

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As we move further and further into the twenty-first century, the twentieth takes on more and more an air of unreality. In one sense, its features recede, and in another, some of those same features become caricatures of themselves. Our memories have become uncertain. Mussolini's Fascism becomes a burlesque,¹ and Lenin's Bolshevism the antechamber of gulags and killing fields.² One is left with a feeling of disquiet, as though one does not understand any of it.

For a very long time the twentieth century seemed to make sense. The planet was caught up in a Manichean struggle of light against darkness. Marxism, embodying all the values of the Enlightenment, found itself opposed by the irrational evil of reactionary and counterrevolutionary fascism. Fascism, ignominiously struck down in the course of the Second World War, quickly lost whatever cachet it briefly enjoyed among some intellectuals in the West, to be reduced to little more than a public expression of private pathologies.³ For the nations of the world, antifascism became a compulsory patrimony.

FASCISM AND COMMUNISM

Until the coming of the Second World War, both Mussolini's Fascism and generic fascism had been the subjects of passionate debate. There had been perfectly rational and objective discussion of their respective merits and deficits. Mussolini's Fascism, for example, could be spoken of as possessed of a "complete philosophy" articulated by a number of "young intellectuals" fully competent to argue in defense of their positions. Economists

could speak of the “gains and losses” of Fascist economic policy and affirm that “the mass of Italians sympathize with Fascism and, on the whole, support the regime.”⁴

After the war, none of that was possible any longer. Antifascism became the negation that unified the capitalist, democratic West and the socialist, nondemocratic East. Fascists were banished from humanity. They became the unprecedented objects of general reprobation. Their very essence was deemed barbarous. Their sole motivation understood to have been war and violence.

Conversely, for years after the Second World War, Joseph Stalin’s Soviet Union, triumphant in that conflict, the presumptive embodiment of Marxism, became the hope of a surprisingly large minority of Western intellectuals. Fascism was remembered as the tool of a moribund capitalism—seeking to preserve its profits at the cost of war and pestilence. It was seen as the extreme opposite of Soviet socialism. All the simplisms that had been the content of the Marxist interpretation of fascism in the interwar years were seen by many as having been confirmed by the war. Many on the left were persuaded that monopoly capitalism, in its death agony, had unleashed fascism on the world in its desperate effort to stay the hand of history.

The Second World War was understood to have been a war between imperialists who each sought advantage over the other. The Soviet Union, innocent of all that, became the victim of National Socialist Germany—but had heroically succeeded in emerging victorious. The Red Army was depicted as an antifascist army that had sacrificed itself in defense of humanity. For their part, the Western powers were seen as craven spoilers who sought only profit, and worldwide hegemony, from the defeat of fascism.

Some intellectuals in Europe and North America found such an account convincing. Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle, Europe’s most consistent antifascists before the advent of the war, were somehow transformed into “cryptofascists.” Churchill’s postwar “Iron Curtain” speech at Fulton in 1946 was understood to constitute a provocation calculated to support the effort of “industrialists” who hoped to use a contest with the Soviet Union as the pretext for “curbing the claims of the working classes with the help of the authorities and thus complete the [postwar] process of reorganizing production on monopolistic lines at the expense of the community.” General de Gaulle, in turn, long known to be an anticommunist, could only be an enemy of the poor and underprivileged, and, as a consequence, one expected to extend aid and comfort to fascists and “reactionaries” of all sorts.⁵

So convinced of all this were some European and American intellectuals that they could only speak of fascism as an excrescence of capitalism. Some Europeans solemnly maintained that “those who have nothing to say about capitalism should also be silent about fascism.”⁶ The relationship between the two was conceived as one of entailment.

Marxists, for more than half-a-hundred years, had argued that there could only be “two paths . . . open before present society. . . . [The] path of fascism, the path to which the bourgeoisie in all modern countries . . . is increasingly turning . . . or [the] path of communism.”⁷ Marxists and leftist liberals in the West had been convinced by the war that Soviet theoreticians had always been correct. Capitalism was the seedbed of fascism, and the only recourse humanity had was to protect, sustain, foster, and enhance Soviet socialism and its variants. Only with Nikita Khrushchev’s public denunciation of Stalin’s crimes at the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party, did the support of Western leftists for the Soviet Union show any signs of flagging.

Immediately after Stalin’s death in March 1953, oblique criticisms of his regime, by the leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, signaled the forthcoming denunciation—and in February 1956, Khrushchev delivered his catalog of charges against the departed leader in a “secret speech” to the leadership of the Party. In that speech, Stalin’s dictatorship was characterized as tyrannical, arbitrary, and homicidal, having created a system in which many, many innocents perished, and in which prodigious quantities of the nation’s resources had been wasted. Largely unexpected both within and outside the Soviet Union, the disclosures of the 20th Party Congress created political tensions within the Party and among Soviet sympathizers throughout the West.

