

# Editorial

With its new scholarly journal “Totalitarianism and Democracy” the Hannah Arendt Institute sets out to provide the educated public with a forum for both historical and present-oriented research on non-democratic systems and movements. With special reference to the two 20<sup>th</sup>-century German dictatorships, its central concern is the comparative analysis of the origins, mechanisms, and effects of autocratic regimes in Europe and elsewhere. In addition, the journal will investigate the historical, political, social, socio-psychological, and cultural constellations, conditions, and predispositions conducive to the establishment and consolidation of the intellectual, procedural, and institutional foundations underlying liberal and democratic societies.

“Totalitarianism” is both the most familiar and the most controversial concept drawn upon for the comparison of non-democratic systems. Since the 1980s and more particularly the great sea change of the years 1989/1991, it has undergone an extraordinary renaissance both in scholarly and journalistic writing. This could hardly have happened if there had been a rival concept found to be more suitable for referring to the threat to individual freedom posed by the ideological dictatorships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The partly justified criticism of its political misuse in the Cold War period was not strong enough to outweigh its origins in Italy’s anti-Fascist opposition as an immediate response to the “march on Rome”. As early as the 1930s, various authors with a wide range of political persuasions and affiliations were already availing themselves of this notion in their attempts to pinpoint the differences and commonalities between the apparently unprecedented one-party regimes springing up in Europe, notably in Russia, Italy, and Germany. Despite all the progress that has been made since, many of the contributions made by the scholars involved in those early discussions – Franz Borkenau, Carlton Hayes, Hans Kohn, Luigi Sturzo, to name only a few – still give us ample food for thought. The partly well-founded scholarly criticism of the term “totalitarianism” does little to substantiate its radical eschewal by many researchers on Fascism and Communism in the 1960s and 1970s. The foundations on which this decision was based were no sounder than those underpinning the gradual reinstatement of the term in the 1980s. The establishment of the Hannah Arendt Institute in Dresden as a locus of research on “totalitarianism” was a response to the impressions produced both by the recent experience of repression in East Germany and by the restoration of political freedom. It was not in any sense a reflection of dogmatic allegiance to a research concept upheld as in any way sacrosanct. The purpose of the Institute is rather to assist in the analysis of all those threats to liberty that are typically designated, however unsatisfactorily, as “totalitarian”. It is in this spirit that the journal “Totalitarianism and Democracy” sets out to engage in scholarly terms with the historical and present-day forms of “dictatorship”, “autocracy”, “extremism” or

“fundamentalism”, with “political religions” and “modern dictatorships”, irrespective of the conceptual categories and interpretive approaches used in the engagement with them.

Thematically, the two dictatorships established in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Germany represent both the point of departure and the main focus of this research. But their specific features can only be properly appreciated in a European context. Accordingly, other “right-wing” or “left-wing” autocracies will be automatically foregrounded in the comparisons made. Here, the historical preconditions and the effects on the present are of equal moment. This fact calls for an approach availing itself of the diverse forms of scholarly comparative study, at the personal, local, regional, international, and inter-temporal level, and from the integral just as much as from the sectorial perspective. Implicit in this is the persuasion that the pinpointing of differences is no less important than the establishment of commonalities.

Both the location of the Institute and the aims it has set itself make it only natural and logical for regional research on Saxony to be a firm fixture in the program of the new journal, of course with specific reference to the dictatorships of the past and the challenges to freedom posed by the present. In addition, issues centering around German-Polish and German-Czech relations will also be given special attention, including the perspective on comparative regional history. This is not to suggest, of course, that the major traditions of political liberty of western European and Anglo-American provenance will take a back seat: without the impulses they have generated, our political cultures would lack the life-giving roots of constructive criticism on dictatorship.

