

ON THE FUTURE ASCENT OF A CAESAR

October 13, 2021

I recently wrote about what might happen after an American Caesar, a radical reconstructor of our polity, arose. And in these days of American humiliation and accelerating decay, a Caesar is viewed by many, if in quiet tones, as a kind of solution. But is Caesar, Michael Anton's Red Caesar, merely a coping mechanism for the Right, a fantasy meant to replace the dead hope of a restored American founding? Is Caesar an encouragement to eschatological passivity, our equivalent of the Twelver Shia hidden imam, who when everything is at its worst will arrive to set the world aright, without any action needed by us? No, and today I will tell you why.

This is not to say that Caesar is necessarily inevitable, or if he is inevitable, imminent. Nor can our future be precisely derived from studying the past—what happened in the time of Julius Caesar, or at other historical moments, shows us tendencies, not prophecies. We will not closely examine the career of the original Caesar, for that produces tunnel vision. To be sure human nature does not change, and reality will always reimpose itself, so we can learn much from broadly studying how these truths have made themselves known to past generations. Yet societies are different, one from the other, and the wholly new aspects of modern technology, in particular, mean that the past can only be a rough guide to our future.

As a threshold matter, we should sharply distinguish the rise of a Caesar from a coup d'état. The latter, as Edward Luttwak outlined decades ago, is merely the transfer of the existing structures of power to new leadership, often with little violence. The former is the creation of wholly-new structures of power, along with the substantial transformation of surviving structures of power, often following a great deal of precursor violence, and itself frequently involving much violence. A coup may be led by a powerful, charismatic individual, usually a military man and certainly with military support, but as with Carl Schmitt's vision of commissary dictatorship, his goal is to have the nation recognize the need for his rise to save the nation and its constitution, its governing structures. A true Caesar, however, is a sovereign dictator,

who channels the constituent power of the nation to create something that did not exist before, with a new constitution. He begins the new.

The assumption I make here is that Caesar, whatever may be his drawbacks, is a solution for our current problems—a Gordian Knot solution, to be sure, but still a solution. Today I will mostly ignore three other possible solutions—renewal, civil war, and coup. Renewal, the restoration of the American Founding within the current system, is a chimera; given the massive forces arrayed against the principles that founded America, renewal could never happen except through extreme violence, and that violence itself would ensure that an attempted renewal would not renew, but rather create something entirely new. A civil war not involving a coup or a Caesar is certainly possible, even likely, and it might result in solving our problems, by renewal or otherwise, but it is not our topic today, except inasmuch as the rise of Caesar may be the cause or result of such a war. A coup would not solve any of our problems, because our national government (and all other national structures) is utterly Left-ruled, corrupt, and in denial of reality. Simply changing the men at the top would have no effect at all on our current Cthulhu State's unhinged and massively destructive malice. (If you believe that our society is on the correct path, more or less, or if you believe history has an arrow and that it points Left, you will find nothing here of interest.) Most likely, therefore, the fastest, cleanest, least destructive, and most effective path to real necessary change in the lands currently known as the United States is Caesar.

Because Caesarism is in the air, many mentions of the possibility float around our chattering classes. Most of these mentions are not in fact discussions of Caesar, but lurid glimpses into the mind of the Left and their hangers-on and fellow-travelers. Lately the mention of Caesar in the regime press is an excuse to spew fear-soaked bile about the (fantastic and excellent) Electoral Justice Protest of January 6, 2021, with the goal of present-day political advantage though weaponizing the federal government against normal Americans. All this babbling is boring and not relevant to our discussion, which is a purely practical exploration.

The rise to Caesar is necessarily an opportunistic one, where he takes advantage of, or is forced to take advantage of, the opportunity to overthrow a governing regime to establish personal rule. Caesar

cannot force the circumstances necessary for his success. Moreover, successful Caesars are, if you think about it, surprisingly rare. In the West, the standard candles of Caesarism are Julius Caesar himself and Napoleon Bonaparte. I do not count as Caesars somewhat similar heroes who saved their country from internal threats, such as Francisco Franco and António Salazar; they did not create something new, rather they beat down the evils of the Left, and that only temporarily. They were agents of (unfortunately) transient renewal in nations that had not yet reached their end (though they are getting close). They were not wholesale reconstructors.

