

# Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy

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# I

## AUTOCRACY AND THE PROBLEM OF THE STATE

"We have created a new type of state!" Lenin repeatedly claimed. He made it clear at the same time that he considered this new state to be radically different from a constitutional democracy with its civil liberties. With the creation of this new type of state, "a turn in world history had occurred . . . the epoch of bourgeois-democratic parliamentarism is ended; a new chapter of world history began: the epoch of the proletarian dictatorship." (207a) By these statements, which are still orthodox doctrine in accordance with the emphasis on Lenin's views, the great revolutionary fanatic made it amply explicit that the Soviet state was different. He considered it a new kind of democracy, in which the masses of workers and peasants are activated for participation through the party. Democracy in this context means a nonautocratic system of the tsarist type, and certainly the Soviet Union from its very beginning has constituted a radical departure from that traditional and hereditary autocracy which was the tsars'. And yet a more comprehensive analysis shows it to be a new species of autocracy. In order to justify this statement, we first need such an analysis.

Totalitarian dictatorships have been labeled with every one of the expressions used to signify older autocracies. They have been called tyrannies, despotisms, and absolutisms. Yet all these terms are highly misleading. In any historically valid sense, the resemblance between twentieth-century totalitarian dictatorships and such older autocracies as oriental despotism and Greek tyranny is very partial. The autocratic regimes of the past were not nearly as thor-



✓ ough as the totalitarian dictatorships of today. (389a) They did not seek to get hold of the entire man, the human being in his totality, but were satisfied with excluding him from certain spheres and exploiting him more or less mercilessly in others. Yet one also maligns totalitarian dictatorship by these analogical descriptions. For whereas tyranny was conducted for the benefit of the tyrant, as Aristotle pointed out, it is not very realistic to make that kind of egoism the basis of an interpretation of totalitarian dictatorship. ✓ Whatever Lenin's new type of state was, it was not conducted in the personal interest of Lenin.

There have, then, been many types of autocracy in the history of government. Certain forms of primitive kingship, the several forms of despotism often associated with the deification of the ruler characteristic of the Orient, as well as the later Roman empire, the tyranny in the Greek city-states and in Renaissance Italy, and the absolutist monarchies of modern Europe, including tsarist Russia, are the more familiar types of autocracy. Any typology of broad empirical scope must include these models, as well as military dictatorship and related forms of emergency rule. It has been shown elsewhere (110i) that the thirteen identifiable types of rule fall into a rough developmental pattern, but this pattern is devoid of any inherent value constituting "progress" from the first to the last. Rather it should be recognized that the value of any particular political order corresponding to one of these types is, from a pragmatic viewpoint, the consequence of the degree of its "working." From an ideological viewpoint, its value may result from the purposes to which the particular regime is addressing itself, from the national or class group that predominates, from the religion prevalent therein, from the degree of general consensus it enjoys, and from various other considerations. Autocracy is therefore not "in itself" bad; it has worked over long periods of time, and the question of its value now is its workability, as well as the ideological considerations just enumerated. Totalitarian dictatorship may, in a preliminary characterization, be called an autocracy based upon modern technology and mass legitimation.

✓ In all autocratic regimes, the distinguishing feature is that the ruler is not accountable to anyone else for what he does. He is the *autos* who himself wields power; that is to say, makes the decisions and reaps the results. The logical opposite of autocracy, therefore,



would be any rule in which another, as the *heteros*, shared the power of ruling through the fact that the ruler is accountable to him or them. In the modern West, it has become customary to speak of such systems as responsible or constitutional government.\* Among such constitutional systems, constitutional democracy has become the predominant type, though there have existed other types, such as constitutional monarchies, aristocracies, and theocracies. (431)

Since any system of accountability must be expressed in rules of some kind which together constitute the "constitution" and, as rules, are properly speaking a kind of legal norm, it has been customary since Plato and Aristotle to stress the role of law and to distinguish political systems according to whether or not they are characterized by the subordination of the political rulers to law. From this viewpoint, an autocracy is any political system in which the rulers are insufficiently, or not at all, subject to antecedent and enforceable rules of law — enforceable, that is, by other authorities who share in the government and who have sufficient power to compel the lawbreaking rulers to submit to the law.

This problem of the control of the rulers by the law must be distinguished from the problem of the role of law in a given society. All human societies, communities, and groups of any sort have some kind of law, and the totalitarian dictatorships of our time are characterized by a vast amount of "legislation," necessitated by the requirements of a technically industrialized economy and of the masses of dependent operators involved in such a society. (19; 102a) Similarly the Roman empire saw an increase, not a decline, in the detailed complexity of its legal system during the very period when it was becoming more and more autocratic. This autocracy eventually reached the point of deifying the emperor, while the detailed development of the legal system continued. Long before this time, all enforceable control of the ruler had vanished and the responsibility of which the republic had been so proud had completely disappeared. The will of the emperor was the ultimate source of all law. (81a) This conception was expressed in a number

\* The term *heterocracy* has never been suggested, though it is the genuine logical alternative to autocracy. Some such general term would be highly useful, since "constitutional government" is a much more restricted type, limited to the modern West. (104)



of celebrated phrases, which eventually became the basis of the doctrine of sovereignty that provided the rationalization of absolute monarchs in the seventeenth century. (105a)

It is at this point that the analysis is faced with the problem of the "state." The notion of the state arose in the sixteenth century and has since become generalized to mean any political order or government. But in view of the problem of law as a restraint upon government, it may be instructive to go back to the origins of the concept. The state as an institutional manifold developed in response to the challenge presented by the Christian church's secular ambitions. It embodies a political order institutionally divorced from the ecclesiastical establishment. Even where a "state church" has survived, as in England, this church is separated from the political order in terms of authority, legitimacy, and representation. This sharp separation of the state from religion and church distinguishes it from the political order of Greece and Rome as much as from the Asiatic and African monarchies. The state in this distinct historical sense is almost entirely "Western," and some of the complexities of contemporary state-building are connected with this fact. (110j) The "new type of state" that Lenin spoke of so proudly is, in this perspective, an effort to transcend this modern state; for the official ideology encompasses a pseudo-religion that is intended to replace the separated religions of the past. It marks in that sense a return to the sort of political order that characterized the Greek and Roman world, as well as older autocracies.

