Stalinism and Nazism

Dictatorships in Comparison

EDITED BY

IAN KERSHAW AND MOSHE LEWIN

The several contributions to this landmark volume represent a variety of new and unique approaches to the joint study of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes.

Moshe Lewin and Ian Kershaw, prominent Russian and German experts respectively, have assembled a distinguished international team of historians and sociologists to examine the parallel aspects of totalitarianism. Although not explicitly comparative, these far-reaching essays provide the necessary foundation for a fuller comparative analysis and provide the means to deepen and extend research in the field. The essays are grouped into three selective areas of common ground between the systems. The first section highlights similarities and differences in the leadership cults at the heart of the dictatorships. The second section moves to the 'war machines' engaged in the titanic clash of the regimes between 1941 and 1945. A final area covered surveys the shifting interpretations of successor societies in Germany and Russia as they have faced up to the legacy of the past.

Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison combines state-of-the art research with fresh perspectives on the most violent and inhumane epoch in modern European history. It will be essential reading for both students and specialists in the social and political sciences, international relations and transcultural studies.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521563451

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First published 1997
Reprinted 1997, 1999, 2000, 2003

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison/
edited by Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin.
p. cm.
ISBN 0 521 56345 3. – ISBN 0 521 56521 9 (pbk.).
1. Totalitarianism – Congresses. 2. Soviet Union – Politics and
goverment – Congresses. 3. Germany – Politics and
goverment – 1933–1945 – Congresses. I. Kershaw, Ian. II. Lewin,
Moshe, 1921–.
JC480.D53 1996
20.5'3-dc20 96-16150 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-56345-1 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-56521-9 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2009

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Contents

List of contributors *page* ix
Preface xi

Introduction: The regimes and their dictators: perspectives of comparison 1
IAN KERSHAW and MOSHE LEWIN

1 Stalin and his Stalinism: power and authority in the Soviet Union, 1930-53. 26
RONALD GRIGOR SUNY

2 Bureaucracy and the Stalinist state 53
MOSHE LEWIN

3 Cumulative radicalisation and progressive self-destruction as structural determinants of the Nazi dictatorship 75
HANS MOMMSEN

4 'Working towards the Führer': reflections on the nature of the Hitler dictatorship 88
IAN KERSHAW

5 Stalin in the mirror of the other 107
MOSHE LEWIN

6 The contradictions of continuous revolution 135
MICHAEL MANN

7 From *Blitzkrieg* to total war: controversial links between image and reality 158
OMAR BARTOV

8 Stalin, the Red Army, and the 'Great Patriotic War' 185
BERND BONWETSCH

9 The economics of war in the Soviet Union during World War II 208
JACQUES SAPIR

10 From 'Great Fatherland War' to the Second World War: new perspectives and future prospects 237
MARK VON HAGEN

11 German exceptionalism and the origins of Nazism: the career of a concept 251
GEORGE STEINMETZ

12 Stalinism and the politics of post-Soviet history 285
MARK VON HAGEN

13 Work, gender and everyday life: reflections on continuity, normality and agency in twentieth-century Germany 311
MARY NOLAN

Afterthoughts 343
IAN KERSHAW and MOSHE LEWIN

Index 359

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Preface

This book had its genesis in a conference (of which Moshe Lewin was the principal organiser) that took place in Philadelphia in September 1991. Fifty scholars from five countries – France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – took part. The aim of the conference was to explore similarities and differences in the development of Russia and Germany during the twentieth century. The Cold War had not encouraged comparison outside the framework of the totalitarianism concept and its assumption that comparison assumed similarity. The conference accepted no such imperative and ranged across the century, tackling a broad array of topics – some widely couched, others more narrowly focused – that reached back into the monarchical systems before the First World War and forward to the demise of the Soviet system. The wide thematic and chronological range of the comparison, the conceptual framework of the enquiry, and the fact that it could take place without the ritual ideological posturing which had existed in the era of the Cold War, meant that the conference was breaking new ground. The participants shared the view that comparison offered the nearest the historian could come to the laboratory experiment of the natural scientist, but that there is no single prescribed or specific method to undertake comparative history. The methods and approaches must remain eclectic and pragmatic in comparative history, as in any other kind of historical analysis.

The conference produced 27 papers and 18 prepared commentaries. The initial intention was to publish not only these, but in addition transcripts of the recorded discussions that flowed unabated for three days. It became clear, however, that to publish the full proceedings of the conference would not have served the interests of a wider, non-specialised, readership. Moreover, several volumes and a number of additional editors would have been necessary to accommodate the extensive material. With some reluctance, therefore, we opted for

concentration on a more limited period, but on one where the comparative issues posed themselves particularly clearly, and could be delineated with some precision. In some instances the initial conference papers were considerably revised. In addition, it was necessary to solicit a number of new contributions on topics which had not been covered at the conference itself. The debt which the editors and authors of the papers in this volume owe to the conference participants whose papers did not fit the narrower confines of the theme of this volume, and which could not, therefore, be included is considerable indeed. Most of these contributions, it is gratifying to note, have in any case meanwhile appeared in print.

This description of the genesis of the present volume is sufficient to indicate that it has not been conceived as a systematic or comprehensive comparative history of Russia and Germany in the Stalinist and Nazi periods. 'Perspectives', as noted in the title of the Introduction, aptly summarises what was intended. The selection of subject areas might easily have been a quite different one. Even so, we believe that this volume serves as a modest pointer to numerous promising avenues for research, reflection, and debate on a subject of self-evident importance.

The editors would like to offer their warmest thanks to the National Council for Soviet and East European Research in Washington DC, which supplied most of the funding needed to stage the conference, and to the School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Pennsylvania which contributed the residue. The Department of History at the University of Pennsylvania offered important administrative support. Special thanks are also owing to James Heinzen and David Kerans, doctoral students at the time of the conference and by now qualified as PhD, for splendid assistance in organisational matters.

Ian Kershaw
Moshe Lewin

Introduction

The regimes and their dictators: perspectives of comparison

Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin

The need to compare

The starting-point of comparative history is invariably the impression, realisation, or certainty that two (or more) societies have sufficient in common to invite – even demand – analysing them as a part of a single set of questions. Normally, it is a problem common to both societies or the historical interaction of those societies which prompts recourse to the comparative method.

Alongside the many exhortations to undertake comparative analysis are the many warnings of its pitfalls. A conventional theoretical objection to comparison is embodied in the claim that historical knowledge is derived from unique, non-repeatable events – in contrast to those fields of knowledge which relate to phenomena capable of repeating themselves, about which generalisations can be drawn and conceptual constructs erected. However, the dichotomy is a false one. The categories are not mutually exclusive. Each individual, for instance, has a unique personality. But we do not presume that the uniqueness of the individual prevents us from comparing individuals, using concepts like 'humanity', or generalising about 'society' and the 'systems' or 'structures' underpinning that society. For societies are not simply agglomerates of individuals. They could not exist, and could not have existed in the past, without creating and recreating discernible patterns allowing that modicum of predictability without which human activity would be impossible. For this to be so, individual 'personality', though unique, has also to be seen as a social product. And once this is admitted, we can theorise; and we can and should compare. In fact, it is self-evident that only comparison allows an understanding of uniqueness. Nietzsche's conclusion that 'only things without a history are definable'[1] could be stood on its head: in human

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Use and Abuse of History* (Indianapolis–New York 1959), pp. 59, 61, 70.

affairs *only* entities with a history are subject to theorisation, and are thus definable.

