**Stephen J. Lee. (1987). European Dictatorships, 1918-1945. London: Routledge**

**Chapter 2 – Types of Dictatorship**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the terms which will be used for the rest of this book. Some readers may, however, prefer to return to it after covering [Chapters 3](11_Chapter03.html) to [6](14_Chapter06.html), and before looking at [Chapter 7](15_Chapter07.html).

**Dictatorship as a Concept**

Dictatorship is not a modern concept. Two thousand years ago, during the period of the Roman Republic, exceptional powers were sometimes given by the Senate to individual dictators such as Sulla and Julius Caesar. The intention was that the dictatorship would be temporary and that it would make it possible to take swift and effective action to deal with an emergency. There is some disagreement as to how the term should be applied today. Should it be used in its original form to describe the temporary exercise of emergency powers? Or can it now be applied in a much broader sense – as common usage suggests?

Buchheim argues that dictatorship should be seen as a temporary device. It is ‘equally present in contemporary democratic republics’ and involves the short-term suspension of the democratic process when quick and vigorous action is necessary.[1](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn1) Linz is more specific. Where the temporary suspension of the democratic process is in accordance with ‘rules foreseen in the constitution of a regime’, then the process should be called ‘crisis government’ or ‘constitutional dictatorship’. But the ‘term dictatorship’ should be ‘reserved’ for ‘interim crisis government that has not institutionalized itself and represents a break with institutionalized rules about accession to and exercise of power of the preceding regime, be it democratic, traditional or authoritarian’.[2](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn2)

Others take a less restricted view. According to Curtis, ‘the meaning of the term has changed since Roman times. The essential ingredient of modern dictatorship is power; an emergency is not necessarily present.’[3](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn3) Brooker refers to the emergence, after the First World War, of ‘a modernized form of dictatorship’ which had ‘a longer-term perspective than the previous forms’. But it had a characteristic feature – the possession of ‘an official ideology and political party’; hence the ‘most accurate categorical or conceptual description of the twentieth-century form of dictatorship’ would be the ‘ideological one-party state’. In this form, dictatorship was actually ‘a more modern regime than democracy’.[4](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn4)

Even these four examples show an enormous range of possibilities. At one end of the spectrum we see ‘dictatorship’ as a temporary device to save an existing system. A little further along we encounter ‘dictatorship’ as a change not foreseen by that system. At the other end we move, via the permanent monopoly of power, to the monolithic ideological regime. One end of the spectrum might be seen as *exclusive*, in that it disallows anything but the original usage of the term; the other as *inclusive*, acknowledging that there are modern variants as well as earlier forms. Hence some historians writing on the twentieth century avoid referring to ‘dictatorship’ altogether; others, like Kershaw and Lewin, use it as an integral part of the title of one of their works – *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison*.[5](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn5)

This book has opted for the *inclusive* approach. Being tightly prescriptive about the use of words can lead to their elimination. There are, after all, similar debates over ‘revolution’ – but it is a term we still need. If the original understanding were exclusively employed we would be emphasizing revolution as a return to an earlier phase, as with the turn of a wheel. But in an *inclusive* sense we can refer to ‘political, social, economic, scientific or cultural’ revolution, or to revolution ‘from above or below’, as a ‘sudden change of course’ or as ‘accelerated evolution’. The same should apply to ‘dictatorship’. The important thing is to recognize that it can include alternative forms, which need to be defined by carefully chosen adjectives. In a sense, Linz did this with his use of the term ‘constitutional dictatorship’ while using an *exclusive* argument. Why, therefore, should we not refer, more *inclusively*, to ‘military’ or ‘one-party’ dictatorship, or to ‘authoritarian’ or ‘totalitarian’ dictatorship?

With this in mind, we might provide a provisional definition of ‘dictatorship’ based on three main characteristics. First, it is a regime whose power-base is monopolized by a single group which cannot be removed. The type of group defines the type of dictatorship structure – ‘personal’, ‘military’, ‘party’ or, in Marxist terms, even ‘class’ (‘dictatorship of the bourgeoisie’ or ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, for example). Second, ‘dictatorship’ involves the unchallengeable monopoly of controls by the powerbase over the population. This may range from ‘temporary’ or ‘emergency’ to ‘permanent’ or ‘institutionalized’. Third, this may include the imposition of attitudes, ideas or an ideology. The type of attitudes or ideology will then indicate whether the dictatorship is ‘authoritarian’ or ‘totalitarian’, ‘left’ or ‘right’, ‘Communist’ or ‘Fascist’.

The most significant feature about ‘dictatorship’ in an *inclusive* sense is, therefore, the defining characteristics which go with it. To these we now turn.