Stalin’s successors were burdened with the unanticipated necessity of renouncing the tyrannical and homicidal rule associated with his name, while seeking to perpetuate the regime he had created. They were obliged, by their leadership responsibilities, to continue to speak of “socialism in one country,” while at the same time, denouncing its architect. They spoke of a “return to Leninism” while abandoning some of Lenin’s most important policies. They spoke of the commitment to classical Marxism, while at the same time beginning the process that would conclude with the creation of a socialist “state of the whole people”—an arrant affront to classical Marxism’s emphatic insistence that socialism would see the inevitable “withering away of the state.”⁸

Nikita Khrushchev fashioned himself master of a system that revealed

itself as increasingly nationalistic in inspiration, militaristic in department, industrializing in intent, and statist by choice. It was a system that sought uniform control of all the factors of production, enlisted in the service of an economic plan calculated to make the nation a major international power, restoring “lost territories” to the motherland, and securing its borders against external “imperialists.” It was an elitist system, with minority rule legitimized by a claim of special knowledge of the laws governing the dialectical evolution of society.⁹

In the years that followed, more and more Soviet intellectuals reflected more and more critically on the properties of their political and economic system. They seemed to recognize, at least in part, that the special claim to wisdom and moral virtue by the ruling elite had occasioned the creation of a “cult of personality” around their leader, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, from which they had all suffered. They appreciated the fact that Stalin had proceeded to implement views that “in fact had nothing in common with Marxism-Leninism”—but which he invoked in order “to substantiate theoretically the lawlessness and the mass reprisals against those who did not suit him.”¹⁰ Possessed of “unlimited power” in an “administrative system”—typified by “centralized decision-making and the punctual, rigorous and utterly dedicated execution of the directives coming from the top and, particularly, from Stalin”—Stalinism devolved into a morally defective system in abject dependence on the whims of a single man, whose sense of infallibility and omnipotence, ultimately and irresistibly, led to his utter “irrationality.”¹¹

Before the close of the system, Soviet theoreticians had begun to draw conclusions from the role played by Stalin in their nation’s revolutionary history. They suggested that “Stalin quickly grew accustomed to violence as an indispensable component of unlimited power”—to ultimately conceive it a “universal tool”—a conception that opened the portals to a “tragic triumph of the forces of evil.”¹² Soviet analysts concluded that all of that, apparently, “was payment for building socialism in a backward country—by the need to build in a short space of time a heavy (above all, defence) industry, and thousands of enterprises in these industries,” in circumstances in which the motherland was “surrounded by enemies.”¹³

By the time of its passing, the apologists for the Soviet system, under the uncertain leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, had taken the measure of the system they staffed. They sought to abandon all its ideological pretenses as well as its institutional forms, to replace them with the values and fashions of the liberalism Marxism-Leninism had long deplored. In the years

between Stalin's death and the appearance of Gorbachev, all the properties associated with Lenin's Bolshevism, and Stalin's "socialism in one country," were made subject to corrosive review by Soviet Marxist-Leninists themselves—and were found wanting.

The impact of all that on Western academics varied from person to person.¹⁴ Some saw their earlier commitment to the Soviet Union the product of an infatuation with an unattainable dream—and proceeded to abandon socialism as the only alternative to fascism. Others dismissed the entire Soviet sequence as the consequence of one man's perversity. Others simply shifted their allegiance to other, more appealing, socialisms—in China, Cuba, or Ethiopia. The schematization of history, with exploitative capitalism at one pole and socialist liberation at the other, was simply too familiar and attractive to forsake. What would change would be the socialist country that would be the object of their allegiance. Marxist socialism as the paradigm of virtue appears fitfully in the writing of intellectuals to the present day.¹⁵ The possibility never appears to have occurred to them that the socialism they had embraced, in the form it had assumed in the twentieth century, was hardly the incarnation of the Marxism of which they approved.

SOVIET COMMUNISM, NATIONALISM, AND FASCISM

Before Khrushchev's "secret speech" at the 20th Party Congress in 1956, there had been scant tolerance for any resistance to the political systems imposed on Eastern Europe by the Soviets at the conclusion of the Second World War. At the end of the Second World War, among the first responses of many Western intellectuals, was the depiction of the entry of the Red Army into the heartland of Europe as the coming of an avenging host of decency and liberation. Soon, however, the restiveness of those "liberated," and the heavy-handed suppression that followed, produced disquiet among intellectuals in the industrial democracies.

The system imposed on a fragment of what had been Germany, for example, was a purgatory of expiation for the atrocities committed by Adolf Hitler's National Socialism. East Germany, under Soviet occupation, and the regime imposed upon it by Moscow, was expected to provide prodigious amounts of industrial goods and material resources to the Soviet Union as compensation for the destruction of assets and loss of life that resulted from the Nazi invasion of the homeland. Even after the East Ger-

mans emerged from the desolation of the war, the “German Democratic Republic,” cobbled together by the Soviets, soon revealed itself to be an ineffectual, incompetent, and unpopular police system, which, in the final analysis, was justified only by its “antifascist” credentials.¹⁶ In fact, through the long years between the Second World War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow employed its certification as antifascist to legitimate its rule over much of Eastern Europe.

