and economic commissariats, in the Komsomol, the party apparatus, the Central Committee and even the Politburo.[43] The NKVD became, for a bloodstained period, a third hierarchy empowered not only

to support the party in supervising the state administration, but to monitor — and terrorise — the party apparatus itself.

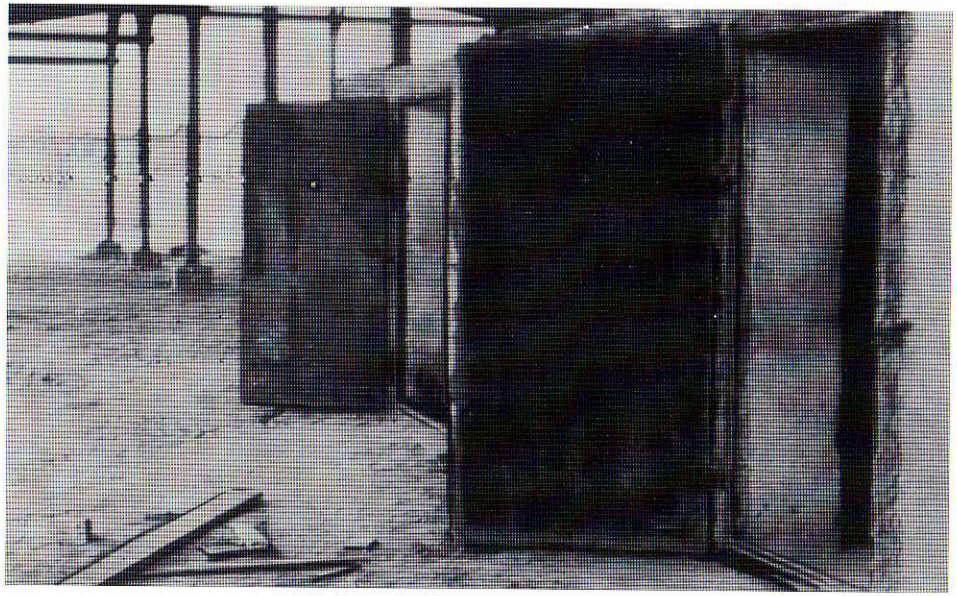
The forces disrupting the administration of the two dictatorships differed profoundly. Whereas the 'polycratic chaos' in Germany reflected the incompatibility between rational administration and the irrational if dynamic nature of Nazism, the dysfunction of the Stalinist apparatus reflected first and foremost the intractable problems of the Soviet command economy. In Germany, administrative chaos became progressively worse, whereas in the USSR, after the Great Terror Stalin and his successors would gradually if fitfully stabilise the apparatus, achieving greatest success in the Brezhnev years (1964-82) — without ever overcoming the central problem.[44]

The Murderous State

The final, harrowing facet to be considered was the mass murder both regimes carried out. Each was responsible for a death-toll which not only defied every principle of liberal democracy but has left a permanent scar on the European, indeed the human psyche. It is the issue of whether or not these crimes were similar in kind which has made comparison between the two regimes so contentious. That there was a symmetry is suggested, in particular, by three features.

First, the sheer scale of the death-toll. There is still no consensus on the grim audit. The Nazi victims included 2.6-3 million in death camps; over 0.7 million executed in Russia by the German army and SS; upwards of 0.5 million in ghettos; 0.23 million dying from forced evacuation marches in 1945; and over 0.5 million premature deaths in inhuman conditions in concentration camps. The total number, excluding Soviet POWs, is generally reckoned to exceed 7 million of whom between 5.6 and 5.9 million were Jews. New archival evidence on the Stalinist record has greatly advanced our knowledge and sharply corrected earlier estimates. The regime's victims, according to the most carefully argued, if far from conclusive, recent assessments, included 1 million who were killed by the OGPU/NKVD, the majority during the Great Terror; 2-3 million who died prematurely through the inhuman conditions in the prisons, colonies, labour camps and special settlements of the GULAG system, half of them before the outbreak of war in 1941; and up to 7 million victims of the famine of 1932-33. The total, excluding German POWs, is in the region of 11 million.[45] Both involved the death of numbers so vast that they defy the imagination and make it exceedingly difficult to find meaningful historical yardsticks.

