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# Toward a Theory of Totalitarianism: Franz Borkenau's *Pareto*

William David Jones

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In an article that appeared in the October 1985 issue of *Commentary*, historian Walter Laqueur posed the question, "is there now, or has there ever been, such a thing as totalitarianism?"<sup>1</sup> Laqueur's query was of course intended as a challenge to those who either deny the existence of totalitarianism as a unique type of dictatorship or challenge the validity of the so-called "theory of totalitarianism." Not surprisingly, Laqueur's provocatively phrased question and the answer he supplied generated a sharp debate. The point of his article was not simply to defend the Cold War era theory of totalitarianism, which paired German National Socialism with Soviet Communism as structurally similar regimes, but instead to examine the reasons (good ones, he argued) for the persistence of the idea of totalitarianism. Laqueur's article and the response it drew were part of a longstanding debate about modern dictatorships and the adequacy of some version of a concept of totalitarianism to describe them.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Laqueur, "Is There Now, or Has There Ever Been, Such a Thing as Totalitarianism?" *Commentary*, 80 (1985), 29-35.

<sup>2</sup> A few of the most important and useful studies are: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, 1979 [1st edition 1951]); Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die totalitäre Erfahrung* (Munich, 1987); Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956, [2nd edition 1965]); Carl J. Friedrich, Michael Curtis, and Benjamin R. Barber, *Totalitarianism in Perspective* (New York, 1969); Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986); Ernest A. Menze, *Totalitarianism Reconsidered*

Indeed, the persistence of controversy over the idea of totalitarianism indicates the need for a closer look at the earlier history of uses of the term and the cluster of concepts it has indicated. For while the analytical usefulness of the theory of totalitarianism may be questioned, the theory's importance in helping to shape postwar political culture in Europe and the United States is beyond dispute.

It is not the point of this discussion, however, to revive the dominant Cold War era notion of totalitarianism, which has often proven to be a flawed model of comparison.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the point is to contribute to a better understanding of the origins and various types of conceptions of totalitarianism by looking at the emergence of a version of the theory that may be described as "leftwing anti-totalitarianism."

The leftwing opponents of totalitarian dictatorship analyzed and criticized fascism or bolshevism (or both) from a political and theoretical perspective that can fairly be labeled as "socialist."<sup>4</sup> Among the German socialist opponents of totalitarianism, who produced probably the richest array of such writings on state-party dictatorship, were several political and academic figures who were or would become prominent scholars and theorists—Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, Ernst Fraenkel, Max Horkheimer, Karl Korsch, Arthur Rosenberg, Ruth Fischer, Rudolf Hilferding, and Richard Löwenthal.<sup>5</sup> With this group belongs another writer whose work has received relatively little scholarly attention: Franz Borkenau. Borkenau's approach to the problem of totalitarianism recommends itself as an object of study for two reasons: it provides a means of broaching the topic of leftwing anti-totalitarianism generally, and it af-

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(Port Washington, N.Y., 1981); Leonard Schapiro, *Totalitarianism* (New York, 1972); Walter Schlangen *Theorie und Ideologie des Totalitarismus, Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer liberalen Kritik politischer Herrschaft* (Bonn, 1972) and *Die Totalitarismustheorie, Entwicklung und Probleme* (Stuttgart, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> For a brief discussion of the theory's weaknesses, see Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 79-84.

<sup>4</sup> Reinhard Kühnl, "Linke Totalitarismusversionen," in M. Greiffenhagen, R. Kühnl, and J. B. Müller, *Totalitarismus, Zur Problematik eines politischen Begriffs* (Munich, 1972), 97-110; and Wolfgang Wippermann, *Zur Analyse des Faschismus, Die Sozialistischen und Kommunistischen Faschismustheorien 1921-1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1981), 32-33, 43-44.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Marcuse, "Der Kampf gegen den Liberalismus in der totalitären Staatsauffassung," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 3 (1934), 161-95; Rudolf Hilferding, "State Capitalism or Totalitarian State Economy," *The Modern Review*, 1 (1947), 266-71; Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State* (New York, 1941); Franz Neumann, *Behemoth* (New York, 1942); Karl Korsch, "Notes on History: The Ambiguities of Totalitarian Ideologies," *New Essays*, 6 (1942), 1-9; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "Dialektik der Aufklärung" und *Schriften, 1940-1950, V, Max Horkheimer: Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt, 1987); Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948); Richard Löwenthal, "Totalitarianism Reconsidered," *Commentary*, 55 (1960), 504-12.

fords a glimpse of one theorist's unorthodox approach to the comparative analysis of fascism and communism.

