



Bernard Shaw and Totalitarianism: Longing for Utopia

Matthew Yde

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One of the most famous playwrights of the twentieth century, George Bernard Shaw has a reputation as a humanitarian, a seeker of justice - and, in his own words, 'world betterer.' But this is difficult to reconcile with his enthusiastic support of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, which is usually dismissed as comic exaggeration and hyperbole, pugnacious rhetoric, paradox, or the antagonizing of the British political establishment.

But as *Bernard Shaw and Totalitarianism* shows, Shaw's support was genuine, rooted in his powerful desire for absolute control over the unruly and chaotic, in a deep psychological longing for perfection. Shaw expressed rigid control over his own bodily instincts, and looked for political rulers of strong will and utopian designs to exercise similar control over unruly social elements.

For fifty years Shaw expressed a desire for state liquidation of recalcitrant or incorrigibly unproductive citizens in the hope of clearing the ground for a 'higher' kind of human creature. While Shaw knew that the public was not ready to act on such controversial ideas, he did hope that by disseminating his ideas through highly entertaining plays and essays they would take root in the mind and be activated later on by the power of the will.

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