

Hannah Arendt

# The Origins of Totalitarianism

NEW EDITION

WITH ADDED PREFACES

# Contents

Preface to the First Edition	vii
Preface to Part One: Antisemitism	xi
Preface to Part Two: Imperialism	xvii
Preface to Part Three: Totalitarianism	xxiii

## PART ONE: ANTISEMITISM

<i>Chapter</i> ONE: Antisemitism as an Outrage to Common Sense	3
TWO: The Jews, the Nation-State, and the Birth of Antisemitism	11
i: <i>The Equivocalities of Emancipation and the Jewish State Banker</i> 11.   ii: <i>Early Antisemitism</i> 28.   iii: <i>The First Antisemitic Parties</i> 35.   iv: <i>Leftist Antisemitism</i> 42.   v: <i>The Golden Age of Security</i> 50.	
THREE: The Jews and Society	54
i: <i>Between Pariah and Parvenu</i> 56.   ii: <i>The Potent Wizard</i> 68.   iii: <i>Between Vice and Crime</i> 79.	
FOUR: The Dreyfus Affair	89
i: <i>The Facts of the Case</i> 89.   ii: <i>The Third Republic and French Jewry</i> 95.   iii: <i>Army and Clergy Against the Republic</i> . 100.   iv: <i>The People and the Mob</i> 106.   v: <i>The Jews and the Dreyfusards</i> 117.   vi: <i>The Pardon and Its Significance</i> 119.	

## PART TWO: IMPERIALISM

- FIVE: The Political Emancipation of the Bourgeoisie 123  
 I: *Expansion and the Nation-State* 124. II: *Power and the Bourgeoisie* 135. III: *The Alliance Between Mob and Capital* 147.
- SIX: Race-Thinking Before Racism 158  
 I: *A "Race" of Aristocrats Against a "Nation" of Citizens* 161. II: *Race Unity as a Substitute for National Emancipation* 165. III: *The New Key to History* 170. IV: *The "Rights of Englishmen" vs. the Rights of Men* 175.
- SEVEN: Race and Bureaucracy 185  
 I: *The Phantom World of the Dark Continent* 186. II: *Gold and Race* 197. III: *The Imperialist Character* 207.
- EIGHT: Continental Imperialism: the Pan-Movements 222  
 I: *Tribal Nationalism* 227. II: *The Inheritance of Lawlessness* 243. III: *Party and Movement* 250.
- NINE: The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man 267  
 I: *The "Nation of Minorities" and the Stateless People* 269. II: *The Perplexities of the Rights of Man* 290.

## PART THREE: TOTALITARIANISM

- TEN: A Classless Society 305  
 I: *The Masses* 305. II: *The Temporary Alliance Between the Mob and the Elite* 326.
- ELEVEN: The Totalitarian Movement 341  
 I: *Totalitarian Propaganda* 341. II: *Totalitarian Organization* 364.

CONTENTS	xliii
TWELVE: Totalitarianism in Power	389
i: <i>The So-called Totalitarian State</i> 392.   ii: <i>The Secret Police</i> 419.   iii: <i>Total Domination</i> 437.	
THIRTEEN: Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government	460
Bibliography	483
Index	509

## CHAPTER TEN: A Classless Society

### I: *The Masses*

NOTHING is more characteristic of the totalitarian movements in general and of the quality of fame of their leaders in particular than the startling swiftness with which they are forgotten and the startling ease with which they can be replaced. What Stalin accomplished laboriously over many years through bitter factional struggles and vast concessions at least to the name of his predecessor—namely, to legitimate himself as Lenin's political heir—Stalin's successors attempted to do without concessions to the name of their predecessor, even though Stalin had thirty years' time and could manipulate a propaganda apparatus, unknown in Lenin's day, to immortalize his name. The same is true for Hitler, who during his lifetime exercised a fascination to which allegedly no one was immune,<sup>1</sup> and who

<sup>1</sup> The "magic spell" that Hitler cast over his listeners has been acknowledged many times, latterly by the publishers of *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, Bonn, 1951 (*Hitler's Table Talks*, American edition, New York, 1953; quotations from the original German edition). This fascination—"the strange magnetism that radiated from Hitler in such a compelling manner"—rested indeed "on the fanatical belief of this man in himself" (introduction by Gerhard Ritter, p. 14), on his pseudo-authoritative judgments about everything under the sun, and on the fact that his opinions—whether they dealt with the harmful effects of smoking or with Napoleon's policies—could always be fitted into an all-encompassing ideology.

Fascination is a social phenomenon, and the fascination Hitler exercised over his environment must be understood in terms of the particular company he kept. Society is always prone to accept a person offhand for what he pretends to be, so that a crackpot posing as a genius always has a certain chance to be believed. In modern society, with its characteristic lack of discerning judgment, this tendency is strengthened, so that someone who not only holds opinions but also presents them in a tone of unshakable conviction will not so easily forfeit his prestige, no matter how many times he has been demonstrably wrong. Hitler, who knew the modern chaos of opinions from first-hand experience, discovered that the helpless seesawing between various opinions and "the conviction . . . that everything is balderdash" (p. 281) could best be avoided by adhering to *one* of the many current opinions with "unbending consistency." The hair-raising arbitrariness of such fanaticism holds great fascination for society because for the duration of the social gathering it is freed from the chaos of opinions that it constantly generates. This "gift" of fascination, however, has only social relevance; it is so prominent in the *Tischgespräche* because here Hitler played the game of society and was not speaking to his own kind but to the generals of the Wehrmacht, all of whom more or less belonged to "society." To believe that Hitler's successes were based on his "powers of fascination" is altogether erroneous; with those qualities alone he would have never advanced beyond the role of a prominent figure in the salons.

after his defeat and death is today so thoroughly forgotten that he scarcely plays any further role even among the neo-Fascist and neo-Nazi groups of postwar Germany. This impermanence no doubt has something to do with the proverbial fickleness of the masses and the fame that rests on them; more likely, it can be traced to the perpetual-motion mania of totalitarian movements which can remain in power only so long as they keep moving and set everything around them in motion. Therefore, in a certain sense this very impermanence is a rather flattering testimonial to the dead leaders insofar as they succeeded in contaminating their subjects with the specifically totalitarian virus; for if there is such a thing as a totalitarian personality or mentality, this extraordinary adaptability and absence of continuity are no doubt its outstanding characteristics. Hence it might be a mistake to assume that the inconstancy and forgetfulness of the masses signify that they are cured of the totalitarian delusion, which is occasionally identified with the Hitler or Stalin cult; the opposite might well be true.

It would be a still more serious mistake to forget, because of this impermanence, that the totalitarian regimes, so long as they are in power, and the totalitarian leaders, so long as they are alive, "command and rest upon mass support" up to the end.<sup>2</sup> Hitler's rise to power was legal in terms of majority rule<sup>3</sup> and neither he nor Stalin could have maintained the leadership of large populations, survived many interior and exterior crises, and braved the numerous dangers of relentless intra-party struggles if they had not had the confidence of the masses. Neither the Moscow trials nor the liquidation of the Röhm faction would have been possible if these masses had not supported Stalin and Hitler. The widespread belief that Hitler was simply an agent of German industrialists and that Stalin was victorious in the succession struggle after Lenin's death only through a sinister conspiracy are both legends which can be refuted by many facts but above all by the leaders' indisputable popularity.<sup>4</sup> Nor can their popularity be attributed to the victory of masterful and lying propaganda over ignorance and stupidity.

<sup>2</sup> See the illuminating remarks of Carlton J. H. Hayes on "The Novelty of Totalitarianism in the History of Western Civilization," in *Symposium on the Totalitarian State*, 1939. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1940, Vol. LXXXII.

<sup>3</sup> This was indeed "the first large revolution in history that was carried out by applying the existing formal code of law at the moment of seizing power" (Hans Frank, *Recht und Verwaltung*, 1939, p. 8).

