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PERSONALITY IN HISTORY

HITLER AND STALIN

A perennial A-level dilemma is how to explain the rise of Hitler and Stalin and the horrors that were carried out under their rules. Drawing on his recent research, Alan Bullock offers some clues.

I do not believe that either Hitler or Stalin created the historical circumstances of which they were able to take advantage. Nor was there anything inevitable about the rise of either man. Neither would have succeeded had it not been for a stroke of luck. In Stalin's case this was the unexpected death of Lenin at the early age of 54; in Hitler's the unexpected chance offered by the economic depression which hit Germany with such force that it allowed him to convert the Nazi vote of 800,000 in the election of 1928 to over 6 million in 1930, and to double that again to more than 13 million in 1932.

MEN OF DESTINY

The motivation of both men was a passion to dominate, a need to dominate, which they combined with a belief about themselves that they were men of destiny, destined to play a great role in the world. In both cases this belief was linked to a feeling about history. Stalin derived his sense of mission from an identification with the creed of Marxism-Leninism, a creed he believed had uncovered the laws of historical development of which he was to be the agent.

Hitler too saw his destiny as a part of history. 'I often wonder,' he said, 'why the ancient world collapsed.' He thought the explanation was Christianity, the invention of the Jew, Saul of Tarsus, better known as St Paul, who had played the same disintegrative role in the ancient world as Bolshevism, the invention of the Jew, Karl Marx, had in the modern. He saw himself having been born in a time of crisis similar to that of the ancient world, at a time when the liberal bourgeois order of the nineteenth century was disintegrating and when the future would lie with the egalitarian Jewish-Bolshevik ideology of the Marxist-led masses, unless Europe could be saved by the Nazi racist ideology of the new elite which it was his mission to create.

Hitler was quite open in what he had to say about himself. He spoke of himself confidently as a man called by Providence to raise Germany from the humiliation of defeat in 1918 — the first stage to re-creating a new racist empire in the east of Europe. His great gift was as a speaker, arguably the greatest demagogue in history. No-one has described the charismatic attraction someone like Hitler could exercise on an audience better than Nietzsche, 11 years before Hitler was born:

> Men believe in the truth of all that is seen to be strongly believed. In all great deceivers a remarkable process is at work to which they owe their power. In the very act of deception with all its preparations, the dreadful voice, the expressions, the gestures, they are overcome by their belief in themselves and it is this belief which then speaks so persuasively, so miracle-like to the audience.

And Nietzsche added: 'not only does he communicate that to the audience but the audience returns it to him and strengthens his belief.'

STALIN'S SEIZURE OF POWER

Stalin presents an entirely different picture. At some stage, he formed the same conviction as Hitler that he was destined to play a great role in history. Unlike Hitler, however, Stalin had to keep this belief to himself. The Bolshevik Party, as good Marxists, were deeply hostile to anything like a cult of personality. For Stalin to allow any hint to appear of his conviction that he had a historic role to play would have been fatal to his advancement.

While Hitler had to create his own party and win mass support in a series of open elections, Stalin had been carried into office by the October Revolution of 1917, in which he played a minor role, and owed his subsequent promotion as General Secretary of the party to Lenin's favour. His chance came by an extraordinary piece of luck when Lenin died in January 1924, at the early age of 54, just when he realised that he had made a mistake and was planning to revoke Stalin's appointment. The least fancied of the contestants for the succession, Stalin possessed none of Hitler's charismatic gifts. They would have been counterproductive with the audience he had to win, the closed world of the central bodies of the Soviet Communist Party. Declaring that no-one could take Lenin's place, he called for a collective leadership, in which he succeeded in establishing his own claim to be, not Lenin's successor, but the guardian of his legacy.

In Stalin's hands this was enough to enable him to outmanoeuvre his rivals (above all Trotsky) by accusing them of abandoning Leninist principles and branding them as guilty of factionalism and of dividing the party in pursuit of personal ambition. At the same time he used his position as General Secretary of the party to manipulate appointments to the *nomenklatura*, the 5,500 leading party office holders – such as regional secretaries – who effectively governed the huge country. By this means, during the 1920s, Stalin built up a body of clients (to borrow a term from Roman history) who knew very well on whom they depended for preferment and what was expected of them in return.