During that same period, international communism, with Moscow at its core—having achieved its apotheosis in its defeat of fascism in the Second World War—faced the first critical challenge to its dominance and control in the defection of Tito’s Yugoslavia. It was immediately clear that Tito’s defection from the highly centralized organization constructed around the Soviet center was not the consequence of ideological disagreement. Originally, there were no doctrinal problems between Tito and Stalin. Their shared ideology notwithstanding, Tito simply refused to surrender control over any of his nation’s sovereignty to Moscow. The Yugoslav defection from “proletarian internationalism” brought to public attention what long had been a private apprehension among Marxist thinkers. “Titoism” was to be symptomatic of a critical problem at the heart of “international socialism.”

Since its very founding, Bolshevism had struggled not only against “bourgeois nationalist,” but “national communist,” factions as well. Even before the Bolshevik revolution, Lenin had been bedeviled by the nationalisms of Polish, Baltic, and Jewish revolutionaries. Dismissed as apostasies by Lenin and his followers, after the October revolution, the leaders of those factions were incarcerated, exiled, or murdered.

There could be none of that in dealing with Tito. Tito Broz was a heretic of a different sort. He could not be dealt with as others had been. Tito was the leader of an independent nation, and his national communism heralded the prospect of a proliferation of just such state systems.

While, in the past, there had been any number of Marxist heretics who had advocated various forms of national communism, it was only with Tito that heresy spread to a ruling party and to an extant state. Tito’s “nationalist deviation” compromised the proletarian international. The vision of an international proletarian revolution that would result in a worldwide socialism lost whatever credibility it had hitherto enjoyed. At the time, observers could not know that a new chapter in the history of communism had begun with the long anti-Tito Cominform resolution of June 1948.

What Tito had done was to reaffirm the coupling of the ideas of na-

tionhood and revolution. In declaring his independence from institutional Stalinism, Tito demonstrated that the sentiment of nationality might serve as a fulcrum for revolutionary mobilization—all the counterarguments of Leninism notwithstanding. The schismatic of Belgrade had raised questions for international communism that could not be laid to rest by political suppression, incarceration, exile, or terror. National communism would demonstrate more resonance than any, at the time, anticipated.

About a decade later, the disaffection of Mao Zedong became public knowledge—and confirmed to even the most skeptical, that international communism had fallen on evil times. National communism revealed itself an endemic factional threat to revolutionary Marxism—with the defection of Mao to be followed by the national Marxists of tiny Albania, Fidel Castro's Cuba, and the dedicated nationalism of Ho Chi Minh. Even the hermetic regime of Kim Il Sung and his heir would ultimately take on nationalist coloration. Titoism no longer was a personal idiosyncrasy; it was to be an irremediable and ongoing affliction of international Marxism-Leninism.

The Soviet leadership that long had been self-congratulatory in claiming to have solved the “nationalities problem” within its own boundaries, could not control political nationalism in the world outside. It was to be a recurrent concern for the quondam leaders of what had been a conjectured international proletariat.

Tito, originally a militant Stalinist, was prepared to oppose Stalin in the service of political autonomy from Moscow—an autonomy that could accommodate significant nationalist sentiments. While Tito could allow direct expression of such values, a similar option was not available to other nations of the “Soviet bloc.” Nonetheless, it can be argued that after 1948, it was just those sentiments that made communism at all viable in the Soviet satellite nations.

What seemed reasonably clear was the fact that most of the communist governments, sponsored by Moscow in Eastern Europe, remained at all effective only because their communism was sustained by national sentiment. Domestic communists had coupled nationalism with the postwar aversion to Germans, who, as Nazis, had destroyed, pillaged, and butchered their way across vast territories in their conquest of Europe. Those circumstances provided Moscow its most effective *raison d'être*: its “antifascism.” The Soviet treatment of the states of Eastern Europe was vindicated by an argument that warned of a possible rise of a revanchist, “neonazi” Germany, which would threaten regional security in the future. Rather than

the putative merits of communism to hold its satellites together, Moscow fell back on its antifascist credentials.¹⁷ It was not Marxism-Leninism that tied the Eastern European communities to Moscow; it was Moscow's "antifascism."

For all that, in the years that were to follow, national sentiment, quite independent of the overlay of communist antifascism, would successively animate national political life throughout the satellite nations of Eastern Europe, in Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. Gradually, and in varying measure, the national communisms of each of those nations found expression in its own developmental "socialism in one country," several with their own respective "charismatic leader," and corresponding unitary party—until national independence from Moscow became the dominant imperative. The truth is that the issue of the connection of nationalism and revolution had never been resolved by Marxist revolutionaries in the twentieth century.

"FASCISM," AND "NEOFASCISM," AS CONCEPTS

Until the collapse of the entire system, "antifascism" had served as the linchpin of the international policies of the Soviet Union. For about two decades after the end of the Second World War, Moscow reiterated its "interpretation of fascism," first fully articulated in the mid-1930s, identifying fascism the "terrorist tool" of "finance capitalism."¹⁸ The singular difference that distinguished its interpretation after the Second World War was Moscow's ready identification of any political system, any political leader, or any political movement, that opposed itself to Soviet Marxism-Leninism, not only as "capitalist," but as "neofascist" as well. Thus, almost immediately after the end of the war, Winston Churchill, Harry Truman, and Charles de Gaulle, who warned the industrial democracies against Soviet machinations, became "neo-" or "protofascists," according to Moscow. To satisfy Moscow's entry criteria into the class of "neofascisms" required only that one's policies be conceived "capitalist," or "anticommunist." Thus, according to Moscow, the "McCarthy era" in the United States, with its "hysterical anticommunism," signaled the "rise of fascism" in the Western Hemisphere.