Second, in both cases the toll was the result of action taken by the state, not in a momentary frenzy but for years on end, if at varying rates, and with the approval of the leadership. In the Third Reich, this was epitomised by the construction and administration of the death camps and gas chambers, and the production-line systematization of murder by officials instructed and paid by the state. In the Stalinist case, too, party and police officials were acting on behalf of the state in uprooting, deporting and thereby, in many cases, sending to their death peasants opposed to collectivization and minority nationalities accused of treason; in implementing food requisitioning policies which left millions helpless in the face of famine and disease; in manning the GULAG's sprawling network; and in carrying out something of the order of a million executions. There has been much debate over the interaction between and relative importance of Hitler's personal will and the radicalising momentum of competition between rival agencies over "resolving the Jewish question".[46] Doubt has also been cast on the notion that Stalin deliberately planned the Great Terror of 1936-



Entrance to the gas chamber at Majdanek concentration camp in Poland
Imperial War Museum

38.[47] But what is beyond doubt is that, in both cases, these and the other mass killings were sanctioned by the head of government.

Third, both regimes carried out wholesale slaughter in the name of the ideology they proclaimed. In Nazi eyes, mass murder was made legitimate, indeed made necessary and even heroic, by the racial struggle. Likewise, for Stalinism's defenders, the toll in the USSR was justified by the higher goal of building socialism; those who, consciously or without knowing it, stood in the way of that goal had to be removed. The quintessence of this ideological justification was the imposition of death-sentence-by-category. The character, record, and attitude of individual Jews was irrelevant: all members of the race were to be wiped out because of their physical make-up, their flesh, their bones, their blood. During the Great Terror local NKVD officials were given a quota of 'anti-Soviet elements' and 'enemies of the people' to arrest, as if the question of which particular individuals filled the quota was a decidedly secondary matter.

So monstrous was the scale of the crime in each case and so chilling is the apparent symmetry — the ideologically sanctioned use of state power to put to death unarmed human beings under its authority in numbers that pass understanding — that it is tempting to dismiss the differences between them as matters of mere detail. Yet it is precisely the blurring of the distinctions that has aroused gravest unease. Given that in other respects, as we have now seen, the contrast between the two regimes was profound, it should come as no surprise that here, too, each aspect of the analogy needs to be qualified.

First, ideology: in the Stalinist case, endless deceit and intellectual contortions were required to depict the slaughter as being in line with the regime's ideology and self-description. The Soviet regime went to extraordinary lengths not only to hide the fact of mass deaths, but also to conceal the identity and