Probably the closest thing to a modern Caesar is Lenin—not an example that springs to mind for most, but one that is mostly accurate, at least as I have defined Caesar. And to Lenin can perhaps be added several other Communist killers, from Mao to Fidel Castro. Not all successful Communist killers, however—merely leading a revolution does not make one a Caesar; a man must of himself remake the society in his own image. Thus, the French Revolution, despite the very great changes in governance it wrought, had no Caesar. Nor is one a Caesar if one is a bought and owned client of others, which makes most Communist dictators, and all those in Europe, not Caesars (and might also disqualify Castro, but we need not settle that today).

One might claim that this is too narrow a lens—that, for example, the French Revolution suggests that a nation can be remade by a group, a type of oligarchy, obviating the need for an individual, a Caesar. Perhaps, but this seems as if it can only be true if the oligarchy is bound by a revolutionary Left ideology to a degree allowing its members to act in unison, even though normally a change in the oligarchy is only a coup. (The American Revolution lacked such a binding ideology, even if it had Left lines of thought among some of its leaders, and was therefore less than a wholesale remaking of political structures, but still more than a coup. The lines are not always clear, but that does not mean the lines do not exist.) Ideology as a substitute for personal rule is not an option for the post-Enlightenment Right, which because it is based in reality has never had ideology that can of itself tightly bind a ruling group. (And as I have discussed elsewhere, Red Caesar is very unlikely to be an ideologue.) Adolf Hitler's rise might be adduced as a counterexample, to the extent National Socialism may be considered a Right

ideology, but his rise was also much more in the nature of a coup than of Caesarism.

Despite the claims of some to the contrary, there has never been any type of American Caesar. Neither Franklin Roosevelt nor Abraham Lincoln, despite strong use of executive power, was a Caesar. Their extensive modifications of the American constitutional system were organic developments based on political processes, following on then-irresistible currents in the world at large, not ruptures in the system.

Finally, we should also remember that what follows Caesar, either a monarchy or other individual coming after him, is not Caesarism. What distinguishes Caesar is his rise from chaos and his taking advantage of that chaos to make great changes. True, his successors may make more changes, and refine the ones he made, as did Augustus. But successors are downstream, in time and action, of Caesar, the man.

On to the main event. Recently, in May of this year, Michael Anton lent the intellectual heft of the Claremont Institute to a serious discussion of Caesarism, in a discussion with Curtis Yarvin (and Anton had earlier discussed the same topic with Yarvin on the Jack Murphy Live podcast). Now, as most know, although I regard Yarvin as a useful and interesting figure on the Right, I am skeptical of much of Yarvin's work product, and his performance in these discussions did nothing to change my mind. (Of course, far more people listen to Yarvin than me, so perhaps this is mere sour grapes.) While he offers some interesting, even valuable, thought experiments, his history is often bad, or at best a little knowledge is very often used to draw wrong conclusions, usually declaimed vociferously and with absolute certainty while talking over his interlocutor. For example, Yarvin constantly claims that the Soviet Union "fell in favor of the West," in a turn to "Western competence," and subscribes to the crucial importance of blue jeans in the process. This is completely false, as is basically everything else Yarvin says about the fall of Soviet-bloc Communism. In short, he has an essentially gnostic approach to history, where the hidden knowledge he purports to reveal is invisible because it is not knowledge.

