1 Dictatorships: ideologies and totalitarianism

Any comparative history of the three interwar dictatorships must involve looking at three main questions. First, to what extent were the ideologies and regimes associated with Lenin and Stalin similar and thus both part of communism? Second, to what extent were the movements of Mussolini and Hitler the same and how far were their fascist states similar? Finally, there is the much more controversial question of the degree of similarity between the communist and fascist ideologies, movements and states, with the related issue of whether the Soviet, Fascist and Nazi states were authoritarian or totalitarian dictatorships.

The first two of these issues will be discussed below. As regards the final question, there are two main viewpoints. Many historians believe that communism and fascism are two politically extreme but fundamentally opposed movements, with drastically different origins and aims, even though their methods of rule were very similar during the 1920s and 1930s. This view sees communism as a revolutionary left-wing movement and fascism as an essentially reactionary right-wing one (despite some 'radical' aspects in its methods and style of rule). The fundamental difference between them is said to lie in the fact that communism is dedicated to destroying capitalism, while fascism is seen as capitalism's most ruthless defender.

Not all historians share the view that these two political ideologies are diametrically opposed. R. Pipes in *Russia under the Bolshevik regime, 1917–24*, for example, sees them as having many 'affinities' and as competing 'for the same constituencies'. In particular, he sees Lenin and Bolshevism as having far more influence on Mussolini and Hitler than on the general socialist movement. Although Pipes attacks liberal and left-wing historians for being unable to examine this issue dispassionately, it is useful to bear in mind that Pipes himself is not quite an entirely neutral authority (in 1981–82, he was director of Soviet and east European affairs under President Reagan).

These questions will be addressed again in the final chapter (see p. 210), after the dictatorships of the Soviet Union, Italy and Germany have been examined.

Ideological terms

The history of the political dictatorships that emerged in Russia, Italy and Germany after the First World War is often seen as extremely complicated. This is partly the result of the large number of different political terms used to describe the ideologies and forms of rule in these dictatorships. An added

complication is that different historians use the same terms in slightly different ways.

At first glance, the ideology of these dictatorships appears to be more straightforward than their history as, in many ways, they can be seen to be based on one of two fundamentally opposing political ideologies: communism or fascism. Using the political terminology of the early stages of the French Revolution (when the most radical political groups sat on the left side of the national convention, while the most conservative sat on the right), the communists can be described as being on the far or extreme left, while the fascists are on the extreme right.

Unfortunately, it is not quite as simple as this, as both communism and fascism have more than one strand. Consequently, both historical players and historians have often meant different things when using the same terms. At the same time, some have argued that, instead of seeing the political spectrum as one where the two extremes are separated by being at opposed ends, those ends should be seen as almost forming a circle. Although this relates to practice rather than political theory, this description shows the great similarities, rather than the contrasts, between these two ideologies.

Communism

Marxism

In many ways, communism seems the clearer of the two main conflicting ideologies, as it can trace its political roots to the writings of one man: Karl Marx (1818–83) – or two men, if Marx's close collaborator, Friedrich Engels (1820–95), is included. At the most basic level, Marx's writings were based on the materialist conception of history, which he developed. Using the works of the German philosopher Georg Hegel (1770–1831) and of Charles Darwin (1809–82), Marx explored the idea that human history was largely determined by the class struggles between ruling and oppressed classes, which had conflicting interests. He argued that the ruling class needed to exploit, while the oppressed class wanted to escape from this exploitation.

Marx argued that from the start of human history it is possible to detect five different types of society or modes of production. These are:

- primitive communalism: an early form of communism which existed when humans lived as hunter-gatherers and had no separate or dominating social classes;
- slave society: when society was divided into two classes of slave-owners and slaves, such as the Roman empire;
- feudalism: with land-owning aristocrats and serfs;
- agricultural capitalism: with a wealthy land-owning class and landless labourers;
- industrial capitalism: when the bourgeoisie, the dominant social class, owned the factories, mines and banks, and the work was done by the proletariat, a class of industrial workers who owned no property.

Marx, standing left, with Engels in 1864. Seated are Marx's daughters Jenny, Eleanor and Laura.