In some senses, all historical enquiry is comparative, even if unwittingly so. Like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who did not know that he was using prose, we engage in comparison without always realising it. The study of lengthy stretches of history even of a single country, for example, involves a comparison of different periods in the past. Equally, any study of extensive geographical areas (such as Western Europe) or deployment of concepts in historical explanation (for example, capitalism, or nationalism) is by definition comparative, even if this is not always claimed or even realised. By contrast, some studies purporting to be comparative are in reality describing separate histories in parallel. In other cases, historians might claim similarities for phenomena whose superficial likeness is deceptive on account of the greatly differing historical environment in which the phenomena occurred. In any case, the obvious point needs to be reiterated: comparison does not consist of seeking similarity. It is at least equally important to seek out and explain fundamental differences, to understand not just what common ground there might be between the societies or systems compared, but also their specific and unique features. To keep these aims in view requires constant questioning of the validity of the comparison, and of the historical method deployed to explore it. No patent or ready-made methodology is to hand. Comparison is fraught with difficulties. But not to compare leaves us blind to the past – and to the past's implications for the present and future. For knowing just one society may often amount to a poor understanding of even that single society.

One way of approaching the past of the two countries examined in this volume has proved influential, but contains a fallacy which is not immediately evident. Seeking to explain the respective 'anomalies' of the historical development of Germany and Russia, some scholars have turned to liberal-bourgeois western societies and their political systems as a model and blueprint. The absence of such a development has then been taken to explain the growth of National Socialism in the one case, Leninism and Stalinism in the other. Looking to 'the West' and the mechanisms of its political and social development as the paradigm seemed to offer the key to what was missing east of the Rhine. As critics, particularly specialists on Germany, have said, it sometimes amounted to studying what did not happen, rather than what actually did take place.[2] The French ethnographer and political sociologist Pierre Clastre thought this a more broadly shared fallacy among social scientists. He

[2] See David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History* (Oxford 1984), esp. p. 283.

complained that in some studies of 'primitive societies', such societies 'were determined negatively, under the guise of what was missing', allowing them to be portrayed as societies without states, without literacy, and without history, incapable of creating a market or acquiring surpluses, and thereby of developing into 'advanced' societies.[3] This 'ethnocentric' approach, positing an inexorable evolution (or prevention of such an evolution), hindered real understanding of these societies. Moreover, the evolutionary determinism of such 'ethnocentrism' is of self-evidently limited value if two societies within a specific socio-economic system followed quite different paths. Deducing Nazism and Stalinism from the failure of Germany and Russia to develop like Britain raises the obvious objection: not every country with weak capitalism (even in the absence of parliamentary government) produced an equivalent of Stalinism; not every country with a vibrant capitalist system (even where authoritarian structures of rule prevailed) engendered an equivalent of Nazism. Once the 'ethnocentric' fallacy is avoided, however, comparison – including comparison with the West – is often illuminating.

Even so the question arises: why compare countries with such different history, geography, social structures, and levels of development as Germany and Russia (subsequently the Soviet Union)? The framework we have imposed upon this volume suggests three strands of an answer, though these are certainly not the only possibilities.

One reason is certainly that for much of this century Germany under Nazi rule and the Soviet Union *have* been openly compared, by bracketing them together through the concept of 'totalitarianism' – a comparative concept *par excellence*. Here we had comparison with a vengeance, positing a high degree of similarity between two different, and opposed, systems of rule. (This is itself somewhat unusual, since comparative political science tends to look for affinities rather than opposites, for groups of intrinsically similar systems, such as liberal democracies, or fascist regimes.) Criticism by many scholars about the usability of the concept in comparative analysis, and about the superficiality of the purported similarities of the two supposed 'totalitarian states', has not dented the continued, in recent years even strengthened, usage of the term both in common parlance and in academic analysis.

Above all, it was the way in which the totalitarianism concept was used as an ideological tool in the service of the Cold War – often distorting reality and intellectually dishonest – which disqualified it in the eyes of numerous scholars. Indeed, the comparison did often contain all too obvious ideological or propagandistic aims. By claiming

[3] Pierre Clastre, *La société contre l'état* (Paris 1974), p. 162.

an essential 'sameness' between Nazism and Stalinism, though they had been in mortal combat with each other, it used the evils of the dead Hitler regime to condemn the Soviet system which was still very much alive. However, the ideological abuse of a comparative concept does not in itself invalidate genuine historical comparison. Scholarly analysis of comparative fascism, for example, has never been regarded as invalid – though some dispute the applicability of the term 'fascism' to German National Socialism – despite the fact that the concept of 'fascism' has been at least as commonly abused as 'totalitarianism' for propagandist and ideological purposes.

Another objection was that Stalinism and Nazism were wholly different phenomena, arising from totally different types of society, thereby rendering comparison otiose. Like had to be compared with like, the argument ran; to compare fundamentally dissimilar societies and systems was futile. This objection, it will be noted, is based upon an *a priori* determination of dissimilarity. It is, of course, impossible to evaluate the extent of difference, or of similarity, without comparison. It is as well, therefore, to make such a comparison explicit.

When comparison is a method of scholarly enquiry, not of propaganda, there can be no logical objection to it, even if the conclusions emphasise differences more than similarities. Comparative analysis welcomes both sameness and difference. It can work with nuances of analogy, parallelism, identity, and polarity. In two different societies, or even in two very different periods in the history of one society, nothing is ever actually very similar, let alone identical. That does not invalidate comparison. Comparing two societies demands the search for the 'specific' in each case, while acknowledging the common features when and if they can be ascertained.

In fact, looking for 'common ground' is more fruitful than the search for 'sameness'. After all, very different species can form part of the same genus. Elements of the historical development of the two countries which are our concern here also speak in favour of the 'common ground' approach, even where the differences and contrasts are obvious. Before the First World War, both countries had authoritarian monarchies, which were forced into concessions to parliamentarism (of an extremely curtailed kind in the Russian case). Both had powerful bureaucracies, and strong military traditions. Both possessed powerful landowning classes, but also experienced strong economic modernising drives and rapid industrialisation (intense, if geographically very circumscribed, in Russia). Both countries were expansionist powers with imperialist ambitions, in which the contested territories of central and eastern Europe figured prominently. The countries clashed militarily in the First World War, but both felt the trauma of defeat and

revolution (if of very different kinds). Germany went on to experience what has been described as a fourteen-year 'latent civil war'[4] (in which the 'model' of the Soviet Union posed as a bogy figure in the intensifying ideological confrontation of bolshevism versus nationalism). Russia's experience was of a near-genocidal actual civil war of the utmost brutality, leaving behind a baleful legacy. Alongside the fragile pluralism of Weimar democracy, eventually collapsing to open the door to the Hitler dictatorship, it is even possible to see a form of 'authoritarian pluralism' during the 1929s, when Soviet Russia conducted the so-called New Economic Policy (often abbreviated as NEP), before this gave way to Stalin's dictatorship.

The 'common ground' approach, based upon recognition of crucial differences, offers pointers towards explaining how such easily equated dictatorships, though fundamentally different in so many respects, were produced almost simultaneously in countries with sharply contrasting profiles. Multi-layered systemic crisis is certainly a key element. It helps, too, in focusing attention on the historical background to the acute ideological struggle of the two regimes during the 1930s and to the titanic clash of the Nazi and Stalinist systems during the Second World War, which forms the second strand of our volume. In 1941, lines of historical development which had mainly seemed to run parallel to each other converged and clashed with the utmost violence. The extremity of clashes in war offers the most direct comparison of all.

The Second World War determined, of course, the total eradication of one of the dictatorships, while the other, following the death of Stalin, attempted to distance itself from the atrocities of his regime and, partially metamorphosised, lived on for almost four decades. During this time the existence of the German Democratic Republic, the most loyal Soviet satellite, was the clearest expression of the continued intertwined histories of Germany and the Soviet Union.

