

Hannah Arendt

# The Origins of Totalitarianism

NEW EDITION

WITH ADDED PREFACES

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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."

and political philosophy are fairly well known; what will happen once the authentic mass man takes over, we do not know yet, although it may be a fair guess that he will have more in common with the meticulous, calculated correctness of Himmler than with the hysterical fanaticism of Hitler, will more resemble the stubborn dullness of Molotov than the sensual vindictive cruelty of Stalin.

In this respect, the situation after the second World War in Europe does not differ essentially from that after the first; just as in the twenties the ideologies of Fascism, Bolshevism, and Nazism were formulated and the movements led by the so-called front generation, by those who had been brought up and still remembered distinctly the times before the war, so the present general political and intellectual climate of postwar totalitarianism is being determined by a generation which knew intimately the time and life which preceded the present. This is specifically true for France, where the breakdown of the class system came after the second instead of after the first War. Like the mob men and the adventurers of the imperialist era, the leaders of totalitarian movements have in common with their intellectual sympathizers the fact that both had been outside the class and national system of respectable European society even before this system broke down.

This breakdown, when the smugness of spurious respectability gave way to anarchic despair, seemed the first great opportunity for the elite as well as the mob. This is obvious for the new mass leaders whose careers reproduce the features of earlier mob leaders: failure in professional and social life, perversion and disaster in private life. The fact that their lives prior to their political careers had been failures, naïvely held against them by the more respectable leaders of the old parties, was the strongest factor in their mass appeal. It seemed to prove that individually they embodied the mass destiny of the time and that their desire to sacrifice everything for the movement, their assurance of devotion to those who had been struck by catastrophe, their determination never to be tempted back into the security of normal life, and their contempt for respectability were quite sincere and not just inspired by passing ambitions.

The postwar elite, on the other hand, was only slightly younger than the generation which had let itself be used and abused by imperialism for the sake of glorious careers outside of respectability, as gamblers and spies and adventurers, as knights in shining armor and dragon-killers. They shared with Lawrence of Arabia the yearning for "losing their selves" and the violent disgust with all existing standards, with every power that be. If they still remembered the "golden age of security," they also remembered how they had hated it and how real their enthusiasm had been at the outbreak of the first World War. Not only Hitler and not only the failures thanked God on their knees when mobilization swept Europe in 1914.<sup>44</sup> They did not even have to reproach themselves with having been an easy prey for chauvinist propaganda or lying explanations about the purely defensive

<sup>44</sup> See Hitler's description of his reaction to the outbreak of the first World War in *Mein Kampf*, Book I, chapter v.

character of the war. The elite went to war with an exultant hope that everything they knew, the whole culture and texture of life, might go down in its "storms of steel" (Ernst Jünger). In the carefully chosen words of Thomas Mann, war was "chastisement" and "purification"; "war in itself, rather than victories, inspired the poet." Or in the words of a student of the time, "what counts is always the readiness to make a sacrifice, not the object for which the sacrifice is made"; or in the words of a young worker, "it doesn't matter whether one lives a few years longer or not. One would like to have something to show for one's life."<sup>45</sup> And long before one of Nazism's intellectual sympathizers announced, "When I hear the word culture, I draw my revolver," poets had proclaimed their disgust with "rubbish culture" and called poetically on "ye Barbarians, Scythians, Negroes, Indians, to trample it down."<sup>46</sup>

Simply to brand as outbursts of nihilism this violent dissatisfaction with the prewar age and subsequent attempts at restoring it (from Nietzsche and Sorel to Pareto, from Rimbaud and T. E. Lawrence to Jünger, Brecht, and Malraux, from Bakunin and Nechayev to Alexander Blok) is to overlook how justified disgust can be in a society wholly permeated with the ideological outlook and moral standards of the bourgeoisie. Yet it is also true that the "front generation," in marked contrast to their own chosen spiritual fathers, were completely absorbed by their desire to see the ruin of this whole world of fake security, fake culture, and fake life. This desire was so great that it outweighed in impact and articulateness all earlier attempts at a "transformation of values," such as Nietzsche had attempted, or a reorganization of political life as indicated in Sorel's writings, or a revival of human authenticity in Bakunin, or a passionate love of life in the purity of exotic adventures in Rimbaud. Destruction without mitigation, chaos and ruin as such assumed the dignity of supreme values.<sup>47</sup>

The genuineness of these feelings can be seen in the fact that very few of this generation were cured of their war enthusiasm by actual experience of its horrors. The survivors of the trenches did not become pacifists. They cherished an experience which, they thought, might serve to separate them

