PATHFINDER
DIGEST OF WORLD AFFAIRS

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Dictators, Systems

If today's troubled world were mapped in terms of governments and political philosophies, it would show one indisputable fact with graphic clarity. It would show that the past two decades have been prolific in producing dictatorships.

In Europe alone, there are no less than 11 nations operating under systems far removed from democracy as we know it in this country. Most of these changed their forms of government after 1918. In many cases, the people surrendered their self-rule in order to be led by men and parties whose first principle was that personal liberties would have to yield to the authoritarian state.

At this time, the world's most powerful dictatorships exist in three countries—Russia, Italy and Germany. In Russia, Communism rules under Josef Stalin; in Italy, Fascism rules under Benito Mussolini; in Germany, Nazism rules under Adolf Hitler. The first replaced a czardom that had degenerated into a stupid government without conscience. The two others replaced democratic systems that were not working well. All three were born of unrest.

If necessity can be called the mother of invention, then deep public dissatisfaction can be called the mother of the authoritarian or "totalitarian" state. In Europe, the World war resulted in post-war conditions that walked arm in arm with profound social change. The aftermath was a great political and economic headache that grew slowly in intensity until it led people to embrace anything that promised a cure. For this they were willing to abandon individual rights and accept the surface allure of uniformed regimentation. They found themselves overcome by confusion and desperation. They were their own masters but they were weary of thinking for themselves when such thinking seemed to lead forever into blind alleys. It was not for nothing that they were willing to submit to the men who came forth with bright oratorical claims about how they would put everybody's house in order.

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The Era of Dictators

Now firmly established, the dictatorships have their propaganda machines, their secret police, their big armies, their servile newspapers, and their absolute censorship of all free thought and expression. In their own territories, however much they may have failed to restore order, they are supreme, and only internal economic disasters can be their undoing. Outside their own boundaries, they cast large and ominous shadows across the few democracies remaining in Europe.

The curious thing about dictatorships is that they closely resemble each other and yet are as far apart as the poles. They all use arrogance and force to accomplish their contrasting ends. All fervently practice an absolutism that places the State above the individual, but they eye one another with envy and hate. This is the thing that separates the Fascists and Communists beyond possibility of bridging. Italy's governmental structure is basically the same as Russia's but the philosophies behind them are as different as night and day.

In a broad sense, apart from democracy, it may be said that there are only these two political systems abroad—Fascism and Communism. Neither can be defined with ease or complete accuracy because neither has been crystallized by age.

For purposes of distinction, however, Fascism may be described as a political philosophy that advocates an all-powerful rule concentrated in the hands of a few. It does not believe that men are created equal. It is a regulated capitalism, with upper, middle and lower classes. It is highly nationalistic and endorses force to expand territorial possessions. It preaches a doctrine of hate against Communism.

Communism, on the other hand, may be described as a political philosophy that advocates the same type of dictatorial rule as Fascism. Theoretically at least, it holds that all men are created equal. It is anti-capitalistic, believing in complete State ownership of all private productive property. It advocates a union of all workers in the common possession of virtually everything. It would reward each worker according to his needs. It is international in character. It preaches a doctrine of hate against Fascism.

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In Europe at present, events seem to be shaping themselves into a titanic struggle between these two schools of thought and the nations that belong to them. Thus, we see Italy and Germany united in a campaign of vitriolic words against Russia. German Nazi-ism, which is patterned so closely after Italian Fascism that it may be called the same thing, has been particularly violent in its moves against Communism. By the same token, Russia has been no less bitter in its attitude toward Fascism. The hot words fly back and forth without let-up, and it seems only a matter of time before the physical blows will be struck.

This situation may be more fully understood when studied in the light of the remarkable personalities involved in it. A dictatorship generally takes its strength from a single man, and its influences and weaknesses can therefore be more completely revealed as the man himself is revealed. For that reason, we begin with this issue a series of sketches on dictators. A study of Adolf Hitler will be found on page 18. Others will be presented in the weeks following. We feel that these sketches should be of some value to our readers because the actions of the men discussed affect all of us. Theirs is a power so appalling that they can swing the world pendulum either to peace or war, either to life or death.

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