<sup>4</sup> The best study of Hitler and his career is the new Hitler biography by Alan Bullock, *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny*, London, 1952. In the English tradition of political biographies it makes meticulous use of all available source material and gives a comprehensive picture of the contemporary political background. By this publication the excellent books of Konrad Heiden—primarily *Der Fuehrer: Hitler's Rise to Power*, Boston, 1944—have been superseded in their details although they remain important for the general interpretation of events. For Stalin's career, Boris Souvarine, *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*, New York, 1939, is still a standard work. Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*, New York and London, 1949, is indispensable for its rich documentary material and great insight into the internal struggles of the Bolshevik party; it suffers from an interpretation which likens Stalin to—Cromwell, Napoleon, and Robespierre.

For the propaganda of totalitarian movements which precede and accompany totalitarian regimes is invariably as frank as it is mendacious, and would-be totalitarian rulers usually start their careers by boasting of their past crimes and carefully outlining their future ones. The Nazis "were convinced that evil-doing in our time has a morbid force of attraction."<sup>5</sup> Bolshevik assurances inside and outside Russia that they do not recognize ordinary moral standards have become a mainstay of Communist propaganda, and experience has proved time and again that the propaganda value of evil deeds and general contempt for moral standards is independent of mere self-interest, supposedly the most powerful psychological factor in politics.

The attraction of evil and crime for the mob mentality is nothing new. It has always been true that the mob will greet "deeds of violence with the admiring remark: it may be mean but it is very clever."<sup>6</sup> The disturbing factor in the success of totalitarianism is rather the true selflessness of its adherents: it may be understandable that a Nazi or Bolshevik will not be shaken in his conviction by crimes against people who do not belong to the movement or are even hostile to it; but the amazing fact is that neither is he likely to waver when the monster begins to devour its own children and not even if he becomes a victim of persecution himself, if he is framed and condemned, if he is purged from the party and sent to a forced-labor or a concentration camp. On the contrary, to the wonder of the whole civilized world, he may even be willing to help in his own prosecution and frame his own death sentence if only his status as a member of the movement is not touched.<sup>7</sup> It would be naïve to consider this stubbornness of conviction which outlives all actual experiences and cancels all immediate self-interest a simple expression of fervent idealism. Idealism, foolish or heroic, always springs from some individual decision and conviction and is subject to experience and argument.<sup>8</sup> The fanaticism of totalitarian move-

<sup>5</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The Totalitarian Enemy*, London, 1940, p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from the German edition of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," *Die Zionistischen Protokolle mit einem Vor- und Nachwort von Theodor Fritsch*, 1924, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> This, to be sure, is a specialty of the Russian brand of totalitarianism. It is interesting to note that in the early trial of foreign engineers in the Soviet Union, Communist sympathies were already used as an argument for self-accusation: "All the time the authorities insisted on my admitting having committed acts of sabotage I had never done. I refused. I was told: 'If you are in favour of the Soviet Government, as you pretend you are, prove it by your actions; the Government needs your confession.'" Reported by Anton Ciliga, *The Russian Enigma*, London, 1940, p. 153.

A theoretical justification for this behavior was given by Trotsky: "We can only be right with and by the Party, for history has provided no other way of being in the right. The English have a saying, 'My country, right or wrong.' . . . We have much better historical justification in saying whether it is right or wrong in certain individual concrete cases, it is my party" (Souvarine, *op. cit.*, p. 361).

On the other hand, the Red Army officers who did not belong to the movement had to be tried behind closed doors.

<sup>8</sup> The Nazi author Andreas Pfennig explicitly rejects the notion that the SA were fighting for an "ideal" or were prompted by an "idealistic experience." Their "basic

ments, contrary to all forms of idealism, breaks down the moment the movement leaves its fanaticized followers in the lurch, killing in them any remaining conviction that might have survived the collapse of the movement itself.<sup>9</sup> But within the organizational framework of the movement, so long as it holds together, the fanaticized members can be reached by neither experience nor argument; identification with the movement and total conformism seem to have destroyed the very capacity for experience, even if it be as extreme as torture or the fear of death.

The totalitarian movements aim at and succeed in organizing masses—not classes, like the old interest parties of the Continental nation-states; not citizens with opinions about, and interests in, the handling of public affairs, like the parties of Anglo-Saxon countries. While all political groups depend upon proportionate strength, the totalitarian movements depend on the sheer force of numbers to such an extent that totalitarian regimes seem impossible, even under otherwise favorable circumstances, in countries with relatively small populations.<sup>10</sup> After the first World War, a deeply anti-democratic, productatorial wave of semitotalitarian and totalitarian movements swept Europe; Fascist movements spread from Italy to nearly all Central and Eastern European countries (the Czech part of Czechoslovakia was one of the notable exceptions); yet even Mussolini, who was so fond of the term “totalitarian state,” did not attempt to establish a full-fledged totalitarian regime<sup>11</sup> and contented himself with dictatorship and one-party

experience came into existence in the course of the struggle.” “Gemeinschaft und Staatswissenschaft,” in *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, Band 96. Translation quoted from Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State*, New York and London, 1941, p. 192. From the extensive literature issued in pamphlet form by the main indoctrination center (*Hauptamt-Schulungsamt*) of the SS, it is quite evident that the word “idealism” has been studiously avoided. Not idealism was demanded of SS members, but “utter logical consistency in all questions of ideology and the ruthless pursuit of the political struggle” (Werner Best, *Die deutsche Polizei*, 1941, p. 99).

<sup>9</sup> In this respect postwar Germany offers many illuminating examples. It was astonishing enough that American Negro troops were by no means received with hostility, in spite of the massive racial indoctrination undertaken by the Nazis. But equally startling was “the fact that the Waffen-SS in the last days of German resistance against the Allies did not fight ‘to the last man’” and that this special Nazi combat unit “after the enormous sacrifices of the preceding years, which far exceeded the proportionate losses of the Wehrmacht, in the last few weeks acted like any unit drawn from the ranks of civilians, and bowed to the hopelessness of the situation” (Karl O. Paetel, “Die SS,” in *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, January, 1954).

<sup>10</sup> The Moscow-dominated Eastern European governments rule for the sake of Moscow and act as agents of the Comintern; they are examples of the spread of the Moscow-directed totalitarian movement, not of native developments. The only exception seems to be Tito of Yugoslavia, who may have broken with Moscow because he realized that the Russian-inspired totalitarian methods would cost him a heavy percentage of Yugoslavia’s population.

<sup>11</sup> Proof of the nontotalitarian nature of the Fascist dictatorship is the surprisingly small number and the comparatively mild sentences meted out to political offenders. During the particularly active years from 1926 to 1932, the special tribunals for political offenders pronounced 7 death sentences, 257 sentences of 10 or more years imprisonment, 1,360 under 10 years, and sentenced many more to exile; 12,000, more-



rule. Similar nontotalitarian dictatorships sprang up in prewar Rumania, Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary, Portugal and Franco Spain. The Nazis, who had an unflinching instinct for such differences, used to comment contemptuously on the shortcomings of their Fascist allies while their genuine admiration for the Bolshevik regime in Russia (and the Communist Party in Germany) was matched and checked only by their contempt for Eastern European races.<sup>12</sup> The only man for whom Hitler had "unqualified respect" was "Stalin the genius,"<sup>13</sup> and while in the case of Stalin and the Russian

over, were arrested and found innocent, a procedure quite inconceivable under conditions of Nazi or Bolshevik terror. See E. Kohn-Bramstedt, *Dictatorship and Political Police: The Technique of Control by Fear*, London, 1945, pp. 51 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Nazi political theorists have always emphatically stated that "Mussolini's 'ethical state' and Hitler's 'ideological state' [*Weltanschauungsstaat*] cannot be mentioned in the same breath" (Gottfried Neesse, "Die verfassungsrechtliche Gestaltung der Ein-Partei," in *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, 1938, Band 98).

Goebbels on the difference between Fascism and National Socialism: "[Fascism] is . . . nothing like National Socialism. While the latter goes deep down to the roots, Fascism is only a superficial thing" (*The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, ed. by Louis Lochner, New York, 1948, p. 71). "[The Duce] is not a revolutionary like the Führer or Stalin. He is so bound to his own Italian people that he lacks the broad qualities of a worldwide revolutionary and insurrectionist" (*ibid.*, p. 468).

