

Access to History  
for the **IB Diploma**



## Origins and development of authoritarian and single-party states

Michael Lynch

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Access to History  
for the IB Diploma

# Origins and development of authoritarian and single-party states

**Michael Lynch**

## For Elizabeth Suzanne Clare

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# Contents

<b>Dedication</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
1 What you will study	2
2 How you will be assessed	2
3 About this book	4
<b>CHAPTER 1 Authoritarian and single-party states</b>	<b>7</b>
1 Political terms	7
2 The development of authoritarianism and totalitarianism	13
<b>CHAPTER 2 The USSR under Joseph Stalin, 1924–53</b>	<b>18</b>
1 Stalin's rise to power, 1924–29	18
2 Stalin's establishment of an authoritarian state	31
3 Stalin's domestic policies and their impact, 1929–53	46
4 Key debate	57
Examination practice	60
Activities	60
<b>CHAPTER 3 Germany under Adolf Hitler, 1933–45</b>	<b>61</b>
1 Hitler's rise to power, 1919–33	61
2 Hitler's establishment of an authoritarian state	73
3 Hitler's domestic policies and their impact, 1933–45	85
4 Key debate	105
Examination practice	108
Activities	108
<b>CHAPTER 4 China under Mao Zedong, 1949–76</b>	<b>109</b>
1 Mao's rise to power, 1911–49	109
2 Mao's establishment of an authoritarian state	120
3 Life in China under Mao, 1949–76	137
4 Key debate	145
Examination practice	150
Activities	150
<b>CHAPTER 5 Communism, Nazism and Maoism – a comparison</b>	<b>151</b>
1 Comparing Stalin's Soviet Union, Hitler's Germany and Mao's China	151
2 Interpretations of authoritarianism and totalitarianism	158
Examination practice	163
Activities	163

<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser, 1952–70</b>	<b>164</b>
1	Nasser's rise to power, 1935–54	164
2	Nasser's establishment of an authoritarian state	176
3	Nasser's domestic policies and their impact	192
4	Key debate	198
	Examination practice	203
	Activities	203
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	<b>Cuba under Fidel Castro, 1959–2006</b>	<b>204</b>
1	Castro's rise to power	204
2	Castro's establishment of an authoritarian state	213
3	Life in Cuba under Castro, 1959–2006	229
4	Key debate	236
	Examination practice	241
	Activities	241
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	<b>Argentina under Juan Perón, 1946–74</b>	<b>242</b>
1	Perón's rise to power	242
2	Perón's establishment of an authoritarian state	251
3	Life in Argentina under Perón, 1943–74	265
4	Key debate	275
	Examination practice	280
	Activities	280
<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	<b>Tanzania under Julius Nyerere, 1961–85</b>	<b>281</b>
1	Nyerere's rise to power, 1929–61	281
2	Nyerere's control of Tanzania	292
3	Life in Tanzania under Nyerere, 1961–85	307
4	Key debate	318
	Examination practice	322
	Activities	322
<b>CHAPTER 10</b>	<b>Examination guidance</b>	<b>323</b>
1	Preparing for Paper 2 examination questions	323
2	Examination answer	326
	Examination practice	332
	Glossary	333
	Further reading	344
	Internal assessment	350
	Index	352

# Dedication

## **Keith Randell (1943–2002)**

The original *Access to History* series was conceived and developed by Keith, who created a series to 'cater for students as they are, not as we might wish them to be'. He leaves a living legacy of a series that for over 20 years has provided a trusted, stimulating and well-loved accompaniment to post-16 study. Our aim with these new editions for the IB is to continue to offer students the best possible support for their studies.

# Introduction

This book has been written to support your study of Topic 3: Origins and development of authoritarian and single-party states of the IB History Diploma Route 2.

This introduction gives you an overview of:

- ★ the content you could study for Topic 3: Origins and development of authoritarian and single-party states and how you will be assessed for Paper 2
- ★ the different features of this book and how these will aid your learning.