Borkenau was born in Vienna on 15 December 1900, and according to one of the few accounts of his youth, his student years were marked by both achievement and rebellion. After the First World War, in which Borkenau evidently played no direct part, he left Vienna to attend university in Germany (Leipzig). In 1921 he joined the German Communist Party. Soon he was serving as a national student leader for the Party. He completed his university studies in 1924 and moved to Berlin, where he worked under the direction of Eugene Varga at the Comintern's economics institute, which was housed in the Soviet Embassy. For several years he monitored the policies and practices of the social democratic parties in Western Europe.<sup>6</sup> German political scientist Richard Löwenthal, one of his few longtime friends, described Borkenau's outlook of the 1920s as that of "a sincere Marxist" who hoped for revolution to overtake Europe.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the decade, however, Borkenau had decided that the Comintern's "left turn" policy of labeling the Social Democrats as "social fascists" invited the collapse of the embattled workers' movement in Germany. He and his younger friend Löwenthal broke with the KPD in a rancorous dispute during the last weeks of 1929.<sup>8</sup>

Borkenau continued to cultivate his diverse array of contacts on the European left even after he had ended his party affiliations. He was, for instance, acquainted with key Austro-Marxists in the group close to Socialist Party leader and theoretician Otto Bauer. Borkenau visited Vienna shortly before the Austrian workers' rising of 1934, though he was probably not present during the bloody and tragic event. He cautioned some of his friends against open resistance to the Dollfuss regime, and he himself chose survival over heroics as a violent confrontation approached.<sup>9</sup> At about the same time he was also friend and mentor to several young socialists in Berlin associated with the underground anti-Nazi organization *Neu Beginnen*, and he defended the group against Social Democratic Party elders in a series of articles published in the exile journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Richard Löwenthal, "In memoriam Franz Borkenau," *Der Monat*, 9 (1957), 57-60; John E. Tashjean, "Franz Borkenau: A Study of His Social and Political Ideas." (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown Univ., 1962), 3-11.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Löwenthal, letter to author, 3 September 1986.

<sup>8</sup> Sources on Borkenau include: Löwenthal, "In memoriam Franz Borkenau"; Löwenthal, "Editor's Introduction," in Franz Borkenau, *End and Beginning: On the Generations of Cultures and the Origins of the West* (New York, 1981), 2-8; Valeria E. Russo, "Profilo di Franz Borkenau," *Rivista di filosofia*, 20 (1981), 293-94; Tashjean, "Franz Borkenau: A Study of His Social and Political Ideas," 1-11; Tashjean, "Borkenau: The Rediscovery of a Thinker," *Partisan Review*, 51 (1984), 289-300.

<sup>9</sup> Anson Rabinbach, *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism: From Red Vienna to Civil War, 1927-1934* (Chicago, 1983), 116.

<sup>10</sup> Ludwrig Neureither [Franz Borkenau], "Klassenbewußtsein," *Zeitschrift für Sozialis-*

By 1934, however, the arena of Borkenau's opposition to the Nazis had shifted from organizational activism to political journalism and scholarship. His most important writings appeared toward the end of the 1930s: *The Spanish Cockpit* (1937) and *The Communist International* (1938).<sup>11</sup> But the theoretical outlook that informed these valuable studies of the Spanish Civil War and the Comintern emerged only gradually during several years of intensive study of both the current political scene and the historical past. Early in the decade Borkenau was associated with the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, and he also wrote a series of essays in which he blended historical and sociological approaches to contemporary political concerns.<sup>12</sup> These writings displayed the emerging persona of Borkenau the independent journalist-cum-political analyst: blunt, iconoclastic, intense, didactic. But Borkenau had yet to place his analyses of fascism and bolshevism within the framework of a general and comparative theoretical argument—that is, he had not yet constructed his version of a theory of totalitarianism. By 1936, however, he would develop the theoretical perspective necessary for such a task.