All four of the class-divided societies were ones in which the dominant class comprised a small minority of the population and had an extremely unequal distribution of economic and political power.

According to Marx, the move from one type of society to another was brought about by the struggle between the dominant class and the main subordinate class. As soon as a subordinate class overthrew the dominant class, a new class struggle would begin to emerge between this new ruling class and the new subordinate class. Marx also believed that, although at first the new society was more economically efficient than the previous one and so played a historically progressive role, the new class divisions would lead eventually to conflict and decline, even though this process might take hundreds of years.

In his massive study of industrial capitalism in Britain, *Das Kapital* (published between 1867 and 1894), Marx made a case against the Victorian industrialists who believed that the British had created the most advanced society that was humanly possible. Instead, using his theory of class struggle, he argued that the industrial workers would inevitably be thrown into a bitter class struggle against their employers. Marx believed that if the workers were successful in overthrowing capitalism they would construct a socialist society, in which the ruling class would comprise the majority of the population, for the first time in human history. From this proposed sixth form of human society, Marx believed it

would be possible to move to a seventh one: communism. This society, which would be based on the economic advances of industrial capitalism, would be one of plenty, not of scarcity, as was the case in primitive communalism. As it would be classless, class conflict and struggle would be absent, allowing the economy to develop more efficiently.

However, Marx did not write much about the political forms to be adopted under socialism (the transitional stage between capitalism and communism) and communism, other than to say that, with the majority of the population in control, it would be a more democratic and less repressive society than those that had existed previously. Although he used the phrase 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to describe the political rule in a socialist workers' state, Marx did not mean a harsh and repressive regime. 'Dictatorship' in this sense meant 'dominance' based on the ownership of the means of production. Thus he described the parliamentary democracy of late nineteenth-century Britain as a 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie', as he believed ownership of wealth allowed the bourgeoisie to ensure their interests were always protected and advanced. After the Paris Commune in 1871, Marx added to his views on the state and politics after the workers' revolution by saying that measures should be adopted to bring about the eventual 'withering away' of the state. Along with the anarchists, he believed the state was unnecessary and prevented the people from governing themselves.

Marx did not believe that progression through the six stages of society was inevitable – this was to prove important in future developments in Russia. Although class struggle was inevitable, he said that societies could stagnate and remain stuck in an inefficient system if the lower classes were unable to overthrow their ruling class, and that societies could even revert to a less advanced system. He also argued that, in special circumstances, a relatively backward society could 'jump' a stage, but only if that state was then aided by sympathetic advanced societies. He did not believe that a poor agricultural society could move to socialism on its own, as socialism required an advanced industrial base.

Marx parted company with the anarchists on the question of how to bring about the desired revolution. While the anarchists believed all organisation was evil and that the revolution would happen 'spontaneously', Marx argued that a consciously revolutionary political party was necessary to help the oppressed workers use their strength in numbers to end their exploitation. He did not believe that the workers could spontaneously develop a revolutionary consciousness and argued that in any society the dominant ideas were always those of the dominant classes as they owned the major means of communication.

Leninism

The fact that Marx did not refer to himself as a 'Marxist', but preferred the term 'communist' (which he had used in the title of the book he and Engels wrote in 1847: *The communist manifesto*), confuses matters somewhat. He preferred this term mainly because it pointed to the ultimate goal: a classless communist

society. However, Marx's followers often preferred to call themselves 'Marxists' as well as communists in order to distinguish themselves from other groups which claimed to be communist and also to emphasise that Marxism and its methods formed a distinct philosophy.

One such was the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924). Although Lenin developed some of Marx's economic ideas – especially those on capitalism and imperialism in the early twentieth century – his main contribution to Marxist theory was in relation to political organisation. He took Marx's comments about the need to organise a revolutionary party and applied them to the extremely undemocratic political system operating in Tsarist Russia. His main idea was what became known as 'democratic centralism'. Lenin argued that because Tsarist Russia was a police state a revolutionary Marxist party could not operate there in the same way that a mass workers' party would operate in a democratic society. Although he believed that all members of the party should have the right to form factions to argue their points of view (the 'democratic' part of democratic centralism), once a decision had been made by party members, all members should give it their full support, even if they had argued and voted against it and even if the decision had only gained a majority of one (this was the 'centralism' aspect). Lenin also argued that the Marxist party in Tsarist Russia needed to be made up of fully committed revolutionaries who would make up a small vanguard party. These views were put forward in his book *What is to be done?* published in 1902.