Naturally, a research program so broad in scope cannot be tackled by one discipline alone. We hope and trust that “Totalitarianism and Democracy” will grow into a forum of interdisciplinary exchange between historians, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, educationalists, religious studies scholars, philosophers, and others. To this end, it will be necessary to accommodate a pluralistic range of research approaches and methods. Equally accommodating will be the inclusive framework of discourse providing scope for different descriptive and normative claims and standards in the discussion and interpretation of historical material. As the complexion of the editorial board indicates, there will be no danger of national self-centredness in the selection of topics or authors. A cross-border editorial network will hopefully assure the journal a serious impact on both the European and non-European research community. General information on the issues of the journal already published or due to appear in the near future is available on the Internet at [www.hait.tu-dresden.de/TD](http://www.hait.tu-dresden.de/TD).

The journal will be published twice a year, normally with a unifying central topic for each issue. The first issue, now available, is dedicated to present-day threats to freedom, though all the authors draw upon a historical perspective in their reflections on different forms of contemporary political extremism.

In an essay that builds on his broadly conceived biographical portrait of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*The Face of the Century*), the Bonn-based political scientist Hans-

Peter Schwarz investigates the pro-democratic impulses and the totalitarian hazards that have emanated from charismatic leaders in the past and will in all probability continue to do so in the future. In the wake of Max Weber and Raymond Aron, he too identifies periods of crisis as the golden opportunity for the rise of charismatic figures. These may either renew and hence consolidate democracies or act as their grave-diggers. Accordingly, he calls for constant vigilance and, with reference to the various forms of political and religious fundamentalism rampant in Islamic culture, warns against the appeasement politicians of the day.

In a comparative study, the French political scientist Patrick Moreau draws attention to the fact that the demise of Soviet Communism by no means implies that the parties formerly bound up with it have disappeared from Europe's political landscape. He distinguishes three ideological and programmatic currents in western Europe: "traditional" Communist parties largely adhere to the heritage of Marxism and Leninism, while "post-Communist" organizations have largely dissociated themselves from it, frequently combining their criticism of capitalism with ecological concepts. Between these two poles are the "reform Communists", who have partly turned away from Leninism but largely retain their allegiance to Marxism. While Moreau concedes that none of these mutations are necessarily doomed to demise, he sees the disintegration of their traditional milieus as an essential reason for the uncertainty of their prospects in the ongoing competition with established moderate left-wing organizations.

Leonid Luks (Eichstätt), an expert on eastern Europe, engages with the ideas of the "Eurasians", a group that has so far received little attention in Germany. After the erosion of the Communist ideology underpinning the Soviet empire, many advocates of the vision of an imperial Russia identified the Eurasian idea as a new factor capable of unifying the peoples and religious communities of the former Soviet system. Luks suggests that of the many groupings and publications affirming their allegiance to this idea in present-day Russia the group headed by Aleksandr Dugin and represented by the journal "Èlementy" established in 1992 deserves especial attention in view of the substantial influence it exerts. Luks outlines the intellectual complexion of the periodical, casts light on the links with the extreme right in the West, and inquires into the influence of this form of geopolitics on the present-day Russian leadership.

With reference to Germany, the Dresden-based political scientist Uwe Backes indicates that in comparison with the rest of Europe the dimensions of political extremism encountered here in its different forms by no means qualify as alarming. He outlines the development of organized formations (left-wing and right-wing extremism, political and religious fundamentalism) with reference to such factors as election results and member counts, subjecting these groupings to a systematic comparison in terms of their hazard potential. However, in view of the widespread resentment of the "political class" in large sectors of the German population, he warns against the dangers of assuming that

the gratifyingly high degree of stability achieved by the German constitutional state will automatically and inevitably live on into the future.

The Berlin political scientist Hans-Gerd Jaschke contends that despite its grounding in Germany's Basic Law the concept of "militant democracy" (*streitbare Demokratie*) is in need of an overhaul. The necessity of a further development of the concept in line with the demands of the times is underlined by the changes undergone by political extremism, the firm entrenchment of the democratic constitutional state, and various practical problems of the recent past, as exemplified by the failure in the attempt to prohibit the extreme right-wing NPD party. The author urges that prevention is better than repression and advocates a restructuring of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution as an advisory agency for the government and interested sectors of the public.

The artwork on the cover takes up a motif from William Blake's illustrations for the Book of Job (1825). It shows Behemoth and Leviathan, the mightiest land and sea monsters.

*Gerhard Besier*