In his attempt to formulate an alternative to marxist theories of social change, whose postulates he now accepted only in part, Borkenau took as his subject a writer sharply critical of any socialist perspective: Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923). This Italian sociologist and economist had detested democracy and lamented the participation of the "masses" in national political life. Most likely, Pareto's ideological affiliation with fascism stirred Borkenau's interest.<sup>13</sup> For despite his claims for Pareto's significance, Borkenau made no secret of his scorn for the Italian's highblown

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*mus*, 1 (1934), 153-59; "Staat und Revolution," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 1 (1934), 181-85; "Noch einmal 'Klassenbewußtsein,'" *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 1 (1934), 325-29.

<sup>11</sup> Two of the authors cited in note 8 have also focused their attention on particular aspects of Borkenau's life and writings. See John E. Tashjean, "Borkeu on Marx: An Intellectual Biography," *Wiseman Review* (1961), 149-57. Valeria E. Russo has written of Borkenau's early work on capitalism and fascism in the following articles: "A proposito di un'interpretazione sociologica del fascismo," *Dimensioni* (1981), 39-46; "Franz Borkeu e l'origine del moderno," *La Politica*, 1, (1985) 110-14; "Henryk Grossmann and Franz Borkeu: A Bio-Bibliography," *Science in Context*, 1 (1987), 181-91.

<sup>12</sup> For discussions of Borkeu's work with the Institute of Social Research, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston, 1971), 13, 16-17, 19-20, 38, 91, 151, 290, 302n; and Rolf Wiggershaus, *Die Frankfurter Schule, Geschichte, Theoretische Entwicklung, Politische Bedeutung* (Munich, 1988), 144-45, 182, 288. He published his first book with the Institute's reluctant sponsorship: *Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild. Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie der Manufakturperiode* (Paris, 1934). Borkeu's essays included: "Zur Soziologie des Faschismus," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 68 (1933), 513-43; "Fascisme et syndicalisme," *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, 6 (1934), 337-50; "La Crise des parties socialistes dans l'Europe contemporaine," *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, 7 (1935), 337-52.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of another leftist who became interested in Pareto during the 1930s, see Stuart L. Campbell, "The Four Paretos of Raymond Aron," *JHI*, 47 (1986), 287-98.

geometrical formulations and his hypotheses of "residues" and "derivations."<sup>14</sup> But the issue of whether or not Borkenau did justice to the full range of the sociologist's ideas is not important to the discussion of *Pareto* that follows.<sup>15</sup> The most important accomplishment of Borkenau's book was its appropriation of Pareto's theory of the circulation of elites in the analysis of state-party dictatorships.

As sketched by Borkenau, Pareto's theory of the circulation of elites posits a hierarchical model of society characterized by significant differences in the economic and political abilities of its various social strata. Elites, Pareto contended, can be found in all the various classes and vocational and social groups. The political elite, which includes the wielders of national power, is typically the most important. But there is also a process Pareto called the "circulation of elites," whereby elites are both replenished and eventually replaced. Individuals possessing innate biological superiority in intelligence, will, or leadership, will rise into the higher classes of society, while those of inferior gifts, regardless of their status at birth, will tend to sink. Only free competition can guarantee this result, however.<sup>16</sup> In the absence of free circulation, new elites will arise under less than ideal conditions. Pareto was unable to conceive of a balance between the need for regeneration and the destructive forces required to accomplish it. He concluded that the best possibility, a free market capitalist competition, could not survive the demands of the masses for economic security. Pareto finally arrived at a pessimistic vision of the cyclic recurrence of the degeneration, destruction, and regeneration of elites.

Borkenau argued that Pareto's admiration for the competitive element of economic liberalism and his contempt for the egalitarianism made possible by political democracy had resulted in a sociology that was at least as polemical as it was scientific:

It is as the precursor of an attitude to social life becoming more powerful every day that Pareto is of the greatest interest to us, whatever the objective value of this attitude as to its content of scientific truth may be. In Pareto's work for the first time, the powerful tendency towards a change of political machinery and social organization since embodied in Bolshevism, Fascism, National Socialism and a score of similar movements has found clear expression: clearer here than in the work of Georges Sorel, who alone could be ranked with Pareto as a precursor of the political and social changes we behold in our days.<sup>17</sup>

Though Pareto had not, in Borkenau's estimate, provided a sufficiently convincing analysis of Italy's past social development, he had accurately formulated the key components of fascist propaganda techniques and

<sup>14</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto* (London, 1936), 72-77, 88-90.

