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.
Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison

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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
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concentration on a more limited period, but on one where the compara-
tive issues posed themselves particularly clearly, and could be delin-
eated 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.

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