By the end of 1939 each man had achieved a unique position which admitted no rivals and no opposition. The revolution which Stalin had imposed on the Russian peoples between his fiftieth and his sixtieth year (1929–39) had completed the work left incomplete when Lenin died. Stalin was already coming to see his revolution as a continuation of the historic tradition of the tsarist state. But in laying claim to be the successor to Peter the Great, he refused to abandon the claim to the revolutionary succession as well. It was the combination of these two traditions, the Marxist-Leninist-ideological, with the Russian-nationalist, both refracted through the medium of Stalin's own personality, which characterised the Stalinist state. In 1939 Hitler, 10

years younger, had still to complete his revolution, but he had taken a decisive step towards it by freeing himself of dependence on the traditional German elites who had helped him into power; by restoring Germany's dominant position in Central Europe with the occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia, and by breaking through the barrier between peace and war with the attack on Poland.

GREAT MEN IN HISTORY

But how far, you may ask, were these personal achievements? Are they not rather to be seen as the product of socio-historical forces which both in Russia and in Germany would have produced the same result, whoever was nominally in command? Certainly neither series of changes would have been possible without the commitment and active participation of a great number of other men; no individual, however gifted, could have carried them out by himself. In the process had Stalin and Hitler not become prisoners of the systems and bureaucracies it had been necessary to create; were they any more than figureheads, whose continuation in office depended upon their continuing to satisfy the expectations of their supporters? How could it be otherwise? In the modern world, with its huge populations and complex organisation, surely no individual can exert an influence upon the course of history comparable with that exercised by rulers in earlier times – for example the Tsar Peter the Great and the Prussian King Frederick the Great, with whom Stalin and Hitler identified – when the scale of events and the forces engaged were so much smaller.

As a general proposition, in the settled societies in which we live, yes: who could disagree with it? But let us look a little more closely at the nature of the power Stalin and Hitler exercised. There was, of course, a great difference in style between them. Stalin was the more reserved, Hitler the more flamboyant; Stalin operated in the shadows, Hitler performed best in the limelight. Stalin was more the calculator, Hitler the gambler. The Georgian was *un homme de gouvernement*, the experienced administrator, disciplining himself to regular work; the Austrian still the artist-politician, hating routine. The style was different but the nature of the power they exercised was the same, personal power inherent in the man not the office. The only office Stalin held until 1941 was as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. It was the fact that Stalin held it, that made this the most important office in the Soviet Union. Only with the war did he become formally head of government and Supreme Commander.

Stalin's power was not only personal, but also concealed. The 'cult of personality' increasingly projected him as of more than human stature; but it was part of the fiction necessary, if he was to continue to lay claim to the Marxist-Leninist as well as the tsarist succession, that this should be presented as the spontaneous tribute of the Russian people, embarrassing to a man, sprung from the Russian people, who asked no more than to serve them and the party as its general secretary. The formula employed for any decision was impersonal, 'the "highest Soviet authorities" have decided'; the secret was all the more powerful because everyone in office knew that this meant Stalin, but that this must never be mentioned in public.

At first sight Hitler's position was exactly the opposite: head of state, head of government, head of party and supreme commander, all combined in the unique title of Führer of the German People. But it was the fact that Adolf Hitler was the Führer that gave the office its authority, just as it was the fact Stalin held it that made the office of General Secretary of the party the most important in the Soviet Union. The only difference was that this was concealed in Stalin's case, but openly acknowledged in Hitler's.