<sup>15</sup> See T. H. Marshall's review of *Pareto* in *The Political Quarterly*, 7 (1936), 459-61.

<sup>16</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, 108-9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

ideology: the lions would subdue the foxes; sheer force and repetition of simplistic slogans would replace the appeal to reason; the decadent old bourgeois world would give way to vital new elites.<sup>18</sup>

In formulating his own arguments regarding the formation of these new elites and their successful establishment of state-party regimes, Borkenau turned to examples from recent European politics. In his chapters on “Bolshevism” and “Fascism” he emphasized the politically destabilizing impact of the economic disruptions that had accompanied World War I and allowed these new political movements in Russia and Italy the possibility of success. The restructuring efforts of the 1920s and the economic crisis at the end of the decade he described by means of an historically-based hypothesis: free competition would lead (and had led) to concentration of production in the hands of the ablest capitalists, and, as a result, a more or less “natural” economic elite had arisen.<sup>19</sup> But as larger and larger enterprises collapsed when competition continued at higher levels of concentration (as after the stock market crash of 1929), great numbers of workers and investors felt the harmful effects. In Marxian fashion, Borkenau described the political consequences of this increasingly destructive economic competition. At some point (depending upon particular national circumstances and the relative power of economic classes, political parties, and other social groups) the state was forced to intervene with laws which established some limited control over the distributive rewards of industrial production. But by virtue of its new role in a period of crisis,

the state becomes important for the very life of every one of its citizens, who fight a desperate battle for the domination over it, in order to preserve their existence and make the others perish. Theoretically the struggle may lead to the complete victory of one group of citizens over all the other groups, ending in a complete unification of society.<sup>20</sup>

Borkeu's model of social change would emerge from a bold and heretical combination of components: a Marxian theory of capitalist economic crisis and state intervention and a Paretoan notion of the emergence of new political elites. The result of the process Borkeu described by means of this model—the “complete unification of society”—would not be a true unity, he concluded, but a hierarchal order under the authority of a state controlled by a new elite.<sup>21</sup> In his subsequent writings he would refer to such a regime as a “totalitarian state.”

Using both Pareto's model of elite formation and his own capsule

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-56, 160-63, 171-72; Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, tr. Arthur Livingstone (New York, 1935), I, 973-76; IV, 1515-41, 1912.

<sup>19</sup> Borkeu, *Pareto*, 198.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

history of postwar economic developments, Borkenau described how Lenin and the bolsheviks had gained and retained power. He was aware of the problems that this analytical maneuver offered, and began by acknowledging that egalitarian socialism “put Pareto’s theory to its strongest test.”<sup>22</sup> Bolshevism declared not only that economic elites were bound to disappear, but also that the state apparatus itself eventually would vanish. Pareto’s insistence on the inevitability of natural domination and the persistence of hierarchies was utterly incompatible with bolshevism—or at least with bolshevist ideology. But Borkenau drew a distinction between ideological appeals for revolution to achieve a classless society and the actual practices of Leninism. The latter rested not upon unbending principles of egalitarianism but on the political needs of the moment as determined by the Party leadership:

At every important moment of the Russian revolution Marxism had to be abandoned. . . . It was a belief and not a scientific guide. In reality, Lenin acted by ingenious intuitions, based on close knowledge of facts, as all great political leaders of all times have done. And the main function of Marxism was to hold the elite together.<sup>23</sup>

Borkenau insisted that the bolsheviks were not the vanguard of the classless society, but were instead the creators of a new and oppressive hierarchy. By focusing on the bolsheviks’ theoretical and practical elitism, Borkenau could now study the Soviet Union in comparison with German fascism or any other dictatorial state-party regime.<sup>24</sup> One road to the exploration of “totalitarian affinities” between fascism and bolshevism had been opened.

