

Richard overy and his views history essay



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The 20th century was the time when ideology became something like religion and it played the role as the engine of mass destruction. Two leaders have come to clarify what we mean absolutist : Stalin and Hitler. Their symbolic status as the embodiments of modern tyranny has long since eclipsed the specific enormities of their crimes.

Richard Overy's *The Dictators* is by no means the first work to compare the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, but it surpasses all others in breadth and depth. His method is less chronological than analogical. He stays more at the level of comparison of the two leaders rather than the historical narration of the facts..

He claims, for instance, that the Nazis achieved a more thorough surveillance of their population than the Communists ever did; on the other hand, there were more than 40 attempts on Hitler's life, but none on Stalin's. Germany had a larger and more advanced economy than the Soviet Union, but the latter produced more armaments with fewer workers, even after the Nazis had occupied much of European Russia. Each tyrant created a personality cult, but Stalin's " view of it was opportunistic and cynical, whereas Hitler's was deadly earnest." Both men had utopian architectural ambitions, but Hitler's monumental People's Hall in Berlin would have been outdone by Stalin's Palace of the Soviets in Moscow, which, had it been built, would have been taller than the Empire State Building, capped by a statue of Lenin three times the size of the Statue of Liberty.

Overy asks : why did the Nazis and Soviet Communists think they were right? Here he shows how both regimes subordinated religion and law to their

purposes, adopting an extreme moral relativism that denied the existence of any norms or necessities beyond those dictated by their own historical circumstances. Both subsumed individual conscience into the collective will, driven by ideological imperatives. The clergy and courts, like other elites, were either co-opted or crushed. Though neither Germany nor the Soviet Union succeeded in eliminating what Hitler called “ the disease of Christianity,” the moral constraints imposed by Judeo-Christian and classical humanism were, as Overy recounts, surgically removed from the body politic. Totalitarian jurisprudence taught that the state was above the law, and that the law was a continuation of war against class or racial enemies by other means.

This discrepancy may be attributable in part to the lack of scholarly consensus about the numbers of victims, to the heterogeneous nature of the Soviet Union, and to the haphazard process by which former Soviet archives became accessible during the window of opportunity that opened under Boris Yeltsin and that Vladimir Putin is now trying to slam shut again. But it remains the case that Overy tends to give Stalin the benefit of the doubt, either offering no specific figures or accepting estimates at the lower end of the scale.

This comparison has been made by other intellectuals too, for example the German historian Ernst Nolte who did probably the greatest damage to the subject when he made an explicit Nazi-Soviet comparison in 1986.

As Richard Overy writes in the introduction to his important book, any argument about “ who killed more” is an empty game: “ It is a futile exercise

to compare the violence and criminality of the two regimes simply in order to make them appear more like each other, or to try to discover by statistical reconstruction which was the more murderous.” Yet there is something that can be learned from describing and comparing the institutions of the two systems, if the goal is the one that Arendt essentially laid out fifty years ago: to define what, exactly, we mean by “evil” political regimes, and to attempt to explain why they are so popular.

Like Bullock, Overy is a British historian who came to the subject of Hitler and Stalin sideways, through an interest in World War II. Having written a number of books about the Western Allies, he decided several years ago to write a history solely dedicated to the Russian experience of the war, a subject that had been mostly neglected in the West. Having looked at both the German and the Russian military machines and marveled at the parallels, he decided to take the project one step further.

Kerwaw

differences in terms of ideology, methodology, politics, national traditions are crucial differences between Stalinism and Nazism, but the facts that glue this two absolutisms together are much stronger. Lewin tries to apply the intentionalist/functionalist paradigms of Nazism to bureaucratic rule in Stalinist Russia. The second effort is that Kersaw believes that it is easy to prove that the Nazi and Stalinist states were similar in their dependence upon what he calls “continuous revolution” leaves the reader with the impression that historical facts have been sacrificed to a concept.

The starting point of comparative history is invariably the impression, realization, or certainly that two societies have sufficient in common to invite analyzing them as a part of a single set of questions. Both nazis and Stalinist regimes represented a new genre of political system centred upon artificial construct of a leadership cult. The heroic myth of the graded leader no longer a king or emperor but a man of the people. Neither regime could in the long run reproduce itself, Mann says. The paper by Mann which closes the first section offers an analysis of the Stalinist and the nazi system not from the position of a specialist on German or Russian history but from the comparative perspective of a sociologist. Von Hagen analysis brings out plainly it is the German intentionalist and structuralist debates that have the clearest application to recent attempts at reevaluating Stalinism. At Nolan's paper surveying a rich scholarship that has developed since the 70s on German society under the Nazi regime might be seen as offering an agenda for the future major research programme on equivalent themes in the history of Soviet society under Stalinism, benefiting in the process from the methods and the approaches developed in the more established German historiography/

Thompson

The system of Apartheid in South Africa was one of the largest forms of institutionalized segregation. The word apartheid comes from the Afrikaans word meaning to be separated or a part. The history of the apartheid in South Africa started long before it was initially instituted in 1948. The separation of blacks and white in South Africa was a common practice that existed among the black majority and the white minority. The system to

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establish the apartheid was very simple. The Nationalist Party would remove the blacks from the urban cities and move them into African homelands, establish a tolerant state of government, and to keep South Africa as a white nation. South Africa is of course not unique in having been founded in violence, but whereas in other States the founders have attempted to create a common nationality and a common citizenship, in South Africa they elevated concepts of conquest and legal inferiority into constitutional principles given explicit governmental form.

Apartheid may have ended in South Africa in 1992, but its ghost would still haunt not only that country but the international political community as well. The legacy bequeathed to the ANC government was one of poverty, illness, violence and desperation. Meanwhile, the United Nations had to realize that apartheid was a global problem in need of legal sanction. The problem with its adoption as a crime against humanity was duly corrected, so that the 1998 Statute of the International Criminal Court qualifies the definition of apartheid (as a crime) by specifying its relationship to torture, murder, or the enslavement of peoples, effectively locating it within the existing boundaries of international law. The continuing support for apartheid can be seen in many organizations such as the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Resistance Movement. These conflicting battles for support of apartheid are not without their bloodshed in modern South Africa. On March 1994, violence rang out in South Africa about apartheid as three pro-apartheid supporters were shot by black soldiers. Yet another leap forward for a non-apartheid South Africa was the election of President Nelson Mandela in May 1994.