THE EXERCISE OF POWER

The fact that Hitler's and Stalin's power was personal in character was no guarantee, however, that it was effective, was real not formal power. We have still to go on and ask, what was the relationship between the two individual leaders and the massive bureaucracies which were characteristic of both Communist Russia and Nazi Germany. Having created a unique position of authority for himself, Hitler was determined not to see it institutionalised or defined. The Weimar constitution was never formally replaced: the constitutional rights of the citizen were only 'suspended' by emergency decree, never repealed. The sole basis of the Nazi regime was a single law, the Enabling Act, passed by the Reichstag in March 1933,

giving the cabinet the power to enact laws. As the cabinet met less and less frequently and not at all after February 1938, this meant Hitler; in fact, laws were soon replaced by decrees.

But Hitler was not interested in the day-to-day business of government, and more and more withdrew from it, concentrating his attention on his long-term interests of foreign policy, rearmament and war. To a degree unthinkable in the case of Stalin, he left the more powerful of the Nazi leaders – Goering, Himmler, Goebbels, Ley – free not only to build up rival empires but to feud with each other and with the established ministries in a continuing fight to take over parts of each other's territory. The result has been variously described as 'authoritarian anarchy', 'permanent improvisation', 'administrative chaos' — very different from the outside world's picture of a monolithic totalitarian state.

Such a state of affairs suited Hitler very well, allowing him to make arbitrary interventions, whenever he chose to, so keeping the civil service uncertain of his intentions. At the same time he outflanked it by setting up special agencies for tasks he regarded as urgent. The two most powerful of these were the Four Year Plan headed by Goering – which absorbed an increasing share of the German economy and eventually the economies of the occupied countries as well, with the priority for rearmament that Hitler demanded – and the fusion of the police and the *Gestapo* (secret police) with Himmler's SS empire. This removed the police function and the power of coercion from the state, placing it in the hands of a body unknown to the constitution and responsible only to Hitler himself.

Unlike Hitler, who detested administration and absented himself from his Chancellery for long periods, Stalin rarely left the Kremlin and demanded that his secretariat keep him informed of everything. But like Hitler he was determined not to let his power be defined or regularised. For him, too, power, to be effective, had to be arbitrary and intervention unpredictable — at any level he chose, from top to bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy.

This is the key to the extraordinary series of purges and show trials launched by Stalin in 1936–39. On the pretext of defending the Bolshevik Party and the Leninist tradition, Stalin wiped out the generation of leaders – his own generation – who had known and served with Lenin. Accusing them of betraying the cause to which they had devoted their lives, he replaced them with a rising younger generation – Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's generation – who had never known Lenin or any other leader than Stalin. Stalin extended the purges to the Red Army and Navy, the state ministries, the nationalised industries, and the cultural establishment as well as the party hierarchy. The security police, the NKVD, provided Stalin, as the Gestapo-SS provided Hitler, with an instrument specially created to carry out arbitrary decisions, responsible solely to him personally, operating outside the law and licensed to use any degree of force necessary, including torture and death. And with a twist characteristic of Stalin, the NKVD itself was subject to the purge: those who carried out the interrogations and secured confessions by torture knew all the time that they might be cast in the role of victim, not executioner. All told, the number of those arrested in 1937 and 1938 was of the order of 7–8 million, of whom around one million were executed and another two million died in the camps. The intensity of the purges in the late 1930s could not be maintained without dangerously weakening the Soviet Union. But the purge was not abandoned; instead of an emergency measure, Stalin made it into a permanent feature of Soviet life.

THE MAINTENANCE OF PERSONAL POWER

Let me try to draw together the threads of my argument. I have sought to show that, once they came to power, neither Stalin nor Hitler had any intention of letting themselves become prisoners of a system. What they made sure of was that their power remained inherent in the man, not the office. This does not mean that they decided everything – that was impossible – but that they were free to decide anything which they chose, and that they could do this, without warning, without consulting or requiring the agreement of anyone else. Of course Stalin and Hitler do not bear the sole responsibility for the actions, crimes and mistakes committed during these years. Millions of men and women were involved, in the Soviet Union, in Germany and as collaborators in the occupied countries. From the operations on the ground, responsibility reached up through the bureaucratic hierarchies where the thousands of 'little Hitlers' and 'little Stalins' abused their power without waiting for orders from above, to Hitler's and Stalin's closest associates, Molotov, Kaganovich, Beria; Goering, Himmler and Bormann. Neither Hitler nor Stalin, so far as is known, ever witnessed or personally took part in the acts of terror and repression which were not peripheral but absolutely central to the exercise and preservation of their power. Nonetheless, their responsibility was of a different kind from and greater than that of anyone else. I shall illustrate my argument from half a dozen examples.