Borkenau’s examination of the historical formation of the bolshevik and fascist elites was but an initial step in this exploration. He began to make broad comparisons between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, revealing their similarities and differences through the lens of Pareto’s political sociology. He pointed out that fascism and bolshevism had arisen as responses to divergent economic and political conditions and enunciated radically opposed goals. He also noted the clear differences in the parties’ primary class appeal, arguing that “National-Socialism at the moment of its advent was more of a victorious regime of the upper classes than Italian Fascism had been, not to mention Bolshevism.”<sup>25</sup> But he also found some significant similarities. Each of the three parties (Fascist, National Socialist, and Communist) appealed to an elite of some kind—nationalist, racial, and, in the more complicated case of the bolsheviks,

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

both a class (the proletariat) and a political vanguard (the Party).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in each party, a single individual served as the official articulator of ideology and policy, and as the paternal symbol of authority. Hitler and Mussolini had assumed this role in the early days of their respective parties. Stalin's ascent reflected a bureaucratization of the Russian revolution accompanied by an intense struggle for power within the Party elite carried out over a period of years. All three men, however, had succeeded by being "able manager[s] of the party machine."<sup>27</sup> Each of these recent party-based movements had achieved a relatively high level of cohesiveness before its successful revolution and seizure of the state. According to Borkenau the formation of elites prior to the overthrow of the old state meant that, in the event of revolutionary success, reconstruction of a new state apparatus by the elite party would be relatively swift and decisive.<sup>28</sup>

Among the successful party elite's vital tasks was the organization of collective displays of nationalism in order to stimulate fanatical allegiance to the new order. On this point, Borkenau again found Pareto's writings pertinent to the events of the 1930s. The Paretoan categories of "non-logical action," which Borkenau had dismissed as poor sociological theory, found their functional place in both fascist and bolshevist ideology:

Sentiments uncontrolled by reason *have* really played an enormous role in the ascendancy of Fascism, and in addition, in the later developments of Bolshevism the same sentiments came to the forefront, though in the official Bolshevik theory this trend is neglected or rejected. Bolshevism of course had to take over many elements of the age of enlightenment, and of rationalism as an ideology, in order to fit the Russian population for a modern industrial order. The common trend, however, the acceptance of authority instead of rational consideration, the eulogy of activity in the place of thought, the unconsidered acceptance of a few metaphysical principles taken for granted and the rejection of any "problems" not solved by these official axioms, is conspicuous. In Fascism as well as in Bolshevism, rationalism is banned from the most important spheres of human life and relegated to matters of pure technique. One may doubt whether, in the long run, a rationalistic technique can coexist with thoroughly anti-rationalist habits of life.<sup>29</sup>

Such discussions of the contradiction between the rationalist and irrationalist elements of totalitarian party ideology and practice—supported with pertinent quotations and statistics—would quite soon become a standard element of more thorough studies of state-party dictatorships.<sup>30</sup> But Borkenau was not typically a patient and systematic political analyst; his mind moved in great conceptual leaps and led him toward decisive and

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 115, 179.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-94.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-95.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Neumann, *Behemoth*.

iconoclastic pronouncements. *Pareto* shows him in one of his most creative efforts to fashion new analytical perspectives on contemporary events.

Rounding out his comparative analysis of fascism and bolshevism, Borkenau briefly discussed the internal policies common to state-party dictatorships: institutionalized terror and party monopolization of economic and political power.<sup>31</sup> He had mentioned these as characteristics of fascism in previous writings, but he now understood them as integral to Soviet Communist policies as well. By the closing pages of *Pareto*, Borkenau had outlined a theory of totalitarian convergence:

It has often been observed that in Fascism and Bolshevism along with an evident antagonism in social policy, there goes a surprising similarity in political institutions. From the point of view of the theory of domination and of elites, Bolshevism and Fascism can only really be treated as slightly different specimens of the same species of dictatorship.<sup>32</sup>

Such a comparison would become commonplace during the early Cold War years, but it was hardly an attitude typical of European leftist intellectuals in 1936.

The details of Borkenau's discussion of European politics are hardly beyond question. Some historical arguments important to Borkenau's analysis—his generalizations about the economic and policy developments of the 1920s, for example—would have to be greatly revised or refined in light of subsequent scholarship.<sup>33</sup> But regardless of whether or not one admires the model of state-party elites Borkenau generated in *Pareto*, it clearly anticipated the direction that anti-totalitarian theory would take in later decades. One might say that Borkenau was not only an unorthodox but also a "premature" anti-totalitarian.