Himmler expressed the same opinion in a speech delivered in 1943 at a Conference of Commanding Officers: "Fascism and National Socialism are two fundamentally different things, . . . there is absolutely no comparison between Fascism and National Socialism as spiritual, ideological movements." See Kohn-Bramstedt, *op. cit.*, Appendix A.

Hitler recognized in the early twenties the affinity between the Nazi and the Communist movements: "In our movement the two extremes come together: the Communists from the Left and the officers and the students from the Right. These two have always been the most active elements. . . . The Communists were the idealists of Socialism. . . ." See Heiden, *op. cit.*, p. 147. Röhm, the chief of the SA, also repeated a current opinion when he wrote in the late twenties: "Many things are between us and the Communists, but we respect the sincerity of their conviction and their willingness to bring sacrifices for their own cause, and this unites us with them" (Ernst Röhm, *Die Geschichte eines Hochverrätters*, 1933, Volksausgabe, p. 273).

During the last war, the Nazis more readily recognized the Russians as their peers than any other nation. Hitler, speaking in May, 1943, at a conference of the Reichsleiter and Gauleiter, "began with the fact that in this war bourgeoisie and revolutionary states are facing each other. It has been an easy thing for us to knock out the bourgeois states, for they were quite inferior to us in their upbringing and attitude. Countries with an ideology have an edge on bourgeois states. . . . [In the East] we met an opponent who also sponsors an ideology, even though a wrong one. . . ." (*Goebbels Diaries*, p. 355).—This estimate was based on ideological, not on military considerations. Gottfried Neesse, *Partei und Staat*, 1936, gave the official version of the movement's struggle for power when he wrote: "For us the united front of the *system* extends from the German National People's Party [*i.e.*, the extreme Right] to the Social Democrats. The Communist Party was an enemy outside of the *system*. During the first months of 1933, therefore, when the doom of the *system* was already sealed, we still had to fight a decisive battle against the Communist Party" (p. 76).

<sup>13</sup> *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, p. 113. There we also find numerous examples showing that, contrary to certain postwar legends, Hitler never intended to defend "the West" against Bolshevism but always remained ready to join "the Reds" for the destruction of the West, even in the middle of the struggle against Soviet Russia. See especially pp. 95, 108, 113 ff., 158, 385.

regime we do not have (and presumably never will have) the rich documentary material that is available for Germany, we nevertheless know since Khrushchev's speech before the Twentieth Party Congress that Stalin trusted only one man and that was Hitler.<sup>14</sup>

The point is that in all these smaller European countries nontotalitarian dictatorships were preceded by totalitarian movements, so that it appeared that totalitarianism was too ambitious an aim, that although it had served well enough to organize the masses until the movement seized power, the absolute size of the country then forced the would-be totalitarian ruler of masses into the more familiar patterns of class or party dictatorship. The truth is that these countries simply did not control enough human material to allow for total domination and its inherent great losses in population.<sup>15</sup> Without much hope for the conquest of more heavily populated territories, the tyrants in these small countries were forced into a certain old-fashioned moderation lest they lose whatever people they had to rule. This is also why Nazism, up to the outbreak of the war and its expansion over Europe, lagged so far behind its Russian counterpart in consistency and ruthlessness; even the German people were not numerous enough to allow for the full development of this newest form of government. Only if Germany had won the war would she have known a fully developed totalitarian rulership, and the sacrifices this would have entailed not only for the "inferior races" but for the Germans themselves can be gleaned and evaluated from the legacy of Hitler's plans.<sup>16</sup> In any event it was only during the war, after the conquests

<sup>14</sup> We now know that Stalin was warned repeatedly of the imminent attack of Hitler on the Soviet Union. Even when the Soviet military attaché in Berlin informed him of the day of the Nazi attack, Stalin refused to believe that Hitler would violate the treaty. (See Khrushchev's "Speech on Stalin," text released by the State Department, *New York Times*, June 5, 1956.)

<sup>15</sup> The following information reported by Souvarine, *op. cit.*, p. 669, seems to be an outstanding illustration: "According to W. Krivitsky, whose excellent confidential source of information is the GPU: 'Instead of the 171 million inhabitants calculated for 1937, only 145 million were found; thus nearly 30 million people in the USSR are missing.'" And this, it should be kept in mind, occurred after the dekulakization of the early thirties which had cost an estimated 8 million human lives. See *Communism in Action*. U. S. Government, Washington, 1946, p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> A large part of these plans, based on the original documents, can be found in Léon Poliakov's *Bréviaire de la Haine*, Paris, 1951, chapter 8 (American edition under the title *Harvest of Hate*, Syracuse, 1954; we quote from the original French edition), but only insofar as they referred to the extermination of non-Germanic peoples, above all those of Slavic origin. That the Nazi engine of destruction would not have stopped even before the German people is evident from a Reich health bill drafted by Hitler himself. Here he proposes to "isolate" from the rest of the population all families with cases of heart or lung ailments among them, their physical liquidation being of course the next step in this program. This as well as several other interesting projects for a victorious postwar Germany are contained in a circular letter to the district leaders (Kreisleiter) of Hesse-Nassau in the form of a report on a discussion at the Fuehrer's headquarters concerning "measures that before . . . and after victorious termination of the war" should be adopted. See the collection of documents in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Washington, 1946, *et seq.*, Vol. VII, p. 175. In the same context belongs the planned enactment of an "over-all alien legislation," by

in the East furnished large masses of people and made the extermination camps possible, that Germany was able to establish a truly totalitarian rule. (Conversely, the chances for totalitarian rule are frighteningly good in the lands of traditional Oriental despotism, in India and China, where there is almost inexhaustible material to feed the power-accumulating and man-destroying machinery of total domination, and where, moreover, the mass man's typical feeling of superfluosity—an entirely new phenomenon in Europe, the concomitant of mass unemployment and the population growth of the last 150 years—has been prevalent for centuries in the contempt for the value of human life.) Moderation or less murderous methods of rule were hardly attributable to the governments' fear of popular rebellion; depopulation in their own country was a much more serious threat. Only where great masses are superfluous or can be spared without disastrous results of depopulation is totalitarian rule, as distinguished from a totalitarian movement, at all possible.

Totalitarian movements are possible wherever there are masses who for one reason or another have acquired the appetite for political organization. Masses are not held together by a consciousness of common interest and they lack that specific class articulateness which is expressed in determined, limited, and obtainable goals. The term masses applies only where we deal with people who either because of sheer numbers, or indifference, or a combination of both, cannot be integrated into any organization based on common interest, into political parties or municipal governments or professional organizations or trade unions. Potentially, they exist in every country and form the majority of those large numbers of neutral, politically indifferent people who never join a party and hardly ever go to the polls.

It was characteristic of the rise of the Nazi movement in Germany and of the Communist movements in Europe after 1930<sup>17</sup> that they recruited their members from this mass of apparently indifferent people whom all other parties had given up as too apathetic or too stupid for their attention. The result was that the majority of their membership consisted of

means of which the "institutional authority" of the police—namely, to ship persons innocent of any offenses to concentration camps—was to be legalized and expanded. (See Paul Werner, SS-Standartenführer, in *Deutsches Jugendrecht*, Heft 4, 1944.)

In connection with this "negative population policy," which in its aim at extermination decidedly matches the Bolshevik party purges, it is important to remember that "in this process of selection there can never be a standstill" (Himmler, "Die Schutzstaffel," in *Grundlagen, Aufbau und Wirtschaftsordnung des nationalsozialistischen Staates*, No. 7b). "The struggle of the Fuehrer and his party was a hitherto unattained selection. . . . This selection and this struggle were ostensibly accomplished on January 30, 1933. . . . The Fuehrer and his old guard knew that the real struggle had just begun" (Robert Ley, *Der Weg zur Ordensburg*, o.D. Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront. "Not available for sale").