The end of the Soviet system has revealed in all openness a trait largely concealed, despite Krushchev's famous denunciation of 1956, before the Gorbachev era: the problem of confronting the Stalinist past. This parallels the continuing problem in Germany of coming to terms with the Nazi past, and of locating the past in a wider German historically-shaped identity. It is a problem acutely felt since 1945, one that came into full focus in the Fischer controversy of the 1960s and especially the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, and resurfaced once more in the aftermath of Unification. This further common ground for a comparison between the two countries forms the third strand of enquiry in this volume.

[4] The term is Richard Bessel's. See his *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford 1993), p. 262.

The national debates about the fate and identity of the respective countries are invitations to compare those very debates. For 'facing the past' involves, in these cases, questioning identities with roots extending beyond the era of the two dictatorships themselves. They are questions with deep political and ideological implications, as is made evident in the analyses offered in this section of the volume. This can, perhaps, be most vividly illustrated by a further example, drawn from an area which is not part of the sustained comparison offered in the contributions which follow: the denial of the Holocaust.

The perversity of the denial that the Holocaust actually happened has psychological underpinnings that echo the perversity of mind of the Nazi perpetrators themselves. Implied by the denial is that the Jews themselves invented the horror stories of the death-camps. Thus the victims are once more vilified as the perpetrators are exonerated. While some of those swallowing the denial claims might – charitably – be regarded as no more than naive, the main promoters of such ideas cannot but be well aware of what the Nazis did to the Jews, and must even approve of their actions. They share the antisemitic fury of the Nazis themselves, illustrated by the lengths to which they are prepared to go to revile Jews by attempting to turn the Jewish tragedy into a Jewish invention.

An attenuated or 'indirect' version of the Holocaust-denial occurred in the Soviet Union with the suppression by the Stalinist regime – and for some time under Stalin's successors – of information on the destruction of the Jews in the Ukraine. Though the Soviet regime had not itself perpetrated the killing of the Ukrainian Jews, the slaughter had involved the active participation of many local pro-Nazi collaborators. And it had probably met with tacit acquiescence among broader strata resting on support and connivance to be found in the deeply chauvinistic and antisemitic atmosphere permeating influential party circles under, and after, Stalin. The conspiracy of official silence was only broken by Yevtushenko's courageous poem *Babij Yar* – dealing with the notorious massacre of 33,371 Jews on 29–30 September 1941. The poem was later set to music by Shostakovitch and performed in concert halls.[5]

The distortion of history in the attempt to salvage historical identity is seldom as crude as in the Holocaust denial stories. But parallels exist in both countries of the misuse of comparison for such purposes. An example is provided by one strand of the *Historikerstreit* in Germany in the mid-1980s, depicting Nazi racial genocide as the *reaction* to the earlier

[5] Krushchev ferociously attacked Yevtushenko's poem in 1961 for the implied insult to the Soviet people in depicting the loneliness of the Jews' fate – Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution* (Sphere Books end, London 1971) pp. 248–9.

'class genocide' of the Bolsheviks.[6] In attributing prime guilt to Soviet Communism – still a going concern at the time – this interpretation overlooked the evidence in Hitler's own early writings and speeches. This indicated that anti-bolshevism was a later insertion into an already present virulent, latently genocidal anti-Jewish myth which had been prevalent on the *völkisch* Right long before the Russian Revolution, and long before Hitler's entry into the political arena.[7] Hitler's own antisemitic prejudices were probably formed, or accentuated, during his time in pre-war Vienna, as he claimed in *Mein Kampf*. But the first clear evidence that whatever feelings he had about the Jews had been 'rationalised' into an antisemitic ideology dates from September 1919. Strikingly, this first antisemitic statement, concluding that the final aim of antisemitism must be 'the uncompromising removal of Jews altogether', does not mention Bolshevism or Russia.[8] Anti-capitalism à la Gottfried Feder, not anti-Bolshevism, was the basis of this and Hitler's other early attacks on the Jews, portrayed as racketeers, war profiteers, speculators, and exploiters of 'interest slavery'. Anti-bolshevism was only included in the armoury some months later, around April 1920. It was summer 1920 before it became a frequent vehicle for his anti-Jewish tirades. It gave Hitler a further propaganda weapon. And it provided him with yet greater certainty in the correctness of his 'world view'. But it did not cause that intrinsically genocidal 'world view' in the first place.

In the Soviet case, many defenders of Stalinism, from the beginnings of *perestroika*, either denied that gross atrocities had taken place or continued to voice the view advanced by the regime at the time that those arrested and executed under Stalin were indeed traitors and enemies of the country, who had deserved their punishment. A rich crop of such statements, which, in addition, accused the critics of denying the Stalinist regime's enormous achievements and, above all, its victory over the Nazis to save humanity from slavery, could still be found in the post-Soviet press. Unlike the German attempt to salvage the past by eliding Hitler from it as a kind of aberration produced by an understandable response to a worse evil in Soviet Communism, the Russian apologetics amounted to an attempt to save the past by rehabilitating Stalin.

[6] See Ernst Nolte, 'Zwischen Geschichtslegende und Revisionismus?', in *'Historikerstreit'. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich 1987), p. 32.

[7] Hitler's antisemitic rantings in his early speeches drew eclectically on a variety of tracts by well-known anti-Jewish writers, including Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Adolf Wahrmund, and, especially, Theodor Fritsch. All, of course, pre-dated anti-Bolshevism. See Reginald Phelps, 'Hitler's "grundlegende" Rede über den Antisemitismus', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 16 (1968), pp. 390–420, here esp. pp. 395–9.

[8] Eberhard Jäckel and Axel Kuhn (eds), *Hitler. Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905–1924* (Stuttgart 1980), pp. 88–90.

A final example of politically motivated distortions of comparison in the continuing reappraisal of the recent past of both countries returns us to the Holocaust and what one might call the 'atrocity toll' of each regime. Not only German nationalists and apologists for Nazism, but also vehemently anti-communist Russian nationalists, emphasise the extent of Stalinist terror, the one tendency in order to point out that Stalin claimed even more victims than Hitler (as if that excused anything in the horrors perpetrated by Nazism), the other to appropriate to Stalinism genocide of a comparable or even worse kind than that of the Nazis in order to stress the evil they see embodied in Communism itself.

Stalinist terror does not need to be played down to underline the uniqueness of the Holocaust – the only example which history offers to date of a deliberate policy aimed at the total physical destruction of every member of an ethnic group. There was no equivalent of this under Stalinism. Though the waves of terror were massive indeed, and the death-toll immense, no ethnic group was singled out for total physical annihilation. A particularly heavy toll among Stalin's victims was, of course, exacted from the state and party apparatus.

The application of the term 'Holocaust' to the Stalinist system is inappropriate. The best way to reveal the pathology and inhumanity of Stalinism is by scholarly attention to the evidence, and not by abusing the methods of comparative history through the loose – and often far from innocent – misleading transplantation of terms imbued with deep historical significance.

II. Comparative approaches

As already noted, this volume makes no pretence at offering a systematic comparison of Stalinism and Nazism. It sets out to be suggestive, not definitive. It is, of necessity, rigorously selective in the themes chosen for comparison. For instance, we do not have a contribution – surprising as it might at first sight seem – which offers an explicit comparative analysis of terror in 'the two great slaughterhouses of the twentieth century' (Michael Geyer). Yet, implicitly, the terroristic aspect of the two regimes figures in almost every contribution. No other aspect of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes has been the subject of so many studies.[9] Perhaps for this very reason, no paper specifically on terror was offered to the conference from which this volume emanates. Our volume in this important case, as in others, can offer pointers to a

[9] Standard works include Hans Buchheim *et al.*, *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, 2 vols. (Olten–Freiburg in Breisgau 1965); and Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror* (London 1968) (with findings updated in the new edition of 1990).

full-scale comparison.[10] But it cannot provide the systematic comparison which still awaits its historian. Another crucial theme, comparison of the 'war machines' of the two regimes, is a parallel omission. The literature on the armed forces in each of the two countries is vast. But systematic comparison is hard to undertake and, as a result, is hard to find. We thought we had the prospect of such a comparison for this volume. But, ultimately, it did not materialise. What remains once more is a series of pointers towards a comparison – building bricks rather than the fabric itself. A third area where the gulf between the relative state of empirical research in Germany and in the former Soviet Union hinders what would be an important comparison is the impact of the regimes on attitudes and behavioural patterns of 'ordinary' citizens. Here, the volume is perhaps regrettably but necessarily one-sided. Germany is simply far better researched than is the Soviet Union under Stalin in this respect. The uneven historiographical base makes systematic comparison extremely difficult, if not at present impossible.

