

A Few Words in Conclusion

In recent decades, a number of studies and reflections have been published that compare the social and political systems of Stalin's USSR and Nazi Germany. But this research direction should not overlook their substantial differences—differences in their economic and social bases, in their ideologies, objectives, and the real-world tasks that occupied them or that they wished to address. These pages have attempted to capture the development of the USSR from 1917 until 1945 in great detail, with a focus on the development of post-war. These pages have attempted to detail the development of the USSR from 1917 until 1945, weaving into the story the impact of Germany's post-war development and the rise of the Nazi regime, itself the subject of an extensive global literature. While we do not wish to supplant that literature, we would wish to add a few words on the topic. The deep differences in starting conditions between Germany and Russia after World War I, both as regards economic and cultural development and as regards the level of civilization present and the standard of living, need little discussion. They are self-evident.

It must be acknowledged that during the interwar period the USSR was able to create the governmental, political, and economic basis to survive. But this came at the price of unimaginable sacrifice that impacted all levels of society, particularly peasants and the urban lower class because of the living conditions they had to endure. What was created, however, was not in keeping with the basic promise made by the Russian revolution to create a new, socially just, humane society. Despite this, it must be noted that the Soviet state, in contrast to Hitler's Germany, did not target external expansion, the creation of an empire, but was forced to focus instead on its own internal issues.

We have already noted that large-scale societal goals may be realized only in exchange for a price paid by society. In the Soviets' case, our revulsion at what transpired stems not from the fact that this price was disproportionately high and the backwardness of pre-revolutionary Russia vast. It was that the price exacted was set not just by the limited capabilities of the new upper stratum, but by the moral and instinctual lack of its leading representatives.

When we compare the development of Stalin's USSR and Hitler's Germany, we must remember that both regimes were involved in a war, and it was one in which the USSR was not acting purely as a nation-state or empire, but rather as a member of the anti-Hitler coalition whose name was to protect positive human and social values. The country made a significant contribution to defeating Nazism

and fascism in Europe. This coloured the impressions contemporaries to these events had of the Soviet Union, and that included leading politicians and members of the intelligentsia.

When we compare the Soviet and Nazi regimes and their leaders Stalin and Hitler, there can be no doubt about the similarities in many of their aspects. Both regimes arose from the consequences of World War I, both were dictatorships heading towards totalitarianism, both were characteristic of the utmost brutality in their methods of controlling the society, and their dishonour to human life. Nonetheless, there are still marked differences between them. They came into existence in different historical circumstances, they are based on dissimilar ideologies, and they focused on different social aims.

Something that also needs to be said is that the characteristics of Stalin's regime may not be arbitrarily applied to the Soviet regime in the post-Stalin era. A number of changes took place which transformed the regime's nature. These changes did not eliminate hegemony and imperialism, but they vitiated elements of the totalitarian and terrorist understanding of power. It must be acknowledged that from the 1960s through the 1980s, the Soviet Union played a model role, particularly in several developing countries. Whether that role was positive or negative is an open question whose answer may come with the further development.

Very significant was also the nationwide effort that succeeded in overcoming the vast losses of the early phase of war. However, this is when the complete insufficiency of the Soviet economy and social system manifested themselves. Similarly to the weight of the early "socialist construction" which brought the USSR in early stages of the war to the verge of collapse, the USSR could not manage the weight of becoming a superpower: its economic and social systems lost their dynamics, fossilised and fell into degeneration.

The USSR, unlike Hitler's Germany, did not pass out of existence because of a war against democratic states. Its rulers lost touch with the younger politically active generations of their own population. These generations abandoned the regime and its dogmata, this estrangement resulted in fundamental changes of the political and social life. The ultimate result was the 1991 disintegration of the USSR and its social foundations. This development has not yet come to an end, nor is it possible to see whence it ultimately leads.