Lenin did not refer to himself as a 'Leninist'; as far as he was concerned, he was a Marxist or a communist. However, many Marxists believed he had deviated from Marx's teachings. One of the leading Russian Marxists who disagreed with him on the issue of party organisation was Trotsky, who argued that democratic centralism would allow an unscrupulous leader to become a dictator over the party. His view that Lenin was distorting rather than developing Marx's ideas would gain credence after the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917 and were faced with the practical task of governing Russia.

It is often said that another adaptation of Marxism by Lenin is his theory that the stages of human society as identified by Marx could be 'telescoped', so that there would be an extremely short period between the end of feudalism in Russia and the beginning of socialist construction. To an extent, however, this is based on the mistaken belief that Marx had said there would be clear and distinct stages which would always be separated by many years. In fact, both Lenin and Trotsky (who, independently, developed a similar view) based their ideas on the possibility of moving quickly to the socialist phase on Marx's own ideas of permanent revolution. Marx wrote that as soon as one revolutionary stage had been achieved the struggle for the next could begin almost immediately. According to Lenin, 'orthodox' Marxists like the Mensheviks were not taking all of Marx's writings into consideration and were placing undue emphasis on some of his earlier comments.

However, both Lenin and Trotsky believed that Russia could not succeed in carrying through any 'uninterrupted revolution' without outside economic and

technical assistance. When their earlier hopes of successful workers' revolutions in other European states failed to materialise, Lenin proved to be an extremely pragmatic – some would argue opportunistic – ruler, who was quite prepared to adopt policies which seemed to conflict with communist goals and even with those of the socialist stage of development. This is seen most clearly in relation to the New Economic Policy (see pp. 33–34) and in Lenin's ban on factions and other parties. Lenin argued that these were just adaptations to the prevailing circumstances and that as soon as conditions allowed there would be a return to 'socialist norms'.

Marxism-Leninism

This term was invented by Stalin and was not used until after Lenin's death. It was used to show that Lenin was almost as important in the development of Marxism as Marx himself and it soon came to be used in Stalin's Soviet Union to describe 'orthodox Marxism'. Increasingly it came to mean what Stalin himself had to say about political and economic issues. Essentially, Marxism-Leninism was the official ideology of the Soviet state and all communist parties loyal to Stalin and his successors. Many Marxists and even members of the Communist Party itself believed that Stalin's ideas and practices (such as 'socialism in one country' and the purges) were almost total distortions of what Marx and Lenin had said and done.

Stalinism

This term is used by both historians and those politically opposed to Joseph Stalin (1879–1953) to describe the views and practices associated with him and his supporters. Historians and political scientists use it to describe a set of beliefs and a type of rule which are essentially deeply undemocratic and even dictatorial. While it was first used to describe Stalin's actions in the Soviet Union, it has since been used to describe the general style of rule adopted by his successors in the Soviet Union and by those communists who ran the countries of eastern Europe from 1945 until the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989–90.

According to G. Gill, Stalinism has six components:

- a highly centralised economy, in which all important areas are state-owned;
- a social structure which at first allows mobility from working-class occupations into scientific, technical, administrative and intellectual professions but leads to the emergence of a privileged elite who attempt to keep access to such occupations within their families;
- tight political controls over cultural and artistic life;
- a personal dictatorship based on coercion, through the use of secret police and repression;
- total politicisation of all aspects of life, which weakens the political control of state and party because the dictator is seen as the embodiment of the country;
- an ossified conservative ideology which pays lip-service to earlier revolutionary ideals but which, in practice, replaces them.