## 1 What you will study

The twentieth century has seen the rise and rule of various authoritarian, single-party states. This book covers the regimes of Stalin in the Soviet Union, Hitler in Germany, Mao in the People's Republic of China, Nasser in Egypt, Castro in Cuba, Perón in Argentina and Nyerere in Tanzania.

You will need to study regimes from at least two of these different regions:

- Africa
- Asia and Oceania
- Americas
- Europe and the Middle East.

## 2 How you will be assessed

### Paper 2

The IB History Diploma can be studied either to Standard or Higher Level. It has three papers in total: Papers 1 and 2 for Standard Level and a further Paper 3 for Higher Level. It also has an internal assessment which all students must do.

- For Paper 1 you need to answer four source-based questions on a prescribed subject. This counts for 20 per cent of your overall marks at Higher Level, or 30 per cent of your overall marks at Standard Level.
- For Paper 2 you need to answer two essay questions on two different topics. This counts for 25 per cent of your overall marks at Higher Level, or 45 per cent of your overall marks at Standard Level.
- For Paper 3 you need to answer three essay questions on two or three sections. This counts for 35 per cent of your overall marks at Higher Level.

For the Internal Assessment you need to carry out a historical investigation. This counts for 20 per cent of your overall marks at Higher Level, or 25 per cent of your overall marks at Standard Level.

Topic 3: Origins and development of authoritarian and single-party states is assessed through Paper 2. There are five topics on Paper 2 and you will answer two questions in total, one each from a different topic. Questions for Topic 3 may ask you to discuss the rise and rule of a specific leader of an authoritarian regime, the role of education in maintaining a leader or various leaders in power, to compare and contrast two leaders each from the same governing philosophy or perhaps from two different regions, to assess the importance of an authoritarian regime on women, and so forth.

### Examination questions

You should answer only one question out of the six questions you will find on Topic 3: Origins and development of authoritarian and single-party states. Your answer will take the form of an essay. These questions are not in any particular order. There will be questions that your teacher has prepared you to answer, but others that you will not be able to address. This is normal and expected. Topic 3 has many authoritarian regimes that may be studied and your teacher has selected various states, covering different regions. This book prepares you to answer questions on Stalin of the Soviet Union, Hitler of Germany, Mao of the People's Republic of China, Nasser of Egypt, Castro of Cuba, Perón of Argentina and Nyerere of Tanzania.

There are different types of questions, as described below.

#### ***Questions about a single-party state leader***

Your examination will contain questions regarding a single leader. This leader may be named, or the question may allow you to choose one to address.

##### **Example 1**

Assess the significance of Stalin's purges in maintaining his authority in the Soviet Union.

##### **Example 2**

How did one Left-wing single-party state leader affect education in his country?

##### **Example 3**

For what reasons, and with what results, did Mao's policies change the lives of women in the People's Republic of China?

##### **Example 4**

Discuss the importance of the military during Perón's rule in Argentina.

#### ***Questions about more than one authoritarian leader***

Your examination will contain questions regarding more than one leader. Some questions will name the two leaders to be covered, while others allow you to choose the leaders you wish to use to address the question.

**Example 1**

To what extent did both Stalin and Mao successfully employ nationalism in maintaining their authority in their respective countries?

**Example 2**

Compare and contrast the economic policies of two leaders of different single-party states, each from a different region.

**Example 3**

Discuss the importance of the military for both Mao and Nasser.

**Example 4**

Assess the importance of opposition for two leaders of single-party states.

## The appearance of the examination paper

### Cover

The cover of the examination paper states the date of the examination and the length of time you have to complete it: 1 hour and 30 minutes. Please note that there are two routes in history. Make sure your paper says Route 2 on it. Instructions are limited and simply state that you:

- should not open it until told to do so
- should answer only two questions, each from a different topic
- should make sure that you understand what the paper means by regions. A map indicates the regions for you.

