

'CAESARISM' IN THE POLITICS AND SOCIOLOGY

OF MAX WEBER

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to describe the meanings, chart the development and evaluate the cogency of 'Caesarism', with particular reference to that concept's place and significance in the thought of Max Weber. It begins (Chapter 2) by investigating the genesis and historical trajectory of the term, concentrating on French and German usage between the period 1850-1880. My concern here is to determine the social causes of the word's emergence, the social problems and issues that it articulated and the reasons that account for its decline as a vernacular expression among the educated political public. With the term's original intellectual milieu established the next task is to proceed (Chapters 3 and 4) to the centrepiece of this study, an exposition and critique of Caesarism as both word and concept in Weber's political and sociological writings. Four primary contexts in which Weber employed 'Caesarism' are discussed: Bismarck's governance; 'plebiscitary leadership' in modern liberal-democratic states; the military 'dictatorships' of the likes of Cromwell and Napoleon; and the constitutional position of the Weimar Reich President. In the process of the discussion, 'Caesarism's' relationship to the more famous 'charisma' is explored. Following on from this I assess the view of the 'irrational masses' that underlies Weber's theory of leadership, and seek to demonstrate that view's empirical implausibility and logical incoherence while, at the same time, defending Weber from the charge of 'irrationalism' and defending also the value of the notion of 'irrationality' itself. Finally (Chapter 5) surveys a selection of recent attempts to apply the concept of 'Caesarism' to specific institutions, epochs and types of leadership. Though locating problems with these attempts, my suggestion is that 'Caesarism' can indeed do some sociological work for us, provided that our ambitions for the concept are modest and our approach historically informed.



## CONTENTS

### Page No.

Acknowledgements

i

Abbreviations

iv

Chapter 1      Introduction

1

1.1      Introductory: scope of the thesis

1

1.2      Why study 'Caesarism'?

6

Chapter 2      Accounting for 'Caesarism', 1850-1880

11

2.1      Introduction

11

2.2      Origins

12

2.2.1    Romieu: Age of Caesarism, Age of Force

15

2.2.2    The making of a fashion: aspects of  
          'Caesarism' after Romieu

25

2.3      Explanations

29

2.3.1    Caesar, Napoleon and 'the great parallel'

31

2.3.2    Caesarism and illegitimacy

41

2.3.3    Caesarism and the rise of 'the masses'

51

2.4      Conclusion

65

Chapter 3      'Caesarism' in the Politics and Sociology of  
                    Max Weber

70

3.1      Introduction

70

3.2      Weber as a student of antiquity

73

3.3      The 'Caesarism' of Bismarck

81

3.4      Democracy, Parliament and modern Caesarism

101

3.4.1    Excursus on Albert Schäffle and Wilhelm  
          Roscher

122

3.4.2    (B), (C) and (D) of the definition  
          continued

130

3.4.3    (E): The definition concluded

142

3.5      Caesarism and the military dimension

154

3.6      Charisma and Caesarism revisited: their  
          systematic relationship, and a methodological  
          problem considered

159

3.7      The Reich President

181

3.8      Conclusion

198

Chapter 4      Of Caesarist Leadership and the 'Irrationality'  
                    of the Masses

202

4.1      Introduction

202

4.2      The 'irrationality' of the masses

203

4.3      Towards an historical and logical critique of  
          Weber's assumptions concerning the irrational  
          masses

216

4.4      Was Weber an 'irrationalist'?

247



|                  |   |     |
|------------------|---|-----|
| 4.5              | Importance of the concept of irrationality                                    | 256 |
| 4.5.1            | Against hubris: irrationality and the human condition                         | 257 |
| 4.5.2            | Irrationality as polemic; irrationality and social science                    | 262 |
| 4.6              | Conclusion  | 272 |
| <u>Chapter 5</u> | 'Caesarism' after Max Weber, and a working concept proposed                   | 273 |
| 5.1              | Introduction  | 273 |
| 5.2              | Caesarism and 'Oriental Despotism'  | 274 |
| 5.3              | Of 'Simple', 'Totalitarian' and 'Caesaristic' Dictatorships                   | 276 |
| 5.4              | Crisis, Compromise and Coalition: Caesarism as an Equilibrium of Class Forces | 285 |
| 5.5              | Culture, Civilisation and Caesarism: the Riencourt thesis                     | 309 |
| 5.6              | Caesarism as a form of 'populism'   | 318 |
| 5.6.1            | Canovan and Laclau on 'populism'  | 319 |
| 5.6.2            | An alternative concept of Caesarism proposed                                  | 330 |
| 5.7              | Conclusion  | 379 |
| <u>Chapter 6</u> | General Conclusions   | 381 |
| Appendix         | 'Bonapartism' in the Thought of Karl Marx                                     | 385 |
| Bibliography     |   | 415 |



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and Madame Agar's diligence on Romieu's essay was especially useful to me. For the Italian texts I was completely dependent upon the skills of Marina Orsini, while for those in German I required extensive aid from a host of teachers, friends and colleagues including Renata Becker, Martine Bruder, Marianne Howarth, Elizabeth Schick, but particularly Gordon Wells without whose invaluable, oft-requested assistance I should have often been left quite helpless.

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At the heart of a sociological thesis lies a paradox that will be familiar to all who have attempted to write one. While the subject matter of one's work is social relations, social categories, social practices, the domain of the interpersonal, the activity actually demanded by the research process itself normally requires long stretches of isolation, introspection, peace and quiet, asocial if not often plain anti-social behaviour. A corollary



of this skewed relationship between what is being studied and how one is compelled to study was in my case some very poor conduct on occasions, and for this reason my most keenly felt obligation is to the two people who lived constantly with the consequences of this work: my wife Hilary (who also proof-read the entire manuscript) and my mother Anne. The standards of tolerance and understanding they have displayed over the years offer the conclusive proof of altruism in the human species. My thesis is dedicated to them, and to my father, who did not live to see the project's completion.



Abbreviations

(Full details of the editions used will be found in the main text and in the bibliography).

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| WG                | Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft  |
| ES                | Economy and Society  |
| GPS               | Gesammelte Politische Schriften                                    |
| FMW               | From Max Weber   |
| GAW               | Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre                         |
| Methodology       | Methodology of the Social Sciences                                 |
| Roscher and Knies | Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems<br>of Historical Economics |
| GARS              | Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie                        |
| Protestant Ethic  | The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism                  |
| GASS              | Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und<br>Sozialpolitik            |
| GASW              | Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial- und Wirtschafts-<br>geschichte     |



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Introductory: scope of the thesis

This thesis examines the formation, meaning and applicability of a concept which once enjoyed wide dissemination in its heyday - roughly 1850 to 1920 - among European academics, politicians, propagandists, journalists and the broader educated public, but which today finds only fringe employment in the hands of specialist scholars. The concept in question, Caesarism, is studied in the pages that follow from three distinct, though related, standpoints.

I am concerned to begin with in what amounts to an attempt at historical retrieval and reconstruction, my interest being to pose and answer the following sorts of questions. When was the term Caesarism first coined and by whom? What did the word mean originally, both to the person conventionally associated with its first detailed elaboration and to those who recognised in it something of relevance to their contemporary situation? Why, exactly, did the term so rapidly become popular and why did it then fade away from that plurality of discourses which we are accustomed to abbreviate for simplicity's sake in the phrase 'the national culture'? If, as an acknowledged master of the social location of ideas remarks, concepts 'grow and change with the group whose expression they are', if they 'live as long as (a) crystallization of past experiences and situations retains an existential value ... that is, as long as succeeding generations can hear their own experiences in the meaning of the words', and 'die when the functions and experiences in the actual life of society cease to be bound up with them',<sup>1</sup> then clearly it is necessary to explain what Caesarism meant to those who thought in terms of it, what social forces sustained the idea in the culture of the day, and what accounts for its

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1. N. Elias, The History of Manners (The Civilizing Process, Vol. 1) (1978, orig. 1939) transl. E. Jephcott, 6-7; cf 117 on speech as 'human relations turned into sound'.  
(Place of publication England unless otherwise stated).



demise. In this part of the thesis, then, which comprises Chapter 2, 'Caesarism' is placed in its nineteenth-century context and studied historically, with special reference to the countries in which the term seems to have been employed with the greatest frequency and urgency: France and Germany.

The second and indeed central task of the thesis is to establish the meanings of Caesarism in the sociological and political thought of Max Weber. The emphasis of Chapters 3 and 4 is accordingly theoretical in character, and there the attempt is made to delineate as precisely as possible the conceptual and lexical structure of Weber's perspective on the limits and possibilities of 'mass' politics. Essentially one is concerned in these chapters to understand and appraise the concept of Caesarism's position in Weber's theory of modern, western, liberal-democracy. My method is to engage in a close reading of Weber's texts which takes seriously the observation of Geoffrey de Ste. Croix that 'A writer's attitude will often emerge clearly from the way he uses political and social terminology'.<sup>2</sup> In the process we shall see, for instance, that Caesarism is no unitary idea but to the contrary consists of four dimensions; that in contrast to those authors like Romieu, Roscher and Schäffle for whom it can accurately be said that 'Caesarism was the outcome of a degenerate democracy',<sup>3</sup> Weber envisaged it as one of modern democracy's elemental and organic features; and that the notion rests on a perception of the 'masses', the pedestal of the Caesarist ruler, as quite literally 'irrational' - which to all intents and purposes means incapable of participating in the governance of a polity in anything more than a subordinate, acclamatory role. (The bulk of my critique of Weber's theory of Caesarism is aimed against this claim that the masses are 'irrational',

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2. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, The Origins of the Peloponnesian War (New York: 1972), 358.

3. Z. Yavetz, Julius Caesar and his Public Image (1983), 18.



though I argue that Weber was not an irrationalist, and suggest why the idea of irrationality remains, in spite of the abuses it has endured, a notion worthy of our respect).

Finally, in Chapter 5, the focus shifts away from the preoccupations of the nineteenth century and away, also, from Max Weber to an assessment of a selection of more modern attempts to apply 'Caesarism' sociologically. Interest here turns on the empirical utility of the idea, on the purchase it might conceivably have for the sociologist or political scientist who wants to work with it. To this end, a variety of attempts to 'operationalise' the concept are considered with particular attention paid to Marxist applications (An appendix examines the extent to which the idea of 'Bonapartism' in Marxian theory diverges from the Weberian conceptualisation of Caesarism.) To anticipate I maintain that for all the problems the notion gives rise to, Caesarism is not a redundant category. It can be illuminating, provided, one hastens to add, that we are clear about what Julius Caesar's regime historically represented - a populist, autocratic, military and syncretic mode of rule - and as long as we do not exaggerate the concept's sphere of relevance.

I am presently going to defend the pertinence of a thesis devoted to Caesarism both because it is customary to justify one's topic and because it would be presumptuous to proceed as if my enterprise had self-evident value. But before I do that I feel constrained to enter a couple of caveats on the undertaking that the reader is about to ponder and assess. The first is this. Most people would probably agree that there is no such thing, strictly speaking, as a 'definitive' study of an author's work or even one aspect of it. It is a commonplace that we all have to reconcile ourselves to research which is necessarily partial because no study can be exhaustive and no perspective truly olympian. In a sense, of course, this situation is highly fortunate for the Ph.D. candidate because it means that even in relation to a man so voluminously written about as Max Weber there may still be something of interest



to say about him! But it also means that one's ambitions must not be inflated. Let me say at the outset of this thesis, then, that it is not my ambition in what follows to suggest that Caesarism is in some way the 'central' concept of Weber's political sociology, a spatial metaphor which, though fashionable, seems to me disastrous as applied to theory;<sup>4</sup> I claim only that Caesarism is an important and understudied idea from which we can learn something of

4. Competition to find Weber's central concept (not just in his political sociology but, even more grandiosely, tout court) has been fierce and a variety of pretenders have been thrust on the sociological public. From these accounts Weber is so centripetal he is implosive. For a sample which confines itself to sources available in English see F.H. Tenbruck, 'The problem of thematic unity in the work of Max Weber', (transl. M.S. Whimster), British Journal of Sociology, 31, 3 (1980), 316-51, esp. 343-4 (the issue of rationalisation is 'the vital centre of Weber's thinking'); W. Hennis, 'Max Weber's "Central Question"' (transl. K. Tribe), Economy and Society, 12, 2 (1983), 135-80, esp. 157 (Weber's '"central" interest was the specificity of modern Menschentum'); G.H. Mueller, 'Socialism and Capitalism in the work of Max Weber', British Journal of Sociology, 33, 2 (1982), 151-71 (the 'polar opposites' of capitalism and socialism are 'the sole [sic] centre of Weber's thought', 165); L.A. Scaff, 'Weber before Weberian sociology', British Journal of Sociology, 35, 2 (1984), 190-215. (Scaff asks rhetorically: 'Is there a central concept, nodal point or idea ... around which Weber's thought develops', 199, and concludes that there is, that of 'Arbeitsverfassung, the key theoretical term in Weber's major writings from 1892 to 1894', 200. It should be noted that, according to Scaff, 'The later texts are a reflection of the formative ideas', 193); more distantly, W. Stark, 'Max Weber and the heterogony of purposes', Social Research, 34 (1967), 249-64 (to Stark, 'Weber's thought is thoroughly consistent. It is really and truly dominated by one pattern, the heterogony of purposes understood in a negative sense. Weber's key to the interpretation of world history is this pattern and nothing else', 261, emphasis in original).

It goes without saying that many of the individual points made by these authors are valuable, thought-provoking, and stand on their own merit; it is just that the extravagant dress in which they are clothed vitiates, rather than adds to, their plausibility.

The spatial metaphor is 'disastrous' because theories are composed of relations between concepts, not structured as centre is to periphery; and because the notion of a central concept implies an unhistorical and over-integrated view of a person's life and work. In short, the metaphor reproduces the 'mythology of coherence', so ably criticised by Quentin Skinner in his 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas', History and Theory, 8, Part I (1969), 5-53, at 16-22.



significance about a complex and subtle thinker who will for a long time to come continue to tax our understanding, challenge our prejudices and test our intellectual honesty.

My second qualification concerns the project's remit. Of Julius Caesar, the person and politician, this thesis has little directly to say. Certainly his deeds do receive some consideration and analysis when, in the penultimate Chapter, the attempt is made to determine what his rule might have involved in its own time, the twilight years of the Republic - a task necessary to accomplish if we are going to stand any chance at all of sociologically estimating the concept of Caesarism's authentic empirical referent (the term itself was unknown to the ancient world). Essentially, however, Caesar himself is not the prime focus of this research; neither is the pre-nineteenth century iconography of Caesar the man a paramount concern of mine, nor even its nineteenth century manifestations, for that matter.<sup>5</sup> Rather by far the greatest part of my interest is directed towards the idea of Caesarism - an idea, incidentally, that had only the most tenuous links with the flesh-and-blood figure modern scholarship recognises as Rome's greatest popularis - as it emerged in the third quarter of the last century, as it thereafter evolved and was interpreted by Max Weber; and as it exists today. Representations of Caesar the person throughout the ages are interesting in their own right, a fertile field of images begging to be examined systematically. But my study has a different focus. For if a fascination with Caesar in Western culture is by no means peculiar to the previous century, the concept of Caesarism did first make its appearance then; and it is that concept, especially as it found expression in the thought of Max Weber, which it is the job of this particular thesis to explore.

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5. The classic texts remain F. Gundolf's Caesar: Geschichte seines Ruhms (Berlin: 1924), together with his Caesar im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert (Berlin: 1926). For a very detailed analysis of Caesar's image at one moment of its career see W. Blissett, 'Lucan's Caesar and the Elizabethan Villain', in Studies in Philology, 53 (1956), 553-75, and the same author's companion article 'Caesar and Satan', in the Journal of the History of Ideas, 18, (1957), 221-32.



## 1.2 Why study 'Caesarism'?

The first reason why arguably it is profitable to devote a thesis to the study of Caesarism has already been hinted at: the concept affords us with some strategic insights into the wider structure of Weber's theory of modern democracy and 'mass' politics. Curiously, though Weber often used the word Caesarism, particularly in his political writings - indeed, the foremost British authority on the latter has recently described the term as 'integral to (Weber's) account of democratic politics'<sup>6</sup> - Caesarism has to the best of my knowledge never up till now received a sustained and systematic treatment in any language with which I am acquainted. The result is a lacuna in Weberian scholarship which this thesis in part seeks to fill.

There is a second, related, reason why the analysis of Caesarism may repay investigation and this is for the light it sheds on the far more famous sister-notion of charismatic domination. David Beetham, calling attention to the association between the two ideas and noting that, chronologically, Weber's concern with Caesarism pre-dated his investigations into the nature of charisma, remarks:

It is usually believed that Weber started with the religious concept and then extended it into the political realm, but in fact it was the other way about. If one considers the underlying idea, rather than the particular term, then the type of authority which Weber calls charismatic was already a commonplace of political text books under the more specifically political label of "Caesarism", a category developed to characterise the Bonapartist regimes. It was this category that Weber generalised into the concept of charismatic authority, adding to it in the process the religious language of mission, duty, supernatural endowment, etc.<sup>7</sup>

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6. D. Beetham, in the Introduction to the second edition of his Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics (1985; orig. 1974), hereafter Max Weber, 6.
  7. D. Beetham, 'From Socialism to Fascism: the relation between theory and practice in the work of Robert Michels', Parts I and II, Political Studies, XXV, 1 (1978), 3-24; 2, 161-181. The quote is taken from 2, 177.



These remarks are instructive and suggestive, even if their schematic character tends to gloss over both the specificity of Weber's concept of Caesarism when contrasted to the usages of his contemporaries,<sup>8</sup> and important differences too between the logical status of the two notions (Caesarism and charisma) in the Weberian corpus. Specifically it cries out to be explained why, for instance, the concept of charisma is, with the exception of 'Politics as a Vocation',<sup>9</sup> absent from Weber's 'political' writings and why, in successive drafts of the three types of legitimate domination, Caesarism as a term progressively diminishes in prominence, eventually disappearing altogether. Part of my task in this thesis is to elucidate the relationship between charisma and Caesarism, and to do so in a way that I believe has not been attempted before.

Third, an enquiry into Weber's reflections on 'Caesarism' rewards us with a more informed understanding of his theoretical relationship to Marx.<sup>10</sup> Now it must be one of the peculiarities of modern scholarship which has dealt with this relationship that, so far as I am aware, Marx's theory of Bonapartism and Weber's theory of Caesarism has never been seriously compared. No shortage is there of material discussing the intellectual proximity or otherwise of Marx and Weber on, say, ideology or religion or bureaucracy; exegesis recounting their respective stances on class analysis, capitalism and socialism we have in abundance. Yet on the Caesarism-Bonapartism connection social science

8. In another place Beetham does explicitly recognise the innovative character of Weber's usage of Caesarism, even if his comments on this matter are, again, very abbreviated: see Max Weber, 6.
9. This anomaly is explained in 3.6 below.
10. This subject is examined indirectly in the analysis of Weber in Chapters 3 and 4, and explicitly in the Appendix to this thesis ('Bonapartism' in the Thought of Karl Marx').



has thus far been poorly served, an omission all the more anomalous considering the conventional wisdom that it is precisely in Marx's discussion of the events in France during the 1850s that he came nearest to providing the substantive theory of the bourgeois state, and of political struggle, so conspicuously lacking in Capital. Accordingly if one wants to examine the Marxian and Weberian perspectives on modern state power, the comparison between Bonapartism in the work of Marx and Caesarism in that of Weber would appear a singularly promising point of departure (or terminus).

Fourth, my hope is that this study of Caesarism may contribute to an understanding, however modest, of the discursive conditions of modern liberal 'representative' democracy. We know that for the most part of the nineteenth century, as in the centuries that had preceded it, democracy was 'a bad word'; 'Everybody who was anybody knew that democracy, in its original sense of rule by the people or government in accordance with the will of the bulk of the people, would be a bad thing - fatal to individual freedom and to all the graces of civilized living'.<sup>11</sup> Yet what do we find today? We find that democracy is a portmanteau term which political systems of the most disparate and incompatible political colouration fall over themselves to appropriate and jealously defend; it is a word now invested not with contempt or consternation but with respectability: apparently we are all 'democrats' now. But how was this metamorphosis possible in relation, specifically, to Western democratic states?

The question is, alas, not answered in this thesis to any satisfactory extent; the research that would be required to do so far exceeds the present author's current energies and competence. However, even in the pages that follow I fancy the outlines of an answer become discernible. In no small

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11. C.B. Macpherson, The Real World of Democracy (1966), 1.



part the legitimacy of liberal democracy was founded on a profoundly, and fatefully, negative image of alternative democratic conceptions of modern governance based on more participatory models of politics. The latter were in effect rubbished through a powerful, enduring caricature which insisted that the direct involvement of 'the masses' in government would inevitably issue in tyranny, as these same masses, actually incapable of rule by virtue of their irrationality, incompetence or puerility, ceded control to a 'Caesarist' demagogue. The choice was presented in a form as stark as it was exclusive: one could live either under 'Caesarist' domination or 'representative' democracy, the rule by men of property, intelligence and responsibility accountable to their constituencies only spasmodically i.e. at times of election. And if Max Weber himself did not pose the issue in those terms - his position is characteristically heterodox - there were many others (as we shall see in Chapter Two), writing during the formative years of 'representative democracy''s development, who certainly did.

It has been said with justice by Gareth Stedman Jones that social historians (and, by extension, sociologists and political scientists too) could learn much by investigating 'languages of class'. As he observes, 'We need to map out (the) successive languages of radicalism, liberalism, socialism etc., both in relation to the political languages they replace and laterally in relation to rival political languages with which they are in conflict. Only then can we begin to assess their reasons for success or failure at specific points in time'.<sup>12</sup> This is surely right. But I think we also need to map out the successive languages of domination which though related to languages of

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12. G. Stedman Jones, Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982 (1983), 22. My agreement with Jones does not imply an uncritical endorsement of his 'non-referential' conception of language, though there are few writers who can defend this view as persuasively as he is able to do.



class are not reducible to them. 'Caesarism' formed a key term in the language of domination, in some European countries, in the second half of the nineteenth century. It superseded to a large extent<sup>13</sup> the pejorative terminology of 'absolutism', 'despotism' and 'usurpation'; it formed part of the lexicon of 'Bonapartism' and 'plebiscitary democracy'; it was itself supplanted by the category of 'totalitarianism'. We need to know more about this process, and the issue could hardly be of greater importance. For behind the battle over words and meanings a serious contest is being decided: a contest for the minds and sensibilities of individual men and women.

Finally, I hope this thesis will go some way towards identifying what Caesar's regime itself historically amounted to, and what place it might occupy in a sociological classification of populisms. The confusion surrounding early and modern applications of the term Caesarism which will gradually become evident as this thesis unfolds, has not been entirely negative in its results; as is so often the case, confusion of usage reflects a complicated subject matter and, in any case, disorder in theorising can be as much a register of creativity as of fuzzy thinking. And yet it is hard not to conclude that a number of analyses of the thing or things we call Caesarism could have been greatly improved by a more careful scrutiny of the historical record, that is, by attending more closely to the social dynamics of the Roman Republican era. We need to be as clear as we can about this period, and the distinctive politics it engendered, if we are going to compare and contrast it adequately with others. My final task, in short, is to try to reach for this greater clarity and, by so doing, make Caesarism a useful concept for the sociologist and political scientist, as opposed to the abstruse or implausible one it has so often been in the past.

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13. As Melvin Richter argues: see 2.3.2 below.



## Chapter 2

### Accounting for 'Caesarism', 1850-1880

#### 2.1 Introduction

The person who resolves to study 'Caesarism' quickly discovers that the subject is characterised by a double obscurity. On the one hand, its virtual absence as a word in everyday parlance makes Caesarism necessarily unfamiliar to the lay publics of contemporary European societies; on the other hand, social scientific interest in the notion is mostly restricted to the specialist: colleagues in sociology and political science may vaguely connect 'Caesarism' with Napoleon III or plebiscitarian acclamation, but they will consider more detailed knowledge to be the task of those with a bent for esoteria. 'Caesarism', they will tend to agree, is definitely not a fundamental social scientific concept in the manner that, say, 'dictatorship', 'militarism' or 'totalitarianism' might reasonably be claimed to be.

These responses are in themselves of some sociological significance. They reveal, no less, that a dramatic change has overtaken the status of Caesarism as a term in the years since first it was coined. For there was a time in Europe, roughly between 1850-1920, when the word would have been instantly recognised by most educated people, and when one might have expected these same individuals to have entertained a strong opinion about the phenomenon it purported to denote; a time when Caesarism was a keyword - an appellation of both polemic and analysis - employed with great frequency in academic circles, certainly, but also in the much wider vernacular of journalists, men and women of letters, publicists and politicians. In short, if 'Caesarism' today has fallen into desuetude, there was a period by contrast in which it mattered.

My basic objectives in this chapter are first, to trace the origins of 'Caesarism', and second, to try and account for its currency in the thirty



years following the middle of the nineteenth century. (I will also venture some ancillary comments on the term's vernacular persistence to approximately 1920, and will suggest why the word to all intents and purposes expired after that date.) The two tasks are related but not identical, as Marc Bloch wisely pointed out when he warned his readers to resist confusing 'ancestry with explanation'.<sup>1</sup> Origins tell us when something happened but not automatically why it did, a problem which demands its own distinct line of investigation. Respecting Bloch's strictures I thus divide the remainder of this Chapter into two main parts: the first (2.2) pinpoints and describes the earliest elaborated usage of the word, and examines aspects of its history up to 1880, concentrating on French and German usage; the second (2.3) surveys some reasons advanced to explain 'Caesarism''s nineteenth century pertinence and popularity. All this serves as an extended, contextualising preface to a detailed analysis of the role that 'Caesarism' plays in Max Weber's political sociology.

## 2.2 Origins

Although the group of words to which 'Caesarism' belongs has a long and complex history, and though semantic elements of what later came to be known explicitly as 'Caesarism' were anticipated in the eighteenth century (see 2.3.2 below), it is often said that the word itself was coined in 1850 by a Frenchman, M. Auguste Romieu in his book L'ère des Césars. Yet just as often has this date been contested. Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexicon, for instance, defining 'Cäsarismus' as 'a description for a technique of rule (Herrschaftstechnik) characterised by the uniting of political power in the hands of one man, legitimation through plebiscite and sham-democratic institutions, as well as by the organising of support for the regime through armed force and through a staff of officials', claims that the term emerged (in Germany?) 'between 1800 and 1830'.<sup>2</sup> Maddeningly, however, no examples

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1. M. Bloch, The Historian's Craft (1954), transl. P. Putnam, 32.

2. Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexicon, Vol. 5 (Mannheim: 1972), 364.



of usage are supplied, an omission that leads me to doubt the accuracy of that periodisation. Or consider Littré's French dictionary. In an edition published two years after the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian war 'Césarisme' is recorded as a neologism but, again, no citations are provided, and no visible attempt made to discover the term's provenance.<sup>3</sup>

Other sources I have found to be more precise. Dieter Groh, author of that goldmine of a piece on 'Caesarism' to which everyone working in this area will feel indebted, notes that Johann Friedrich Böhmer, a catholic-conservative thinker, deployed the German equivalent of the word (in 1845) as part of a critique of 'the modern military and bureaucratic state'.<sup>4</sup> (This is the earliest mention of the term in any national tongue that I have been able to locate/verify) The Grand Larousse, on the other hand, is emphatic, at least as regards the French language: 'Césarisme' (the 'method of government of Julius Caesar' and 'by extension, the form of government which is very authoritarian, in which a single person unites all the forms of power, but this is however founded upon consent') it pins down firmly to 1850 and to the pen of Romieu, a judgement shared, incidentally, by Franz Neumann and Zwi Yavetz.<sup>5</sup> By contrast with France and Germany, Britain and Italy were apparently tardy in their adoption of the term. Our own O.E.D. records the first English use in a comment of Brownson (in 1857) equating Caesarism with 'monarchical absolutism'. (The O.E.D. makes the interesting additional point that 'Caesar' is 'generally

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3. E. Littré, Dictionnaire de la langue française, Vol. I (Paris: 1873), 534. Here 'Césarisme' is rendered as the 'Domination of the Caesars i.e. princes brought to government by democracy but invested (revêtus) with absolute power. Theory of those who think that this form of government is best'.
  4. See D. Groh's entry on Cäsarismus in O. Brunner et.al. (eds.) Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, Vol. I (Stuttgart: 1972), 726-71, at 744. Groh actually dates Böhmer's comment '1847' but examination of the original source reveals this to be a mistake: see J. Jansen (ed.), J.F. Böhmer, Leben, Briefe und kleinere Schriften Vol. I (Freiburg: 1868), 277-9.
  5. Grand Larousse de la langue française Vol. I (Paris: 1971), 652. A precursor of this great lexicon, Pierre Larousse's Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> (Paris: 1867), stated (Vol. III, 812) that 'Césarisme' first appeared as a word 'more or less twenty years ago'. Also F. Neumann, 'Notes on the theory of dictatorship', in F. Neumann (ed. H. Marcuse), The Democratic and the Authoritarian State (New York: 1964 edn.), 233-56 at 236; Zwi Yavetz, op.cit., p.16.



held to be the earliest Latin word adopted in Teutonic, where it gave Gothic "kaisar").<sup>6</sup> While in Italy, if Momigliano is correct, 'Cesarismo', enters that country's discourse not before 1865, when it is first taken up by the formidable Mazzini.<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding the isolated case of Böhmer (cited above), perusal of the literature has convinced me that we will not go too far astray by following one of Europe's most authoritative modern lexicons in stating that 'Caesarism' ('Césarisme') enters popular parlance first in France and does so 'around 1850', a sensible hedging of bets I would suggest in a field of scholarship where the techniques of carbon dating will forever be denied us.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, rather than embark on a search to track down the first time the word is mentioned, it seems to me much more fruitful to examine the first time it receives an extended and sustained treatment: and my researches have unveiled no usage of this kind before Romieu. For this reason, coupled to the absence in English of a description of Romieu's thought - in my experience commentators on 'Caesarism' have satisfied themselves with merely naming the man, almost out of a sense of academic propriety one suspects, only to plunge the unfortunate fellow immediately back into the obscurity from which he had been so briefly rescued<sup>9</sup> - I believe some systematic analysis of Romieu is in order. Romieu's description

6. The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (Complete Text) (1971), 315. The O.E.D. goes on to say that the Old English form of the word was lost in the Middle English period. 'It was replaced in ME by keiser, cayser, kaiser, from Norse and continental Teutonic, which has in its turn become obsolete, except as an alien term for the German emperor, and been replaced by the Latin or French form. See KASER, KAISER. Another form of the word is the Russian Tsar or Czar.'
7. A. Momigliano, 'Per un riesame della storia dell'idea di Cesarismo', in Radio Italiana (ed.), Cesare Nel Bimillenario Della Morte (Turin: 1956), 231-43, at 231. Much more generally cf. B. Croce, Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915 (Bari: 1967; orig. 1928), 7.
8. P. Robert, Dictionnaire alphabetique et analogique de la langue française (Paris: 1966), 689.
9. It is a practice Romieu was accustomed to in his own day. In the preface to the second edition of his book, he remarks somewhat testily that his treatise has 'been judged severely, especially by those who only knew the title of it ... It has been very little read although much commented on', M.A. Romieu, L'ère des Césars (Paris: 1850; 2nd edn.), i. To avoid the unnecessary proliferation of footnotes I shall insert, wherever practicable, page references of Romieu's book into the main text with the device of parentheses.



of Caesarism, furthermore, provides us with an essential bench-mark by which later theorisations of the concept can be usefully compared and contrasted, though this is not to suggest, of course, that those later developments 'derive' from Romieu. If only the history of ideas were that simple! My point is only the truism that to understand the career of a word we require some sort of base-line from which to view it, and it is this that Romieu so vividly supplies.

### 2.2.1 Romieu: Age of Caesarism, Age of Force

Romieu's Age of Caesars (written, he tells us, in July 1850)<sup>10</sup> is a book in which clarity is the occasional sacrifice to declamation, a lapse aggravated no doubt by the nature of a man whose interest in the imperial purple coexisted with a tendency to dye his prose a similar colour. But difficulties of exegesis are eased somewhat if we begin by appreciating the prime objective of Romieu's polemic which is essentially an assault on what he calls the 'liberal principle' (132) and its twin manifestations in philosophy - and culture more generally - and politics.

Philosophically, the liberal principle amounts to the denigration of faith and the celebration of Reason as the alleged guiding-force of man. The problem is, however, that reason cannot guide but is capable only of fostering chronic doubt, dissensus, uncertainty and emotional and social chaos. This should not surprise us. For man, far from being a rational animal is fundamentally a creature of passion (82-5, 205), a being that requires, if his life is to be anchored, the certainties that only religious dogma

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10. Ibid., 75. For other biographical details see also 57 (Romieu tells us here that he was a member of the National Guard in June 1848), and 112-18 (where Romieu volunteers the information that his experience includes three prefectures and a two week hunting session with the Prince de Joinville, the third son of Louis Philippe).



provides.<sup>11</sup> But this is precisely what rationalism, and its materialistic and atheistic corollaries, has been busily attacking. The role of liberalism, as an intellectual attitude which promotes the love of abstraction and discussion, and which encourages contempt for all that is holy and sublime, is thus destructive of the human fabric. More than this, liberalism's philosophical doctrines are utterly false: man is not free but acts only within a predestined orbit decided for him by God, is not an angel but still a beast; the belief in moral progress trumpeted by liberal philanthropists is totally illusory. In undermining respect for the old truths in king and God, in transmitting, through secular education, its arrogance to the young and placing in their hearts a void which 'the dry algebra of reason' (79) can never fill, liberalism has poisoned the mind of France and all those other European nations that have drunk from the same cup.