By the end of the 1960s, whatever the revisions in the Soviet "standard version" of "fascism," Moscow continued to employ the term to identify its "class enemies." The treatment of "fascism" was stereotypic, abstract, and

largely ahistorical. At best, Soviet spokesmen identified fascism with a catalog of horrors. The account of fascism's rise and appeal was delivered in an unconvincing and insubstantial rendering. According to the prevailing opinion in Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s, the propertied elites of Germany had invoked, mobilized, organized, directed, and ensconced in power, Adolf Hitler and his henchmen.¹⁹ Throughout the years before the Soviet Union disappeared into history, Moscow insisted that the selfsame propertied elites in the United States, and the Western industrialized powers, in their eternal search for "corporate profits," were preparing, once again, to visit the same horrors on the world.

At the same time, driven by its abstract and stereotypic interpretation of world history, Moscow discovered a totally unanticipated "fascism" on its long borders to the East. By the mid-1960s, Soviet theoreticians began to characterize Maoism as an "anti-Marxist, petty bourgeois nationalism."²⁰ Given the generous criteria for admission into the class of "fascisms," the People's Republic of China, in Moscow's scheme of reality, became a fascist power, ultimately to make common cause with international finance capitalism.

The late 1960s actually saw the two "socialist" powers in armed conflict on the Sino-Soviet border. In the course of all that, Beijing tendered its assessment of what had been transpiring in the Soviet Union. Maoists began to identify "capitalist-roaders" among the post-Stalinist leadership in Moscow. There was easy talk about the "restoration of capitalism" in the Soviet Union.²¹ To Beijing, with that putative restoration, the Soviet Union quickly made the transition to "social imperialism," to finally morph into "social-fascism."²²

Genuinely puzzled by the appearance of "fascism" in "socialist states," most commentators in the West refrained from treating such identifications as instructive. Such conceptual notions created theoretical stress in their antifascist repertory. They simply identified the exchanges as a form of political abuse that accompanied the political, military, and economic tensions between the two "socialisms."

Most anglophone commentators chose to extend credit to generic communism, surrounding it with the deference due the Marxist ideas it supposedly incarnated. They seemed to find impossible the notion that either the Soviet Union, the heir of Lenin, or China, the product of a "Marxist Long March," could qualify as "fascist." Whatever they were, or had become, Western intellectuals had difficulty imagining that fascism could find place among the heirs of classical Marxism and Marxism-Leninism.

The fact that both revolutionary socialist systems employed the concept “fascism” to describe the other was dismissed as a product of international tension. The term could not have meant anything in such an exchange.

Thereafter, Western scholarship has sought, largely in vain, for some definition of “fascism” that minimally would satisfy research requirements. To date none has been forthcoming—or at least none that satisfies all participants in search for fascism or neofascism.²³ In the interim, hundreds of books, and thousands of articles, have been published dealing with both topics. None have been notably successful.

“Fascism” and “neofascism,” at one time or another, have been identified with conservatism, a defense of capitalism, anticommunism, right-wing extremism, genocidal intent, racism of one or another sort, thuggery of whatever sort, chauvinism, militarism, military rule, authoritarianism, xenophobia, homophobia, tax protests, terror bombings, religious fundamentalism, simple irrationalism, sexism, violence at soccer matches, religious bigotry, vandalism in graveyards, and hate speech.²⁴ What they have not been identified with is communism—no matter how murderous and bestial some Marxist dictatorships have been.²⁵

Part of the responsibility for this derives directly from the fact that during the Second World War, the Allied powers had chosen to identify the conflict with the Axis powers as a “war against fascism”—with Hitler’s National Socialism conjoined with Mussolini’s Fascism, to become a generic “fascism,” sometimes carrying a “fascist” imperial Japan in its train. By the end of the war, “fascism” was identified with every bestiality from unprovoked attack, to the mass murder of innocents, that could be attributed to the forces of National Socialism or imperial Japan. The noncommunist Allied powers, for a variety of reasons, were as prepared as Moscow to identify any and all of their opponents in the war as “fascists.” The consequence was the artless identification of a generic “fascism” with every enormity committed by any of the Axis powers, anywhere in the world, in the course of the Second World War. By that time, the term had dilated to such an extent that it hardly commanded any cognitive reference; it was little more than a term of abuse. All that notwithstanding, Soviet forces, and communist partisans, however egregious their conduct, were never associated with fascism.

As has been suggested, it was in that parlous condition that the term entered the lexicon of then current Western academic inquiry. It was used then, and still used now, to refer indifferently to Hitler’s National Socialism and Mussolini’s Fascism (as well as to an expanding number of other sociopolitical systems as time progressed). Together with a general leftist-liberal disposition to forever see merit in Marxism, all of that reinforced the

interpretation of contemporary politics as divided along the fault lines of “capitalism-fascism” and “socialism.”