<sup>17</sup> F. Borkenau describes the situation correctly: "The Communists had only very modest successes when they tried to win influence among the masses of the working class; their mass basis, therefore, if they had it at all, moved more and more away from the proletariat" ("Die neue Komintern," in *Der Monat*, Berlin, 1949, Heft 4).

people who never before had appeared on the political scene. This permitted the introduction of entirely new methods into political propaganda, and indifference to the arguments of political opponents; these movements not only placed themselves outside and against the party system as a whole, they found a membership that had never been reached, never been "spoiled" by the party system. Therefore they did not need to refute opposing arguments and consistently preferred methods which ended in death rather than persuasion, which spelled terror rather than conviction. They presented disagreements as invariably originating in deep natural, social, or psychological sources beyond the control of the individual and therefore beyond the power of reason. This would have been a shortcoming only if they had sincerely entered into competition with other parties; it was not if they were sure of dealing with people who had reason to be equally hostile to all parties.

The success of totalitarian movements among the masses meant the end of two illusions of democratically ruled countries in general and of European nation-states and their party system in particular. The first was that the people in its majority had taken an active part in government and that each individual was in sympathy with one's own or somebody else's party. On the contrary, the movements showed that the politically neutral and indifferent masses could easily be the majority in a democratically ruled country, that therefore a democracy could function according to rules which are actively recognized by only a minority. The second democratic illusion exploded by the totalitarian movements was that these politically indifferent masses did not matter, that they were truly neutral and constituted no more than the inarticulate backward setting for the political life of the nation. Now they made apparent what no other organ of public opinion had ever been able to show, namely, that democratic government had rested as much on the silent approbation and tolerance of the indifferent and inarticulate sections of the people as on the articulate and visible institutions and organizations of the country. Thus when the totalitarian movements invaded Parliament with their contempt for parliamentary government, they merely appeared inconsistent: actually, they succeeded in convincing the people at large that parliamentary majorities were spurious and did not necessarily correspond to the realities of the country, thereby undermining the self-respect and the confidence of governments which also believed in majority rule rather than in their constitutions.

It has frequently been pointed out that totalitarian movements use and abuse democratic freedoms in order to abolish them. This is not just devilish cleverness on the part of the leaders or childish stupidity on the part of the masses. Democratic freedoms may be based on the equality of all citizens before the law; yet they acquire their meaning and function organically only where the citizens belong to and are represented by groups or **form a social and political hierarchy**. The breakdown of the class system, the only social and political stratification of the European nation-states,

certainly was "one of the most dramatic events in recent German history"<sup>18</sup> and as favorable to the rise of Nazism as the absence/of social stratification in Russia's immense rural population (this "great flaccid body destitute of political education, almost inaccessible to ideas capable of ennobling action"<sup>19</sup>) was to the Bolshevik overthrow of the democratic Kerensky government. Conditions in pre-Hitler Germany are indicative of the dangers implicit in the development of the Western part of the world since, with the end of the second World War, the same dramatic event of a breakdown of the class system repeated itself in almost all European countries, while events in Russia clearly indicate the direction which the inevitable revolutionary changes in Asia may take. Practically speaking, it will make little difference whether totalitarian movements adopt the pattern of Nazism or Bolshevism, organize the masses in the name of race or class, pretend to follow the laws of life and nature or of dialectics and economics.

Indifference to public affairs, neutrality on political issues, are in themselves no sufficient cause for the rise of totalitarian movements. The competitive and acquisitive society of the bourgeoisie had produced apathy and even hostility toward public life not only, and not even primarily, in the social strata which were exploited and excluded from active participation in the rule of the country, but first of all in its own class. The long period of false modesty, when the bourgeoisie was content with being the dominating class in society without aspiring to political rule, which it gladly left to the aristocracy, was followed by the imperialist era, during which the bourgeoisie grew increasingly hostile to existing national institutions and began to claim and to organize itself for the exercise of political power. Both the early apathy and the later demand for monopolistic dictatorial direction of the nation's foreign affairs had their roots in a way and philosophy of life so insistently and exclusively centered on the individual's success or failure in ruthless competition that a citizen's duties and responsibilities could only be felt to be a needless drain on his limited time and energy. These bourgeois attitudes are very useful for those forms of dictatorship in which a "strong man" takes upon himself the troublesome responsibility for the conduct of public affairs; they are a positive hindrance to totalitarian movements which can tolerate bourgeois individualism no more than any other kind of individualism. The apathetic sections of a bourgeois-dominated society, no matter how unwilling they may be to assume the responsibilities of citizens, keep their personalities intact if only because without them they could hardly expect to survive the competitive struggle for life.

The decisive differences between nineteenth-century mob organizations and twentieth-century mass movements are difficult to perceive because the modern totalitarian leaders do not differ much in psychology and mentality from the earlier mob leaders, whose moral standards and political devices so closely resembled those of the bourgeoisie. Yet, insofar as individualism

<sup>18</sup> William Ebenstein, *The Nazi State*, New York, 1943, p. 247.

<sup>19</sup> As Maxim Gorky had described them. See Souvarine, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

characterized the bourgeoisie's as well as the mob's attitude to life, the totalitarian movements can rightly claim that they were the first truly antibourgeois parties; none of their nineteenth-century predecessors, neither the Society of the 10th of December which helped Louis Napoleon into power, the butcher brigades of the Dreyfus Affair, the Black Hundreds of the Russian pogroms, nor the pan-movements, ever involved their members to the point of complete loss of individual claims and ambition, or had ever realized that an organization could succeed in extinguishing individual identity permanently and not just for the moment of collective heroic action.

The relationship between the bourgeois-dominated class society and the masses which emerged from its breakdown is not the same as the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the mob which was a by-product of capitalist production. The masses share with the mob only one characteristic, namely, that both stand outside all social ramifications and normal political representation. The masses do not inherit, as the mob does—albeit in a perverted form—the standards and attitudes of the dominating class, but reflect and somehow pervert the standards and attitudes toward public affairs of all classes. The standards of the mass man were determined not only and not even primarily by the specific class to which he had once belonged, but rather by all-pervasive influences and convictions which were tacitly and inarticulately shared by all classes of society alike.

Membership in a class, although looser and never as inevitably determined by social origin as in the orders and estates of feudal society, was generally by birth, and only extraordinary gifts or luck could change it. Social status was decisive for the individual's participation in politics, and except in cases of national emergency when he was supposed to act only as a *national*, regardless of his class or party membership, he never was directly confronted with public affairs or felt directly responsible for their conduct. The rise of a class to greater importance in the community was always accompanied by the education and training of a certain number of its members for politics as a job, for paid (or, if they could afford it, unpaid) service in the government and representation of the class in Parliament. That the majority of people remained outside all party or other political organization was not important to anyone, and no truer for one particular class than another. In other words, membership in a class, its limited group obligations and traditional attitudes toward government, prevented the growth of a citizenry that felt individually and personally responsible for the rule of the country. This apolitical character of the nation-state's populations came to light only when the class system broke down and carried with it the whole fabric of visible and invisible threads which bound the people to the body politic.

The breakdown of the class system meant automatically the breakdown of the party system, chiefly because these parties, being interest parties, could no longer represent class interests. Their continuance was of some importance to the members of former classes who hoped against hope to regain their old social status and who stuck together not because they had

common interests any longer but because they hoped to restore them. The parties, consequently, became more and more psychological and ideological in their propaganda, more and more apologetic and nostalgic in their political approach. They had lost, moreover, without being aware of it, those neutral supporters who had never been interested in politics because they felt that no parties existed to take care of their interests. So that the first signs of the breakdown of the Continental party system were not the desertion of old party members, but the failure to recruit members from the younger generation, and the loss of the silent consent and support of the unorganized masses who suddenly shed their apathy and went wherever they saw an opportunity to voice their new violent opposition.