<sup>45</sup> See the collection of material on the "inner chronicle of the first World War" by Hanna Hafkesbrink, *Unknown Germany*, New Haven, 1948, pp. 43, 45, 81, respectively. The great value of this collection for the imponderables of historical atmosphere makes the lack of similar studies for France, England, and Italy all the more deplorable.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>47</sup> This started with a feeling of complete alienation from normal life. Wrote Rudolf Binding, for instance: "More and more we are to be counted among the dead, among the estranged—because the greatness of the occurrence estranges and separates us—rather than among the banished whose return is possible" (*ibid.*, p. 160). A curious reminiscence of the front generation's elite claim can still be found in Himmler's account of how he finally hit upon his "form of selection" for the reorganization of the SS: ". . . the most severe selection procedure is brought about by war, the struggle for life and death. In this procedure the value of blood is shown through achievement. . . . War, however, is an exceptional circumstance, and a way had to be found to make selections in peace time" (*op. cit.*).

definitely from the hated surroundings of respectability. They clung to their memories of four years of life in the trenches as though they constituted an objective criterion for the establishment of a new elite. Nor did they yield to the temptation to idealize this past; on the contrary, the worshipers of war were the first to concede that war in the era of machines could not possibly breed virtues like chivalry, courage, honor, and manliness,<sup>48</sup> that it imposed on men nothing but the experience of bare destruction together with the humiliation of being only small cogs in the majestic wheel of slaughter.

This generation remembered the war as the great prelude to the breakdown of classes and their transformation into masses. War, with its constant murderous arbitrariness, became the symbol for death, the "great equalizer"<sup>49</sup> and therefore the true father of a new world order. The passion for equality and justice, the longing to transcend narrow and meaningless class lines, to abandon stupid privileges and prejudices, seemed to find in war a way out of the old condescending attitudes of pity for the oppressed and disinherited. In times of growing misery and individual helplessness, it seems as difficult to resist pity when it grows into an all-devouring passion as it is not to resent its very boundlessness, which seems to kill human dignity with a more deadly certainty than misery itself.

In the early years of his career, when a restoration of the European status quo was still the most serious threat to the ambitions of the mob,<sup>50</sup> Hitler appealed almost exclusively to these sentiments of the front generation. The peculiar selflessness of the mass man appeared here as yearning for anonymity, for being just a number and functioning only as a cog, for every transformation, in brief, which would wipe out the spurious identifications with specific types or predetermined functions within society. War had been experienced as that "mightiest of all mass actions" which obliterated individual differences so that even suffering, which traditionally had marked off individuals through unique unexchangeable destinies, could now be interpreted as "an instrument of historical progress."<sup>51</sup> Nor did national distinctions limit the masses into which the postwar elite wished to be immersed. The first World War, somewhat paradoxically, had almost extinguished genuine national feelings in Europe where, between the wars, it was far more important to have belonged to the generation of the trenches, no matter on which side, than to be a German or a Frenchman.<sup>52</sup> The Nazis based their

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Ernst Jünger, *The Storm of Steel*, London, 1929.

<sup>49</sup> Hafkesbrink, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>50</sup> Heiden, *op. cit.*, shows how consistently Hitler sided with catastrophe in the early days of the movement, how he feared a possible recovery of Germany. "Half a dozen times [*i.e.*, during the Ruhrputsch], in different terms, he declared to his storm troops that Germany was going under. 'Our job is to insure the success of our movement' (p. 167)—a success which at that moment depended upon the collapse of the fight in the Ruhr.

<sup>51</sup> Hafkesbrink, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>52</sup> This feeling was already widespread during the war when Rudolf Binding wrote: "[This war] is not to be compared with a campaign. For there one leader pits his



whole propaganda on this indistinct comradeship, this "community of fate," and won over a great number of veteran organizations in all European countries, thereby proving how meaningless national slogans had become even in the ranks of the so-called Right, which used them for their connotation of violence rather than for their specific national content.