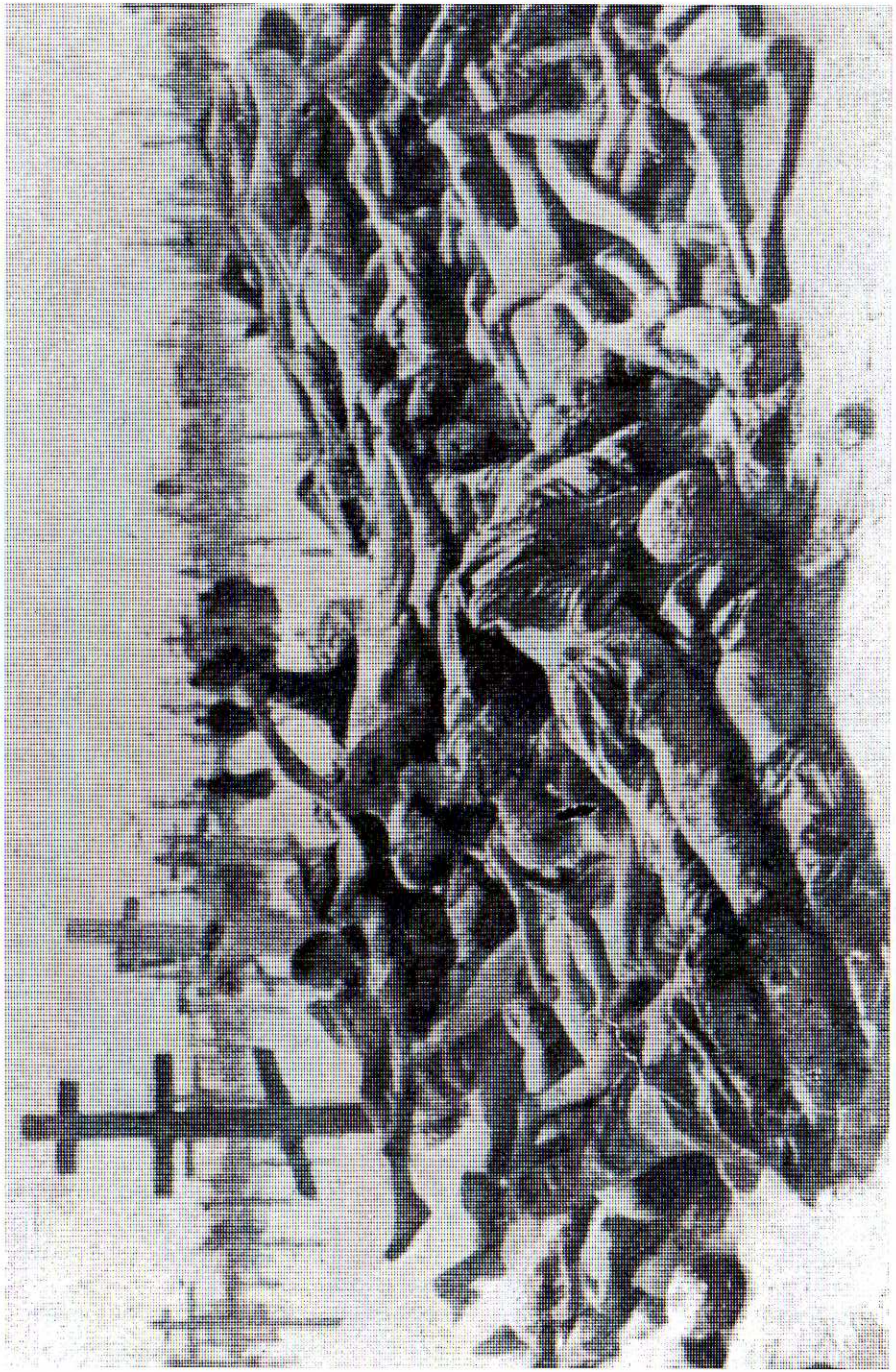
distort the record of the victims. Peasants deported during collectivization were described as 'kulaks' or 'kulak hirelings', regardless of their socio-economic status. Lesser victims of the Great Terror were damned for deeds they did not do, or for actions which at the time they were performed were no offence of any kind. The leading Bolsheviks accused in the great Show Trials of 1936-38 were tortured into confessing to plots and sabotage, treason and conspiracy which their accusers knew to be brazen fabrication.

In the Third Reich, on the other hand, there was no attempt to justify the mass murders through the formality of a trial or trumped-up charges against the victims. If the regime partially concealed the death camps and employed euphemisms such as 'euthanasia' and the 'Final Solution', this was not because the leadership or the perpetrators pretended that the Jews were being killed for some reason other than the fact that they were Jews. In the Soviet case, the slaughter was cloaked and rationalised to conform to the humanist ideology; in the Nazi case, the slaughter was the ultimate fulfilment of the racialist ideology.

Second, there was a striking difference between the clumsy and at times almost indiscriminate nature of Stalinist repression and the relative accuracy with which the Nazi state picked out its victims. In the Soviet case, there was frequently no clearly defined target or organised planning behind the successive waves of violence. The Stalinist crimes which appeared on the surface to be finely tuned were the assaults of the Great Terror. But in fact the very notion of numerical targets fixed by region was the epitome of arbitrariness; the regime had no idea exactly who would be picked upon to fill the quotas; and in any case the numbers arrested bore very little relation to the quotas set.[48] Countless individuals were caught up in the net by chance, because they were denounced by a malicious or terrified neighbour, because the quotas had to be filled. Certainly some categories were more vulnerable than others: peasants much more than workers, men much more than women, and in the Great Terror the social category at greatest risk were senior members of the party, the upper echelons of the regime itself. There were specific instances of more precise targeting, notably the exile of minority nationalities accused of collaborating with the Germans. But the repression was so diffuse that, in the course of Stalin's twenty-five year rule, it affected every ethnic group including the Russians themselves and every social stratum including loyal Stalinist officials.

