

Review of: "Carl Friedrich's Path to "Totalitarianism""

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I have read the article on Carl Friedrich with interest, for it contains a lot of previously unknown information about him and about the polemics he was carrying on.

The author conducts his argument in such a way that the title phrase: "the road to totalitarianism" is not exposed satisfactorily. It is worth considering whether it would not be better to start by presenting Friedrich's concept of the birth of German totalitarianism from the moment Hitler took power. After all, it was a protracted process, not a one-off event. In order to grasp the essence of this process, it may be necessary to consider separately how it proceeded in the sphere of legislative, executive and judicial powers.

From my point of view, the originality of Friedrich's views on the essence of the totalitarian system is debatable, because there are reasons to claim that he primarily developed the theses previously proclaimed by Hermann Rauschning in his book *Die Revolution des Nihilismus. Kulisse und Wirklichkeit im Dritten Reich*. In this book, a lot of space is devoted to the role of bureaucracy in a specific incapacitation of society. According to Rauschning, this process went smoothly thanks to the state control of all forms of organized activity of individuals, so that the system left no space for individual freedom whatsoever. However, exactly the same remark could be applied to the communist system, which would suggest that the Nazis simply copied solutions that had already proved effective in Soviet Russia.

From the perspective of a country that experienced the dramatic consequences of both forms of totalitarianism, it can be seen that Friedrich was unable to refer his quite pertinent reflections on fascist totalitarianism to the specificity of communist totalitarianism. Nevertheless, one should consider it possible. After Eric Hobsbawm it can be admitted that every totalitarian system "depoliticizes citizens", which guarantees its durability. Referring once again to Rauschning's work, the totalitarian system is in its essence a maximally simplified vision of the world, for which the individual has no alternative, because freedom of thought is taken away from them. Individuals have no room for maneuver, they do not even have anywhere to escape, which is why they are doomed to total indoctrination.

The sources of totalitarianism are related to the people who live in such a social order. Totalitarianism does not fall from the sky, for it is a product of society. Hence I am convinced of the truth of Friedrich's thesis, quoted by the author: "I think it is much more nearly true to say that people want a minimum of freedom, rather than a maximum. Most people are very glad to leave a lot of things to other people". At the same time, Friedrich seemed to have exaggerated the role of state terror, because in reality it was actually "discreet", often unnoticed by the rest of society.

Obedience to the law has been a feature of European societies since at least the time of Socrates, who voluntarily

submitted to the court's verdict, although he did not agree with it. Friedrich himself admits that: "it is important to realize that every society must be 'authoritarian' in some degree, that every society must "it is important to realize that every society must be 'authoritarian' in some degree, that every society must contain 'authoritarian' personalities, every society must exact obedience to authority". No wonder that Polish philosopher Tadeusz Kroński (1907-1958) in his work *Fascism and the European Tradition* claimed that the border between the democratic and totalitarian systems in Europe is fluid, i.e. that any supposedly mature democracy under favorable conditions can transform into despotic totalitarianism.

The totalitarian system persists because it quickly becomes part of everyday human life, as the author aptly captured when quoting Friedrich: "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction [...] and the distinction between true and false (that is, the standards of thought) no longer exist". In my opinion, the essential feature of the totalitarian system is that it does not provide for the possibility of losing power, and thus its peaceful transfer into the hands of the current opposition. The consequence of this state of affairs is the common belief that nothing will change and that you have to function within the system.

There is no doubt, therefore, that any totalitarian system can be a subject of scholarly analysis, as such systems apparently take advantage of the historical experience of the so far unsuccessful attempts of their predecessors. Improving itself, it constitutes a constant threat to democracy. It is good, therefore, that the author has taken up such a topic, although the way of its presentation may raise some objections. On the other hand, when analyzing totalitarian systems, democracy should also improve, and in such a way as not to enable the revival of totalitarianism.

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