No single element in this general intellectual climate in postwar Europe was very new. Bakunin had already confessed, "I do not want to be *I*, I want to be *We*,"<sup>53</sup> and Nechayev had preached the evangel of the "doomed man" with "no personal interests, no affairs, no sentiments, attachments, property, not even a name of his own."<sup>54</sup> The antihumanist, antiliberal, anti-individualist, and anticultural instincts of the front generation, their brilliant and witty praise of violence, power, and cruelty, was preceded by the awkward and pompous "scientific" proofs of the imperialist elite that a struggle of all against all is the law of the universe, that expansion is a psychological necessity before it is a political device, and that man has to behave by such universal laws.<sup>55</sup> What was new in the writings of the front generation was their high literary standard and great depth of passion. The postwar writers no longer needed the scientific demonstrations of genetics, and they made little if any use of the collected works of Gobineau or Houston Stewart Chamberlain, which belonged already to the cultural household of the philistines. They read not Darwin but the Marquis de Sade.<sup>56</sup> If they believed at all in universal laws, they certainly did not particularly care to conform to them. To them, violence, power, cruelty, were the supreme capacities of men who had definitely lost their place in the universe and were much too proud to long for a power theory that would safely bring them back and re-

will against that of another. But in this War both adversaries lie on the ground, and only the War has its will" (*ibid.*, p. 67).

<sup>53</sup> Bakunin in a letter written on February 7, 1870. See Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution*, Boston, 1939, p. 180.

<sup>54</sup> The "Catechism of the Revolutionist" was either written by Bakunin himself or by his disciple Nechayev. For the question of authorship and a translation of the complete text, see Nomad, *op. cit.*, p. 227 ff. In any event, the "system of complete disregard for any tenets of simple decency and fairness in [the revolutionist's] attitude towards other human beings . . . went down in Russian revolutionary history under the name of 'Nechayevshchina'" (*ibid.*, p. 224).

<sup>55</sup> Outstanding among these political theorists of imperialism is Ernest Seillière, *Mysticisme et Domination: Essais de Critique Impérialiste*, 1913. See also Cargill Spietsma, *We Imperialists: Notes on Ernest Seillière's Philosophy of Imperialism*, New York, 1931; G. Monod in *La Revue Historique*, January, 1912; and Louis Estève, *Une nouvelle Psychologie de l'Impérialisme: Ernest Seillière*, 1913.

<sup>56</sup> In France, since 1930, the Marquis de Sade has become one of the favored authors of the literary avant-garde. Jean Paulhan, in his Introduction to a new edition of Sade's *Les Infortunes de la Vertu*, Paris, 1946, remarks: "When I see so many writers today consciously trying to deny artifice and the literary game for the sake of the inexpressible [*un évènement indicible*] . . . , anxiously looking for the sublime in the infamous, for the great in the subversive . . . , I ask myself . . . if our modern literature, in those parts which appear to us most vital—or at any rate most aggressive—has not turned entirely toward the past, and if it was not precisely Sade who determined it." See also Georges Bataille, "Le Secret de Sade," in *La Critique*, Tome III, Nos. 15-16, 17, 1947.

integrate them into the world. They were satisfied with blind partisanship in anything that respectable society had banned, regardless of theory or content, and they elevated cruelty to a major virtue because it contradicted society's humanitarian and liberal hypocrisy.

If we compare this generation with the nineteenth-century ideologists, with whose theories they sometimes seem to have so much in common, their chief distinction is their greater authenticity and passion. They had been more deeply touched by misery, they were more concerned with the perplexities and more deadly hurt by hypocrisy than all the apostles of good will and brotherhood had been. And they could no longer escape into exotic lands, could no longer afford to be dragon-slayers among strange and exciting people. There was no escape from the daily routine of misery, meekness, frustration, and resentment embellished by a fake culture of educated talk; no conformity to the customs of fairy-tale lands could possibly save them from the rising nausea that this combination continuously inspired.

This inability to escape into the wide world, this feeling of being caught again and again in the trappings of society—so different from the conditions which had formed the imperialist character—added a constant strain and the yearning for violence to the older passion for anonymity and losing oneself. Without the possibility of a radical change of role and character, such as the identification with the Arab national movement or the rites of an Indian village, the self-willed immersion in the suprahuman forces of destruction seemed to be a salvation from the automatic identification with pre-established functions in society and their utter banality, and at the same time to help destroy the functioning itself. These people felt attracted to the pronounced activism of totalitarian movements, to their curious and only seemingly contradictory insistence on both the primacy of sheer action and the overwhelming force of sheer necessity. This mixture corresponded precisely to the war experience of the "front generation," to the experience of constant activity within the framework of overwhelming fatality.

Activism, moreover, seemed to provide new answers to the old and troublesome question, "Who am I?" which always appears with redoubled persistence in times of crisis. If society insisted, "You are what you appear to be," postwar activism replied: "You are what you have done"—for instance, the man who for the first time had crossed the Atlantic in an airplane (as in Brecht's *Der Flug der Lindberghs*)—an answer which after the second World War was repeated and slightly varied by Sartre's "You are your life" (in *Huis Clos*). The pertinence of these answers lies less in their validity as redefinitions of personal identity than in their usefulness for an eventual escape from social identification, from the multiplicity of interchangeable roles and functions which society had imposed. The point was to do something, heroic or criminal, which was unpredictable and undetermined by anybody else.

