

Hannah Arendt

Fawcett

The Origins of Totalitarianism

NEW EDITION


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The Origins of Totalitarianism

NEW EDITION

by HANNAH ARENDT

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Contents

Introduction	vii
Preface to the First Edition	xxix

PART ONE: ANTISEMITISM

Chapter ONE: Antisemitism as an Outrage to Common Sense	3
TWO: The Jews, the Nation-State, and the Birth of Antisemitism	11
i: <i>The Equivocalities of Emancipation and the Jewish State Banker</i> 11. ii: <i>Early Antisemitism</i> 28. iii: <i>The First Antisemitic Parties</i> 35. iv: <i>Leftist Antisemitism</i> 42. v: <i>The Golden Age of Security</i> 50.	
THREE: The Jews and Society	54
i: <i>Between Pariah and Parvenu</i> 56. ii: <i>The Potent Wizard</i> 68. iii: <i>Between Vice and Crime</i> 79.	
FOUR: The Dreyfus Affair	89
i: <i>The Facts of the Case</i> 89. ii: <i>The Third Republic and French Jewry</i> 95. iii: <i>Army and Clergy Against the Republic</i> 100. iv: <i>The People and the Mob</i> 106. v: <i>The Jews and the Dreyfusards</i> 117. vi: <i>The Pardon and Its Significance</i> 119.	

PART TWO: IMPERIALISM

FIVE: The Political Emancipation of the Bourgeoisie	123
i: <i>Expansion and the Nation-State</i> 124. ii: <i>Power and the Bourgeoisie</i> 135. iii: <i>The Alliance Between Mob and Capital</i> 147.	

SIX:	Race-Thinking Before Racism	158
	i: <i>A "Race" of Aristocrats Against a "Nation" of Citizens</i> 161. ii: <i>Race Unity as a Substitute for National Emancipation</i> 165. iii: <i>The New Key to History</i> 170. iv: <i>The "Rights of Englishmen" vs. the Rights of Men</i> 175.	
SEVEN:	Race and Bureaucracy	185
	i: <i>The Phantom World of the Dark Continent</i> 186. ii: <i>Gold and Race</i> 197. iii: <i>The Imperialist Character</i> 207.	
EIGHT:	Continental Imperialism: the Pan-Movements	222
	i: <i>Tribal Nationalism</i> 227. ii: <i>The Inheritance of Lawlessness</i> 243. iii: <i>Party and Movement</i> 250.	
NINE:	The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man	267
	i: <i>The "Nation of Minorities" and the Stateless People</i> 269. ii: <i>The Perplexities of the Rights of Man</i> 290.	

PART THREE: TOTALITARIANISM

TEN:	A Classless Society	305
	i: <i>The Masses</i> 305. ii: <i>The Temporary Alliance Between the Mob and the Elite</i> 326.	
ELEVEN:	The Totalitarian Movement	341
	i: <i>Totalitarian Propaganda</i> 341. ii: <i>Totalitarian Organization</i> 364.	
TWELVE:	Totalitarianism in Power	389
	i: <i>The So-called Totalitarian State</i> 392. ii: <i>The Secret Police</i> 419. iii: <i>Total Domination</i> 437.	

THIRTEEN:	Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government	460
	Bibliography	483
	Index	509

sult of dekulakization, collectivization, and the Great Purge was neither progress nor rapid industrialization but famine, chaotic conditions in the production of food, and depopulation. The consequences have been a perpetual crisis in agriculture, an interruption of population growth, and the failure to develop and colonize the Siberian hinterland. Moreover, as the Smolensk Archive spells out in detail, Stalin's methods of rule succeeded in destroying whatever measure of competence and technical know-how the country had acquired after the October Revolution. And all this together was indeed an incredibly "high price," not just in suffering, exacted for the opening of careers in the party and government bureaucracies to sections of the population which often were not merely "politically illiterate."²⁴ The truth is that the price of totalitarian rule was so high that in neither Germany nor Russia has it yet been paid in full.

III

I MENTIONED before the detotalitarization process which followed upon Stalin's death. In 1958, I was not yet sure that the "thaw" was more than

so far in this subtle justification of Stalin as Isaac Deutscher in his biography, but many still insist that "Stalin's ruthless actions were . . . a way to the creation of a new equilibrium of forces" (Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p. 64) and designed to offer "a brutal but consistent solution of some of the basic contradictions inherent in the Leninist myth" (Richard Lowenthal in his very valuable *World Communism. The Disintegration of a Secular Faith*, New York, 1964, p. 42). [There are but few exceptions from this Marxist hangover, such as ~~Richard C. Tucker~~ (*op. cit.*, p. XXVII), who says unequivocally that the Soviet "system would have been better off and far more equipped to meet the coming test of total war had there been no Great Purge, which was, in effect, a great wrecking operation in Soviet society." Mr. Tucker believes that this refutes my "image" of totalitarianism, which, I think, is a misunderstanding. Instability is indeed a functional requisite of total domination, which is based on an ideological fiction and presupposes that a movement, as distinguished from a party, has seized power. The hallmark of this system is that substantial power, the material strength and well-being of the country, is constantly sacrificed to the power of organization, just as all factual truths are sacrificed to the demands of ideological consistency. It is obvious that in a contest between material strength and organizational power, or between fact and fiction, the latter may come to grief, and this happened in Russia as well as Germany during the Second World War. But this is no reason to underestimate the power of totalitarian movements. It was the terror of permanent instability that helped to organize the satellite system, and it is the present stability of Soviet Russia, its detotalitarization, which, on one side, has greatly contributed to her present material strength, but which, on the other, has caused her to lose control of her satellites.]

²⁴ See the interesting details (Fainsod, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-355) about the 1929 campaign to eliminate "reactionary professors" against the protests of party and Komsomol members as well as the student body, who saw "no reason to replace the excellent non-Party" professors; whereupon of course a new commission promptly reported "the large number of class-alien elements among the student body." That it was one of the main purposes of the Great Purge to open the careers to the younger generation has always been known.