It would be expecting too much, therefore, to look to overt comparison in all or even in most of the papers of the volume. In more cases than not, analysis centres upon one or other of the regimes in question, though inviting in every case direct comparison with the counterpart regime. The eclectic approaches reflected in the volume are aimed in most cases at suggesting fruitful possibilities of comparison, rather than providing the finished product. This was also the aim of the conference underlying the volume: it saw itself as an experimental laboratory testing possible ground for comparison, rather than attempting to produce a refined product which the raw materials would not yet sustain. It is our hope that, on this basis, the papers presented on the three areas chosen make a collective contribution in providing just such raw materials out of which systematic comparison can begin to be constructed. One promising area of comparison is that of the leadership cult in the two regimes.

Both the Stalinist and the Nazi regimes represented a new genre of political system centred upon the artificial construct of a leadership cult – the 'heroic myth' of the 'great leader', no longer a king or emperor but a 'man of the people'. The first section of the volume highlights similarities and differences in the menacing new cult-driven form of authoritarianism.

In the first essay in the volume Ronald Suny explores the basis of

[10] A number of comparative reflections on Stalinist and Nazi terror are brought together in the 'Afterthoughts'. See also Ian Kershaw, 'Totalitarianism Revisited: Nazism and Stalinism in Comparative Perspective', *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, 23 (1994), pp. 23–40. Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past* (Cambridge, Mass. 1988), pp. 71–84, provides some perceptive comments.

Stalin's personal autocracy, how he was able to sustain his authority. Though Suny does not explicitly deal with it, there is a resonance here of the 'intentionalist' versus 'structuralist' (or 'functionalist') debates about the role of Hitler in the National Socialist regime.[11] Suny rejects an exclusive focus on terror and propaganda as the explanation of Stalin's power, arguing that terror itself rested on widespread support and collaboration. He emphasises Stalin's centralisation drive, and aim to monopolise decision-making, though demonstrates the practical effect this had of building up local power bases run by 'little Stalins'. Concentration of power at the top thus led inevitably at the same time to its diffusion through a multiplicity of agents, dependent upon Stalin for their careers and even for their physical survival, and not surprisingly anxious to do his will. (There are parallels here to the readiness of Nazi functionaries to 'second-guess' Hitler and anticipate his presumed wishes, as emphasised in Kershaw's essay below.)

Suny also points to the social groups who were on the receiving end of Stalin's 'Big Deal', and wedded through material improvement to the 'order created by Stalin'. He singles out 'a new Soviet middle class . . . with its own form of "bourgeois values"', 'Stakhanovite workers, with their newly acquired bicycles and wristwatches, . . . factory managers and their wives'. For there is no doubt, in Suny's view, that Stalin *did* create 'Stalinism', that his personal role was crucial. The functionalist argument for Suny – and here there are clear parallels to the German debates – reaches only so far, as he points out in the context of the debates among Soviet specialists on the causes of Stalinist terror: 'neither arguments from social context nor functionalist deductions from effects to causes have successfully eliminated the principal catalyst to the Terror, the will and ambition of Stalin'.

One of the most important features of the Soviet system was its bureaucratic character. This can be seen as one reflection of what Trotsky (reformulating Marx's concept of 'uneven development') called 'combined development' – the merging of the most modern with the most archaic traits in systems attempting rapid modernisation.[12] By the end of the Civil War a huge, 'pre-modern' peasantry was ruled over by a new, centralised state with the full command of whatever modern means of control and administration were available. The potential was provided, therefore, for a rapid expansion of 'statism'. In what came to be known as 'the Stalin Revolution', the state monopoly, especially with

[11] Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (3rd edn, London 1993), offers an evaluation of these debates.

[12] Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1st edn 1932; New York 1980), pp. 3–15. Trotsky did not try to apply this to Stalin's Russia, probably because Stalinism was insufficiently crystallised at the time he was writing in 1930.

regard to economic reconstruction, opened up an enormous bureaucratisation of all walks of life. With that came, naturally, growing power of the bureaucracy as the main carrier of the state's activities. The term – 'bureaucratic absolutism' – used to characterise the grip on power of the bureaucracy in the USSR after Stalin's death, had originally been deployed with reference to the Prussian bureaucracy in the eighteenth century. This itself serves as a pointer that the extensive literature available on the history of bureaucracy in Prussia/Germany presents obvious avenues for opening up comparison with the role of the bureaucracy in the Soviet state.

The history of the Soviet bureaucracy illustrates the stages of its development as well as its social composition. Soviet bureaucrats in the middle and higher rungs of the hierarchy enjoyed power and privilege, though until Stalin's death the path to the emergence of the bureaucracy as a genuine ruling class was blocked by the dictator's despotic and arbitrary exercise of power. Before 1953, the upper tiers of the bureaucracy had to be content to be 'ruling serfs'. After Stalin's demise, the way was clear for a new stage to begin in the bureaucracy's collective hold on power.

Moshe Lewin's first contribution to the volume singles out the vital contradiction at the heart of the Stalinist system hinted at in the previous remarks: the indispensability of state bureaucracy, yet its incompatibility with arbitrary personalistic despotism. As Lewin succinctly puts it: 'Despotism depends on bureaucracy but cannot trust it.' Bureaucracy once instituted, as Max Weber commented, is as good as impossible to destroy. The waves of Stalin's purges, bloody as they were, could not achieve this. On the contrary: Lewin provides evidence for a remarkable growth of officialdom throughout the very period when the purges were at their height. As long as Stalin was alive, bureaucracy, ever-present though it was, could not take over the system. Rather, it had to cope with the arbitrariness and insecurity which are the antithesis of efficient administration. The despot, for his part, could destroy a 'little Stalin', but ended up by having to replace him. Centralisation produced a proliferation of localised bureaucracies. But 'system' was impossible to create and sustain as long as bureaucracy's own rules were overridden by the whim of the despot. The central contradiction in Stalinism therefore casts grave doubt over its reproductive capacity as long as the despotic element prevailed. Following Stalin's death, the real heyday of bureaucracy commenced. It could now form a fully fledged ruling class. It could, as Lewin concludes, replace 'the cult of Stalin' by 'the cult of the state'.

The theme of intrinsic structural contradiction – and consequently inherent self-destructiveness – is echoed in Hans Mommsen's contribution. Mommsen highlights the Nazi regime as one where the regulative

power of state bureaucracy is undermined and corroded by arbitrary and despotic power nevertheless incapable of supplanting and replacing an expanding bureaucracy. He sees a causal relationship between, on the one hand, the escalating radicalisation, external expansionism, and what he calls the ultimate 'running amok' of the regime, and, on the other hand, the fragmentation and disintegration of the governmental and administrative apparatus of the state. National Socialism, he insists, certainly unleashed enormous energy, ruthlessly channelled into accomplishing short-term aims. But it was incapable at any point of creating a coherent institutional framework of government. Rather, it took over the existing institutional framework of the Weimar state, exploiting that framework where it was useful, but otherwise simply bypassing it or erecting new organisations which often stood in competition with the formal organs of government. The result was increasing organisational chaos, a 'war of all against all'.