The state, as already mentioned, was recognized as a new order in the sixteenth century. Jean Bodin more especially formalized its understanding by linking the state with sovereignty. The claim that the ruler of a state must be sovereign, if the state is to epitomize a good order, amounted to claiming that the ruler must be free of all restraints. Jean Bodin did not, in fact, dare to go that far, though some of his more radical formulations do. But Hobbes did and thus completed the doctrine of the modern state. Among the restraints that particularly concerned Bodin, Hobbes, and their contemporaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was that of fixed and established law. The ruler must be free to change all laws to enable him to rule effectively. Yet even Hobbes could not bring himself to go quite that far. The arbitrary discretion of the ruler found its limit in the right of self-preservation of each of his subjects. But the



trend was clear: power must be concentrated so as to produce order and peace. It was this doctrine that remained at the core of absolutism in its characteristic monarchical form. Tsarist autocracy rested upon it as clearly as Western monarchies, with one highly significant difference: the separation from the church that had been the heart of the matter in the West never occurred.

This is not the place to sketch the evolution of these absolutist regimes or the doctrines; nor can we even sketch the constitutional alternative which, inherited from the Middle Ages, was fashioned to supersede them in conjunction with those revolutions, English, American, and French, that Lenin contemptuously brushed aside as bourgeois. Let us merely state again that the state was by the sixteenth century a large-scale governmental organization effectively centralized by means of a strictly secular bureaucracy, often implemented by some kind of representative body. Suffice it merely to point out that the contradictory implications, in theory and practice, of this monarchical absolutism, this autocracy, prevented its maintenance. It broke down because as the economy became more complex — stimulated by these very autocracies — the centralized bureaucracy was unable to handle the ever larger number of decisions that had to be taken.\* In order to salvage the state concept, political philosophers and jurists attributed sovereignty either to the people or to the state. Both of these collectives were sufficiently intangible to negate the real meaning of the doctrines of Bodin and Hobbes. For, as has been pointed out, the essence of the doctrine of sovereignty was that a determinate person or group of persons wield an unlimited power of deciding what is in the public interest. The truth of the matter is that, as once was said rather picturesquely by the great Sir Edward Coke, "sovereignty and the common law make strange bedfellows," by which he meant that the common-law tradition of the supremacy of the law could not be reconciled with the new theory of the state as unlimited in fact.† The genuine state concept calls for an absolute ruler, an autocrat.

\* There is a striking analogy here to the present difficulties in the Soviet Union, which are highlighted in the controversy over decentralization and its implementation.

† The present debate among lawyers in the Soviet bloc, and more especially the USSR, over legal restraints to prevent a return to the Stalinist terror therefore raises this central issue, and it is understandable that the lawyers (as always) are clashing with the party and its politicians on this score. (449b)



Doctrines such as that of "democratic centralism" or the "mass line of leadership," just as much as Hitler's *Führerprinzip*, constitute a return to this autocratic conception of the state. The retention of the "people," the "masses," or the "Volk" as ultimate reference points does not alter the fact that decision making is concentrated and unlimited at the apex of the official hierarchy. And this is the quintessence of autocracy: that the autocrat is able to determine by and for himself to what extent he will use his power. Any self-imposed limits — and there always are such — do not alter this key criterion, as long as the autocrat retains the power to discard them, whenever he deems it desirable in the interest of the regime. Such autocracy may be collective; it still is autocratic, as long as the collective or a part of it possesses the "highest and perpetual power over citizens and subjects, unrestricted by laws" (Bodin), and therefore does not have to account for its use "except to immortal God" (or some other intangible entity such as "the people"). Such ultimate decisional power of the sovereign has been given a shorthand description, that of "the last word."

No complete concentration of power being possible, then, the matter is ultimately one of degree, and a state in the classical sense is found to be that form of political order in which power is in fact fairly concentrated, and potentially may be deployed to handle any situation, including the autocrat's own tenure. When seen in this perspective, the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century are the outcome of movements directed against the denigration of the state in the liberal age. This reassertion of the state is not limited to totalitarian systems. It is found, in more restricted form, in those military dictatorships which have replaced ineffectual constitutional orders, as in Pakistan, Portugal, or Brazil. Such dictatorships are often instituted in order to ward off the threat of a possible takeover by a totalitarian movement; yet to confuse them with totalitarian regimes may have serious practical consequences as well as being theoretically unsound.