### Topics

Once you are allowed to open your examination paper, you will note that there are five topics, each numbered and titled. Topic 3 obviously comes third and six questions are below this title. Again, the questions are in no particular order, so a question on a more recent authoritarian leader may precede that of a much earlier one.

### Questions

You are required to answer only one of the six questions. Make sure you have read through all the questions before starting, selecting the question you know the most about and feel the most comfortable with. It is important to understand that you need to answer the question fully in an essay format. We will discuss more about answering questions at the end of each chapter.

## 3 About this book

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### Coverage of course content

This book addresses the key areas listed in the IB History Guide for Route 2: Twentieth-century world history Topic 3: Origins and development of authoritarian and single-party states. It has chapters on:

- Stalin's USSR
- Hitler's Nazi Germany

- Mao's China
- Nasser's Egypt
- Castro's Cuba
- Perón's Argentina
- Nyerere's Tanzania.

These chapters start with an introduction outlining the key questions they address. They are then divided into a series of sections and topics covering the course content. Throughout the chapters you will find the following features to aid your study of the course content.

### ***Key and leading questions***

Each section heading in the chapter has a related key question which gives a focus to your reading and understanding of the section. These are also listed in the chapter introduction. You should be able to answer the questions after completing the relevant section.

Topics within the sections have leading questions which are designed to help you focus on the key points within a topic and give you more practice in answering questions.

### ***Key terms***

Key terms are the important terms you need to know to gain an understanding of the period. These are emboldened in the text and are defined in the margin the first time they appear in a chapter. They also appear in the glossary at the end of the book.

### ***Sources***

Throughout the book are several written and visual sources. Historical sources are important in understanding more fully why specific decisions were taken or on what contemporary writers and politicians based their actions. The sources are accompanied by questions to help you understand them better and which are similar to questions found on Paper 1 examinations.

### ***Key debates***

Historians often disagree on historical events and this historical debate is referred to as historiography. Knowledge of historiography is helpful in reaching the upper mark bands when you take your IB History examinations. There are a number of debates throughout the book to develop your understanding of historiography, some of which quote important historians that you may wish to refer to in your examination.

### ***Theory of Knowledge (TOK) questions***

It is important to understand that there are strong links between IB History and Theory of Knowledge (TOK) issues. Chapters 2–9 have Theory of Knowledge questions that make this link.

### ***Summary diagrams***

At the end of most sections is a summary diagram which gives a visual summary of the content of the section. It is intended as an aid for revision.

### ***Chapter summary***

At the end of each of the topic chapters is a short summary of the content of that chapter. This is intended to help you revise and consolidate your knowledge and understanding of the content.

### **Skills development**

At the end of each chapter, there are examination-style questions to practice and suggestions for activities to extend your learning. These activities will include ideas for debate, essays, displays and research.

Chapter 10 gives guidance on how to answer different question types, accompanied by a sample answer and commentary designed to help you focus on specific details.

### **End of the book**

The book concludes with the following sections.

#### ***Glossary***

All key terms in the book are defined in the glossary.

#### ***Further reading***

This contains a list of books and websites which may help you with further independent research and presentations. It may also be helpful when further information is required for internal assessments and extended essays in history. You may wish to share the contents of this section with your school or local librarian.

### **Internal assessment**

All IB History diploma students are required to write a historical investigation which is internally assessed. The investigation is an opportunity for you to dig more deeply into a subject that interests you. This gives you a list of possible areas for research.

# Authoritarian and single-party states

Throughout the text a number of political terms are frequently used in analysing the character of the regimes and states under consideration. This opening chapter defines those terms and places them in their historical context in relation to the development of the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.

You need to consider the following questions throughout this chapter:

- ★ What shades of meaning do political terms have?
- ★ What factors explain the development of authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century?

## 1 Political terms

▶ **Key question:** *What shades of meaning do political terms have?*

It is notoriously difficult to attach a precise meaning to political terms. The context in which they are used and the movements to which they are ascribed often differ considerably. The definitions that follow, therefore, are not accurate in any absolute sense. However, they do offer a guide to general meaning and common usage.