Predictably enough, Romieu blames the temporary intellectual ascendancy of 'the cripple reason' (8) on the Enlightenment philosophes. But, claims Romieu, the rot had begun at least two centuries earlier in the Reformation when Luther provoked the revolt of the mind against belief. It was he who proclaimed the right of free examination in religious affairs and this right, by a direct process of intellectual contagion, spread naturally to political questions also: 'The deduction is simple: he who can discuss God can discuss man' (81).<sup>12</sup>

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11. 'We know the marvels of faith! In every subject Faith applies herself - religion, royalty, glory, honour, love, the flag - everywhere she is poetry; everywhere she transports man beyond his terrestrial sphere and shows him a fabulous universe full of intoxicating harmonies ... We know the failings of reason ... she has one hundred answers which mutually contradict and condemn one another', ibid., 197-8.

12. On 24 Romieu speaks of the 'fight between two principles which, since Luther, are disputing the world: freedom and authority'.



In the political arena, meanwhile, the liberal principle is incarnated in the 'fashion' (phase) for constitutional, parliamentary government. Now Romieu's assessment of this kind of rule is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand he accepts that some countries are more attuned to it than others: England and Spain, for instance, in their historically evolved political mix of democracy and aristocracy facilitate constitutional government, whereas in other countries where these conditions are absent - such as France - 'constitutional government' (Romieu here means constitutional monarchy) is the 'obligatory prelude to the Republic' (24).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Romieu finds the constitutional, parliamentary system deplorable in principle, since it deprives a nation of resolute leadership and puts in its place a cacophany of bickering voices whose only produce is verbiage, indecision and cowardice. Besides, conceived of as a social practice, parliamentarism is completely alien to the normal way people conduct their affairs:

I will always ask myself, until we manage to apply the parliamentary form to the serious and ordinary actions of life, what is the peculiar cause of madness which makes us apply it to the things of government. I have never seen the navigation of a ship entrusted to an assembly; and I know why: it is because the ship and assembly would sink two leagues from the harbour. In that case the danger would be immediate and one would at all costs avoid putting the ship at such risk. But in a matter of politics, stupidities only have their effect after months and years. Their cause is soon forgotten. In the same way it has never occurred to anybody to place a regiment under the command of a commission. The regiment would be beaten by the national guard. In the family, which is the molecule of society, where is the vote, where is the ballot? For any thing which interests your fortune,

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13. Romieu is especially scornful of thinkers like Montesquieu and Voltaire (and their followers even more) who, taking the English constitution as their model, believed it could be universally grafted (12). However, he does concede that constitutional ideas served as a moderating influence in the midst of revolutionary turmoil (ibid).



your plans, your life, do you ever go to the vote?  
 ... Everywhere, in every thing that touches him  
 directly, man only proceeds with one will, so sure  
 is he that he cannot act in a better or quicker way.  
 And in this serious thing which is the conduct of  
 the state, he decides in a bizarre way to reject this  
 natural rule as imperishable as humanity!.<sup>14</sup>

Romieu has no difficulty at all in finding the main culprits for this modern malaise: it is the bourgeoisie who are primarily responsible. It is they who insinuated the liberal principle, as intellectual creed and set of political institutions, into the French body politic and European civilisation generally. It is from their ranks that the secular intelligentsia have come propagating, even more so after 1814, 'the cult of the university' (14), that obsession with the sentence and the word, preposterously imagining they are the inheritors of the old Roman assembly tradition though forgetting that people like Cicero were simultaneously men of action. It is the bourgeoisie whose cupidity and ambition led them to oppose the restoration of legitimist governance because they visualised it leading once more to the 'supremacy of the gentleman' (113). Worst of all, the bourgeois class it is which has prepared the ground for the organised insurrection of the masses, the 'inner barbarians' (6, 77) by openly abandoning and mocking tradition, by teaching them dissatisfaction through the book, the pamphlet, the newspaper, the speech (92), and by fuelling their rapaciousness. This mass now stands poised to devour the creature that gave it birth for 'A population to whom one has only taught revolution will never become peaceful. A population in front of whom one has laughed at God, from whom one has taken away belief will never be resigned to its laborious poverty in the presence of idle luxury; a population to whom one has preached equality as a dogma ... will never admit the lords of yesterday, born of the bank and the gaming houses. This population will

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14. Ibid., 19-20.



be a perpetual rebel, one hundred times more logical than those who formed it ...' (92). In short the custodians of the liberal principle have brought society to a state of civil war which can only temporarily be calmed.<sup>15</sup> The masses have been unleashed and their orgy of violence and hatred is imminent and inescapable (206).

What will emerge from this turmoil? Even if Romieu's tirade, in the targets it chooses to attack and the ferocity of its invective, reads at times like a spiteful codicil to the last will and testament of legitimism, Romieu is not, strictly speaking, a reactionary. Nowhere in his book does he entertain the hope that the past can be restored. Though hardly reconciled with the present, he is at least resigned to it. This is because Romieu is committed to a cyclical philosophy of history, a commitment which he not only states explicitly on a couple of occasions (7, 162) but one which forms the basis of the many analogies between present and ancient conditions that Romieu is fond of citing: for example, the Roman world threatened by the 'barbarian' and Christian invasions - 'one killing the material wealth of the state, the other its moral wealth' (6) - and those invasions represented by the proletariat and bourgeoisie (6, 77); between ancient and modern military dictatorships spawned by democracy (3, 35-6); between the figures of a Caesar and a Napoleon (13, 34, 44, 130-2). Contemporary Europe, says Romieu 'finds itself placed in conditions nearly like those which characterised the epoch when the Caesars appeared' (5)<sup>16</sup> a statement necessarily incompatible with restorationist sentiment. Furthermore, Romieu accepts, even argues, that the faith in the

15. Romieu remarks that the bourgeoisie themselves are now disillusioned with the liberalism they once so zealously advocated. Ibid., 93.

16. For a similar, though less qualified, statement, see ibid., 29. It is on this page that the reader will find the first mention of 'Césarisme' in the book, when Romieu says that 'The simultaneous study of the present and the past has given me this belief, that there is a moment of extreme civilisation among peoples, where the obligatory issue is Caesarism'.



old monarchical legitimacy ('ce beau dogme'!: 111) is dead and cannot be resuscitated. Attempts to combine it with constitutionalism, as the Orleanist example shows, are doomed to futility and failure. For one cannot combine faith (which legitimacy rests upon and requires), which always entails an element of religiosity, with the purely ephemeral products of discursive reasoning and the ballot box (109-11). People have lost their sense of the divine, their spiritual convictions, and so 'it is real childishness to look for social salvation in the combinations of the past' even if the past was 'noble and beautiful' (195).

Paradoxically, in spite of his detestation of liberalism, Romieu shares one feature in common with his enemy: a belief that the future will vindicate him and his ideas. Diehard Bourbons and Orleanists ended up spitting blood after their collision with modernity. Romieu, on the other hand, convinced that liberalism has reached its eclipse, need only spit venom. Liberalism marks an interregnum between the collapse of legitimism and a new order of things. That order is 'Caesarism'.

So what is 'Caesarism'? One of Romieu's strategies in answering this question is to insist on what Caesarism is not, and it is not (hereditary) monarchy, for monarchy supposes legitimacy, legitimacy ultimately supposes faith in the divine, and faith, as we have seen, is moribund, a victim of the slavish rationalism of the liberal principle and its carriers (194-5). Caesarism, to be sure, does have a tendency to move towards a monarchical system but its dynastic aspirations are always confounded (193-4), the case of Napoleon Bonaparte being instructive in this regard. For Bonaparte, while achieving the status of First Consul, could not establish a monarchy. 'He had made himself Caesar on the 18th Brumaire and was never anything more ... The annointment (as emperor) added nothing to his greatness; it only earned him some hatred and some sarcasm' (130): even this 'demi-god' was thus powerless to rejuvenate the attributes of royalty in an age where all transcendental



belief had been annulled. According to Romieu, the 'cult of which he was the idol, this fabulous admiration of which he was the object was for the hero and not for the sovereign' and this was because 'there was no throne; there was only an all-powerful sword which could only, like that of Alexander, be given to the worthiest man, that is to say the strongest' (130-1). Monarchy, Romieu observes in another place, lasts as long as it is believed in, while Caesarism exists by itself and itself alone (193-4).

Yet if Caesarism is not monarchy, neither is it 'empire', 'despotism' nor 'tyranny' (30), though Romieu does not specify the exact meaning of these words (yet see footnote 20 below). Instead it is best conceived of as the modern rule of force (194), which replaces both the principle of discussion and that of heredity. Force, indeed, is actually at the bottom of all institutions, their necessary guarantee, though liberalism hypocritically disguises this fact, while monarchy softens it with the sublime conviction and consolation that belief in it inspires. But with Caesarism force emerges in all its brutality; Caesarism is naked power: untrammelled might: coercion without apologetics. And it is in the nature of things that Caesarism should come in this form and at this time, for 'Men have respect for two things, what is saintly and what is strong. The saintly element does not exist any more in this century. The strong element is of all times and it alone can re-establish the other one' (200) though only after an indeterminate period of violence. The experience of the Napoleonic empire presaged this new era of undiluted force (132), and though periods of calm were subsequently regained, Caesarism remained immanent within the historical process. It will re-emerge soon (193), in the midst of the protracted civil war that is destined to follow the liberal experiment's collapse into anarchy (150). And who is best fitted to rule in such an historical conjuncture? The army, naturally, whose turn it is to have its day.



Romieu makes a number of related points about the military which are worth brief consideration since the 'man on horseback' theme is common to so many nineteenth century conceptualisations of Caesarism. Like many later thinkers, most notably Wilhelm Roscher, Romieu envisages the domination of the army springing directly from democratic foundations. He is convinced that 'always and without exception', where public authority has its basis in discussion and the vote, a day will come when army commanders decide the result of the election on the battlefield (3). One of Romieu's points, if a minor one, is that military dictatorships are the natural consequence of the geographical expansion of states per se (3-4, 35); but the weight of his argument falls on the now familiar proposition that democracy brings in its train such bickering and disorder that the army, feeling keenly the humiliation experienced within civil society to a lesser extent, turns its eyes 'toward the order and unity incarnated in its chief' (36).<sup>17</sup> Two features in particular enhance the army's ability to seize power: for one thing, its martial training, its discipline ('the army will obey ... he who knows how to command it'), its relative distance from the dissensions of civil society, lend it an institutional coherence supremely adapted to survive the general social disintegration (158); for another, the soldiery has learned, since the June Days, a new and invigorating political axiom: 'an army determined to fight always dominates an insurrection' (91; capital letters omitted). Nonetheless, Romieu does not believe that, for the foreseeable future, one commander will be able to establish a stable and durable dynasty. On the contrary, the modern age of Caesars is an age of vicissitude, of habitual violence, where a 'succession of masters' (196) will do battle for hegemony.

Before we leave this description of Romieu's thesis three aspects of his treatment should be recorded. To start with, it is notable that under

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17. Cf. ibid., 39-40.



the category of the Caesars Romieu omits the one military leader that, from the title of his book, we all expect him to include: namely, Julius Caesar himself. But, for Romieu, the exploits of Julius Caesar are the culmination of a decadence and demagogy, stretching back at least as far as Marius (34) which preceded the age of Caesars and made it historically inevitable. No, it is with Augustus that the era of the Caesars commences.<sup>18</sup> Augustus' reign was a golden age, a time when the evils that had plagued the late Republic were extirpated and when an unprecedented tranquility (never again matched) settled on the Roman world (40) - a claim which stands in some tension, the reader may think, with Romieu's standard equation of the Caesars with Force. Critically it was Augustus' momentous achievement to have combined 'the command of the army and the tribunicary power. Rome was made one in the person of Caesar' (33, capital letters omitted).<sup>19</sup> In other words, the Caesars (and unless I have missed something Romieu never uses the word 'Caesarism' of antiquity, but speaks only of the 'era', 'epoch', 'period' or 'time' of the Caesars) refer to what we think of today as the Roman emperors.<sup>20</sup>

My second observation concerns Romieu's attitude to the Bonapartes, uncle and nephew. There is no doubt at all in Romieu's mind that Napoleon I performed deeds that were similar to those of the Caesars and that the Corsican was a harbinger of Caesarism to boot, a judgement repeated throughout the book with

18. Romieu divides the age of the Caesars into three periods: from Augustus' Principate to the murder of Pertinax; from Didius Julianus to Diocletian; and from Diocletian onwards - Romieu tells us when this age begins but not when it ends. See ibid., 42-6.

19. See E. Gibbon's The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. I (1910; orig. 1776), 65 for a somewhat similar account - except that while Romieu goes on to say that the republican political structure survived this change, Gibbon is in no doubt that Augustus' initiatives, including this one, established what 'may be defined [as] an absolute monarchy disguised by the forms of a commonwealth', 68. Cf. 58-60, 70-2.

20. For Romieu's own misgivings about the use of the term 'emperor' in this context see op.cit., 33-4.



all the regularity of an incantation (e.g. 13, 34, 44, 130-2). Louis Napoleon on the other hand (and remember that L'ère des Césars was written before the coup of 2 December 1851) is assigned a much more humble place in Romieu's schema. Louis' personal courage and integrity are acknowledged; the power of his name understood. But Romieu is convinced that Louis can only be a 'temporary leader' and that the coup d'état 'of which so much is spoken, would have no serious result ... In one way or another one would arrive at a slim interim, followed soon by unavoidable uprisings' (133). What is interesting here of course is not Romieu's limited powers of prediction - how could he have known that the 'interim' would extend to two decades? - but the inference we must draw that Caesarism does not apply here to the man later writers would take to be the archetypical embodiment of the phenomenon - a clear sign already of the mutations that the concept of Caesarism would undergo in its curious evolution.

Finally, an anticipation. Romieu, like many others who followed him, is adamant that Caesarism is a non-legitimate, if not a downright illegitimate, mode of domination. As we saw earlier, legitimacy is capable of flourishing only in a climate of faith; it cannot thrive in the soulless ice-age heralded by liberalism. But Caesarism requires no prettying or comforting justification; force is its only *raison d'être*. Moreover, Romieu sees as essential to the idea of Caesarism the devastation of democracy which ushers in the violent new order; the regime of a military commander; and a permanent state of civil war as the normal form of future society. It is a picture of the future that would not have shocked Max Weber, the subject of our next Chapter. But it is worth saying now, as a kind of mental preparation for what is to come, that in virtually all important respects Weber's sociology of Caesarism breaks with Romieu's analysis.



### 2.2.2 The making of a fashion: aspects of 'Caesarism' after Romieu

Soon after Romieu's study of Caesarism - his book was translated into German in 1851 with the title 'Caesarism, or the necessity of sabredomination represented by historical examples from the time of Caesar to the present day',<sup>21</sup> - the word became all the rage. Pierre Joseph Proudhon wrote expansively on the subject in his Césarisme et christianisme (1852-4), a work which, according to one analyst, expressed the author's disquiet at the rule of a despot Napoleon-Caesar 'who maintained his hegemony through corruption, cunning and terror' and who simultaneously reduced the 'multitude of people ... to an ignorant and miserable mass'.<sup>22</sup> Proudhon's notoriety, it is reasonable to conjecture, would have done much to publicise the term in France though receptivity to it was not however confined to that country. In Germany, Hal Draper reckons, the term was current around 1851,<sup>23</sup> a statement perfectly compatible with Groh's estimate that 'Cäsarismus', together with the closely related concepts of 'Napoleonism', 'Bonapartism' and 'Imperialism', was in common use by 1859.<sup>24</sup>

It was a parlance greeted by conflicting judgements on its worth. Some believed it to be plain confusing - witness Gerlach's letter of 5 June 1857 to Bismarck insisting on the distinction between absolutism, Bonapartism and

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21. D. Groh, 'Cäsarismus', op.cit., 749.

22. George L. Mosse, 'Caesarism, Circuses and Monuments' in Journal of Contemporary History, 6, 2 (1971), 167-182, at 169.

23. H. Draper, Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution Vol I: State and Bureaucracy (New York: 1977), 466.

24. Groh, op.cit., 757.



Caesarism<sup>25</sup> - or, in the case of Weber's mentor Theodor Mommsen, bordering on the libellous.<sup>26</sup> The abuse of the word also irritated a contributor to the October 1858 edition of Britain's Westminster Review who complained loudly about the 'clumsy eulogies of Caesarism as incarnate in the dynasty of Bonaparte' (cited in O.E.D.).

But admonition has rarely been of itself an effective sanction against fashion and 'Caesarism' at this stage in its metamorphosis showed no sign of becoming passé. 'Everybody is now talking of Caesarism', a sceptical Bamberger remarked in 1866, and the great Swiss historian J. Burckhardt was evidently just one such person: to students attending his November 1867 lectures on the French Revolutionary epoch, delivered at the University of Basel, he declared confidently that Napoleon Bonaparte 'is the most instructive type of Caesarism. He is, at the same time, the saviour of the new French society and a world conqueror.'<sup>27</sup> And if two years later Marx was sniping famously

25. 'Bonapartism is not absolutism, not even Caesarism; the former may found itself on a jus divinum, as in Russia and in the East, and therefore does not affect those who do not recognise this jus divinum, for whom, in fact, it does not exist ... Caesarism is the arrogation of an imperium in a lawful republic and is justified by urgent necessity; to a Bonaparte, however, whether he like it or no, the Revolution - that is, the sovereignty of the people - represents an internal, and in any conflict or exigency also an external, legal title', quoted in Bismarck, The Man and the Statesman. Being the Reflections and Reminiscences of Otto Prince Von Bismarck, Vol. I (1898), 206. (No translator's name provided).

On the intellectual relationship of Gerlach and Bismarck, see the comments in H. Gollwitzer's fundamental 'Der Cäsarismus Napoleons III. im Widerhall der öffentlichen Meinung Deutschlands', Historische Zeitschrift, 173 (1952), 23-75, at 28-31. For Gollwitzer, the correspondence that passed between these men in 1857 constitutes 'the classical example of the argument between legitimist policy and Realpolitik', 30.

26. See T. Mommsen, The History of Rome, Vol. 5 (1901), transl. W.P. Dickson, 325-7. I return to Mommsen in the next chapter and so merely note his outrage here, expressed in 1857.

27. Bamberger's comment is cited by Otto Ladendorf in the latter's Historisches Schlagwörterbuch (Berlin: 1906), 41. (The vagueness of usage is also underscored by Bamberger whose statement continues with the words 'and God only knows what thousands of people imagine it to be'.) For Burckhardt's observation see J. Burckhardt, Judgements on History and Historians (1959), transl. H. Zohn, 212. Earlier, Burckhardt has referred to Julius Caesar as 'the greatest of mortals', 34.



at 'the current (n.b. - P.B.) German scholastic phrase which refers to a so-called Caesarism',<sup>28</sup> good Englishmen, it transpired, could be scholastic too. One of Britain's foremost nineteenth century constitutional theorists and political commentators found the word admirably suited to express the nature of Napoleon III's regime, a regime which at the time Bagehot wrote his piece for The Economist in August 1870, though still to suffer the final ignominy of Sedan, was tottering on the brink of that debacle. Bagehot's formulation deserves quoting at length since it embraces a number of elements which, in the work of many earlier authors, are found only in isolation. For purposes of ready assimilation I have interpolated numbers into Bagehot's text. After declaring that it is not 'personal government' per se that has failed in France - for the 'personal government' of the Prussian crown is steaming to victory - Bagehot proceeds to identify the miscreant:

(1) It is Caesarism that has utterly failed in France, - meaning by Caesarism, (1) that peculiar system of which Louis Napoleon - still, we suppose, nominally the Emperor of the French - is the great exponent, which tries to win directly from a plebiscite i.e. the vote of the people, a power for the throne to override the popular will as expressed in regular representative assemblies, and to place in the monarch an indefinite "responsibility" to the nation, by virtue of which he may hold in severe check the intellectual criticism of the more educated classes and even the votes of the people's own delegates. That is what we really mean by Caesarism, (2) - the abuse of the confidence reposed by the most ignorant in a great name to hold at bay the reasoned arguments of men who both know the popular wish and also are sufficiently educated to discuss the best means of gratifying those wishes. (3) A virtually irresponsible power obtained by one man from the vague preference of the masses for a particular name - that is Caesarism ... (4) ... Caesarism, - i.e. ... the absence of all intermediate links of moral responsibility and co-operation, which

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28. K. Marx, preface to the second edition of 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in D. Fernbach (ed.), Surveys from Exile (1973), transl. B. Fowkes, 143-249, at 144, emphasis omitted.



such a system necessarily leaves between the throne and the people. It is the very object of the plebiscite to give the Emperor an authority which reduces all intermediate powers to comparative insignificance if they come into collision with his own. Consequently everything must depend on him, and if he be not practically omniscient there is no substantial check at all on the creatures whom he sets up to execute his will.<sup>29</sup>

Because all power and patronage is ultimately concentrated in the hands of one man, the Caesarist leader, Bagehot observes, the errors, miscalculations and inefficiencies of that person, (and under Napoleon III these were legion) have totalising repercussions for his system; a more devolved system on the other hand, such as that which existed within the Prussian military caste, where the king rules through his nobility, provides 'a thousand checks against the dishonesty and corruption which seem to have undermined the French military system' - provides, that is to say, a mechanism of damage limitation.<sup>30</sup>

By the late 1870s, if the testimony of F.W. Rustow is accepted, 'Caesarism' was still showing no signs of obsolescence.<sup>31</sup> And from the 1880s to the end

29. W. Bagehot, 'The Collapse of Caesarism' in The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot, Vol. 4, ed. Norman St. John Stevas (1968), 155-59, at 155-6. Four and a half years previously, in an article also published in The Economist entitled 'Caesareanism [sic] as it now exists' (ibid., 111-16) Bagehot compares Napoleons I and III to Julius Caesar 'the first instance of a democratic despot' who 'overthrew an aristocracy - by the help of the people, of the unorganised people'. Moreover, whereas the old monarchies of feudal origin claimed obedience from the people on the grounds of duty, 'Louis Napoleon is a Benthamite despot. He is for the "greatest happiness of the greatest number". He says, "I am where I am, because I know better than any one else what is good for the French people, and they know that I know better". He is not the Lord's anointed; he is the people's agent', ibid., 111. On 112 Napoleon III's empire is dubbed 'An absolute government with a popular instinct'.

30. Ibid., 157-8.

31. F.W. Rustow, Der Cäsarismus, sein Wesen und sein Schaffen (Zurich: 1879). See esp. 3 and his remark that in 'recent political literature, especially in the daily press, we often encounter the terms "Caesarism" and "Parliamentarism" which are always used in a certain opposition to one another.' (Max Weber, as will be shown in the next chapter, broke with this earlier usage - he was by no means alone in doing so - by insisting that Caesarism and parliamentarism were capable of positive and negative combination).



of the First World War the term was employed by a host of people - including Roscher, Schäffle, Ostrogorski, Tönnies and Michels - whose thoughts I have deliberately chosen to omit from the present discussion; as men who formed the immediate intellectual context and foils for Max Weber's thinking on 'Caesarism', they will receive separate treatment in the next chapter, and I defer consideration of them until then.

The purpose of this section has not been to attempt a comprehensive history of 'Caesarism' up to 1880, a task that would require, to do it justice, a thesis in itself. My goal has been less ambitious: to show the term's popularity in this period and hence to establish the existence of a set of traditions, in two countries, that dealt with it and from which Weber could draw. Yet a problem remains. If Caesarism was so much a part of the mainstream political vocabulary in the three decades after 1850 (and indeed up to 1920) why did it subsequently become redundant? What core meaning invested in the word, which allowed it to be such an appropriate vehicle of thought and value, came later to be withdrawn so that in our own era Caesarism resembles a sort of conceptual dinosaur? In short, why did 'Caesarism' die and what killed it? A tentative answer to these questions is attempted in 2.4 below.

### 2.3 Explanations

It is always easy to be glib about why something happens, even to assume that if the phenomenon in question did occur, it was somehow destined to do so. In this way, what professes to be history slips effortlessly into hindsight, and of all verities hindsight must surely be the most hollow. The truth of the matter is that we can never know with certainty what factors led to Caesarism's emergence and development as a term and concept, though we can make informed judgements on the basis of what appears sociologically credible. In this section I present three complementary explanations of our subject which, together, seem to represent a plausible account of why 'Caesarism'



emerged and flourished when it did. But before I do so a difficulty of my procedure has to be acknowledged.

Words are like moulds into which each writer pours his or her own meaning and preoccupations. As such one must expect of them to be constantly in flux; a word is a process. Now it is true that Caesarism was a term whose currency was not limited to any one political creed or persuasion. A conservative of the likes of Romieu might use it as readily as the anarchist Proudhon or the Marxist journalist, cited by Groh, who clearly had his doubts about the merits of universal franchise.<sup>32</sup> But in each case what is meant by 'Caesarism' is not exactly the same: the first author envisaged it as a future dominated by military warlords; while the second and third had in mind the actual state practices of Napoleon I and Napoleon III. Other discrepancies are just as easily charted: for some people (e.g. Treitschke), Caesarism was construed as an exclusively national phenomenon, a product of the peculiarities of French history; for others, like Droysen, on the other hand, Caesarism assumed a wider European significance.<sup>33</sup> There was also dispute over Caesarism's historical import: was it an accelerator or retarder of revolution? Again, protagonists for both positions existed.<sup>34</sup> It follows that anyone trying to explain Caesarism must be aware of its non-monolithic character, must recognise the concept's nuances and permutations, always conditioned by the generational, national, class and ideological location of its bearer.

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32. Writing for the Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterzeitung, in December 1864, this person remarked that while he and the people he represented were 'fighting for full political and civil rights for the workers and for the universal franchise' they were nonetheless 'mindful that only education can really liberate; we don't want this precious right in the hands of the uneducated masses to be used as a lever in the setting up of a Caesarism hostile to liberty', Groh, op.cit., 760. On 'Caesarism's dissemination across the political spectrum see 726, 732. Groh also makes the point that Caesarism and communism were sometimes equated: 749, 754.

33. Ibid., 754-5, 762; cf. 727, 752, 765.

34. Ibid., 735, 748, 759-60.



The generalisations I am about to put forward do not do justice to all this and there is no point in pretending otherwise. Yet it is my conviction that they do at least go some way in suggesting the elemental materials which constituted the mould that was 'Caesarism', and which encouraged people of diverse opinion to cast their thoughts with it. The most important of these materials I believe was the issue of 'the masses' and what was to be done with or about them; the issue of how to respond to their increasingly vocal demands for social and political rights, how to harness their energies and demands into institutional forms compatible with, or in opposition to, a class divided society. Since I shall be expanding on this theme in 2.3.3 I shall say no more about it here. Instead I turn to explore the first explanation for 'Caesarism's intellectual appeal in the period with which this chapter is immediately concerned.

### 2.3.1 Caesar, Napoleon and 'the great parallel'

Few analogies can have proved more seductive than the one linking the political careers of Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte, an alleged historical similitude that has exercised the imagination of scholars, journalists and propagandists for almost two centuries. True, Napoleon I was not the only person to find himself compared with ancient Rome's most famous dictator - Mirabeau had earlier claimed this mantle for Lafayette;<sup>35</sup> nor was Julius Caesar the only model which commended itself to those with a penchant for

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35. See A. Soboul, A Short History of the French Revolution 1789-1799 (1977), transl. G. Symcox, 55.



heroic parallels: Alexander,<sup>36</sup> Charlemagne,<sup>37</sup> and Cromwell,<sup>38</sup> to name but three, were all identified, at one time or another, as figures whose monumental deeds bore remarkable affinity with those of the great Corsican. But if one name was to stick to Napoleon more than any other it was that of Caesar. There is evidence that Napoleon would not have been too downcast by the association.

The analogy often crossed his own fantastically egoistic mind, albeit sometimes defensively. Consider Napoleon's own description of the events surrounding his coup of the 9 November 1799. France, he tells us, was in a shameful state when he arrived back from Egypt, dogged by the weakness and oscillation of the Directory's policies whose bankruptcy was evident both in the domestic turmoil that gripped the country and in the humiliating military reverses suffered in Italy, Switzerland and Germany the government had presided over. The agitation of the people was palpable; a crackle of expectation charged the air: the French nation looked for a saviour to deliver it from its misery. It would not have to look for long. Everywhere he travelled in the period immediately subsequent to his landing, his reception was rapturous - 'It was not like the return of a citizen to his country, or a general at the head of a victorious army, but like the triumph of a sovereign restored to his people'<sup>39</sup> - hurraged by crowds of people ecstatic that at last a leader

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36. Groh, op.cit., 741. Groh says that by 1828 'the parallelisation of Napoleon with Alexander and Caesar' had become a cliché.

37. See F. Guizot on the resemblance in his History of Civilisation, Vol. II (1887), transl. W. Hazlitt, 182-6. Guizot's comparison comes in one of a series of lectures he delivered at the Old Sorbonne between 1828-30.

38. See Lord Macaulay's 'Hallam's Constitutional History' (originally published in The Edinburgh Review in September 1828), Historical Essays (1913), 1-83, at 53-4. For Macaulay, Napoleon is one of a select band of men, which includes Caesar as well as Cromwell, 'who have founded monarchies on the ruins of republican constitutions.'

39. Napoleon's Memoirs, ed. S. de Chair (1954), 363. (No translator's name provided).



had been sent to them to restore the glory that was their birthright. Lyons, apparently, was in 'an universal delirium', while the unfortunate Baudin, a deputy from Ardennes 'died of joy when he heard of my return'!<sup>40</sup> Emboldened by this display of support, Napoleon continues, he resolved to save France from both the weaklings in the Directory and the Jacobins 'men of blood', a decision which after a few weeks of scheming culminated in the coup d'état of the 18th Brumaire ('prepared with a cunning as skilled as Nazi management of the Reichstag fire'<sup>41</sup>). The next day, a few hours before his stormy confrontation with a hostile Council of the Five Hundred, who would greet his entry into the chamber 'with angry shouts of "Down with the tyrant!" "Down with Cromwell!" "Outlaw the dictator!"',<sup>42</sup> Napoleon attempted to justify his action to the Council of Ancients. 'You stand', he thundered

upon a volcano; the Republic no longer possesses a government; the Directory is dissolved; factions are at work; the hour of decision is come ... I know that Caesar, and Cromwell, are talked of - as if this day could be conquered with past times. No, I desire nothing but the safety of the Republic, and to maintain the resolutions to which you are about to come.<sup>43</sup>

The breathtaking disingenuousness of Napoleon's lecture to the cowed assembly, surrounded by grenadiers, must make his repudiation of Caesar and Cromwell's example difficult to accept. At less guarded moments his role-model could reveal itself more blatantly. Five years after the coup, smarting from George III's rebuff to Bonaparte's 'peace' overtures, he would promise Josephine: 'I will take you to London, madam ... I intend the wife of the

40. Ibid.

41. According to Correlli Barnett in his Bonaparte (1978), 68.

42. Ibid., 69..

43. Napoleon's Memoirs, op.cit., 375-6.



"modern Caesar" shall be crowned at Westminster',<sup>44</sup> while he would later advise Goethe 'to write a tragedy about the death of Caesar - one really worthy of the subject, a greater one than Voltaire's. That could be the finest task you undertook.'<sup>45</sup>

Yet there was always a residue of ambivalence. In the same year as he remarked to the sculptor Canova 'What a great people were these Romans, especially down to the Second Punic War. But Caesar! Ah, Caesar! That was a great man!'<sup>46</sup> Napoleon turned down a request from the Institute to award him the titles of Augustus and Germanicus with the following disquisition on ancient Roman history. Since it is the fullest reflection by Napoleon on the Caesars known to me I quote his letter in full:

NOTE ON THE PROPOSED INSCRIPTIONS FOR THE ARC DE TRIOMPHE

Schönbrunn, 3rd October 1809.

The Institute proposes to give the Emperor the titles of 'Augustus' and 'Germanicus.' Augustus only fought one battle - Actium. Germanicus may have appealed to the Romans through his misfortunes: but the only famous thing he did was to write some very mediocre memoirs.