It is interesting at this point to consider briefly the personal regimes of Franco in Spain and of De Gaulle in France. Both represent a reassertion of the need for a strong state with an autocrat at the head, intended to ensure the functioning of the body politic. The Gaullist republic is still a constitutional order of sorts, though the General has taken it upon himself to set the constitu-



tion aside when it interfered with his plans for the succession, thereby demonstrating the trend toward autocracy. The Caudillo, on the other hand, has been moving in the opposite direction. In the heyday of the Falangist party, Spain had many of the hallmarks of a totalitarian regime in the making. But the regime has been gradually transformed into a personal military dictatorship of essentially reactionary propensities, lacking both a total ideology and a party to support and embody it. It has many parallels in Latin America, past and present. As such, it rests upon military support and ecclesiastical sanction and a kind of negative legitimation of popular apathy, reinforced by some pseudo-democratic rituals, such as rigged elections and plebiscites. Its essence is nevertheless autocratic in the general sense here developed and is epitomized by the absence of any genuine opposition, a free press, and the like.

Such military dictatorships are distinguished from the older autocracies of monarchy and tyranny not only by their curious legitimation, but also by their essentially technical outlook on politics. This is true whether their propensity is conservative-reactionary, as in Spain or Brazil, or progressive, as in Pakistan and *ceteris paribus* the Turkey of Kemal. Such pragmatic "functions" suggest the term "functional dictatorship." The absolute monarchies of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe had a much more deep-rooted cultural concern, even though their mercantilist policies fostered technical progress. The oriental despotic regimes (when they were despotic) were typically expansionist. In both the legitimacy rests upon a divinely sanctioned blood descent and some sort of identification of the ruler with the deity as master of the universe. This outlook provided an underpinning for expansionist policies. Finally the tyrannies of Greece and Italy, both products of periods of profound anomie and a disruption of traditional order, sought to substitute personal valor and violence for any satisfactory and satisfying claim to legitimacy — hence their extreme instability. Such instability is by no means the hallmark of other autocracies. On the contrary, some have exhibited to a remarkable degree a capacity to endure over long periods.

In this connection, it should be remembered that autocratic regimes are not necessarily possessed of a greater degree of authority than nonautocratic ones; in fact they often arise when authority is difficult to maintain. The role of authority in government is a



ubiquitous one, and for that reason it is rather misleading to speak of autocratic regimes as "authoritarian" (264); a constitutional democracy or a traditional monarchy, neither of them autocratic, may be highly authoritarian in fact. Every government of whatever type will seek to achieve as much authority as possible, because authority contributes to stability and longevity. (110m) This problem of longevity calls for further comment.

The totalitarian dictatorship in the Soviet Union is by now over a generation old. No one can be sure at the present time what the lasting qualities of this system of government will turn out to be. At first it was rather generally believed that such dictatorships would, like the tyrannies of ancient Greece, prove short-lived. Aristotle, reasoning in terms of the Greek passion for the citizen's free participation in the affairs of his polis, believed high mortality to be a built-in feature of tyranny. But the historical record of autocracy suggests that these Greek tyrannies were the exception proving the rule that autocracies tend to last. They have shown an extraordinary capacity for survival. Not only the Roman empire, but also the despotic monarchies of the Near and Far East lasted for centuries, the Chinese empire for millennia. (52 p. 198ff) To be sure, the dynasties changed and there were recurrent internal times of trouble, as well as foreign invasions, but the systems endured in Egypt, in Mesopotamia, in Persia, in India, China, and Japan, to mention only the most important. When they did fall, it was usually because of conquest by a rival empire, Babylon, Assur, Egypt, and India being cases in point. It is similarly quite conceivable, as Orwell hints in *1984*, that by the end of this century rival totalitarian empires will from time to time engage in mortal combat; for there is certainly no reason to assume that the world-wide triumph of totalitarianism would necessarily usher in a period of universal peace. The mounting conflicts between the USSR and China are a hint of what might be in store for mankind along this line (see Chapter 27).

The autocratic regimes of the past, while lasting over long periods, witnessed considerable ups and downs in the degree or intensity of violence employed for their maintenance. Periods of relative order and domestic peace, such as that of the Antonines, alternated with periods of fierce oppression and tyrannical abuse of power. The first century of the Roman *principatus* saw the benevolent rule



of Augustus turn into the fierce absolutism of Tiberius and the criminal license of Nero; comparable contrasts are part of the historical record of every such autocracy. Medieval political thought elaborated these alternatives into the dichotomy of monarch and tyrant, the latter being a monarch who by abuse of his power raised serious doubts about his title to rule. The historical record suggests that some sort of cycle is involved in this alternation between intensification and relaxation of autocratic power, though the adventitious change in rulers who brought a different personality to the task of ruling disrupted the cycle from time to time. Extraneous events, whether natural or man-made, such as plagues, disasters, and foreign threats, may also cause deviations from the natural cycle of gradual intensification of violence that increase until a certain extreme is reached, to be followed by a more or less violent reversal, a return to the original state, and the recommencement of the cycle. Thus the long rule of Stalin saw a gradual increase in totalitarian violence that came to an end with his death, which some believe to have been a murder committed by persons in his entourage who were in danger of becoming victims of his suspicion. This cycle seems to have recommenced after a period of transition. The process resembles a familiar and repetitive pattern, which characterized Russian tsardom. Time and again, the new hope raised by a young emperor, that autocracy would end, died as the reign matured and methods became violent once more.