The first is the collectivisation of Russian agriculture. Russia was overwhelmingly a peasant country: 80% of its population, 120 million people, lived in 600,000 villages. At some stage, if the Communist programme was to be carried out, the land had to be taken out of peasant ownership and nationalised. Stalin won support in the party because he argued that this could not be put off, but no-one ever supposed that he would attempt to carry it out and collectivise the 25 million peasant holdings in one or at most two years — a social upheaval on a scale for which there is no parallel in history except Mao's Great Leap Forward, which was modelled on it. It could only be accomplished by force, Stalin's revolution from above. The human cost is estimated at 11 million lives, with another 3.5 million dying in the labour camps later; 5 million of that total was due to a man-made famine which Stalin deliberately imposed on the Ukraine in order to break peasant resistance. The whole Communist Party as well as the security forces and the army were involved, but the driving force behind collectivisation, the will to complete it in four years, whatever the cost, was Stalin's — and Russian agriculture has never recovered from the methods he used.

My second example follows on from the first. Although muted, there was criticism of Stalin's methods in the party, and a move at the 1934 Party Congress – the details of which remain obscure – to replace him with Kirov. The move failed and an open split was avoided. But Stalin did not forget. In December 1934 Kirov was assassinated (almost certainly on Stalin's initiative) and over the next two years Stalin made his preparations for the series of purges and trials which I have already described. Stalin, like Hitler in the Holocaust, took care to conceal his role, but even the evidence we already have leaves no doubt that *Pravda* was right when it declared in April 1988: 'Stalin did not simply know, he organised and directed the purges. Today this is a fact, already proved.' Amongst the proofs are 383 lists of names – in all, 40,000 names –which required and received Stalin's personal signature for execution.

HITLER AND WAR

The fact that Hitler suppressed the radical wing of the Nazi Party in 1934 when it called for a 'second revolution' misled many at the time – and some historians since – into believing that he was not to be taken seriously as a revolutionary. Hitler meant to have his revolution all right, but instead of turning aggression inwards and setting one class against another, he meant to turn the energies and tensions of the German people outwards and create a racist empire at the expense of the Slav *Untermenschen* ('sub-humans') in the East, so providing the Germans, far better than any internal revolution could, with the psychological satisfaction as well as the material advantages of a *Herrenvolk* ('master-race'). This programme was plainly set out in *Mein Kampf*, published in the mid-1920s.

Until he could carry out the re-armament to which he gave overriding priority, however, Hitler had to lull suspicions abroad and keep the support of the conservative-nationalist forces in Germany. There was no timetable or blueprint of aggression; Hitler was both a gambler and an opportunist, but never lost sight of his ultimate objective. By the winter of 1937–38 he had made sufficient progress to change the terms of the game and raise the stakes. Dismissing the banker Schacht as Minister of Economics and the conservative leaders of the foreign ministry and the army, he went over to the offensive with the annexation of Austria and the destruction of the Czechoslovak state. The first was an improvisation, the second so alarmed the German army that a plot was mounted to arrest Hitler and only called off when Chamberlain offered to fly to Munich. Six months later Hitler entered Prague without a gun being fired.

Hitler's object, however, was not to avoid war; he believed war was essential if he was

to re-arm the German people psychologically (*Wiederwehrheftmachung*, his own phrase) for the conquest of empire. The key was to isolate those Powers which opposed him and defeat them one at a time in a series of single campaigns. The diplomatic coup of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, relieving him of any threat of Soviet intervention in case of war, was not only the outstanding example of such a strategy but provides the clearest possible illustration of both men's personal authority. For only leaders completely confident of their hold on power and free to act without consultation could have taken the risk of openly reversing the policies with which they were identified at home and abroad — Hitler's defence of European civilisation against Communism, Stalin's leadership of the anti-fascist crusade.