**Totalitarian or Authoritarian Regimes?**

The terms most widely used by historians to describe different types of regime in the twentieth century are ‘democratic’ and ‘non-democratic’, ‘authoritarian’ and ‘totalitarian’, ‘left’ and ‘right’, ‘communist’ and ‘fascist’. All of these can be used in different ways – or avoided altogether. This section will try to establish a framework which can apply a *type* to dictatorship, after considering various alternative approaches. As we have seen, not all historians like the word ‘dictatorship’ but our intention will be to qualify it by association with some of these other terms, rather than discard in favour of these terms.

The first distinction sometimes drawn is between ‘democratic’ and ‘non-democratic’. Since all the regimes covered in this book were essentially ‘non-democratic’, this would not be particularly useful as a basic definition. It would contribute towards establishing which ‘democratic’ qualities each of them lacked but not towards defining the type of regime set up as an alternative.

A second possibility would be to distinguish between ‘democratic’ and ‘authoritarian’ systems. Generically, the latter is a system of government which is based on heavily centralized control and which dilutes or dispenses with a properly functioning parliamentary democracy. Used in its widest sense, ‘authoritarian’ would cover all forms of ‘non-democratic’ regime and hence all the examples dealt with in this book. Some historians confine themselves to this broad approach, while others, like Perlmutter, consider that ‘authoritarianism’ has sub-categories: thus ‘When one speaks of “totalitarianism”, one means an institutionalized authoritarian regime sustained by a combination of organization and ideology’.[6](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn6)

A third approach is to separate ‘authoritarian’ and ‘totalitarian’ rather than to see the latter as a branch of the former. Linz includes among ‘authoritarian’ regimes those which might be under military leadership or a non-totalitarian one-party system. The purpose of the authoritarian regime might be political demobilization and the pursuit of conservative or social policies which do not involve radicalization or mass mobilization.

This contrasts directly with the ‘totalitarian’ system[7](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn7). According to Laqueur, the term was ‘coined to cover common features of communist and fascist states’, even though Mussolini had used it during the 1930s to describe the type of regime he was hoping to establish over the Italian people. Laqueur’s statement was more relevant to the period immediately after the Second World War, when Western governments came to fear the Soviet Union – their former ally against Hitler – and to see much in common between communism and fascism. In the atmosphere of the Cold War, two systems were therefore conjoined under one classification. In an attempt to move away from loose generalization into more structured definition, historians since the 1950s have explained totalitarianism in a variety of ways. According to Friedrich and Brzezinski,[8](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn8) totalitarianism was a combination of ‘an ideology, a single party typically led by one man, a terroristic police, a communications monopoly, a weapons monopoly, and a centrally directed economy’.[9](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn9) The ideology and the whole aim of the regime is ‘total destruction and total reconstruction’.[10](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn10) Hence, the true totalitarian system moves step by step towards the achievement of its goals through the effective manipulation of the population. This makes full use of modern techniques of propaganda and indoctrination as well as of force. For Arendt the process is less orderly.[11](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn11) Radical ideology, she agrees, forms the basis of the totalitarian regime. There is, however, no coherent programme – only a restless movement ‘to organise as many people as possible within its framework and to set and keep them in motion’.[12](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn12) The result is chaos rather than order, with new institutions overlapping traditional ones. The most important method used to bring the population into line is terror, since it cannot be assumed that other forms of socialization will be fully effective.

It should be pointed out that there are problems with the use of the term ‘totalitarian’. The first concerns the regimes to which it should be applied. The original classification covered the USSR, Germany and Italy. Then the term was partially discredited by its Cold War extension to post-Stalinist Russia and its satellite states in eastern Europe. Gleeson, for example, describes totalitarianism as ‘the great mobilizing and unifying concept of the Cold War’.[13](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn13) But should the term be applied to communist regimes *per se*? In the 1960s, at the height of the Cold War, Curtis argued: ‘If communist countries are automatically viewed as totalitarian, with all the concept’s pejorative connotations, they emerge not simply as the inevitable enemy but also as the embodiment of evil and of a heresy to be isolated.’[14](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn14)

This brings us to a second difficulty. Some historians have applied the term ‘totalitarian’ to certain ‘democratic’ regimes. In the early 1950s, for example, Talmon used the variant ‘totalitarian democracy’,[15](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn15) to describe the modern application of ideas and structures which first became apparent during the eighteenth century, especially the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution. This, however, has been applied only to the political *left* – and therefore excludes the ideologies and systems of the right like Fascism and Nazism. In effect, therefore, there have been two concurrent debates – one on whether the Soviet Union after Stalin was a totalitarian regime at all, the other on whether, if it *was* totalitarian, it was a democracy or a dictatorship.