What is more, I disagree profoundly with his philosophical core, which is that men should be used as instruments. Yarvin, a materialist and atheist, seems to regard most of mankind as NPCs; aside from its inaccuracy, this approach can never lead to societal flourishing. As a

result of this lack in his thinking, Yarvin simply does not grasp virtue politics. He thinks he's a Machiavellian, but ignores that a pure focus on power doesn't work without some virtue in both the people and the ruling classes. He does not understand that the problem of the West is the Enlightenment, and treats it as a surprise that Communists throughout the twentieth century had a lot in common with the West's rulers; he should read some Ryszard Legutko. But enough of this inside baseball, for it is Caesar we're talking about today, not Yarvin, and my point is that Anton's and Yarvin's discussion illuminated the topic, and thereby inspired some of my thought that follows.

One main objection to the viability of Caesarism revolves around the claim that our current regime is, despite appearances, in fact very strong and able to continue indefinitely in total control of the lives of the people. It is noted, accurately, that the Left occupies all positions of power in our society, and appears to control a form of panopticon, only growing in intrusive power. Therefore, the claim runs, Caesar could not possibly gain any traction—any potential Caesar will be identified and quickly either erased or co-opted. In short, this is a claim that the regime, despite appearances, universally observed, of sclerosis, incompetence, and administrative decline, is strong, and those appearances are just that, appearances.

No serious person can maintain this position. Not even Yarvin actually maintains this position, although he feints often in that direction, no doubt thinking it makes him daringly contrarian, when it mostly just makes him look like a man lost in a forest. When pressed, essentially all on the Right will admit that the regime is in fact fragile—but then some deny that the fragility shown by what are advanced symptoms, not mere appearances, will or can lead to any kind of regime collapse. They will ask rhetorically what such a collapse would look like, using the inherent vagueness of specific factual predictions about the future to implicitly make the logically unconnected claim that collapse is not possible, and therefore that something resembling the status quo is likely to continue indefinitely.

This is a failure both of historical memory and of imagination. In point of fact, anyone who admits that the regime is fragile is necessarily admitting that it is likely to shatter. That a fragile regime has not yet shattered proves nothing, because in all relationships, political

and personal, inertia carries the present situation forward as long as external and internal conditions maintain the status quo in equilibrium. It is only when a crisis arrives that failure becomes a possibility; by definition something that is fragile will fail in a crisis. And a crisis, also by definition, cannot be predicted in advance—but once it arrives, in a type of phase change, it seems as if nothing else was possible, and without a doubt, now everything is permanently different. The days of status quo then seem like a dream from long ago. The right man, at the right moment, changes everything—and that we cannot precisely discern the details is irrelevant.

Why, and in what precise manner and along which axes, our regime is fragile is a larger topic for another day. There is no unitary cause—some of it is mere complexity; much of it is ideology, of the Enlightenment and of the modern Left specifically, which, being anti-reality, is inherently incompetent; some of it is terminal grafting. Ultimately, all causes feed into regime incompetence, and as I say, mere incompetence is itself fragility, because it cannot survive a crisis. It is not the case that pointing this out is a Whig approach to history, or offering as a solution a *deus ex machina*. Those claims are obtuse, a form of invincible ignorance masquerading as sophistication. They ignore that history is an accurate predictor, of some events if not of their timing. We can be sure, given its fragility, this regime will disappear, and that right soon—not measured in centuries, or even decades, though perhaps in a small number of half-decades. What appear to be powers, such as the panopticon, are exaggerated in scope and importance, and anyway require competent, dedicated government servants to operate, which are in vanishingly short supply, and moreover can be turned back against the regime. The crown will be in the street; this much is sure, because that is the inevitable end of a fragile regime, and there is no way back.

Some argue that the only regimes that collapse are those where the ruling class does not believe in its own ideology. There is some truth in this, but the American ruling class does not, as a whole, actually believe in any ideology. Elements of it do—but for the most part, the truly ideological, those actually dedicated to the Left, are not the ruling class, but exist in symbiotic relationship with the ruling class, in order to jointly control and rob the productive classes of America. When there's a new fashion in town, much of the ruling class will change

their political tune—especially when given the correct incentives, and especially when those who don't become unpleasant examples.