Measured against this, the Nazi murders were planned, controlled and targeted with extraordinary care and precision. In identifying 'political' suspects, it is true, the Gestapo depended even more than did the NKVD on denunciations by citizens and, since as in the USSR denunciations were often motivated by fear, ambition or private grievance, there was a decidedly arbitrary element about these arrests.[49] But there was nothing haphazard about the identity of the vast majority of those who died at the hands of the regime. Tens of thousands were killed for political opposition, but millions were selected irrespective of political conduct, regardless of gender or age, because they were judged to be mentally or physically defective, or to belong to the races which the regime had condemned — Sinti, Roma, Slavs and, above all, Jews. The Nazi massacres were directed at and in very large measure fell upon those defined as 'other' on biological grounds, most of them from occupied Europe and over three-quarters of them Jewish, while the (gentile) German population in general and party members in particular were virtually immune.

This relates to the third, critical contrast. In the USSR, the proportion of the victims



The Soviet Famine: frozen bodies pile up at a cemetery in the Ukraine
L'Illustration/Sygma

who were deliberately killed were a small minority — 1 million out of 11 million, or under 10%. The vast majority, rather than being deliberately killed, were callously left to die. This applies to the famine of 1932-33, where rather than setting out to inflict death the leadership demonstrated ruthless indifference by refusing to cut its grain-collection quotas adequately.[50] It applies, too, to the inmates of the GULAG. Although the regime set considerable store by the forced-labour which the camps and labour colonies provided — and indeed one motive for the scale of the arrests appears to have been to replenish this labour-force[51] — those arrested as common criminals (never less than 50% of the GULAG population)[52] died alongside those arrested for supposedly political offences. The Stalinist death-toll rose primarily through attrition, maltreatment, sheer hardship, overwork, exposure to extreme cold, and above all starvation and disease.[53]

In the Third Reich, the reverse was true. The great majority of Nazi victims — some 80% or 5-6 million — were deliberately killed, while those left to die in concentration camps by attrition constituted a small minority. Whereas the Stalinist regime treated millions with such brutality that many of them died, the Nazi regime set out not only to punish, segregate, terrify and exploit those it arrested: it set out to kill them. In the former case, the potential victims were in a sense almost limitless and the actual victims were drawn from all social categories, but slaughter as such was not generally the goal and the rate of attrition fluctuated widely. In the latter, extermination was exactly what the regime aimed to achieve and once it had embarked on genocide it pursued that goal relentlessly and to the bitter end. One regime displayed a blood-curdling callousness, a generalised indifference to human suffering and willingness to take human life; the other displayed an icy determination to treat specific categories of the human race, and in particular the Jewish people, as vermin to be stripped, gassed and incinerated.

Conclusion

Despite some common features, the contrast between the two regimes was profound. Both propounded virulently anti-liberal ideologies, but those ideologies were at odds in their basic premises, the values they cherished, their scope and coherence, and the ultimate destination to which they pointed. Both elevated one individual to a position of unchallengeable authority, but whereas Hitler was inseparable from the Nazi regime and his death in itself potentially fatal to it, Stalin's death made it possible for the Soviet regime to extend its hold on power. Both states achieved what was by modern standards a remarkable measure of autonomy from society, but whereas the Stalinist regime exercised that autonomy to refashion by force the entire social fabric, the Nazi regime never put the full measure of its autonomy to the test. Both states set out to mould a 'new man', but the Stalinist propaganda drive was much broader in scope and was accompanied by a far more radical restructuring of society and deeper penetration of the state into social life. While both regimes aspired to supersede legal-rational methods of administration and failed dismally to do so, Nazi 'polycratic chaos' reflected the regime's parasitic erosion of the state apparatus it inherited, whereas the malfunctioning of the Stalinist apparatus reflected above all the tension inherent in the undemocratic nature of the command economy. Finally, while both regimes were responsible for murder on a mass scale, the Nazi regime executed the great majority of its 7 million civilian victims, whereas some 10 of 11 million Stalinist victims died of attrition, worked into the ground, or fed too little to live, and left to die.