### Left and Right

The terms Right and Left are not exact political descriptions, but are useful, broad distinctions between movements characterized by conservative or **reactionary** attitudes (Right) and those whose predominant features include a desire for **radical** or revolutionary change (Left). Both 'wings' believe in the power of the central government as the main agency of state action. As political reference points, the terms Left and Right had their origin in the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century when, in the **Estates-General**, revolutionaries sat on the left side of the chamber and conservatives on the right. This helped establish the idea of politics as a Left–Right spectrum.

Despite the lack of exact definition, a number of key differences between Left and Right can be identified (see table on page 8).

**What distinctions can be drawn between Left and Right?**

#### KEY TERM

**Reactionary** Fiercely resistant to change.

**Radical** Change at the very roots.

**Estates-General** A French Assembly made up of 'the three orders' – aristocracy, clergy and commons – which gathered in 1789. The assertion by the commons that they alone were the sovereign authority was a critical stage in the development of the French Revolution.

### KEY TERM

**Socialism** Capable of taking many forms, it is essentially concerned with the structuring of society and the economy through government action to meet the needs of the people.

**Nazism** The National Socialist movement that dominated Germany between 1933 and 1945.

**Nationalism** A devotion to the interests and culture of one's nation, often leading to the belief that certain nationalities are superior to others.

**USSR** Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the name given to communist Russia and states under its control from 1922, also known as the Soviet Union.

**Communism** The revolutionary theories advanced by Karl Marx, who interpreted history as class struggle and called upon the working classes to overthrow their oppressors and create a workers' state.

Left typical attitudes	Right typical attitudes
Progressive outlook	Reactionary outlook
Essentially optimistic view of human nature	Essentially pessimistic view of human nature
Belief in equality as a social imperative	Belief that equality is an impossible goal and its pursuit socially disruptive
Rejection of the past	Respect for the past
Belief in the future	Lack of confidence about the future
Belief that history is predetermined	Belief that history is contingent upon the play of events
Sense of alienation from existing society	Sense that existing society represents accumulated, lasting values
Belief that change is essential	Belief that change is destructive
Belief in the perfectibility of society through revolution	Belief that human beings are incapable of social perfectibility
Inspired by ideology	Suspicious of ideology
Lack of realism	Strong sense of realism
Socialist in outlook	Conservative in outlook
Holding a conviction that compromise betrays weakness	Ready to compromise to preserve social stability

### Limitations to categorization

One could, of course, challenge such a listing, pointing out, for example, that the regimes of Left and Right have often shared attitudes, and that, in their extreme forms, their methods have been indistinguishable. Interestingly, the extreme Right and Left movements of the twentieth century are now commonly seen by modern scholars as having many overlapping features. Indeed, the more extreme the Right and Left were, the more they resembled each other. This theme is taken up in later chapters.

How imprecise the division between Left and Right is evident in the use of such a key term as **socialism**. Usually thought of as descriptive of Left-wing movements, it has to be remembered that **Nazism**, commonly regarded as the most extreme of Right-wing regimes, was itself a socialist movement. Indeed, the term Nazism is an abbreviation derived from National *Socialism*. Similarly, **nationalism**, often regarded as a characteristic of Right-wing movements, is a feature of all the regimes that you will study. In supposedly Left-wing movements, such as those in the People's Republic of China and the **USSR**, intense nationalism was as much a driving force as it was in Germany in the era of Nazism. Indeed, Stalin and Mao used socialism and **communism** as mechanisms for achieving nationalistic ends.

It is also very unlikely that committed members of the political Left and Right would accept that all, if any, of the tabled categories (see above) applied to

them. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that many scholars regard the traditional way of referring to the Left and the Right as a dated practice that causes more problems than it solves, their argument being that the labels tend to obscure rather than clarify the movements to which they are ascribed. The terms create an assumption that what is being described falls into one of a set of opposing categories, whereas the emphasis in modern research is on the similarities between movements such as **fascism** and communism.