The 'culmative radicalisation' of the regime, with ever fewer constraints on the exercise of its power within Germany and above all in the occupied territories, could not be halted, argues Mommsen, because there were no institutions able to take on overall responsibility and block the catastrophic course which the Nazi leadership had set in train. This 'structural' explanation is more persuasive in Mommsen's eyes than explanations which put ideological commitment above the mobilisation of base social resentments and prejudices and the consequent collapse of 'civilised' behavioural norms. It is also more satisfactory, he claims, than explanations stressing the personal role of Hitler as the main reason for the inability to restrain the regime's radical dynamic and limit its aims. The destruction of the Third Reich came about, therefore, in Mommsen's view, not simply because Hitler unleashed a world war which could only lead to Germany's defeat, but because self-destructiveness was immanent to Nazism. Purely parasitic, the Hitler regime was incapable of reproducing itself – a contrast in this respect, in Mommsen's eyes, with Stalinism.

Ian Kershaw's contribution develops the comparison between the Stalinist and Nazi dictatorships. Despite superficial similarities, he argues, the regimes were fundamentally different – a difference residing directly in the character of leadership under Stalin and Hitler. The Nazi movement, he contends, was a classic charismatic leadership movement; the Soviet Communist Party was not – a key difference which had a bearing on the self-reproductive capacity of the two regimes. He explores a number of points of contrast in the character of the Stalin and Hitler dictatorships. Where Hitler's style was wholly unbureaucratic, Stalin immersed himself in bureaucratic detail. Whereas Stalin was highly interventionist, Hitler remained largely aloof from

government administration. While Stalin ruled through the insecurity of his underlings and purges directed at his closest collaborators, Hitler operated through a contrived and cultivated *Nibelungentreue* – quasi-feudal bonds of loyalty with his paladins and chieftains. Where Stalin's cult was superimposed on an existing ideological orthodoxy, Hitler *was* ideological orthodoxy, and the 'Hitler myth' the very pivot of National Socialism. While Stalin's rule, for all its horror, was nevertheless compatible with limited rational goals, Hitler's was not. Where, therefore, Stalinism had the capacity to reproduce itself – once the despot seemingly bent on the destruction of anything resembling systematic rule was dead – Nazism was innately both systemless and self-destructive. These tendencies were embedded in the incompatibility of 'charismatic rule', the essence of the 'system', with the bureaucratic rule it overlaid but could not replace. Kershaw goes on to suggest how the disintegration of 'ordered' government and administration was related to the gathering momentum of radicalisation, and how Hitler's ideological imperatives became transformed into practical policy options. He singles out a key mechanism in the way wielders of political and social power 'worked towards the Führer', anticipating his presumed intentions without any regular string of precise directives from above.

In a second essay, Moshe Lewin explicitly uses comparison in deploying the more extensively developed historiography on the Hitler dictatorship as a mirror to cast reflection on Stalin. He shows how the Stalin cult – though artificially created (directly under Stalin's own supervision) and not in existence at all before 1928 – was easily able to exploit social and psychological preconditions arising from the post-revolutionary and post-Civil War turmoil. In the construction of the differing facets of the cult surrounding him, Stalin tapped various traditions – not least the tsarist heritage – and erected a form of personal rule with a wholly different base to Lenin's and accomplished by a thorough perversion of Bolshevik ideology. In Lewin's interpretation, the Stalin cult had, indeed, to be constructed as a form of justification or internal legitimation – an 'alibi' to camouflage the fact that Stalin had been merely one of the claimants (and a disputed one at that) to the mantle of Lenin, and had betrayed the real Bolshevik heritage. The 'Stalin myth' – the analogy with the 'Hitler myth' is plain here – was, states Lewin, indispensable to Stalin's rule. But, he adds, the rapid demise of the 'myth' after Stalin's death demonstrates that it was not indispensable to the Soviet system or to the party – a point of contrast to Nazism.

Close comparison with the German dictatorship is drawn by Lewin, however, in his remark that 'not unlike Hitler and his self-identification

with the function of Führer, Stalin actually became the system and his personality acquired therefore a "systemic" dimension'. Lewin brings out further similar as well as contrasting traits in the portrayed images and personalities of the two dictators, and in the style and character of their rule. One could be highlighted here: the intense inhumanity and detachment from the sufferings of their own peoples of both dictators as revealed by their wartime leadership; the way they refrained from contact with ordinary soldiers and civilians; the manner in which they directed the fates of dehumanised masses remote from the reality of their actual experiences and actions; the readiness to turn their own failings into the most brutal wrath towards those they regarded as 'guilty'. At the end, while Hitler, in the isolation of the bunker, was deserted by some of his closest henchmen, most prominently Göring and Himmler, Stalin's increasing self-isolation, as Lewin points out, was accompanied by such pathological derangement that he felt betrayal and treachery all around him, and with practically his last gasp had a group of mainly Jewish doctors arrested and tortured into confessions of plotting to kill Kremlin leaders.

The paper by Michael Mann, which closes the first section, offers an analysis of the Stalinist and Nazi systems not from the position of a specialist on German or Russian history, but from the comparative perspective of a sociologist. In contrast to those (including, in this volume, Mommsen and Kershaw) who are critical of the 'totalitarianism' concept and emphasise the differences between the two systems, Mann, while not wedded to the particular term 'totalitarianism' (though he sees it as so deeply implanted in scholarly and popular language that it is inescapable), states at the outset that 'the two regimes belong together' and that 'it is only a question of finding the right family name'. 'What was common to the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, *and to no others*', Mann emphasises, 'was their persistent rejection of institutional compromise' in favour of 'the frontal violent assault of continuous revolution'. The 'continuous revolution', the essence of each of the systems in Mann's interpretation, had, of course, different goals – the 'class' and 'nation-statist' revolutionary aims representing the two major power actors of modern times. The administrative methods which Mann detects in each of the systems – internalised divide-and-rule strategies, 'working towards' the despot, reliance on comradeship, and local party mobilisation – produced fluidity and violence, not bureaucratic regularity. Mann is not prepared (in contrast to Mommsen) to see in what he regards as a *relative* administrative disorder and lack of bureaucratic coherence a total lack of coherence in the system, nor the root of its self-destruction. However, he accepts a point raised in a number of contributions about the innate self-destructiveness of each of the

systems. In Mann's articulation: 'Neither regime could in the long run reproduce itself. Both were destroyed by the contradiction between institutionalising party rule and achieving the party's goal, continuous revolution.'

The second section of the volume takes us to the heart of the 'deadly clash' between the Nazi and Stalinist regimes between 1941 and 1945. The victims of this clash numbered tens of millions. The consequences left Germany in ruins and divided in a Europe riven by the Iron Curtain and plunged into forty-five years of the Cold War. In a century whose hallmark has been unprecedented violence, destruction, and inhumanity, these four years of war in eastern Europe stand out in their horror even more than the trenches of the First World War, the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Vietnam War, or the killing fields of Cambodia.

In the first paper in this section, Omer Bartov examines how images of the *Blitzkrieg*, which had its culmination and dénouement in 'Operation Barbarossa', were related to reality. An underlying premise of this paper is a revision of the distinction usually drawn between *Blitzkrieg* and 'total war'. In contrast to some long-held historiographical positions, he argues, '*Blitzkrieg* was not practised *instead* of total war, but was rather a new manner of deploying and employing forces without giving up the notion of total mobilisation.' Moreover, the attempt to minimise the cost of war to the German population was coupled with the unleashing of a genocidal policy directed at the subject populations, and in this way, too, an aspect of total war. It was, therefore, 'merely a tactical innovation, not a new strategy'. It 'cannot be divorced from total war as a phenomenon of modern industrialised society', but has to be seen as an attempt to make total war more effective. Bartov points out how the success of the propagated image of the 'lightning war' in creating the impression of invincibility led to an over-confidence that blinded the Germans to the limitations of their own strategy, leading to catastrophe in the final *Blitzkrieg* of 'Barbarossa' and, ironically, to a reversion to the very 'total war strategies' reminiscent of 1914-18 which they had set out to avoid. Once this stage was reached, adds Bartov, Germany had no prospect of competing successfully against its enemies, despite the significant improvements in weapon technology and armaments production in the last war years.