These differences cast doubt on the value of seeking to assess which was the more evil of the two regimes. When they have been weighed in moral terms, the Third Reich has so far generally been convicted of the heavier burden of guilt. In all the controversies over the legitimacy of comparison between the two — that of the Cold War between the 1940s and 1970s, the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, and the post-Soviet debate of the 1990s — those who have pressed the similarity between the two have done so to emphasise the criminality of Stalinism, or to cast doubt on the notion that the Nazi regime was uniquely malign. Subsequent German generations have found it much harder than the descendants of Stalin's generation to come to terms with their horrendous history. This may be because virtually every Soviet family, including the many with members who played a direct role in Stalinist repression or colluded in denunciations, suffered loss at the hands of the regime, thereby in some sense expiating the crime, whereas the proportion of German families who suffered at Hitler's hands was small and his victims were helpless minorities at home and conquered peoples abroad. It may be because it was the Nazi regime which launched the bestial war on the Eastern Front, inflicting horrendous suffering and a death-toll of some 27 million on the USSR. It may be because Nazi rule is judged to have had minimal impact on many long-term trends in German socio-economic development, and to have had an entirely destructive impact on the rest, whereas there has been vigorous debate over 'positive' and 'negative' socio-economic repercussions of the Stalinist industrialization drive and general recognition that the USSR under Stalin played the central role in defeating and destroying the Nazi regime. It may be because, having won the war, the Stalinist regime and its successors were able to launder the documentary records and soften the impact made by the gradual uncovering of Stalinist crimes, whereas those of the fallen Third Reich suddenly stood revealed in all their naked evil.

If the profound differences in the nature of the two regimes are overlooked, it is difficult to resist this kind of moral comparison, or the hovering suggestion that whichever regime is found less culpable cannot have been all that bad. The implication of this study is that, rather than forcing both into the same measuring frame, deeper insight may be gained by identifying the specific crime of each. One regime adopted an ideology that was vicious at root and acted out its monstrous precepts. The other purported to stand for humanism's highest ideals and defiled every one of them.

Notes

[1] **M. Mann**, 'The contradictions of continuous revolution', in ***Stalinism and Nazism, Dictatorships in Comparison*, eds. I. Kershaw and M. Lewin** (Cambridge, 1997), p. 135.

[2] For a classic definition see **C. Friedrich and Z. Brezezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*** (New York, 1966), pp. 9-10.

[3] **I. Kershaw**, 'Working towards the Führer: Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship', in ***Stalinism and Nazism*, eds. Kershaw and Lewin**, p.89.

[4] Quoted in **R. Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow*** (London 1989), p.31, 28. Much of the polemic is available in translation in **R. Piper, ed., *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust***, trans. J. Knowlton and T. Cates (New Jersey, 1993).

[5] The chapter-heading coined by **C. S. Maier** in his analysis of the controversy, ***The Unmasterable Past. History, Holocaust and German National Identity*** (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), pp. 66-99.

[6] **R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*** (Basingstoke, 1997), p.121.

[7] **R. W. Davies, Mark Harrison and S. G. Wheatcroft, eds., *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945*** (Cambridge, 1994), p.270.

[8] **V. R. Berghahn, *Modern Germany. Society, Economy and Politics in the Twentieth Century*** (Cambridge, 1982), p.263.

[9] ***History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*** (Moscow, 1939), p.329

[10] **Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*** (London, 1969), transl. R. Manheim, p. 263

[11] See **I. Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth. Image and Reality in the Third Reich*** (Oxford, 1987)

[12] **Hitler, *Mein Kampf***, p. 389

[13] On Marxism's place in the Western tradition, see **R. N. Berki, *The Genesis of Marxism. Four Lectures*** (London, 1988)

[14] See **M. Burleigh and W. Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*** (Cambridge, 1991) for a powerful account.

[15] This was typified by the leadership's abrupt disavowal of the utopian experiments of the 'cultural revolution' (1928-1931) and reaffirmation instead of relatively traditional structures and patterns of authority in everything from the family and education to the factory floor and the state itself.

[16] **G. Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System*** (Cambridge, 1990), esp. pp. 240-46, 290-306.

[17] See **Kershaw**, 'Working Towards the Führer', pp.88-106; see also **J. Noakes and G. Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945***. Vol. 2 (Exeter, 1984), pp. 203-7.

[18] **E. Bahr**, 'Nazi Cultural Politics: Intentionalism vs. Functionalism', in ***National Socialist Cultural Policy*, ed. G. R. Cuomo** (New York, 1995), p.15; **Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism***, p.466.