The pronounced activism of the totalitarian movements, their preference for terrorism over all other forms of political activity, attracted the intellectual elite and the mob alike, precisely because this terrorism was so ut-

terly different from that of the earlier revolutionary societies. It was no longer a matter of calculated policy which saw in terrorist acts the only means to eliminate certain outstanding personalities who, because of their policies or position, had become the symbol of oppression. What proved so attractive was that terrorism had become a kind of philosophy through which to express frustration, resentment, and blind hatred, a kind of political expressionism which used bombs to express oneself, which watched delightedly the publicity given to resounding deeds and was absolutely willing to pay the price of life for having succeeded in forcing the recognition of one's existence on the normal strata of society. It was still the same spirit and the same game which made Goebbels, long before the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany, announce with obvious delight that the Nazis, in case of defeat, would know how to slam the door behind them and not to be forgotten for centuries.

Yet it is here if anywhere that a valid criterion may be found for distinguishing the elite from the mob in the pretotalitarian atmosphere. What the mob wanted, and what Goebbels expressed with great precision, was access to history even at the price of destruction. Goebbels' sincere conviction that "the greatest happiness that a contemporary can experience today" is either to be a genius or to serve one,<sup>57</sup> was typical of the mob but neither of the masses nor the sympathizing elite. The latter, on the contrary, took anonymity seriously to the point of seriously denying the existence of genius; all the art theories of the twenties tried desperately to prove that the excellent is the product of skill, craftsmanship, logic, and the realization of the potentialities of the material.<sup>58</sup> The mob, and not the elite, was charmed by the "radiant power of fame" (Stefan Zweig) and accepted enthusiastically the genius idolatry of the late bourgeois world. In this the mob of the twentieth century followed faithfully the pattern of earlier parvenus who also had discovered the fact that bourgeois society would rather open its doors to the fascinating "abnormal," the genius, the homosexual, or the Jew, than to simple merit. The elite's contempt for the genius and its yearning for anonymity was still witness of a spirit which neither the masses nor the mob were in a position to understand, and which, in the words of Robespierre, strove to assert the grandeur of man against the pettiness of the great.

This difference between the elite and the mob notwithstanding, there is no doubt that the elite was pleased whenever the underworld frightened respectable society into accepting it on an equal footing. The members of the elite did not object at all to paying a price, the destruction of civilization, for the fun of seeing how those who had been excluded unjustly in the past forced their way into it. They were not particularly outraged at the monstrous forgeries in historiography of which all totalitarian regimes are guilty and which announce themselves clearly enough in totalitarian propaganda. They had convinced themselves that traditional historiography was a forgery

<sup>57</sup> Goebbels, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>58</sup> The art theories of the Bauhaus were characteristic in this respect. See also Bertolt Brecht's remarks on the theater, *Gesammelte Werke*, London, 1938.

in any case, since it had excluded the underprivileged and oppressed from the memory of mankind. Those who were rejected by their own time were usually forgotten by history, and insult added to injury had troubled all sensitive consciences ever since faith in a hereafter where the last would be the first had disappeared. Injustices in the past as well as the present became intolerable when there was no longer any hope that the scales of justice eventually would be set right. Marx's great attempt to rewrite world history in terms of class struggles fascinated even those who did not believe in the correctness of his thesis, because of his original intention to find a device by which to force the destinies of those excluded from official history into the memory of posterity.

The temporary alliance between the elite and the mob rested largely on this genuine delight with which the former watched the latter destroy respectability. This could be achieved when the German steel barons were forced to deal with and to receive socially Hitler the housepainter and self-admitted former derelict, as it could be with the crude and vulgar forgeries perpetrated by the totalitarian movements in all fields of intellectual life, insofar as they gathered all the subterranean, nonrespectable elements of European history into one consistent picture. From this viewpoint it was rather gratifying to see that Bolshevism and Nazism began even to eliminate those sources of their own ideologies which had already won some recognition in academic or other official quarters. Not Marx's dialectical materialism, but the conspiracy of 300 families; not the pompous scientificity of Gobineau and Chamberlain, but the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion"; not the traceable influence of the Catholic Church and the role played by anticlericalism in Latin countries, but the backstairs literature about the Jesuits and the Freemasons became the inspiration for the rewriters of history. The object of the most varied and variable constructions was always to reveal official history as a joke, to demonstrate a sphere of secret influences of which the visible, traceable, and known historical reality was only the outward façade erected explicitly to fool the people.