The fall of protecting class walls transformed the slumbering majorities behind all parties into one great unorganized, structureless mass of furious individuals who had nothing in common except their vague apprehension that the hopes of party members were doomed, that, consequently, the most respected, articulate and representative members of the community were fools and that all the powers that be were not so much evil as they were equally stupid and fraudulent. It was of no great consequence for the birth of this new terrifying negative solidarity that the unemployed worker hated the status quo and the powers that be in the form of the Social Democratic Party, the expropriated small property owner in the form of a centrist or rightist party, and former members of the middle and upper classes in the form of the traditional extreme right. The number of this mass of generally dissatisfied and desperate men increased rapidly in Germany and Austria after the first World War, when inflation and unemployment added to the disrupting consequences of military defeat; they existed in great proportion in all the succession states, and they have supported the extreme movements in France and Italy since the second World War.

In this atmosphere of the breakdown of class society the psychology of the European mass man developed. The fact that with monotonous but abstract uniformity the same fate had befallen a mass of individuals did not prevent their judging themselves in terms of individual failure or the world in terms of specific injustice. This self-centered bitterness, however, although repeated again and again in individual isolation, was not a common bond despite its tendency to extinguish individual differences, because it was based on no common interest, economic or social or political. Self-centeredness, therefore, went hand in hand with a decisive weakening of the instinct for self-preservation. Selflessness in the sense that oneself does not matter, the feeling of being expendable, was no longer the expression of individual idealism but a mass phenomenon. The old adage that the poor and oppressed have nothing to lose but their chains no longer applied to the mass men, for they lost much more than the chains of misery when they lost interest in their own well-being: the source of all the worries and cares which make human life troublesome and anguished was gone. Compared

with their nonmaterialism, a Christian monk looks like a man absorbed in worldly affairs. Himmler, who knew so well the mentality of those whom he organized, described not only his SS-men, but the large strata from which he recruited them, when he said they were not interested in "everyday problems" but only "in ideological questions of importance for decades and centuries, so that the man . . . knows he is working for a great task which occurs but once in 2,000 years."<sup>20</sup> The gigantic massing of individuals produced a mentality which, like Cecil Rhodes some forty years before, thought in continents and felt in centuries.

Eminent European scholars and statesmen had predicted, from the early nineteenth century onward, the rise of the mass man and the coming of a mass age. A whole literature on mass behavior and mass psychology had demonstrated and popularized the wisdom, so familiar to the ancients, of the affinity between democracy and dictatorship, between mob rule and tyranny. They had prepared certain politically conscious and overconscious sections of the Western educated world for the emergence of demagogues, for gullibility, superstition, and brutality. Yet, while all these predictions in a sense came true, they lost much of their significance in view of such unexpected and unpredicted phenomena as the radical loss of self-interest,<sup>21</sup> the cynical or bored indifference in the face of death or other personal catastrophes, the passionate inclination toward the most abstract notions as guides for life, and the general contempt for even the most obvious rules of common sense.

The masses, contrary to prediction, did not result from growing equality of condition, from the spread of general education and its inevitable lowering of standards and popularization of content. (America, the classical land of equality of condition and of general education with all its shortcomings, knows less of the modern psychology of masses than perhaps any other country in the world.) It soon became apparent that highly cultured people were particularly attracted to mass movements and that, generally, highly differentiated individualism and sophistication did not prevent, indeed sometimes encouraged, the self-abandonment into the mass for which mass movements provided. Since the obvious fact that individualization and cultivation do not prevent the formation of mass attitudes was so unexpected, it has frequently been blamed upon the morbidity or nihilism of the modern intelligentsia, upon a supposedly typical intellectual self-hatred, upon the spirit's "hostility to life" and antagonism to vitality. Yet, the much-slandered intellectuals were only the most illustrative example and the most articulate spokesmen for a much more general phenomenon. Social atomization and extreme individualization preceded the mass movements

<sup>20</sup> Heinrich Himmler's speech on "Organization and Obligation of the SS and the Police," published in *National-politischer Lehrgang der Wehrmacht vom 15-23. Januar 1937*. Translation quoted from *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*. Office of the United States Chief of Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality. U. S. Government, Washington, 1946, IV, 616 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Gustave Lebon, *La Psychologie des Foules*, 1895, mentions the peculiar selflessness of the masses. See chapter ii, paragraph 5.



which, much more easily and earlier than they did the sociable, non-individualistic members of the traditional parties, attracted the completely unorganized, the typical "nonjoiners" who for individualistic reasons always had refused to recognize social links or obligations.

The truth is that the masses grew out of the fragments of a highly atomized society whose competitive structure and concomitant loneliness of the individual had been held in check only through membership in a class. The chief characteristic of the mass man is not brutality and backwardness, but his isolation and lack of normal social relationships. Coming from the class-ridden society of the nation-state, whose cracks had been cemented with nationalistic sentiment, it is only natural that these masses, in the first helplessness of their new experience, have tended toward an especially violent nationalism, to which mass leaders have yielded against their own instincts and purposes for purely demagogic reasons.<sup>22</sup>

Neither tribal nationalism nor rebellious nihilism is characteristic of or ideologically appropriate to the masses as they were to the mob. But the most gifted mass leaders of our time have still risen from the mob rather than from the masses.<sup>23</sup> Hitler's biography reads like a textbook example in this respect, and the point about Stalin is that he comes from the conspiratory apparatus of the Bolshevik party with its specific mixture of outcasts and revolutionaries. Hitler's early party, almost exclusively composed of misfits, failures, and adventurers, indeed represented the "armed bohemians"<sup>24</sup> who were only the reverse side of bourgeois society and whom, consequently, the German bourgeoisie should have been able to use successfully for its own purposes. Actually, the bourgeoisie was as much taken in by the Nazis as was the Röhm-Schleicher faction in the Reichswehr, which also thought that Hitler, whom they had used as a stool-pigeon, or the SA, which they had used for militaristic propaganda and paramilitary training, would act as their agents and help in the establishment of a military dictatorship.<sup>25</sup> Both considered the Nazi movement in

<sup>22</sup> The founders of the Nazi party referred to it occasionally even before Hitler took over as a "party of the Left." An incident which occurred after the parliamentary elections of 1932 is also interesting: "Gregor Strasser bitterly pointed out to his Leader that before the elections the National Socialists in the Reichstag might have formed a majority with the Center; now this possibility was ended, the two parties were less than half of parliament; . . . But with the Communists they still had a majority, Hitler replied; no one can govern against us" (Heiden, *op. cit.*, pp. 94 and 495, respectively).

<sup>23</sup> Compare Carlton J. H. Hayes, *op. cit.*, who does not differentiate between the mob and the masses, thinks that totalitarian dictators "have come from the masses rather than from the classes."

<sup>24</sup> This is the central theory of K. Heiden, whose analyses of the Nazi movement are still outstanding. "From the wreckage of dead classes arises the new class of intellectuals, and at the head march the most ruthless, those with the least to lose, hence the strongest: the armed bohemians, to whom war is home and civil war fatherland" (*op. cit.*, p. 100).

<sup>25</sup> The plot between Reichswehr General Schleicher and Röhm, the chief of the SA, consisted of a plan to bring all paramilitary formations under the military authority of the Reichswehr, which at once would have added millions to the German

their own terms, in terms of the political philosophy of the mob,<sup>26</sup> and overlooked the independent, spontaneous support given the new mob leaders by masses as well as the mob leaders' genuine talents for creating new forms of organization. The mob as leader of these masses was no longer the agent of the bourgeoisie or of anyone else except the masses.

That totalitarian movements depended less on the structurelessness of a mass society than on the specific conditions of an atomized and individualized mass, can best be seen in a comparison of Nazism and Bolshevism which began in their respective countries under very different circumstances. To change Lenin's revolutionary dictatorship into full totalitarian rule, Stalin had first to create artificially that atomized society which had been prepared for the Nazis in Germany by historical circumstances.