The oscillation between tight and loose control in an autocratic regime is probably linked to its origin. Born in violence, it remains confronted by the problem of how far it can go in abandoning violence. The autocratic regimes of modern times, at least, have all had such a violent beginning. Absolute monarchy and military and totalitarian dictatorships share this trait, even though the violence is in one case an extension of traditional discretion by usurpation, in another counterrevolutionary reaction, and only in the third the revolutionary seizure of power. By analogical reasoning, one might presume that the origin of older autocracies is similarly conditioned. This is certainly true for the rise of the Roman emperors, even though it was accomplished by gradual steps and disguised behind a curtain of traditional republican claptrap. It is also historically confirmed for the Macedonian rulers and for the tyrants of Italy and Greece. In the case of oriental despotism and its primi-



tive antecedents, we are left to surmises. The origins are shrouded in the mists of legend and myth, telling of divine descent, as in Egypt and China. Recent scholarship has advanced the argument that at the dawn of history nomadic herdsmen, and more especially conquerors on horseback, subjected large peasant populations to their exploitative rule and thereby laid the foundations for the growth of civilization. (306a) This process of superimposition (*Überlagerung*) was certainly also extremely violent, and if further research should confirm the theory it would place the expansionist totalitarians in line with the earliest forebears in the practice of autocracy.

That even these early autocracies faced the problem of how to tame the extremes of senseless violence, is clear. It has been shown that the growth of elaborate bureaucracies in response to complex technical tasks of administration produced the bureaucratic empires. Of these it has been said that they arose within the various types of autocratic rule, when torn by strife and dissension. Usually, we are told, it was "the objective of the ruler to reestablish peace and order." (81b) As the scope of the activities of these bureaucracies grew and their performance depended increasingly on experience and know-how, the rulers found that they had to grant them a certain autonomy, which in turn was embodied in rules, traditions, and supervisory controls. These measures did not go nearly as far as in modern autocracies, but they constituted a means of ordering and institutionalizing autocratic procedures under law. The most important conditions for the institutionalization of such bureaucratic empires were (1) the tendency of rulers toward implementing autonomous political goals, and (2) the development of certain relatively limited levels of differentiation in all the major institutional spheres. It should therefore not occasion any surprise that the autocracies of our time are confronted by similar problems.

Two other general hypotheses concerning the empirical evidence on autocracies deserve to be mentioned. One is the existence of widespread consensus. Such consensus on the broad goals of peace and order, as well as on the more particular and parochial goals of specific deities and the cultures associated with them, is to be found throughout the history of autocracy. Only in the initial phase of the establishment or re-establishment of an autocracy is that consensus lacking. The formation of such consensus will in part occur in



response to efforts by the ruler as he seeks to provide his rule with a basis of legitimacy (110k); it will also "grow" as a result of the subject population's becoming accustomed to the rule, as its more active members are given or discover opportunities for personal advancement and gain. Indeed, in a certain sense, it can be said that general consensus is a specific characteristic of autocratic regimes that last more than one generation, in contrast to nonautocratic ones wherein a measure of sharp dissent is unavoidable and may even be cultivated.

The other hypothesis concerns consultation of the subject population, as implied in Lenin's democratic centralism, Mao's mass line, and Hitler's *Volksbefragung* through plebiscites. Autocratic regimes have often in the past engaged in such consultative practices, from Harun al-Rashid's legendary wanderings through the taverns of Baghdad to Frederick the Great's extended solicitation of popular responses to his proposed code of laws, to be repeated by Napoleon Bonaparte. In Frederick's case, we know the extent to which opinions were in fact expressed and later sifted by the drafters for possibly valid criticism, much as the Soviet Union has often through the party engaged in stimulating widespread popular discussion of impending changes. Such consultation is, therefore, not "democratic" in the Western sense of representative government, because the ruler retains full and complete power to decide what to accept and what to reject, because he alone is in charge. He has, as we mentioned, "the last word." He is sovereign in the full sense of the word.

In summary and conclusion, it might be said that autocracy appears to have been the prevailing form of government over long stretches of mankind's history. It should therefore not occasion any great surprise that it has reappeared in recent times, wherever public order seemed threatened by revolutionary movements or wherever such movements sought to institutionalize their power. The latter process has given rise to totalitarian dictatorships. It is the main purpose of this study to discover what is the actual nature of such a system, what its structure and the conduct of its affairs, and in the course of that inquiry to throw some light on the possible answer to the question of why such systems have arisen in the twentieth century. There has been much general speculation on this score, but the results have been rather unsatisfactory from a



scientific viewpoint, even when impressive in their brilliance as literary exercises. In any case, scientific method seems to us to require that a phenomenon first be identified in its full complexity, before an attempt can be made to "explain" its existence.



## 2

### THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TOTALITARIAN DICTATORSHIP

Totalitarian regimes are autocracies. When they are said to be tyrannies, despotisms, or absolutisms, the basic general nature of such regimes is being denounced, for all these words have a strongly pejorative flavor. When they call themselves "democracies," qualifying it by the adjective "popular," they are not contradicting these indictments, except in trying to suggest that they are good or at least praiseworthy. An inspection of the meaning the totalitarians attach to the term "popular democracy" reveals that they mean by it a species of autocracy. The leaders of the people, identified with the leaders of the ruling party, have the last word. Once they have decided and been acclaimed by a party gathering, their decision is final. Whether it be a rule, a judgment, or a measure or any other act of government, they are the *autokrator*, the ruler accountable only to himself. Totalitarian dictatorship, in a sense, is the adaptation of autocracy to twentieth-century industrial society. (19)

Thus, as far as this characteristic absence of accountability is concerned, totalitarian dictatorship resembles earlier forms of autocracy. But it is our contention in this volume that totalitarian dictatorship is historically an innovation (cf. 133; 389; 52) and *sui generis*. It is also our conclusion from all the facts available to us that fascist and communist totalitarian dictatorships are basically alike, or at any rate more nearly like each other than like any other system of government, including earlier forms of autocracy. These two theses are closely linked and must be examined together. They are also linked to a third, that totalitarian dictatorship as it actually



developed was not intended by those who created it — Mussolini talked of it, though he meant something different — but resulted from the political situations in which the anticonstitutionalist and antidemocratic revolutionary movements and their leaders found themselves. Before we explore these propositions, one very widespread theory of totalitarianism needs consideration.