The gain for Stalin was the partition of Poland and the annexation of territory in Eastern Europe larger than France; for Hitler it was a free hand in defeating first the Poles, then the French. With the destruction of Poland, Hitler had carried the German people, still mindful of defeat in 1918, over the psychological barrier between peace and war. It was followed by the defeat of France and the eviction of Britain from the continent, raising him to a peak of personal success which no German leader before him had equalled. In achieving this, Hitler acted in defiance of the General Staff's advice, scrapping their plan for the French campaign in favour of one which they had rejected. The effect was to convince Hitler of the infallibility of his judgment in war as in politics. On 31 July 1940 he ordered the army to prepare plans for an attack on Russia the following May (1941) which would destroy the Soviet state in a campaign of five months. Hitler never wanted a war with the British, whom he admired for their success in creating an empire; all he asked was that they should give up any pretension to interfere in Europe. When the British refused, and the defeat of the German Air Force in the Battle of Britain convinced him that invasion would be a risky gamble, he decided to ignore them and go ahead with his real objective from the beginning, the attack on Russia.

While Hitler became more and more irked by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Stalin did all in his power to prolong it by increasing Soviet supplies to Germany of raw materials and food to levels which Russia could ill afford to spare. In face of a flood of evidence that the Germans were concentrating their forces for an invasion of Russia, Stalin persisted in believing that Hitler would not attack before 1942–43, and that the Western Powers were trying to trick him into provoking Hitler by countermeasures. The Russian commanders were not allowed to order defensive preparations right up to and including the night of 21/22 June.

That night, the largest army ever assembled for a single campaign, 3,200,000 troops broke across the frontiers, driving to the outskirts of Leningrad and Moscow, overrunning the Ukraine and, in the second half of 1941, capturing three million prisoners, most of whom were so badly treated by the Germans that they died. This was the price of Stalin's obstinacy, compounding the unprecedented blows he had dealt to the Soviet military leadership during the purges. Not until German troops had reached the oilfields of the Caucasus, and the Red Army was fighting desperately to hold Stalingrad on the Volga in the winter of 1942–43, would Stalin's distrust of the officer corps allow an alternative military leadership to emerge.

WAR IN THE EAST

Hitler left it to the German Army to carry out the preparations for the attack on Russia. But the decision to make such an attack was Hitler's alone, taken without consultation or discussion. Hitler's gamble was that the Soviet state was so much weakened by the purges that it would collapse – as the French had done – if subjected to a series of violent blows compressed into a single campaigning season. It is possible that the gamble might have come off, had he not rejected the army plan to continue the advance on Moscow after the capture of Smolensk in mid-July, insisting that they should first complete the overrunning of the Ukraine. As a result the drive on Moscow was not resumed until 2 October at the beginning of autumn, instead of in the summer weather of August or even September. Certainly, it was in the middle of October that the Soviet resistance came nearest to cracking. But, once Hitler's original gamble failed to come off – and with the winter weather and the Russian counter-offensive of 5 December, this became certain – the odds against a German success grew longer and longer.

By an extraordinary effort of will-power, Hitler mastered the crisis, halted any German retreat and stabilised the front, still deep in Russian territory. But the lesson he drew from it, that so long as his will remained unbroken, he would still prevail, proved his undoing. His refusal to listen to advice, his conviction of his mission, his belief that Providence would never allow him to be defeated, which had combined to produce one success after another, now combined to produce one defeat after another. Doubling the stakes by gratuitously declaring war on the United States and renewing the offensive on the Eastern Front instead of going over to the defensive, he compounded his difficulties by brutal occupation policies, refusing to play the role of liberator from Stalin's oppression – for example, in the Ukraine – or alternatively, refusing to seek a compromise peace with Stalin which could have left him master of Europe, including the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Baltic States. Instead he forced the German army, for nearly two and a half years after the defeat at Stalingrad, to fight step by step all the way back from the Volga to Berlin, a distance of 1,000 miles, with total disregard of the cost in human lives and of the consequences for Germany and Europe. The end result of Hitler's defence of European civilisation against Communism was to leave half-Europe and half-Germany under Soviet occupation and Communist rule for more than 40 years.