To this aversion of the intellectual elite for official historiography, to its conviction that history, which was a forgery anyway, might as well be the playground of crackpots, must be added the terrible, demoralizing fascination in the possibility that gigantic lies and monstrous falsehoods can eventually be established as unquestioned facts, that man may be free to change his own past at will, and that the difference between truth and falsehood may cease to be objective and become a mere matter of power and cleverness, of pressure and infinite repetition. Not Stalin's and Hitler's skill in the art of lying but the fact that they were able to organize the masses into a collective unit to back up their lies with impressive magnificence, exerted the fascination. Simple forgeries from the viewpoint of scholarship appeared to receive the sanction of history itself when the whole marching reality of the movements stood behind them and pretended to draw from them the necessary inspiration for action.

The attraction which the totalitarian movements exert on the elite, so long as and wherever they have not seized power, has been perplexing because the patently vulgar and arbitrary, positive doctrines of totalitarianism are more conspicuous to the outsider and mere observer than the general mood which pervades the pretotalitarian atmosphere. These doctrines were so much at variance with generally accepted intellectual, cultural, and moral standards that one could conclude that only an inherent fundamental shortcoming of character in the intellectual, "*la trahison des clercs*" (J. Benda), or a perverse self-hatred of the spirit, accounted for the delight with which the elite accepted the "ideas" of the mob. What the spokesmen of humanism and liberalism usually overlook, in their bitter disappointment and their unfamiliarity with the more general experiences of the time, is that an atmosphere in which all traditional values and propositions had evaporated (after the nineteenth-century ideologies had refuted each other and exhausted their vital appeal) in a sense made it easier to accept patently absurd propositions than the old truths which had become pious banalities, precisely because nobody could be expected to take the absurdities seriously. Vulgarity with its cynical dismissal of respected standards and accepted theories carried with it a frank admission of the worst and a disregard for all pretenses which were easily mistaken for courage and a new style of life. In the growing prevalence of mob attitudes and convictions—which were actually the attitudes and convictions of the bourgeoisie cleansed of hypocrisy—those who traditionally hated the bourgeoisie and had voluntarily left respectable society saw only the lack of hypocrisy and respectability, not the content itself.<sup>59</sup>

Since the bourgeoisie claimed to be the guardian of Western traditions and confounded all moral issues by parading publicly virtues which it not only did not possess in private and business life, but actually held in contempt, it seemed revolutionary to admit cruelty, disregard of human values, and general amorality, because this at least destroyed the duplicity upon which the existing society seemed to rest. What a temptation to flaunt extreme attitudes in the hypocritical twilight of double moral standards, to wear publicly the mask of cruelty if everybody was patently inconsiderate and pretended to be gentle, to parade wickedness in a world, not of wickedness, but of meanness! The intellectual elite of the twenties who knew little of the earlier connections between mob and bourgeoisie was certain that the old game of *épater le bourgeois* could be played to perfection if one started to shock society with an ironically exaggerated picture of its own behavior.

At that time, nobody anticipated that the true victims of this irony would

<sup>59</sup> The following passage by Röhm is typical of the feeling of almost the whole younger generation and not only of an elite: "Hypocrisy and Pharisaism rule. They are the most conspicuous characteristics of society today. . . . Nothing could be more lying than the so-called morals of society." These boys "don't find their way in the philistine world of bourgeois double morals and don't know any longer how to distinguish between truth and error" (*Die Geschichte eines Hochverrätters*, pp. 267 and 269). The homosexuality of these circles was also at least partially an expression of their protest against society.

be the elite rather than the bourgeoisie. The avant-garde did not know they were running their heads not against walls but against open doors, that a unanimous success would belie their claim to being a revolutionary minority, and would prove that they were about to express a new mass spirit or the spirit of the time. Particularly significant in this respect was the reception given Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper* in pre-Hitler Germany. The play presented gangsters as respectable businessmen and respectable businessmen as gangsters. The irony was somewhat lost when respectable businessmen in the audience considered this a deep insight into the ways of the world and when the mob welcomed it as an artistic sanction of gangsterism. The theme song in the play, "*Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral*," was greeted with frantic applause by exactly everybody, though for different reasons. The mob applauded because it took the statement literally; the bourgeoisie applauded because it had been fooled by its own hypocrisy for so long that it had grown tired of the tension and found deep wisdom in the expression of the banality by which it lived; the elite applauded because the unveiling of hypocrisy was such superior and wonderful fun. The effect of the work was exactly the opposite of what Brecht had sought by it. The bourgeoisie could no longer be shocked; it welcomed the exposure of its hidden philosophy, whose popularity proved they had been right all along, so that the only political result of Brecht's "revolution" was to encourage everyone to discard the uncomfortable mask of hypocrisy and to accept openly the standards of the mob.

