



Modern Tyrants: The Power and Prevalence of Evil in Our Age

By Daniel Chirot

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Along with its much vaunted progress in scientific and economic realms, our century has witnessed the rise of the most brutal and oppressive regimes in the history of mankind. Even with the collapse of Marxism, current references to “ethnic cleansing” remind us that tyranny persists in our own age and shows no sign of abating. Daniel Chirot offers an important and timely study of modern tyrants, both revealing the forces which allow them to come to power and helping us to predict where they may arise in the future.

Tyrannical rule typically begins in an economically depressed and unstable society with no real tradition of democratic government. Under such circumstances, a self-pitying nationalism often arises along with a widespread popular perception among the citizenry that grave injustices have been committed against them. When a charismatic leader is able to exploit this situation, he may sanction unspeakable atrocities while claiming to uphold cherished national myths.

Chirot analyzes the careers and characters of notorious dictators such as Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and Saddam, as well as lesser known tyrants such as Kim II Sung of North Korea, Ne Win of Burma, Argentina’s Peron, the Dominican Republic’s Trujillo, Pol Pot, Duvalier, and others. He demonstrates how they can survive the rise and fall of particular ideologies and reveals the frightening new marriages between nationalism and a host of local concerns. The lesson drawn is stark and disturbing: the age of modern tyranny is upon us, and unlikely to fade soon.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Chirot's classification scheme for understanding modern tyrannies makes this survey a valuable sourcebook on dictatorships. At one extreme, he finds "ideologically driven" tyrannies like those of Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot of Cambodia and slain Romanian Communist Nicolae Ceausescu. At the other pole are "old-fashioned" tyrannies, rooted in corruption, wanton brutality and extreme concentration of power, such as Idi Amin's Uganda. A political science professor at Northwestern University, Chirot argues that the volatile mix of angry and resentful nationalisms, combined with economic misery and a lack of democratic traditions, are a recipe for tyranny. He maintains that intellectuals who espouse extremist social theories often sow the seeds of absolutism, citing as examples the fundamentalist Muslim revival, the militaristic authoritarianism of Croatia and Serbia and Peru's Shining Path guerrillas. This is a disquieting and ominous road map of the 20th century's political horrors.

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From Library Journal

An intriguing but somewhat uneven work, Chirot's study is at its best in the preliminary chapters and concluding comments on the nature of tyrants and tyranny. As the author notes, the subject has not received much attention of late, although that gap may be quickly filled as the decline of East-West politics allows closer scrutiny of the polities and their leaders who have lived and sometimes profited in the shadow of the Cold War. Chirot's study is certainly an excellent step in that direction. The more recent case studies in the book, however, are often too brief to elucidate as clearly as intended the author's imaginative typological map of tyranny. Most likely to be read by advanced undergraduates and graduate students, the book is recommended for major university libraries.

- Joseph R. Rudolph Jr., Towson State Univ., Md.

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From [Booklist](#)

Here is an episodic look at 13 of this century's despots, ranging from champions of murder down to the Duvaliers of Haiti. For the most part, the intellectual heavy lifting has already been achieved in such critiques as *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt, *Modern Times* by Paul Johnson, and *Hitler and Stalin* by Alan Bullock. Yet there remains the need for a propagator of their analyses, a role that college professor Chirot adopts for the newcomer to the subject. His work requires a certain determination to read, for it is not light fare, it is rather mechanical rhetorically, and there are some gruesome passages. Moreover, Chirot presents the pessimistic argument that such tyrants as Adolf Hitler and Pol Pot are liable to recur in the post-Cold War situation. To hold the mirror to the future, he gives a capsule history of the country in question, the fanaticism of the dictator's belief in his unique gnosis, and the body count it took to effect it. Libraries where the classics on tyranny circulate might see this title join the stream. *Gilbert Taylor*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bernice Fugate:

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