HITLER AND THE HOLOCAUST

The attack on Russia enabled Hitler to bring together into a common focus his strategic, political and ideological objectives — the conquest of *Lebensraum* in the East, the defeat of egalitarian Marxism, the enslavement of the Slav *Untermenschen* and the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Problem'. Moscow was the capital and symbol of the Slav, Marxist and Jewish threat to the Aryan race. Persecution of the Jews had begun on the night Hitler became Chancellor; until the war, however, its object had been to strip German Jews of their possessions, deprive them of all rights and force them to emigrate. The turning point was the decision to invade Russia. Hitler insisted to the German commanders as well as to the SS that this was no ordinary clash of arms, but a conflict of two ideologies, a war of extermination, *Vernichtungskrieg*. If this was to be applied to ordinary Russian soldiers and civilians – as it was – it meant that the last inhibitions had been abandoned in the treatment of Russian Jews. But 'the total solution of the Jewish question' was aimed at more than the Jewish population of Poland and Russia — at nothing less than the extermination of the whole Jewish population of Europe, estimated by the Nazis at around 11 million.

The fact that there is no order signed by Hitler is not surprising. Careful as always of his public image with the German people, he had deliberately distanced himself from the anti-Jewish riots of November 1938, and from the secret wartime programme for killing the physically and mentally handicapped which he had authorised but immediately ordered stopped when it brought strong protests from the churches. The plan for exterminating the Jews was to be carried out in Poland and Russia, not Germany, and every effort made to keep it secret. Only those who needed to know were told by word of mouth that the order came from the Führer himself.

Hitler left it to Himmler, Heydrich and the SS to build the death camps and organise the transport to them of Jews from all over Europe; but there was only one man among the Nazi leaders who had the imagination – however twisted – to come up with so grandiose and bizarre a plan, not Himmler or Goering but Hitler. And if there was one year in which Hitler was capable of making the giant leap from imagining such a 'solution' as fantasy to imagining it as fact, it was 1941. This was the year in which he showed the same unique gift for translating into literal fact another fantasy, that of *Lebensraum* and the empire in the east, to be achieved by the invasion of Russia. He left the organisation of that to the army's General Staff, just as he left the organisation of the final solution to the SS. But if there had not been a Hitler to conceive of such projects and to convince others that they could actually take place, I believe neither would have happened.

Hitler's second contribution to the Holocaust was to legitimise it. Those involved knew, as Himmler told the SS, that 'this is a page of glory in our history which can never be written', but they also knew, as Himmler went on to tell them, that they were carrying out the orders of the man who, as Führer, held a supreme position of authority in the German Reich. Hitler's final contribution was to insist that the operation to hunt down Jews all over Europe, from Holland and France to Greece

The entrance to Auschwitz: Hitler died believing the world would be grateful at least for his 'solution' to the Jewish 'problem'.

was to continue into the final stages of the war when everyone knew it was lost. As the Russians overran the death camps, those who had not yet been 'processed' were force-marched to Germany by the SS and shot on arrival. The last such death march took place in May 1945, after Hitler's suicide. Some weeks earlier, sitting amid the ruins of his hopes in the Berlin bunker, the man who had first appeared in history 25 years earlier ranting about the Jewish problem, found consolation in the thought that this problem at least had been solved and that the world would be grateful to him for it.

DREADFUL LEGACY

Hitler died by his own hand, defeated but unrepentant, still convinced of his sense of mission, regretting only that he had not had the time to carry it out. Stalin emerged victorious, but saw no more reason than Hitler to change his mind. He still believed that the Russian people could only be ruled by force and fear – and that he was the only man who knew how to do this.

No other people had suffered anything like the Russian losses in the war — between 20 and 25 million military and civilian dead. Those who survived sought hope in the widespread belief that life after the war would now be different, that the repressive regime under which they had lived would now be relaxed, after all the efforts and sacrifices they had made.