Borkenau returned to the analysis of recent events in a series of books that followed *Pareto* in quick succession. The political battles in Spain, Germany, Austria, and the Soviet Union revealed to Borkenau further evidence supporting the models of crisis and the formation of elites that he had first expounded in *Pareto*.<sup>34</sup> The 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact momentarily lent greater credibility to the comparative analysis of dictatorship Borkenau had been articulating, and in that year he formulated his only book-length critique of totalitarianism. Unfortunately, *The Totalitarian Enemy* (1940) was a hastily completed book and sometimes displayed Borkenau at his worst—speculation and polemics outran his often brilliant

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 184-94, 203-10, passim.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> *The Spanish Cockpit* (London, 1937); *The Communist International* (London, 1938); *Austria and After* (London, 1938); *The New German Empire* (Harmondsworth, 1939); *The Totalitarian Enemy* (London, 1940).

analysis. Even his friend George Orwell criticized the book's poor organization in a review article.<sup>35</sup>

Although he never produced a book on modern dictatorship that gained either the popular or scholarly reception accorded to some of the writings of Orwell, Arthur Koestler, and Hannah Arendt, Borkenau's books and essays of the interwar and wartime years mark important stages in the development of theories on the problem of totalitarianism. All the phases of totalitarian theory—the initial focus on fascism, the shift in emphasis to comparisons between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and the anticipation of Cold War ideological and military conflicts—are evident in his interwar and wartime writings. In short, in addition to their great inherent interest, Borkenau's writings offer an excellent case study in the development of anti-totalitarian ideology.

Through the vagaries of Borkenau's careers as political journalist, teacher, scholar, and editor, the theory of elites he had developed in *Pareto* and applied in *The Spanish Cockpit* remained a vital component of his methodology. During the war Borkenau continued his comparative analysis of the role of party elites in the bolshevist and fascist revolutions, arguing that *both* movements were revolutionary in the sense of violently shattering or accelerating existing social, political, and economic arrangements and patterns of development.<sup>36</sup> A focus on the development and behavior of elites also characterized his pioneering postwar efforts in Kremlinology, in which he emphasized the esoteric reading of public communications in order to discern shifts of power within the Soviet elite.<sup>37</sup>

Borkenau's later historical essays also focused on the importance of elites, uncovering the role of religious monastics as the carriers and guardians of civilization during the first millennium AD.<sup>38</sup> Collected and edited by Richard Löwenthal, several of these essays appeared in print for the first time in 1981 under the title *End and Beginning: On the Generations of Cultures and the Origins of the West*. They show that Borkenau's perspective on history ripened in the postwar years as he attempted to gauge the cultural meaning of the events of the first half of the century. He concluded that the European civilization he had defended would be transformed and surpassed in a new confluence of cultures but only after a barbaric period marked by further conflict. The broadly Hegelian historical outlook that informs these reflective essays and their rush of specula-

<sup>35</sup> George Orwell, review of *The Totalitarian Enemy*, by Franz Borkenau, in *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, II, *My Country Right or Left*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York, 1968), 24-26.

<sup>36</sup> Borkenau, *Pareto*, 136, 175, 180-83; *Totalitarian Enemy*, 242-53.

<sup>37</sup> See Laqueur, *The Fate of the Revolution: Interpretations of Soviet History* (New York, 1967), 180.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of Borkenau's postwar career, see Tashjean, "Franz Borkenau: A Study," 16-21, and Löwenthal, "Editor's Introduction," 6-8.

tive insights offer a glimpse of the kind of provocative intellectual work Borkenau could accomplish when current events did not press so closely. These fascinating investigations of the origins and fate of western civilization remained incomplete, however, cut short by Borkenau's death in 1957.

Selecting the most interesting and persuasive of the three Borkenaus—the unorthodox analyst of current political events, the knowledgeable theorist and critic of totalitarian dictatorship, and the speculative historian of culture—finally becomes a matter of intellectual and political preference. In terms of their lasting significance, though, his most successful books were *The Spanish Cockpit* (1937) and *The Communist International* (1938), for they allowed him to draw upon both his personal experiences (working for the Comintern and as an observer in Spain) and the unique theoretical perspective on politics and dictatorship he had developed in *Pareto*.