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44. M.A. Le Normand, The Historical and Secret Memoirs of the Empress Josephine, Vol. I (1895), 250. (No translator's name provided). At Josephine's incredulity Napoleon reminded her tartly 'You know I am the idol of the French; everywhere am I hailed as a guardian god', 251.
45. Goethe: Conversations and Encounters, edited and translated by David Luke and Robert Pick (1966), 72. Napoleon continued: 'You would have to show the world how Caesar would have been its benefactor, how everything would have turned out quite differently if he had been given time to carry out his magnificent plans.' Goethe's conversation with Napoleon was recorded by F. von Müller on 2 October 1808.
46. Cited in P. Geyl, Napoleon: For and Against (Peregrine edn.: 1965), transl. O. Renier, 352. Geyl takes this quote from Louis Madelin. According to the latter Napoleon 'was fed on Rome. Many years before he brought Caesar back to life, he made an impassioned study of Livy, Tacitus, and Plutarch and of all the works which the eighteenth century had produced on the subject of Rome', ibid.



I can see nothing to envy in what we know about the Roman emperors. It ought to be one of the principle endeavours of the Institute, and of men of letters generally, to show what a difference there is between their history and ours. What a terrible memory for future generations was that of Tiberius, of Caligula, of Nero, of Domitian, and of all those princes who ruled by no laws of legitimacy, or rules of succession, and who, for what reasons it is needless to specify, committed so many crimes, and burdened Rome with such a weight of misfortunes!

The only man who distinguished himself by his character, and by many illustrious deeds - and he was not an emperor - was Caesar. If the Emperor desired any title, it would be that of "Caesar". But the name has been dishonoured (if that is possible) by so many pretty princes, that it is no longer associated with the memory of the great Caesar, but with that of a mob of German princelings, as feeble as they were ignorant, not one of whom is familiar to the present generation.

The Emperor's title is "Emperor of the French." He does not want any name carrying alien associations - neither "Augustus", nor "Germanicus", nor "Caesar".

The inscriptions ought to be written in French. The Romans sometimes used Greek for their inscriptions, but that was only a relic of the Greek influence upon Roman arts and sciences. French is the most cultivated of all modern tongues: it is more widely spread, and more exactly known, than the dead languages. Nobody, then, wants any other language to be used for these inscriptions.<sup>47</sup>

Napoleon's nationalism (or reasons of state) might make him recoil from a too-close identification with Julius Caesar, but other people had less hesitancy in stating the affinity. Lucien Bonaparte, believing political capital could be made by the link, had even written a pamphlet marrying the names as early as November 1800 - and thus only a year after his brother's pious renunciation in front of the Council of Ancients. Entitled 'Parallel between Caesar, Cromwell, Monk and Bonaparte' the pamphlet purported to notice a magnificent resemblance between the men, except that 'Caesar was the chief of demagogues ... Bonaparte on the contrary rallied the class of property

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47. J.M. Thompson (ed. and transl.), Napoleon's Letters (1954), 224.



owners and educated men against a raging multitude ... The First Consul, far from overthrowing all the conservative ideas of society, restores them to their ancient splendour.<sup>48, 49</sup>

A great visionary was less impressed by the fruits of Napoleon's beneficence. For William Blake, Napoleon's tyranny meant the end of his hopes for the French Revolution, a despair he registered in the haunting 'Auguries of Innocence'. Blake's indictment of militarism, composed around 1803, has lost nothing of its freshness with the passing of time though it was ignored by his contemporaries and is ignored still:

The Strongest Poison ever known  
Came from Caesar's Laurel Crown.  
Nought can deform the Human Race<sup>50</sup>  
Like to the Armour's iron brace.

Blake in his turn was just one person among many - including, in Germany alone, von Moser, Wieland, Schlosser, Hegel and Heine - who alluded to or commented directly on the similarity between Julius Caesar and Napoleon.<sup>51</sup> But what has all this got to do with the concept of Caesarism? An important

48. Cited in J. McManners's 'Napoleon', in his Lectures on European History 1789-1914 (1966), 75-91, at 87. Cf. 90.
49. Louis Napoleon later wrote a biography of Caesar in which he expanded the pantheon. In the preface to his Histoire de Jules César (Paris: 1865) he outlines the aim of his book: it is to prove that 'when Providence raises up men the likes of Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, it is to trace out to peoples the path they ought to follow, to stamp with the seal of their genius a new era, and to accomplish in a few years the labour of several centuries', vi.
50. J. Bronowski (ed.), William Blake. A Selection of Poems and Letters (1958) 70.
51. The sport persists to this day. Two more recent analyses of the Caesar-Napoleon congruety are G. Ferrero, The Life of Caesar (1933), transl. A.E. Zimmern, for whom the men 'are the two most complete and most instructive examples' of '(r)evolutionary usurpation', an 'historical experiment ... the course of which is always and everywhere the same, as if it followed a constant law', 11-12 (on the stages of this historical law see 12-13) and Franklin L. Ford, Europe, 1780-1830 (1970), 169, 187. To Ford the comparison of Napoleon with Caesar is irresistible: 'the successful and eloquent general, quick to smash all republican obstacles in the way of his own drive to power, but then anxious to give the state and society a formal structure which would restrain other ambitious men from aspiring to his high place' (187).



piece of the jigsaw was discovered by Karl Marx in the celebrated observation that just when people 'appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them; they borrow their names, slogans and costumes so as to stage the new world-historical scene in this venerable disguise and borrowed language. Luther put on the mask of the apostle Paul; the revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman republic and the Roman empire; and the revolution of 1848 knew no better than to parody at some points 1789 and at others the revolutionary traditions of 1793-5.'<sup>52</sup> Marx goes on to say that once bourgeois society had been established in France by a revolution acted out 'in Roman costume and with Roman slogans' the 'resurrected imitations of Rome - imitations of Brutus, Gracchus, Publicola, the tribunes, the senators, and Caesar himself'<sup>53</sup> - disappeared, an assessment which this chapter has already shown to be premature. But Marx's central point is right it seems to me: when confronted by new situations, we do tend to respond to them through analogy with the past, through recourse to the conduit of tradition (venerable or 'invented')<sup>54</sup> not just because the cognitive operation of comparison and contrast is deeply rooted in the structure of the human mind, but because thought is a transformative practice working on pre-existent materials - which is to say on other concepts

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52. K. Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon', op.cit., 146-7.

53. Ibid., 147.

54. On the concept of 'invented tradition' see the fascinating collection of essays edited by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, The Invention of Tradition (1983), especially chapters 1, 4, 6 and 7.



and experiences already known to us, as the classical tradition was known to the men of the 18th and 19th centuries. (Our lack of such a widespread classical education today is one reason for supposing that Caesarism will never again be a popular catchword). And how the images and rituals of Rome were indeed emulated and paraded in Napoleon's time and subsequently! One finds them in the 'classical' art of a David or an Ingres, both of whom composed grand studies of Napoleon - the simplicity of 'Napoleon in his Study', described by one interpreter as possessing 'the realism of late Republican art in Rome',<sup>55</sup> can be interestingly juxtaposed to the Diocletian-like splendour of 'Napoleon I on the Imperial Throne' - as well as in the constitutional labels of Tribune, Senate, Consulate and Empire that the French state adopted.<sup>56</sup> But this was just part of a much wider and more profound cultural tendency to depict the modern era (as we now recognise it) in the language and forms of antiquity. Dieter Groh has aptly called this tendency 'the great parallel' and noted that its longevity extends from the Enlightenment to the 1880s and beyond; Patrick Brantlinger makes a similar point when he documents the history, and muted persistence to this day, of 'positive' and 'negative' classicisms, responses to mass politics and 'mass culture' (one has to be careful of anachronistic phrases) which mythologically either idealise a past golden age from which modernity has supposedly deviated and is enjoined to resurrect ('positive' classicism) or which 'suggest that the present is a recreation or repetition of the past in a disastrous way: the modern world is said to have entered a stage of its history like that of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire'

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55. K. Clark, The Romantic Rebellion. Romantic versus Classic Art (1976), 98.

56. Cf. McManners, op.cit., 90. Also on the influence of classicism, M. Stürmer, 'Krise, Konflikt, Entscheidung. Die Suche nach dem neuen Cäsar als europäisches Verfassungsproblem' in K. Hammer and P.C. Hartmann (eds.), Der Bonapartismus. Historisches Phänomen und politischer Mythos (Munich: 1977), 102-18, at 106-7. (Stürmer informs us on 107 that the symbol of the laurel crown was pressed onto coins of the First Empire).



('negative' classicism).<sup>57</sup> Traces of the great parallel, central to which was the decline of the Roman Republic and its aftermath, figure conspicuously in the political predictions of Diderot and Friedrich II; their reading of the Republic's demise, together with their understanding of Cromwell as 'the first modern usurper of hereditary monarchy', did not persuade them to be sanguine about the future.<sup>58</sup> And that sort of interpretation was lent inexorable momentum by the French Revolution and Napoleon: for a century afterwards major currents of political theory and polemic across the ideological spectrum would attempt to make sense of these events, their causes and consequences, with the example of Rome as paradigmatic.<sup>59</sup> Recurring elements would include: the masses as the new barbarians; Civil War; the Caesar figure as *bête noir* or saviour; a popularly based usurpatory militarism as the dominant type of state; and so on. Even Tocqueville, a man who was ever alive to the limitations of historical extrapolation, speculated on the stark choice facing modern European peoples in the following manner:

To find anything analogous to what might happen now with us, it is not in our own history that we must seek. Perhaps it is better to delve into the memorials of antiquity and carry our minds back to the terrible centuries of Roman tyranny, when mores had been corrupted, memories obliterated, customs destroyed; when opinions become changeable and freedom, driven out from the laws, was uncertain where it could find asylum; when nothing protected the citizens and when the citizens no longer protected themselves; when men made sport of human nature and princes exhausted heaven's mercy before their subjects' patience.

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57. Groh, op.cit., 727; P. Brantlinger, Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay (Ithaca: 1983), 17. (Brantlinger's book came to my attention just as this thesis went to the typist and I have thus not been able to integrate, unfortunately, its many insights).

58. Groh, op.cit., 732.

59. Ibid., 738-9 (on Constant and Vollgraff), 741-3 (on Heine), 754 (on Bauer).



I find those very blind who think to rediscover the monarchy of Henry IV or Louis XIV. For my part, when I consider the state already reached by several European nations and that toward which all are tending, I am led to believe that there will soon be no room except for either democratic freedom or the tyranny of the Caesars.<sup>60</sup>

The insights of Marx and Groh, combined with the earlier comments on the Caesar-Napoleon analogy, all help to explain, I believe, why the term Caesarism emerged and flourished as a nineteenth century keyword. People were engaged in an attempt to understand radical social change; they resorted to the great parallel with Rome to aid them in this labour which was natural for an age whose intellectuals had been suckled on a classical education. But why then did the word not emerge earlier, say immediately following Brumaire or after Bonaparte assumed the title of emperor on 18 May 1804? This is a hard question about timing which I think is almost impossible to answer precisely, or at least I should say, to avoid presumption, that I'm personally conscious of not answering it well. I feel tempted to say that the word could have been coined and come into common use well before 1850,<sup>61</sup> indeed perhaps at any time after Napoleon's rise to power and fame: many conditions were ripe for its genesis, aspects of the idea were certainly present during his lifetime

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60. Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. I, eds. J.P. Mayer and Max Lerner (1968), transl. George Lawrence, 388. The two volumes of this classic work were published together in 1835. Groh remarks that Tocqueville's achievement consisted in being the first to develop a sociology of Caesarism which refused at the same time to use the term, so convinced was he that old ideas were no longer adequate to convey the uniqueness of modern political forms. 'Bonapartism' and 'Napoleonism' were also avoided because their associations with France belied the universality of the thing that sort of nomenclature only partially conveyed, i.e. a 'specifically totalitarian democracy with a sovereign dictator at its head', Groh, op.cit., 746.

61. We do know for a fact that Caesarism was not a common word prior to the 1850s but isolated mention of it is to be expected a long time before then; the discovery of a usage in the late 1820s, say, would not surprise me at all. Nonetheless a distinction has to be made between first use and currency, and for a sociologist it is the latter that holds the most significance.



and, besides, a healthy agnosticism allows us to resist the sort of facile determinism that blots out from the imagination the existence of genuine but unrealised historical possibilities. However, if pushed, my (unoriginal)<sup>62</sup> suspicion is that, although Romieu himself did not consider Napoleon's nephew as a personification of 'Caesarism' when he first penned his polemic, it took Louis's coup of 2 December 1851 to secure and galvanise another dimension of the word vital for its public dissemination: namely, whether conceived of as a parody of his illustrious relation, or as an authentic second coming, the arrival of Louis Napoleon's regime suggested the establishment and consolidation of a state-society pattern of which Napoleon I had been the prototype. In other words, the alleged repetition of a Napoleonic type of rule seemed to reveal it as the crystallisation of a political principle, a phenomenon sui generis whose very recurrence showed it to be something transcending the idiosyncrasies of particular great (or shallow) men - an idea that the suffix '-ism' is perfectly designed to convey.<sup>63</sup> 'Bonapartism', coined and popularised after 1815, was also suited to serving this purpose and often did; but the influence of the great parallel, combined to the theoretical obsession with historical cycles, would have naturally been conducive to mention of Caesar.

### 2.3.2 Caesarism and illegitimacy

Our attempt to explain the advent of Caesarism as a concept receives a welcome fillip from the thought-provoking approach to the problem pioneered

62. See Melvin Richter's remark on 45 below, plus footnote 76.

63. See the very illuminating remarks in R. Koebner and H.D. Schmidt, Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840-1960 (1965), xiv. The original Greek ismos referred to 'actions which are at the same time denoted by the cognate suffix izein making a verb; the suffix istes denoting a person active in the appropriate ismos' but, the authors add, this 'ism' formation came 'to denote not so much the action in progress as principles of action or intentions. In this meaning it makes the word to which it is attached understood far beyond the country of its birth, the more so because in most cases the root of the word, like this suffix, is of classical origin'. Finally, for our purposes, Koebner and Schmidt note that the 'ism' suffix developed in two directions: the first, designated an ideology of a specific group of people (liberalism, socialism, communism are proffered as examples); while the second 'added a note of derogation to the words to which it is attached' (e.g. despotism, imperialism).



by Melvin Richter, the American political theorist and historian of ideas. This approach is premised on a specific contention about method which, to do justice to the sophistication of Richter's analysis, requires being stated at the outset.

Richter is convinced that scholars can learn much about such heavily loaded notions as 'legitimacy' and 'liberty' - about the significance attributed to them by historical actors, about their role in constructing conceptual frames of reference defining political common sense - by an investigation into their antinomies. Indeed,

My contention is that concepts of illegitimacy and total domination are as important, theoretically and in the actual practice of politics, as those concepts of legitimacy and liberty, to which they are related, but from which they cannot be derived.<sup>64</sup>

How so? Richter's test case, through which he seeks to demonstrate the relatedness of normative terms, is the pair 'legitimate regime' and 'illegitimate regime' as they evolved in France during those tumultuous years of 'revolution, counter-revolution, restoration and imperial foundation',<sup>65</sup> that span the period 1789-1871,<sup>66</sup> a time characterised by a fierce ideological assault prosecuted by the enemies of the Bonapartist regime experience. The battle that ensued between, on the one hand an unholy alliance of Royalist and liberal critics of the Bonapartist regime and, on the other, Napoleonic partisans, was simultaneously cultural and political. It was cultural in that an important

64. M. Richter, 'Modernity and its Distinctive Threats to Liberty: Montesquieu and Tocqueville on New Forms of Illegitimate Domination', in M. Hereth and J. Höffken (eds.), Alexis de Tocqueville - Zur Politik in der Demokratie (Baden-Baden: 1981), 61-80, at 71.

65. M. Richter, 'Toward a Concept of Political Illegitimacy: Bonapartist Dictatorship and Democratic Legitimacy' in Political Theory, 10, 2 (1982), 185-214, at 187.

66. Richter's articles concentrate in the era between the Bourbon Restoration and 1852, the year in which Louis Napoleon became emperor.



role was taken by French intellectuals who, 'sensible that mankind is governed by names',<sup>67</sup> determined to monopolise on behalf of their own chosen constituency that most coveted of political identities: the claim to de jure governance. Their theatre of war may have been labels, their battle-engines the pen, the printing press and the lecture; but the prize to be gained - the power to define what was rightful and to dignify interest with the pomp of authority - meant that theoretical argument automatically assumed a practical political significance. A claim by one party to be legitimate, necessarily involved rubbishing the claims of its rivals as illegitimate; conversely a critique of a rival's illegitimacy, involved a justification of what ingredient it was exactly that constituted one's own moral superiority.<sup>68</sup> Both activities had implications for how part of the political public viewed, and judged, incumbents of the higher echelons of the state apparatuses, and how the latter, in turn, themselves viewed the purpose of their rule, and their place in society.<sup>69</sup>

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67. I take this beautiful phrase from Gibbon, op.cit., 71, who uses it to describe the prescience of Augustus.

68. The reciprocity of the process is central to Richter's thesis. As he says: '... the political vocabulary required categories both for legitimacy and illegitimacy. Persuasion entailed dissuasion; dissuasion in turn entailed denying, neutralizing, redefining, or redescribing competing regimes and principles. In such a situation, political theorists had to master more than the one set of terms they themselves preferred. For despite their differences they could not ignore the audiences to which they addressed themselves. Unless polemicists took notice of those concepts favoured by their opponents, they could not successfully attack them', 'Toward a Concept', 187.

69. An important part of Richter's project is to show how political discourse has consequences for political behaviour. Compare his comment that 'In this unstable context, claims that a regime was legitimate or illegitimate could not be a matter of indifference to political actors, whether incumbents or contenders for power' (ibid.) with Quentin Skinner's conviction that: '... in recovering the terms of the normative vocabulary available to any given agent for the description of his political behaviour, we are at the same time indicating one of the constraints upon his behaviour itself. This suggests that, in order to explain why such an agent acts as he does, we are bound to make some reference to this vocabulary, since it evidently figures as one of the determinants of his action': see Skinner's admirable The Foundations of Modern Political Thought Vol. I: The Renaissance (1978), xiii.



It is against this backdrop of affirmation and imprecation over the politics of (il)legitimacy that Richter's comments about 'Caesarism' are best appreciated. He invites us to consider 'Caesarism' as part of a 'negative model'<sup>70</sup> or, alternatively, as one of a 'family of concepts'<sup>71</sup> - encompassing 'tyranny', 'despotism', 'absolute monarchy', 'usurpation' and 'totalitarianism' - which political thinkers have employed from antiquity onwards to 'designate a relationship between rulers and ruled strictly analogous to that of master over slave'.<sup>72</sup> These concepts, viewed historically, were attempts to convey a dominant or prominent mode of illegitimacy then flourishing - for instance, the tyrannies of the ancient Greek polis, the absolutist rule of eighteenth century European monarchs - and, in the process of describing the situation obtaining, they also secreted criteria for evaluating that situation, which in effect meant condemning it as heinous. 'Bonapartism' or 'Caesarism' or 'plebiscitary dictatorship'<sup>73</sup> - there is a tendency for Richter to view these notions as semantic equivalents - were the nineteenth century counterparts to earlier (and later) categories of illegitimate rule, typifying regimes thought to embody 'the most dangerous potentialities of politics in the modern age'.<sup>74</sup> 'Bonapartism', a term Richter dates as first used in 1816,<sup>75</sup> 'for a time could

70. Richter, 'Modernity', 63.

71. Richter, ibid., 71.

72. Ibid.

73. Richter, 'Toward a Concept', 186, 191, 202.

74. Richter, 'Modernity', 63.

75. I assume that Richter bases this date on Robert (op.cit.) which cites a certain M. Courier using the term 'bonapartisme' in a 'Petition aux Chambres' on 10 December of that year (510). However, the O.E.D. (op.cit.) quotes a usage from Jefferson, dated 1815, who speaks of 'Bonaparteism' (245). The best one can say, then, is that 1816 was the first time the word was used in France.



mean either supporters of Napoleon or the regime he created'; Caesarism, on the other hand 'came into general use to refer to a regime type only after 1851, when Louis Napoleon repeated the sequence of taking over, by military coup d'etat, a republic established by revolution'.<sup>76</sup> Then, after Louis's coup d'état, 'Bonapartism' and 'Caesarism' tended progressively to merge with one another, coming to be treated as virtually synonymous.

Given that a vocabulary of negative terms already existed (tyranny, despotism, absolutism, usurpation) through which the odious character of a regime might be communicated, what was it exactly about nineteenth-century France that prompted the creation, or dissemination, of 'Bonapartism' and 'Caesarism'? Richter's reply is nicely materialist in its attempt to link thought to experience, for what he suggests is that the old discourse carried associations which political theorists increasingly sensed to be inadequate to convey the new social reality that had burst forth around them. Recognising a gap between the language they had inherited and the situation they currently faced, glimmering that words lose their fluency as they lose their relevance, a group of thinkers in the first half of the nineteenth century sought new terminological coordinates: the result, eventually, was the birth of 'Bonapartism' and, later, 'Caesarism'.

Unfortunately, Richter does not say much more than this about 'Caesarism', though his brevity is explicable for a couple of reasons. To begin with, Caesarism as a concept in its own right is not Richter's primary concern; he is interested in it only insofar as it comprises one of the 'family' or notions that express illegitimate domination and whose role in political thought and action the author wants to understand. Second, because he tends to

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76. 'Toward a Concept', 186. This comment on 'Caesarism' had a major influence on my own explanation for the term's appeal after 1850; see 41 above.



concentrate on the sixty years prior to 1850 there is a sense in which Richter's analysis deals mostly with 'Caesarism's pregnancy rather than its birth.

The two anti-republican, anti-Bonapartist and, incidentally, anti-democratic strains of French thought he examines - the camps of Royalism (Burke, Maistre, Chateaubriand, Bonald) and liberalism (Constant, Madame de Staël, Guizot) - were ones which certainly anticipated a number of central ideas that 'Caesarism' would later magnetise to itself, including the theme 'that there is an inevitable slide from revolutionary governments based on popular sovereignty into military domination by a single commander' <sup>77</sup> (the view of Royalists) and the contention that, where the people have politically abdicated, have renounced their rights as individual citizens and instead entrusted supreme legislative and executive power to a supposed representative of the general will, a lamentable condition of 'democratic despotism' (Guizot) ensues, which is to say a condition of irresponsibility and coercion inevitably inimical to liberty. <sup>78</sup> However, as Richter shows, none of the theorists from either camp, used the term

77. Ibid., 192. Richter quotes Maistre: 'The very attempts of a nation to attain its objects are the Providential means of frustrating it. Thus the Roman people gave itself masters whilst thinking it was struggling against the aristocracy following Caesar. This is the epitome of all popular insurrections ... peoples as a whole participate in historical movements only like wood and rope used by a workman ... even their leaders are leaders only to inexperienced eyes ... Those men who, taken together, seem the tyrants of the multitudes are themselves tyrannized by one.' Richter glosses: 'the conclusion is that out of the people's revolutionary efforts to free itself from its ancient monarchy must come its enslavement to a single man. From popular sovereignty would come another Caesar'. (Maistre's comments are from his 'Considerations sur la France', first published in 1797).

78. Ibid., 199-200. Guizot construed Napoleon's regime as the exemplar of modern 'democratic despotism', compared his rule with that of the Roman emperors, and claimed that the implementation of the theory of popular sovereignty issued logically in the domination of one man.



Caesarism (or, I believe, Bonapartism for that matter): all of them were searching for a new word to express the new thing, he suggests, but, in a sort of prolonged stutter, remained stuck in an older terminology. It would fall to a later generation of thinkers, among them Marx, Bagehot, Tocqueville,<sup>79</sup> Lorenz von Stein, Jacob Burckhardt and Max Weber<sup>80</sup> to break new ground; it was they who, pondering on the significance of Louis Napoleon's reign for France and modern politics more generally, would use and develop (or consciously discount) such terms as 'Caesarism', 'Bonapartism' and 'plebiscitary dictatorship':

Often it was argued that under such dictatorships (as Louis Napoleon's: PB), subjects were put under greater constraints than under tyranny, despotism, or absolute monarchy. The modern age was the first to use such effective psychological manipulation, mass mobilisation, the organisation of enthusiasm by nationalistic appeals, and effective all-encompassing bureaucratic controls. And a single man was the focus of such loyalties.<sup>81</sup>

Richter's preoccupation with the conceptual precursors of 'Caesarism' and 'Bonapartism', together with his concentration on the (Restoration) period in which 'a new pejorative regime type was being formed' to uncloak a kind 'of military usurpation historically novel because it based its legitimacy upon plebiscitary approval, and hence popular sovereignty as proclaimed during the French Revolution',<sup>82</sup> means, as I have already indicated, that there is only a small amount of space devoted specifically to the concept this

79. Richter praises Tocqueville's work as one of the nineteenth century's most penetrating attempts to demonstrate that democracy was not ineluctably destined to produce the domination of a single person, yet could do so if a nation failed to take the necessary moral and institutional precautions. See, 'Modernity', 76-80, where Richter also sets out the three ways (corresponding to three phases of Tocqueville's thought) that the Frenchman thought illegitimate domination might come to be established both in his country and in America, viz: through the intolerance exerted by majority opinion on minority dissent (1835); through the suffocation imposed by a pacific, paternalist state on a society in which material comfort had become the overriding goal (1840); through the emergence of military dictatorship (also 1840).

80. These names are mentioned in ibid., 73 and 'Toward a Concept', 210-11.

81. 'Modernity', 73.

82. 'Toward a Concept', 196.



Chapter is attempting to unravel. Moreover, Richter's abbreviated analysis inevitably underplays the variety of meanings 'Caesarism' could assume; the restriction of his analysis to France and his broad identification of 'Caesarism' with 'Bonapartism' compound this tendency to homogenise. More seriously, Richter actually exaggerates the extent to which 'Caesarism' was, indeed, a pejorative term. Without doubt it was such a word of disparagement in the majority, perhaps the vast majority of cases, particularly in Germany (less so in France and, I suspect, Italy) as Heinz Gollwitzer's excellently detailed study vividly illustrates. But Gollwitzer points also to a range of people of diverse intellectual backgrounds and political persuasions who envisaged the 'Caesarism of Napoleon III' in ways quite different to what one might have expected from Richter's analysis. Consider German conservative thought of the period: overwhelmingly anti-Napoleon and the Napoleonic model it certainly was, but there remained plenty of space for recusancy. Hence conservative thinkers like Radowitz, Riehl, Manteuffel, Quehl, Böhmer and Segesser - a heterogeneous bunch in themselves - congratulated Napoleon III's 'Caesarism' for confronting the red menace, checking revolution and revolutionary fervour, reaffirming the sanctity of private property and for generally restoring 'order'. And liberal and socialist thinkers too were in particular instances not immune from some admiration, however ambivalent, as the stances of Heine, Fröbel, Hillebrand and Mundt (all liberals after a fashion) and the socialist Schweitzer reveal plainly enough.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, even in the French case, the country on which Richter concentrates, uncomfortable facts exist to challenge sweeping generalisation. Romieu's usage of 'Caesarism' was not 'negative'

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83. On the generally derogatory German use of the term 'Caesarism', at least in its relation to the rule of Napoleon III, see Gollwitzer, op.cit., 46, 55, 58. On those people (mentioned in the main text) who were more positive in their estimation of the 'Caesarism' of Napoleon III or who felt ambivalently about it, ibid., 31 (Radowitz, Riehl), 32 (Manteuffel, Quehl), 39 (Böhmer), 41 (Segesser), 45 (Heine), 47-50 (Fröbel), 51-2 (Hillebrand), 53-4 (Mundt), 73 (Schweitzer). (Gollwitzer also remarks that there were some people in Germany, and they were not necessarily conservatives, who imagined that Caesarism might be capable of use in the service of German nationalism and Realpolitik: 62-7).



in Richter's sense, nor was the term employed in a derogatory manner by members of the Bonapartist party. And it is also significant that while the author of the entry on 'Césarisme' for Larousse's (1867) Grand dictionnaire universel does not hide his own personal animosity for the phenomenon it is his task to define, he retains sufficient objectivity as a scholar to record that 'Caesarism implies necessarily the idea of a government either good or bad according to the person who will exercise it ... It is one of the progressive forms of despotism, fitting to those peoples who cannot or do not know how to govern themselves' (my emphasis).<sup>84</sup>

These qualifications aside, Richter's study seems to me to be immensely valuable, not only as a concrete application of Vico's advice to see the order of ideas proceeding according to the order of things,<sup>85</sup> but because it clarifies a distinction which all too easily is fudged in a project like mine. After reading Richter, 'Caesarism' can be shown to possess three dimensions: it exists as word, as concept (or idea), and as a member of a family of concepts. The word, we have established, has its origins in the mid-to-late 1840s. The concept, however, has a longer lineage. Burke, in 1790, was predicting, in phrases that uncannily resemble later specific theorisations of 'Caesarism', that popular revolution in France (and, by extension, elsewhere) would result in a military take-over, the hegemony

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84. Op.cit., 812.

85. L. Pompa, (ed. and transl.), Vico: Selected Writings (1982), 180.



of a general; Maistre and Bonald said something similar; so did Constant.<sup>86</sup> Even before them, there were members of the Enlightenment, like Diderot and Friedrich II, who wrote uneasily about future post-royal forms of autocracy and whose writings prefigured later concerns associated with the word Caesarism.<sup>87</sup> Finally, the family of concepts expressing illegitimate domination, of which Caesarism (in some renditions) is but one, is as old as the hills - the provenance of the word tyranny, for example, is at least as old as mid-seventh century B.C. Greece, while accusations concerning 'usurpation' were flourishing in Rome in the fourth century A.D.<sup>88</sup>

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86. According to Burke 'In the weakness of one kind of authority, and in the fluctuation of all, the officers of the army will remain mutinous and full of faction, until some popular general, who ... possesses the true spirit of command, shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself ... But the moment in which that event shall happen, the person who really commands the army is your master; the master (that is little) of your king, the master of your assembly, the master of your whole republic', cited in Richter, 'Toward a Concept', 190-1. Richter adds 'Burke gave no name to such a situation, nor did he cite any previous instances, despite the Roman examples as well known to him as to Maistre. Rather it was the novelty of the situation he stressed.'

On Maistre and Bonald, *ibid.*, 191-2; on Constant, *ibid.*, 193. (For both Richter and Groh, Constant's theory of 'usurpation' represents a crucial advance on earlier discussions of the phenomenon that would become known as 'Caesarism'. Constant's ideas, presented to the public in 1814, are described by Groh as 'perhaps the first worked-out theory of Caesarism', *op.cit.*, 738).

87. Groh, *op.cit.*, 732-3. See also the remarks of G. Bruun, Europe and the French Imperium. 1799-1814 (New York: 1938), especially chapter one on eighteenth century Europe, the title of which is 'Prelude to Caesarism'. According to Bruun, if we are to understand sensibly Napoleon's career, which means appreciating 'how largely it was a fulfillment rather than a miscarriage of the reform program, it is necessary to forget the eighteenth century as the seedtime of political democracy and remember it as the golden era of the princely despots, to recall how persistently the thinkers of that age concerned themselves with the idea of enlightened autocracy and how conscientiously they laid down the intellectual foundations of Caesarism. Napoleon was, to a degree perhaps undreamed of in their philosophy, the son of the philosophes, and it is difficult to read far in the political writing of the time without feeling how clearly the century prefigured him, how ineluctably in Vandal's phrase l'idée a précédé l'homme', 1-2. Sometimes the search for the 'intellectual foundations of Caesarism' takes on an air of unreality, as when Hasso Hofmann speaks of 'the Caesarist model of Thomas Hobbes and his successors' in Hofmann's 'Das Problem der cäsaristischen Legitimität im Bismarckreich', in Hammer and Hartmann (eds.), *op.cit.*, 77-101, at 93.

88. I cull this information from that superb, uplifting book, The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World (1981), by Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, 279, 387.



Richter's distinction gives Caesarism a depth lacking in other, more narrowly focused treatments of the term, and thus cannot but help aid our understanding of its significance and political purpose. But, before we leave him, we should remember that a sociologist will also find it necessary to ask for whom is a type of rule deemed both 'illegitimate' and a mode of 'domination' since the answer will depend to an important extent, naturally enough, on the class and political position of the complainant. A sixth century B.C. Athenian landed aristocrat might look with abject horror and indignation at Solon's cancellation of debts aimed to improve the conditions of impoverished landless labourers, bread-line artisans or poor peasants, and view this 'tyranny' as 'illegitimate domination' (as we say today); but it would be extraordinary indeed if the recipients of the act shared the same sort of revulsion towards Solon's deeds. Further, I dare say that a French peasant who credited Napoleon I with the consolidation of small landholding property, or who attributed to Napoleon III the fact that, for the first time his village had a school, would be unlikely to rail against either for their 'democratic despotism'. Conversely, a late twentieth century British worker who describes anti-union legislation as dictatorial or authoritarian can be expected to be informed by the prime minister that her administration has a mandate from the electorate who expect the rule of law to be protected and the peace of the land to be kept.

### 2.3.3 Caesarism and the rise of 'the masses'

A third candidate nominated to stand as an explanation for Caesarism's influence as a nineteenth century political term was proposed quite recently by George Mosse. Despite the underdeveloped character of his argument, Mosse has put his finger on something very important.