A reaction similar in its ambiguity was aroused some ten years later in France by Céline's *Bagatelles pour un Massacre*, in which he proposed to massacre all the Jews. André Gide was publicly delighted in the pages of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, not of course because he wanted to kill the Jews of France, but because he rejoiced in the blunt admission of such a desire and in the fascinating contradiction between Céline's bluntness and the hypocritical politeness which surrounded the Jewish question in all respectable quarters. How irresistible the desire for the unmasking of hypocrisy was among the elite can be gauged by the fact that such delight could not even be spoiled by Hitler's very real persecution of the Jews, which at the time of Céline's writing was already in full swing. Yet aversion against the philosemitism of the liberals had much more to do with this reaction than hatred of Jews. A similar frame of mind explains the remarkable fact that Hitler's and Stalin's widely publicized opinions about art and their persecution of modern artists have never been able to destroy the attraction which the totalitarian movements had for avant-garde artists; this shows the elite's lack of a sense of reality, together with its perverted selflessness, both of which resemble only too closely the fictitious world and the absence of self-interest among the masses. It was the great opportunity of the totalitarian movements, and the reason why a temporary alliance between the intellectual elite and the mob could come about, that in an elementary and undifferentiated way their problems had become the same and foreshadowed the problems and mentality of the masses.

Closely related to the attraction which the mob's lack of hypocrisy and the masses' lack of self-interest exerted on the elite was the equally irresistible appeal of the totalitarian movements' spurious claim to have abolished the separation between private and public life and to have restored a mysterious irrational wholeness in man. Since Balzac revealed the private lives of the public figures of French society and since Ibsen's dramatization of the "Pillars of Society" had conquered the Continental theater, the issue of double morality was one of the main topics for tragedies, comedies, and novels. Double morality as practiced by the bourgeoisie became the outstanding sign of that *esprit de sérieux*, which is always pompous and never sincere. This division between private and public or social life had nothing to do with the justified separation between the personal and public spheres, but was rather the psychological reflection of the nineteenth-century struggle between *bourgeois* and *citoyen*, between the man who judged and used all public institutions by the yardstick of his private interests and the responsible citizen who was concerned with public affairs as the affairs of all. In this connection, the liberals' political philosophy, according to which the mere sum of individual interests adds up to the miracle of the common good, appeared to be only a rationalization of the recklessness with which private interests were pressed regardless of the common good.

Against the class spirit of the Continental parties, which had always admitted they represented certain interests, and against the "opportunism" resulting from their conception of themselves as only parts of a total, the totalitarian movements asserted their "superiority" in that they carried a *Weltanschauung* by which they would take possession of man as a whole.<sup>60</sup> In this claim to totality the mob leaders of the movements again formulated and only reversed the bourgeoisie's own political philosophy. The bourgeois class, having made its way through social pressure and, frequently, through an economic blackmail of political institutions, always believed that the public and visible organs of power were directed by their own secret, non-public interests and influence. In this sense, the bourgeoisie's political philosophy was always "totalitarian"; it always assumed an identity of politics, economics and society, in which political institutions served only as the façade for private interests. The bourgeoisie's double standard, its differentiation between public and private life, were a concession to the nation-state which had desperately tried to keep the two spheres apart.

What appealed to the elite was radicalism as such. Marx's hopeful predictions that the state would wither away and a classless society emerge were no longer radical, no longer Messianic enough. If Berdyaeff is right in stating that "Russian revolutionaries . . . had always been totalitarian," then the attraction which Soviet Russia exerted almost equally on Nazi and Communist intellectual fellow-travelers lay precisely in the fact that in Russia

<sup>60</sup> The role of the *Weltanschauung* in the formation of the Nazi movement has been stressed many times by Hitler himself. In *Mein Kampf*, it is interesting to note that he pretends to have understood the necessity of basing a party on a *Weltanschauung* through the superiority of the Marxist parties. Book II, chapter I: "*Weltanschauung* and Party."

"the revolution was a religion and a philosophy, not merely a conflict concerned with the social and political side of life."<sup>61</sup> The truth was that the transformation of classes into masses and the breakdown of the prestige and authority of political institutions had brought to Western European countries conditions which resembled those prevalent in Russia, so that it was no accident that their revolutionaries also began to take on the typically Russian revolutionary fanaticism which looked forward, not to change in social or political conditions, but to the radical destruction of every existing creed, value, and institution. The mob merely took advantage of this new mood and brought about a short-lived alliance of revolutionaries and criminals, which also had been present in many revolutionary sects in Czarist Russia but conspicuously absent from the European scene.