Borkenau's defiant will to promote particular unpopular or unusual ideas distinguished him even in a period of cultural and political upheaval. But his equally notable habit of slipping into and out of dominant currents of ideas typified the careers of intellectuals of his era. And in the trend of his politics in particular he was yet another example of the gradual movement of some Marxist intellectuals from revolutionary socialism towards liberalism or social democracy. Others who followed a similar pattern included the "god that failed" authors—Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, et al.,<sup>39</sup> and several of Borkenau's other old friends and acquaintances from Germany—Henry Pachter, Karl August Wittfogel, Ruth Fischer, George Lichtheim, Ossip Flechtheim, and Richard Löwenthal. In company with these individuals Borkenau had been one of the relatively early "renegades," and accounts of his life indicate that he paid a high price for his heterodoxy in terms of both personal and political isolation.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps as a result of his embittering experiences, his writings often revealed a deep cultural pessimism even as they called for vigorous political action. These two aspects of his intellectual personality—the mature and skeptical analyst and the stridently defiant heretic—never quite reached a satisfying mutual accommodation. Indeed, the uneven quality of his postwar writings on politics indicates that he never overcame the tensions inherent in the abandonment of an intellectual and political allegiance to Marxism. Before his final disillusionment with Marxism, however, he found a means to salvage part of his leftwing theoretical heritage, fuse it with serviceable elements of Pareto's sociology, and thereby fashion a distinctive notion of totalitarianism.

<sup>39</sup> See Richard Crossman (ed.), *The God that Failed*. Borkenau wrote the afterword for the first edition of the German language version of Richard Crossman's collection of the testimonies of former Communists. *Der Gott, der keiner war* (Köln, 1952).

<sup>40</sup> Löwenthal, "Editor's Introduction," 8.

The concept of totalitarianism would, in one form or another, become a dominant political perspective in the United States and Western Europe during the Cold War, and it helped to legitimate a wide array of domestic and foreign policies. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the original formulations of Borkenau's theory of totalitarianism emerged as the outcome of his intellectual and political retrenchment in the face of overwhelming socialist defeat in the 1930s and not as the confident assertion of Western liberal values in the 1950s, though he contributed to this later phase of anti-totalitarianism as well.<sup>41</sup> Yet even as a spokesman for the anti-totalitarian consensus of the early Cold War years, Borkenau did not quite fit in. His anti-Communism was always accompanied by his dismissals of the ideology of free market capitalism as pernicious and utopian nonsense.<sup>42</sup> Thus even during an "age of conformity" Borkenau remained a daring and isolated figure.

Walter Laqueur, whose rhetorical question opened this discussion, has stated elsewhere his admiration for the anti-totalitarian writings of Franz Borkenau and also those of Borkenau's close friend Richard Löwenthal, who became a leading intellectual in the postwar German Social Democratic Party.<sup>43</sup> But as if to demonstrate once again the controversial character of interwar leftwing theories and theorists of totalitarianism—and the stubborn survival of both—Löwenthal himself responded to Laqueur's article on totalitarianism in a letter to the editor asserting that the "totalitarian concept" is "no longer appropriate to more recent developments" because current Communist regimes, while still oppressive, were "post-totalitarian" and that a return to their totalitarian past was foreclosed.<sup>44</sup> For a veteran ex- and anti-Communist such as Löwenthal, despite the political distance he had traveled since Weimar, not only totalitarianism but also the theories attempting to explain it needed to be situated and analyzed historically in order to be comprehended and surpassed.

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<sup>41</sup> See the books and articles of Löwenthal, Tashjean, and Russo, as well as Peter Coleman's *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York, 1989), 2, 7, 15, 20-21, 29-31, 60, 83, 160.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Borkenau, *Totalitarian Enemy*, 78-79.

<sup>43</sup> See note 37 and "Letters from Readers," *Commentary*, 81 (1986), 6.

<sup>44</sup> "Letters from Readers," *Commentary*, 81 (1986), 2-4.