Stalin soon disillusioned them. This was no time for relaxation, he declared — all the vigilance of the NKVD was still needed to protect the state (for which, read Stalin) against its enemies within and without. The officers and men who had fought their way halfway across Europe, and the prisoners of war who had survived their brutal treatment by the Germans, found themselves on their return received not with gratitude but with suspicion. Hundreds of thousands of them were sent to the camps. The same treatment was meted out to the millions who had lived under German occupation or been deported to the Reich as slave labour. At the time of Stalin's death, 12 million are estimated to have been held in the camps, and Stalin had already launched yet another purge with the discovery of the so-called 'Doctors' Plot'.

Defeat cost the Germans a terrible price, but at least spared them – and the world – the perpetuation of the Nazi regime. Victory cost the Soviet peoples an even greater price, but did not liberate them. Nor did Stalin's death. The system he had imposed on them, although modified over time, lasted for nearly another 40 years, leaving them economically so crippled and politically divided that they face an unpredictable future.

The dominant trend in the postwar study of history has been the rise of social and economic history, of history 'seen from below', challenging the traditional concentration on political history, history seen 'from above'. Social and economic historians, like social scientists, have found it natural to seek historical explanations in terms of such impersonal factors as demographic changes, movements of population, the impact on society of industrialisation and technological innovation, and to concern themselves with human beings collectively as members of groups in which individual characteristics are submerged in the average. Such an approach is well-suited to countries like the United States, Britain and France, whose political institutions, despite their shortcomings, are democratic, countries where despite the rapidity of change, there is sufficient stability and prosperity to preserve a framework of normality, and where pretensions to inspired leadership are unlikely to survive exposure by sceptical media and press.

CONCLUSIONS

But a different situation arises when war, defeat, civil war, revolution or some other violent upheaval disrupt normality and continuity, as happened in Russia in 1917, and in Germany in the Depression of the early 1930s, so soon after the defeat of 1918 and the inflation that followed. In such a situation, I believe, it is possible for an individual to exert a powerful, even a decisive, influence on the way events develop and the policies which are followed. This is what happened in Russia when Lenin returned to Russia in 1917, saw that there was a vacuum of power and turned the Bolshevik Party round and in defiance of the Marxist schema seized power not by a revolution – that had to come later – but by a *coup d'état*.

Such occasions are not common. There are many more situations where, for lack of leadership, a crisis is never resolved and the opportunity for a decisive turn goes begging. The moment more often than not fails to find the man, as it did in Russia in 1905. Where a leader does emerge, however, as happened for example with Kemal Pasha in Turkey, with Gandhi in India, or with Mao in China, he can establish a position which allows his personality, his individual gifts and his views to assume an importance out of all proportion to normal experience. And, once established, it is very difficult to dislodge a leader from such a position, as the example of Saddam Hussein shows. I believe Hitler and Stalin to have been two such cases.

I said earlier that neither man created the circumstances which gave them their opportunity. But I do not believe that circumstances by themselves in some mysterious way produce the man; I do not believe that, if not Hitler and Stalin, then someone else would have seized the opportunity and the result would have been much the same. There are many ways of writing history, especially of such large scale and abnormal episodes as the history of Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. I submit that one which focuses on the roles of Hitler and Stalin is legitimate and is one that forms a necessary part of any attempt to understand what happened and why.

Let me leave you with a final provocative question. In any mental hospital you may expect to find patients who suffer from the delusion that they are called upon to play a great historic role in some form or another — and are completely incapacitated by it. Why in Stalin's and Hitler's case did the same belief provide so exceptional a psychological drive as to carry them to such peaks of success that it would be hard to omit them from any list, however short, of individuals who have had the greatest impact on the history of the twentieth century? Read my book and work out the answer for yourselves.

This article was based on the Waterstone Lecture given by Lord Bullock on 28 October 1991. Lord Bullock's book,* Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives, *was published by Harper Collins in 1991. A revised edition in paperback was published in 1993.