The disturbing alliance between the mob and the elite, and the curious coincidence of their aspirations, had their origin in the fact that these strata had been the first to be eliminated from the structure of the nation-state and the framework of class society. They found each other so easily, if only temporarily, because they both sensed that they represented the fate of the time, that they were followed by unending masses, that sooner or later the majority of European peoples might be with them—as they thought, ready to make their revolution.

It turned out that they were both mistaken. The mob, the underworld of the bourgeois class, hoped that the helpless masses would help them into power, would support them when they attempted to forward their private interests, that they would be able simply to replace the older strata of bourgeois society and to instill into it the more enterprising spirit of the underworld. Yet totalitarianism in power learned quickly that enterprising spirit was not restricted to the mob strata of the population and that, in any event, such initiative could only be a threat to the total domination of man. Absence of scruple, on the other hand, was not restricted to the mob either and, in any event, could be taught in a relatively short time. For the ruthless machines of domination and extermination, the masses of co-ordinated philistines provided much better material and were capable of even greater crimes than so-called professional criminals, provided only that these crimes were well organized and assumed the appearance of routine jobs.

It is not fortuitous, then, that the few protests against the Nazis' mass atrocities against the Jews and Eastern European peoples were voiced not by the military men nor by any other part of the co-ordinated masses of respectable philistines, but precisely by those early comrades of Hitler who were typical representatives of the mob.<sup>62</sup> Nor was Himmler, the most power-

<sup>61</sup> Nicolai Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, 1937, pp. 124-125.

<sup>62</sup> There is, for instance, the curious intervention of Wilhelm Kube, General Commissar in Minsk and one of the oldest members of the Party, who in 1941, *i.e.*, at the beginning of the mass murder, wrote to his chief: "I certainly am tough and willing to co-operate in the solution of the Jewish question, but people who have been brought up in our own culture are, after all, different from the local bestial hordes. Are we to assign the task of slaughtering them to the Lithuanians and Letts who are dis-



ful man in Germany after 1936, one of those "armed bohemians" (Heiden) whose features were distressingly similar to those of the intellectual elite. Himmler was himself "more normal," that is, more of a philistine, than any of the original leaders of the Nazi movement.<sup>63</sup> He was not a bohemian like Goebbels, or a sex criminal like Streicher, or a crackpot like Rosenberg, or a fanatic like Hitler, or an adventurer like Göring. He proved his supreme ability for organizing the masses into total domination by assuming that most people are neither bohemians, fanatics, adventurers, sex maniacs, crackpots, nor social failures, but first and foremost job holders and good family men.

The philistine's retirement into private life, his single-minded devotion to matters of family and career was the last, and already degenerated, product of the bourgeoisie's belief in the primacy of private interest. The philistine is the bourgeois isolated from his own class, the atomized individual who is produced by the breakdown of the bourgeois class itself. The mass man whom Himmler organized for the greatest mass crimes ever committed in history bore the features of the philistine rather than of the mob man, and was the bourgeois who in the midst of the ruins of his world worried about nothing so much as his private security, was ready to sacrifice everything—belief, honor, dignity—on the slightest provocation. Nothing proved easier to destroy than the privacy and private morality of people who thought of nothing but safeguarding their private lives. After a few years of power and

criminated against even by the indigenous population? I could not do it. I ask you to give me clear-cut instructions to take care of the matter in the most humane way for the sake of the prestige of our Reich and our Party." This letter is published in Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors*, New York, 1946, pp. 153-154. Kube's intervention was quickly overruled, yet an almost identical attempt to save the lives of Danish Jews, made by W. Best, the Reich's plenipotentiary in Denmark, and a well-known Nazi, was more successful. See *Nazi Conspiracy*, V, 2.

Similarly Alfred Rosenberg, who had preached the inferiority of the Slav peoples, obviously never realized that his theories might one day mean their liquidation. Charged with the administration of the Ukraine, he wrote outraged reports about conditions there during the fall of 1942 after he had tried earlier to get direct intervention from Hitler himself. See *Nazi Conspiracy*, III, 83 ff., and IV, 62.

There are of course some exceptions to this rule. The man who saved Paris from destruction was General von Choltitz who, however, still "feared that he would be deprived of his command as he had not executed his orders" even though he knew that the "war had been lost for several years." That he would have had the courage to resist the order "to turn Paris into a mass of ruins" without the energetic support of a Nazi of old standing, Otto Abetz the Ambassador to France, appears dubious according to his own testimony during the trial of Abetz in Paris. See *New York Times*, July 21, 1949.