Historians have also described Stalinism as an ideological adaptation of Marxism which resulted from the particular conditions that existed in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s and early 1930s. D. Lane points out that Stalinism contains many values related to Russia's Tsarist and peasant past, such as Tsarist-style autocracy and the belief in the need for an all-powerful leader, an official orthodox ideology (with communism replacing religion) and the belief in a 'national community', which was transformed into a nationalist belief that the Russian people could achieve 'socialism in one country' without outside help.

Stalinist ideology can thus be seen to have contributed to the rapid industrialisation of the USSR by stimulating national confidence and pride. Another important element of Stalinism is the 'cult of personality', in which the leader is elevated to a position where he is believed to be capable of achieving anything and is always right.

Marxist opponents of Stalin and post-Stalin rulers used the term in some of the ways it is used by historians. However, they were determined to show that Stalinism was not an adaptation of Marxism but a qualitative and fundamental aberration from both Lenin and Marx and from revolutionary communism in general. They stress, in particular, the way in which Stalin and his supporters rejected the goal of socialist democracy in favour of a one-party state and how Stalinism, in theory and in practice, placed the national interests of the Soviet Union above the struggle to achieve world revolution. From the time of the power struggle in the Soviet Union, Stalinism (and the accompanying term 'Stalinist') has been a term of abuse used by those who opposed Stalin's rise and his policies, in much the same way that Stalin and his supporters accused all communists who opposed them of being 'Trotskyists'. Trotskyists came to see themselves as the true defenders of the legacy of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and so the only truly revolutionary Marxists (all others having turned Marxism into a reactionary and even counter-revolutionary ideology which rejected the Marxist commitment to internationalism).

Fascism

Historians have found it even more difficult to agree on a definition of fascism than to agree on a definition of communism. S. Payne's clear definition of fascism as 'a form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism for national rebirth that is based on a primarily vitalist philosophy, is structured on extreme elitism, mass mobilisation and the *Führerprinzip* [leadership principle], positively values violence as an end as well as a means and tends to normalise war and/or the military virtues' says nothing about it being committed to the violent destruction of all independent working-class organisations, especially trade unions and socialist and communist parties. Also absent from this definition is any mention of anti-Semitism or racism in general.

'Fascism' is certainly one of the most controversial and misused terms in the history of the modern world. It is, for example, often loosely used as a term of abuse to describe any political regime, movement or individual seen as being

right-wing or authoritarian. In addition, fascism, unlike Marxism and communism, has no coherent, unified ideology or *Weltanschauung* (world view) which is accepted as being specific to it. Even groups calling themselves fascist often fail to agree on any of its essential aspects.

Fascism: the 'third way'

There is a viewpoint whereby fascism is seen as simply a series of unconnected and uncoordinated reactions to the impact of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, that its nature varied from country to country and that it is impossible, therefore, to generalise about it. Here fascism is seen as a series of specific responses to the specific situations that existed in many European countries in the interwar period, rather than as a thought-out ideology. In general terms, therefore, fascism can be seen as an opportunistic form of extreme nationalism which, in political terms, lies somewhere between communism and capitalism; in other words, a political 'third force'.

However, as R. Griffin points out, some historians see fascism as a specific type of ideology, as distinct as liberalism or anarchism, which puts itself forward as an alternative 'third way' to liberal and Marxist modernisation. R. Thurlow has contributed to this debate by pointing out how Italian Fascism can be seen as a synthesis of influences from both the extreme left and right of Italian politics, while Nazism was essentially a far-right ideology that incorporated some left-wing organisational practices, such as mass meetings and rallies. The Israeli historian Z. Sternhell, in particular, has portrayed fascism as a serious 'third way' between capitalism and socialism. He argues that fascism has strong left-wing roots and so he rejects Nazism as a form of fascism. However, R. Eatwell and others point out that most people came to fascism from the right rather than the left.

Eatwell has also argued that it is possible to see fascism as a rejection of both capitalist individualism and socialist internationalism. From this perspective, the argument is that fascism is an attempt to combine the capitalist elements of private property and dynamism with socialist concerns for community and welfare, to bring about a national rebirth.

Nonetheless, even if its ideology was inconsistent – if not non-existent – fascism has had almost as great an effect on the modern world as communism.