The third complication is the more recent identification of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ variants of totalitarianism. In the strong model, totalitarianism achieves total control over the population through conversion by methods such as socialization, indoctrination and force. The most important criterion for success is the degree to which the ideology and objectives of the regime are accomplished; the word ‘strong’ therefore reflects the structured or projective approach to change. By contrast, the weak model focuses on the way in which the regime exercises its power. The emphasis is on ‘the practices of rule rather than its effects’. It stresses ‘the actions of the regime, what the regime does as opposed to the degree of control it is able to wield’.[16](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn16) The word ‘weak’ is a reflection on the regime having to react to changes rather than being in control of them. Of the two, the weak model seems to offer more scope for effective analysis. For one thing, it is extremely difficult to define objectively how far a population within a totalitarian regime has been imbued with its ideology. It is far easier to assess the methods by which the regime has tried to achieve conformity. The strong model also implies that the regime is always in control, that power and decisions about the exercise of power are part of a ‘top-down’ process. The weak model, by contrast, allows for the existence of administrative confusion and for the influence of sectors of the population on the development of policy: this makes possible a ‘bottom-up’ analysis. In addition, the strong model would logically characterize an effective totalitarian regime as one which made decreasing use of terror. In the most extreme cases of totalitarian rule, the reverse happened, which also adheres more closely to the weak model.

With these difficulties, it is not surprising that the need for the term ‘totalitarian’ has been questioned altogether. Some historians now consider that it has been tainted by the ideological conflict of the Cold War; others have argued that recent research on Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia has revealed so many deficiencies in the structure of their power that it can be doubted whether there ever has been a regime which can be properly described as ‘totalitarian’. But the problem with this approach to terminology is that almost every word could be thrown out by purists, thus severely depleting the historian’s vocabulary. As Tormey believes, it therefore ‘seems as pointless to write off the concept of totalitarianism as it is to write off the concept of democracy’.[17](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn17)

For the sake of clarity, this book will make a broad distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian. Both types of dictatorship dispensed with the normal processes of parliamentary government and were critical of democracy. Beyond that, however, their basic intentions differed.

Totalitarian regimes had a radical programme of change, and deliberately mobilized the masses to serve a ‘revolutionary monopolist movement’. They were also permeated by an ideology or ‘a quasi-religious philosophy with a claim to exclusivity’.[18](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn18) More specifically, totalitarian regimes possessed a distinctive ideology which formed a ‘body of doctrine covering all vital parts of man’s existence’.[19](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn19) Everything was in theory subordinated to it and attempts were to be made to restructure society according to its goals. Second, the political system was under the control of a single party, presided over by a leader who was invested with the cult of personality. This party aimed at mobilized mass support, particularly among the young, and generated paramilitary activity. Party politics were ended and the legislature brought under the control of the executive. Third, the individual was completely subordinated to the dictates of the state through a process of coercion and indoctrination. The former could involve ‘a system of terror, whether physical or psychic, effected through party and secret police control’.[20](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn20) Indoctrination sought the destruction of cultural pluralism and the shaping of education, literature, art and music to the objectives of political ideology. Fourth, the totalitarian state sought to impose complete control over the economy by establishing the basic objectives and providing ‘bureaucratic co-ordination of formerly independent corporate entities’.[21](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn21) In some respects the most ‘totalitarian’ of all the regimes may appear to have been Stalin’s Russia, since it fulfilled all the categories mentioned. Marxism-Leninism was an all-embracing ideology which was used extensively as a social-engineering force. The Nazi regime, too, was totalitarian in that it was based on an ideology which was more extreme than any yet devised and which was imposed upon the population by extensive coercion and indoctrination. In Italy, however, radical theory was undermined by a remarkably persistent status quo. This places Fascist Italy on the borderline between totalitarianism and authoritarianism.

Authoritarian regimes, by contrast, used dictatorship in a conservative way, aiming to preserve traditional values and often the traditional social structure. This was to be accomplished neither by revolution nor by rousing the masses. Quite the contrary. As Bracher argues, authoritarian regimes arrived at the neutralization or ‘immobilization of all other forces in the state’.[22](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn22) It is true that some had one or two common features with the totalitarian states. Greece, for example, sometimes imitated the Nazi security system and Metaxas was partly influenced by Hitler’s ideology. Hungary under Gömbös and Poland after Piłsudski flirted with milder forms of fascism, while Austria under Dollfuss and Salazar’s Portugal tried out local variants of corporativism. Several factors, however, prevent these and the other regimes from being regarded with Italy as even partly totalitarian. With the possible exception of Portugal, they lacked any consistent attempt to mobilize the masses behind the regime. In fact, quite the reverse: they aimed to neutralize and depoliticize. This was partly because their leaders relied upon traditional ideas, although in a regenerated form, and distrusted anything which was remotely radical or revolutionary. Finally, authoritarian leaders were content to let the individual remain within his traditional social context and there was rarely any attempt at mass indoctrination.

There remains one major issue. The terms ‘authoritarian’ and ‘totalitarian’ are generally used to classify a regime from a structural or static point of view. They do not, however, take account of *changes* within a regime – where it originates, how it develops and why it decays. There are two possible ways of dealing with this.