Leftist European intellectuals then, and largely continue to this day, to labor the thesis that fascism was the lamentable and inevitable by-product of capitalism. In places like the German Federal Republic and Great Britain, professors, academicians, and journalists regularly made a case for the “bourgeois” and “capitalist” essence of fascism. Fascism was, and continues to be, portrayed “as a form of counterrevolution acting in the interests of capital.” The only “lasting alternative” to fascism was, and is, seen in the creation of “a root-and-branch socialism” that will render capitalism and the existence of the bourgeoisie no longer possible.²⁶ Given such convictions among those who shape opinion, the long revolutionary, anticapitalist, and antibourgeois tradition of Italian Fascism disappears into a stylized, amnesiac, historically inaccurate reconstruction.

Not all the history of the interwar years slipped away. Some scholars conjured up a half-remembered concept that early in the interwar years had been used, in its time, to subsume both fascism and communism. During those years, Fascist intellectuals themselves acknowledged the institutional and structural similarities their “corporative state” shared with the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Those similarities were collected under the rubric: “totalitarianism.”

Fascist theoreticians recognized the logic that sustained all single-party systems—communist and fascist alike. In the identification of the individual with the single party state, and the identification of the single party state with a leader, “whose will is the will of the governed,”²⁷ they recognized a shared “totalitarianism.”

The rationale of totalitarianism was articulated before the Great War of 1914–1918 by Giovanni Gentile—the author of the variant of Hegelian idealism that ultimately came to animate Mussolini’s Fascism. Before the First World War, Gentile had proposed a conception of political rule that conceived individuals organically united in a society that found its identity in an “ethical state.” Gentile conceived society and the state intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, to the individual. Like Hegel, and Aristotle before him, Gentile conceived the individual outside society and the state only an “abstraction.”²⁸

From that fundamental identity of the individual, society, and the state, all the subsequent identities followed. There followed a conceived unity of political opinion, culture, and aspirations—and the corresponding institutional structures that endowed those identities physical substance.

Fascist ideologues not only saw in that social philosophy the rationale

of their system—but they recognized its appearance in the political rule of V. I. Lenin in Bolshevik Russia. “Totalitarianism” was understood to cover antidemocratic and antiparliamentarian systems of both the political left and right.

In December 1921, Mussolini had himself acknowledged the affinities shared by his Fascism and Lenin’s Bolshevism. He spoke of their common recognition of the necessity of creating “a centralizing and unitary state, that imposes on all an iron discipline.”²⁹

In the course of time, Fascist intellectuals identified a similar rationale in the ideology of Adolf Hitler’s National Socialism, and in the political rationale of Chiang Kaishek’s Kuomintang. In effect, Fascists saw totalitarianism as a novel form of governance, as a singular product of revolution in the twentieth century. In origin, it was neither of the left or right.

TOTALITARIANISM

Fascist ideologues spoke affirmatively of totalitarianism. They spoke of the primacy of politics over economics, and leadership over consultation. They spoke of obedience and belief, and a readiness to struggle against the reactionary forces of wealth and privilege. They spoke of creating a “new humanity” for a “new society” under the auspices of an “ethical state.” Totalitarianism was understood to be a unique political creation of the modern age.

For their part, Fascism’s opponents, as early as 1923, identified totalitarianism as an oppressive system of “absolute political dominion” over citizens.³⁰ Thereafter, the term appeared sporadically outside Fascist environs—almost always accompanied by negative connotation. In the fall of 1929, for example, the term appeared in the *London Times*, and was applied to both Fascist Italy and Stalin’s Russia. In 1934, George Sabine spoke of a “new type” of state that found expression not only in “fascist totalitarianism,” but in the “very similar” conception of the state that had manifested itself in Stalin’s Russia.³¹

In the mid-1930s, the term “totalitarianism” was used, with some frequency, to identify not only the political systems of Mussolini and Hitler, i.e., fascist states, but that of Stalin’s Russia as well.³² Marxist-Leninists, predictably, took exception to the usage. They had first used the term in 1928, and thereafter applied it exclusively to what they considered fascist state systems. They had decided that totalitarianism was a by-product of the final crisis of industrial capitalism.³³

With the coming of the Second World War, “totalitarianism” was used almost exclusively to refer to the Axis powers. The Soviet Union, by that time an ally in the “war against fascism,” was generally exempt, with the often unspoken suggestion that Stalin’s Russia was some sort of incipient democracy. Those sympathetic to Stalin, Marxists of one or another degree of commitment, given their identification of fascism and monopoly capitalism, insisted that “totalitarianism” could only refer to fascist systems—with fascism representing the pathological reaction of capitalism in decline.³⁴

The identification of Stalin’s Russia as a totalitarianism was largely left to democratic, or anti-Soviet, Marxists—Mensheviks, Trotskyists, and social democrats. Only with the end of the Second World War did the term become increasingly inclusive, to refer to socialist, as well as fascist, systems. Such usage had survived throughout the war years in publications such as Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, and in more academic works such as Franz Neumann’s *Behemoth* and Sigmund Neumann’s *Permanent Revolution*. George Orwell reported that the idea for his premonitory, antitotalitarian novel, *Nineteen Eighty-four*, had come to him in 1943. For Orwell, a victorious Soviet Union held out the prospect of something other than social democracy.

