

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

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Stephen Turner's article sets an excellent account of the weaknesses of Carl Friedrich's position, which, officially demarcating itself from Vilfredo Pareto's proclaimed elitism, nevertheless stayed away from a genuine democratism, eventually slipping oppositely into a purely statistical notion of representation and representativeness.

Still, Turner's position can also be considered as suffering from ambiguity. First of all, it seems to me, it must be admitted the only partially democratic nature of even the most democratic political regimes. As to that, there is undoubtedly a core of truth in Pareto's other elite theorists' arguments, even if the reasons for the predominance of elites are actually limited to the possibilities of concertation inherently associated with all small groups. Then there is the undeniable "crisis of democracies" corresponding to the uncontrolled growth of the levels of social inequalities, the sharp rise of abstention, disappointment and even cynicism that characterizes the state of public opinion in most countries, including all those we are obliged to characterize as "democracies", whether on the basis of purely formal criteria or by any other means.

Then there is also, finally, the delicate issue of the articulations between political leaders, democratically elected or not, and public functionalism. The US and continental European countries have historically solved this problem in very different, if not opposite ways. In continental Europe functionalism, in particular in accordance with the Hegelian tradition, but by no means only it, civil servants ("Beamte") are the representative par excellence of universality and legality, as opposed to the particularism and arbitrariness of the political decision-makers. The constitution of powerful state machines antedates here the democratizing processes, and so these maintained that weight of the state machine, even reinforcing it, on the condition that the principle of equal opportunities intrinsic to the ideal-type of organization that Max Weber has designated as "bureaucracy" is consecrated and underlined. The bureaucratic state machine corresponds here to legal-rational authority, while the sphere of politics is left as a ground for the exercise of charisma, and so democracies almost inevitably tend towards a plebiscite model... unless party machines are also caught in by trend, thus becoming themselves increasingly bureaucratic.

In the USA, by contrast, the state machine is by tradition comparatively weak, and the exercise of state functions is much more strongly politicized, even immediately politicized. The US is, for example, traditionally the country of the so-called "spoils system", and also of lynchings, and the truth is that, even after several centuries elapsed, it remains, for example, a country with a much less professionalized judiciary and much more dependent on political life than its European counterpart (a much more closed one, undoubtedly, but also much more emphatically meritocratic): think, for example, about the fact that the district attorney is a position dependent on elections, or think of the administration of justice by jury courts. These facts are, moreover, enshrined in the US through constitutional provisions, thus they become almost

unalterable.

When thinking of the need to democratize its political life, American opinion tends in an almost atavistic way to think in terms of limiting the power of anything that is unelected functionalism, normally posited to be (or at least to tend to be) sinisterly undemocratic, or even openly undemocratic: the quintessentially infamous “deep state”. The truth, however, is that the limitations on the democratic character of political life in the US seem to come much more from its excessive dependence on so-called “civil society”, not its independence from that. Exercised in conditions of marked inequality of social conditions and taking into account the complex “checks and balances” set by the Constitution to the US, electoral practices tend much more easily to reinforce pre-existing inequalities than to oppose or challenge them.

It is (at least in part) why the US, with its rich political life with elections on multiple and diverse levels, continues to have a more unequal society than most European ones, and also an increasingly unequal society. Think, for example, of the nature of political life in both branches of the single bipartite of its political landscape, with its almost non-existent ideological-programmatic definition, the irrelevance of public funding in the face of open private funding, the legality and open nature of lobbying practices (the crude “quid pro quo” of favors, instead of public virtue, or even mere honesty), the enormous dependence on the utterly privatized mass media, all of which is reinforced by the archaic “first-past-the-post” electoral system, and we have defined an environment that is an excellent ground for the exercise of political entrepreneurship, but certainly not for the effectiveness of democracy in what it is supposed to include regarding political capabilities for the redistribution of income and/or wealth within the social fabric.

Regarding that, the problems seem to result much more from the factual plutocracy (although electorally confirmed, or rather precisely because of that) than from the supposed excessive power of any unelected political officials. In fact, the latter, in all that they represent the influence of the ideas of traditional Chinese Confucian mandarinism, exercised through the best minds of the Europe of Enlightenment and via these producing European “bureaucracies”, seem to configure an alternative for the administration of the destinies of the polities who, while relying less on electoral processes, or even on the cultural representativeness of political leaders with the “common man”, à la Friedrich, allow us to think of political devices (differently from what occurs in the USA, and even oppositely that) capable to halt and revert the unstoppable growth of inequalities, disbelief, and cynicism.