One is to allow an overlap between the terms at various points within a regime’s history. An ‘authoritarian’ regime can, for example, tighten up into a ‘totalitarian’ one; indeed some, like Arendt, have argued that the ‘authoritarian’ regime of Lenin was eventually transformed into the ‘totalitarianism’ of Stalin. ([Chapter 3](11_Chapter03.html), however, refutes this particular example.) Conversely, ‘totalitarianism’ can loosen or decay into more typically ‘authoritarian’ regimes; these have been called ‘post-totalitarian authoritarian’ and have been applied particularly to the communist systems in Europe after the Stalin era. Like the right-wing ‘authoritarian’ systems in Spain and Portugal, these eventually loosened up still further to enable the reintroduction of democratic influences. At this point it is no longer appropriate to call them ‘dictatorships’, although there is some controversy as to when, precisely, this occurred.

The other way of making terms such as ‘authoritarian’ and ‘totalitarian’ more dynamic is to develop a further description based on its ideological origins and purpose. Two main possibilities are fascist and communist. But others include looser terms such as nationalist or conservative.

**The Ideological Basis of Dictatorship**

**Communism**

The communist movements were based on a carefully formulated set of principles. The original ideas derived from Marx and Engels, who argued that all societies comprised two main parts – the base and the superstructure. The former was the prevailing economic structure (for example capitalism), the latter the political and social institutions of the ruling class. In order to change the institutions, or superstructure, it was essential to transform the base. This, in turn, involved the notion of class conflict, as the exploited classes sought to bring down their oppressors. Indeed, according to the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), ‘The history of all human society, past and present, has been the history of class struggles.’ This struggle operated by a dialectical process, by which the capitalist system inevitably developed its own opposite which would eventually destroy it. Hence, ‘the bourgeoisie produces its own gravediggers’. Revolution, Marx considered, was a necessary function of this change for, in his words, ‘force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one’. After the revolution had been accomplished, a period known as the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ would begin, during which the bourgeois superstructure would be dismantled, private property would be abolished, production would be socialized and the proletariat would proclaim its triumph by eliminating all other classes. Gradually the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ would be transformed into the ‘classless society’ which would see an end to all need for force and coercion. According to Engels, ‘The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then dies away of itself.’ The result is that state powers would be confined to purely administrative functions. In every other respect the state ‘withers away’.

These theories were adapted to Russian conditions by Lenin, whose works of over twenty volumes covered all the different aspects of revolutionary activity, in the process bringing some major shifts to Marxist interpretation. Whereas Marx and Engels had looked to Germany as the most likely source of future change, Lenin added the significant twist that capitalism was most immediately vulnerable at the weakest link in its chain, rather than where it was most highly developed. In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, he maintained that the war revealed capitalism in decline everywhere, but the process of overthrowing old regimes would actually begin in Russia. Forcing the pace of the historical dialectic necessitated a tightly organized Party Central Committee, which consisted of dedicated professional revolutionaries. He regarded organization as essential, for ‘Just as a blacksmith cannot seize the red hot iron, so the proletariat cannot directly seize power.’ Marxism-Leninism, as the new synthesis came to be called, succeeded in overthrowing the western-style Provisional Government in Russia in October 1917. In the aftermath of the Revolution Lenin established his own version of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. Considerable coercion was used to accomplish this, although he argued that the roles were now reversed: the ‘majority’ now suppressed the ‘minority’.

Was this Leninist version a distortion of Marxism? The official Soviet view was that Lenin was adapting Marxism to new conditions, creating ‘a mighty vehicle for the revolutionary transformation of the world’.[23](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn23) Against this, some western historians have put the case for a major distortion. Keep maintains that Lenin’s regime, pretended to be democratic, but ‘Common to all Soviets was a form of organization that permitted them to be influenced – indeed, manipulated – by the radical activists.’[24](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn24) According to Pipes, ‘his strategy owed precious little to Marxism and everything to an insatiable lust for power’.[25](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn25) Rigby establishes a direct connection between the practice of Leninism and the power base of traditional Tsarism: ‘the tendencies towards a mono-organisational order were indeed apparent in the old Russia.’[26](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn26)

Between 1918 and 1919 it looked as though it might, in the wake of the First World War, make spectacular gains elsewhere. The British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, said in 1919: ‘The whole of Europe is filled with the spirit of revolution.’ Yet, by 1929, the failure of the non-Russian communist parties to seize control had become apparent. Revolutions of the far left had collapsed in Bavaria, Hungary, Austria and the Po Valley in Italy. After 1920, communism, while remaining a spectre and constant threat, never succeeded in gaining power. Among the reasons, examined in [Chapter 3](11_Chapter03.html), were the inconsistencies and defects of Stalin’s foreign policy, which eventually weakened communism everywhere.