Fascism and ideology

Unlike Marxism and communism, fascism does not appear to have existed before the end of the First World War. In Italy Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) and other ultra-nationalists took the term *fascio* (meaning 'band', 'union' or 'group'), which had been used previously by various Italian left-wing and anarcho-syndicalist groups, for their own political organisation. Once he was established as dictator, Mussolini attempted to link his party's name to the *fasces* (bundle of sticks) which had signified the authority of the Ancient Roman lictor (an official who controlled the debates in the Senate).

Before 1919, the political groups that influenced the Italian Fascist Party and the German Nazi Party were small and insignificant. With the benefit of

hindsight, however, it is possible to trace the intellectual origins of fascism to the nineteenth century. This basic but rudimentary form of fascism is sometimes referred to as 'proto-fascism'. In general terms, proto-fascism can be seen as a 'new right' reaction against the late eighteenth-century liberal ideas of the Enlightenment and early nineteenth-century positivism. Both these philosophies emphasised the importance of reason and progress over nature and emotion. In addition to a general reaction against other aspects of the nineteenth century, such as the growth of liberal capitalism, which tended to hit smaller businesses and artisans, and the emergence of class struggle, there were two main philosophical and intellectual influences on what was to become fascism.

First was the French philosopher Georges Sorel (1847–1922), who, appalled by the moderation of most socialists, argued that workers should form revolutionary unions known as *syndicats* in order to bring about a revolution through direct militant action, such as the general strike. After the revolution, there would be no state, just workers' control of the factories they worked in, with 'spontaneous' anarchist co-operation between them. Though not a Marxist, Sorel was clearly on the left. Nonetheless, some fascists (in Italy especially) transformed his ideas into the concept of the 'corporate state' (see pp. 117–19).

However, it was Sorel's ideas on political myths which influenced most fascists. Sorel argued that most people were impelled into action by emotion not reason and that, therefore, a revolutionary movement needed to find or invent some powerful myth or big idea (whether true or not was unimportant) that would motivate people to take violent action. This idea was later commented on by Gustave le Bon (1841–1931) in relation to crowd behaviour and by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) in relation to personality, and was picked up by future fascists, who replaced Sorel's myth of the general strike with the importance of the nation and the need to restore it to its former (mythical) greatness.

Nationalism was an important strand of fascism. In this, fascism was taking to extremes, rather than rejecting, one of the aspects of the Enlightenment. By the nineteenth century, a belief had emerged that there were distinct and separate groups of people who shared the same history, language and culture ('cultural nations') who should all be grouped together in the same nation. Extreme nationalists developed the argument that the nation was supreme and that the individual should be made subservient to the nation and its interests. This ultranationalism was often accompanied by the belief that the nation was in decline, resulting in demands for its dramatic rebirth.

By stressing the nation over the individual in this way, proto-fascism also paved the way for the fascist belief that class struggle should be prevented for the good of the nation. Thus hostility to left-wing political groups was an early feature of fascist movements. According to S. M. Lipset this partly explains why fascism can be seen as an 'extremism of the centre' which originated from and found its main support among the lower middle classes, who felt squeezed between the power of big capitalist firms and the threat of socialism and, especially, communism.

Also influential on early fascism was the strand of thought known as social Darwinism, which was partially based on the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin. One of Darwin's followers, Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), developed a very simplified version – with racial overtones – of his theories and then applied them to the development of human societies. According to Spencer and the social Darwinists, people and nations were like animals, in that it was natural for them to struggle and fight in order to determine the survival of the fittest. This violence would ensure that weaker groups and nations, which did not deserve to survive, would be eliminated in order to keep the strong healthy.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) later contributed his idea of a superman, and his writings frequently referred to the importance of emotion, struggle and war. Yet his views were complex and he was, in fact, against mindless obedience to authority and in favour of individualism. Nonetheless, early fascists used and misused his ideas to justify their actions.