It is a theory that centers on the regime's efforts to remold and transform the human beings under its control in the image of its ideology. As such, it might be called an ideological or anthropological theory of totalitarianism. The theory holds that the "essence" of totalitarianism is to be seen in such a regime's total control of the everyday life of its citizens, of its control, more particularly, of their thoughts and attitudes as well as their activities. "The particular criterion of totalitarian rule is the creeping rape [*sic*] of man by the perversion of his thoughts and his social life," a leading exponent of this view has written. "Totalitarian rule," he added, "is the claim transformed into political action that the world and social life are changeable without limit." (44a) As compared with this "essence," it is asserted that organization and method are criteria of secondary importance. There are a number of serious objections to this theory. The first is purely pragmatic. For while it may be the intent of the totalitarians to achieve total control, it is certainly doomed to disappointment; no such control is actually achieved, even within the ranks of their party membership or cadres, let alone over the population at large. The specific procedures generated by this desire for total control, this "passion for unanimity" as we call it later in our analysis, are highly significant, have evolved over time, and have varied greatly at different stages. They have perhaps been carried farthest by the Chinese Communists in their methods of thought control, but they were also different under Stalin and under Lenin, under Hitler and under Mussolini. Apart from this pragmatic objection, however, there also arises a comparative historical one. For such ideologically motivated concern for the whole man, such intent upon total control, has been characteristic of other regimes in the past, notably theocratic ones such as the Puritans' or the Moslems'. It has also found expression in some of the most elevated philosophical systems, especially that of Plato who certainly in *The Republic*, *The Statesman*, and *The Laws* advocates total control in the interest of good order in the political community. This in turn



has led to the profound and unfortunate misunderstanding of Plato as a totalitarian (284; 111a; 353); he was an authoritarian, favoring the autocracy of the wise. The misunderstanding has further occasioned the misinterpretation of certain forms of tyrannical rule in classical antiquity as "totalitarian," on the ground that in Sparta, for instance, "the life and activity of the entire population are continuously subject to a close regimentation by the state." (114) Finally, it would be necessary to describe the order of the medieval monastery as totalitarian; for it was certainly characterized by such a scheme of total control. Indeed, much "primitive" government also appears then to be totalitarian (223) because of its close control of all participants. What is really the specific difference, the innovation of the totalitarian regimes, is the organization and methods developed and employed with the aid of modern technical devices in an effort to resuscitate such total control in the service of an ideologically motivated movement, dedicated to the total destruction and reconstruction of a mass society. It seems therefore highly desirable to use the term "totalism" to distinguish the much more general phenomenon just sketched, as has recently been proposed by a careful analyst of the methods of Chinese thought control. (217; 314)

Totalitarian dictatorship then emerges as a system of rule for realizing totalist intentions under modern political and technical conditions, as a novel type of autocracy. (301) The declared intention of creating a "new man," according to numerous reports, has had significant results where the regime has lasted long enough, as in Russia. In the view of one leading authority, "the most appealing traits of the Russians—their naturalness and candor—have suffered most." He considers this a "profound and apparently permanent transformation," and an "astonishing" one. (238a) In short, the effort at total control, while not achieving such control, has highly significant human effects.

The fascist and communist systems evolved in response to a series of grave crises—they are forms of crisis government. Even so, there is no reason to conclude that the existing totalitarian systems will disappear as a result of internal evolution, though there can be no doubt that they are undergoing continuous changes. The two totalitarian governments that have perished thus far have done so as the result of wars with outside powers, but this does not mean



that the Soviet Union, Communist China, or any of the others necessarily will become involved in war. We do not presuppose that totalitarian societies are fixed and static entities but, on the contrary, that they have undergone and continue to undergo a steady evolution, presumably involving both growth and deterioration. (209f)

But what about the origins? If it is evident that the regimes came into being because a totalitarian movement achieved dominance over a society and its government, where did the movement come from? The answer to this question remains highly controversial. A great many explanations have been attempted in terms of the various ingredients of these ideologies. Not only Marx and Engels, where the case seems obvious, but Hegel, Luther, and a great many others have come in for their share of blame. Yet none of these thinkers was, of course, a totalitarian at all, and each would have rejected these regimes, if any presumption like that were to be tested in terms of his thought. They were humanists and religious men of intense spirituality of the kind the totalitarians explicitly reject. In short, all such "explanations," while interesting in illuminating particular elements of the totalitarian ideologies, are based on serious invalidating distortions of historical facts. (182; 126; 145.1; 280) If we leave aside such ideological explanations (and they are linked of course to the "ideological" theory of totalitarian dictatorship as criticized above), we find several other unsatisfactory genetic theories.