<sup>63</sup> An Englishman, Stephen H. Roberts, *The House that Hitler Built*, London, 1939, describes Himmler as "a man of exquisite courtesy and still interested in the simple things of life. He has none of the pose of those Nazis who act as demigods. . . . No man looks less like his job than this police dictator of Germany, and I am convinced that nobody I met in Germany is more normal. . . ." (pp. 89-90)—This reminds one in a curious way of the remark of Stalin's mother who according to Bolshevik propaganda said of him: "An exemplary son. I wish everybody were like him" (Souvarine, *op. cit.*, p. 656).

systematic co-ordination, the Nazis could rightly announce: "The only person who is still a private individual in Germany is somebody who is asleep."<sup>64</sup>

In all fairness to those among the elite, on the other hand, who at one time or another have let themselves be seduced by totalitarian movements, and who sometimes, because of their intellectual abilities, are even accused of having inspired totalitarianism, it must be stated that what these desperate men of the twentieth century did or did not do had no influence on totalitarianism whatsoever, although it did play some part in earlier, successful, attempts of the movements to force the outside world to take their doctrines seriously. Wherever totalitarian movements seized power, this whole group of sympathizers was shaken off even before the regimes proceeded toward their greatest crimes. Intellectual, spiritual, and artistic initiative is as dangerous to totalitarianism as the gangster initiative of the mob, and both are more dangerous than mere political opposition. The consistent persecution of every higher form of intellectual activity by the new mass leaders springs from more than their natural resentment against everything they cannot understand. Total domination does not allow for free initiative in any field of life, for any activity that is not entirely predictable. Totalitarianism in power invariably replaces all first-rate talents, regardless of their sympathies, with those crackpots and fools whose lack of intelligence and creativity is still the best guarantee of their loyalty.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> The remark was made by Robert Ley. See Kohn-Bramstedt, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>65</sup> Bolshevik policy, in this respect surprisingly consistent, is well known and hardly needs further comment. Picasso, to take the most famous instance, is not liked in Russia even though he has become a Communist. It is possible that André Gide's sudden reversal of attitude after seeing the Bolshevik reality in Soviet Russia (*Retour de l'URSS*) in 1936, definitely convinced Stalin of the uselessness of creative artists even as fellow-travelers. Nazi policy was distinguished from Bolshevik measures only insofar as it did not yet kill its first-rate talents.

It would be worthwhile to study in detail the careers of those comparatively few German scholars who went beyond mere co-operation and volunteered their services because they were convinced Nazis. (Weinreich, *op. cit.*, the only available study, and misleading because he does not distinguish between professors who adopted the Nazi creed and those who owed their careers exclusively to the regime, omits the earlier careers of the concerned scholars and thus indiscriminately puts well-known men of great achievement into the same category as crackpots.) Most interesting is the example of the jurist Carl Schmitt, whose very ingenious theories about the end of democracy and legal government still make arresting reading; as early as the middle thirties, he was replaced by the Nazis' own brand of political and legal theorists, such as Hans Frank, the later governor of Poland, Gottfried Neesse, and Reinhard Hoehn. The last to fall into disgrace was the historian Walter Frank, who had been a convinced antisemite and member of the Nazi party before it came to power, and who, in 1933, became director of the newly founded Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des Neuen Deutschlands with its famous Forschungsabteilung Judenfrage, and editor of the nine-volume *Forschungen zur Judenfrage* (1937-1944). In the early forties, Frank had to cede his position and influence to the notorious Alfred Rosenberg, whose *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* certainly shows no aspiration whatsoever to "scholarship." Frank clearly was mistrusted for no other reason than that he was not a charlatan.

What neither the elite nor the mob that "embraced" National Socialism with such

fervor could understand was that "one cannot embrace this Order . . . by accident. Above and beyond the willingness to serve stands the unrelenting necessity of selection that knows neither extenuating circumstances nor clemency" (*Der Weg der SS*, issued by the SS Hauptamt-Schulungsamt, n.d., p. 4). In other words, concerning the selection of those who would belong to them the Nazis intended to make their own decisions, regardless of the "accident" of any opinions. The same appears to be true for the selection of Bolsheviks for the secret police. F. Beck and W. Godin report in *Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession*, 1951, p. 160, that the members of the NKVD are claimed from the ranks of party members without having the slightest opportunity to volunteer for this "career."

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*.

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