'Caesarism', Mosse observes, 'became involved with the new importance given to the masses as a political force in the post revolutionary age':



Caesarism as a concept is important in modern times because it became shorthand for a new political constellation arising during the nineteenth century. As a result of the French revolution, political theorists began to distinguish between two kinds of democracy: the rule of representatives, and the rule of the masses ... A discussion of Caesarism leads necessarily to an analysis of the rise of mass democracy: if not yet within the reality of historical development, then certainly, as either a fear or hope in the minds of men concerned with the trend of the politics of the time.<sup>89</sup>

Mosse is wrong if he believes that this distinction between the two kinds of democracy was first mooted after the Great Revolution; in fact, it had already been theorised by, among other people, Spinoza in the seventeenth century and Hamilton over a decade before France erupted.<sup>90</sup> Hume, who died thirteen years before the Revolution commenced, is another example. He put the matter thus (note the historical model on which he draws):

The constitution of the Roman republic gave the whole legislative power to the people, without allowing a negative voice either to the nobility or consuls. This unbounded power they possessed in a collective, not in a representative body. The consequences were: when the people, by success and conquest, had become very numerous and had spread themselves to a great distance from the capital, the city tribes, though the most contemptible, carried almost every vote; they were, therefore, most cajoled by everyone that affected popularity; they were supported in idleness by the general distribution of corn and by particular bribes which they received from almost every candidate. By this means they became every day more licentious, and the Campus Martius was a perpetual scene of tumult and sedition; armed slaves were introduced among these rascally citizens, so that the whole government fell

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89. George L. Mosse, op,cit., 167-8.

90. On Spinoza and Hamilton see the informative remarks of R. Williams, in Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (Glasgow: 1976), 83-4.



into anarchy, and the greatest happiness which the Romans could look for was the despotic power of the Caesars. Such are the effects of democracy without a representative.<sup>91</sup>

But Mosse is certainly right on the crucial point: 'Caesarism' has an integral relationship to the dramatic entry of 'the masses' onto the political stage after the French Revolution and their demand over the next century and a half, in all European countries, for political and social justice with all this implies; he is also correct to recognise that 'Caesarism' had an emotion in it, and that emotion was fear: the majority of men of letters and politicians who used the term wished with a great deal more sincerity than Mark Antony to bury Caesarism, not to praise it. Even where 'Caesarism' existed as a hope, fear was not far below the surface: I mean dread of the multitude, set to storm the citadel of authority, who only a 'Caesarist' leader could contain. These comments call for some elaboration.

Throughout recorded time, to be sure, the common folk have been in the eyes of their betters an object of fear, loathing and derision, though never more so than in those periods where they appeared restive or menacing to the established order. Language records the denigration in fascinating ways. It is striking, for instance, how often the common people have been depicted, when acting in concert, when engaged in a popular initiative or response,

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91. D. Hume, 'That Politics May Be Reduced To A Science' in C.W. Hendel, (ed.), David Hume's Political Essays (New York: 1953), 12-23. at 13. Hume's confidence that politics can be founded on 'causes and principles eternal and immutable' (14) is well displayed in this essay. On 15 can be found a summary of his view that 'It may ... be pronounced as a universal axiom in politics that a hereditary prince, a nobility without vassals, and a people voting by their representatives form the best monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.'

It goes without saying that, as history, Hume's description of the workings of the Roman constitution is pure fiction: republican Rome was run, not by the people, but by a hereditary nobility made up of (patrician first, patrician and plebeian after 287 B.C.) families who monopolised the consulship.



as analagous to non-human animals - a comparison which usually has the consequence of portraying collective behaviour as irrational. (I am not suggesting for a moment, let me add, that non-human animals are irrational, only that they have often been perceived as such and that this perception has figured as a brush with which to tar collective action). So many miscellaneous illustrations of the animism of the ruling culture suggest themselves. There is Luther's condemnation of the peasants, when they took to arms, as no better than 'mad dogs';<sup>92</sup> there is the line, put in the mouth of Casca in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, describing how, when Mark Antony offers Caesar a crown, 'the rabblement hooted' ('and clapped their chopped hands, and threw up their sweaty night-caps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath' etc., etc., I.2. lines 234-5); there is the sixteenth and seventeenth century likening of the lower orders, in Britain, to an 'idiot multitude', to 'enraged beasts', a 'hydra-headed monster', 'dunghill dogs', 'so monstrous ... when it holds the bridle in its teeth'.<sup>93</sup> To Burke, the French masses in revolt, he says somewhere, constituted a 'swinish multitude'; in Dickens's Barnaby Rudge

92. 'Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants, May 1525' in E.G. Rupp and B. Drewery (eds.), Martin Luther (1970) (no translator's name provided), 121-6, at 121. On 123 the peasants are referred to as 'insane' in refusing to abide by the Lord's command 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.' The peasants' claim that 'according to Genesis i and ii, all things were created free and common' is quickly scotched by Luther.

93. See C. Hill, 'The Many-Headed Monster' in his Change and Continuity in Seventeenth Century England (1974), 181-204 at 183-5, 195. Hill brings out in a number of passages the link between the irrationality of animals and that of the 'mad multitude', but see particularly 186 where Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne harangue 'that great enemy of reason, virtue and religion, the multitude, that numerous piece of monstrosity which ... confused together make but one great beast.'



the rioters appear as a 'howling throng';<sup>94</sup> for Nietzsche, the masses are a common 'herd';<sup>95</sup> for Bagehot, the people's 'bovine stupidity' is obvious;<sup>96</sup> and so on and so forth. The choice of animal to select in these comparisons is also revealing with the reference to the dog being among the most piquant. For what worse creature could there be than the hound, whose proper place is at heel, turning on its master? What but insanity or some rabid fever could motivate such conduct, and what but the severest punishment adequately expiate it? The man's best friend that turns against the man. What insolence! What ungratitude! What folly!

Yet if the general idea of the people as 'a many-headed beast, incapable of reason'<sup>97</sup> is an old description and insult, 'Caesarism', I am convinced,

94. See George Orwell's comments in 'Charles Dickens', in Decline of the English Murder and Other Essays (1965), 80-141, at 88. Orwell says that Dickens's first inclination (which he subsequently ignored) 'was to make the ring-leaders of the riots three lunatics escaped from an asylum' (*ibid.*). The riot is explicitly compared, nonetheless, to an escape from Bedlam. (That Orwell was himself not immune from animistic notions is evident on 81 - 'Nowadays there is no mob, only a flock' - and, classically of course, in Animal Farm).
95. F. Nietzsche, A Nietzsche Reader (1977), ed. and transl. R.J. Hollingdale, 267.
96. Cited by R.H.S. Crossman in his Introduction to W. Bagehot, The English Constitution (1963; orig. 1867), 1-57, at 29.
97. As Cromwell put it: see C.V. Wedgwood, Oliver Cromwell (1975), 113. Not all views of mass conduct as irrational are as harsh and vicious as the ones I have just been quoting. For instance Charles Mackay's treatment of mass irrationality in his Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions Vols. I-III (all three volumes 1841) is written in a style more sardonic than savage, and with an intent more humorous than polemical. In his view, if collective behaviour can in cases result in absurdity, it does not always do so, and where it does it shows itself capable of striking down the elevated and refined just as much as the humble and wretched. Mackay's books, in short, are not a political diatribe against the poor to whom he evinces a great deal less disdain than he does to, say, the courtly duellists. Where he speaks, to take just one example, of 'Popular Follies in Great Cities' (the tenth chapter of Vol. I) it is the 'whimseys of the mass' which arouse his curiosity, 'the harmless follies by which they unconsciously endeavour to lighten the load of care which presses upon their existence', 341. It is the bizarre dimension of social life as it is expressed in 'crazes', panics and persecutions which fascinates and amuses Mackay and from which he draws the lesson that 'Men ... think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one', 3.



is unimaginable without it (- unlike notions such as 'tyranny', 'dictatorship', 'despotism', 'absolutism', or 'totalitarianism' which do not carry overtones, I think, of contempt for the vast bulk of humanity): reference to the crazed, mad, blind, stupid or just plain ignorant masses is the leitmotif of the concept from its earliest articulation. I must emphasise this here because the importance I attribute to this theme is the basis of my decision to devote so much space later in this thesis to a thorough explication of 'irrationality' in the work of Max Weber. For it seems to me that, for all the ways Weber broke with earlier usages of 'Caesarism', the idea of the irrational masses provides a crucial bridge of continuity to them.

That authors who theorised about Caesarism - as term or idea - shared for the most part a view of the masses as unreasoning is a fact that can be easily documented. Sometimes the proximity of that conviction is not always adjacent to their specific comments on 'Caesarism' itself, though it often is. Two variations on the irrational/non-irrational theme - a weak and a strong one - are especially evident. The first is the contention that 'Caesarism' rests upon or promotes the ignorance of what the greatest exponent of utilitarianism once called the 'untaught masses';<sup>98</sup> it is a presumed popular nescience that is held at least partially responsible for 'Caesarism'. This position finds its most eloquent spokesman in Bagehot for whom 'Caesarism' 'stops the effectual inculcation of important thought upon the mass of mankind.'<sup>99</sup> Under the regime of Napoleon III, Bagehot insisted, high brow culture may thrive and respect still be given to the achievements of scholarship. But outside of cultivated circles, a populace has been created which is totally

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98. J.S.Mill, 'M. de Tocqueville on Democracy in America' in G.L. Williams (ed.), John Stuart Mill on Politics and Society (Glasgow. 1976), 186-247 at 191; cf. 201.

99. W. Bagehot, 'Caesareanism as it now exists', op.cit., 113.



unschooled politically - a consequence of the Second Empire's draconian censorship policy. As he puts it, for 'the crude mass of men ... there are but two instruments penetrative enough to reach their opaque minds - the newspaper article and the popular speech, and both of these are forbidden.'<sup>100</sup> (Readers may wish to consult Bagehot's definition of 'Caesarism', quoted on 27 above, which refers to it as 'the abuse of the confidence reposed by the most ignorant in a great name to hold at bay the reasoned arguments of men who both know the popular wish and also are sufficiently educated to discuss the best means of gratifying those wishes').

Whatever one might think about the patronising tone of these comments, Bagehot at least attempts a political explanation of the alleged mass vacuity, just as Tocqueville, with greater humanity, had earlier adduced a sociological one. According to the latter, the reason why 'charlatans of every sort' have such an easy job of manipulating people in democracies is easily understandable: because most people are constrained to work full-time in order to survive, because they must of necessity devote their entire energy to toil, they simply have no opportunity to instruct themselves in the sophisticated science of politics; as a consequence their standard of political enlightenment, and hence political judgement, is low.<sup>101</sup> Writers who subscribe to the second variation of the mass irrationality theme, on the other hand, seem to have less need for explanation: in their case, the almost congenitally deficient character of collective behaviour is accepted as a datum. Bismarck was in no doubt at all that, without 'the restraining influence of the propertied class', a state would be destroyed by 'the unreasoning masses'. But order would soon reassert itself because it corresponds to a need the masses feel

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100. Ibid.

101. Tocqueville, op.cit., 242-4.



keenly: 'if they do not recognise this need a priori, they always realise it eventually after manifold arguments ad hominem and in order to purchase order from a dictatorship and Caesarism they cheerfully sacrifice that justifiable amount of freedom which ought to be maintained, and which the political society of Europe can endure without ill-health.'<sup>102</sup> Treitschke, one of the Iron Chancellor's greatest admirers, was similarly struck by the idiocy of the mass, warmly endorsing in his Politik Schiller's assertion that 'Majorities are folly and reason has always lodged among the few'.<sup>103</sup> Democratic government (i.e. the masses in power), Treitschke maintained, 'must totally lack certain finer attributes of political intelligence, and more especially the gift of foresight'; it is always subject to 'that terrible demoniacal and base passion - envy', while the people whom it embodies are 'peculiarly responsive to direct and simple sensations, good or bad alike and easily roused by a skilful demagogue'.<sup>104</sup> (The above remarks are not from his chapter on Caesarism - but they do bear an indirect relationship to it since, for Treitschke, Caesarism is the archetype of what he calls 'democratic tyranny'.)<sup>105</sup>

Examples of authors from both of these camps could be multiplied and to some extent will be in the next Chapter. But what I need to do now is explain why the perception of the masses as irrational or credulous or ignorant fitted into the concept of Caesarism like a hand into a glove. There is a logical and an ideological level to the problem.

102. Bismarck, op.cit., Vol. II, 65-6.

103. H. von Treitschke, Politics, Vol. II (New York: 1916), transls. B. Dugdale and T. de Bille, 277. It is noteworthy that unlike Treitschke, Romieu's irrationalism is at least in a sense equalitarian: everyone, (and hence every class), by virtue of their membership of the species is subject to the dominant influence of 'passion'.

104. Ibid., 282-3, 289.

105. Chapter XVIII of Politics, Treitschke's analysis of 'Tyranny and Caesarism', contains three references to the irrationality of the Caesarist ruler himself; evidently, in this discourse, the leader and led deserve one another: see 208, 221, 223. We will see a similar formal symmetry existing in the thought of Max Weber.



The logic - at least on paper - unfolds with almost syllogistic force. For if the masses are essentially stupid (either qua mass or because of their lack of education) but, through some social disaster, are in a position of political strength vis-à-vis other social classes; and if their influence, when exerted, is not modified, mediated or guided by those best fitted to rule by virtue of their sagacity and property (the two are predictably conflated), that is to say by those who understand the prerequisites of social freedom, decency and civilisation; then the masses will naturally, since they lack the rational attribute of autonomy, succumb to some other person or group from outside society proper (the illegitimate usurper) whose talents for oratory - especially effective among the impressionable illiterate - manipulation - which ignorant people are too dim to recognise - and mobilisation - the masses are incapable of organising themselves but crave discipline - issue in a centralised, tyrannical dominion. (At this point, depending on your position, you will either damn the Caesarist leader as the culmination and embodiment of the tragedy - scum floats to the top - or thank heavens that at last someone has arrived to terminate the anarchy and establish an order of sorts once more).

It goes without saying that there is an inevitable artificiality about the logic I have presented; it is a heavy iron that flattens the untidiness of process. Not all ideas of Caesarism are encapsulated in it, and a logical model is one which in any case always implies stasis, whereas the concept of Caesarism, like every idea, has been subject to change and refinement in the course of its evolution. The dilemma is inescapable: by assembling the fragments we do damage to their integrity and uniqueness; but by leaving them in pieces we ignore their coherence and reduce them to mere idiosyncrasy. My reading of the literature convinces me that it is possible to find



more than a shadow of the logic, presented above, in the minds of people who employed the concept of Caesarism. Fortunately, however, my case concerning the cultural conduciveness of the irrational/ignorant/credulous (or just plain dangerous) masses theme to the idea of Caesarism does not rest on what the sceptical reader may deem an imputed logic alone. There is an ideological dimension to be considered.

Let us recall that during the nineteenth century a major struggle was in progress over the extension of citizenship rights to the subordinate, unpropertied or little-propertied classes. Sociologists, following the fine analysis of T.H. Marshall, customarily distinguish between three types of citizenship rights, only the second of which is of immediate concern to me in this Section: civil rights i.e. 'liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice' ('the institutions most directly associated with civil rights are the courts of justice'); political rights, i.e. the rights to 'participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body' (the 'corresponding institutions are parliament and councils of local government'); and social rights, which encompass 'the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security (and) the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society' (the educational system and the social services are the institutions that execute these rights).<sup>106</sup>

Marshall makes the point - his comments are almost exclusively addressed to the English case, but they have a much wider, European applicability -

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106. T.H. Marshall, 'Citizenship and social class' in his Sociology at the Crossroads and other essays (1963), 67-127, at 74.



that the 'formative period' of the political element of citizenship was the early nineteenth century<sup>107</sup> but, as we know, the first strides towards winning the franchise were, in quantitative terms, the shortest: the Reform Act of 1832, for instance, only increased the electorate by two per cent (from five to seven per cent of the adult population).<sup>108</sup> The Reform Act of 1867, on the other hand, roughly doubled the number of those entitled to vote, while the Act of 1884, which entitled male householders and lodgers to make known their political preferences at the ballot box, increased the British electorate to five million. By 1914, as Eric Hobsbawm points out, 'some form of extensive if not universal manhood suffrage was operating' in a host of European (and not just European) countries including Austria (1907), Belgium (1894), Denmark (1849), Finland (1905), France (1875), Germany (1871), Italy (1913), Norway (1898), Sweden (1907) and Switzerland (1848-79).<sup>109</sup> If one follows the useful definition of modern Western democracy advanced by Göran Therborn to denote: '1. a representative government elected by 2. an electorate consisting of the entire adult population, 3. whose votes carry equal weight, and 4. who are allowed to vote for any opinion without intimidation by the state apparatus',<sup>110</sup> the dates will change considerably: given these criteria, Germany became (for the first time) a democracy in 1919, Britain in 1928, and France in 1946.<sup>111</sup> But what concerns me here is not the full establishment of representative democracy but the period (approximately, 1850-1914) in which the consequences of the political enfranchisement process were the source of excited discussion among the *élites* of Europe.

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107. *Ibid.*, 80. The eighteenth and twentieth century were the periods which established civil and social rights respectively.

108. A.H. Birch, *Representation* (1971), 61.

109. Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914' in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *op.cit.*, 263-307, at 267.

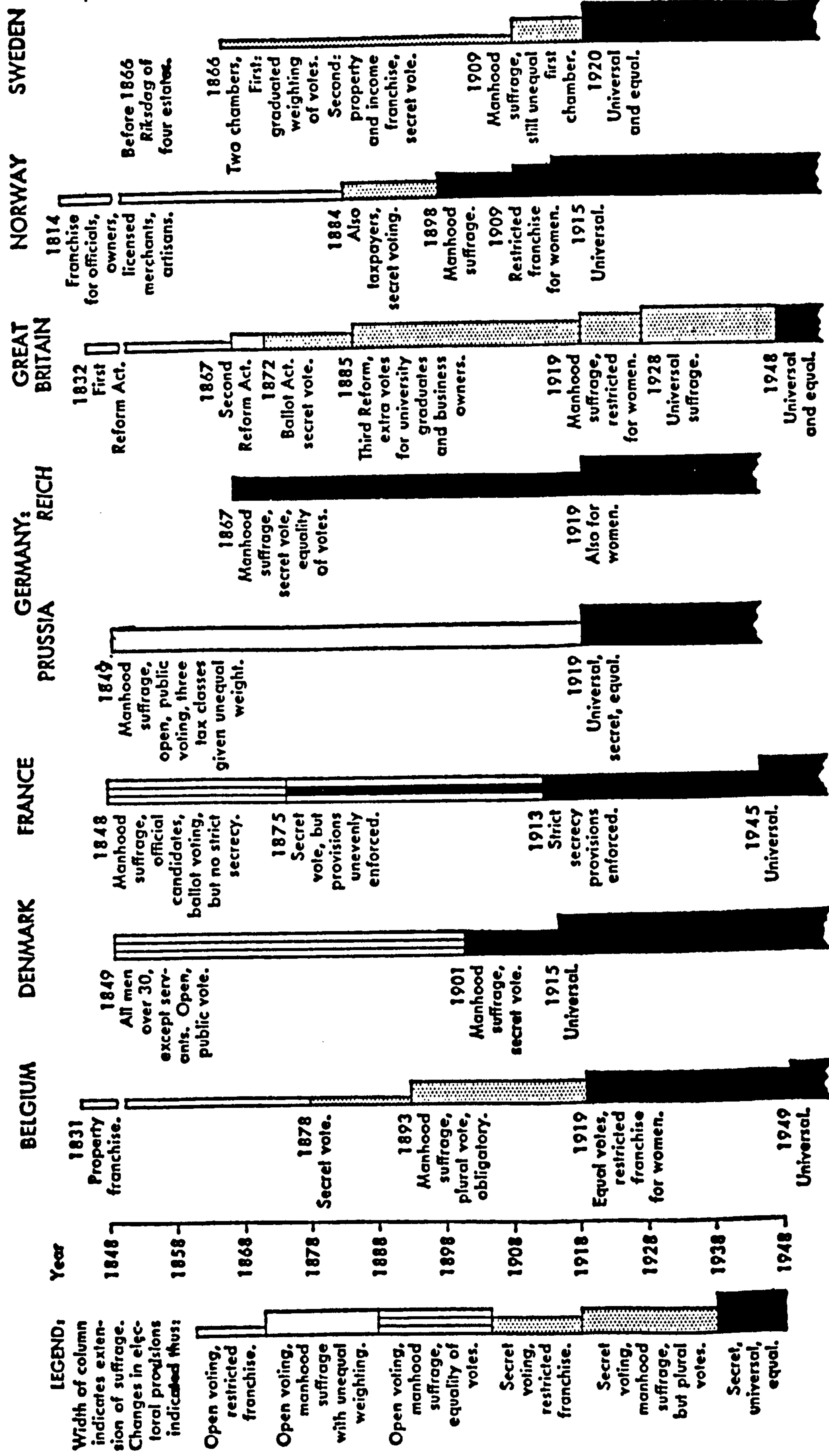
110. G. Therborn, 'The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy', *New Left Review*, 103, (May-June 1977), 3-41, at 4.

111. *Ibid.*, 11.



Figure 1.

COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF SUFFRAGE EXTENSIONS: Some Contrasts in Western Europe



Source: S. Rokkan (see footnote 113 below), 75.



The table on page 62 reveals that the major part of the process of male mass political enfranchisement was complete by 1920; in most countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Germany are notable exceptions) women's electoral emancipation would have to wait a while longer. The significance of this for our subject is that although this Chapter has only dealt with Caesarism up to 1880 or thereabouts, the term seems actually to have enjoyed its heyday from the 1850s to around 1920, rapidly fading out of public political discourse after that latter date. (Usage of the term between 1880-1920 will be illustrated in the next Chapter.) In short, there is a considerable, if not perfect, overlap between Caesarism's career as a word and the consolidation or/and extension of political citizenship rights for men. Is the correlation fortuitous? I very much doubt it. It seems more plausible to suggest that an era which witnessed the ever growing political presence of the working class in society, which saw ground being given to their demands for a voice in the councils of state, which raised the spectre of their dubious loyalty, was one in which the issue of social control would be raised in a dramatic form. As short hand 'Caesarism' was well equipped to feed off this process and articulate some of the anxiety that went with it because of its inherent plebiscitarian associations. Responses to the anxiety varied. Many propertied people, politicians and intellectuals may have feared that extension of the franchise would mean the influence of the fickle and ignorant masses, the influence too of demagogues and rabblers, <sup>112</sup> but there were others who had been much impressed by Napoleon III's apparent ability to control the multitude

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112. See J.J. Sheehan's account of the debate between Bismarck and the liberals over the suffrage issue in his German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century (1982), 145-6. Sheehan remarks that 'The reticence of most liberals during the constitutional debate over the suffrage probably came from a number of tactical considerations, but it also reflected their initial uncertainty about what democratization would mean for the German political system. On the eve of the first Reichstag election, Eduard Lasker wondered if the new electoral law would bring about "an emancipation of the Volk" or if it would encourage "the mob's opposition to the maturer judgements of their betters". This was, of course, a question which liberals had always asked themselves about the German Volk: would it behave like (cont'd. on 64).



through 'Caesarist' methods. Writing about the German case, Stein Rokkan observes that the motive of Bismarck and his supporters 'for extending the suffrage to the workers was patently not to create a channel for the articulation of the interests of the economically dependent strata; the objective was to strengthen the policies of centralization by enlisting the support of the least articulate classes in German society'.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, in Britain, Disraeli had looked to the working class for a new bastion of Conservative support. But whatever people's opinions on the opportunities and dangers represented by the franchise,<sup>114</sup> this kind of debate provided a most healthy climate for the concept of Caesarism to grow in, particularly when combined to the prejudices that also flourished about the prerequisites for keeping the masses in order: naturally they would require bread (early welfare provisions might substitute for the corn dole) and circuses: 1870-1914 is the age where 'mass-producing traditions', seeking often quite deliberately to canalise the electorally liberated into state-sanctioned areas, wildly

112. (cont'd). the enlightened "real" Volk or would it become a powerful and threatening mob without reason and restraint".'

Liberals who feared 'the mob', but who wanted reform (as long as it was discharged by a responsible state) had, earlier, not been above looking for a 'Caesar' figure to solve the problem of national unity and stability: see ibid., 117.

113. S. Rokkan, 'The Comparative Study of Political Participation: Notes Toward a Perspective on Current Research' in A. Ranney (ed.), Essays on the Behavioural Study of Politics (Illinois: 1962), 47-90 at 73.

114. 'At the heart of the bitter debates over the extension of the suffrage were conflicting expectations concerning the repercussions of the entry of the "politically illiterate" into the arena: conflicting views of the allegiances and probable reactions of these masses once they were enfranchised and conflicting evaluations of the possibilities of controlling and channeling these new forces. Liberals tended to express fear of an irresponsible and disruptive radicalization of politics; Conservative and Christian party leaders were more likely to see in the enfranchisement of the lower classes and of all women a major strategic move in the stabilization of the national system against the attacks from the Socialist Left', ibid., 74.



proliferate in the shape of ceremonies, festivals, monuments, public holidays and hero cults. According to Mosse, who provides ample evidence for his contention, 'Festivals' for instance, meant 'emphasis upon national cohesion not only because of the growth of the national spirit, but also because of the fear of political anarchy ... The longing to give form to the inchoate "masses" always implied the idea of stability and order ... (T)he idea of Caesarism became involved in this quest.'<sup>115</sup>

It was just these issues - of 'stability and order' in an age of male mass enfranchisement, of a mass as 'inchoate' or worse - that 'Caesarism' was tuned to convey. Those issues became especially pressing during the fifty years preceding the Great War. It is no coincidence, I believe, that this was also a period in which Caesarism prospered as a political term.

#### 2.4 Conclusion

This Chapter has attempted to discover the origins of Caesarism and account for its popularity, as term and as idea, in the nineteenth century, though with particular reference to the period 1850-1880. The currency of the term, though not its first use, is a product of the 1850s, and I have suggested that the coup and subsequent regime of Louis Napoleon was responsible for this. I have emphasised, moreover, drawing on Richter and Mosse respectively, that 'Caesarism' expressed both a newly perceived mode of illegitimate domination and a fear of the growing intrusion of the ignorant or irrational masses into political life. What I have singularly failed

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115. Mosse, op.cit., 171-2. For Mosse, these festivals etc. 'became a secular religion within which Caesarism could play the role of a unifying symbol of leadership', 169.



to do so far however is explain why 'Caesarism' died out after 1920 as I claim, and why it has become, as a consequence, almost antediluvian for the contemporary sociologist and lay person.

Most obviously, the regime which had been the archetype of 'Caesarism' - that of Napoleon III - was destroyed. No Bonapartist dynasty was established, and by 1871 a republic was once more installed in France. Bismarck, whom Engels and other socialists saw as ruling in a 'Bonapartist' manner, kept 'Caesarist' methods in the limelight but by 1890 he too was out of office, dying six years later. One era was closing and with it one category of domination. After the First World War came Stalinism in the Soviet Union, Fascism in Italy and National Socialism in Germany, and in the 1940s with them a new concept to describe a regime-type that had gone way beyond nineteenth century authoritarianism and militarism: 'totalitarianism'.<sup>116</sup> We are still living in an age dominated by this concept and the reality it struggles to signify.

Perhaps, in addition, its very linguistic form was unfavourable to 'Caesarism's chances of survival into the late twentieth century. 'Caesarism' consists of a proper noun and a suffix, and though the latter is ideal for enduring (and international) dissemination, the former, other things being equal, is not. Thus words like Gaullism, McCarthyism, and Thatcherism smack not only of a distinct regional location but of a personal disposition too: in the above cases, towards isolationist nationalism, communist scaremongering and monetarist resolution respectively. Naturally, the personal disposition itself embodies a principle, but the principle can quite easily uncouple itself and remain meaningful: I hazard the guess that, should the planet

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116. The word 'totalitarian', probably of Italian origin, first came into use in the mid-1920s. It did not, however, become a popular term until after the second world war: L. Schapiro, Totalitarianism (1972), 13-15.



be lucky enough to survive until 2050, there will be many people who are acquainted with nationalism, red-baiting and monetarism but only a few who are sensible of the deeds of Charles de Gaulle, Joseph McCarthy and Margaret Thatcher to the extent of linking those politicians' names with principles the aforementioned individuals are today felt to embody. In contrast to 'Caesarism', words like 'imperialism' and 'militarism' (which do not of course contain an inherent character association) are the great nineteenth century survivors: 'imperialism' has flourished since the 1850s and was originally synonymous with Napoleon III's 'Bonapartism', while 'militarism' though coined around 1816-18, only 'took off' after 1861.<sup>117</sup> As long as the 'great parallel' persisted (and with it cyclical theories of history) and a classical education retained its influence, 'Caesarism' could weather its intrinsic linguistic handicap; but with their decline it was probably doomed to vernacular extinction in the long run.

I had at one time thought that the 'social question', the problem of how to incorporate the working class into bourgeois society without thereby fundamentally transforming that society's property relationships, might also help us account for the fall (as well as the rise) of the concept of Caesarism. My assumption was that by the mid-1920s it could be said that the incorporation of most of the European working classes had been decisively achieved and that 'Caesarism', in consequence, had become surplus to requirement, losing its value as it shed its ideological role. The problem with this supposition then became clear: it is wrong, or at least simplistic. The case of Germany alone shows how cautious we must be in speaking of the institutionalisation

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117. On imperialism see Koebner and Schmidt, op.cit.; on militarism see V.R. Berghahn, Militarism: The History of an International Debate, 1861-1979 (1984).



of the working class. In 1890 Bismarck was sufficiently alarmed by the volatility of mass suffrage to countenance a coup d'état. The end of the First World War produced revolutionary turmoil. And the very spread of Nazism after 1920 was in no small part attributable to 'a large and organised working class which, through its political parties, whether communist or social democratic (had) made significant demands on industry and on the bourgeoisie. Fear of the demands of the working class is a major factor in the mass support for fascist movements ...'.<sup>118</sup>

The German example may be an extreme one - I do not know - but it encourages us to be prudent about our assumptions. It is arguable that the working class has never been, nor probably will ever be, fully socially pacified and reconciled to its lot: containment is largely a matter of degree, is largely conditional and negotiable. The quest and drive for incorporation has been ongoing, but Caesarism has for a long time been absent as a term of public political discourse; the fate of the latter could not, then, have been ultimately dependent on the completion of the former process. Explanation of 'Caesarism''s decline, it would seem to follow, is more realistically located in reasons I offered earlier in this Conclusion (the collapse of Napoleon III's regime; the emergence of a new mode of domination and a new concept to match it; peculiar linguistic handicaps) or in other causes which I have failed to uncover.

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118 M. Kitchen, Fascism (1976), 84. Kitchen adds, however, that the victory of 'fascism is only possible when the socialist working class has suffered severe defeats, such as those in Italy in 1920 and in Germany between 1918 and 1923, and when the socialist parties are so badly divided between themselves as was the case with the communists and the social democrats .... Thus, although a large, organised and menacing working class is a necessary precondition of fascism, it must have spent its forces before fascism can succeed', ibid.



But what of the author who has received hardly a mention in this Chapter - Max Weber? How did he perceive 'Caesarism'? How far is continuity evident between his usage and that of an earlier generation? Alternatively, how far is his concept novel and what, in addition, is its relationship to the illustrious 'charisma'? These are the key questions which I seek to answer in Chapter Three.



### Chapter 3

#### 'Caesarism' in the Politics and Sociology of Max Weber

##### 3.1 Introduction

Caesarism is one of the most neglected terms of the Weberian political lexicon. Extremely rarely does one witness it being treated by Weber scholars as a term worthy of investigation in its own right. Much more frequently is it confined instead to the fleeting aside or converted into one of many possible synonyms. What explains this nonchalance in a field of study (Weber exegesis) notable for its attention to detail, the assiduousness of its practitioners and the sheer volume of its output? Probably one reason is more important than any other: 'Caesarism' has been up-staged by a member of the same linguistic family whose character has been deemed to possess substantially more interest for the contemporary social scientist than its archaic-sounding relation. The term being alluded to is, of course, 'charisma'.

The perception of 'Caesarism's diminutive stature when measured against 'charisma' is understandable and, to a large extent, is also rightly conceived. The latter term Weber defines precisely and at length in a number of prominent, famous texts; it is finely tuned to his purposes, explicitly set to work and elaborated upon in his sociology of religion and domination, self-consciously stamped with his authority. Capacious, thought-provoking, and easy to apply to imposing personalities in the world around us, it is little wonder that 'charisma' has caught the imagination of social scientists and laypeople alike. By contrast, 'Caesarism' has first to be noticed and its meanings patiently reconstructed mainly from fragments, not all of which have been translated into English; its personality is mercurial; its import so embedded in the common sense of its time that Weber only rarely bothers to pause carefully to explain it. And yet without in any way arguing for a displacement of charisma's paramount position as Max Weber's leadership-concept par excellence,



there is a sense in which 'Caesarism' has much more claim on our attention than hitherto it has received. For it was 'Caesarism' that Weber used first and continued to use till the end of his days - it thus has a career continuity lacking in 'charisma'; Caesarism which far more than the term he adopted from Rudolf Sohm and the Bible connects Weber to a storehouse of nineteenth century prejudices and preoccupations; Caesarism the word with which Weber issued his censure of Bismarck, lacerated the literati and theorised the nature of modern democracy; Caesarism, a choice of vocabulary which once more, if no doubt unwittingly, pits Weber against Marx.