The October Revolution's amazingly easy victory occurred in a country where a despotic and centralized bureaucracy governed a structureless mass population which neither the remnants of the rural feudal orders nor the weak, nascent urban capitalist classes had organized. When Lenin said that nowhere in the world would it have been so easy to win power and so difficult to keep it, he was aware not only of the weakness of the Russian working class, but of anarchic social conditions in general, which favored sudden changes. Without the instincts of a mass leader—he was no orator and had a passion for public admission and analysis of his own errors, which is against the rules of even ordinary demagoguery—Lenin seized at once upon all the possible differentiations, social, national, professional, that might bring some structure into the population, and he seemed convinced that in such stratification lay the salvation of the revolution. He legalized the anarchic expropriation of the landowners by the rural masses and established thereby for the first and probably last time in Russia that emancipated peasant class which, since the French Revolution, had been

army. This, of course, would inevitably have led to a military dictatorship. In June, 1934, Hitler liquidated Röhm and Schleicher. The initial negotiations were started with the full knowledge of Hitler who used Röhm's connections with the Reichswehr to deceive German military circles about his real intentions. In April, 1932, Röhm testified in one of Hitler's lawsuits that the SA's military status had the full understanding of the Reichswehr. (For documentary evidence on the Röhm-Schleicher plan, see *Nazi Conspiracy*, V, 456 ff. See also Heiden, *op. cit.*, p. 450.) Röhm himself proudly reports his negotiations with Schleicher, which according to him were started in 1931. Schleicher had promised to put the SA under the command of Reichswehr officers in case of an emergency. (See *Die Memoiren des Stabschefs Röhm*, Saarbrücken, 1934, p. 170.) The militaristic character of the SA, shaped by Röhm and constantly fought by Hitler, continued to determine its vocabulary even after the liquidation of the Röhm faction. Contrary to the SS, the members of the SA always insisted on being the "representatives of Germany's military will," and for them the Third Reich was a "military community [supported by] two pillars: Party and Wehrmacht" (see *Handbuch der SA*, Berlin, 1939, and Victor Lutze, "Die Sturmabteilungen," in *Grundlagen, Aufbau und Wirtschaftsordnung des nationalsozialistischen Staates*, No. 7a).

<sup>26</sup> Röhm's autobiography especially is a veritable classic in this kind of literature.

the firmest supporter of the Western nation-states. He tried to strengthen the working class by encouraging independent trade unions. He tolerated the timid appearance of a new middle class which resulted from the NEP policy after the end of the civil war. He introduced further distinguishing features by organizing, and sometimes inventing, as many nationalities as possible, furthering national consciousness and awareness of historical and cultural differences even among the most primitive tribes in the Soviet Union. It seems clear that in these purely practical political matters Lenin followed his great instincts for statesmanship rather than his Marxist convictions; his policy, at any rate, proves that he was more frightened by the absence of social and other structure than by the possible development of centrifugal tendencies in the newly emancipated nationalities or even by the growth of a new bourgeoisie out of the newly established middle and peasant classes. There is no doubt that Lenin suffered his greatest defeat when, with the outbreak of the civil war, the supreme power that he originally planned to concentrate in the Soviets definitely passed into the hands of the party bureaucracy; but even this development, tragic as it was for the course of the revolution, would not necessarily have led to totalitarianism. A one-party dictatorship added only one more class to the already developing social stratification of the country, *i.e.*, bureaucracy, which, according to socialist critics of the revolution, "possessed the State as private property" (Marx).<sup>27</sup> At the moment of Lenin's death the roads were still open. The formation of workers, peasants, and middle classes need not necessarily have led to the class struggle which had been characteristic of European capitalism. Agriculture could still be developed on a collective, co-operative, or private basis, and the national economy was still free to follow a socialist, state-capitalist, or a free-enterprise pattern. None of these alternatives would have automatically destroyed the new structure of the country.

All these new classes and nationalities were in Stalin's way when he began to prepare the country for totalitarian government. In order to fabricate an atomized and structureless mass, he had first to liquidate the remnants of power in the Soviets which, as the chief organ of national representation, still played a certain role and prevented absolute rule by the party hierarchy.

<sup>27</sup> It is well known that the anti-Stalinist splinter groups have based their criticism of the development of the Soviet Union on this Marxist formulation, and have actually never outgrown it. The repeated "purges" of Soviet bureaucracy, which were tantamount to a liquidation of bureaucracy as a class, have never prevented them from seeing in it the dominating and ruling class of the Soviet Union. The following is the estimate of Rakovsky, writing in 1930 from his exile in Siberia: "Under our eyes has formed and is being formed a great class of directors which has its internal subdivisions and which increases through calculated co-optation and direct or indirect nominations. . . . The element which unites this original class is a form, also original, of private property, to wit, the State power" (quoted from Souvarine, *op. cit.*, p. 564). This analysis is indeed quite accurate for the development of the pre-Stalinist era. For the development of the relationship between party and Soviets, which is of decisive importance for the course of the October revolution, see I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879-1921*, 1954.

Therefore he first undermined the national Soviets through the introduction of Bolshevik cells from which alone the higher functionaries to the central committees were appointed.<sup>28</sup> By 1930, the last traces of former communal institutions had disappeared and had been replaced by a firmly centralized party bureaucracy whose tendencies toward Russification were not too different from those of the Czarist regime, except that the new bureaucrats were no longer afraid of literacy.

The Bolshevik government then proceeded to the liquidation of classes and started, for ideological and propaganda reasons, with the property-owning classes, the new middle class in the cities, and the peasants in the country. Because of the combination of numbers and property, the peasants up to then had been potentially the most powerful class in the Union; their liquidation, consequently, was more thorough and more cruel than that of any other group and was carried through by artificial famine and deportation under the pretext of expropriation of the kulaks and collectivization. The liquidation of the middle and peasant classes was completed in the early thirties; those who were not among the many millions of dead or the millions of deported slave laborers had learned "who is master here," had realized that their lives and the lives of their families depended not upon their fellow-citizens but exclusively on the whims of the government which they faced in complete loneliness without any help whatsoever from the group to which they happened to belong. The exact moment when collectivization produced a new peasantry bound by common interests, which owing to its numerical and economic key position in the country's economy again presented a potential danger to totalitarian rule, cannot be determined either from statistics or documentary sources. But for those who know how to read totalitarian "source material" this moment had come two years before Stalin died, when he proposed to dissolve the collectives and transform them into larger units. He did not live to carry out this plan; this time the sacrifices would have been still greater and the chaotic consequences for the total economy still more catastrophic than the liquidation of the first peasant class, but there is no reason to doubt that he might have succeeded; there is no class that cannot be wiped out if a sufficient number of its members are murdered.

The next class to be liquidated as a group were the workers. As a class they were much weaker and offered much less resistance than the peasants because their spontaneous expropriation of factory owners during the revolution, unlike the peasants' expropriation of landowners, had been frus-

<sup>28</sup> In 1927, 90 per cent of the village Soviets and 75 per cent of their chairmen were non-party members; the executive committees of the counties were made up of 50 per cent party members and 50 per cent non-party members, while in the Central Committee 75 per cent of the delegates were party members. See the article on "Bolshevism" by Maurice Dobb in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*.

How the party members of the Soviets, by voting "in conformity with the instructions they received from the permanent officials of the Party," destroyed the Soviet system from within is described in detail in A. Rosenberg, *A History of Bolshevism*, London, 1934, chapter vi.

trated at once by the government which confiscated the factories as state property under the pretext that the state belonged to the proletariat in any event. The Stakhanov system, adopted in the early thirties, broke up all solidarity and class consciousness among the workers, first by the ferocious competition and second by the temporary solidification of a Stakhanovite aristocracy whose social distance from the ordinary worker naturally was felt more acutely than the distance between the workers and the management. This process was completed in 1938 with the introduction of the labor book which transformed the whole Russian worker class officially into a gigantic forced-labor force.

On top of these measures came the liquidation of that bureaucracy which had helped to carry out the previous liquidation measures. It took Stalin about two years, from 1936 to 1938, to rid himself of the whole administrative and military aristocracy of the Soviet society; nearly all offices, factories, economic and cultural bodies, government, party, and military bureaus came into new hands, when "nearly half the administrative personnel, party and nonparty, had been swept out," and more than 50 per cent of all party members and "at least eight million more" were liquidated.<sup>29</sup> Again the introduction of an interior passport, on which all departures from one city to another have to be registered and authorized, completed the destruction of the party bureaucracy as a class. As for its juridical status, the bureaucracy along with the party functionaries was now on the same level with the workers; it, too, had now become a part of the vast multitude of Russian forced laborers and its status as a privileged class in Soviet society was a thing of the past. And since this general purge ended with the liquidation of the highest police officials—the same who had organized the general purge in the first place—not even the cadres of the GPU which had carried out the terror could any longer delude themselves that as a group they represented anything at all, let alone power.