Yet, notwithstanding these reservations and accepting that the categories do not pretend to be precise, the list offers a workable set of broad definitions and can be used in the following chapters as a check list when examining the features of the regimes under study.

## Democracy

In ideal terms, democracy is a representative system in which ultimate authority lies not with the government but with the governed, who express their judgement in regular free elections. Democracy was given its modern definition in Abraham Lincoln's timeless words: 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people'. The paradox is that nearly all regimes across the extremes of Left and Right have described themselves as democratic, asserting that their form of government truly represented the will of the people.

### Abraham Lincoln

US President at the time of the American Civil War (1861–65). His words were part of his celebrated address at Gettysburg in which he paid tribute to the honoured dead of both sides, Union and Confederacy, who had fallen in a great battle there.

## Nationalism

Nationalism is an intense belief that the nation-state is the highest form of political organization and that it is as members of the nation that individuals derive their true identity and worth. It was the dynamic force of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but it seldom expressed itself in democratic forms. The achievement of statehood by Germany and Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century had been a triumph not of democracy, but of authoritarian, centralized power. Otto von Bismarck, one of the founders of the modern German state in 1871, declared in 1862: 'It is not through speeches and majority decisions that the great questions of the day are decided. It is by iron and blood.'

### Otto von Bismarck

As President of Prussia, the strongest of the separate German states, Bismarck conducted a series of aggressive wars which, backed by adroit diplomacy, led to the creation of the state of Germany in 1871.

### KEY TERM

**Fascism** The ultra-nationalist movement that operated in Italy under Mussolini between 1922 and 1943. The term came generally to be used to describe extreme Right-wing regimes and ideas.

← What are the main characteristics of democracy?

← What are the main characteristics of nationalism?

What are the main characteristics of liberalism?

## → Liberalism

Liberalism, a product of the **Enlightenment**, was an influential movement that developed in many countries in Europe in the nineteenth century. It argued for greater freedom of the individual from government control. As a term, it is frequently linked to **liberal-democracy**. Nationalist movements often adopted liberal arguments in support of their claims. However, many of the authoritarian states analysed in this book were a rejection of liberalism. The extreme wings of both the Left and Right condemned liberal-democracy as effete and inefficient. The Left tended to stress economic class as the principal dynamic that shaped history, while the Right regarded the nation as the agency through which society achieved its ultimate destiny. In both cases, the individual was regarded as secondary to the group.

What are the main characteristics of authoritarianism?

## → Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism refers to a governmental system in a given country or region in which the levers of power are exclusively in the hands of a group or an individual whose decisions are not subject to control from below. Although an authoritarian government is not directly answerable to its people, this does not necessarily mean it is unpopular; its authoritarian measures may be approved of by the population, albeit the government does not depend on such approval.

What are the main characteristics of totalitarianism?

## → Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism is an extension and intensifying of authoritarianism. A totalitarian system is necessarily authoritarian, but it goes much further. What distinguishes a system as totalitarian is how it uses its monopoly of power.

### KEY TERM

**Enlightenment** A flowering in the eighteenth century of new political, philosophical and social ideas about the nature of society and the individual. Key elements were the promotion of the rights of the individual and emphasis on the power of applied reason to solve society's problems.

**Liberal-democracy** Descriptive of states which function according to the principles of individual freedom and equality and operate systems under which governments can be removed at elections.

- In a totalitarian state, individuals are subordinate to the state and personal autonomy is not tolerated.
- Such a regime seeks to control not simply political life, but society in all its features: institutional, economic, moral and personal.
- Its power is exercised pervasively, affecting every person.
- The lives of the population, collectively and as individuals, are subject to the direction of the state which demands complete obedience from its citizens on pain of the direst punishments for those who do not conform.
- Totalitarian systems base their right to absolute control by reference to a basic ideology, which both explains why they hold power and justifies its exercise.
- In their extreme forms, totalitarian systems of both Left and Right regard history as predetermined. Their belief is that societies develop in accordance with iron laws of progress that follow a set pattern to an unavoidable conclusion.