The debate about the causes or origins of totalitarianism has run all the way from a primitive bad-man theory (46a) to the "moral crisis of our time" kind of argument. A detailed inspection of the available evidence suggests that virtually every one of the factors which has been offered by itself as an explanation of the origin of totalitarian dictatorship has played its role. For example, in the case of Germany, Hitler's moral and personal defects, weaknesses in the German constitutional tradition, certain traits involved in the German "national character," the Versailles Treaty and its aftermath, the economic crisis and the "contradictions" of an aging capitalism, the "threat" of communism, the decline of Christianity and of such other spiritual moorings as the belief in the reason and the reasonableness of man — all have played a role in the total configuration of factors contributing to the over-all result. As in the case of other broad developments in history, only a multiple-factor analysis will



yield an adequate account. But at the present time, we cannot fully explain the rise of totalitarian dictatorship. All we can do is to explain it partially by identifying some of the antecedent and concomitant conditions. To repeat: totalitarian dictatorship is a new phenomenon; there has never been anything quite like it before.

The discarding of ideological explanations — highly objectionable to all totalitarians, to be sure — opens up an understanding of and insight into the basic similarity of totalitarian regimes, whether communist or fascist. They are, in terms of organization and procedures — that is to say, in terms of structure, institutions, and processes of rule — basically alike. What does this mean? In the first place, it means that they are not wholly alike. Popular and journalistic interpretation has oscillated between two extremes; some have said that the communist and fascist dictatorships are wholly alike, others that they are not at all alike. The latter view was the prevailing one during the popular-front days in Europe as well as in liberal circles in the United States. It was even more popular during the Second World War, especially among Allied propagandists. Besides, it was and is the official communist and fascist party line. It is only natural that these regimes, conceiving of themselves as bitter enemies, dedicated to the task of liquidating each other, should take the view that they have nothing in common. This has happened before in history. When the Protestants and Catholics were fighting during the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they very commonly denied to one another the name of "Christians," and each argued about the other that it was not a "true church." Actually, and in the perspective of time, both were indeed Christian churches.

The other view, that communist and fascist dictatorships are wholly alike, was during the cold war demonstrably favored in the United States and in Western Europe to an increasing extent. Yet they are demonstrably not wholly alike. For example, they differ in their acknowledged purposes and intentions. Everyone knows that the communists say they seek the world revolution of the proletariat, while the fascists proclaimed their determination to establish the imperial predominance of a particular nation or race, either over the world or over a region. The communist and fascist dictatorships differ also in their historical antecedents: the fascist movements arose in reaction to the communist challenge and offered themselves



to a frightened middle class as saviors from the communist danger. The communist movements, on the other hand, presented themselves as the liberators of an oppressed people from an existing autocratic regime, at least in Russia and China. Both claims are not without foundation, and one could perhaps coordinate them by treating the totalitarian movements as consequences of the First World War. "The rise [of totalitarianism] has occurred in the sequel to the first world war and those catastrophies, political and economic, which accompanied it and the feeling of crisis linked thereto." (31a) As we shall have occasion to show in the chapters to follow, there are many other differences which do not allow us to speak of the communist and fascist totalitarian dictatorships as wholly alike, but which suggest that they are sufficiently alike to class them together and to contrast them not only with constitutional systems, but also with former types of autocracy.

Before we turn to these common features, however, there is another difference that used to be emphasized by many who wanted "to do business with Hitler" or who admired Mussolini and therefore argued that, far from being wholly like the communist dictatorship, the fascist regimes really had to be seen as merely authoritarian forms of constitutional systems. It is indeed true that more of the institutions of the antecedent liberal and constitutional society survived in the Italian Fascist than in the Russian or Chinese Communist society. But this is due in part to the fact that no liberal constitutional society preceded Soviet or Chinese Communism. The promising period of the Duma came to naught as a result of the war and the disintegration of tsarism, while the Kerensky interlude was far too brief and too superficial to become meaningful for the future. Similarly in China, the Kuomintang failed to develop a working constitutional order, though various councils were set up; they merely provided a facade for a military dictatorship disrupted by a great deal of anarchical localism, epitomized in the rule of associated warlords. In the Soviet satellites, on the other hand, numerous survivals of a nontotalitarian past continue to function. In Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Yugoslavia we find such institutions as universities, churches, and schools. It is likely that, were a communist dictatorship to be established in Great Britain or France, the situation would be similar, and here even more such institutions of the liberal era would continue to operate, for a con-



siderable initial period at least. Precisely this argument has been advanced by such British radicals as Sidney and Beatrice Webb. The tendency of isolated fragments of the preceding state of society to survive has been a significant source of misinterpretation of the fascist totalitarian society, especially in the case of Italy. In the twenties, Italian totalitarianism was very commonly misinterpreted as being "merely" an authoritarian form of middle-class rule, with the trains running on time and the beggars off the streets. (27) In the case of Germany, this sort of misinterpretation took a slightly different form. In the thirties, various writers tried to interpret German totalitarianism either as "the end phase of capitalism" or as "militarist imperialism." (263a) These interpretations stress the continuance of a "capitalist" economy whose leaders are represented as dominating the regime. The facts as we know them do not correspond to this view (see Part V). For one who sympathized with socialism or communism, it was very tempting to depict the totalitarian dictatorship of Hitler as nothing but a capitalist society and therefore totally at variance with the "new civilization" that was arising in the Soviet Union. These few remarks have suggested, it is hoped, why it may be wrong to consider the totalitarian dictatorships under discussion as either wholly alike or basically different. Why they are basically alike remains to be shown, and to this key argument we now turn.