With the end of the Second World War, the referents of the term once again included Stalin’s Soviet Union. The criterial traits that governed admission into the category included the features that had been common to totalitarianism since the first years of the 1930s. They included a “charismatic leadership,” inspired by a formal ideology of pretended infallibility, leading an elite vanguard housed in a single, dominant party, which administered a disciplined system of potential controls over all aspects of civil life, ranging from the economy, the flow of information, to culture.³⁵

The war having been won, the leaders of the industrial democracies no longer had to concern themselves with the sensibilities of their counterparts in Moscow. There were enough critics of the political system in the Soviet Union to provide the energy to once again address the issue of the relationship between political democracy and totalitarianism. Deteriorating relations between Washington and Moscow precipitated the development—and signaled the advent of the “cold war.”³⁶

A wave of publications, both popular and academic, made an issue of the “threat of totalitarianism.” In 1950, the United States Congress passed the McCarran Internal Security Act, which proscribed the entry of “totalitarians” into the United States—a proscription that explicitly included “communists”—transcending the customary distinction between the political left and right.

For a time, the expression “Red fascism” enjoyed a certain vogue.³⁷ Anti-Soviet leftists had persisted in their employment of “totalitarianism” to include Stalinism throughout the war—and immediately fell into line behind Washington. Soviet Marxists, in opposition, reaffirmed their standard theoretical argument. In 1946, a Soviet official contended that although the war against the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini had been successfully concluded, the fascist threat remained. “Fascism,” he contended, “is a manifestation of capitalist society in its imperialistic phase,” and could be expected to resurface as capitalists feel the necessity to “oppose Soviet democracy.”³⁸

Throughout the course of the cold war, “totalitarianism” became a contested political concept. Senator Joseph McCarthy created a political firestorm with his crusade against communists, and “fellow-travelers.” Liberal journalists objected that McCarthyism had taken on totalitarian features—an objection that suggested that liberal democratic systems themselves might well share traits with totalitarianism. Totalitarianism, it was contended, was not uniquely limited to fascism or communism. Its properties might be found anywhere. It is a contention that continues to resonate in Western academic and journalistic communities to this day.

As early as the McCarthy committee meetings, liberals and leftists developed a strategy in dealing with totalitarianism. “Totalitarianism” was to be a term to be employed against any “reactionary” or “quasifascist” opponents of “democracy.” Fascism and capitalism might be its proper referents—but could hardly apply to Marxist or Marxist-Leninist systems since Marxism was understood to be in the democratic traditions of the French revolution.³⁹

As the concept entered fulsomely into academic discourse, it became increasingly complex and uncertain. Hannah Arendt delivered her *Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951 to general acclaim, but her account created problems.⁴⁰ She had argued that the term “totalitarianism” covered the Soviet system as well as that of Adolf Hitler—but her treatment of the Soviet Union appeared somewhat contrived, as though it were something of an afterthought. She had managed to trace the totalitarianism of National Socialist Germany to conditions created by the “bourgeoisie” of the nineteenth century—to unbridled economic competition, the dissolution of class and caste identities, resultant alienation, and the creation of the political “mob.” The bourgeois economic system had left individuals bereft of particularity, and reduced them to search for their identities in such nebulous concepts as race. It was that which fueled the *völkisch* thought of nineteenth-century Germany that, in turn, provided much of the substance of National Socialist ideology.

On the other hand, Arendt's treatment of Soviet totalitarianism was deemed, even by her admirers, as being far less penetrating and substantive.⁴¹ She did assign some responsibility to Marx for having reduced law and governance to simple "reflexes" of economic factors, and she alluded to the collectivistic and deterministic aspects of his social philosophy as factors. How that lent itself to the rationale that underwrote totalitarianism was not clear. One comes away from the text with a sense that, somehow or other, "capitalism" and the "bourgeoisie," and not Marx, are really responsible for totalitarianism. As a consequence, the ultimate sources of Soviet totalitarianism remained more than a little obscure.

Arendt's volume was one of a collection of notable volumes that appeared about the same time. Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, and Jacob Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* and his *Political Messianism* contributed to the ongoing discussion. By the 1970s, interest in the origins of totalitarianism, in some measure, had begun to flag, and more and more academics found reason to object to the concept's employment.

"Destalinization" had presumably taken hold in the Soviet Union, and there were many who sought to reduce international tensions by no longer invoking "inflammatory" political characterizations. Besides, it was argued, the term "totalitarianism" was hardly sufficiently nuanced to allow its use in social science and historical exposition. As a case in point, it was argued, Lenin's ideas were very complex, and so were the ideas of other Bolsheviks. Their individual and collective behaviors were hardly the consequence of holding fast to some collection of uniform political convictions. They were rather the results of a complex of factors far too numerous to be captured by so broad gauged a term as "a formal totalitarian ideology."⁴²

It was further argued that Mussolini's regime, whatever the Duce's boasts, was never really totalitarian. Fascism never succeeded in absorbing the Italian monarchy, the Roman Catholic Church, or the officer corps of the armed forces.⁴³ Worse still, Mussolini hardly massacred anyone. Guilty of employing toxic gas in the Ethiopian war, and brutality in suppressing uprisings in Libya, Mussolini killed remarkably few of his own citizens during his reign of a quarter century.⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt noted that failure, and decided Italian Fascism did not qualify for entry into the class of totalitarianisms.