Further features were added to the ideology and practice of Communism by Stalin. He claimed that ‘Socialism in One Country’ was more in line with Marxism-Leninism as it had been developing up to 1924 than was Trotsky’s variant – ‘Permanent Revolution’. He used this to justify a strong domestic focus to socialist construction, as opposed to the internationalist approach of many other ‘old Bolsheviks’. Second, in this construction, he placed particular emphasis on the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. This, he said in 1930, ‘represents the mightiest and most powerful authority of all forms of State that have ever existed.’[27](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn27) He thus abandoned the idea of the state ‘withering away’ and was able to intensify measures against any form of political opposition and, more importantly, against whole sectors of the population. Third, he explained the considerable increase in his own authority by reference to the original Marxist relationship between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’. He claimed to be updating an ideological adaptation already started by Lenin. Marx and Engels had argued that the economic ‘base’ gave rise to the political and social ‘superstructure’, the assumption being that economic transformation would come first. Stalin used the same metaphors but reversed their relationship. He argued that the superstructure needed to become ‘the greatest active force’ to ‘assist its basis to take shape and acquire strength’ and ‘to help the new order to finish off and liquidate the old basis and the old classes’.[28](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn28) This directly justified the introduction of a centralized bureaucracy, and the reshaping of the economy through collectivization and industrial planning.

Was Stalinism the natural fulfilment of Marxism-Leninism – or a major distortion? The official Soviet line at the time was that Stalin had made major theoretical contributions in the process of ensuring that Moscow remained the centre of world communism. But after his death in 1953 few continued to believe that Stalin had advanced Marxist theory or that he was really the ‘great educator’ claimed as part of his personality cult. Instead, he was seen increasingly as the ‘great opportunist’, merely using ideological arguments to support policies he was making through other motives. Many saw Stalinism as a distortion of Leninism: these included sources as diverse as Soviet premier Khrushchev, the historian Tucker, and Lukács, the Hungarian revolutionary. Lukács said that ‘Stalinism is not only an erroneous interpretation and a defective application of Marxism; it is, in fact, its negation. There are no longer any theorists. There are only tacticians.’[29](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn29) Another strand of interpretation has developed more recently: Stalinism *was* an ideological successor to Leninism, since it was Leninism which was responsible for the original distortion of Marxism. This has been emphasized by non-Soviet communist parties in western Europe, as well as by post-Soviet socialists. A possible viewpoint is that Lenin was a theorist of strategy, adapting Marxism to a new situation. Stalin was not a theorist, except in the limited ways already examined. But he used the Leninist approach to Marxism with his own special emphasis.

**Fascism**

The most extreme movement of the right is generally called Fascism. This was more diffuse than Marxism-Leninism and certainly much more difficult to explain. There are also controversies as to what type of support it attracted; where it was in the political spectrum; and where, when and why it appeared.

Two – complementary – definitions will do as a starting point. According to Blum, fascism was an ‘ultranationalist, imperialist, and even racial ideology and political system’; it was ‘entirely a European phenomenon closely tied to the personalities of Hitler and Mussolini’.[30](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn30) Paxton prefers to call it

a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with political decline, humiliation, or victim-hood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elite groups, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.[31](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn31)

Where did fascism originate? Here may be found widely divergent explanations. Marxist theories naturally put as much distance between fascism and communism as possible. They therefore reject the ‘totalitarian’ approach – either as a description of communism itself or as a method of finding common characteristics between communism and fascism. Instead, Marxists see fascism as a variant of capitalism. The earliest version of this was the interpretation advanced by the Communist International (Comintern) in 1933. As predicted by Lenin, capitalist societies were entering a period of crisis after the First World War. The reactionary capitalist elements manipulated the population through a mass movement capable of challenging the more genuinely revolutionary movement of the working class. In this sense it was the final and dying stage of bourgeois-capitalist domination, the fascist leaders being the ‘agents’ of capitalist controllers. A variant to this was the more nonconformist Marxist analysis provided by the Italian Communist, Gramsci, who pointed to the *political*crisis of capitalist states: fascism emerged as a radical populist alternative to the fading appeal of the ruling class – in an attempt to revive the capitalist drive.

These theories suffer from an over-structured interpretation of past trends, related entirely to the theory of class conflict and the ultimate struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between the capitalist system and its inevitable successor. They were an attempt to read back into the works of Marx and Lenin the events of the twentieth century, without allowing for other influences and interpretations, based on more subtle nuances than class conflict and exploitation. A wide variety of these has been provided by non-Marxist explanations.

Some emphasize the climate of change between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Early non-Marxist arguments, advanced by the likes of Meinecke and Ritter, emphasized the moral crisis of European society, Fromm even referring to an ‘escape from freedom and a refuge in submission’.[32](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn32) These, however, were somewhat sweeping, a reflection of disillusionment of the time but not convincing in the broader sweep of historical analysis. A similar, but more balanced theme has been taken by Blum, who sees fascism in the context of major changes in the climate of opinion of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe.[33](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn33) He argues that ‘The ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution – rationalism, liberalism, democracy and egalitarianism – were increasingly challenged by new philosophical, scientific, pseudoscientific, and political precepts.’[34](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn34) Other interpretations focus on fascism as a reaction to other influences. Nolte, for example, argues that ‘The origin of the Right lies always in the challenge of the Left.’[35](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn35) Elsewhere he defines fascism as ‘an anti-revolutionary revolution of subversive conservatives’.[36](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn36) Hildebrand sees it rather as a reaction to development, the energy of fascism, coming from the resistance of residual ‘elites to the egalitarian tendencies’ of industrial society.[37](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn37) Others have cited agrarian societies in a crisis of modernization which threatened both landed elites and the peasantry. There is also a considerable emphasis on fascism as ‘a reaction against the devastating impact of World War I’ and the latter’s ‘unsettling aftermath on basically liberal nineteenth-century nations that failed to achieve social harmony’.[38](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn38) Among these, the recently united Italy and Germany were especially vulnerable.