The basic features or traits that we suggest as generally recognized to be common to totalitarian dictatorships are six in number. The "syndrome," or pattern of interrelated traits, of the totalitarian dictatorship consists of an ideology, a single party typically led by one man, a terroristic police, a communications monopoly, a weapons monopoly, and a centrally directed economy. Of these, the last two are also found in constitutional systems: Socialist Britain had a centrally directed economy, and all modern states possess a weapons monopoly. Whether these latter suggest a "trend" toward totalitarianism is a question that will be discussed in our last chapter. These six basic features, which we think constitute the distinctive pattern or model of totalitarian dictatorship, form a cluster of traits, intertwined and mutually supporting each other, as is usual in "organic" systems. They should therefore not be considered in isolation or be made the focal point of comparisons, such as "Caesar developed a terroristic secret police, therefore he was the



first totalitarian dictator," or "the Catholic Church has practiced ideological thought control, therefore . . ."

The totalitarian dictatorships all possess the following:

1. An elaborate ideology, consisting of an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man's existence to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere, at least passively; this ideology is characteristically focused and projected toward a perfect final state of mankind — that is to say, it contains a chiliastic claim, based upon a radical rejection of the existing society with conquest of the world for the new one.

2. A single mass party typically led by one man, the "dictator," and consisting of a relatively small percentage of the total population (up to 10 percent) of men and women, a hard core of them passionately and unquestioningly dedicated to the ideology and prepared to assist in every way in promoting its general acceptance, such a party being hierarchically, oligarchically organized and typically either superior to, or completely intertwined with, the governmental bureaucracy.

3. A system of terror, whether physical or psychic, effected through party and secret-police control, supporting but also supervising the party for its leaders, and characteristically directed not only against demonstrable "enemies" of the regime, but against more or less arbitrarily selected classes of the population; the terror whether of the secret police or of party-directed social pressure systematically exploits modern science, and more especially scientific psychology.

4. A technologically conditioned, near-complete monopoly of control, in the hands of the party and of the government, of all means of effective mass communication, such as the press, radio, and motion pictures.

5. A similarly technologically conditioned, near-complete monopoly of the effective use of all weapons of armed combat.

6. A central control and direction of the entire economy through the bureaucratic coordination of formerly independent corporate entities, typically including most other associations and group activities.

The enumeration of these six traits or trait clusters is not meant to suggest that there might not be others, now insufficiently recognized. It has more particularly been suggested that the admin-



istrative control of justice and the courts is a distinctive trait (see Chapter 10); but actually the evolution of totalitarianism in recent years suggests that such administrative direction of judicial work may be greatly limited. We shall also discuss the problem of expansionism, which has been urged as a characteristic trait of totalitarianism. The traits here outlined have been generally acknowledged as the features of totalitarian dictatorship, to which the writings of students of the most varied backgrounds, including totalitarian writers, bear witness.

Within this broad pattern of similarities, there are many significant variations to which the analysis of this book will give detailed attention. To offer a few random illustrations: at present the party plays a much greater role in the Soviet Union than it did under Stalin; the ideology of the Soviet Union is more specifically committed to certain assumptions, because of its Marx-Engels bible, than that of Italian or German fascism, where ideology was formulated by the leader of the party himself; the corporate entities of the fascist economy remained in private hands, as far as property claims are concerned, whereas they become public property in the Soviet Union.

Let us now turn to our first point, namely, that totalitarian regimes are historically novel; that is to say, that no government like totalitarian dictatorship has ever before existed, even though it bears a resemblance to autocracies of the past. It may be interesting to consider briefly some data which show that the six traits we have just identified are to a large extent lacking in historically known autocratic regimes. Neither the oriental despotisms of the more remote past nor the absolute monarchies of modern Europe, neither the tyrannies of the ancient Greek cities nor the Roman empire, neither yet the tyrannies of the city-states of the Italian Renaissance and the Bonapartist military dictatorship nor the other functional dictatorships of this or the last century exhibit this design, this combination of features, though they may possess one or another of its characteristic traits. For example, efforts have often been made to organize some kind of secret police, but they have not even been horse-and-buggy affairs compared with the terror of the Gestapo or the OGPU (afterwards MVD, then KGB). Similarly, though there have been both military and propagandistic concentrations of power and control, the limits of technology have prevented the achieve-



ment of effective monopoly. Again, certainly neither the Roman emperor nor the absolute monarch of the eighteenth century sought or needed a party to support him or an ideology in the modern party sense, and the same is true of oriental despots. (389c) The tyrants of Greece and Italy may have had a party — that of the Medicis in Florence was called *lo stato* — but they had no ideology to speak of. And, of course, all of these autocratic regimes were far removed from the distinctive features that are rooted in modern technology.

In much of the foregoing, modern technology is mentioned as a significant condition for the invention of the totalitarian model. This aspect of totalitarianism is particularly striking in the field of weapons and communications, but it is involved also in secret-police terror, depending as it does upon technically advanced possibilities of supervision and control of the movement of persons. In addition, the centrally directed economy presupposes the reporting, cataloging, and calculating devices provided by modern technology. In short, four of the six traits are technologically conditioned. To envisage what this technological advance means in terms of political control, one has only to think of the weapons field. The Constitution of the United States guarantees to every citizen the right to bear arms (fourth amendment). In the days of the Minutemen, this was a very important right, and the freedom of the citizen was indeed symbolized by the gun over the hearth, as it is in Switzerland to this day. But who can “bear” such arms as a tank, a bomber, or a flamethrower, let alone an atom bomb? The citizen as an individual, and indeed in larger groups, is simply defenseless against the overwhelming technological superiority of those who can centralize in their hands the means with which to wield modern weapons and thereby physically to coerce the mass of the citizenry. Similar observations apply to the telephone and telegraph, the press, radio and television, and so forth. “Freedom” does not have the same potential it had a hundred and fifty years ago, resting as it then did upon individual effort. With few exceptions, the trend of technological advance implies the trend toward greater and greater size of organization. In the perspective of these four traits, therefore, totalitarian societies appear to be merely exaggerations, but nonetheless logical exaggerations, of the technological state of modern society.



