

Soft tyranny

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Soft tyranny is an idea first coined by Alexis de Tocqueville in his 1835 work titled *Democracy in America*.^[1] In effect, soft tyranny occurs whenever the social conditions of a particular community hinder any prospect of hope among its members.^[2] For Tocqueville, hope is the driving force behind all democratic institutions.^[3] As such, whenever this all-encompassing hope is taken away from the people, liberal democracy fails. Examples of this failure can be seen in the Weimar Republic of Germany during the 1930s, in the French Third Republic around 1940 or arguably throughout western democracies since the economic collapse of 2008.

Inciting Rebellions

Soft tyranny is often cited by historians as being the driving force behind many insurrections. The most obvious area in which soft tyranny affects people occurs with their fiscal situations. Price control is typically considered to be a common feature associated with communist societies; however, it relates directly to not only rebellion, but also soft tyranny. For example, when seigneurial rights, such as land taxes and byway tolls, began to seriously irritate the French peasantry in the mid-eighteenth century, violence in the form of rioting emerged as a consequence.^[4] In effect, the price of bread, which was a staple in the peasant diet, increased to the point where common peasants could not afford to purchase it on a daily basis.^[5] And whenever people cannot feed themselves, havoc tends to ensue. This instance in mid-eighteenth century France exemplifies a form of soft tyranny which can quietly disrupt and eventually unravel an entire socio-economic order.

References

- ↑ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 2000), 9-15.
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- ↑ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 2000), 9-15.
- ↑ John Markoff, "Peasants and their Grievances," *The Origins of the French Revolution*, ed. Peter Campbell (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2006), 243.
- ↑ John Markoff, "Peasants and their Grievances," *The Origins of the French Revolution*, ed. Peter Campbell (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2006), 247.

External links

- In Search of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (<http://www.tocqueville.org/>), information and resources about Alexis de Tocqueville.
- Democracy in America (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/home.html>), hypertext with a gallery of related projects describing America ca. 1820–1840.

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