## Characteristics of the totalitarian state

The following list is neither a definitive nor an exclusive one, but it does indicate some of the main features evident in most totalitarian regimes:

- 1 Only one political party is allowed to exist.
- 2 Power is exercised by the party leader who controls the party.
- 3 The leader's authority is underpinned by a dominant ideology.
- 4 The leader claims that his authority derives from the immutable laws of historical development.
- 5 The state maintains social and political control through terror.
- 6 The state crushes opposition through control of the media.
- 7 The state exercises central control of the economy.
- 8 The regime uses the armed forces and law enforcement bodies to operate a police state.
- 9 The state uses censorship and propaganda to promote the idea of a faultless leader.
- 10 Religion is either outlawed and persecuted as an affront to state ideology or exploited as another means of controlling the people.
- 11 Independent institutions, such as religious organizations and trade unions, are suppressed.
- 12 The legal system is politicized so that it becomes an instrument of state control.
- 13 The state seeks to reshape culture so that it conforms to state ideology.
- 14 Internal opponents are identified and persecuted.
- 15 An aggressive stance is adopted towards external ideological enemies.

In the two outstanding examples of European totalitarianism, Soviet communism and Nazism, each was inspired by a passionate commitment to an ideology. In the Soviet case, it was Stalin's class concepts that motivated his policies. He saw his prime purpose to be the destruction of all those he deemed to be the class enemies of the Soviet state. In the German case, it was Hitler's notion of race that shaped his policies; he saw it as his destiny to rid Germany of all those he deemed to be racial inferiors.

## Problems in analysis

### Cultural and linguistic

In analysing authoritarian and single-party systems, what has to be allowed for is the wide difference between cultures. This is particularly important where concepts are concerned. Some words do not easily translate and political concepts sometimes shift their meaning or emphasis. An obvious example is 'democracy'. In a Western liberal sense the word relates to the rights of the individual. In a Russian or Chinese context it refers to the rights of the group. That was why Mao and Stalin could use the word democracy unblushingly to describe the unchallengeable control of their single-party systems. In Western terms a single-party democracy is a contradiction in terms whereas for Julius Nyerere, the Tanzanian leader, the single-party system was the best means of achieving democracy (see pages 295–296).

← **What difficulties may arise when analysing differing authoritarian regimes?**

## Preconceptions

A major problem for liberal historians, particularly those in the West, is that they tend to see democracy as the basic form of responsible representative government. Any system that does not accord with that notion is regarded as falling short of an ideal. However, thinkers and leaders from other cultures dismiss this as an example of Western presumption. Western values are not definitive and should not, therefore, be regarded as prescriptive. As Nyerere was concerned to point out, democracy was not an end but a means and there was no absolute value attaching to it. Context and practical considerations, not an abstract notion, should determine what the ideal system was for a particular region. Nyerere, indeed, claimed that the two-party system as it operated in Britain and other Western countries was a barrier to, not a guarantee of, genuinely representative government.

Although all the systems in this book claimed to be revolutionary, not all were so in practice, or in effect. Later chapters will show that a number of them looked back as much as forward:

- Nazism was essentially an appeal to the past, an attempt to restore the traditional *volkisch* values and virtues of German history (see Chapter 3).
- Nyerere declared that the socialism he was adopting as the way forward for the new Tanzanian nation was drawn directly from the collective values of Africa's tribal past (see Chapter 9).
- Castro's personalized form of communism was an expression of his desire to rid Cuba of its colonial inheritance and return his people to a pre-colonial form of national purity (see Chapter 7).
- Nasser worked under the banner of socialism, but his primary aim was to assert the independence of Egypt and lead his nation in a resurgent Arab and African world (see Chapter 6).
- Péron took a similar line in Argentina. His wish was to see his country modernize by basing its growth on the traditional virtues and skills of the Argentinian people (see Chapter 8).

## 2 The development of authoritarianism and totalitarianism

► **Key question:** *What factors explain the development of authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century?*

This section explains the historical context in which the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century developed.

