

Review of: "Carl Friedrich and the Cancellation of Pareto"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

If one is going to write a paper on the “cancellation” of Pareto, there is one indisputable fact about him that needs to be acknowledged—that he was a supporter of Mussolini and the Italian fascist state. But this paper never gets around to mentioning that. Indeed, the word “Mussolini” never appears in the paper at all, and the word “fascist” only arises in questioning the anti-fascist credentials...of Carl Friedrich, someone never on record as supporting Mussolini or any of the fascist powers (quite the opposite).

At the same time the paper whitewashes Pareto, it smears Friedrich by insinuation, in some very questionable ways. It discusses the “the expansion of state power and liberation from a strict interpretation of the constitution under Roosevelt, his ‘brains trust,’ and the expansion of federal regulatory agencies with expert leaders,” and how all this was supported by the “Harvard community” (p. 2). (Indeed, the paper has limitless bile for the “Harvard elite,” but can't spare a bad word for the Italian Blackshirts.) It then adds that Friedrich and those Harvard elites treated “these developments not as anti-democratic but as the fulfillment of genuine democracy” (pp. 2-3). What am I supposed to make of this? Is the author insinuating that the New Deal was somehow anti-democratic? I'm sorry, but that is a lunatic fringe position backed only by the extreme Right. But I think it is only through such insinuation that one can suggest that Friedrich, an opponent of fascism who edited one of the seminal critiques of totalitarianism, had somehow weaker democratic credentials than the fascist-supporting Pareto.

I am utterly baffled by the approach taken by the author in this paper. I hope it is not meant as an attempt to invert history by making the fascists the good guys and the New Dealers the bad guys in the 1930s. Unfortunately, I am unable to come up with another explanation for what is offered here. If that is not what the author intends, I strongly urge him to rewrite the paper from start to finish.