Despite the catastrophic course of the actual *Blitzkrieg*, Bartov argues that the *image* of *Blitzkrieg* has been enduringly successful – and dangerously so – in depicting modern warfare as fast, heroic, and glamorous. In speculating upon such images of *Blitzkrieg* and the indifference bred by present-day news coverage of live war and violence, Bartov suggestively concludes that *Blitzkrieg* was 'part of a

process in the development of modern humanity which perfected our capacity . . . to observe with fascination and yet remain indifferent'.

As is well known, when the Soviet Union encountered the initial might of the German *Blitzkrieg* on 22 June 1941, it was caught completely unawares. Bernd Bonwetsch's paper begins by seeking to explain the débâcle which, as he shows, took place in a country that had been expecting war and preparing for it since the mid-1930s. In the parlance of German historiography, his account would be regarded as a largely 'intentionalist' one, which nevertheless builds in important strands of a 'structuralist' explanation, inviting comparison with the far more thoroughly researched relationship between Hitler and the German military leadership during the Second World War.[13]

Bonwetsch unequivocally sees Stalin's actions as decisive. However, he also clearly shows not only how those actions directly destroyed the army command in the pre-war purges, how Stalin's personal shock and corresponding *inaction* following the German invasion contributed to the Soviet military paralysis, and how his repeated interventions and those of other military 'illiterates' contributed massively to the setbacks of the Red Army. He adds to this the 'atmosphere of suspicion, intimidation, and irresolution' which Stalin's rule had created, and which 'severely impaired the professional self-confidence' of the army command. This in turn, he goes on to illustrate, together with the genuine intimidation and repression exerted even against high-ranking officers, produced a cowed and supine military leadership, unwilling to stand up to Stalin even when his absurd orders flew in the face of all military logic. Genuine opposition to Stalin in the military command, he claims, did not exist. Stalin could count upon the consent, by whatever means it had been manipulated, of his officers. Bonwetsch indicates the corrosive perversity of Stalinism in the action of the relatively independent-minded Marshal Zhukov – echoing Stalin's *leitmotiv* of the early war period that any thought of war on Soviet soil or contemplation of retreat was 'defeatism' – reprimanding the Commander of the Kiev District for taking routine military precautions 'which under normal conditions would have been self-evident'. Ultimate blame for the repeated refusal to confront the reality of the situation lay, however, for Bonwetsch in one place only: in Moscow, where Stalin remained the prisoner of his illusions, his paranoia demanding the ruthless search for scapegoats for defeats which his own actions had rendered certain.

Bonwetsch sees the change in Soviet military fortunes from Autumn

[13] See the still incomplete multi-volume series, edited by the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart 1979–), for the most thorough analyses. The attack on the Soviet Union is the subject of the fourth volume.

1942 onwards as heavily influenced by the increased reliance upon professional military judgement, and prevention of interference by the military 'illiterates'. This decisive shift, too, he attributes directly to Stalin. Though his power remained absolute, Stalin was prepared for the rest of the war to give his commanders greater leeway. Even so, Soviet losses of men and equipment were far higher than those of the Germans. The human and material cost accorded with the practice of Stalinism long before the war began. Bonwetsch can therefore conclude that 'however Stalin changed during the war, the victory had been achieved with genuine Stalinist methods'.

Jacque Sapir's analysis of the Soviet war economy, approaching the issue from the perspective of an economist, offers quite a different interpretation to that of Bonwetsch. Certainly, Sapir explicitly accepts that Stalin himself, already 'a pathological case' by the later 1930s, has largely to be blamed for the disasters of 1941. Responsibility cannot be removed from the Soviet dictator, who destroyed his own armed forces, believed Hitler's promises, and took all the key decisions. Even so, Stalin scarcely figures in Sapir's paper, whereas he dominates in Bonwetsch's. Turning away from a concentration on the dictator and the decision-making process, Sapir concentrates on the structural problems of Soviet military thought, armaments production, and economic mobilisation. He sets out to explain the economic implications of Soviet military planning – leading to what has been described as a 'war economy' before the war – and the economic transformation needed once the Soviet Union was embroiled in a war that did not fit pre-war conceptions.

Sapir outlines a specific conceptualisation of warfare, developed in the interwar years by the Soviet military establishment. It demanded an all-embracing mobilisation of economy and society even in peacetime, and provided rigid prescriptions for wartime mobilisation and military strategy. In the turmoil of the 1930s, the military conception changed from emphasis upon a lengthy, but defensive, war under full mobilisation, to a short but total, mechanised war, with all military resources immediately available and deployed in combined operations, though without the earlier requirement of prior complete economic mobilisation. Sapir shows that this led to a notable increase in weapons production and massive stockpiling. But the weapons were of low quality, the economic cost was very heavy, and technological innovation was neglected. Military and technological conservatism, despite attempts to adjust in the light of the German *Blitzkrieg* successes in 1939–40, left the Soviet armed forces ill-equipped to meet the onslaught when it came in 1941.

Out of the catastrophic defeats of 1941 and 1942 emerged, however, a

profound restructuring of the armed forces alongside the traumatic relocation of industry. The need to readjust to fighting a protracted defensive war paid no heed to the scale of human or material losses. The 'extensive' use of men and weapons which Bonwetsch also emphasised, had been, as Sapir shows, a hallmark of Soviet military planning even before 1941. Military success was attained at terrible cost.

Despite serious flaws in military and economic planning before 1942, Sapir argues that the reconstruction from 1942 onwards shows an underlying soundness in Soviet military thought that was absent in a Nazi system predicated upon a strategic gamble without genuine economic mobilisation. The comparison, he comments, reveals 'the difference between pathological interference and a pathological process from the outset'. This applies, in his view, also to a comparison of military-industrial economics and 'technological culture' in the two countries. He suggests that the differences between the Soviet and Nazi economies in the 1930s have often been overdrawn. Even so, in the military-industrial sector the differences were significant and growing. This was especially the case in the technological sophistication and superiority of German weaponry, though, Sapir remarks, this was 'an irrational answer to the problem of war production in a protracted conflict'. In a suggestive comment which could possibly be extended to a comparison of the Nazi and Stalinist systems as a whole, he states: 'Whereas organisational and institutional pathologies were limited to crisis conditions in the USSR, they were a norm of social behaviour in Germany'.

Sapir goes on to ask how the complete concentration of Soviet industrial output on munitions production was compatible with economic reproduction, since the economy had been already so heavily mobilised before the war, and so squeezed thereafter, that it was almost at breaking-point. He offers a threefold explanation. The specialisation of the Soviet war industry and the benefits of the US Lend-Lease Programme form two strands. The third, most fundamentally, he locates in the far-reaching economic reforms which, paradoxically, *demobilised* the economy in part by introducing individual initiative together with market and financial mechanisms that had largely been replaced by administrative *fiat* before the war. Sapir concludes by asking whether an opportunity was not lost in the post-war era, with its return to brutal Stalinist policies, of continuing the incorporation of elements of the market within a centrally planned economy. The war experience shows, he suggests, that there was nothing to have prevented this from developing fruitfully. There was, in other words, nothing systemic in the incapacity of the Soviet system to adapt. But from a position at the end of the war analogous, in its mix of market

mechanisms and central planning, to present-day China, the Soviet system reverted to a rigidity which helped to ensure the failure of *perestroika* at precisely the same juncture that Chinese reform was proving successful.