### The impact of the First World War, 1914–18

Historians suggest that it was no accident that the twentieth century saw a spate of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. The phenomenon was in large part a reaction to the destructive impact of the **First World War** that ended in 1918. Prior to that war, liberalism, a political movement which contained a central belief in human progress, had made considerable strides in Europe. There was a common conviction that the improvement in social conditions and the spread of education, which had followed the recognition by European governments of the need to tackle physical and intellectual deprivation, heralded a time of improvement for the world's peoples. The 1914–18 conflict shattered such dreams. In the face of the appalling devastation of the war, liberals found it difficult to sustain their concept of ordered human progress. For some persuasive radical thinkers, it was a short step from this to a conviction that discipline and control from above were more likely to create order and national well-being than was cumbersome democracy.

Adding weight to this view was the plentiful evidence of the benefits of state authority. Every nation in the First World War had undergone a large and rapid extension of centralized control over politics, society and the economy. It was arguable that without this centralization, no European nation would have survived. The lessons for national regeneration post-war were obvious. In times of crisis, democratic procedures were too inefficient to meet the needs of the state.

Significant groups, who were to become influential, concluded that social and political ideals were impossible to achieve by moderate, evolutionary means. Progress did not occur spontaneously, ran the argument; it had to be imposed. Strong governments had to be prepared to make the sweeping, even violent, changes that were needed.

Such views were particularly strongly held among certain sections in the relatively new states of Germany and Italy where democratic traditions were weak or non-existent. Scorning what they regarded as the ineffectual methods of democracy, certain groups of nationalists in those countries

← **What was the effect of the First World War in the development of authoritarian regimes?**

#### KEY TERM

**First World War (1914–18)** Fought mainly between the Central Powers (Germany and Austria–Hungary) and the Entente Powers (France, Britain and Russia).

## KEY TERM

**Allies** In the First World War, principally France, Britain, Russia (1914–17), Italy (1915–18) and the USA (1917–18).

**Central Powers** In the First World War, principally Germany, Austria–Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

**Tsarist Russia** A centuries-old autocratic state, lacking genuinely democratic institutions.

**Self-determination** The right of peoples to be free of domination by an outside power and to form a nation and government of their own choice.

**Imperial powers** Those countries that had developed as colony-owning empires; principally, Russia, Britain, France, Germany, Austria–Hungary and Turkey.

**Great Depression** The international economic recession that started in the USA in 1929 and led to a rapid fall in demand for manufactured goods in all industrial countries, a situation which created high levels of unemployment in the 1930s.

How did the economic situation in the inter-war years contribute to the development of authoritarian regimes?

developed an extreme form of anti-democratic politics, believing that only by such means could their nation achieve its destiny. Nowhere was this more evident than in Germany where a significant number of the population had a searing sense of bitterness at their defeat in the First World War in 1918. It was such bitterness that the National Socialists, or Nazis, relied upon, directing their attack at the German government, which, they asserted, had cravenly accepted a humiliating, dictated peace.

## The triumph of democracy?

What sometimes confuses the analysis is that the First World War was still regarded by some as a triumph of democracy since this is what the victorious **Allies** claimed they represented. But that was a late development. At the start of the war in 1914, democracy had not been one of the Allies' declared aims; their only certain objective had been to defeat the enemy, the **Central Powers**. Moreover, the idea of one of the Allies, **Tsarist Russia**, as a champion of democracy defied common sense. It is true that as the war dragged on Britain and France claimed to be fighting for civilized values against German decadence, but what eventually gave the Allies their democratic image was the entry of the USA into the war in 1917 with the express purpose, as stated by its President Woodrow Wilson, 'to make the world safe for democracy'. It was this that enabled the Allies to claim retrospectively that that had been their purpose all along.