Neither ideology nor party has as significant a relation to the state of technology. There is, of course, some connection, since the mass conversion continually attempted by totalitarian propaganda through effective use of the communication monopoly could not be carried through without it. It may here be observed that the Chinese Communists, lacking the means for mass communication, fell back upon the small group effort of word-of-mouth indoctrination, which incidentally offered a chance for substituting such groups for the family and transferring the filial tradition to them. (346a) Indeed, this process is seen by them as a key feature of their people's democracy.

Ideology and party are conditioned by modern democracy. Totalitarianism's own leaders see it as democracy's fulfillment, as the true democracy, replacing the plutocratic democracy of the bourgeoisie. From a more detached viewpoint, it appears to be an absolute, and hence autocratic, kind of democracy as contrasted with constitutional democracy. (346b) It can therefore grow out of the latter by perverting it. (30) Not only did Hitler, Mussolini, and Lenin\* build typical parties within a constitutional, if not a democratic, context, but the connection is plain between the stress on ideology and the role that platforms and other types of ideological goal-formation play in democratic parties. To be sure, totalitarian parties developed a pronounced authoritarian pattern while organizing themselves into effective revolutionary instruments of action; but, at the same time, the leaders, beginning with Marx and Engels, saw themselves as constituting the vanguard of the democratic movement of their day, and Stalin always talked of the Soviet totalitarian society as the "perfect democracy"; Hitler and Mussolini (347) made similar statements. Both the world brotherhood of the proletariat and the folk community were conceived of as supplanting the class divisions of past societies by a complete harmony — the classless society of socialist tradition.

Not only the party but also its ideology harken back to the democratic context within which the totalitarian movements arose. Ideology generally, but more especially totalitarian ideology, involves a high degree of convictional certainty. As has been indicated, totalitarian ideology consists of an official doctrine that

\* Lenin's Bolshevik Party was quite different in actuality from the monolithic autocratic pattern that he outlined in *What Is To Be Done?*. (205e)



radically rejects the existing society in terms of a chiliastic proposal for a new one. It contains strongly utopian elements, some kind of notion of a paradise on earth. This utopian and chiliastic outlook of totalitarian ideologies gives them a pseudo-religious quality. In fact, they often elicit in their less critical followers a depth of conviction and a fervor of devotion usually found only among persons inspired by a transcendent faith. Whether these aspects of totalitarian ideologies bear some sort of relationship to the religions that they seek to replace is arguable. Marx denounced religion as the opium of the people. It would seem that this is rather an appropriate way of describing totalitarian ideologies. In place of the more or less sane platforms of regular political parties, critical of the existing state of affairs in a limited way, totalitarian ideologies are perversions of such programs. They substitute faith for reason, magic exhortation for knowledge and criticism. And yet it must be recognized that there are enough of these same elements in the operations of democratic parties to attest to the relation between them and their perverted descendants, the totalitarian movements. That is why these movements must be seen and analyzed in their relationship to the democracy they seek to supplant.

At this point, the problem of consensus deserves brief discussion. There has been a good deal of argument over the growth of consensus, especially in the Soviet Union, and in this connection psychoanalytic notions have been put forward. The ideology is said to have been "internalized," for example — that is to say, many people inside the party and out have become so accustomed to think, speak, and act in terms of the prevailing ideology that they are no longer aware of it. Whether one accepts such notions or not, there can be little doubt that a substantial measure of consensus has developed. Such consensus provides a basis for different procedures from what must be applied to a largely hostile population. These procedures were the core of Khrushchev's popularism, as it has been called, by which the lower cadres and members at large of the party were activated and the people's (mass) participation solicited. By such procedures, also employed on a large scale in Communist China, these communist regimes have come to resemble the fascist ones more closely; both in Italy and Germany the broad national consensus enabled the leadership to envisage the party cadres in a "capillary" function (see Chapter 4). As was pointed out in the last



chapter, such consensus and the procedures it makes possible ought not to be confused with those of representative government. When Khrushchev and Mao talk about cooperation, one is reminded of the old definition aptly applied to a rather autocratic dean at a leading Eastern university: I operate and you coo. There is a good deal of consensual cooing in Soviet Russia and Communist China, there can be no doubt. That such cooing at times begins to resemble a growl, one suspects from some of the comments in Russian and Chinese sources. There is here, as in other totalitarian spheres, a certain amount of oscillation, of ups and downs that they themselves like to minimize in terms of "contradictions" that are becoming "nonantagonistic" and that are superseded in "dialectical reversals."

In summary, these regimes could have arisen only within the context of mass democracy and modern technology. In the chapters that follow, we shall deal first with the party and its leadership (Part II), then take up the problems of ideology (Part III), and follow them with propaganda and the terror (Part IV). Part V will be devoted to the issues presented by the centrally directed economy, while the monopoly of communications and weapons will be taken up in special chapters of Parts III, IV, and VI. Part VI will deal with certain areas that to a greater or lesser extent have managed to resist the totalitarian claim to all-inclusiveness; we have called them "islands of separateness" to stress their isolated nature. In the concluding Part VII the expansionism of these regimes is taken up, including the problem of stages of totalitarian development and the possibility of projecting such developmental models into the future.