In the last Chapter I was primarily concerned to demonstrate Caesarism's currency, as term and as idea, in the period immediately preceding, and during, Weber's life time. In this Chapter I turn explicitly to the work of the man himself, seeking to proffer a systematic guide to his own political and sociological thought on Caesarism. The narrative, predominantly expository in character (criticisms are reserved for Chapter 4) is composed of five main parts. It begins (3.2) with a schematic consideration of Weber's intellectual background as an historian of antiquity contrasting, in the process, his and Theodor Mommsen's attitude toward the concept and phenomenon of Caesarism. Section 3.3. clarifies what Weber meant when he described Bismarck as a Caesarist figure. While 3.4 expands the discussion to embrace Weber's understanding of Caesarism in the context of parliament, mass suffrage and the modern party system, 3.5 ponders the military dimension of the notion of Caesarism as Weber deployed it. A difficult methodological problem is then confronted in 3.6 which has to do with the relationship between Weber's academic-sociological and political writings and their respective treatments of the Caesarist theme. Finally, 3.7 restores the historical focus through a scrutiny of



Weber's post-war advocacy of a plebiscitarian Reich President, an advocacy significantly informed by a notion of Caesarist political leadership.

I wrote in the previous paragraph that this Chapter would attempt to provide a 'systematic guide' to Weber's thought on Caesarism, and so it shall. That attempt is not, however, the same thing at all as one of furnishing an 'integrated' account. Caesarism in Weber's thought, my reading has persuaded me, evinces no unitary, cellular character. Weber himself nowhere attempts to tie the various threads of his usages together; his remarks on Caesarism are to a significant extent casual in their presentation, as opposed to being rigorously articulated. Not that Weber's handling of the term is chaotic, though it is multi-dimensional. Each of those dimensions can be adumbrated, without distortion or heavy-handedness, to reveal their own special integrity and logic. On the other hand, consistency between the dimensions is partial, and should not be assumed as self-evidently given. Consequently if the reader is surprised to find in this Chapter no protracted attempt to harmonise the various thematics of Caesarism into a single overarching theory, it should be stated here that the omission is deliberate. Too often, academics, craving order, or mistaking their own chief preoccupation for that of the individual they are studying, impose an arrangement on an author's thought which is in reality spurious. Coherence once supposed, is inevitably 'discovered'. The practice is widespread, but it is one, I believe, that ignores the fractured quality of much of human thought and human experience.



### 3.2 Weber as a student of antiquity.

It was part of the argument of the previous Chapter that Caesarism was a familiar term in the European political vocabulary of the second half of the nineteenth century not least because during that era a classical, humanistic education retained a prominence it has long since lost. Comparisons of modernity with antiquity were commonplace, part of the very fabric of political reasoning, and the main characters of the Roman Republic's final drama, for instance, were well known. Weber's schooling in such a cultural milieu is likely to have been one factor which predisposed him to employ the term this thesis is intent on unravelling.

His early interest in antiquity is well documented. At the age of thirteen (1877) he had already written an essay on the 'Roman Imperial Period from Constantine to the Migration of Nations' while by fourteen and a half, Max was confident enough to settle on Homer ('I like him best of all the writers I have ever read'), pronounce derogatively on Virgil (The Aeneid 'seeks to arouse a certain suspense, but one hardly feels it, or, if one does, it is not a pleasant sensation'), patronise Herodotus (who though a credulous and thus 'not a completely reliable historian' nonetheless 'makes very pleasant reading'), tick-off Livy ('a bad critic' who was certainly not as hard working as Herodotus) and inveigh against Cicero, for whom Weber reveals a particular dislike. Cicero's 'first Catilinarian oration and his vacillating and unstable policies in general do not impress me at all', and the consul's short-sighted behaviour in failing to remove Catiline from the Roman scene also earns the young scholar's castigation: 'For if he had arrested and strangled Catiline at the proper time and had nipped Mallius's preparations in the bud, the



Roman state would have been spared the tremendous, bloody battle of Pistoria in which so many thousands died in a civil war'.<sup>1</sup>

These precocious jottings were, to be sure, lent immeasurably greater depth and content by Weber's university studies first at Heidelberg (spring 1882-autumn 1883) and then at Berlin and Göttingen (autumn 1884-late winter 1886).<sup>2</sup> Jurisprudence was his chosen 'major' but the prodigious appetite for knowledge that Weber possessed, whetted by the inter-disciplinary opportunities afforded by the German university system, ensured the undergraduate a thoroughly omnivorous diet of political economy, theology, philosophy and, of course, history. In this environment Weber was able to attend Immanuel Bekker's Heidelberg classes in Roman Law and take advantage, while resident in Berlin, of Mommsen's lectures.<sup>3</sup> And from that time onwards Weber's academic development would be punctuated with analyses of the ancient world and reflections on it.<sup>4</sup> Key texts include: Weber's Habilitation thesis, 'Roman Agrarian History in Its Bearing on Public and Private Law' published in 1891; the 1896 lecture on 'The Social Causes of the Decay of Ancient Civilisation'; the 1897 and

1. Marianne Weber, Max Weber: A Biography (New York: 1975), transl. H. Zohn, 50-54 = Jugendbriefe (Tübingen: 1936), 9-14. The quotes derive from a letter Weber wrote to his elder cousin Fritz Baumgarten on 9 September 1878. In the letter to Fritz of 25 October 1878 we learn of Max's familiarity with T. Mommsen's History of Rome (see below).
2. Interrupted by spells of military service, though even here, despite the mind-numbing monotony and exhaustion of barrack life, he still found time for Gibbon: see Marianne Weber, ibid., 72.
3. Ibid., 65, 96.
4. According to Guenther Roth, 'From the beginning of his academic career Weber addressed himself to two broad historical questions: the origins and nature of (1) capitalism in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and modern times, (2) political domination and social stratification in the three ages.' 'Introduction' to M. Weber, Economy and Society, Vol. 1 (hereafter ES), eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich (New York: 1978; orig. 1968), XL. All the references to ES that follow are taken from this 1978 unexpurgated paperback version in two volumes.



1909 versions of 'Agrarian Relations in Antiquity'; the article of 1904 entitled 'The Argument about the Character of the Old German Social Constitution in the German Literature of the Last Decade'; and the many sections on the ancient world that can be found in Weber's 'The City' which though composed around 1911-13 only first appeared posthumously in 1921.

An assessment of Weber's scholarship in this area is beyond my ability but it is worth noting that those best equipped to judge the matter have often been enthusiastic in their praise of Weber's classical erudition. Finley hails the 'Roman Agrarian History' a 'brilliant piece of historical research.'<sup>5</sup> Momigliano declares the lecture on the demise of ancient civilisation 'epoch making.'<sup>6</sup> While, according to Heuss, the 'Agrarian Relations' essays are 'the most original, daring and persuasive analysis ever made of the economic and social development of antiquity ... the area in which Weber's judgement, especially in the details, was most sovereign and surefooted'.<sup>7</sup> Even so severe a critic of Weber's theoretical approach to history and society as Geoffrey de Ste. Croix (who observes, incidentally, that Weber's grasp of Greek history is inferior to his understanding of Roman) is happy to acknowledge that the 1896 lecture is 'very interesting'.<sup>8</sup> All these comments are impressive testimonials which the classically untutored, like the present author, will feel bound to respect. We may also listen with interest to

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5. M. Finley, 'The Ancient City: From Fustel de Coulanges to Max Weber and Beyond', Comparative Studies in Society and History, XIX (1977), 305-27, at 318.
  6. A. Momigliano, 'The instruments of decline', Times Literary Supplement, 8 April 1977, 435-6, at 435.
  7. Quoted by G. Roth in his review of R.I. Frank's translation of the essay's second version, American Journal of Sociology, 83, 3 (1977), 766-9, at 766.
  8. G. de Ste. Croix, The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World (1981) 85. See also the appreciative comments in Perry Anderson's Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism (1974), 20.



the debate concerning the relative importance for Weber's intellectual development of such luminaries as Theodor Mommsen, August Meitzen, Julius Beloch, or Eduard Meyer,<sup>9</sup> even if again we might find ourselves in no firm position to venture an informed judgement. And yet a fact I should like to mention, and pause at this juncture to explore, is that one of these figures recorded for posterity his own sour judgement on Caesarism in a work which Weber would have been certain to know intimately: the man was Theodor Mommsen who as well as being a formidable historian was also a friend of the Weber family; the work in question, his History of Rome.

Unlike Jacob Burckhardt who accepted the utility of the term Caesarism without any visible reluctance - in a footnote to his The Age of Constantine the Great (published in December 1852), Burckhardt had remarked that he was 'at a loss to know why the world of learning should prove so recalcitrant to this expression coined (aufgebracht) by Romieu since it describes a particular thing very well',<sup>10</sup> - the stance of Mommsen on the subject was downright hostile.

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9. It is Momigliano's thesis, for instance, that by 1897 Weber had broken with the influence of both Meitzen and Mommsen and had become engaged in a dialogue with Meyer, 'one of the few German historians who was independent of Mommsen.' Meyer, Momigliano contends, not only shifted the focus of Weber's interest from land to city but also, through Meyer's emphasis on social and economical history, provided Weber with 'a point of reference in his progressive liberation from Mommsen's juridical approach and in the extension of his historical interests from the Middle Ages and Rome to Greece and, ultimately, the Near East', Momigliano, op.cit., 435.
  10. Quoted in A. Momigliano, 'J. Burckhardt e la parola "Cesarismo"', Rivista Storica Italiana, LXXIV (1962), 369-71 at 369. Momigliano, a pioneer in the interpretation of Caesarism as an historical term, is unable to locate those recalcitrants to whom Burckhardt refers. Parenthetically, the author claims that Romieu's ideas on Caesarism helped clarify Burckhardt's understanding of Diocletian, and Momigliano also observes that both Romieu and Burckhardt shared some core attitudes: 'there is the same contempt for the contemporary optimism, the same emphasis on the element of strength as constitutive of the modern state' (371). This statement is particularly suggestive when juxtaposed to Reinhard Bendix's comparison of Burckhardt and Max Weber which draws precisely on these themes. See 'Jacob Burckhardt' in R. Bendix and G. Roth, (eds.), Scholarship and Partisanship: Essays on Max Weber (Berkeley: 1971), 266-281, esp. 270-1, 272-7.



A liberal who welcomed German unification and Prussia's role in that achievement, but who became a staunch critic of Bismarckian authoritarianism, Mommsen combined the strongest admiration for Julius Caesar with the deepest suspicion of all would-be modern imitators. Caesar, 'the first ruler over the whole domain of Romano-Hellenic civilisation',<sup>11</sup> was a monarch, no doubt about it, in fact his state was an 'absolute military monarchy'.<sup>12</sup> But he was also the leader of the popular party, a man who 'displayed the bitterest, even personal, hatred to the aristocracy' and 'retained unchanged the essential ideas of Roman democracy, viz. alleviation of the burden of debtors, transmarine colonisation, gradual equalisation of the differences of rights among the classes belonging to the state, emancipation of the executive power from the senate.'<sup>13</sup> Indeed:

his monarchy was so little at variance with democracy, that democracy on the contrary only attained its completion and fulfilment by means of that monarchy. For this monarchy was not the Oriental despotism of divine right, but a monarchy such as Gaius Gracchus wished to found, such as Pericles and Cromwell founded - the representation of the nation by the man in whom it puts supreme and unlimited confidence.<sup>14</sup>

Mommsen's laudation of Caesar, however, did not extend to the contemporary concept and phenomenon of Caesarism,<sup>15</sup> a point he was at pains to make clear after some had construed the first (1854-6) edition of his work as a panegyric to modern despotism. The concept of Caesarism he criticises for its clumsy

11. T. Mommsen, The History of Rome, Vol. 5 (hereafter HR) (1901), transl.

W.P. Dickson, 305 = Römische Geschichte, Vol. 3 (hereafter RG) (Berlin: 1857; 2nd edn.), 442.

12. HR, 326-7 = RG, 458-9.

13. HR, 324-5 = RG, 457.

14. HR, 325 = RG, 457.

15. In the edition of RG that I am using here, Mommsen actually refers to 'Caesarianism' (Caesarianismus) apparently in the attempt to denote the self-styled followers and supporters of Caesar, leaving the word 'Caesarism' thus free to designate actions deriving from Caesar himself. In later editions of his classic, however, Mommsen gave up this nuance, probably sensing that he had lost this particular semantic battle. (For this information I am indebted to Groh, 'Cäsarismus', op.cit., 755.)



and vulgar use of analogy<sup>16</sup> because although it 'is true that the history of past centuries ought to be the instructress of the present' it is patently crude to theorise 'as if one could simply by turning over the leaves discover the conjunctures of the present in the records of the past, and collect from these the symptoms for a political diagnosis and the specifics for a prescription'.<sup>17</sup> Similarly inappropriate is the phenomenon of Caesarism, if this means an attempt to ape Caesar's type of rule in present-day European conditions:

Caesar's work was necessary and salutary, not because it was or could be fraught with blessing in itself, but because - with the national organisation of antiquity, which was based on slavery and utterly a stranger to republican-constitutional representation, and in presence of the legitimate urban constitution which in the course of five hundred years had ripened into oligarchic absolutism - absolute military monarchy was the copestone logically necessary and the least of evils. When once the slave-holding aristocracy in Virginia and the Carolinas shall have carried matters as far as their congeners in the Sullan Rome, Caesarism will there too be legitimised at the bar of the spirit of history; where it appears under other conditions of development, it is at once a caricature and a usurpation.<sup>18</sup>

Europe of Mommsen's day was not a slave-owning society in which an enlightened 'absolute military monarchy' was 'the least of evils'. It was an increasingly capitalist, urban and industrial society which required its own distinctive constitutional, liberal-democratic state. The attempt to graft onto the modern age a type of rule that belonged organically to another epoch, was hence a monstrous mockery of a great man, a fundamental misunderstanding of history itself, and a dangerous rationalisation for modern

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16. The same general criticism, incidentally, that Marx levelled at Mommsen himself ('who discovers the capitalist mode of production in every monetary economy') in Capital Vol. III (1981), transl. D. Fernbach, 923. Cf. 444, n. 46.

17. Mommsen, op.cit. HR, 325 = RG, 458.

18. HR, 326-7 = RG 459.



autocracy - by which Mommsen meant, it seems (though this is not explicit in the text), Bonapartism.<sup>19</sup>

The personalities of Mommsen and Weber reveal some striking parallels. Both men had strong liberal and patriotic instincts; both possessed intimidating intellects;<sup>20</sup> both displayed integrity and courage in the political stands they adopted (Mommsen, as well as losing his chair in civil law at the University of Leipzig for his part in the May 1849 Saxony uprising, came within a whisker of being sent to prison for his radical activities there); both were staunch critics of Bismarck though at the same time appreciative of the latter's role in German unification; and both recoiled from the sycophancy and submission that bowed so many other members of the middle class in the Kaiserreich: Friedrich Naumann was right to say, in his affectionate obituary tribute to Mommsen, that the latter 'never became a Geheimrat'<sup>21</sup> (privy councillor), a comment one may take to hint at more than the simple fact that the historian never attained ministerial office:<sup>22</sup> Naumann meant, surely, that Mommsen was not the sort of man to allow his political sting to be drawn. Naumann was right. Mommsen remained a bourgeois rebel, a defiant champion of his

19. He cannot, obviously, have been alluding to Bismarck since in 1857, when these lines on Caesarism were first written, Bismarck's star was not yet in the ascendant; that constellation would have to wait for the years following Bismarck's appointment as Prussian prime minister (minister president) in September 1862.

20. The author of the entry on Mommsen in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (15th edn.) remarks, ironically, that Mommsen's academic critics responded to his own autocratic brand of scholarship with the charge of 'Caesarism'.

21. First published in Die Hilfe (1903, Nr. 45) but more conveniently located in F. Naumann, Werke, Vol. 5 (Dusseldorf: 1964), 325-7, at 325. And Naumann added, 'He was the voice of principle ..., the voice of ... the people in the middle of Caesarism', 326.

22. Mommsen served as a deputy in the Prussian Landtag between the years 1873-9, and in the Empire's Reichstag from 1881-4.



liberal creed - in 1882 an election speech led him to be charged for an alleged slander of Bismarck; he was tried and acquitted - in his own sad words, an ultimately disappointed 'animal politicum' who 'wished to be a citizen' in a state that was, alas, only willing to tolerate subjects.<sup>23</sup>

Yet in respect to the issue of Caesarism itself the differences between Mommsen and Weber are more obvious than the similarities. If Mommsen cautioned against the term, Weber seemed happy enough to use it, not only with an informality that must have alarmed his teacher but even, without qualification, in an ancient historical context!<sup>24</sup> Moreover, if Napoleon III and his supplicants were the target of Mommsen's fulminations,<sup>25</sup> Weber's attitude towards them is detached, a fact explained by his being a member of a younger generation. And what about the phenomenon that Caesarism is supposed to have denoted? Even here, especially here, one may spy discrepancies, with the austere translucence of Mommsen's rejection confronting, in Weber's account, all the density of the most blinding Neckar fog. In one context, that of Bismarck, Caesarism is deemed a bad thing; in another, where Caesarism is envisaged as the natural corollary of the extension of the franchise, the tone is resigned, indeed, where invidious contrasts are being drawn between the German and British

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23. T. Mommsen, '"Last Wishes". A codicil to the will of Theodor Mommsen', Past and Present, 1 (February 1952), 71. (No translator's name provided).

24. Weber uses the term, albeit very vaguely, in the 1897 and 1909 versions of 'Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum' (Agrarian Relations in Antiquity). See, respectively, J. Conrad et.al., (eds.), Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften, 2nd supplementary volume (Jena: 1897), 1-18, at 12, and M. Weber, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial - und Wirtschaftsgeschichte (hereafter, GASW) (Tübingen: 1924) 1-288, at 242, 253. R.I. Frank has translated the latter, expanded version of the essay as The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilisations (1976), 35-386. (The references to Caesarism can be found on 323, 335). Weber deploys the term loosely to refer to the social conditions of Caesar's support, e.g. those relating to the growth of a proletarian army.

25. The disdain was not reciprocated: Napoleon III was one of Mommsen's greatest admirers. On their relationship see A. Momigliano, 'Per un riesame ...', op.cit., 237-8.



parliamentary systems, benedictory; while if one interprets Weber's Reich President proposals as those of Caesarism in code, what we are there faced with is no less than urgent, positive recommendation. With the likes of Romieu and Mommsen at least you always knew where you were: Caesarism, for or against. Not so with Max Weber. The next five sections, in moving from issues of ancient history to those of modern political sociology, attempt to cut a path through this confusing ambiguity.

### 3.3 The 'Caesarism' of Bismarck

A.J.P. Taylor has observed nicely that people 'live after their own deaths in the minds of others'.<sup>26</sup> He might have added that there are some people whose 'spiritual' longevity is assured through more than human recollection or the documentary evidence that testifies to their existence: these individuals live on in the institutions they have fashioned, the pulse of their influence evident long after they have been removed from office or have exhaled their last breath.

Such a person was Otto von Bismarck. As diplomatic wizard and consummate political strategist, as prime and directing author of the Second Empire's constitution, Bismarck and his supporters engaged themselves in that most formative and momentous of political endeavours, the act of shaping 'the lives of citizens by designing the structure or "dwelling" which they and their posterity will inhabit'.<sup>27</sup> It was a founding act whose significance was not lost on Max Weber, at any rate as he later reflected on it. For Weber, the nationalist, who did not expect the historical realisation of

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26. 'Metternich' in A.J.P. Taylor, Europe: Grandeur and Decline (1967), 22-26 at 22.

27. The quote comes from Sheldon S. Wolin's 'Max Weber: Legitimation, Method and the Politics of Theory', Political Theory, 9, 3 (1981), 401-24, at 401, where the author is constructing a seductive analogy between the founders of states and the founders of sciences.



an ideal to be wholesome or edifying, the achievement of German unification was a demonstrably necessary geo-political task to pursue, and Bismarck's role in the process of construction cause for profound national gratitude. What appalled Weber from his late teens onwards, however, was Bismarck's management of the subsequent 'peace',<sup>28</sup> the grievous injuries inflicted on the fledgeling Reich in both domestic and foreign arenas by a regime Weber construed to be so self-serving and short-sighted as to mistake the interests of a world power with the survival of a totally anachronistic and irresponsible system of governance. Worse still, that system proved eminently capable of enduring in the absence of its original architect, thus underscoring the need for its radical institutional restructuring.

Where Weber refers to Bismarck the charge of 'Caesarism' is never far away and the word is invariably inflected with animus. However, what Weber disapproves of is not always the same. So what was it, then, about Bismarck's statecraft that Weber found simultaneously Caesarist and reprehensible? Three features emerge as paramount.

In the first place, there was Bismarck's own variety of populism, particularly his initiative in introducing, or, to be exact, re-introducing<sup>29</sup> universal manhood suffrage, though now extended to encompass the whole of the Reich. Reflecting on the implications for the German polity of the 1884 Reichstag election, the young Max Weber penned a revealing letter to his uncle and

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28. According to Anthony Giddens, Weber's ambivalent attitude towards Bismarck 'lies at the origin of the whole of his political writings', A. Giddens, Politics and Sociology in the Thought of Max Weber (1972), 10.

29. Universal manhood suffrage had suffered a chequered career in Prussia. Established in April 1848 only to be superseded in May 1849 by the notorious three class system, itself a product of reaction, Bismarck had made the institution a central plank of the North German Confederation constitution, ratified in April 1867. See G.A. Craig, Germany, 1866-1945 (1981), 12, 43 n.9.



confidant Hermann Baumgarten. Of course, what with the National Liberals' rightward shift under Johannes Miquel at the eleventh hour of the campaign and the failure of a union with the German Free Thought party to materialise 'the pathetic result' for the forces of liberalism 'was predictable'. 'Interesting', on the other hand, was the success of the Social Democrats in increasing their proportion of the votes cast from 6.1 (1881) to 9.7 per cent and as a consequence doubling their seats in the National Parliament from twelve to twenty-four:<sup>30</sup> evidently Bismarck's anti-socialist legislation had failed to turn the tide of their support. After then remarking that a case could conceivably be constructed to support the anti-socialist laws on the grounds that Social Democratic agitation threatened to bring about a general curtailment of civil liberties by the state - better the few repressed than the many<sup>31</sup> - Weber delivers his indictment of Bismarck in the following somewhat confusing, laboured metaphor: 'The capital mistake seems to be the Greek gift of Bismarckian Caesarism, universal suffrage, which is sheer murder of equal rights for all in the true sense of the word'.<sup>32</sup>

Marianne Weber interprets this statement to constitute not so much an objection to the institution of universal manhood suffrage per se than evidence

30. The figures can be found in Table 4 of H.W. Koch's A Constitutional History of Germany in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (1984), 384-5.
31. The context suggests that this would not be a case to which Weber himself would subscribe, though Weber's remarks here are very dense and reveal uncharacteristic uncertainty.
32. Letter to H. Baumgarten, dated 8 November 1884, in Jugendbriefe, 139-48, at 143. There is a slightly different translation in Marianne Weber, op.cit., 118 though, in the latter, part of Weber's sentence on the effect of universal suffrage (i.e. sheer murder for all etc.) appears in an emphasis which is absent in Jugendbriefe. Weber reaffirmed the link in his own mind between universal suffrage and Caesarism in 'Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany' (1918), a revised and extended version of articles published in the Frankfurter Zeitung in May and June 1917. See his comments on 'The hopes that a Caesarist figure like Bismarck attached to universal suffrage ...', ES, Vol. II (where 'Parliament and Government' is translated as an appendix by G. Roth, 1381-1469) at 1452 = Gesammelte Politische Schriften (hereafter GPS) (Tübingen: 1958; 2nd edn.) 294-431, at 382.



of Weber's distrust of the motives behind its implementation and timing:

her husband-to-be, she tells us, 'disapproved of the symbol (-as opposed to the existence? PB) of political equality of rights - apparently because it was Bismarck's original plan to use universal suffrage in the Reich to keep liberalism in check.'<sup>33</sup>

There is probably something in this explanation, though exactly how much it is hard to determine accurately. Certainly the twenty-year-old Weber, already remarkably politically astute, would have recognised that Bismarck's establishment of universal manhood suffrage had above all a partisan objective: to outflank liberalism by creating a mass constituency for conservatism, so confident was the Junker that 'In moments of decision the masses will always stand by the King.'<sup>34</sup> Quite possibly too Weber would not have shared, in 1884, his uncle's uncompromising repudiation of universal manhood suffrage in principle: Baumgarten was convinced that the institution would eventuate in socialism and the hegemony of a Catholic clergy. (He had declaimed to a distinguished fellow liberal, a little over three and a half years before the Weber letter referred to above, that Bismarck 'has ... bestowed on us the curse of universal manhood suffrage, which admittedly he knows how to manipulate as a truly Caesarian demagogue but which must cause the greatest disaster in the hands of his successors').<sup>35</sup> But even if it could be demonstrated

33. Marianne Weber, op.cit., 118.

34. Quoted in E. Eyck, Bismarck and the German Empire (1968; 3rd edn.), 116.

35. Hermann Baumgarten to Heinrich von Sybel, 29 March 1881, in E.K. Bramsted and K.J. Melhuish (eds. and transls.), Western Liberalism, A History in Documents from Locke to Croce (1978), 561-2, at 561. Wolfgang Mommsen, commenting on Baumgarten's influence on Weber, points to the 'astounding similarity in direction, temperament, and critical focus' of the former's views 'with Weber's later comments about Bismarck, William II, and the political immaturity of the nation', and Mommsen also notes that Weber 'came to share Baumgarten's opinion of the Caesarist-demagogic character of Bismarck's policies', W.J. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920 (Chicago: 1984), transl. M.S. Steinberg, 6, n. 22, 7 respectively. Cf. Weber's letter to Baumgarten of 30 April 1888, Jugendbriefe, 292-302 at 300. (Cont'd. over).



that Weber in the mid-1880s agreed with his uncle's total opposition, it could also be shown that such an agreement must have been exceedingly short lived. In 1892, writing for Die Christliche Welt, Weber's contempt for what he construed to be the ill-informed paranoia of those who harboured the 'superstition that dark and secret powers are at work in the labouring class' is symptomatic of his own less alarmist attitude towards the consequences of mass suffrage; while by the Freiburg Inaugural lecture (May 1895) Weber's acceptance of the electoral presence of the proletariat is clear (it is their political 'immaturity' and 'philistinism' that he decries, not their electoral position and rights in the Reich) as, again, is his scorn for those who continue to be obsessed with the red peril.<sup>36</sup> And of course during the Great War Weber is robust in demanding that all remaining impediments to the suffrage in Prussia be removed, outraged that the men who had fought for the fatherland might otherwise return to find themselves in the lowest of the Prussian three class system.<sup>37</sup> In fact it is in one of his wartime articles that Weber provides us with the best clue of his thinking about Bismarck's reintroduction and geographical extension of universal manhood suffrage (though naturally one cannot be sure that this was Weber's thinking at the time of his letter to Baumgarten). What Weber questions here is not the wisdom or necessity

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35. (cont'd).

Baumgarten's prophecy of 'disaster' was, from the liberal standpoint, partially realised by 1912: in the election of that year one in every three Germans who cast their ballot voted socialist, and though the SPD were denied an overall parliamentary majority they had become nonetheless the single largest party in the Reichstag: see W. Carr, A History of Germany, 1815-1945 (1979; 2nd edn.), 191.

36. The remark in Christian World is quoted in W.J. Mommsen, op.cit., 20. On the Freiburg lecture see Weber's comment 'The danger does not lie with the masses, as is believed by people who stare as if hypnotised at the depths of society', 'The national state and economic policy (Freiburg address)', Economy and Society, 9, 4 (1980), transl. B. Fowkes, 428-449, at 446-7 = GPS, 1-25, at 23, emphasis in original.
37. See, for example, 'Wahlrecht und Demokratie in Deutschland' ('Suffrage and Democracy in Germany'), originally published in December 1917, reprinted in GPS, 233-279, at 235, and the parallel discussion in ES, Vol. II, 1382-3 = GPS, 296.



of affording the mass of the male population the right to vote, but rather the rapidity with which the process was inaugurated. Weber seems to have thought that the ideals of national parliamentary co-operation and responsibility would have been better served through a gradualist, evolutionary approach to political democratisation, say, on English lines; specifically, through a process which would have first embraced the economically and socially privileged and the politically educated, only later ushering in the masses onto the political stage.<sup>38</sup> However, this was not to be, the interests of the nation as Weber perceived them, sacrificed to Bismarck's populist-Cesarism.

Historically speaking, Bismarck's attempt at electoral manipulation formed only one part of his populist strategy and any full analysis of Bismarck's career would want to consider among other things, his habit of dissolving the Reichstag when it refused to do his bidding, and appealing instead over its head to the voters - as in 1878 (when the assassination attempt on the Emperor gave him the god-given opportunity to put the National Liberals in their place and come down like an avalanche on the growing socialist movement) and 1887 (when he determined to bully parliament into accepting his Appropriations Bill); his management of anti-Catholic feeling in the early-to-mid 1870s; and his part in the introduction of the famous social insurance legislation enacted throughout virtually the whole period of his chancellorship. Weber actually refers to some of these events, and to others I have not mentioned here, in 'Parliament and Government'.<sup>39</sup> But they largely fall under the wider rubric of Bismarck's 'demagogy', whereas the term 'Caesarism' is reserved more narrowly to capture one feature of the populist package - Bismarck's

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38. GPS, 233-4. See also ES Vol. II, 1442 = GPS, 370. Cf. W.J. Mommsen's discussion in op.cit., 247-8.

39. ES Vol. II, 1388-90 = GPS, 303-6.



role in the establishment of universal male suffrage - and this is why I have accordingly assigned the lion's share of my comments so far to its scrutiny.

The second aspect of Bismarck's 'Caesarism' to earn Max Weber's rebuke is quite closely related to the first. It concerns the great man's towering stature and the shadow it cast over the Second Empire, enthralling supporters, intimidating opponents and, subsequently, awing the epigones. Writing just over two decades after Bismarck's death, Weber put the matter thus:

The present condition of our parliamentary life is a legacy of Prince Bismarck's long domination and of the nation's attitude toward him since the last decade of his chancellorship. This attitude has no parallel in the reaction of any other great people toward a statesman of such stature. Nowhere else in the world has even the most unrestrained adulation of a politician made a proud nation sacrifice its substantive convictions so completely.<sup>40</sup>

These comments are at first bound to strike us as just so much hyperbole, permissible no doubt in the context of a polemic but surely straining the credulity of the social scientist trained to be dubious of heroic conceptions of culture and society. Yet outright dismissal would be premature. For there is solid evidence to show that from the inception of his first Reich chancellorship onwards Bismarck came to be the object of an extraordinarily resilient and pervasive personality cult, the effects of which were as profound as they were to prove ultimately damaging. Bismarck's actual deeds only partially explain the elevation he enjoyed. Just as important was the context in which the man became hero, namely a Reich newly-forged and vigorously particularist in its social structure and in its political and cultural temperament: discounting Prussia, twenty-four governments composed the Empire, many of which remained hostile to Prussia's hegemony and extremely jealous of traditions (including confessional ones) and prerogatives they were determined

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40. ES Vol. II, 1385 = GPS, 299.



to preserve. The new Empire, bereft of its own identity and lacking the collective symbols through which its unity might be affirmed<sup>41</sup> found in Bismarck its personal surrogate - this is the plausible thesis advanced by Gordon Craig. And Craig shows how across the whole spectrum of German culture of the 1870s and 1880s and beyond - for instance, in the history of Treitschke, in the painting of Böcklin, Lenbach and Feuerbach, in the stories of Heyse, and, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the sculpture of Begas, Lederer and Schaudt - the Bismarck myth grew, compensatory apotheosis of an uncertain Empire seeking social and emotional coherence.<sup>42</sup>

Max Weber's own attitude towards Bismarck the person and Bismarck the legend are best treated separately. The Bismarck legend he quite simply detested. Bismarck the icon, '"Bismarck sans phrase"',<sup>43</sup> he denounced not

41. 'Germany had no national flag until 1892, and no national hymn until after the First World War; and the choice of the day of the victory at Sedan as the national holiday was widely opposed. Even in the matter of national monuments, the Germans had their troubles. The Teutoburger Wald monument (1875) and the Niederwald "Germania" monument (1885) celebrated events so remote in time as to have little sentimental importance for the new Reich', Craig, op.cit., 58. The controversy that surrounded the 1913 centenary 'celebrations' is another indication of the absence of agreed-upon national symbols: see, on the controversy, G. Eley, 'Defining social imperialism: use and abuse of an idea', Social History, 3 (October 1976), 265-290, at 284-5.

