

legitimacy are simply the different formulas of that unspoken contract'. From the time this is accepted, either actively or passively, every principle of legitimacy implies, therefore, the duty to obey on the condition that certain rules are observed; it is a contract. If either party fails to respect the contract, the principle of legitimacy is no longer valid, and guarantees security neither to power nor to its subjects. Fear is then reborn. The unspoken contract is violated, the Hobbesian state of nature re-emerges, and widespread fear grips everyone.

For Ferrero, then, the destruction of legality is the most dangerous and traumatic experience for any society. Great social upheavals and civil wars are examples of such a dramatic state of affairs. 'When the legality of a social body is destroyed, even though the destruction may be justified by the vices or weaknesses of that legality, fear invades everyone: the first to feel fear are the destroyers themselves, after which it spreads to others'. In such situations, the whole society is thrown into chaos: people suddenly discover that they can no longer trust one another; the unspoken contract is of no value; and fear dominates society, altering all behaviour. According to Ferrero, nothing better displays such a condition of 'great fear' than the French Revolution. One of the oldest and most sophisticated societies suddenly disintegrated before the eyes of the world. It simply woke up one morning to find itself without an army, without justice, policy, administration, and laws. It was caught in the grip of a diabolic cycle of fear: terror, coups d'état, revolutionary dictatorship, invasions, and war without rules. Accordingly, Ferrero interpreted 1789 as an 'abscess of fear' that terrified first France and then all of Europe. At this point, Ferrero begins his analysis of revolutionary dictatorship, which, in his opinion, had its first historical expression in the political power of Napoleon Bonaparte. The great



political crisis (the 'great schism', to use Ferrero's term), and the war that followed, consolidated an entirely new form of political domination that endangered civility and political liberty.

Ferrero's approach follows the pattern of liberal thought stretching from Constant to Talmon, but his interpretation of the totalitarian nature of revolutionary dictatorship is particularly original because it highlights the generally neglected problem of fear. Napoleon's power is seen as an example of a power that violated democratic legitimacy, suppressing the right of opposition and the freedom to vote. Such government is an

inversion of the democratic formula, for the will of the nation is silenced and directed by government itself. The nation is *said* to enjoy sovereignty. But it is actually deprived of the essential components of such power, even in its moment of maximum glory. Revolutionary dictatorship is illegitimate government, since, instead of freeing its subjects from fear, it makes them, in an unprecedented way, its victim. Fear is the 'energetic principle' of modern revolutionary dictatorship.

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CSD News

Visiting Research Associate

Dr Oldrich Tuma, Institute for Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences, funded by the British Academy.

Events

In early October, CSD will host a course on European integration, for young diplomats from Central and Eastern Europe, organized by the Clingendael Institute, the Dutch Institute for International Relations.

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Dr A. El-Affendi (Sudan/CSD); Professor A. Elmessiri (Cairo); Professor John Esposito (Washington D. C.); John Keane; Professor Gudrun Krämer (Berlin).

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