## Self-determination

The peace settlement that followed the military collapse of the Central Powers was supposedly based on the principle of **self-determination**. Yet, powerful though self-determination was as an idea, it did not always imply democracy since it was applied in a very selective way. Although it was meant to recognize legitimate national aspirations, the principle was not extended to the defeated nations. Indeed, it was used as a justification for dismembering the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires and creating new states out of the remnants, a process that left Germany, and other parts of Europe, with a deep sense of grievance. Self-determination was also regarded with grave suspicion by the **imperial powers** that survived the war, Britain and France: they saw the principle as a threat to their continued hold over their colonies.

## The impact of economic crises

Anti-democratic arguments might have had less influence had there been a general recovery from the economic effects of the First World War, but, apart from occasional, short-lived economic booms in the 1920s, the post-war trend was unremittingly grim, reaching its nadir in the **Great Depression** of the 1930s. In the atmosphere of despair and recrimination that the economic hardships created, fragile democratic structures collapsed. Nor should it be thought that the dictatorships of the period were always imposed on an unwilling people. The success of Italian fascism starting in the 1920s and

German Nazism in the 1930s in taking over the state was related to the genuine popularity of their regimes. The conversion of the middle classes, the traditional supporters of **constitutionalism**, to the support of the extreme Right was a clear sign that those seeking order and security no longer believed that these could be guaranteed by the processes of democracy.

## Inter-war dictatorships

Between 1919 and 1939, when the **Second World War** began in Europe, many states came under the control of regimes which abandoned any pretensions to liberal-democracy. Russia (the Soviet Union after 1922), Italy, Turkey, Germany, Spain and Portugal, as well as many central and eastern European states, adopted dictatorships or became increasingly authoritarian and placed crippling limits on democratic institutions.

- In Russia, the **Bolshevik** (Communist) Party, led by Vladimir Lenin, had seized power in 1917 and imposed what it called the dictatorship of the **proletariat** (see page 18).
- In Italy, Benito Mussolini led his **Fascist** Party to power in 1922 and ruled as dictator until being overthrown in 1943.
- In Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), although intent on avoiding the extremes of fascism and communism, attempted to turn his country into a modern **secular state** and resorted to increasingly dictatorial methods of control to do so.
- In Germany, Adolf Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party came to power in 1933.
- In Spain, Francisco Franco, having led his ultra-nationalist Falangist Party to victory in a civil war that ended in 1939, ruled as a Right-wing dictator until his death in 1975.
- In Portugal, António Salazar, as prime minister and then president, led his New State Party in a Right-wing dictatorship from 1932 to 1974.

Even where democracy appeared to operate, for example in some western European nations, it was arguable that appearance belied reality. That, indeed, was the charge that Lenin made. He defined liberal-democracy as a charade used by the propertied classes, who held power in such countries as Britain and France, to justify and perpetuate their rule over the people. He dismissed the supposedly free elections in those countries as shams which left the **bourgeois** power structure untouched.

Outside Europe during the same period, it was a very similar story of growing authoritarianism.

- The tendency towards dictatorship was clearly evident in Central and South America whose constitutional traditions were even weaker than in Europe.
- The areas of Africa sufficiently free of colonial control to shape their own systems exhibited a similar trend. Tribal traditions and cultures were essentially authoritarian.

Which countries became dictatorships in the inter-war years?

### KEY TERM

**Constitutionalism** The belief that ordered progress is best achieved by keeping to established laws and precedents.

**Second World War, 1939–45** Fought between the Allies (principally Britain, China, USSR and the USA) and the Axis powers (principally Germany, Italy and Japan).

**Bolshevik** The dominant branch of Russian communism, led by V.I. Lenin, which claimed to be the true interpreter of Marxism and which took power in Russia in the October Revolution of 1917.

**Proletariat** The revolutionary working class destined, in Marxist revolutionary theory, to achieve ultimate triumph in the class war.

**Fascist** In strict terms, the word applies specifically to Italy's ultra-nationalist Fascist Party whose symbol was a bundle of rods (*fasces* in Latin), representing power and authority, but the term became used generally to describe Right-wing regimes of the twentieth century.