Where in the political spectrum should fascism be placed? The majority view is that it belonged on the far right, in alliance with the conservative right which helped it into power. From this position it proceeded to expunge the centre and the left.

An interesting alternative, advanced by Sternhell, is that fascism was the result of a convergence between the far right and the far left, originating in turn-of-the-century France and spreading to Italy.[39](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn39) This does suggest the synthesis of nationalism and the syndicalist variant of socialism, without suggesting an ideological overlap with communism, which remained entirely distinct. It does not, however, apply to Nazi Germany. Another possibility is the extremism of the centre. Lipset maintains fascism depended on defections from the traditional liberal parties by middle classes feeling threatened by capitalism and communism.[40](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn40) This, however, provides a strong sociological explanation for the support of a movement going through an opportunist phase rather than an accurate placing of its theories.

Any attempt at a synthesis of fascism’s characteristics is hazardous. Yet there were several obvious characteristics. It carried a belief in a radical change or revolution to end an existing condition of subjection or decadence and to achieve social transformation and rebirth. In the process, it rejected the two main alternatives of the early twentieth century and had a deep hatred of the British and French traditions of democracy (Hitler claimed, in *Mein Kampf*, that ‘there is no principle which … is as false as that of parliamentarianism’,[41](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn41)and of the revolutionary left, with its notions of class conflict and dictatorship of the proletariat). In terms of organization, fascist parties were presided over by an absolute leader who, in turn, was surrounded by all the trappings of a personality cult. At the lower levels were cadres and paramilitary outfits, intended to mobilize the masses and turn them against the establishment. In the context of the state, it combined single-party rule with the leadership principle (Führerprinzip or Cult of the Duce) within the context of a totalitarian system which exerted control over all forms of communication and the economy. It also developed an alternative economic strategy to socialism and trade union power on the one hand and capitalism and big business on the other. It therefore offered a ‘third way’ which would seek to eliminate class conflict. Elsewhere it placed the emphasis firmly on conflict, applying the theory of the survival of the fittest to the social and political spheres and justifying both the crushing of the weak and ruthless military expansion. The result was a glorification of war which led to ‘hypernationalist’ policies. In Germany, this Social Darwinism also underlay Hitler’s racism and anti-Semitism.

Fascist movements drew support from a wide cross-section of the population, although with varying degrees of success from area to area. One receptive social group was the*lumpenproletariat*, the unemployed and displaced, although it should be said that most workers tended to support socialist or communist parties. Another was the rural population – both the peasantry and the estate owners. A third was the large number of former army officers and demobilized soldiers, veterans who were disillusioned by their treatment immediately after the First World War and, in some instances, shocked by the terms of the peace settlement. In the more industrialized countries, fascism drew its main support from the middle classes, who were profoundly affected and destabilized by the economic crises of the early 1920s and 1930s. Finally, capital and big business joined the bandwagon to try to find security against the threat of communism. Overall, fascism benefited greatly from the instability of the inter-war period and made the most of the ‘flabbiness and the failures of the existing regimes’.[42](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn42)

At this stage it is necessary to sort out the various regimes of the right and establish which were fascist. The most obvious instance was Mussolini’s Italy, where the term fascism originated, and which showed all the components already mentioned. Some authorities, like Sternhell, prefer to exclude Nazi Germany, but the general consensus is that a generic definition of fascism ought to include it. According to Kershaw, ‘It might well be claimed that Nazism and Italian fascism were separate species within the same genus, without any implicit assumption that the two species ought to be well-nigh identical.’[43](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn43) Nolte refers to Nazism as ‘radical fascism’.[44](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn44) and Linz calls it a ‘distinctive branch grafted on the fascist tree’.[45](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn45) Although Nazism did not consciously imitate Italian Fascism, there was considerable common ground in both organization and ideas. The most important differences were Hitler’s emphasis on the racial community and anti-Semitism – neither of which was an integral part of Italian Fascism until 1938.