42. Craig, op.cit., 58-60; cf. Hofmann, 'Das Problem ...', op.cit., 96 who informs us that Bismarck himself consciously exploited the constitutional idea of (his monarch's) emperorsip to promote national centralisation and a German sense of unity.

Weber's perception of Bismarck was anticipated in 1879 by Gustav Freytag, the novelist, whom Craig quotes (60) as saying: 'We are still going to suffer a long time from the circumstances that the political strength of the nation has, for one and a half decades, been personified in one man. And, along with all of the good fortune and progress of this age, we are going to have to bear the damage that attaches itself to this kind of domination by a single individual.'

43. Marianne Weber, op.cit., 118.



just as an intellectual capitulation but as a distortion of Bismarck's achievement by men who, in seeking to emulate his example, simultaneously misrepresented it through concentrating exclusively on 'the admixture of violence and cunning, the seeming or actual brutality of his political approach'.<sup>44</sup> Weber's attitude to the man, however, was more complex. As I hinted at the beginning of this Section, Weber found much in Bismarck to admire: Weber appreciated the Chancellor's political adroitness and intellectual sophistication (his mental acuity, Weber would say, was often lost on admirers and detractors alike) respected the sheer lack of humbug that accompanied his Machtpolitik. At the same time, Bismarck's ambition, his monomania and the political excesses it encouraged, had left the nation with the deepest scars. For Bismarck had bequeathed to his successors 'a nation without any political sophistication, far below the level which in this regard it had reached twenty years before (i.e. in 1870)'; 'a nation without any political will of its own, accustomed to the idea that the great statesman at the helm would make the necessary political decisions'; 'a nation accustomed to fatalistic sufferance of all decisions made in the name of "monarchic government", because he had misused monarchic sentiments as a cover for his power interests in the struggle of the parties'; 'a nation unprepared to look critically at the qualification of those who settled down in his empty chair.' Furthermore:

The great statesman did not leave behind any political tradition. He neither attracted nor even suffered independent political minds, not to speak of strong political personalities. On top of all this, it was the nation's misfortune that he harboured ... intense

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44. ES Vol. II, 1385 = GPS, 299. Weber's rather nebulous target is a section of the 'political literati which entered public life from about 1878 on.' He tells us that from 1878 this group represented the dominant tendency of 'political literati' opinion.



mistrust toward all even vaguely possible successors  
 ... A completely powerless parliament was the purely  
 negative result of his tremendous prestige.<sup>45</sup>

Weber's censoriousness, deeply felt and powerful as it is, has to be treated with some care in a study whose aim is to clarify political nomenclature; we cannot simply assume that every article on the above list of condemnation amounts to a specifically 'Caesarist' attribute. Instead we must look to other statements by Weber to confirm what was, and what was not, distinctly Caesarist about Bismarck's rule. Undoubtedly one trait which was Caesarist was Bismarck's capacity to leave his nation 'without any political will of its own, accustomed to the idea that the great statesman at the helm would make the necessary political decisions', because Weber mentions just this characteristic in the Freiburg Inaugural and invokes the image of Caesar to illustrate his point. In that lecture, which Ernst Nolte once described as abounding 'in phrases which in meaning and sometimes even formulation, could have appeared in Mein Kampf'(!), and which Wolfgang Mommsen, in his first, great book on Weber depicted with perfect accuracy as a 'beacon of German imperialism',<sup>46</sup> Weber ponders, among other things, the qualification of the middle class to govern Germany as the latter approaches a new and potentially dangerous century, and concludes that 'the bourgeois classes, as repositories of the power-interests of the nation, seem to be withering,

45. ES Vol. II, 1392 = GPS, 307-8. (I have omitted Weber's many emphases). Weber also says here that the 'intellectual level' of the parliament Bismarck left behind him 'was greatly depressed', an opinion contested by James J. Sheehan in his 'Political Leadership in the German Reichstag, 1871-1918', American Historical Review, 74 (1968-9), 511-28, esp. 527, n.47. On the other hand, Weber's point (ES Vol. II, 1388 = GPS, 303) that 'Bismarck did not tolerate any autonomous power - neither within the ministries nor within parliament' has received authoritative documentation by J.C.G. Röhl. On the fascinating minutiae relating to how Bismarck attempted comprehensively to rule over his Prussian ministers and state (Reich) secretaries, see Röhl's Germany without Bismarck: The Crisis of Government in the Second Reich 1890-1900 (1967), 20-26, esp. 22.

46. E. Nolte, Three Faces of Fascism (New York: 1969), transl. L. Vennewitz, 558 (Nolte goes on to insist, however, that Weber is wrongly seen as an intellectual precursor of fascism); W.J. Mommsen, op.cit., 137 and (on Weber's 'liberal imperialism' more generally) 68-90, 205-7, 210-11 and *passim*.



and there is still no sign that the workers have begun to mature so that they can take their place'.<sup>47</sup> Weber's fear was of an interregnum without end, a prospect which as a self-proclaimed member and partisan of the bourgeoisie, he could not be expected to contemplate dispassionately. His diagnosis was, in fact, all the more gloomy in that the explanation he proffered for the political immaturity which inflicted his own class, just as it did the proletariat, cited causes which no amount of wishful thinking could reverse: 'The explanation lies in its unpolitical past, in the fact that one cannot make up in a decade for a missing century of political education, and that the domination of a great man is not always an appropriate instrument for such a process'.<sup>48</sup>

Bismarck - the 'great man' to whom Weber is so obviously referring, 'that Caesar-like figure hewn out of quite other than bourgeois timber',<sup>49</sup> architect of German unification and de facto ruler of the German Empire until his 'departure' from office in 1890, 'the all powerful physician to whom we have entrusted everything' as Weber's favourite uncle had once bleated<sup>50</sup> - was no longer in charge when Weber spoke these words, even if his scheming continued unabated. But his deeds and example had stamped their indelible imprint on an impressionable Reich to such a degree that the middle class (at least this is Weber's thesis) accustomed to a prostrate position before a Titan, had lost the will, perhaps even the ability, to get off its knees: 'One section of the haute bourgeoisie longs all too shamelessly for the coming of a new Caesar, who will protect them in two directions: from beneath against

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47. 'The national state and economic policy', 446 = GPS, 23, emphasis in original.

48. 'The national state and economic policy', 445 = GPS, 22. Cf. ES Vol. II, 1420 = GPS, 343.

49. 'The national state and economic policy', 444 = GPS, 20-21.

50. In another letter to Sybel, this one dated 21 July 1880: see Bramsted and Melhuish (eds.), op.cit., 559.



the rising masses of the people, from above against the socio-political impulses they suspect the German dynasties of harbouring.'<sup>51</sup> There had been a time when Bismarck had been compelled to force 'his Caesarism' on a 'reluctant bourgeoisie';<sup>52</sup> then, increasingly terrorised by their own insecurity, they had come to accept willingly their own subaltern status within the Reich, reconciled to a regime 'half "Caesarist", half "patriarchal"' whose existence was severely detrimental to the nation's political education.<sup>53</sup>

When, many years later, Weber returned to the relationship between Bismarck and the bourgeoisie his treatment is noticeably different, at least in emphasis. Musing, in 'Parliament and Germany', on what he called the 'Reichstag's prime period', by which he meant the prime period of German liberalism,<sup>54</sup> the bourgeoisie's political leadership is dealt with sympathetically and respectfully, in sharp contrast to the hectoring the bourgeois class had received in the earlier Freiburg lecture. These leaders, predominantly National Liberal in affiliation, had been candid enough to admit Bismarck's 'tremendous intellectual superiority' without thereby abdicating their political responsibility. For while Weber recalled hearing liberal big-wig guests of his parents opining

51. 'The national state and economic policy', 445 = GPS, 21.

52. As Weber later remarked in 'Suffrage and Democracy', GPS, 233.

53. 'Stellungnahme zur Flottenumfrage der Allgemeinen Zeitung' (1897), reprinted in the 3rd (1971) edition of GPS, 30-32, at 31.

Weber's unflattering description of the bourgeoisie has had a significant influence on the development of the theory of the German Sonderweg, a favourite theme among historians and sociologists of Germany. The Sonderweg (literally, 'special way') has a number of variants but revolves around the core idea that German history was exceptional in not experiencing an authentic bourgeois revolution, this supposed authenticity being measured against a British or French model. The theory is the subject of an interesting, possibly important, definitely repetitive critique by Geoff Eley in his essay 'The British Model and the German Road: Rethinking the Course of German History before 1914', in D. Blackbourn and G. Eley, The Peculiarities of German History (1984), 39-155.

54. The National Liberals were unceremoniously ditched by Bismarck in 1879, by which date he had already begun the makings of a new political alignment of conservative parties and the (Catholic) Centre founded on the policy of economic protectionism.



that 'they would consider Caesarism - government by a genius - the best political organisation for Germany, if there would always be a new Bismarck'<sup>55</sup> the point of this reminiscence is to insist that these same people had no illusions about such a phenomenon occurring. They had therefore attempted to secure a strong parliamentary and party system capable of 'attracting great political talents', and capable of providing political stability and continuity; moreover, many of the most vibrant Reich institutions, such as the office of the Imperial Chancellor, the creation of the Reichsbank and the unification of the civil code, had been born of liberal parliamentary initiatives.<sup>56</sup> That they failed to wrest power from the Bismarck system, in which they were also enmeshed, was due to more than the anachronistic aspects of their economic and social policy: it was ultimately because Bismarck himself had successfully stymied every attempt to involve parliament in government. Evidently, then, Weber did not believe that the bourgeoisie's political immaturity was due to the puerility of that class's professed representatives.<sup>57</sup> On the contrary, history had vindicated the National Liberals' sense of political foreboding, a fact Weber sought to ram home to those whom he saw as the far less percipient members of the contemporary middle class: 'a Caesarist figure like Bismarck',<sup>58</sup> and a 'Caesarist regime',<sup>59</sup> like his were rare occurrences - 'At best, a genius

55. ES Vol. II, 1387 = GPS, 302. Roth's translation of 'Cäsarismus', 'cäsarisch' and 'cäsaristisch' renders all the English equivalents with a small 'c'. To conform to the practice I have adopted up to now, I propose to use, in all cases, the capital letter.

56. ES Vol. II, 1387-8 = GPS, 302-3.

57. Note, however, the telescoping of causality that occurs between the Freiburg lecture and 'Parliament and Government'. In the former, Germany's travails are attributed to 'a missing century of political education'; in the latter they are adduced to the 'legacy of Prince Bismarck'. The ambivalence actually seems to have been present as early as 1894, on which see W.J. Mommsen, op.cit., 86.

58. ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 382.

59. ES Vol. II, 1413 = GPS, 335.



appears once in several centuries'<sup>60</sup> - and it was time the nation grew up and threw off a political system ripe not for a Bismarckian epiphany, but fertile only for a posturing literati, an histrionic Kaiser intoxicated on his own vanity, and an arthritic, token parliamentarism constitutionally destitute of the capacity to exercise real power and responsible leadership.

I come now to the third reproach that Weber levelled against Bismarck's 'Caesarism'. This was the criticism that there was something improper about his rule, something illegitimate about it. Recall that this was another of the accusations on Bismarck's charge-sheet that Weber recited above when he declared that Bismarck 'misused monarchic sentiments as a cover for his power interests in the struggle of the parties'. Or, if that statement is not explicit enough in binding together the elements of Bismarckian governance, illegitimacy and Caesarism, then consider Weber's comment that 'one of the worst legacies of Bismarck's rule has been the fact that he considered it necessary to seek cover for his Caesarist regime behind the legitimacy of the monarch',<sup>61</sup> a remark which seems to make the affinity sufficiently transparent.

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60. ES Vol. II, 1387 = GPS, 302.

61. ES Vol. II, 1413 = GPS, 335. (Emphasis in German original). Also see ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 382 ('The circumstances of Bismarck's departure from office demonstrate the manner in which hereditary legitimism reacts against ... Caesarist powers') and ES Vol. II, 986 = Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (hereafter WG) (Berlin: 1964 paperback edn., based on the 1956 4th edn.) Vol. II, 726, where 'legitimate' and 'Caesarist' political power are presented as antinomies.

Weber had also implied a similar counterposition of Caesarism to legitimacy as early as 1891 in the course of more correspondence with Baumgarten: 'By the way I think that it is very important and essentially beneficial for the political formation of the young generation's judgement that they have experienced Bismarck not dying at the height of his power but disappearing from the scene. Immediately after the event (- Bismarck tendered his resignation on 20 March 1890, five days after a stormy confrontation with Kaiser Wilhelm II over parliamentary and foreign affairs: PB) one could make the most interesting observations on his previous admirers, from the opportunists (Strebernaturen) who had discovered shortly afterwards that Bismarck basically "had not grasped his time", to some eager disciples of Treitschke, young historians, who declared that they would only very reluctantly tip their hats before the emperor after he had covered the tribe of the Hohenzollern with the "ignominy of ungratefulness and petty ambition" like nobody before him. (cont'd over).



The observation that Caesarism involves an illegitimate form of rule was not of itself an original insight. We saw Romieu (whom Weber never mentions) make exactly the same claim, and we will see it repeated and elaborated upon when we turn later in this Chapter to consider the analysis of Wilhelm Roscher. Brockhaus, too, is clear on this point,<sup>62</sup> as is Tönnies: in the notes-cum-glossary appended to his book on the English and German State, he informs us that 'Caesarism (after Julius Caesar) is a form of state in which a leader of the people (usually a leader of the army) sets himself up as a sole ruler (Alleinherrscher)', adding immediately afterwards in parenthesis: 'Illegitimate or irregular monarchy'.<sup>63</sup> However, while most sources discuss the issue of illegitimacy primarily with an eye to the Napoleonic example, Weber is unusual in thinking out his idea in relation to the two Napoleons and Bismarck also (though not just them). What was the connection between these men and their regimes? We are given some clues in a tricky

61. (cont'd).

The latter were not able to contradict when we responded that now it would become clear that, as we have always claimed, their seemingly monarchistic loyalty had been nothing else than hidden Caesarism': Letter from Weber to H. Baumgarten, 3 January 1891, in Jugendbriefe, 327-8.

62. 'The term Caesarism', part of its long definition reads, 'has come into use mainly to characterise the Napoleonic system. In this sense it means a particular kind of monarchy, which is different from the absolute as well as the constitutional ones because of its democratic basis and the lack of legitimacy. Its essence is however a personal autocratic regime which is based on the predominance of administration and the ruthless enforcement of state power. The constitutional authority of the legislative bodies is used for its disguise and it tries to surround itself with the dubious glamour of a self-created aristocracy', Brockhaus Conversations Lexicon (Leipzig: 1883; 13th edn.), 37-8, at 38.

63. F. Tönnies, Der englische Staat und der deutsche Staat (Berlin: 1917), 210. Most of Tönnies' discussion of Caesarism relates, however, not to a military leader but to the office of the British prime minister, on which more below. Suffice it only to note here Tönnies' observation of the 'similarities between the British and ancient Roman Empires', a parallel he discerns in both name ('the name Prime Minister reminds one of the Principate') and in the formidable extent of the premier's powers to change laws, initiate taxation and generally harness state power to his own ends: 50.



passage in 'Parliament and Government' which I will now quote and then do my best to interpret. Because of the importance of this passage, notable for the plethora of references to Caesarism it contains, I propose to quote it at some length. The context of Weber's discussion is the issue of 'the relationship between democracy and parliamentarism':

Active mass democratization means that the political leader is no longer proclaimed a candidate because he has proved himself in a circle of honoratiores, then becoming a leader because of his parliamentary accomplishments, but that he gains the trust and the faith of the masses in him and his power with the means of mass demagogy. In substance, this means a shift toward the Caesarist mode of selection. Indeed, every democracy tends in this direction. After all, the specifically Caesarist technique is the plebiscite. It is not an ordinary vote or election, but a profession of faith in the calling of him who demands these acclamations. The Caesarist leader rises either in a military fashion, as a military dictator like Napoleon I, who had his position affirmed through a plebiscite; or he rises in the bourgeois fashion: through plebiscitary affirmation, acquiesced in by the army, of a claim to power on the part of a non-military politician, such as Napoleon III. Both avenues are as antagonistic to the parliamentary principle as they are (of course) to the legitimism of the hereditary monarchy. Every kind of direct popular election of the supreme ruler and, beyond that, every kind of political power that rests on the confidence of the masses and not of parliament - this includes also the position of a popular military hero like Hindenburg - lies on the road to these "pure" forms of Caesarist acclamation. In particular, this is true of the position of the President of the United States, whose superiority over parliament derives from his (formally) democratic nomination and election. The hopes that a Caesarist figure like Bismarck attached to universal suffrage and the manner of his anti-parliamentary demogogy also point in the same direction, although they were adapted, in formulation and phraseology, to the given legitimist conditions of his ministerial position. The circumstances of Bismarck's departure



from office demonstrate the manner in which hereditary legitimism reacts against these Caesarist powers. Every parliamentary democracy eagerly seeks to eliminate, as dangerous to parliament's power, the plebiscitary methods of leadership selection.<sup>64</sup>

From this historical dissertation we learn at least something about the genus of Caesarism, modelled on the Napoleonic experience, and its Bismarckian species, but the level of abstraction at which the analysis is pitched is regrettably stratospheric. The genus of Caesarism that the account suggests might be represented thus:

- a. Mode of selection (i.e. leadership route): military or civil ('bourgeois')
- b. Mode of acclamation: plebiscitary.
- c. Relation to parliament: antagonistic
- d. Relation to hereditary legitimism: antagonistic
- e. Conditions of existence: political democratisation.

And what of Bismarck? Glossing somewhat, his mode of selection is 'civil' (he is called on by his monarch to become minister president, and though a strategist is not a general);<sup>65</sup> his mode of acclamation is plebiscitary (albeit in the most loose and most unsatisfying of senses): he is a 'demagogue'

64. ES Vol. II, 1451-2 = GPS, 381-2. (I have retained all the emphases of the German original). On Bismarck's 'low estimation of legitimacy' and the manner in which the '"Bonapartist" character of Bismarckian politics is concealed by the monarchist, traditional cloak of the royal servant and imperial chancellor, by the heritage of the conservative junkers' see Gollwitzer, op.cit., 'Der Cäsarismus Napoleons III', 65-6. Cf. Stürmer, op.cit. 'Krise, Konflikt, Entscheidung', 115 who quotes Ranke's crisp judgement of Bismarck: 'Indispensable for the state, but intolerable for the dynasties' (1877).

65. In fact Bismarck is consistently having to assert the civil arm of government to restrain military enthusiasm and encroachment, as after the battles of Königgrätz and Sedan, and again during the Bulgarian crisis of 1887: details in Craig, op.cit., 2-7, 31-3, 133-4.



who leads from the front and who is willing and able to dissolve parliament and appeal directly to the people for support of his policies;<sup>66</sup> his relation to parliament is antagonistic, particularly when it will not succumb to his commands and then Bismarck countenances coups d'état;<sup>67</sup> his relation to the Hohenzollerns is uneasy in that despite constitutional authority ultimately residing in the Emperor, it is Bismarck himself, ostensible agent of the sovereign, who de facto rules the Reich (a situation William II would eventually rudely correct);<sup>68</sup> and, finally, all Bismarck's political orchestration takes place within a society which though far from socially democratic sanctions universal manhood suffrage.

So it is that Bismarck can be reckoned, in Weber's account, the embodiment of a Caesarist ruler. I shall be returning to the wider issue of Caesarism, parliament and democracy in the next Section and so shall say nothing more about those matters here. However, this is the place to clear up an ambiguity which if left unresolved will return to puzzle us later. It concerns this question of Caesarist illegitimacy. In ES (Economy and Society), though not only there, Weber deals with the two Bonapartes under the rubric of charisma, also presenting the idea of Caesarism as a sociological sub-type of his famous leadership concept. (Why this is so, and in what ways, is explained in detail in 3.6; let us simply note the point at this stage). Now, as we know, charisma

66. See my earlier discussion on Bismarck's populism.

67. Bismarck's Staatsstreichplane (coup d'état plans) were prosecuted in the early spring of 1890 when the old pugilist felt the parliamentary ground collapsing beneath him and as he also witnessed a new Kaiser attempting to assert his own personal rule. However, as later events were to show, coup d'état scheming was endemic to the whole Wilhelmine system and, thus, far transcended Bismarck's designs: the plans were resurrected, for instance, by Eulenburg in the summer of 1894 and by William II himself in the winter of 1896-7. On all this Röhl, op.cit., 50-5, 110-17, 217-22 is excellent.

68. One of Bismarck's objectives in planning his coup against the Reichstag was actually to increase William's dependency on him.



happens to be one of Weber's trinity of legitimate domination, leading one to ask: how is it logically possible for Caesarism to be designated as illegitimate in one context (the discussion of the Bonapartes in 'Parliament and Government') and yet, tacitly related to charismatic legitimacy in another?<sup>69</sup> The answer is probably that Weber is quite simply using the concept of legitimacy to mean different things. Caesarism is illegitimate only in the constitutional sense that it is a type of rule devoid of a hereditary, dynastic foundation. Constitutionally speaking, then, a Bourbon, Habsburg or Hohenzollern monarch could never be labelled 'Caesarist',<sup>70</sup> nor could any other monarchy (assuming that it had not been recently established). By contrast Caesarism necessarily assumes the stamp of legitimacy if we look at it from a sociological angle:<sup>71</sup> here it is legitimate to the extent that it elicits from a group

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69. E.g. ES Vol. I, 267-8, Vol. II, 1126 = WG Vol. I, 199-200, Vol. II, 846.

70. Though polemically speaking he might be so called: Weber does refer to William II as 'Bonapartist' (if one wishes to equate that charge with 'Caesarist') and also calls him a 'Caesar', though, in the latter comment, Weber may well be punning on the German word 'Kaiser'. See, respectively, statements to Baumgarten of 31 December 1889 and 3 January 1891, in Jugendbriefe, 323, 328.

W.J. Mommsen points out that, for Weber, strong parliamentary monarchical systems (like Britain's) had an important advantage over republics: the former were able to function as a check against Caesarism of the militarist variety. A parliamentary monarchical system, Mommsen paraphrases, was in Weber's opinion 'the only institutional form of government capable of neutralising the constant desire of the military to expand its power from the military into the political realm', op.cit., 289. On other reasons for Weber's support for parliamentary monarchy, due less to 'royalist sentiments' and more to 'technical considerations about the best form of government' see ibid., 289-91. Also Mommsen's instructive comments on the Weberian perception of the Reich President as an 'elected monarch', ibid., 251, 342-3 (esp. the remarks on the Reich President's office as 'a parliamentary electoral monarchy on a Caesarist basis'), 344, 353; cf. 385.

71. Or, to be precise, from the viewpoint of Weber's sociological understanding, thus recognising the criticisms that have been levelled at Weber's concept of legitimacy. For an incisive critique see F. Parkin's Max Weber (1982), 77-8, and in particular Parkin's helpful distinction, which he rightly claims Weber conflates, between 'legitimacy' and 'legitimations'.



of people, who believe in the moral authority of the Caesarist leader's mission, their voluntary compliance: Weber says as much in his remark that 'active mass democratisation means that the political leader ... gains the trust and the faith of the masses in him' etc. Hence, once this dual meaning of 'legitimacy' is comprehended, the seeming incongruity of Weber's formulations evaporates.

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Bismarck was not the only person to be called 'Caesarist' by Weber - the two Bonapartes (as we have just seen), Lloyd George, Gladstone, Pericles, Cleon and Lassalle were all to enjoy that dubious honour<sup>72</sup> - but, in the end, it is the Iron Chancellor who supremely holds this title. No one, not even the Bonapartes, is referred to as Caesarist more often than he, though I will not expatiate here on the question of how far the Bonapartist regimes (particularly that of Napoleon III) and that of Bismarck's were in fact comparable political formations. That would take me too far away from my subject and the area is, in any case, an historical minefield which requires more than a dilettante treatment.<sup>73</sup> My objective in this Section has been the easier one of delineating Weber's perception of Bismarck as a Caesarist figure and of conveying what Weber meant thereby.

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72. Lloyd George: ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 383; Gladstone: 'Politics as a Vocation', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds. and transls.), From Max Weber (hereafter FMW) (1970 paperback edn.), 77-128 at 106 = GPS, 493-548 at 523-4; Pericles, Cleon, Lassalle: ES Vol. II, 1130 = WG Vol. II, 849. Weber also likened Trotsky to a Caesar, a point to which I return in 3.5; in the meantime see W.J. Mommsen, op.cit., 279, n. 333.

73. A superb analysis is Allan Mitchell's seemingly devastating critique of 'Bonapartism as a Model for Bismarckian Politics', in the Journal of Modern History, 49, 2 (1977), 181-99, esp. 189-99. His rejoinder to Michael Stürmer's piece in the same number ('Caesar's Laurel Crown - the case for a Comparative Concept', 203-7) to the effect that 'Caesarism strikes me as overloaded with ambiguity, (a term) that is likely to land sooner or later on a heap of platitudes with the concept of totalitarianism' (209) is a contention that I shall be investigating more fully in my penultimate Chapter. (Cont'd over).



### 3.4 Democracy, Parliament and modern Caesarism

'Parliamentary democracy' is an expression that, with the passing of time, has become shrouded in its own mystique. To most modern (western) ears it conveys the idea of a political system founded on order and decency. Any threat to 'parliamentary democracy' can be expected to be denounced as a threat to liberty itself, possibly even civilisation, and a host of expectations cling tenaciously to its ritual invocation: good citizens will fastidiously abide by its decisions; responsible politicians will work to enhance its achievements; ordinary men and women will be prepared to die for its preservation. Could there be any other political system so beneficial to the human condition, or any people living under its protection so fortunate?

73. (cont'd).

Other historians have been much less critical of the Bonapartist analogy than Mitchell. See, for example, Eyck, op.cit., 116-7 (according to whom Bismarck's 'practical model was Napoleon III, whose government was sustained by the masses and opposed by a portion of the educated middle class; Napoleon had introduced universal suffrage to get rid of the Second Republic and had been successful in that. Bismarck was confident that he would be able to achieve the same success'. Eyck is also interesting on the relationship between Lassalle and Bismarck); G. Eley, op.cit., 150-1, who takes issue with Mitchell (on Eley's assessment of the concept of Caesarism see his Reshaping the German Right, 1980, 206 ff.); H.-U. Wehler, 'Bismarck's Imperialism 1862-1890', Past and Present, 48 (1970), transls. N. Porter, J. Sheehan and T.W. Mason, 119-55, esp. 122-3, 140, 142, where Bismarck is called a 'bonapartist dictator'; M. Kitchen, The Silent Dictatorship: The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916-1918 (1976), Chapter 1, where the notion undergoes an unapologetic elastication ('The characteristic form of government in Germany from Bismarck to Hitler was ... bonapartism', 10; cf. 11-24); E. Crankshaw, Bismarck (1981), 233-4 who warmly endorses Engels's letter to Marx of 13 April 1866 portraying the Bismarck regime as a 'Bonapartist semi-dictatorship'; and A.J.P. Taylor, The Course of German History (1945), 138. For Taylor, 'Bismarck had been an Napoleon in the German political structure: in true Bonapartist fashion he played off against each other conflicting social forces and maintained himself above them at the point of rest.'



The aura of respectability that now surrounds 'parliamentary democracy' is, however, a relatively recent development: before 1860 most men and women of letters would have been bewildered to hear such a conflation of institutions and meanings.<sup>74</sup> Not only would the historically minded among their number have been perfectly cognisant with the fact that representative assemblies of privileged orders and classes had in Europe long existed without any trace of democratic rule (- depending on their nationality they might have thought of the Spanish Cortes, the French Estates General, the German Landtag, the Polish Sejm, the Swedish Riksdag, the Serbian Sabor, or the British parliament itself as examples of pre-democratic institutions).<sup>75</sup> A great many of these same people would also have been adamant that democracy has an intrinsic incompatibility with parliamentary institutions since 'Caesarism' - the unmediated and unrestrained rule of one man, a military tyrant - is democracy's evolutionary terminus. The very existence of so-called democracy, one prominent view had it (cf. Chapter 2, Section 2.3), necessarily sounded in the long run the death knell of independent, free representative assemblies not because the people ever in fact governed the polity (democracy in its literal sense, they would have said, is strictly a misnomer), but because the people's social influence in a certain conjuncture enabled them to alienate their dispersed power to a spectacular individual who, while purporting to embody their sovereign will, actually subjected them, and every other class into the bargain, to a ghastly bondage.

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74 . The expression still grates in the ears of some: 'I slightly bridle when the word "democracy" is applied to the United Kingdom. Instead of that I say, "we are a Parliamentary nation." If you ... put us into the jar labelled "Democracy", I can't complain: I can only tell you that you have understood very little about the United Kingdom.' Enoch Powell, interviewed in the Guardian, 15 June 1982 and cited in A. Barnett, Iron Britannia (1982), 24.

75. On the variety of pre-democratic assemblies see A.R. Mayers, Parliaments and Estates in Europe to 1789 (1975).



Now Max Weber, as we shall see, also assumed democracy to be somewhat of a bogus term; he knew too that 'Parliamentarisation and democratisation are not necessarily interdependent, but often opposed to one another'.<sup>76</sup> Where he differed from most of his liberal and conservative predecessors, however, and from a number of his German contemporaries on both the political left and right as well, was in his conviction that parliament was an irreplaceable modern mechanism for securing, and medium for expressing, the consent of the governed; that the 'existence and formal power position of the parliaments (were) not threatened by democratic suffrage';<sup>77</sup> and that the institutions of parliament and democracy were in principle capable of functioning symbiotically - indeed were already so functioning in the United States and Great Britain to their enormous national benefit.<sup>78</sup> If government in Germany had failed in recent decades this was not due to the influence of parliamentary democracy so much as the result of national institutional pathologies which had rendered parliament an impotent talking-shop repugnant to men of will, ability and responsibility, a state of affairs constitutional change might remedy, Weber declared. Moreover, instead of defensively denying that 'democracy' results in Caesarism, Weber stridently reaffirms the equation, simultaneously imparting to it a characteristic twist. Yes, he will agree, Caesarism is in the long run inevitable in mass democracies but, at least as it presents itself in the acceptable constitutional form of the British Prime Minister

76. ES Vol. II, 1442 = GPS, 371.

77. ES Vol. II, 1443 = GPS, 371.

78. Weber thus reminded his readers that Great Britain, for all its much-vaunted (and greatly exaggerated) political democratisation, managed to retain a parliamentary system capable of bringing 'a quarter of mankind under the rule of a minute but politically prudent minority'. Germany, by contrast, now 'fights for her life against an army in which Africans, Ghurkas and all kinds of other barbarians from the most foresaken corners of the world stand poised at the frontiers ready to devastate our country': ES Vol. II, 1420, 1382 = GPS, 343, 295. Cf. W.J. Mommsen, op.cit., 263, n. 278.



or the American President, Caesarism should be seen not as a catastrophe but as an opportunity for Germany's political revitalisation. The point is not to bemoan Caesarism but to learn how to cultivate it; not to reject it in toto, but to milk its possibilities for national leadership and mass containment, while at the same time ensuring, through its insertion into a vibrant, watchful parliamentary electoral system, that the Caesarist leadership forgoes incursions into fundamental civil liberties, and remains ultimately accountable to the voting public who may, or may not, choose to re-elect it. This was Weber's position as he articulated it during the Great War.

The predominantly negative association of Caesarism with Bismarckian rule depicted in the last Section, thus coincides with a much more positive assessment of Caesarism as it is found within virile parliamentary-democratic institutions, though in the course of that latter evaluation the meaning of Caesarism itself undergoes considerable adjustment and elaboration. My job in this Section will be to attend closely to the results of this sleight of hand both through an examination of Weber's more obviously propagandist writings on the subject and through an analysis of his more deliberately academic-sociological texts which seek to chart dispassionately the progress of Caesarism to date; my method will be to provide a definition of Caesarism as I believe Weber himself frequently understood it outside of the more narrowly Bismarckian context. Once the definition has been set down I shall proceed to unpack it. But before any of this is possible, a note of caution is necessary.