[19] See **I. Kershaw**, 'Totalitarianism Revisited: Nazism and Stalinism in Comparative Perspective', ***Tel Aviver Jahrbuch fur deutsche Geschichte***, XXIII (1994), pp. 23-40 and **I. Kershaw**, '"Cumulative Radicalisation" and the Uniqueness of National Socialism', ***Von der Aufgabe der Freiheit. Politische Verantwortung und Burgerliche Gesellschaft im. 19 und 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. C. Jansen, L. Niethammer and B. Weisbrod** (1995), pp. 323-36, to which the discussion in this whole section is heavily indebted.

[20] See **O. H. Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls: The Elections to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly*** (Ithaca, 1989) and **T. Childers, *The Nazi Voter*** (Chapel Hill, 1983).

[21] States of all complexions have generally enjoyed a much greater measure of autonomy where foreign policy is concerned.

[22] **Berghahn, *Modern Germany***, p.131; **R. W. Davies**, 'Forced Labour Under Stalin: The Archive Revelations', ***New Left Review***, 214 (1995), pp. 67-8.

[23] **R. J. Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich*** (Oxford, 1994), pp. 178-204; see table in **P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*** (London, 1988), p. 429.

[24] **S. Salter**, 'Class Harmony or Class Conflict? The Industrial Working Class and the National Socialist Regime 1933-1945', in ***Government, Party and People in Nazi Germany*, ed. J. Noakes** (Exeter, 1980), pp.88-9.

[25] Ibid., p.82; **Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism***, pp.338-46.

[26] **I. Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945*** (Oxford, 1983), pp. 159-79; 334-40; 340-57; **J. Noakes**, 'The Oldenburg Crucifix Struggle of November 1936: A Case Study of Opposition in the Third Reich', in ***The Shaping of the Nazi State*, ed. P. D. Stachura** (London, 1978).

[27] **Burleigh and Wippermann, *Racial State***, pp. 182-97.

[28] **H. Mommsen**, 'National Socialism: Continuity and Change', in ***Fascism. A Reader's Guide*, ed. W. Laqueur** (Harmondsworth, 1979).

[29] **Overy, *War and Economy***, esp. pp. 233-56.

[30] **T. W. Mason**, 'Labour in the Third Reich, 1933-1939' in his ***Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class*** (Cambridge, 1995).

[31] **K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel. History as Ritual*** (Chicago, 1981).

[32] On the limitations of the regime's cultural impact, see **N. Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany. The Führer State 1933-1945***(Oxford, 1993), pp.91-

9; 149-53; **B. Drewniak,** 'The Foundations of Theatre Policy in Nazi Germany', in ***National Socialist Cultural Policy*, ed. Cuomo,** pp.68, 82-3; **M. Travers,** 'Politics and Canonicity: Constructing Literature in the Third Reich', in ***The Attractions of Fascism*, ed. J. Milfull** (New York, 1990).

[33] **M. Lewin,** ***The Making of the Soviet System*** (London, 1985), p. 221.

[34] See **I. Kershaw,** ***The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*** (London 1993), pp. 131-49, for a critique of the thesis advanced by, among others, **D. Schoenbaum,** ***Hitler's Social Revolution*** (London, 1966), that the Nazi regime effected a social revolution.

[35] **S. Davies,** ***Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941*** (Cambridge, 1997); **Kershaw,** ***Popular Opinion.***

[36] **O. Bartov,** ***The Eastern Front, 1941-45, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*** (London, 1985).

[37] **Kershaw,** ***Nazi Dictatorship***, pp. 145-49.

[38] See **S. White,** ***Gorbachev and After*** (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 249-50 and **S. White, G. Gill, D. Slider,** ***The Politics of Transition: Shaping a Post-Soviet Future*** (Cambridge, 1993), p.16, for suggestive opinion surveys *after* the collapse of the CPSU's prestige.

[39] J. Caplan, 'Recreating the Civil Service: Issues and Ideas in the Nazi Regime', in ***Government, Party and People*, ed. Noakes,** pp. 34-56; **S. Fitzpatrick,** 'Cultural Revolution as Class War', in ***Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*, ed. S. Fitzpatrick** (Bloomington, Ind., 1978), esp. pp.21-7.

[40] **S. Fitzpatrick,** ***Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934*** (Cambridge, 1979); ibid., 'Stalin and the Making of a New Elite, 1928-1939', ***Slavic Review***, 38 (1979), pp. 377-402.