Mark von Hagen's first paper in this collection deals with the shifting interpretations of the Soviet wartime experience that have developed since the end of the Cold War, as Russian scholars have been able to operate openly with normal methods of historical scholarship and proper access to sources. He shows how the need for regime legitimation, encapsulated in the very appellation 'the Great Fatherland War', has thereby succumbed to the more descriptively named 'Second World War', reflecting the move to critical analysis of the USSR's war effort. Even after Krushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956, he points out, conservative forces rallied to the traditional interpretation – and the defence of Stalin – in support of their own vested interests. Apart from the brief interlude of the Krushchev era, serious debate about the war only commenced in 1987. Von Hagen describes the revisionism which then began in earnest, its harshest form regarding the wartime failures and even the pre-war purges as the most radical reflection of a system which had been both intrinsically inhumane and fundamentally flawed since 1917. He also outlines a third 'alternativist' approach, standing between this fundamentalist revisionism and the revamped orthodoxy, that of 'an anti-Stalin Leninist tradition'. The familiar line here is of a genuine socialism derailed by a Stalinist clique, breaking the true Soviet military tradition. The attack on Stalinism has meanwhile been so frontal, he goes on to show, that even the 'alternativist' approach is heavily on the defensive, while revisionism has not only recognised non-Soviet scholarship but has adopted many of its arguments.

The way is now open, therefore, he suggests, for a genuinely international scholarship on the basis of a vastly increased range of sources. This will enable not only a deepened understanding (as represented in this volume by the papers of Bonwetsch and Sapir) of the decision-making, military planning, and the direction of the war. It will also encourage the exploration of the complex and varied social experience of the war – a field left completely unexamined in Soviet historiography because of the ideological insistence upon monolithic treatment of the 'heroic struggle of the Soviet people'. This in turn, suggests von Hagen, will demand research into and reevaluation and comparison of social mobilisation and experience in the First World War and the Civil War. Von Hagen ends, however, on a cautionary note, looking to the likely impact of new nationalisms in the USSR's 'successor states' in ensuring that the Second World War will form part

of a continuing ideological and political struggle over interpretations, as has proved to be the case in Germany since 1945.

Von Hagen's paper is a reminder, then, of the point we have already noted, that both Germany and the successor states to the USSR share a common problem, though of course quite differently manifested, in facing up to the legacy of the past. In Germany, the term invented soon after the War and still enjoying some currency today was *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ('mastery of the past'). It is a somewhat awkward concept. Presumably no past, not even a less troubled one than that of Germany, can in any comprehensible sense be 'mastered'. But 'coping with', 'facing up to', or 'confronting' a past burdened with a large and quite obvious moral, political, and ideological freight is broadly what is meant. Confronting the Soviet past raises many obvious parallel issues, though serious attempts to do so within Russia have only been possible since the Gorbachev era. The short duration of the reassessment of the Soviet past means that in some respects the ideological colouring, as von Hagen showed, is more garish than in Germany, where greater nuance has arisen from five decades of unabated and often rancorous debate of the Nazi past. But in one sense, there is perhaps a position still possible in the ex-USSR which has no tenable parallel in the German case: of seeing some good in the system despite Stalin. In Germany, there is no voice worth listening to which could divorce Hitler from Nazism as an 'aberration', seeing some good in it despite the faults in its leader. The totality of the denunciation of Nazism from moral standpoints that range from socialism to conservatism may well differ, therefore, from the post-Soviet experience. Whether this is the case or not, the 'battle of interpretations' provides further common ground for comparison between our two countries. It provides the framework for the last section of the volume.

The argument for the uniqueness of Nazism has always rested upon the notion of the exceptionality of Germany's path to modernity. George Steinmetz, from a sociological perspective, puts a different gloss on the well-established historiographical positions on the German *Sonderweg* ('special path'). Steinmetz outlines the varied articulations of the case for German exceptionalism – those before 1933 generally approving of an alleged deviation from the standard 'western' path of liberal development, and especially the 'new orthodoxy' of critical stances towards the purported social backwardness hampering the growth of a liberal state and society. He goes on to summarise the numerous strands of the 1980s criticism of the *Sonderweg* thesis, heavily emphasising the modernity of state and society in pre-Nazi Germany, and rejecting its supposed non-synchronised development. In this, the critics were arguing that there was nothing *structurally* exceptional about German

development. The problem, in Steinmetz's view, is that both *Sonderweg* proponents and critics alike fall victim to fallacious assumptions about social development: that societies can be broken down into cohesive political, economic, and cultural levels with a uniform pattern of development in any one of them, let alone in all of them together; that it is normal to have reached an equivalent level of development in each simultaneously; and that the lack of simultaneity leads to fascism. He argues that 'where general trends or shared discourses exist across fields, this is the result of "hegemonic" articulatory practices and not an automatic, natural historical development'. This means that the empirical establishment of social and political power structures, rather than generalisations about 'backwardness' or 'modernity', is necessary in order to understand the uniqueness which Steinmetz, though rejecting the 'exceptionalist' theory, insists upon in characterising Nazism. For he concludes that, ironically, it is the emphasis upon the exceptionality of pre-determined spheres of German development which prevents full recognition of 'the role of contingency and unique constellations of causes' – hence 'uniqueness' – in the Nazi case. He ends by showing, however, that, academically discredited though the *Sonderweg* thesis now is, it continues to flourish as a legitimation of the current post-Unification German state, justifying images of Germany since 1949 – since it was also claimed for the old Federal Republic – as now 'a functional western democracy'. In Steinmetz's view, however, if a form of *Sonderweg* thesis has any validity, then it is as a depiction of a present-day Germany whose inheritance from Nazism has made it more, rather than less, difficult to become simply another European country, just another western democracy.

There is no strict equivalent to the German *Sonderweg* thesis in the heated historical debates which have sprung up since the advent of *glasnost* in the former USSR. Even so, as Mark von Hagen's second contribution to the volume points out, some sort of echo can be heard in the question of social, economic, cultural, and political modernisation in pre-revolutionary Russia, which has naturally surfaced as the search for the roots of Stalinism turned inevitably to considerations of Russia's backwardness. In a muted echo of the German 'historicisation' debate, notes von Hagen, 'developmental or modernisation theories appear to their critics to "historicise" or even "normalise" Stalinism by making the phenomenon more comprehensible'.[14] As these remarks show, the recent reevaluation of the past in the successor states has raised issues which are redolent in certain ways of the German *Historikerstreit* (whose implications are touched upon in Mary Nolan's paper). These centre

[14] For a summary of the German debate, see Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, ch. 9.

upon the place of Nazism in German history, the construction of a sense of historical identity, and the relative singularity or comparability of Nazism.[15] The last of these considerations invokes once more, if in new fashion, the totalitarianism concept – a term also used in recent debates in the former Soviet Union. Unsurprisingly, these debates in Russia, compared with those on Nazism, are still for the most part relatively unsophisticated and, of course, fought out in extremely heated, ideologically loaded, and morally charged terms. Moreover, the empirical base for studies of Stalinism is, of course, still quite underdeveloped in comparison with that provided by a vast array of thoroughly researched monograph literature on Nazism. Even so, the debates on Stalinism, comments von Hagen, have in a remarkably short time replicated the most important debates that had already taken place among Soviet scholars outside the former USSR, and produced a 'rich and innovative' agenda for future research.