Essentially it concerns the observation that the idea of Caesarism, as it is about to be defined, not content with the livery of three (or, in German, four) syllables, shows itself capable of donning a veritable wardrobe of terminological guises including 'plebiscitarian rulership/domination'



('plebiszitäre Herrschaft'),<sup>79</sup> 'leadership democracy with a "machine"',<sup>80</sup> 'plebiscitarian leadership',<sup>81</sup> 'leader-democracy',<sup>82</sup> and 'plebiscitarian leader-democracy'.<sup>83</sup> (This latter term is especially favoured by Wolfgang Mommsen, at least to judge by the frequency with which it appears in one of his highly reputed articles on Weber's theory of leadership: in the piece being referred to Mommsen mentions 'plebiszitäre Führerdemokratie' - I exclude the title - fourteen times.<sup>84</sup> The effect on the unsuspecting reader of this repetition, reinforced by Mommsen's habit of invariably placing either part or all of the expression in quotation marks, is to assume that Weber himself chose often to employ it but I have only been able to locate one written occasion when in fact he does so.<sup>85</sup> Consequently, let us beware of inflating this particular term's significance). I propose to defer until 3.6 my explanation for what is behind this chameleon strategy, only noting at this point that throughout all that follows I will be treating these expressions as if they are mere inflections of Weber's idea of Caesarism; to put it another way, I see them all as linguistic variants on the same semantic leitmotif. There are three reasons why one is justified in so doing. First, and most importantly, Weber himself recurrently uses these terms in parallel (we read

79. ES Vol. I, 267, Vol. II, 1126 = WG Vol. I, 198, Vol. II, 846.

80. FMW, 113 = GPS, 532.

81. Ibid.

82. ES Vol. I, 268, 269 = WG, Vol. I, 199. See also 'Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft', WG, Vol. II (Tübingen: 4th edn.), 551-58, at 558. (Neither my own German 1964 paperback edition of WG, nor the English translation of WG - ES - contains this version of 'the three pure types of legitimate domination'. See footnote 103).

83. WG, Vol. I, 199 = ES, Vol. I, 269, but see footnote 85.

84. W.J. Mommsen, 'Zum Begriff der "plebiszitären Führerdemokratie" bei Max Weber', Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, 15 (1963), 295-322, at 302, 303, 308, 309 (twice), 310 (twice), 311 (three times), 312 (twice), 313, 316.

85. WG, Vol. I, 199. (Rendered in the English translation of WG simply as 'plebiscitary democracy': ES, Vol. I, 269).



for instance of a 'cäsaristisch-plebiszitäres Element' in politics<sup>86</sup>), interchangeably (consider his description of a plebiscitary rulership/domination as 'the official theory of French Caesarism'<sup>87</sup>) or in such a way as to furnish an elucidation, as in his contention that 'the specifically Caesarist technique is the plebiscite'.<sup>88</sup> If it be objected: why use the word Caesarism specifically to communicate the idea you propose to define?, one is able to respond by saying: because Caesarism was the word Weber employed prior to any of those other terms catalogued above (in fact at least 26 years prior to the first sighting of 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft' in Economy and Society) and, what is more, much more often subsequently than any of them in isolation. We have to call the idea I keep threatening to define by some name, and it seems to me that Caesarism is a better label than any of the alternatives. Second, the basic equivalence of the aforementioned expressions with Caesarism in Weber's work is already widely, if in the main unreflectively, accepted in the secondary literature that seeks to interpret this founder sociologist's thought. Beetham treats them and Caesarism virtually as synonyms,<sup>89</sup> so does Mommsen<sup>90</sup> who, together with Neusüss, explicitly remarks on the similarities between the terms 'plebiscitary leader-democracy' and 'Caesarism' (and 'Bonapartism').<sup>91</sup> (Significantly neither of the authors proceeds to spell out the differences). Loewenstein tantalisingly seems to spot some subtle

86. GPS, 523 = FMW, 106. See also GPS, 382 = ES, Vol. II, 1452.

87. ES, Vol. II, 1126 = WG, Vol. II, 846.

88. ES, Vol. II, 1451 = GPS, 382. The subject index of Economy and Society reads 'Caesarism, see Democracy - plebiscitary'.

89. D. Beetham, Max Weber, 226-45, esp. 232, 239 but also, though more indirectly, 230, 265.

90. 'Zum Begriff ...', 312, 313, 314; Max Weber and German Politics, 187, 340.

91. 'Zum Begriff ...', 309-10' and E. Neusüss, 'Demokratie: Theorien und politische Praxis', in F. Neumann (ed.), Politische Theorien und Ideologien (Baden-Baden: 1974/5), 81-146, at 117-8.



metamorphosis of meaning when he says that 'Weber outlined the logical stages by which the plebiscitary leader becomes transformed into the Caesaristic leader', but these 'logical stages' are never examined and, in any event, Loewenstein quickly advances in subsequent paragraphs to criticise the 'identity between the plebiscitary and the Caesarist leader' which Weber is claimed to have forged.<sup>92</sup> A third and final reason for viewing 'plebiscitarian domination', 'leader-democracy' and the rest as derivatives of the Caesarist idea is that such an emphasis accords anyway with conventional, non-Weberian usage: Weber is part of a broader tradition of terminological association into which he quite comfortably fits; put differently, it would be surprising if Weber did not conform to this tradition. One thinks of Michels' comment on the 'plebiscitary Caesarism' of Napoleon III, in which the plebiscite functioned as the 'purifying bath which gave legitimate sanction to every illegality';<sup>93</sup> of the founder of the Red Army's description of the plebiscite as the 'democratic ritual of Bonapartism' (which has earlier been dubbed the 'bourgeois form' of Caesarism);<sup>94</sup> of Guerard's comparison between the National Socialist state and that of the French Second Empire on the grounds that in both 'the political formula was Caesarian democracy: a single leader endorsed by a plebiscite';<sup>95</sup> and of Namier's juxtaposition of 'plebiscitarian Caesarism' with 'so-called "Caesarian Democracy"'.<sup>96</sup> Not that what Weber

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92. K. Loewenstein, Max Weber's Political Ideas in the Perspective of Our Time (Massachusetts: 1966), transls. R. and C. Winston, 68; cf. 71. Emphasis mine.

93. R. Michels, Political Parties (New York: 1915), transls. E. and C. Paul, 219.

94. L. Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed (New York: 1972; 5th edn.) transl. Max Eastman, 277-8.

95. A. Guerard, extracted in B.D. Gooch (ed.), Napoleon III - Man of Destiny (1963), 12.

96. L. Namier, 'The First Mountebank Dictator', in Namier's Vanished Supremacies (1958), 54-64 at 55; cf. 60.



means by the terms he employs is always or mostly the same as these previously cited usages of Michels et al., even where Weber's choice of vocabulary is very close to their formulations; indeed whereas the latter remain for the most part fixated on the Bonapartist example, Weber includes in his notion the modern prime ministership as it operates within the parliamentary party system, a conceptual catholicism which would have scandalised Namier for one.<sup>97</sup> All I am arguing is that just as these authors recognised the affinity between such words as plebiscitarianism and Caesarism, to the extent of shuffling them in their minds as semantic parallels, so we should not be astonished to find Weber treating those sorts of words in a similar manner - even if, as I have just said, the precise significance he attributes to them is in some ways author specific.

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If Max Weber had been asked to provide a definition of Caesarism within the context of parliamentary democracy which brought together in one place his key ideas on the subject he might have responded thus: Caesarism is a term referring to (A) a species of occidental political charisma<sup>98</sup> (B) grounded in modern conditions of political democratisation (which might very generally denote the explosion of popular influence that accompanies revolutionary upheaval, but normally means the extension of the right to vote); (C) promoted

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97. According to Namier, Caesarism's 'direct appeal to the masses' intrinsically involved 'demagogical slogans; disregard of legality in spite of a professed guardianship of law and order; contempt of political parties and the parliamentary system, of the educated classes and their values; blandishments and vague, contradictory promises for all and sundry; militarism; gigantic blatant displays and shady corruption. Panem et circenses once more - and at the end of the road, disaster', *ibid.*, 55. For Namier, 'Napoleon III and Boulanger were to be the plagiarists, shadowy and counterfeit, of Napoleon I; and Mussolini and Hitler were to be unconscious reproducers of the methods of Napoleon III', 54-5.

98. And military charisma, too, though this deserves, and will receive, a short section devoted to it alone. See below 3.5.



by the mass party system in whose ideal and material interests it is to select or support the person who can best attract and sustain an electoral following (which the party machine, in turn, will 'educate', drill and mobilise); (D) endorsed through plebiscitarian affirmation by the predominantly passive demos; and (E) entailing a quintessentially personalised form of rule, the mass direct election and legitimation of which stands in some tension to both modern parliament and hereditary monarchy, though this is not to say that these latter institutions are as a consequence made redundant by the form of rule just mentioned. Particular individuals are accordingly Caesarist to the extent that they fit this ideal-typical pattern (-hence Bismarck was Caesarist insofar as he employed demagogic methods, manipulated the suffrage and threatened both parliament and the reigning dynasty; the two Napoleons were Caesarist insofar as they appealed directly to their mass constituency over the head of the assemblies; Gladstone's rule was Caesarist in conforming to all of the criteria; etc.), a proportionalist approach which allows Weber to apply his term to a variety of individuals for whom in many respects the designation would normally seem inappropriate or of only the most marginal pertinence.

Let me now elaborate on this definition point by point drawing upon in the process a range of sociological and political texts which shall be presented, for the moment, as collectively suggesting a single argument.

(A) That 'Caesarism', or 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft', or 'leader-democracy', is a variant of charisma is a fact swiftly established: Weber is explicit about the matter in Economy and Society<sup>99</sup> and, with more brevity, in a piece written in 1913 as the introduction to Weber's own series on the sociology of religion which he grouped together under the rubric 'The Economic Ethic

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99. ES, Vol. I, 266-8, Vol. II, 1126, 1129 = WG, Vol. I, 198-9, Vol. II, 846, 849.



of the World Religions'.<sup>100</sup> But if Caesarism is indeed a variant of charisma, what sort of variant is it exactly? Weber's answer to this question is more delphic.

Compare for instance the discussion of charisma in 'Politics as a Vocation', originally delivered as a lecture in Munich on 28 January 1919,<sup>101</sup> with those portions from the analyses of 'legitimate domination/authority' in ES where charisma receives systematic and (in two cases) sustained examination, to wit: Chapter XIV (WG, IX) of Part Two composed in 1913 and called 'Charisma and its Transformations'; the bit on charisma from the Section confusingly interpolated into Part Two of the Fourth Edition of WG Vol. II (confusingly because the Section seems to have been penned, according to Wolfgang Mommsen, 'around 1918',<sup>102</sup>) entitled 'The three pure types of legitimate domination';<sup>103</sup> and Sections iv, v and vii, Chapter III (also III in WG) of Part I, probably drafted around 1919. (The overlap between what I shall feel free to call the 1913, 1918 and 1919 treatments/versions/etc. of charisma in ES is considerable though differences are evident too in length - the 1913 treatment is a little more than twice as long as its 1919 counterpart, while both dwarf the 1918 version - and in substance: for instance the 1919 discussion expressly develops the 'anti-authoritarian' aspect of Weber's idea of charisma which is muted in the 1913 analysis and only briefly mentioned in the 1918 draft). In

100. FMW, 267-301 at 295-6 = Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (hereafter GARS) (Tübingen: 1920) Vol. I, 237-75, at 268-9.

101. W. Schluchter's dating in his 'Value-neutrality and the ethic of responsibility' (transl. G. Roth) in G. Roth and W. Schluchter, Max Weber's Vision of History: Ethics and Methods (1979), 65-116 at 114.

102. W.J. Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy. Perspectives on the Political Sociology of Max Weber (1974) 16-17, esp. 17 n. 25.

103. See footnote 82 above. The Section was first published posthumously as an article in the Preussische Jahrbücher Vol. 187, January 1922, 1-12.



'Politics as a Vocation' Weber's argument seems to be relatively straightforward. Having sketched the general character of charisma, and observed that it 'has emerged in all places and in all historical epochs' Weber adds:

Most importantly in the past, it has emerged in the two figures of the magician and the prophet on the one hand, and in the elected war lord, the gang leader and the condotierre on the other hand. Political leadership in the form of the free "demagogue" who grew from the soil of the city state is of greater concern to us; like the city state, the demagogue is peculiar to the Occident and especially to Mediterranean culture. Furthermore, political leadership in the form of the parliamentary "party leader" has grown on the soil of the constitutional state, which is also indigenous only to the Occident.<sup>104</sup>

These comments suggest a tripartite division of charisma into a religious, military and political dimension, with the latter, in the shape of the city state demagogue and the parliamentary party leader, being unique to the west - even though a little earlier in the same essay Weber had presented us with what was more akin to a bifurcation of his concept: we heard there of charismatic domination 'as exercised by the prophet or - in the field of politics - by the elected war lord, the plebiscitarian ruler, the great demagogue, or the political party leader'.<sup>105</sup> But whether tripartite or dualistic it seems that there are good grounds for supposing that Caesarism is a term that Weber could also have included in his category of political charisma for it well expresses his ideas about modern party political leadership alluded to in the two definitions I have just cited. True, the actual word is absent in both; but it does nonetheless emerge explicitly when Weber subsequently describes Gladstone, a man whom he depicts as the paradigmatic manifestation of the charismatic parliamentary-party leader: Gladstone's

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104. FMW, 80 = GPS, 496, emphasis in original; cf. 'Die drei reinen Typen ...', 556.

105. FMW, 79 = GPS, 495.



'"grand" demagogy' and its success in wooing the mass vote is construed by Weber as irrefutable evidence that a 'Caesarist plebiscitary element' had arisen in British politics which, in tandem with the caucus machine, had transformed the Prime Minister into a 'plebiscitarian dictator' who 'stands above Parliament', even if he is constitutionally located within it.<sup>106</sup>

We can then find in 'Politics as a Vocation' a reasonably clear indication that Caesarism is a type of occidental, political charisma. Turning now to ES, it is possible also to discover Caesarism portrayed as a type of occidental, political charisma, even if Weber's own presentation of his analysis is in this instance peculiarly tortuous. So that we may the better understand his position it will be helpful to recapitulate some basic ideas.

Pure or 'genuine' charisma is doubly extraordinary: its bearer is 'treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities';<sup>107</sup> its life-blood, at least initially, a psychological-emotional condition of human excitement, enthusiasm or distress which may or may not be related to a wider social crisis. In the intense

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106. FMW, 106-7 = GPS, 523-4. One should add that though 'demagogy' is a necessary element of Caesarism according to Weber, it is certainly possible for people to be demagogic in his terms without thereby being Caesarist, as for instance, in the cases of the journalist who 'is nowadays the most important representative of the demagogic species' (FMW, 96 = GPS, 513) or that of 'the modern monarchies' who, in using 'speeches, telegrams and propaganda devices of all kinds for the promotion of their prestige' have also chosen 'the road to demagogy' (ES, Vol. II, 1450-1 = GPS, 381). (I explained, towards the end of the last Section, that the constitutional legitimacy conferred on long-standing monarchies was a feature of their standing that militated against the designation 'Caesarism' being applied to them). Similarly, although Weber adopts a phraseology which appears to compound demagogy and charisma - as in his references in Economy and Society to 'charisma of the spirit and the tongue' (the context is Periclean democracy 'which according to the intent of its creator was the domination of the demagogos': ES Vol. II, 1126 = WG Vol. II, 846) or to 'the "charisma of rhetoric"' (the context is modern electioneering: ES Vol. II, 1129 = WG Vol. II, 849) - the ideas remain analytically distinct. Thus Weber would never have described Stefan George as a demagogue, though he does describe him as charismatic (ES Vol. I, 245 = WG Vol. I, 182). On the concepts of 'demagogy' and 'charisma' in Weber's writings see also the comments in Walter Struve's Elites Against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890-1933 (Princeton: 1973), 142.

107. ES Vol. I, 241 = WG, Vol. I, 178.



personal devotion to the master that it inspires, and in its dismissal of tradition and legality for their own sake, 'Charismatic belief revolutionises men "from within" and shapes material and social conditions according to its revolutionary will'.<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, the fealty of both close devotees and the rank-and-file is neither unconditional nor uncritical: the carrier of the unique and wondrous gift of grace, be he a prophet, war lord or some other exemplary figure to whom men and women voluntarily, often rapturously, submit themselves, will lose his hold over disciples and mass alike if his charismatic powers are seen to desert him and he proves unable to deliver the requisite material and emotional goods expected by his followers. However, this ability to perform miracles of various kinds though a condition of charisma's longevity, is not the ground of its claim to legitimacy: rather, the latter is based upon the 'conception that it is the duty of those subject to charismatic authority to recognise its genuineness and to act accordingly'.<sup>109</sup> It is this moral imperative, this demand of allegiance on behalf of a leader convinced that he is the vessel of some deity or of providence that constitutes charisma's 'authoritarian principle' of legitimacy.<sup>110</sup>

By contrast 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft' (Caesarism) reflects a situation in which charisma has strayed such a long way down the road of rationalisation that the grounds of its original claim to legitimacy have been inverted: charismatic legitimacy is subjected 'to an anti-authoritarian interpretation'.<sup>111</sup> Instead of the leader's arrogation of authority being founded upon a mission which the following, to the extent that it recognises him, are duty-bound to acknowledge (charisma in its purest manifestation), legitimacy is now

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108. ES Vol. II, 1116 = WG Vol. II, 836.

109. ES Vol. I, 242 = WG Vol. I, 179. Cf. ES Vol. II, 1113 = WG Vol. II, 833.

110. ES Vol. I, 266 = WG, Vol. I, 198.

111. Ibid.; cf. 'Die drei reinen Typen ...', 558.



formally derived from the will of the following itself, whom the charismatic (political) leader professes to personify. Legitimacy in this way assumes a 'democratic' colouration.<sup>112</sup> In Weber's words:

The personally legitimated charismatic leader becomes leader by the grace of those who follow him since the latter are formally free to elect and even to depose him - just as the loss of charisma and its efficacy had involved the loss of genuine legitimacy. Now he is the freely elected leader.

Correspondingly, the recognition of charismatic decrees and judicial decisions on the part of the community shifts to the belief that the group has a right to enact, recognise or repeal (abschaffen - "appeal" is obviously a misprint - PB) laws, according to its own free will, both in general and for an individual case.<sup>113</sup>

Any reader who ponders these lines and takes their meaning literally will be bound to think that the core meaning of charisma has been changed in them. The leader who once led by virtue of his own qualities to which the masses (or a section of them) submitted in awe, has become reduced to a miserable front-man tolerated as long as he does what he is told, a mere cipher of popular sovereignty. What a degrading transmutation! How is it possible, one asks, for Weber to argue that the 'democratic' leader is, despite his apparent abasement, a charismatic figure? The immediate context of Weber's remarks does little to dispel the mist of incomprehension; on the other hand, the problem is greatly clarified when we probe Weber's wider understanding of the democratic political process and the powers - or rather lack of them - he attributes to the common people.<sup>114</sup> As a means of proceeding let us

112. On 267 of ES Vol. I (= 198 of WG Vol. I) Weber maintains that 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft' is a transitional mode of law-making between the charismatic and rational-legal types, if anyone can make sense of that.

113. ES Vol. I, 267 = WG Vol. I, 198, emphases omitted.

114. A much more extended analysis of Weber's assumptions is provided in the next Chapter.



look first at his discussion of the election and the plebiscite; second at his perception of the demos; and third, return to our exposition to address the question posed just a moment ago.

Weber makes great play of the distinction between an election and a plebiscite though, as we shall see, in the end it amounts to little. The plebiscite, Weber explains, is an acclamatory technique peculiar to democracy<sup>115</sup> and through it voters give fulsome expression of their endorsement of a leader or policy.<sup>116</sup> A plebiscite, strictly speaking, is not politically identical to an 'election' if by that word we are implying 'a real choice between candidates'.<sup>117</sup> Rather, a plebiscite 'is the first or the renewed recognition of a pretender as a personally qualified, charismatic ruler; an example of the latter case is the French plebiscite of 1870'.<sup>118</sup> And yet, when it comes down to it, when Weber discards all fine analytical and historical<sup>119</sup> distinctions to speak plainly, we find that from his own vantage point he sees minimal substantive difference between the election and the plebiscite after all, an observation which does not only rely on their casual compounding

115. There is a useful, short description of the Roman plebiscitum and its evolution in N.G.L. Hammond and H.H. Scullard (eds.), The Oxford Classical Dictionary (1970; 2nd edn.), 844-5.

116. On non-democratic acclamation see ES Vol. II, 1126 = WG Vol. II, 846.

117. ES Vol. II, 1129 = WG Vol. II, 848.

118. ES Vol. II, 1126 = WG Vol. II, 846. Cf. ES Vol. II, 1129 = WG Vol. II, 848 ('We are not at all dealing with an election, of course, when voting for a political ruler has a plebiscitary and hence charismatic character') and ES Vol. II, 1451 = GPS, 392 (where Weber remarks that 'the specifically Caesarist technique is the plebiscite. It is not an ordinary vote or election, but a profession of faith in the calling of him who demands these acclamations').

119. Weber says that the plebiscite and the election represent different phases of rationalisation: see ES Vol. II, 1127 = WG Vol. II, 847.



at one point in 'Politics as a Vocation'.<sup>120</sup> It helps to recall here Weber's analysis of the social and semantic provenance of the 'election' which, he informs us, was originally an acknowledgement, a recognition, by a following - faced with the problems of charismatic succession - of the grace of a charismatic aspirant, a confirmation of the prospective lord's personal charisma. There was only one 'right' choice of, say, a feudal king; to choose 'wrongly' was tantamount to a literally sacrilegious error. And the majority principle had absolutely nothing to do with this 'election' process since 'a minority, no matter how small, might be right in its recognition of genuine charisma, just as the largest majority might be in error',<sup>121</sup> a dilemma which spawned in the case of the papacy the practice of unanimous election. Now Weber remarks in this context that the kind of election he has just described is not one 'in the modern sense of a presidential or parliamentary election',<sup>122</sup> but this is a remark that requires some care in its interpretation. For it is clear from practically everything that Weber says elsewhere (and this will be substantiated when, in 3.4.2 below, we come to view his analysis of the role of the party leader and his machine) that this 'modern sense' of election, proclaiming the secular credo of choice, mass participation etc., is from Weber's perspective so much verbiage, and that essentially the original meaning of 'election' accords well with its modern reality. In both, the actual involvement of the bulk of the population in the running of the state is negligible and, because of the law of the small number, so it will always remain; in both, the agency of the hoi polloi is limited

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120. FMW, 108 = GPS, 525-6: 'That the plebiscitarian "machine" has developed so early in America is due to the fact that there, and there alone, the executive - this is what mattered - the chief of office-patronage, was a President elected by plebiscite'.

121. ES Vol. II, 1126 = WG Vol. II, 846. See also 'Die drei reinen Typen ...', 557-8.

122. ES Vol. II, 1126 = WG Vol. II, 845.



to affirmation and acclamation of the master's mission - the very characteristics, note, of the plebiscitary form Weber originally sought to define as sociologically distinctive! Thus despite all of Weber's analytical exertions, the meaning of election in the original sense, its current manifestation, and the plebiscite too, are all fundamentally similar political practices.

Weber's scepticism of the ability of the 'masses' to govern themselves, making elections relevant primarily as a mechanism to decide whom they should exalt is underlined in a famous passage in Economy and Society where Weber seeks to clarify what he means by democratisation:

... one must always remember that the term "democratisation" can be misleading. The demos itself, in the sense of a shapeless mass, never "governs" larger associations, but rather is governed. What changes is only the way in which the executive leaders are selected and the measure of influence which the demos, or better, which social circles from its midst are able to exert upon the content and the direction of administrative activities by means of "public opinion". "Democratisation", in the sense here intended, does not necessarily mean an increasingly active share of the subjects in government. This may be a result of democratisation, but it is not necessarily the case.<sup>123</sup>

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123. ES Vol. II, 984-5 = WG Vol. II, 724-5. No one could seriously take objection to the claim that the 'demos ... in the sense of a shapeless mass' never governs. But Weber's remark hints at more than this: it points to his perception that 'shapeless' is what the demos of necessity is (he offers us no other 'sense' of demos in this context; 'in the sense of' can be taken to mean 'in my sense'). Consequently, with the compounding of demos with 'shapeless mass', participatory democracy becomes virtually a logical impossibility.

On Weber's limited conception of democracy, and its connection to his imperialism, see Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 394-6. Mommsen summarises: 'Weber made no attempt to save ... the ideal core of the classical democratic theory under the conditions of modern mass democracy. He replaced the postulate of the free self-determination of the people, which, since Rousseau, had bestowed a special dignity on the democratic idea, with the principle of a formally free choice of leaders. The ordinary citizens were no longer supposed to actively participate as responsible individuals in the creation of political community life ... The democratic constitutional state was perceived essentially as a technical organisation for the purpose of training political leaders and enabling them to rise to power and to rule ... Democracy ceased to be a form of government with special dignity. Its chief advantage lay in its greater "efficiency" in the field of foreign policy', 395-6, emphasis in original.



Since the demos 'never "governs"', particularly in the absence of what Weber calls elsewhere 'direct democracy', a system in which the assembled people do make collective choices on a limited range of issues and now made virtually impossible owing to the nature of modern, large, complex, democratic states,<sup>124</sup> 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft' is really not so much about active co-operation of the people in the governing of the common weal as about mastery of an essentially 'passive electorate':<sup>125</sup> the leader remains an Herr, a lord, not an agent, to whom the demos willingly defers.<sup>126</sup> It follows that though the legitimacy of Führer-Demokratie (of, in a word, Caesarism) 'is formally derived from the will of the governed',<sup>127</sup> and though that legitimacy is ideologically mooted to be 'anti-authoritarian', the leader in fact remains what he is in every social system - the boss of demi-god proportions - and hence authoritarian in that sense; all talk of the 'sovereign people', concomitantly, is a fiction, an empty slogan, a political deceit.<sup>128</sup> But if it transpires that, from Weber's standpoint, democratic leadership in modern states is essentially as authoritarian as it always has been - masses, or followers, are subordinated to leaders - why does he refer to it as 'anti-authoritarian'? Because he is only describing democracy's 'claim' to legitimacy, and that claim only tells us how the charismatic democratic leader,

124. It is notable that Weber construes 'a system of direct democracy' as the antithesis of a charismatic leadership structure: see ES Vol. II, 1128 = WG Vol. II, 847.

125. FMW, 99 = GPS, 517. Cf. ES Vol. II, 1457 = GPS, 389.

126. As Wolfgang Mommsen remarks, 'In (Weber's) opinion the voluntary subordination of the masses, and on the parliamentary level, of the deputies, to small groups of leaders constituted an essential precondition of democratic rule'. 'Max Weber and Roberto Michels. An asymmetrical partnership', European Journal of Sociology, XXII, (1981), 100-16, at 110. Also the synopsis on the relationship between democracy, parliament, and foreign policy in the German context, in Max Weber and German Politics, 189.

127. ES Vol. I, 268 = WG Vol. I, 199, emphasis in original.

128. Thus Weber saw nothing contradictory in describing modern democratic government as a sort of 'dictatorship': see, e.g. FMW, 106-7 = GPS, 523-4. I return to the issue of dictatorship below.



and the society of which he is a part, justifies his mission, as opposed to why people opt to support him - which is certainly not because they are told that it is their duty to do so (many pontificate about duty, few are followed) or because they believe he has a duty towards them. No: the charismatic democratic leader wins allegiance on the basis of what he does or on the basis of what people perceive him to do or on the basis of what they perceive he is capable of doing; in short, because of his powers and their actual/potential realisation. Insofar as a democratic leader can prove his ability and win a devoted constituency through extraordinary feats, his domination is thus essentially charismatic, never mind the pious phrases concerning mass participation that surround it.<sup>129</sup>

A man who profoundly understood the follies inflicting the human condition once declared that 'At times our brains lead us into plain silliness'.<sup>130</sup> It would be hard to find a better epitaph for this bizarre example of Weberian circumlocution.

To sum up so far: Caesarism (or 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft', or 'Führer-Demokratie') is that variant of political charisma (and military charisma too, as shall become apparent later) characterised by its occidental geographical location and its decorative anti-authoritarian claim to legitimacy.<sup>131</sup>

129. Cf. Beetham, Max Weber, 265, and Mommsen, Age of Bureaucracy, 91.

130. La Rochefoucauld, Maxims (1959), ed. and transl. L.W. Tancock, 85, Maxim 415.

131. There is one other piece of terminological confusion which is properly tackled here. It concerns a particularly strange sentence from ES which reads as follows: 'Plebiscitary democracy - the most important type of Führer-Demokratie - is a variant of charismatic authority, which hides behind a legitimacy that is formally derived from the will of the governed' (ES Vol. I, 268 = WG, Vol. I, 199) emphasis in the original. The first part of this sentence is garbled, because the way it is phrased suggests that plebiscitary democracy is a species of leader-democracy when common sense tells us that if there is a relationship between these two concepts, and the phenomena they denote, it must be the other way round: after all while it is possible to conceive of a democracy without leaders, it is (cont'd over).



(B), (C) and (D). I will presently be moving to a broader consideration of Weber's handling of the Caesarism theme, particularly as it pertains to the extension of the franchise and the development of the mass party system, but wish to approach this topic via a detour. The objective of this digression is to examine the contributions of a couple of authors - German contemporaries of Weber, albeit of an older generation - who also advanced classic analyses of Caesarism, one of which bears directly on the link between Caesarism and democracy. This will enable me presently to pinpoint the peculiarities of Weber's treatment when counterposed to this older German generation, and will also conveniently provide us with the opportunity of re-calling old Auguste Romieu from his exile in the last Chapter in order that Weber's deviation from the first explicit theory of Caesarism ever penned may be properly calibrated.

I spoke just now of 'the peculiarities of Weber's treatment' of Caesarism, and distinctive it undoubtedly was when contrasted to an older German generation and an earlier continental tradition. But one must be careful

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131. (cont'd).

semantically absurd to posit a leader-democracy without democracy. And elsewhere Weber recognises as much, for instance: in his counterposition, in 'Politics as a Vocation' between 'leadership democracy with a "machine" and leaderless democracy' (FMW, 113 = GPS, 532), a distinction he saw as manifest respectively in Britain and America on the one hand, and in his native Germany on the other; in his remark about it being 'necessary to distinguish the type of plebiscitary leader democracy from that which attempts to dispense with leadership altogether' (ES, Vol. I, 269, transl. modified = WG, Vol. I, 199); and in his reference to 'purely plebiscitary democracy' (which forms the antinome of charisma and Caesarism), a kind of democracy consisting of 'direct popular elections (of both officials and leaders: PB) and referenda, and ... the instrument of the recall' (ES, Vol. II, 1456 = GPS, 387, my emphasis). Thus the weight of Weber's usage much more heavily inclines toward the estimate of leader democracy as a variant of plebiscitary democracy (or as a system in parallel or in contrast to it) than vice versa, a conclusion which makes me wonder whether Weber's original manuscript has been correctly transposed: if the piece in question read 'Plebiscitary democracy - of which leader-democracy is the most important type - ', the sense would not perfectly conform to all of Weber's ideas on this subject but it would come far nearer to some of them than the statement as it stands extant.



not to claim too much for him. Thus in one respect to be examined soon - Weber's theory of the British Prime Minister as a Caesarist figure, as a 'dictator' - his ideas were hardly novel. By the time that Weber sketched his argument on this matter (1917-1919) the portrayal of the British Premier in those terms had been a platitude for around a decade outside of Germany in the writings of such people as A.L. Lowell (United States), Sidney Low and J.A. Hobson (Great Britain) and M. Ostrogorski (France)<sup>132</sup> and was by no means unknown within Germany itself. Otto Hintze, in an article published in 1908, was one such person to have observed that, in England, 'the parliamentary ministry is developing further and further into a popular dictatorship of the Prime Minister', and Tönnies was another: 'the Prime Minister of England has a great future', he declared in 1917, 'and this future is Caesaristic'.<sup>133</sup> All these men had commented, with differing degrees of concern, on the concentration of power that modern history had deposited in the Prime Minister's office (and in the cabinet as well) to the appreciable detriment of the ordinary MP's independence and of parliamentary sovereignty

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132. See A.H. Birch, Representative and Responsible Government. An Essay on the British Constitution (1964), 72-81. Birch shows how the analyses of Lowell, Low, Ostrogorski and, before any of them, Sir Henry Maine, served as an important departure from the 'idealised' picture of the British constitution associated with such liberal thinkers as Gladstone, Morley, Devonshire and Dicey. This picture 'assumed that political power flowed exclusively in one direction, from the electors to Parliament and from Parliament to the government, and never in the opposite way. It took no account of the growth of party management and the extent to which the cabinet could influence, if not control Parliament. Its description of Parliamentary control of the executive was appropriate to, and was based on the experience of, the situation between the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867, but it rapidly ceased to be appropriate in the situation which developed after 1867', 74.

133. O. Hintze, 'The origins of the modern ministerial system: a comparative study', in F. Gilbert (ed.), The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze (New York: 1975), translators various, 216-66, at 266; Tönnies, op.cit., 52.



more generally, a conclusion which both prefigured and considerably influenced Weber's own theory of modern democracy. Without doubt, Weber's perception of the development of Prime Ministerial Caesarism had its own idiosyncratic touches (- he resigns himself to the evolution as inevitable; he widens the concept of Caesarism to cover the US President and city mayor: see below). Nonetheless, it is just as indubitable that the agenda of the political debate about the future of the Premier's office had already been substantially set before Max Weber pronounced on the matter, and that the bulk of what he had to say about the role and powers of the British Prime Minister was not especially original.<sup>134</sup>

#### 3.4.1 Excursus on Albert Schäffle and Wilhelm Roscher

The two authors who merit our attention are the organicist thinker and social reformer Albert Schäffle<sup>135</sup> - Weber described his Bau und Leben des sozialen Körpers as a 'brilliant work'<sup>136</sup> - and the historical philologist and political economist Wilhelm Roscher<sup>137</sup> whom Weber subjected to a merciless methodological critique in an article first published nine years after Roscher's

134. My comments here are derivative of Beetham, Max Weber, 116, n. 6, who remarks that Low's and Lowell's texts 'were widely read in this period' (before and during the War) and who informs us that Low's 'The Governance of England' and Lowell's 'The Government of England' were translated into German 'in 1908 and 1913 respectively'. See also 117, n. 61: 'Weber was not alone in using the terms "dictator" and "Caesar" of the British prime minister; such terms were a commonplace of contemporary analysis'.