[41] See **M. Broszat,** ***The Hitler State*, trans. J. W. Hiden** (London, 1981), for development of the concept.

[42] **O. V. Khlevniuk,** ***1937-y: Stalin, NKVD i sovetskoe obschchestvo*** (Moscow, 1992), pp.78-9.

[43] See **G. T. Rittersporn,** ***Stalinist Simplifications and Soviet Complications. Social Tensions and Political Conflicts in the USSR, 1933-1953*** (Chur, 1991) and **R. T. Manning,** 'The Soviet Economic Crisis of 1936-1940 and the Great Purges', in ***Stalinist Terror. New Perspectives*, eds. J. A. Getty and R. T. Manning** (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 116-41.

[44] **T. Dunmore,** ***The Stalinist Command Economy. The Soviet State Apparatus and Economic Policy, 1945-1953*** (London, 1980).

[45] These figures exclude deaths among Germans deported after the war, as well as POW deaths on both sides. See **S. G. Wheatcroft,** 'The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930-45', ***Europe-Asia Studies***, 48 (1996), pp. 1319-53; **J. A. Getty, G. T. Rittersporn and V. N. Zemskov,** 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years', ***American Historical Review***, 98 (1993), pp. 1017-49; and **A. Nove,** 'Victims of Stalinism: How Many?' and **S. G. Wheatcroft,** 'More light on the scale of repression and excess mortality in the Soviet Union in the 1930s', in ***Stalinist Terror*, eds. Getty and Manning,** pp. 261-74; 275-90.

[46] On intentionalists and functionalists see **T. W. Mason's** seminal article, 'Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism', in his ***Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class.***

[47] Compare **J. A. Getty,** ***Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938*** (Cambridge, 1985) and **R. Conquest,** ***The Great Terror: A Reassessment*** (London, 1990).

[48] **R. Thurston,** ***Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934-1941*** (London, 1996), pp. 59-63.

[49] **S. Fitzpatrick and R. Gellately, eds.,** ***Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History*** (Chicago, 1997).

[50] **M. B. Tauger,** 'The 1932 Harvest and the Famine of 1993', ***Slavic Review***, 50 (1991), pp. 70-89; and see his exchange with **R. Conquest** in ***Slavic Review***, 51 (1992), pp. 192-4, for a persuasive corrective on this issue to **R. Conquest,** ***The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the Terror Famine*** (London, 1986).

[51] **S. Swianiewicz,** ***Forced Labour and Economic Development. An Enquiry into the Experience of Soviet Industrialisation*** (Oxford, 1965); **E. Bacon,** ***The GULAG at War: Stalin's Forced Labour System in the Light of the Archives*** (Basingstoke, 1994).

[52] **Getty, Rittersporn, Zemskov,** 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System', p. 1039.

[53] In British legal terms, 'murder' may still be the appropriate label since, even when the actor does not positively desire to inflict death, a jury may 'infer that it is intended' if it is a virtually certain consequence of the act in question and the actor knows that it is a virtually certain consequence.

About the Author

Edward Acton is Professor of Modern European History at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. He was educated in Africa and at the universities of York and Cambridge. His previous posts have been at the universities of Liverpool and Manchester. He is the author of *Alexander Herzen and the Role of the Intellectual Revolutionary* (CUP, 1979), *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* (London: Arnold, 1990), *Russia: The Tsarist and Soviet Legacy* (London: Longman, 1995), and co-editor of *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914-1921* (London: Arnold, 1997). He is currently writing, with two co-authors, a history of Europe from Napoleon to the Millennium for Penguin.

Cover

Rendezvous by David Low, *Evening Standard*, 20 September 1939.
Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricature, University of Kent, Canterbury.

Detail from poster celebrating the triumphant completion of the First Five Year Plan.
British Museum

NEW APPRECIATIONS

Hitler and Stalin, the malign Tweedledum and Tweedledee of modern European history, are so often bracketed together in A level syllabuses and university courses. But should they be? The comparison is highly charged and implies what many would hotly deny - a general similarity between the two regimes.

Edward Acton takes the reader through the historical controversies raging around the question and briefly sets the scene by looking at the Soviet Union and Germany on the eve of Stalinist and Nazi rule. He examines what each regime put in place of liberal-democratic practice and assesses the extent to which they themselves conformed to a common pattern.

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