Above all, as von Hagen's analysis brings out plainly, it is the German 'intentionalist' and 'structuralist' debates that have the clearest application to recent attempts at reevaluating Stalinism. These have placed personalistic against structuralist interpretations. On the one hand, Stalin has been blamed for the terrible rupture of what had allegedly been an otherwise healthy development derived from Leninism – shades here of the early post-war German demonisation of Hitler – and has been seen as more or less single-handedly responsible for all the Soviet Union's ills. On the other hand, von Hagen can point to a variety of structuralist analyses that have stressed with differing degrees of radicality the deep-seated problems in pre-Stalinist society which produced Stalin and conditioned the nature of his rule. At present, the 'intentionalists' seem to be carrying the day – a not unnatural turn to human agency after decades of a type of extreme 'structuralist' interpretation in orthodox Marxist-Leninist accounts. As von Hagen remarks, 'the moral stakes in the debate are such that authors still risk being charged as "soft on Stalinism" if they tread too far away from the intentionalist mainstream'.

The final section of von Hagen's paper, on the 'national question', points to perhaps the most worrying trends in historical writing on the territory of the former Soviet Union – though most of what he is

[15] There is in the meantime an extensive literature on the *Historikerstreit*. Good analyses are provided by: Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, and Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow* (New York 1989). Peter Baldwin (ed.), *Reworking the Past* (Boston, Mass. 1990), contains English translations of some important contributions, as well as a valuable introduction by the editor. Some of the initial, controversial articles are also available in *Yad Vashem Studies*, 19 (1988). The German texts of all the relevant contributions were gathered together in: *'Historikerstreit'. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich, 1987).

describing here is not scholarly historical writing, but ideology, or history abused for ideological purposes (now of an anti-Soviet kind). National chauvinism, xenophobia, and antisemitism are, he shows, commonplace components in the new extreme anti-Soviet (and, outside Russia, anti-Russian) interpretations of history. Messianic utopianism and chauvinistic myth-making are the order of the day in the writing of nationalist history. Even so, von Hagen is not altogether pessimistic. At least there is now a pluralism of interpretations, with post-Soviet historians operating as part of a world of international scholarship.

The final paper in the volume, by Mary Nolan, takes us into territory for which, as we noted earlier, there is no comparable historiography on any scale to date on Stalinism, despite some fine pioneering work by western scholars. Mark von Hagen has already pointed to the absence of empirical research on Soviet society as a major *lacuna* in the historiography of Stalinism, given the obvious limitations on such work under the Communist regime.

Nolan sets out to assess the balance of two decades of research and debate on a number of central aspects of the social history of the Third Reich: work, gender, and everyday life. She evaluates first the recent studies on the labour process in the Third Reich which mark a shift away from the earlier emphasis upon the oppositional behaviour of the working class. The focus has been on the ways in which 'National Socialism picked up on, continued, and partially distorted processes of rationalisation that were initiated in the mid-1920s and continued into the Federal Republic and German Democratic Republic'. A key consequence of rationalisation, sharply enhanced during the Third Reich, she notes, was the fragmentation of the industrial working class and the accompanying promotion of individualistic and instrumental attitudes towards work – a feature of the post-war *Wirtschaftswunder* in the Federal Republic. However, she singles out racism as 'the specific Nazi contribution to the reconceptualising of work and the restructuring of the working class'. Not 'achievement' alone, but racial 'fitness', was the key to the hierarchisation of a labour force increasingly dependent during the war upon 'foreign workers'.

The second strand of Nolan's enquiry covers the unfolding literature on women and gender in Nazi Germany. Research here has concentrated upon the impact of Nazi ideology and policy on women's work and reproduction; on gender and Nazi racial-eugenic policies; and on the extent of women's complicity on Nazi rule. On the first area, Nolan concludes that the Nazi regime 'failed to reverse long-term secular trends in women's work', but 'did mix racism and labour-market policies in ways that were new'. As regards women's reproductive role, race and purported eugenic value were decisive, class relatively

insignificant. Studies of the relationship between eugenics and gender, she shows, have even prompted the bizarre assertion that the solution to the *Frauenfrage* ('woman question') was for the Nazis just as important as the solution to the 'Jewish question'. But more balanced views would surely still see gender issues as wholly subordinated to racial and eugenics imperatives in the Third Reich. Finally, while the debate on complicity has also sometimes shed more heat than light, Nolan pleads for disaggregated, empirical investigation. This ought to bring out the particular experiences of specific groups of women, rather than simply resorting to broad – and thereby unsatisfactory – generalisations about women as a whole.

The last part of Nolan's survey, on 'everyday life', deals with the way research has developed on the issue of Nazi encroachment on 'the private sphere'; that is, the extent to which a 'normality of everyday life' detached from the inroads of Nazi ideology could continue in the Third Reich. The upshot of recent studies in a number of varied fields has been, she comments, to move away from earlier interpretations of 'everyday life' which emphasised the continuation of such a relatively impervious 'private sphere'. Newer approaches have emphasised the internalisation of Nazi ideas, especially on race, leading to the conclusion that 'the private was transformed and politicised much more than memory claims'.

Nolan's paper, surveying a rich scholarship that has developed since the 1970s on German society under the Nazi regime, might be seen as offering an agenda for a future major research programme on equivalent themes in the history of Soviet society under Stalinism. The fields are not totally *terra incognita* in the case of the USSR. In particular, the labour process under Stalinism has been extensively studied. However, knowledge of popular cultures and counter-cultures is far less advanced, and the key questions of support and opposition are only now beginning to be systematically addressed as the study of *byt* – the Russian equivalent of *Alltagsgeschichte* ('history of everyday life') – starts to gain ground. When it is undertaken, this work will surely discover – as, indeed, is already becoming apparent – that extensive sub-cultures retained a level of autonomy despite the pressures of the system; that certain partial immunities (*Resistenz* in the German parlance) to regime penetration persisted. The prospect of such work being carried out on Stalinist society, and benefiting in the process from the methods and approaches developed in the more established German historiography, is indeed an exciting one.

As we have already noted, this volume certainly does not claim to offer any more than a number of pointers towards a comparative history of the USSR under Stalin and Germany under Hitler. Apart from the

necessary selectivity of themes which has determined the shape of this volume, the varied stages of development of the historiography in almost every aspect of research would mean that such an enterprise would be in some ways premature and unbalanced. However, the papers presented here amount both to a summary of the current state of research in some key areas of comparison, and to an invitation to deepen and extend that research – and in so doing to amplify and enrich the basis of the comparison. The German specialist, though working in historiographically well-ploughed fields, will find much in the analyses of Stalinism in this volume which will provoke a rethink of positions on Nazism. For the Soviet expert, there is the prospect of exploiting the German historiographical debates as, in Lewin's phrase, a 'mirror of the other'. And for historians of either society, the explicitly comparative contributions to the volume offer the potential stimulus of fresh perspectives and conceptualisation on the most violent and inhumane epoch in modern European history.

Studying the history of inhumanity, perpetrated on such a vast, unprecedented scale, has an emotional and psychological cost.[16] It is not like studying the history of philosophy, the Renaissance, or the age of the cathedrals. The subject matter is less uplifting than almost any other conceivable topic of historical enquiry. But it is history all the same. And it *is* important. The emotional involvement has to be contained, even where the very effort to arrive at some balanced and reasoned interpretation seems an affront. 'Interpretation' consists in any case of the attempt to find a rationale for actions which scarcely seem to warrant the term. Hence, there remains the need to master the irrational, the illogical, and the psychologically deranged in order to explain the level of pathological debauchery accepted, approved of, and sustained by masses of people – including highly intelligent ones – and coming to be regarded as normal and justifiable practice. Admitting the irrational in past human behaviour as a legitimate object of study is vital – even at the risk of succumbing to the notion that the irrational is the reality which is bound to prevail. There is nothing else for it than to adhere to scholarly methods in the hope that knowledge might inform action to prevent any conceivable repetition of such political pathologies as characterised Stalinism and Nazism.

[16] Jane Caplan in *Radical History*, 49 (1991), p. 88, citing Tim Mason.