The other dictatorships of the right can be divided, before the Second World War, into two types: those which absorbed fascism and those which resisted it. The first did have significant fascist influences but these were mixed, in varying concentrations, with other factors. An example is Spain, where Franco balanced the fascist Falange Española (formed in 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera) with the more traditional interests of the army, Church and monarchists; certainly the Falange never dominated the regime in the way that the Fascist Party prevailed in Italy. Another instance of a regime partially influenced by fascism can be seen in Austria, where Dollfuss introduced a conservative and clerical-inspired variant which has been dubbed both ‘clerico-fascist’ and ‘Austrofascist’. A case has also been made for the existence of a quasi-fascist regime under Metaxas in Greece. Elsewhere, fascist movements were often regarded as disruptive and dangerous. In Hungary, Horthy had little sympathy with the Arrow Cross (formed by uniting several fascist groups in 1937), while King Carol of Romania tried to suppress the Iron Guard. The Polish leaders had no time for the Polish Falanga; there were also struggles between Päts and the Estonian Freedom Fighters, between Smetona and the Iron Wolf of Lithuania and between Latvia’s Ulmanis and the Thunder Cross. Minority fascist movements also tried to cause upheaval in the democracies: for example, Action Française, the Dutch National Socialist Movement, the British Fascist Movement, Rex in Belgium and Lapua in Finland. There were also, in some countries, subnational or regionally based fascist parties; these included the Slovak People’s Party and Ustashi in Croatia. Every one of these movements failed to gain power.

It appears, therefore, that fascism needed conditions of relative freedom in which to take over by itself. The ideal breeding grounds were the vulnerable democracies of Weimar Germany and liberal Italy. Elsewhere it failed to remove the inter-war authoritarian regimes which absorbed, diluted or rejected the totalitarian characteristics of fascism. Until, that is, an opportunity was provided during the upheaval of the Second World War. From 1941 onwards a series of fascist regimes came into existence as Nazi puppets – the Iron Guard in Romania, Arrow Cross in Hungary, the Slovak People’s Party and the Ustashi in the Croatian part of dismembered Yugoslavia. All proved far more oppressive and vicious than the more traditional dictatorships which they replaced, but none survived the impending defeat of Nazi Germany. Although they all aspired to be totalitarian, they lacked the power base for independent existence. They represented little more than parasitic fascism.

Finally, on what timescale did fascism exist? Most authorities, including Griffin, focus on the inter-war period, with the main examples to be seen in Italy and Germany and smaller movements elsewhere. More controversially, Sternhell places the origins of fascism in pre-1914 France, from which it spread to Italy – but not to Germany; this, however, is essentially a minority view. Elements of fascism have also reappeared in Europe since World War II; these have been associated with the Movimento Sociale Italiano; the National Democratic Party (NPD), German Reich party (DRP) and Republican Party; Le Pen’s National Front in France; and Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic party in Russia.

**Other Influences**

In addition to fascism, Nazism and communism, there were other influences at play in inter-war Europe. These were not ideologies as such, but sometimes they assumed the force normally attributed to an ideology.

The closest to an ideology was nationalism. Indeed, it might be argued that nationalism is the only ‘ism’ which means exactly what it says: Sugar calls it one of the ‘three dominant ideologies of the twentieth century’, along with communism and fascism/Nazism.[46](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn46) On the other hand, it was too diffuse and widely variable to warrant such a connection. According to Minogue: although nationalism ‘is a set of ideas’, these ‘add up less to a theory than to a rhetoric, a form of self-expression by which a certain kind of political excitement can be communicated from an elite to the masses’.[47](17_Notes.html#ch2_fn47) In any case, nationalism took a wide variety of forms, frequently with two or more reacting against each other within the same state. It was certainly present as a component in all systems of thought, whether in radical form in Italian fascism and German Nazism or in Stalin’s Russification of communism. It was also integral, at the other end of the scale, to national self-determination, recognized by President Wilson and others as a legitimate liberal aspiration which was embodied in the formation of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Yugoslavia.

Between the two existed other forms of nationalism which shaped or influenced the authoritarian regimes of Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. One was integrationist nationalism, a powerful centrifugal force applied against internal ethnic minorities by authoritarian regimes: the main examples were measures against the Lithuanians, Belorussians and Ukrainians in Poland, and against the ethnic Hungarians in Romania. In addition, most authoritarian regimes discriminated in some form or other against Jews. Another variant was irredentist nationalism, or the pursuit of territorial claims. This was successfully applied by Piłsudski against Russia, but his authoritarian regime remained in Poland to protect the gains made in 1921. Hungary was less fortunate. A major influence on its foreign policy between the wars was resentment at the massive loss of territory imposed upon it by the Treaty of Trianon in 1919. Different again was the historic nationalism apparent in the longer-established nations of Portugal and Spain. Salazar’s regime in Portugal fostered pride in imperial achievement – a form of sated nationalism – while Franco sought national regeneration inspired by Spain’s more glorious past. There might also be combinations of these types of nationalism. One example was Hungary which experienced, under Szálasi, irredentism combined with a strong sense of the past in what he called Hungarism. Some nationalisms were also influenced by fascism, either by specific fascist movements operating within authoritarian regimes (like the Falange in Francoist Spain) or by authoritarian dictatorships in their later phase (Antonescu’s Romania or Szálasi’s Hungary).