Fascism was also influenced by what has been called 'vitalism', which is the belief that emotion and action are superior to reason. In fact, when Mussolini was asked what fascism was his reply was, 'It is action.' One important result of this was a strong emphasis on the positive benefits of action and violent combat. It is for this reason that fascist parties tend to develop a paramilitary movement alongside their parliamentary section. The vitalists propounded the positive virtues of violent action, especially at times of danger to the nation when, the fascists believed, democratic and liberal political structures were too ineffectual and weak to take the necessary actions. Fascists were also anti-democratic because parliamentary democracy was seen as a way in which large industrialists and the far left could exert influence that was harmful to the small man and to the nation.

In many ways, these political and ideological developments in the latter part of the nineteenth century have led some historians to call this period the 'incubatory period of fascism'. It is important to stress that most of the writers mentioned in connection with the emergence of fascist ideology were not intentional influences.

Generic fascism

Another problem surrounding attempts to define fascism is ascertaining whether there is a general fascist movement to which the different fascist parties belong, in the way that socialist and communist parties belong to clearly defined movements. Connected to this is the issue of comparing the fascist states of Italy and Nazi Germany and assessing to what extent they were similar. Generally speaking, those who argue that there is a general fascist category to which all fascist parties conform, to a greater or lesser extent, tend to see right-wing and left-wing dictatorships as being fundamentally different.

It is certainly true that in the 1920s and 1930s Italian Fascism acted as a model for many fascist parties elsewhere in Europe. Examples include Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists and the Nazi Party of Hitler, who in his early days was an admirer of Mussolini. In 1934, in imitation of the socialists, communists and anarchists, all of which had their own international

organisations, Mussolini set up the Fascist International and gave funds to several emerging fascist parties.

Marxist historians are generally agreed in seeing both fascism and Nazism as essentially similar, in that they were both fanatically anti-communist and anti-socialist, and were also defenders of capitalism, especially of the interests of the large industrialists involved in armaments and associated firms. Many of these people were often important financial supporters of the fascist parties in their rise to power. The Marxist historians also point to their common aggressive and militaristic nationalism, which inevitably led to wars of conquest.

Other historians have gone back to the intellectual origins of fascism in order to determine its core beliefs and characteristics. R. Griffin sees the call for national rebirth at the centre of fascism and describes it as an ideology and movement based on 'populist ultranationalism'. Despite certain national variations, Griffin argues that Italian Fascism and German Nazism shared the desire to destroy the existing political structures and create a new order instead. Essentially, Griffin believes that the features fascist movements have in common are more significant than any differences between them or omissions they might have from a definitive list of characteristics. S. Payne and R. Eatwell have developed interpretations similar to that of Griffin in some respects, pointing out the negative and reactionary aspects of fascist ideology.

Fascism and Nazism

One problem with attempts to portray all fascist parties as broadly similar is the issue of racism and, more specifically, anti-Semitism. While anti-Semitism was not a core belief of Italian Fascism, it was one of the main elements of German Nazism. In general terms, racism towards non-whites was common and widespread in Europe in the nineteenth century and was used to justify imperial expansion in Africa and Asia. The belief that whites were superior and that other races were inferior was supported by various pseudo-scientific writers such as Arthur de Gobineau (1816–82) and Houston S. Chamberlain (1855–1927). De Gobineau argued that there was a hierarchy of races and that those with lighter skins were higher up the evolutionary scale, and that this inequality led to natural antagonism between the races. Chamberlain argued that in order to safeguard 'culture', which could only be produced by the superior Europeans, it was essential to ensure racial purity. Chamberlain saw European history as a struggle between the Germanic peoples (Aryans) of northern Europe, who had inherited the culture of Ancient Greece and Rome, and the Jews, who Chamberlain described as the enemies of culture and mankind. These arguments were connected to the idea of eugenics (a social movement which advocated methods of improving the population through selective breeding), which became popular in some quarters during the 1920s.

In Germany and Austria, in particular, traditional religious hostility to Jewish people was increasingly replaced in the nineteenth century by this pseudo-scientific approach to race and racial purity. These ideas were extremely

influential on Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) and the emerging Nazi Party and its supporters in Germany. Hitler actually met H. S. Chamberlain in 1923 and praised him in his book *Mein Kampf*. In the early stages of Italian Fascism, however, anti-Semitism was not an issue and even after Hitler put pressure on Mussolini to introduce racial laws against the Jews there was never the fanatical hatred of Jews in Italy which marked so many of the Nazi Party's leaders, members and supporters.