So, in answer to the question what a regime collapse could look like, and how as a result the rise of Caesar could occur, let's consider what will be the necessary characteristics of any future happening. It is necessary to appreciate that we need not posit any type of conspiracy, and that in fact most conspiracies by elites to create regime change are merely retconned histories of regime change that begin despite, not because of, those conspiracies. You only need four ingredients for the viable possibility of a successful Caesar. First, societal instability that creates chaos, leading to an undesirable situation for many people. Most commonly this is the inability to feed one's children; it can also be oppression of some kind that leads to a spiral of violence, or a catastrophic regime failure such as accidentally forcing some kind of poison on the population through greed and incompetence (the trigger mechanism in John Michael Greer's future history in *Retrotopia*, and today one that seems more imaginable than it did eighteen months ago). (I note in passing that anarchy is not a possible outcome to chaos. This will never happen; anarchy is unnatural and has never existed to any relevant degree in any Western society.) Second, the desire of a significant number of ordinary people to improve their situation. Third, a belief of those people that regime change will improve their situation. Fourth, the emergence of a ruthless, more-or-less sociopathic, leader who desires to take personal advantage of this situation. As José Ortega y Gasset famously said, force follows public opinion, and once Caesar gets going, he will experience a preference cascade in his favor, among all levels of society. QED.

When pondering how Caesar could come to power, we have to understand that Gordian Knot solutions work—in fact, in most political situations, they are the only solutions that work; all others are playacting. Thus, for example, some point to the massive federal bureaucracy that orbits and milks the federal government, as if it were some immovable object that would defeat any rising Caesar, simply by staring at him in their millions with their gimlet eyes encased in fat, from the windows of their Class A office space. Certainly, these are among the people least likely to feel the need to improve their situation, since in any crisis they will make sure they suffer last, and they will not eagerly follow the new order. No doubt Caesar will require the services of some of the federal

bureaucracy, though only a small part, and the rest will have to find different jobs, that are actually productive of social value. A combination of carefully-applied force to shut down most of the bureaucracy, permanently, simply by locking their doors, erasing their computer systems, and stopping their paychecks, along with the opportunity being offered to change one's views and join the new regime for those parts of the bureaucracy whose continuation is desirable, should do it. The legions of parasites we have today will get with the new program, or they will starve. Nothing more is necessary; just some vigorous incentives and, most crucially, the will to follow through.

It is not the case that the people, the masses, are too apathetic to sign on to the rise of Caesar, at least given these quite simple preconditions. Some argue that consumerism and Netflix will prevent any mass support for Caesar. This is the old error of predicting the continuation of the thing that is happening. It is merely that at this moment the masses, whatever their class or social position, who oppose the regime see no way at present that they can improve their situation by action, and for most of them, no truly desperate need to do so. But they will, no matter how rich and lazy most of us feel now (and far fewer feel rich and lazy than the regime media would have us think). If we focus on those who complain online at present, and wonder why they are not Doing Something, and conclude from that that nothing can or will be done, we are making a basic category error, because those who complain online, or who have many Twitter followers, are not those who will decide the viability of Caesar.

Another frequent objection is that Caesar must have military capacity in order to resist extermination by the regime, and to replace the regime, yet, supposedly, he cannot obtain this, because the military is commanded and dominated by the Left. Or, put another way, where are the future Caesar's legions? It is doubtless true that Caesar must have military capacity, but this is in fact unlikely to be a problem. No doubt many American officers are indistinguishable from the obese, loathsome Mark Milley, and this problem likely extends both into mid-level officers and into the ranks themselves. Nonetheless, I think it clear both that many military men would hew to Caesar, either simply to advance themselves, seeing the main chance, or because of their opposition to the Left. Moreover, as others have pointed out, even without defections,

the military has surprisingly few soldiers who can actually fight, and in the country as a whole, there are far more men with military experience who could be quickly organized and given light weapons. No, Caesar will have no problem accumulating the necessary military force, especially because tanks and F-16s will not be relevant to any significant degree. True, given the technological abilities of the regime, a rising Caesar would be very susceptible to assassination, and as seen by the terrorist behavior our regime already engages in, they would certainly not hesitate to exercise this option. This last is a variant on the argument that the regime is prepared for the possibility of Caesar, as the most notable possible threat to the regime's survival, and will therefore take all necessary steps to preemptively defeat any possible Caesar. True again, up to a point—but then, such steps tend to precipitate the very thing they aim to prevent, as ambitious men see that their only option is to turn against the regime that has identified them as a threat. For every action, a reaction, and this will carry Caesar, some Caesar, through the fire.