None of these immense sacrifices in human life was motivated by a *raison d'état* in the old sense of the term. None of the liquidated social strata was hostile to the regime or likely to become hostile in the foreseeable future. Active organized opposition had ceased to exist by 1930 when Stalin, in his speech to the Sixteenth Party Congress, outlawed the rightist and leftist deviations inside the Party, and even these feeble oppositions had hardly been able to base themselves on any of the existing classes.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> These figures are taken from Victor Kravchenko's *Book I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official*, New York, 1946, pp. 278 and 303. This is of course a highly questionable source. But since in the case of Soviet Russia we basically have nothing but questionable sources to resort to—meaning that we have to rely altogether on news stories, reports and evaluations of one kind or another—all we can do is use whatever information at least appears to have a high degree of probability. Some historians seem to think that the opposite method—namely, to use exclusively whatever material is furnished by the Russian government—is more reliable, but this is the not the case. It is precisely the official material that is nothing but propaganda.

<sup>30</sup> Stalin's Report to the Sixteenth Congress denounced the deviations as the "reflection" of the resistance of the peasant and petty bourgeois classes in the ranks of the

Dictatorial terror—distinguished from totalitarian terror insofar as it threatens only authentic opponents but not harmless citizens without political opinions—had been grim enough to suffocate all political life, open or clandestine, even before Lenin's death. Intervention from abroad, which might ally itself with one of the dissatisfied sections in the population, was no longer a danger when, by 1930, the Soviet regime had been recognized by a majority of governments and concluded commercial and other international agreements with many countries. (Nor did Stalin's government eliminate such a possibility as far as the people themselves were concerned: we know now that Hitler, if he had been an ordinary conqueror and not a rival totalitarian ruler, might have had an extraordinary chance to win for his cause at least the people of the Ukraine.)

If the liquidation of classes made no political sense, it was positively disastrous for the Soviet economy. The consequences of the artificial famine in 1933 were felt for years throughout the country; the introduction of the Stakhanov system in 1935, with its arbitrary speed-up of individual output and its complete disregard of the necessities for teamwork in industrial production, resulted in a "chaotic imbalance" of the young industry.<sup>31</sup> The liquidation of the bureaucracy, that is, of the class of factory managers and engineers, finally deprived industrial enterprises of what little experience and know-how the new Russian technical intelligentsia had been able to acquire.

Equality of condition among their subjects has been one of the foremost concerns of despotisms and tyrannies since ancient times, yet such equalization is not sufficient for totalitarian rule because it leaves more or less intact certain nonpolitical communal bonds between the subjects, such as family ties and common cultural interests. If totalitarianism takes its own claim seriously, it must come to the point where it has "to finish once and for all with the neutrality of chess," that is, with the autonomous existence of any activity whatsoever. The lovers of "chess for the sake of chess," aptly compared by their liquidator with the lovers of "art for art's sake,"<sup>32</sup> are not yet absolutely atomized elements in a mass society whose completely heterogeneous uniformity is one of the primary conditions for totalitarianism. From the point of view of totalitarian rulers, a society devoted to chess for the sake of chess is only in degree different and less dangerous than a class of farmers for the sake of farming. Himmler quite aptly defined the SS member as the new type of man who under no circumstances will ever do "a thing for its own sake."<sup>33</sup>

Party. (See *Leninism*, 1933, Vol. II, chapter iii.) Against this attack the opposition was curiously defenseless because they too, and especially Trotsky, were "always anxious to discover a struggle of classes behind the struggles of cliques" (Souvarine, *op. cit.*, p. 440).

<sup>31</sup> Kravchenko, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>32</sup> Souvarine, *op. cit.*, p. 575.

<sup>33</sup> The watchword of the SS as formulated by Himmler himself begins with the words: "There is no task that exists for its own sake." See Gunter d'Alquen, "Die SS," in *Schriften der Hochschule für Politik*, 1939. The pamphlets issued by the SS solely

Mass atomization in Soviet society was achieved by the skillful use of repeated purges which invariably precede actual group liquidation. In order to destroy all social and family ties, the purges are conducted in such a way as to threaten with the same fate the defendant and all his ordinary relations, from mere acquaintances up to his closest friends and relatives. The consequence of the simple and ingenious device of "guilt by association" is that as soon as a man is accused, his former friends are transformed immediately into his bitterest enemies; in order to save their own skins, they volunteer information and rush in with denunciations to corroborate the nonexistent evidence against him; this obviously is the only way to prove their own trustworthiness. Retrospectively, they will try to prove that their acquaintance or friendship with the accused was only a pretext for spying on him and revealing him as a saboteur, a Trotskyite, a foreign spy, or a Fascist. Merit being "gauged by the number of your denunciations of close comrades,"<sup>34</sup> it is obvious that the most elementary caution demands that one avoid all intimate contacts, if possible—not in order to prevent discovery of one's secret thoughts, but rather to eliminate, in the almost certain case of future trouble, all persons who might have not only an ordinary cheap interest in your denunciation but an irresistible need to bring about your ruin simply because they are in danger of their own lives. In the last analysis, it has been through the development of this device to its farthest and most fantastic extremes that Bolshevik rulers have succeeded in creating an atomized and individualized society the like of which we have never seen before and which events or catastrophes alone would hardly have brought about.

Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals. Compared with all other parties and movements, their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member. This demand is made by the leaders of totalitarian movements even before they seize power. It usually precedes the total organization of the country under their actual rule and it follows from the claim of their ideologies that their organization will encompass, in due course, the entire human race. Where, however, totalitarian rule has not been prepared by a totalitarian movement (and this, in contradistinction to Nazi Germany, was the case in Russia), the movement has to be organized afterward and the conditions for its growth have artificially to be created in order to make total loyalty—the psychological basis for total domination—at all possible. Such loyalty can be expected only from the completely isolated human being who, without any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even mere acquaint-

for internal consumption emphasize time and again "the absolute necessity for understanding the futility of everything that is an end in itself" (see *Der Reichsführer SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei*, undated, "only for internal use within the police").

<sup>34</sup> The practice itself has been abundantly documented. W. Krivitsky, in his book *In Stalin's Secret Services* (New York, 1939), traces it directly to Stalin.

ances, derives his sense of having a place in the world only from his belonging to a movement, his membership in the party.

Total loyalty is possible only when fidelity is emptied of all concrete content, from which changes of mind might naturally arise. The totalitarian movements, each in its own way, have done their utmost to get rid of the party programs which specified concrete content and which they inherited from earlier, nontotalitarian stages of development. No matter how radically they might have been phrased, every definite political goal which does not simply assert or circumscribe the claim to world rule, every political program which deals with issues more specific than "ideological questions of importance for centuries" is an obstruction to totalitarianism. Hitler's greatest achievement in the organization of the Nazi movement, which he gradually built up from the obscure crackpot membership of a typically nationalistic little party, was that he unburdened the movement of the party's earlier program, not by changing or officially abolishing it, but simply by refusing to talk about it or discuss its points, whose relative moderateness of content and phraseology were very soon outdated.<sup>35</sup> Stalin's task in this as in other respects was much more formidable; the socialist program of the Bolshevik party was a much more troublesome burden<sup>36</sup> than the 25 points of an amateur economist and a crackpot politician.<sup>37</sup> But Stalin achieved eventually, after having abolished the factions of the Russian party, the same result through the constant zigzag of the Communist Party lines, and the constant reinterpretation and application of Marxism which voided the doctrine of all its content because it was no longer possible to predict what course or action it would inspire. The fact that the most perfect education in Marxism and Leninism was no guide whatsoever for political behavior—that, on the contrary, one could follow the party line only if one repeated each morning what Stalin had announced the night before—naturally resulted in the same state of mind, the same concentrated obedience, undivided by any attempt to understand what one was doing, that Himmler's ingenious watchword for his SS-men expressed: "My honor is my loyalty."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Hitler stated in *Mein Kampf* (2 vols., 1st German ed., 1925 and 1927 respectively. Unexpurgated translation, New York, 1939) that it was better to have an antiquated program than to allow a discussion of program (Book II, chapter v). Soon he was to proclaim publicly: "Once we take over the government, the program will come of itself. . . . The first thing must be an inconceivable wave of propaganda. That is a political action which would have little to do with the other problems of the moment." See Heiden, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>36</sup> Souvarine, in our opinion wrongly, suggests that Lenin had already abolished the role of a party program: "Nothing could show more clearly the non-existence of Bolshevism as a doctrine except in Lenin's brain; every Bolshevik left to himself wandered from 'the line' of his faction . . . for these men were bound together by their temperament and by the ascendancy of Lenin rather than by ideas" (*op. cit.*, p. 85).

