

Editorial

Weltanschauung dictatorships stamped the history of the “short 20th Century” – beginning with World War I, and ending with the decline of the Soviet Union.¹ In the eschatological major ideologies they are based upon – that laid claim to exclusive truth and explanation – many critics perceived the central difference that made them stand out from the “tyrannies”, “despotisms”, and “autocracies” of previous centuries. Without the integrative and seductive strength of their doctrine of salvation, the attractiveness with which totalitarian movements were temporarily capable of exerting on greater parts of the population, could not be explained. The absolute claim to truth and righteousness established the unprecedented extension of power, as well as the massive depluralization of societies. Specific forms of repression, such as the establishment of concentration camps and the persecution and extermination of “objective enemies” (Hannah Arendt), cannot be understood without referring to corresponding persuasive and justificatory systems. Without them, the specific forms of warlike-imperial expansion of power could hardly be interpreted in an appropriate manner.

Whoever speaks of ‘*Weltanschauung* dictatorships’ has already made a comparison, formed types of dictatorships, and made a distinction between different levels of comparison. For good reason, Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, a historian from Magdeburg, begins his article dedicated to the methodology of the comparison of dictatorships, with the remark that the ban on comparisons, which is continually uttered in German discussions, completely fails to meet the international standards of dictatorship research achieved long ago. Academically fruitful comparisons – for example those concerning the two *Weltanschauung* dictatorships of Germany – require a methodologically reflected access, which, not least of all, takes the problem of diachronism into consideration. Certainly, in comparative studies – whether they refer to the political system as a whole (integral comparison) or to the confrontation of important aspects (sectoral comparison); or whether they instead follow an “understanding”, empirical-analytic or a “judging”, “normatively contrasting” intention (these are Schmiechen-Ackermann’s main types of comparison) – the working out of common aspects, analogies, and isomorphies is at stake. At the same time however, specific differences become visible, which are of immediate importance in contrasting comparisons – especially when the historic-genetic dimension is accentuated accordingly.

When the Nazi regime is compared to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), this usually occurs in terms of the dictatorial character: with its negation of the separation of power and pluralism, as well as the power-structural mean-

1 To this division into periods compare Eric Hobsbawm, *Das Zeitalter der Extreme. Weltgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, München/Wien 1995.

ing of mass mobilization and ideologization. Although this perspective is not new to Eckhard Jesse, political scientist at the Technical University of Chemnitz, he selects yet another approach. After some introductory considerations on the different forms of dictatorship comparisons, he attempts to answer the question, of whether the dictatorships in Germany were “German” dictatorships – particularly in regard to their emergence and demise. Whereas National Socialism was of genuine German origin, this does not apply to the GDR as a “derived” dictatorship, dominated by the Soviet Union. At the same time, specifications to this picture are advisable. Moreover, Jesse is concerned with raising further useful questions for the comparison of dictatorships i. e. on the shape of totalitarianism, the degree of religious similarities, the relation between norms and methods in states, the phases in the expansion of power, the understanding of socialism, the unavoidability of dictatorships and their eventual decline, and the importance of concepts of the enemy (*Feindbilder*).

The subject of the essay by Gilbert Merlio, professor emeritus of German at the Sorbonne University, Paris, has less to do with the Nazi and SED regimes themselves than with the terminology applied to the research on those regimes. He takes the often bewildering variety of labels – which in both regimes got pinned onto nonconformist and disobedient political behavior – as an occasion for fundamental reflection. Following Ian Kershaw, the author speaks out for a distinction in the form of three concentric circles. In the outermost circle, he places all phenomena of a more or less passive or reactive refusal or resistance. The middle circle contains an opposition, that “partially rejects the regime because of an ideological-political disagreement and partly hopes to reform it from within.” Finally the actual resistance – meaning all forms of behavior, that aim actively and consciously at the overthrow of the regime – is in the center circle of this idealized distinction.

The party educational systems of dictatorial parties were not aimed at overcoming the regime, but rather towards firmly establishing and stabilizing it. At the end of October 1944, Wilhelm Pieck, chairman of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), declared in a speech delivered to the Moscow exile party school, that after establishing itself, the Communist Party should set up “similar facilities” to the Nazis in occupied Germany just as the “Nazi party had created its *Ordensburg* for reactionary purposes.” For Pieck it seems to have been certain, that the new KPD could formally follow the National Socialist examples in terms of party education and cadre training. But which paths did the Communist Party tread in reality? Did it really try to orient itself to the party education and cadre policy of the NSDAP, or did it instead pursue its own paths to securing power? The article by the Historian Mike Schmeitzner (*Hannah-Arendt-Institut*) analyses and compares both education systems. Through this he outlines the National Socialist and Communist insinuation into central and regional levels, with inquires into their social range. In conclusion, the structural similarities and differences are discussed against the background of the concur-

ring claim on the ‘totality’ of each *Weltanschauung*, without neglecting the specific influence of certain persons on the establishment of the system.