Yes, for Caesar to rise, it will require a daring man, and a lucky man. Or men, because not every Caesar is successful, even against a fragile regime. But throughout history, in times of turmoil, such men are never in short supply, and the greater the turmoil, the more likely Caesar will emerge. Maybe our age, wealth, and diminishing testosterone make this less true now. Still, I doubt it. We have seen recently a possible small glimpse of the future in the actions of an obscure Marine Lieutenant Colonel, one Stuart Scheller, whose short video attacking the incompetence that has so humiliated America in Afghanistan resulted in his court martial, and more importantly the entire hysterical regime coming down on him, and only him, not those responsible for our national humiliation. Yet Scheller's ability to reach the masses proves that the technology of communication cannot be controlled, at least not by our regime, and were his message to be one not only of complaint, but one tailored to convince the masses that their situation could be improved by following him, such a man could easily, overnight, become a force to reckon with.

Some argue that Caesar must appeal to at least some elements of the ruling class, yet given that our ruling class is so unprecedentedly rotten, that there is no structural path to Caesar's rise purely on the will of the masses. This ignores that fashions are easy to change, and the

most competent, and least ideological, of the ruling class, including those segments who have forced to stay silent in recent decades, will quickly see which way the wind is blowing and which way opportunity lies. (This famously happened under Napoleon.) A segment, the most competent segment, of the ruling class will quickly detach itself, shaking its dust from their sandals and defecating on the rainbow flags forced on them by the myrmidons of globohomo, as they exit stage right to join Caesar's entourage. The rest of the ruling class will be wholly stripped of assets and power, exiled or rusticated (if they are lucky), and lustrated (if they are allowed to remain in the country).

Yet another objection is that we have not been adequately prepared as a society, in the way that Rome was by Marius and Sulla, or France was by the Revolution and the chaos and wars following. Rome was exhausted from a century of actual civil war, after all, while we are only exhausted by the stupidity of our ruling classes and the ennui that comes with modernity. Perhaps. But technology, both in the speed of communications it enables and in the interconnectedness it creates, which means undreamed-of complexity but also therefore undreamed-of fragility, is likely to foreshorten the time of troubles that necessarily precedes a Caesar. Moreover, the ground is a lot closer to us than it was in Rome, and it will come up fast as we fall into chaos. In ancient times, the average person was relatively little discombobulated by the civil wars—or rather he likely was to some extent, on some occasions, but did not worry about getting enough to eat, and he got advance warning when the troubles were about to roll over him. A total collapse of our society is much easier to envision than was a total collapse of Roman society. Our Caesar will be different in the details, therefore, but not in kind.

How Caesar might come to power is not preordained. Caesar and Napoleon swept to power, riding the tide of destiny. Others, Lenin and Mao, took a more circuitous path, more dependent on outside circumstance and support, tied ultimately to a grinding civil war. We will likely see. And what then? Well, that's not really my concern, but we can be sure Caesar isn't likely to restore America to a place of global preeminence. Those days are gone. More likely he will only rule over a part of what is now America. I, of course, want him to remake America along Foundationalist lines; that's also not very likely, but certainly some elements of Foundationalism will be implemented, because Caesar will

return, of necessity, to reality. He'll restore the politics of virtue; he will eliminate the feminization of our society and government; perhaps he will take us to Space, binding us together in a common goal. Maybe, with dramatic enough changes, he can found a new nation that will accomplish great things. We cannot know the future, but because we know the past, we can be sure that a new Caesar is a wholly plausible future for us.