<sup>37</sup> Gottfried Feder's Program of the Nazi Party with its famous 25 points has played a greater role in the literature about the movement than in the movement itself.

<sup>38</sup> The impact of the watchword, formulated by Himmler himself, is difficult to render. Its German equivalent: "*Meine Ehre heisst Treue*," indicates an absolute devotion and obedience which transcends the meaning of mere discipline or personal



## A CLASSLESS SOCIETY

Lack of or ignoring of a party program is by itself not necessarily a sign of totalitarianism. The first to consider programs and platforms as needless scraps of paper and embarrassing promises, inconsistent with the style and impetus of a movement, was Mussolini with his Fascist philosophy of activism and inspiration through the historical moment itself.<sup>39</sup> Mere lust for power combined with contempt for "talkative" articulation of what they intend to do with it is characteristic of all mob leaders, but does not come up to the standards of totalitarianism. The true goal of Fascism was only to seize power and establish the Fascist "elite" as uncontested ruler over the country. Totalitarianism is never content to rule by external means, namely, through the state and a machinery of violence; thanks to its peculiar ideology and the role assigned to it in this apparatus of coercion, totalitarianism has discovered a means of dominating and terrorizing human beings from within. In this sense it eliminates the distance between the rulers and the ruled and achieves a condition in which power and the will to power, as we understand them, play no role, or at best, a secondary role. In substance, the totalitarian leader is nothing more nor less than the functionary of the masses he leads; he is not a power-hungry individual imposing a tyrannical and arbitrary will upon his subjects. Being a mere functionary, he can be replaced at any time, and he depends just as much on the "will" of the masses he embodies as the masses depend on him. Without him they would lack external representation and remain an amorphous horde; without the masses the leader is a nonentity. Hitler, who was fully aware of this interdependence, expressed it once in a speech addressed to the SA: "All that you are, you are through me; all that I am, I am through you alone."<sup>40</sup> We are only too inclined to belittle such statements or to misunderstand them in the sense that acting is defined here in terms of giving and executing orders, as has happened too often in the political tradition and history of the West.<sup>41</sup> But this idea has always presupposed someone in command who thinks and wills, and then imposes his thought and will on a thought- and will-deprived group—be it by persuasion, authority, or violence. Hitler, however, was of the opinion that even "thinking . . . [exists] only by virtue of giving or executing orders,"<sup>42</sup>

faithfulness. *Nazi Conspiracy*, whose translations of German documents and Nazi literature are indispensable source material but, unfortunately, are very uneven, renders the SS watchword: "My honor signifies faithfulness" (V, 346).

<sup>39</sup> Mussolini was probably the first party leader who consciously rejected a formal program and replaced it with inspired leadership and action alone. Behind this act lay the notion that the actuality of the moment itself was the chief element of inspiration, which would only be hampered by a party program. The philosophy of Italian Fascism has been expressed by Gentile's "actualism" rather than by Sorel's "myths." Compare also the article "Fascism" in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. The Program of 1921 was formulated when the movement had been in existence two years and contained, for the most part, its nationalist philosophy.

<sup>40</sup> Ernst Bayer, *Die SA*, Berlin, 1938. Translation quoted from *Nazi Conspiracy*, IV, 783.

<sup>41</sup> For the first time in Plato's *Statesman*, 305, where acting is interpreted in terms of *archein* and *prattein*—of ordering the start of an action and of executing this order.

<sup>42</sup> *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, p. 198.

and thereby eliminated even theoretically the distinction between thinking and acting on one hand, and between the rulers and the ruled on the other.

Neither National Socialism nor Bolshevism has ever proclaimed a new form of government or asserted that its goals were reached with the seizure of power and the control of the state machinery. Their idea of domination was something that no state and no mere apparatus of violence can ever achieve, but only a movement that is constantly kept in motion: namely, the permanent domination of each single individual in each and every sphere of life.<sup>43</sup> The seizure of power through the means of violence is never an end in itself but only the means to an end, and the seizure of power in any given country is only a welcome transitory stage but never the end of the movement. The practical goal of the movement is to organize as many people as possible within its framework and to set and keep them in motion; a political goal that would constitute the end of the movement simply does not exist.

## II: *The Temporary Alliance Between the Mob and the Elite*

WHAT IS MORE disturbing to our peace of mind than the unconditional loyalty of members of totalitarian movements, and the popular support of totalitarian regimes, is the unquestionable attraction these movements exert on the elite, and not only on the mob elements in society. It would be rash indeed to discount, because of artistic vagaries or scholarly naïveté, the terrifying roster of distinguished men whom totalitarianism can count among its sympathizers, fellow-travelers, and inscribed party members.

This attraction for the elite is as important a clue to the understanding of totalitarian movements (though hardly of totalitarian regimes) as their more obvious connection with the mob. It indicates the specific atmosphere, the general climate in which the rise of totalitarianism takes place. It should be remembered that the leaders of totalitarian movements and their sympathizers are, so to speak, older than the masses which they organize so that chronologically speaking the masses do not have to wait helplessly for the rise of their own leaders in the midst of a decaying class society, of which they are the most outstanding product. Those who voluntarily left society before the wreckage of classes had come about, along with the mob, which was an earlier by-product of the rule of the bourgeoisie, stand ready to welcome them. The present totalitarian rulers and the leaders of totalitarian movements still bear the characteristic traits of the mob, whose psychology

<sup>43</sup> *Mein Kampf*, Book I, chapter xi. See also, for example, Dieter Schwarz, *Angriffe auf die nationalsozialistische Weltanschauung*: Aus dem Schwarzen Korps, No. 2, 1936, who answers the obvious criticism that National Socialists after their rise to power continued to talk about "a struggle": "National Socialism as an ideology [*Weltanschauung*] will not abandon its struggle until . . . the way of life of each individual German has been shaped by its fundamental values and these are realized every day anew."

Recognized on publication as the definitive account of its subject and ten years later hailed as a classic by *The Times Literary Supplement*, this remarkable book has been foremost wherever the characteristics and problems of the twentieth century are discussed. Dr. Arendt's study begins with an account of the rise of antisemitism in Central and Western European Jewish history in the nineteenth century and continues with an examination of European colonial imperialism from 1884 to the outbreak of World War I. The final section deals with the institutions, organizations, and operations of totalitarian movements and governments, focusing on the two genuine forms of totalitarian dominion in history—Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. Dr. Arendt discusses the transformation of classes into masses, the role of propaganda in dealing with the nontotalitarian world, and the use of terror, the very essence of this form of government. And in a brilliant concluding chapter she analyzes the nature of isolation and loneliness as preconditions for total domination.

The present edition includes all of the material in the 1966 "New Edition," together with the prefaces to the 1968 Harvest editions of *Antisemitism* and *Imperialism*.

"This has probably been the most influential single book on the theme of totalitarianism. . . . Linking the Nazi and Stalinist phenomena as essentially identical and as transcending all traditional concepts of 'left' and 'right,' Miss Arendt was instrumental both in preparing the way for a whole series of studies of totalitarianism and in challenging the adequacy of 'common-sense' approaches to the malignancy of political pathology."

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