Others emphasized that the term "totalitarian" suggests a depiction of a systematic integration of all the component parts of a society under the control of the omniscient state. In fact, critics contended, so-called totalitarian systems were anything but omniscient. Hitler's regime was

disorganized, and many lived throughout his tenure with little change in their day-to-day lives—until the devastation of the Second World War. In the Soviet Union, party rule varied from place to place, and in Mao's China there was much disorder—and at times, pandemic incompetence. Somehow or other, for critics of the concept, all of that seemed to mean that “totalitarianism” as a social science concept was of little cognitive use. Many recommended that it be abandoned. Its use generated hostility between the superpowers, and provided little insight as compensation.

Other than that, many intellectuals felt that any association between “socialism,” in whatever form it took, and fascism of any sort, was to be rejected. The suggestion that there might be some sort of association between the two could only serve the purposes of capitalism in its struggle against socialist liberation.⁴⁵ There was fulsome support for the use of the designation “antifascism,” rather than “antitotalitarian,” to identify the true enemy of modern democracy.⁴⁶ Fascism, not socialism, was the foe.

And yet, there were those who continued to argue that the term “totalitarian” had as its referents political regimes of both the left and the right—and that those regimes were of a new type, unique to the twentieth century.⁴⁷ Totalitarian regimes featured distinctive political rule, in terms of the singular leader himself, his preclusive ideology and the dominant party it animated. It was not just a police state—or simply a personal dictatorship. It was a political system that arrogated to itself the power to fashion, and emit legislation without the semblance of those “checks and balances” that typify pluralistic arrangements. In such systems, the distinction between legislative and executive branches is deemed anachronistic—and the suggestion that judicial review should be independent of the other branches of government is considered dysfunctional. Such systems, it was held, could be politically either of the left or the right, socialist or fascist as the case might be.

Law in such systems is conceived an adjunct of ideology—an expression of “the will of all.” It is generally formulated and administered through the bureaucracies of the state—with the courts playing an uncertain, ill-defined role. The machinery of the state is designed to serve the ideological purposes of the party as those purposes are understood by the leadership. Individuals, under surveillance by police and party, are enrolled in age cohorts, political, paramilitary, and functional associations, and expected selflessly to serve the system.

It seems evident that such a syndrome of properties serves heuristic, didactic, and mnemonic purposes.⁴⁸ It suggests possible research topics; it

serves to organize complex materials for pedagogical ends; and it assists in ready storage and recall of fugitive information. What “totalitarianism” is not is a “theory.” It can neither explain, in any comprehensible scientific sense, nor predict. At best, it advances a very general description of a syndrome of traits that seem to hang together. It is not clear that all members of the class share *all* its defining traits—nor is it clear how many of those defining traits, or in what measure, are required for entry into the class.

In the past, the concept has assisted social scientists to explore the actual functioning of those systems tentatively identified as totalitarian. Some seem to display more of the traits than others, and some in more emphatic measure.

Some of the systems so identified pass through stages. Stalinism was something quite different before the death of Stalin than after. Maoism was transformed by the death of its “Never Setting Red Sun.” Conversely, Kim Jong Il’s Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has remained stolidly the same after the death of Kim Il Sung. Castro’s regime in Cuba displays some of the major features of totalitarianism, and yet is somehow different. Stalinists, Maoists, and Marxists of sundry sorts have teased out diaphanous totalitarian features even in pluralistic systems.

The fulsome traits associated with the term “totalitarianism” refer to a distinctive form of governance that first became possible in the age of mobilizable masses, of nationalism, of rapid industrialization, and modern technology. For our immediate purposes, it is interesting that some specialists insist that only right-wing political movements in capitalist environs can ever be totalitarian—while others maintain that only “a socialist or communist system can achieve full totalitarianism, since total control requires total institutional revolution that can only be effected by state socialism.”⁴⁹ In Eastern Europe, as Soviet controls weakened in the 1980s, more and more socialist scholars acknowledged the features shared by fascist and Marxist-Leninist systems.⁵⁰ By the mid-1980s, writers and academics in the Soviet Union were prepared to recognize the totalitarianism of their system, particularly that of the Stalinist period.⁵¹ Thereafter, anglophone scholars have either unself-consciously used the characterization to identify entire stages in the history of the Soviet Union, or as part of their analysis.⁵²

What seems to survive out of all of this is an acknowledgment that fascism, however understood, and Marxism-Leninism, in whatever variant, share some identifiable features. Only the most doctrinaire of Marxists still insist that only fascism was totalitarian in practice or intent. Most comparativists, with however little enthusiasm, are prepared to grant important, if

abstract similarities. By the last decade of the twentieth century the debate on the issue of “totalitarianism,” its scope, interpretation, and applicability, had run its course. Fascism, in some of its forms, was somehow related to Marxism, in some of its forms. There was little agreement on how similar these two classes of political systems might be, but many attest to the similarities.

From the interwar years, when fascism and communism were classed together, through the war years when only fascism was identified as totalitarian, until the final years of the twentieth century when, once again, similarities were attested between fascism and communism in however attenuated a form, a search for ideological and historical origins has recommended itself. Enough political systems remain that continue to share totalitarian traits to make the enterprise worthy of the time and energy required.

