Police State and Fear

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Totalitarian states

During the 1930s a new type of government emerged in some countries. These governments aimed to have complete control over how people lived their lives. We call these governments *'totalitarian'*. A key feature of a **totalitarian** state is a dictator, a leader with total power. We will explore how totalitarian dictatorships were established by Hitler in Nazi Germany and Stalin in the Soviet Union.

In totalitarian states, those in power establish control over the people through a range of measures. One of these methods is the creation of a **police state**. This means a state in which the government uses the police, or secret police, to monitor and control what people do and what people say. The police are also used to punish people who are accused of acting against the state. During the 1930s, Hitler and Stalin established police states in Germany and the Soviet Union.

The Nazi police state

When Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, his control of the government and the police was weak. Therefore, he created his own loyal police and security forces to increase his control over the people. The SS (Protection Squad), - initially set up as Hitler's personal bodyguard - controlled the German police and security forces. They held information on everyone suspected of opposing Hitler and kept the German people under constant supervision. They could arrest anyone they viewed as suspicious and it was extremely difficult for suspects to prove their innocence. The fear of being arrested made people afraid to disobey the Nazi Party.

The Nazi police state

The Gestapo were the secret police in Nazi Germany. They identified anyone who opposed or criticised the Nazi Party, using methods such as tapping phones, spying on people and using **informants** to identify their opposition. The Gestapo were able to arrest and imprison suspects without trial and were given permission to torture prisoners to get a confession. They did not wear uniforms so it was difficult to tell the Gestapo apart from other citizens.

New prisons or **concentration camps** were created to cope with the number of people arrested by the police. The conditions in these camps were extremely poor, and prisoners could be forced to work. The presence of the concentration camps created fear amongst the population and caused people to **conform** in Nazi Germany.

The Soviet police state

Stalin also developed a police state in the Soviet Union to monitor and control people. Those who were critical of him or the Communist Party could be arrested and imprisoned by the NKVD, the Soviet secret police.

During the 1930s, Stalin removed anyone from the Communist Party who was suspected of disloyalty to him. Often these people were then arrested, sent to labour camps or murdered. Many were put on public **show trials** where they pleaded guilty to crimes they had not committed. Around 1 million members of the Communist Party were killed during this period, known as the Great Terror. These events terrified members of the Party, and caused many of them to obey Stalin's orders without question through fear of their own arrest or imprisonment.

The Soviet police state

Stalin also used **terror** on ordinary citizens during the 1930s. Anybody suspected of opposing the government could be arrested. The NKVD often made arrests at night without warning, causing people to fear for their own safety. As a result, many citizens demonstrated their loyalty to Stalin by **denouncing** their colleagues or neighbours. This created an atmosphere of fear and terror in which people informed on others to ensure their own safety.

People who were seen to be disloyal would be sent to labour camps called 'the Gulag'. In the Gulag prisoners were forced to complete hard, physical work often in extreme temperatures. Relentless work and the terrible conditions killed many.

Glossary

Concentration camps: a place where large numbers of people (including political prisoners) are detained under armed guard

Conform: to act like others

Denouncing: declaring others are guilty or are in the wrong

Informant: someone who gives information to another person

Police state: a country where the police force(s) have extra powers and can spy on their citizens

Glossary

Show trials: a trial used to reduce political opposition, not in order to find the truth

Terror: violent action or threats designed to cause fear among ordinary people

Totalitarian: a type of government which attempts to control every part of a country

Comprehension questions

1. Who were the dictators of Germany and the Soviet Union during the 1930s?
2. Name one method used to control people in a totalitarian state.
3. What were the names of the secret police forces in Germany and the Soviet Union?
4. What happened in the Gulag and concentration camps?
5. <u>Challenge question</u> - What was the impact of the police state on ordinary citizens?

Extension activity

How similar were the police states in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union?

Similarities	Differences
Both states had a secret police force, the Gestapo in Nazi Germany and the NKVD in the Soviet Union.	*Stalin used show trials to remove his opposition.*