Whoever wants to examine ideologically led dictatorships in a comparative way, must also scrutinize their orientation systems. Taking this consideration as a starting point, Lothar Fritze (*Hannah-Arendt-Institut*) makes an attempt to work out structural parallels and differences regarding the content of the Communist and National Socialist *Weltanschauung*. His special attention focuses on the fact, that both *Weltanschauungen* – despite their differences in content – were suitable for serving as the ideologies of power of totalitarian dictatorships. They proved to be especially appropriate for legitimating a political behavior that claimed to an untold number of victims. Without showing the falsehood and dubious nature of these systems of ideas, Fritze analyzes their inherent potential for justifying the use of bad means, as such, in order to achieve worthy goals as being permissible under exceptional circumstances. For this purpose, it is neither necessary to portray the *Weltanschauungen* of Communism and National Socialism in their fundamental entities, nor to uncover their intellectual roots. It is rather a question of understanding these mental constructions as an inspiration for their – at least in the final results – criminal action. Accordingly then, the article’s main focus is on “structural parallels” of both *Weltanschauungen*. It appears that both systems of ideas, in regard to their structures and elements, as well as in their basic concepts, show considerable similarities. On the one hand, as the analysis of the *Weltanschauungen* presented by Fritze makes clear, illegitimate political sanctions and mass crimes could occur within the Communist and the National Socialist sphere of power, while on the other hand, it also manages to explain why the producers of ideology and their perpetrators were capable of maintaining a subjectively clear conscience.

The article by Boris Orlov, former correspondent for *Iswestija* and actually professor at the INION/Russian Academy of Sciences, is a bit out of the ordinary in as far as it links autobiographic experience with academic analysis. He outlines his own intellectual development as well as that of other Soviet intellectuals, who – during the era of Brezhnev – gradually gained a critical distance towards their own system and began to read the writings of such authors as Arthur Koestler, George Orwell, and Alexander Solshenizyn, that were circulating in the “Samizdat” press. During the era of “Perestroika,” more room opened up for public discussions, and these academics began to absorb the publications of Western research on dictatorship and totalitarianism. This development reached its peak in the 1990s. After giving a brief outline of the political development of the Soviet Union from the October Revolution to its eventual demise in 1991, Orlov discusses the question of the specific characteristics of Soviet totalitarianism. In his point of view, the totalitarian system was established under Lenin and, with the death of Stalin, entered an almost 40 year “process of decline and decay”, which also came to its end as the educational ef-

forts of the system produced an anthropological type, that gained a critical distance to the theory and practice of the Communist Party.²

Was the Soviet Union “totalitarian” until the very end? Or did authoritarian traits take shape during the “process of decay”? The article of Jerzy Máćkó and Margarete Wiest, both political scientists and experts on Central Eastern Europe from Regensburg, makes a contribution to this question. They take as a starting point the observation that until now comparative system research has gone very deep into the concepts of “totalitarianism” and “democracy” but has, on the other hand, neglected the idea of “authoritarianism”. The consequence of this has been an unclear distinction from other types of power, which again can lead to problems when it comes to classifying the systems of “failed democratizations”. In addition, the criterion catalogues for the definition and typologization of authoritarian regimes have remained underdeveloped. In visualizing the extreme differences among the social requirements of authoritarianisms, the impossibility of establishing a meaningful classification of authoritarian systems would very quickly become apparent. Yet, on the basis of different dimensions of authoritarianism, a typologization could be achieved. The relevant dimensions concern the *social* (modern versus non-modern), *national* (weak versus efficient state), *legal* (constitutional versus non-constitutional), and *pluralistic* (governmental system, electoral system etc.) levels. According to their typology, Máćkó and Wiest try to make pronouncements on the evolutionary options of authoritarian systems. It is to be hoped that this article will give fresh impetus to an intensive debate on the various array of regimes considered to be “authoritarian”. This could also become retroactive and fruitful for the academic analysis of “democratic” and “totalitarian” forms.

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2 In contrast to this cf. for example: Manfred Hildermeier, *Geschichte der Sowjetunion 1917–1991. Entstehung und Niedergang des ersten sozialistischen Staates*, München 1998, p. 741–754.