All that notwithstanding, there have been those, at the close of the last century, who have held that concern for a generic totalitarianism has little, if any, place in the social science of our time. Communism had collapsed both in the Soviet Union as well as in its Eastern European satellites. In the People’s Republic of China, Maoist communism transformed itself into something significantly different almost immediately after the death of its “Chairman.”

The consequence was an almost immediate refocus of political attention. Among many, fascism reappeared as the exclusive concern. Soon there was the suggestion that fascism, alone, was the “pathological” cause of the mass murders that darkened the history of the twentieth century. Fascism was understood to have been so destructive a political alternative that it, and it alone, occupies a unique place in the ideological and institutional history of our time. Marxism, in all its variants, recedes into history. It is “fascism,” not “totalitarianism,” that is invoked to “understand” a unique barbarity and inhumanity that apparently exceeded anything that transpired under communist auspices.

A spate of monographs appeared that argued that only fascism could be responsible for the horrors of the twentieth century. The argument was made that Marxism and fascism were, and could only be, diametric opposites. Marxism was a product of the Enlightenment, and was a rational, progressive ideology—while fascism was irrational, reactionary, and intrinsically evil, committed exclusively to “violence and war” for their own sake. Marxism, on the other hand, was “as much an ethical doctrine as an economic one.”⁵³ Their respective morality and ethics distinguished the two systems.

In general, the argument employs Hitler's National Socialism, infamous in its genocidal malevolence, as paradigmatic of the class of "fascisms." That given, many have sought to dilate the term "fascism" to include a variety of political systems—all understood to share in the special evil that was Nazism. That having been established, Marxism and its variants have been accorded a distinctive moral superiority.

It is an intellectual strategy that has left more than one scholar unconvinced. As late as 1994, Walter Laqueur could still speak of the properties shared by Stalin's Soviet Union and Hitler's National Socialist Germany—and others were to catalog the long list of unimaginable moral outrages that stained the history of both.⁵⁴

SOME ISSUES IN THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF REVOLUTION

For all the efforts made to distinguish Marxism from fascism in any of its real or fancied forms, there is a lingering suspicion that the two ideological systems are somehow related. The similarities were noted even before Italian Fascism had reached political maturity.

Many Marxists were there at the birth of Fascism. However strenuously resisted by some, the relationship was recognized in totalitarianism. During the tenure of the regime, it was acknowledged by some of Fascism's major theoreticians. And after the passing of Leninist communism, its relationship to fascism, in general, was acknowledged by many of its erstwhile practitioners.⁵⁵

The difficulty that many have had with all that is the consequence of political science folk wisdom that has made fascism the unqualified opposite of any form of Marxism. So fixed has that notion become in the study of comparative politics that the suggestion of any affinities between the two is generally dismissed. And yet, some contemporary comparativists recognize that there was an unmistakable "essential ideological kindredness" shared by fascism and Leninism. It was equally clear that at "certain pivotal ideational junctures, *les extremes se touchent*."⁵⁶

It is important to try to understand how that could be possible. In answering that, one has a foothold on how one might explain the concept "totalitarianism"—that has fascism and the variants of Marxism as its referents. Attempting to begin to explain the relationship is part of the story of revolutionary thought at the turn of the twentieth century. It is a story that

merits telling. It is part of a long and complicated narrative in the intellectual history of ideology. It is an account that hopefully lends some substance to the relationship between Marxism in its various modern guises—and the Fascism of Mussolini. It is a chronicle that perhaps also serves to distinguish that Fascism from other candidate fascisms.

Italian Fascism was not Hitler's National Socialism, and it was not Lenin's Bolshevism—but all three shared some sort of affinity, however minimal. For the purpose of the present exposition, the relationship between Mussolini's Fascism and Lenin's Bolshevism is of central concern. It speaks to the ideological relationship shared by Italian Fascism and one or another variant of Marxism, and helps us understand why relevant similarities regularly resurface in any study dealing with modern revolutionary political systems. It is a story that covers almost half a century of European radical thought—and involves some of the major intellectuals of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

While it is only a thread in the complex tapestry of revolution in our time, it is an important and interesting concern. It deals with revolutionary morality and the ethical system that sustains it. It addresses the issue of how the revolutionary theorists at the beginning of our time attempted to understand human choice and political decisions. It deals with revolution and its motives, and violence and its uses.

In the course of time, all these concerns were addressed by self-selected Marxist revolutionaries at the end of the nineteenth century, some of whom were to become the leaders of revolutionary movements in the twentieth. History was to subsequently identify some as "Marxists" and others as "fascists." Those with whom we shall concern ourselves were all Marxists of one or another persuasion. The most interesting, for our purposes, were to ultimately be identified as "Mussoliniani," intellectual leaders of Italian Fascism.

It will be surprising to some—though certainly not everyone—that among the first issues engaged by the revolutionary thinkers at the turn of the twentieth century were those having to do with choice and determinism, with morality and ethics, with nationalism, with leadership, with the mobilization of masses, and how revolution was to be understood in the broad expanse of history. They are questions that continue to shape the revolutionary thought of our time.