It is this difference, among others, which has led many to argue that fascist parties were too disparate for there to be a model to which all fascist parties conformed. Others have countered this argument by pointing out that, apart from anti-Semitism, the two main European fascist parties (and the states they constructed) shared many similar beliefs and practices. Consequently, if the racist element developed by German fascism is excluded from the core of fascist beliefs, then it is still possible to talk of the existence of a general fascism.

Dictatorships: authoritarian or totalitarian?

As well as having to understand the meanings of the various political ideologies which came to prominence and power in the interwar period, it is also necessary to be familiar with several terms used by political scientists as these terms are frequently used to compare and contrast the three regimes and ideologies.

A 'dictatorship' is the general term used to describe a political regime in which democracy, liberal individual rights and genuine parliamentary rule are absent. However, historians and political scientists have tended to divide dictatorships into two categories: authoritarian and totalitarian. Authoritarian dictatorships, according to K. D. Bracher, do not come to power as the result of a mass revolution, but come about as the result of an existing conservative regime imposing increasingly undemocratic measures intended to neutralise and immobilise mass political and industrial organisations. They can also arise following a military coup. Whatever their origin, authoritarian regimes are firmly committed to maintaining or restoring traditional structures and values. Totalitarian dictatorships, on the other hand, come to power as the result of a mass movement or revolution and are, at least in theory, committed to a radical ideology and programme of political, economic and social change.

Of particular relevance to any comparative study of the dictatorships of Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler is an understanding of the debate surrounding the application of the 'totalitarian' label to one or more of the regimes in question. In general, those historians who argue that fascist and communist dictatorships are basically similar tend to believe that all three regimes were totalitarian dictatorships and had many features in common.

The concept of totalitarianism (or total political power) was first developed by Giovanni Amendola in 1923. He was a political opponent of Mussolini's Fascist Party and came to the conclusion that the Fascist regime was qualitatively different from other dictatorships. In fact, Mussolini took over Amendola's term in 1925, claiming that fascism was based on a 'fierce totalitarian will' and that all

aspects of the state – its politics as well as its cultural and spiritual life – were now fully politicised. He stated that everything should be 'fascistised' in order to create a situation which could be described as 'Everything within the State. Nothing outside the State. Nothing against the State.' Giovanni Gentile, the main theoretician of Italian Fascism, also used the term on many occasions.

Since then, several historians have attempted to define 'totalitarianism' by identifying certain characteristics that are not usually features of authoritarian dictatorships. As well as Bracher, these have included H. Arendt (*The origins of totalitarianism*, 1951) and C. Friedrich and Z. Brzezinski (*Totalitarian dictatorship and autocracy*, 1956). According to W. Laqueur in *Fascism. A reader's guide*, the term 'totalitarian' was developed to cover the basic 'common features of communist and fascist states'. In 1973, L. Schapiro's *Totalitarianism* updated totalitarian theories. Overall, there are five main aspects which are said to be central to any totalitarian regime. These are as follows:

- a distinctive, 'utopian', all-embracing ideology which both dominates and attempts to restructure all aspects of society;
- a political system headed by an all-powerful leader, around whom a deliberate cult of personality is created, and in which party, parliament and the state are under the control of the leader;
- the deliberate use of censorship and propaganda aimed at controlling all aspects of culture and at indoctrinating (and at times mobilising) all sections of society, especially the young;
- a systematic use of coercion and terror to ensure total compliance on the part of the people, with all decisions made by the leader and the regime;
- the establishment of absolute state control and co-ordination of the economy, which is subordinated to the political objectives of the political regime.

Although these points should ease the task of deciding if the three regimes we will be discussing were authoritarian or totalitarian, the question is further complicated by the fact that, as pointed out by R. Pipes and others, since the end of the Second World War and the start of the Cold War, the use of these terms has been clouded by attempts to score points in the 'great contest' between East and West, which did not end until 1991. While some politicians and historians have tried to establish that both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were similar totalitarian regimes, others have denied any similarities between the two dictatorships or the two ideologies of communism and fascism.