Three other influences can be detected in Europe’s authoritarian regimes, again in differing proportions. One was clericalism and the expression of a religion, normally Catholicism. This made its presence felt as a conservative force, mainly against communism, which the Church regarded as its greatest enemy. This was particularly prevalent in Spain during the Civil War, and in Austria under Dollfuss; it was also apparent in Poland and later in the disembodied states of Slovakia and Croatia. Regimes less affected by religious influences were Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and the Baltic states. Under Atatürk, Turkey’s regime actively pursued the opposite – secularization and the removal of all political influence from Islamic bodies.

Another influence was conservatism. This acted either to maintain the status quo or to remove recent influences considered to have had a damaging impact. These ‘influences’ could include anything but were usually communism, socialism and movements on the far right. Hungary and Poland, for example, had a consistent record – until the late 1930s – of this type of reductionist conservatism. Alternatively, conservatism might be the bond which kept together an alliance of the centre to right against the countervailing forces of the moderate and far left. This was particularly the case in Spain, with Franco’s National Front lined up against the Popular Front of the Republic.

The final factor, militarism, is more debatable. Although normally associated with the authoritarian right, military action has also been used against authoritarian systems as a force for change and reform, especially in pre-First World War Spain, Portugal and Turkey. But during the inter-war period military influences were normally adapted to conservative authoritarianism – most obviously in Piłsudski’s Poland, Franco’s Spain and Horthy’s Hungary.

By and large, it is easier to define what ideologies the authoritarian regimes stood against than what they supported. This was because their fundamental purpose was not to mobilize or energize – but rather to prevent others from doing so. The one possible exception to this was Turkey, which used an authoritarian framework to achieve a radicalizing policy under western influences. This gave it the characteristics of a developmental dictatorship with a set of aims which was rather clearer than the others. But even Atatürk, who adopted certain principles, did not develop an ideology as such. Elsewhere the focus of authoritarian regimes was to impose severe restrictions on western democratic influences. In doing this they also prevented a fascist takeover. As we have already seen, the authoritarian establishment was usually strong enough to prevent the ascendancy of incipient totalitarian ideologies – at least until the latter began to expand from the base of their own regimes.

**Summary**

The main argument of this chapter has been as follows. Although the term ‘dictatorship’ has attracted some controversy, it is more useful to see it in the more modern sense as a description of closed political systems which cannot be changed by the open democratic process. All regimes covered in this book were dictatorships at some point between 1918 and 1945.

‘Dictatorship’ should, however, be amplified by more specific reference to its type. The two most commonly used terms are ‘authoritarian’ and ‘totalitarian’. ‘Authoritarian’ can be used as an overarching description of all closed systems. Or – as it is in this book – it can be distinguished from ‘totalitarian’; as well as having a monolithic political base, the latter also involves a more explicit set of ideas and aims more directly to mobilize the mass of the people. Totalitarian systems include Stalinist Russia ([Chapter 3](11_Chapter03.html)), Fascist Italy ([Chapter 4](12_Chapter04.html)) and Nazi Germany ([Chapter 5](13_Chapter05.html)). In the debate over Leninist Russia the preference here is for totalitarian rather than authoritarian, while the Soviet Union after Stalin could be described as evolving out of totalitarianism into a post-totalitarian authoritarian system. All the other regimes of the period ([Chapter 6](14_Chapter06.html)) were primarily authoritarian. This applies to Portugal, Spain under Primo de Rivera and Franco, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Albania, Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey ([Chapter 6](14_Chapter06.html)). For part of the wartime period some of these regimes came under the totalitarian control of Germany, Italy or the Soviet Union, or tried unsuccessfully to develop their own version of totalitarianism.

Related ideologies define the scope of totalitarian or authoritarian dictatorship. The two main ideologies of the inter-war period were communism and fascism. Both have been identified with totalitarianism within the state context (communism in the Soviet Union, Fascism in Italy and Germany), although there has been some disagreement about the extent of their efficiency and about whether they overlap with authoritarian systems (the pre- and post-Stalinist regimes in Russia, for example). There has also been controversy as to whether fascism includes Nazism; the broad consensus is that it does, although as a different strand. In other cases fascism influenced regimes either briefly (Hungary under Szálasi) or as part of a broader coalition of the right (Spain under Franco or Austria under Dollfuss) which combined other influences not generally seen as ideological – clericalism, nationalism and militarism ([Chapter 6](14_Chapter06.html)). One non-Soviet regime was briefly communist after the First World War – Hungary under Béla Kun ([Chapter 6](14_Chapter06.html)). Other former dictatorships (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania and Yugoslavia) became communist in the wake of the Second World War, while Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were absorbed directly into the Soviet Union. For the moment, at least, Fascism and the right gave way widely to communism and the left.