135. On Schäffle as a social reformer, and on his ideas regarding workers' insurance in particular, see H.J. Braun, 'Political Economy and Social Legislation in Germany, ca 1870-1890', History of European Ideas, 4, 1 (1983), 51-60, esp. 55-6.

136. ES, Vol. I, 14 = WG, Vol. I, 11.

137. A. Oncken has admirably summarised the various branches of Roscher's scholarship in R.H. Inglis Palgrave (ed.), Dictionary of Political Economy Vol. III (1908; 2nd edn.), 323-7.



death in Volume 25 of Schmoller's Jahrbuch, 1903. (As far as I am aware, Weber never developed a commensurately sustained critique of Roscher's political writings, though he does mention in passing the locus classicus of Roscher's theory of Caesarism in the article mentioned above).<sup>138</sup>

Common to the historical perspective of Schäffle and Roscher was a broadly cyclical, heterodox-Aristotelian view of political transformation. Each politico-constitutional structure or stage - Monarchy, Aristocracy, Democracy - had its season; each had its immanent principle of emergence and principle of decline. 'Caesarism' formed a sub-type of the triad.

Schäffle's account is very abbreviated so let me deal with it first. He prefaces his specific remarks on Caesarism with a quote from Aristotle where the latter is describing how 'kingship' (or what Schäffle calls tautologically 'legitimate monarchy'<sup>139</sup>) becomes debased from within, a victim of either dissension between members of the ruling dynasty or of the ambition of a king determined to expand his power beyond its lawful boundaries, or of both.<sup>140</sup> As kingship disintegrates, Schäffle glosses, society is thrown

138. See 'Roscher und Knies und die logischen Probleme der historischen Nationalökonomie' in M. Weber, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre (hereafter GAW) (Tübingen: 1951, 2nd edn.), 1-145, at 28, n. 4 = M. Weber, Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems of Historical Economics (New York: 1975), transl. G. Oakes, 227, n. 69.

139. A. Schäffle, Bau und Leben des socialen Körpers (Tübingen: 1896; 2nd edn.), Vol. II, 486. The expression 'legitimate monarchy' is tautologous because Aristotle's 'kingship' is a term which itself contained the presumption of legitimacy. According to Aristotle, 'tyranny' is a wrongful form of monarchy, 'kingship', a rightful one; the former is a 'deviation' from the latter. See The Politics (1962), transl. T.A. Sinclair, 115-7, 151; on the types of 'kingship' see 135-8. (Incidentally, the trinity of Monarchy, Aristocracy and Democracy is not authentic Aristotle: his taxonomy was Kingship, Aristocracy and Polity: see 116).

140. Schäffle, 486; cf. Aristotle, 223-4 who adds a third cause of decline: 'Those who inherit may be persons of no account, whom it is hard to respect; and though the power they possess is royal, not tyrannical, they may abuse their position'.



into crisis: the eventual result is tyranny or, what is just another word it turns out for the same thing, 'Caesarism', 'the product of a long and tiring battle between aristocrats and democrats, the rich and the poor. Out of the anarchy of civil war comes as the "saviour of society" and democratic at the same time, the ancient Greek tyranny, the Roman emperor system, modern Caesarship'.<sup>141</sup>

The tyrant's power base, Schäffle continues, rests on a combination of brute force and popular incitement as he protects his position, on the one hand, by the deployment of a mercenary army,<sup>142</sup> body guards and 'praetorians' and, on the other, by a divide-and-rule policy in which the poor are pitted against the educated and propertied classes. More generally:

In a superb manner, and as if he had portrayed the most modern Napoleonism, Aristotle draws the basic characteristics of a policy by which alone the tyranny can survive. Its arts are: imitation of genuine monarchy; condemnation, destruction, slander, criminal pursuit of all brilliant independent men; attraction of all the weak characters amongst the rich and noble; corruption in every shape and form; repression of associations and open discussion; the stirring-up of estates, classes and friendships; enormous public extravagance, the feeding and entertaining of the mob; instigation of wars in order to divert internal opposition; police terror and a system of informers.<sup>143</sup>

Thus in Schäffle's schema Caesarism is portrayed as identical to tyranny. Its origins lie in the internal collapse of kingship; its rule is simultaneously divisive, despotic and bellicose; its connection to democracy tenuous; its recent manifestation 'the most modern Napoleonism', by which Schäffle evidently meant the domination of Napoleon III.<sup>144</sup>

141. Schäffle, ibid.

142. 'A king's bodyguard is made up of citizens, a tyrant's of foreign mercenaries', Aristotle, 218.

143. Schäffle, 486.

144. Schäffle says that Napoleon III could have been the model for Aristotle's depiction of tyranny in The Politics 'V, c. 9' (Schäffle must mean V, c. 11) since 'Faked plebiscites, an army of praetorians, corruption, police, (cont'd)



Now Wilhelm Roscher agreed that Napoleon III (and his uncle even more) was a classic example of the Caesarist phenomenon; he concurred, too, with the proposition that 'tyranny' was a suitable term with which to designate it. Yet on the question of Caesarism's source he would beg to differ. Unfortunately, it is not possible to do justice here to all the modulations the concept of Caesarism enjoys in Roscher's hands, a task which would require a chapter devoted to it alone. The analysis of Caesarism in his Politik is far more detailed than that of Schäffle's, constructed on an altogether grander scale and taking up one hundred and twenty six pages of that hefty treatise; indeed, after Romieu, there is no other treatment of Caesarism so elaborated as his. However, the remit of this Chapter is emphatically Max Weber and one must tailor one's cloth accordingly; consequently I shall restrict this necessarily exiguous commentary to those aspects of Roscher's discussion which have most relevance to my prime subject.

Roscher's distance from Schäffle's perspective quickly becomes apparent. Not only does he define Caesarism with more precision as a 'military tyranny';<sup>145</sup> he also pivots his theory on the argument that Caesarism arises out of conditions in which democracy<sup>146</sup> (as opposed to kingship) has degenerated into chaos; that is to say where rich and poor live in a state of mutual hatred, where the rivalry of demagogues and the parties they lead has become increasingly irresponsible, where the masses have become utterly capricious, and where the educated suspect that the extant system allows too much freedom. As a consequence, people in general long for order, for stability, at any

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144. (cont'd).

censoring of the press, the adventures from Mexico to China, the European wars, well payed but servile deputies, senators, civil servants, jailing, deportation, assassination, incarceration of 30,000 political opponents and the like' are all 'characteristics of tyranny', 487.

145. W. Roscher, Politik: Geschichtliche Naturlehre der Monarchie, Aristokratie und Demokratie (Stuttgart: 1892), 588.

146. Cf. Aristotle, 201; 'In earlier times a change from democracy to tyranny took place whenever popular leader and military leader were one person'.



cost, and no group is better placed to satisfy this yearning than the military. This fact, says Roscher (echoing Romieu?) is made explicable by the consideration that in periods of tumult and convulsion it is the army and its commander that provide the only source of social anchorage; furthermore, the military virtues such as courage and obedience, being ones that are in a sense politically primordial, survive the common decadence, enabling those who possess these virtues to rise to a position of almost natural superiority. Caesarism, therefore, is a product of a society on the wane, just as it is that society's coup de grâce also.

The people, Roscher implies, are entirely unsentimental about Caesarism. They submit to it not out of love, but because in a situation where the 'best' have withdrawn from the political arena, and where confusion reigns, the attitude emerges 'that it is better to be oppressed by one lion, rather than ten wolves, a hundred jackals or even a thousand rats', a conviction, Roscher insists, that is the engine (Hauptbeförderungsmittel) of Caesarism.<sup>147</sup> For the sake of an end to 'anarchy', then, people quite instrumentally trade their liberty for Caesarism, 'the graveyard of general bondage'.<sup>148</sup> The tyrant, who once in power assumes a monarchical guise, is conscious of the people's pragmatism and the taste this realisation leaves in his mouth is invariably bitter. Comprehending that he has become their choice not by winning hearts and minds but as the lesser of two evils, aware that he lacks that halo of legitimacy and may even in fact be hated, the tyrant becomes ever more suspicious and his rule increasingly severe; it follows that the monarchy which emanates from democracy's crisis 'is as a rule despotic'.<sup>149</sup>

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147. Roscher, 589.

148. Ibid.

149. Ibid., 590.



The regimes and persons that Roscher happens to call 'Caesarist' are enormously varied (- in contrast to Romieu, incidentally, Julius Caesar is among the men so labelled) and his general discussion many-sided. For our purposes, though, it will suffice to expand on what he has to say about Caesarism's relationship to democracy and what he supposed to flow from that relationship.

Two of Roscher's observations are of especial pertinence. The first regards his contention that democracy paves the way for Caesarism, not only because of the turmoil that issues from its death-throes, but because democracy's tendency to centralise, a consequence in turn of the equalitarian, 'levelling' proclivity this kind of society exemplifies has removed potential loci of resistance to the tyrant from status-groups of various sorts. Moreover, as a consequence of democracy's obsession with novelty and of its secularising propensities more generally, old values which might have figured to restrain the tyrant, together with old religious and moral truths which might have guided the masses, have been subject to erosion. Hence democratic centralisation and democratic mundanity serve as both prelude and preparation for the Caesarist takeover.

Roscher's second observation is more subtle and turns on the peculiarities of the Caesarist leader's administration once installed in power. What Roscher appears to be saying, if I have understood him rightly, is that Caesarism inherits from democracy a strong equalitarian current which it is in a constant struggle to graft onto its own monarchical system. It is this queer admixture of heteroclite political forms that accounts both for the strengths of Caesarism and its disabilities.

As an example of its strengths consider what Roscher refers to as Caesarism's 'janus-faced' nature, that is to say its combination of extreme monarchical and extreme democratic governance, which enables the Caesarist



ruler to encompass, and claim to represent, the most diverse social interests. Napoleon I is offered in illustration. Here was someone who attempted with some success to appeal to everyone across the political spectrum of his day from the old-guard stickler nobility, at one extreme, to the jacobins at the other. Thus Napoleon flaunted himself as a traditionalist - one of his first acts on becoming emperor was to abolish the celebration of Louis XVI's execution - while simultaneously claiming that if he occupied a lofty position this was because he was the living embodiment of the sovereign people.<sup>150</sup> Of course he was aided in this balancing act by his quite outstanding personal ingenuity and élan, but this is not Roscher's point: Napoleon's feats worked because he embodied that monarchical-populist compound intrinsic to the Caesarist system itself.

And what of Caesarism's disabilities? They are many. There is the onus on the leader who exists in an equalitarian environment to prove through public tangible displays - acts of war, dazzling diplomacy, the patronising of the arts - his right to occupy a position of superiority.<sup>151</sup> There is the sticky uncertainty that attends the tyrant daily: should his powers fail him and expectations of success be dashed his rule will be short lived,<sup>152</sup> a predicament that reminds us of charisma's fate in similar circumstances. There is the impossibility of secure abdication, of a quiet and dignified retirement because the Caesarist leader must always fear the revenge of those whose hatred he has earned, and, besides, to his successor he will forever remain a potential source of competition.<sup>153</sup> Other disabilities could also be mentioned. But ultimately they all boil down to this: the Caesarist

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150. Ibid., 590-1, 600.

151. Ibid., 592-3.

152. Ibid., 603-6.

153. Ibid., 606.



leader is plagued by problems of legitimation. His constant need to prove himself attests to this insecurity. His striving to found a dynasty, his wish to confer on his progeny or chosen successor some modicum of respectability, rarely succeeds, and when it does, rarely succeeds for long. His political edifice, tarred by its violent origins, is in the last analysis an artificial juxtaposition of elements which can never possess the solidity, the vibrancy, of something organic; a moral authority he is unable to project. And while, like Edmund in King Lear, he may live in hope that 'the base shall top the legitimate', that 'Now gods stand up for bastards!' (1.2, lines 20-3), his hope will be to no avail if his subjects do not stand up for the bastard as well.

Let me conclude this exposition of Roscherian themes by providing one of his own examples to illustrate the contrast between Caesarism's inevitable discomfiture, and the far more relaxed demeanour afforded to the occupant of a hereditary monarchy. One of the paradoxes of Caesarism, Roscher says, is its military weakness. True, it rises to power through the achievements of a commander of the armed forces. But precisely because so much of its stature and status is focused on its military qualities, the Caesarist leader must always beware the general more able than himself. Domitian, for instance, recalled Agricola after his victories in Britain just to let him languish at court, and later had him poisoned at a time when imperial defeats in foreign places might have commended such a man to the people. By contrast it is said about Wilhelm I that when, in October 1870, one of his generals requested an extra division of troops, the Kaiser replied that it was up to Moltke to decide; as for Wilhelm's own protection it was sufficient that he be left in control of his personal guards. Roscher cites this incident as exemplifying the confidence of a legitimate, hereditary monarch who need not be afraid of even his most brilliant general, so secure is the former's



position. An analogous response by the Caesarist leader would have placed him in the utmost peril and for that reason its occurrence is pretty well unthinkable.<sup>154</sup>

### 3.4.2 (B), (C) and (D) of the definition continued.

We may now resume the analysis of Max Weber, proceeding as follows. I will begin by trying to determine Weber's own perspective on the development of modern Western democracy, and by so doing seek to show how, in his view, Caesarism eventuated from that social process. With that task accomplished, I will then be in a position to move to a systematic contrast between Weber's theoretical stance on Caesarism, and those of the authors just discussed.

Though Weber's remarks on Napoleon I and III quoted towards the end of 3.3 suggested a vision of democracy as broadly consequential upon the mass's entry onto the political stage in an era of revolution, for the most part his discussion of Caesarism was concerned with a much more specific democratic development: the extension of the suffrage to the little-propertied and to the working class, itself but part of that wider citizenship dynamic which so engaged Weber's attention and interest. Politically, democracy 'means simply that no formal inequality of political rights exists between the individual classes of the population',<sup>155</sup> and of course the supreme expression

154. Ibid., 608.

155. M. Weber, 'Socialism', in J.E.T. Eldridge, ed. Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality (1972), transl. D. Hÿtch, 191-219, at 194 = Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik (hereafter GASS) (Tübingen: 1924), 492-518, at 494.

Weber also speaks from time to time of the social, as well as the political dimension of democracy but only the latter concerns me in the discussion that follows. I must only note Weber's observation that formal political equality is perfectly compatible with 'the growth of a raw plutocracy', a juxtaposition nowhere better evinced than in the U.S.A. (FMW, 392 = GPS, 272).

On the social dimension of democracy as 'the levelling of social distinctions', and as 'the growth of mass literacy and the popular press', see Beetham, Max Weber, 103.



of political inequality is the prohibition on the general right to vote. The movement towards universal suffrage, on the other hand, signalled the gradual removal of this prohibition, an emancipatory process of the most fateful moment because in conjunction with its realisation emerged an institution without which contemporary parliamentary Caesarism, as Weber depicts it, is impossible to imagine: the modern mass party system.

The rise of the modern mass party was by no means a smooth and effortless ascent for in its path stood an obstacle, the so-called 'notable' form of party organisation, socially predicated on an exclusivist franchise and characteristic of the bourgeoisie's early parliamentary development, the vested interests and style of life of which could be counted on to stubbornly resist the new vulgarity. Since Weber's contrast between these two modes of party organisation is quite well known it will be dealt with here only briefly; furthermore, though Weber did actually trace the evolution of the notables in a number of countries including his own (- their far from vestigial influence on the Germany of his day confirmed his worst fears about the Reich's political backwardness) I shall confine my comments almost exclusively to the English case: this is done for reasons of economy but also because it was always to England that Weber looked for the paradigmatic case of the notable system's rise and fall, as well as for the classic example more generally of the route to political modernity by whose bench mark the rest of Europe might best properly be measured and evaluated.

The halcyon days of the English notables (or 'honoratiores') were approximately from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the mid 1860s, the notables themselves being a status-group of bourgeois patricians, that is, of gentlemen of private wealth - rich farmers, rentiers and lawyers for instance - respected in their communities as people of substance, and equipped with the material means and inner disposition to live 'for' politics. Reflecting



the limited public sphere to which the notables addressed themselves, their politics was fundamentally that of class nepotism. On the one hand it was they who, composing and controlling the party committees and the élite clubs of the local, privileged middle class, selected those parliamentary candidates whom it was thought would most competently and assiduously represent notable class, family and ideological interests; on the other hand the successful candidate himself could be expected to hail from notable circles. As to the everyday practice of politics, the notable system functioned on an essentially ad hoc and decentralised basis. Outside parliament, the parties consisted of relatively loose and easy-going affiliations, bound together by issues of provincial mutual concern as well as by tribal cultural identities. Lacking a paid, regular, professional officialdom, party administration was dispensed predominantly by amateurs, offering their services for the most part gratis, or at least in a sense: what motivated this primitive organisation to do its work was not pecuniary compensation so much as the glamour and prestige that political involvement was felt to bestow on its agents, itself an infallible index, one might think, of the notable system's antiquity. Inside parliament, meanwhile, the elected notables would congregate in their respective parties but usually in a flexible manner, expected to toe the party 'line' but nonetheless capable, economically and emotionally, of exerting their independence where, say, local issue or religious conviction, might seem to demand it: in short, the Member retained, as MP, a degree of autonomy rare in the lobby-whipped modern House of Commons. Finally, under the notable system, there was no question but that parliament itself was the definitive locus of political authority and, once a member of that august body, of political patronage: it was within parliament itself that a member's advancement was decided, a career contingent not upon his demagogic or plebiscitary



qualities but upon a very different sort of comportment, namely a willingness to abide by the commands of whip and party leader.<sup>156</sup>

It was precisely this formation of amateur local party politics and parliamentary sovereignty that was shattered by 'the advent of plebiscitarian democracy',<sup>157</sup> by, that is, the democratisation of the suffrage. The modern mass parties are the consequence, 'the children of democracy, of mass franchise, of the necessity to woo and organise the masses, and develop the utmost unity of direction and the strictest discipline'.<sup>158</sup> And it is the mass party system which at one and the same time underpins and depends upon the Caesarist leader.

The extension of the suffrage had a number of consequences for the structure of the party system, all of which transformed it fundamentally. The bureaucratisation that 'inevitably accompanies modern mass democracy',<sup>159</sup> - 'inevitably' because the realisation of the formal demand for political equality necessarily generates a state apparatus charged with the administration of that achievement - is mightily reinforced by the related bureaucratisation of the party system itself which proceeds apace, squeezing-out by stages the notables' influence on local politics which now succumbs to the salaried, career party officials and the highly disciplined professional politicians whom they serve. 'The rule of notables and guidance by members of parliament ceases. "Professional" politicians outside the parliaments take the organisation in hand'.<sup>160</sup> The party machine is born: that electoral engine organised

156. FMW, 100-2 = GPS, 518-20; ES Vol. I, 290-2 = WG Vol. I, 215-7.

157. FMW, 103 = GPS, 521; emphasis in original.

158. FMW, 102 = GPS, 520.

159. ES Vol. II, 983 = WG Vol. II, 723, emphasis in German original. Cf. ES Vol. II, 1446 = GPS, 375.

160. FMW, 102 = GPS, 520; emphasis in original.



around the extra-parliamentary caucus (already established in the U.S. by the 1840s, developed in Britain towards the end of the 1860s), primed and regulated by its characteristic figures, 'the American boss and the English election agent',<sup>161</sup> dedicated full-time to the activity of grooming the demagogic candidate and of winning elections. To this end a number of conditions must be secured: party coffers must receive the steady flow of subscriptions, contributions and affiliation fees necessary to run a campaign and pay the staff; newspapers, advertising bureaux and schools must be established to propagate the party wisdom and to train political agitators in the skills of public speaking and persuasion; and, of course the electors themselves must be mobilised and corralled into the polling booths so to translate their preferences into votes.<sup>162</sup> Without a doubt the machine's job is a formidable one; but under conditions of democratised suffrage it must be done, and done efficiently if the party is to monopolise the highest offices of state and be in a position to provide the sinecures and benefices its members crave.

The paradox of this political democratisation is, for Weber, unmistakeable. Formally, power is vested in the party membership, the active among the rank-and-file fashioning and superintending policy at conference which parliamentary representatives then ostensibly execute; more distantly it might be said that parliament carries out the will of the people at large. But the reality is very different, effective power being concentrated in a manner that scoffs at all notion of substantive participatory democracy. In the first place, 'power rests in the hands of those who, within the organisation, handle the work continuously' - that is to say the machine's bureaucracy and its head

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161. Ibid.

162. ES Vol. II, 1443-5 = GPS, 372-4.



- and those who provide the organisation with financial backing and personal assistance.<sup>163</sup> It is invariably a hard core of professionals that drafts the party programme, plans tactics and selects candidates, even in the most professedly democratic parties. As for the voters that the party seeks to attract, they 'exert influence only to the extent that programmes and candidates are adapted and selected according to their chances of receiving electoral support'.<sup>164</sup> In the second place, and at the apex of the power pyramid, this machine itself, willingly or in the last resort, falls into line behind a leader whose demagogic ability to attain the highest parliamentary office will ensure its own continued existence or growth. In effect, the machine becomes the leader's personal clientele, following him out of a fluid combination of inspired devotion to his unique qualities and calculated want-satisfaction: when it comes down to it, he is their bread and butter.<sup>165</sup> Taking the English case Weber declares:

the parties are forced by the "Caesarist" feature of mass democracy to submit to men with political temperament and talent as soon as these prove that they can win the confidence of the masses. The chance for a potential leader to get to the top is a function, as it turns out time and again, of the parties' power chances. Neither the parties' Caesarist character and mass demagoguery nor their bureaucratization and stereotyped public image are in themselves a rigid barrier for the rise of leaders. Especially the well organised parties that really want to exercise state power must subordinate themselves to those who hold the confidence of the masses, if they are men with leadership abilities.<sup>166</sup>

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163. FMW, 103 = GPS, 520, emphasis in original.

164. ES Vol. II, 1396 = GPS, 312.

165. FMW, 103-4 = GPS, 521-2.

166. ES Vol. II, 1459 = GPS, 391. Emphases as in German original.



But of course it is not only the party machine which must subordinate itself to the person who holds 'the confidence of the masses'; the parliamentary deputies of the damagogue's party must also do so.<sup>167</sup> For in a party 'oriented toward sharing governmental power and responsibility' every member knows

that the survival of the party and of all the interests which bind him to it depends upon its subordination to qualified leaders. Nowhere in the world, not even in England, can the parliamentary body as such govern and determine policies. The broad mass of deputies functions only as a following for the leader or the cabinet who form the government, and it blindly follows them as long as they are successful. This is the way it should be. Political action is always determined by the "principle of small numbers", that means, the superior political manoeuverability of small leading groups. In mass states this impact of Caesarism is ineradicable.<sup>168</sup>

Inexorably, then, the mass vote cedes power to the officialdom of the party machine, while the machine and the back-benchers are themselves beholden to the party leader. Everything turns on the ability of that leader to capture the imagination of the masses, as Gladstone showed himself so brilliantly capable of doing in the 1886 Home Rule election. In his case, the machine's victory over the notables was due to 'the fascination of Gladstone's "grand" demagoguery, the firm belief of the masses in the ethical substance of his policy, and above all, their belief in the ethical character of his personality. It soon became obvious that a Caesarist plebiscitarian element in politics - the dictator of the battlefield of elections - had appeared on the plain'.<sup>169</sup>

167. FMW, 106 = GPS, 524.

168. ES Vol. II, 1414 = GPS, 336; translation slightly modified and all emphases restored. On the 'law of the small number' see also ES Vol. II, 952 = WG Vol. II, 700.

169. FMW, 106 = GPS, 523. Cf. the account of Gladstone as an orator in an article which Bagehot wrote for The Economist of 4 November 1871, republished in N. St. John-Steuart (ed.), The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot Vol. III (1968), 461-64, and entitled 'Mr. Gladstone and the People'. To Bagehot, Gladstone's speech at Greenwich marked 'a new era in English politics', heralding 'the time when it will be one of the most important (cont'd over).



However, Weber noted, though the masses are crucial in a 'democratised' society as the mechanism through which leaders are acclaimed, and in this most limited of senses 'selected', with the exercise of that acclamatory imprimatur and its threatened withdrawal their political functions are exhausted. Even their 'choice' of leader is to a large extent foisted upon them since 'it is not the politically passive "mass" that produces the leader from its midst, but the political leader (who) recruits his following and wins the mass through "demagoguery"'.<sup>170</sup>

Mass politics, it thus appears, is democratic in name only, 'apparently democratic',<sup>171</sup> but not really so. The conclusion enshrines both description and prognosis, and effects a theoretical closure on what it is possible for democratic politics to accomplish. Far from deploring the observation that 'the great political decisions, even and especially in a democracy, are unavoidably made by a few men',<sup>172</sup> Weber accepted it as the most elementary datum of political science which only the intellectually dogmatic could fail

169. (cont'd).

qualifications of a prime minister to exert a direct control over the masses - when the ability to reach them, not as his views may be filtered through an intermediate class of political teachers and writers, but directly by the vitality of his own mind, will give a vast advantage in the political race to any statesman', 461. And Bagehot continues on the next page by saying that so greatly has this speech enhanced the government's previously flagging position that 'If Parliament were to meet again tomorrow, Mr. Gladstone's position would be quite changed. It would be at once felt by all his discontented allies as well as (sic) his party foes that Mr. Gladstone's direct command over the people is still immense, - that the result of an appeal to the people by him against a divided and hostile Parliament would very probably end in his full reinstatement in power, with as large a majority as ever'.

170. ES, Vol. II, 1457 = GPS, 389. On electoral passivity see FMW, 99 = GPS, 517.

171. FMW, 105 = GPS, 523.

172. ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 383. Cf. ES Vol. II, 1421, 1439-40 = GPS, 344, 368.



to acknowledge. It was an entirely logical deduction to draw for a man for whom parliamentary elections were substantively little more than a technically advanced form of plebiscite, the opportunity for the masses to toast their champion; for whom the parliamentary deputies were the prisoners of their own ambition and captives of a system which demanded obedience to the party leader, especially once in power; and for whom the party machine was bound to bow to the person who manifested the greatest voting charisma, was bound to accept and employ 'the Caesarist principle of selecting leaders'.<sup>173</sup>

The mass suffrage, the modern party machine, and parliament, hence, were for Weber all locked into the same system of political domination. All three institutions provided the conditions of existence of the Caesarist figure; all three submitted, in their different ways, to his regimen. Call this 'democracy' if you wish, Weber seems to be saying, but have the basic honesty to invoke its name with a due sense of irony.

It is now possible to redeem an earlier promise to contrast systematically Weber's account of Caesarism with the analyses of Schäffle and Roscher. It is a task one feels the more spurred to attempt in the light of a remark by David Beetham who has contended that 'The discussion of Caesarism in, e.g. W. Roscher's Politik bears many similarities to Weber'.<sup>174</sup> This is indeed the case, but Beetham's remark requires immediate qualification because

173. ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 383.

174. D. Beetham, op.cit., 'From Socialism to Fascism' (Part II), 177, n.

1. Beetham is saying here that Roscher's concept of Caesarism 'bears many similarities' to Weber's concept of charisma. However since Beetham adds in the same footnote that Caesarism 'was in fact the term Weber himself chose to use in his political writings' he implies that Roscher's and Weber's notions of Caesarism are also similar, which is to some extent true.



the dissimilarities are just as, if not more, salient as the points of convergence, an observation that applies equally to Schäffle and Romieu, among others.

- i. Unlike Schäffle, but in accordance with Roscher, Weber views Caesarism as intrinsically connected to democracy. For Weber 'every democracy tends ... toward the Caesarist mode of selection'.<sup>175</sup> However, this Caesarism is not cancerous for the democratic body politic, heralding its protracted or imminent demise into military tyranny (pace Roscher) but the natural complement of mass democracy's existence. Democracy and Caesarism belong together. Moreover, parliament and Caesarism are also compatible, an insistence which gainsays the view of Romieu that Caesarism emerges to smash the last vestiges of liberal parliamentarism.
- ii. Though Weber is apt to describe Caesarism as a 'dictatorship' of sorts on many occasions,<sup>176</sup> - I cannot recall him ever using the word 'tyrant' in that context - and thus draws his designation of the phenomenon from the oft-tapped well of antique imagery, the military aspect of Caesarism is far less central to Weber than it is for Roscher. (I shall be saying more about this military aspect in 3.5). Furthermore, where Weber discusses Caesarism and democracy together he for the most part paints the former as a normal, not a crisis, form of rule; as a state in which the civil arm of government is the dominant one; and as a condition in which civil liberties (entirely obliterated in the Schäffle and Roscher versions of Caesarism) are capable of preservation by a robust parliament equipped with real constitutional power.

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175. ES Vol. II, 1451 = GPS, 381-2; cf. ES, Vol. II, 961 = WG Vol. II, 707 for a more qualified statement.

176. The Caesarist figure is 'the dictator of the battlefield of elections', 'a plebiscitarian dictator'; his governance 'a "dictatorship resting on the exploitation of mass emotionality"', FMW, 106-7 = GPS, 523-5.



- iii. Common to the analyses of Schäffle, Roscher and Romieu is the perception that Caesarism is quintessentially an 'illegitimate' political system. For Weber, by contrast, Caesarism may be deemed legitimate, sociologically speaking, to the extent that people living under its jurisdiction believe in its authority and voluntarily comply with its orders. Hence the normative, condemnatory connotation of illegitimacy - a strong undercurrent of Schäffle's vulgarised Aristotelian formulation of Caesarism - is erased from Weber's forensic (as sociologist he considers it beyond the bounds of his science to praise Caesarism as admirable or shower it with epithets of disapprobation); the dynastic theme (central to Schäffle, Roscher and Romieu) judged irrelevant as the sociological criterion of legitimacy; and the rule of force idea (first arrestingly asserted by Romieu, endorsed in the theories of Schäffle and Roscher) conceptually subordinated to that of consent: the Caesarist leader's fate in the modern mass suffrage party system is dependent, both initially and ultimately, on his ability to inspire devotion to his person and, secondarily, to his policies. It will be the ballot, rather than the bullet, that will decide whether he becomes chief of state and for how long.
- iv. While Roscher, Schäffle and Romieu delve into the ancient world for their chief model of Caesarism, Weber hardly ever uses the term in that context (the references in 'Agrarian Relations in Antiquity' are the exception and those are all vague: see footnote 24 above). Moreover, though in agreement with those authors that the Bonapartes provide something approaching the clearest 'modern' example of the phenomenon, as Bismarck also does (but whom they fail to mention in this regard), there is a sense in which Weber's theory comes across as at once more contemporaneous than those of Schäffle and Roscher, and less futuristic



than Romieu's. The reader might recall that, according to the latter, Napoleon I presaged a new age of Caesars that had still in extenso to unfold. For Weber, on the other hand, Caesarism was alive and well in his own day, represented in the characteristic form of the British Prime Minister and the American President.<sup>177</sup>

- v. Finally, the philosophical-methodological context into which Weber's discussion of Caesarism is inserted is another feature distinguishing his treatment from those of the other scholars I have been dealing with. One thinks here not only of the different nature of Weber's trinity, predicated on a taxonomy of modes of legitimate domination as opposed to the constitutional classification employed by Schäffle and Roscher, but also of the philosophy of history that animated it: for though Weber's vision of history was deterministic in a number of ways, it sedulously avoided both a cyclical metaphysic of stages<sup>178</sup> and a social organicism.

177. Carlo Antoni was struck by the contrast with T. Mommsen: 'Thus, almost three-quarters of a century later, Mommsen's Caesarism reappeared in his student, but it was a Caesarism totally different from that of Napoleon III. Rather it was an anglicized, constitutional brand of Caesarism which presupposed, if anything, a long parliamentary tradition in order to function in the best interests of the nation as a whole', C. Antoni, From History to Sociology: The Transition in German Historical Thinking (1962), transl. H.V. White, 133.

178. See Weber's section on the 'Combinations of the Different Types of Domination', ES Vol. I, 262-6 = WG Vol. I, 195-7. .

My comment on Weber's avoidance of a 'cyclical metaphysic' might have prompted the reader into thinking of one author who did subscribe to such a metaphysic and who also wrote expansively about Caesarism but who has been entirely omitted from the main discussion: Oswald Spengler. Spengler's analysis of Caesarism is mind-boggling in its abstraction: Caesarism is 'a return to thorough formlessness', 'the récidive of a form-fulfilled world into primitivism'; it 'grows on the soil of Democracy' but is destined to engage in a 'final battle' with it, a confrontation which can be seen as that 'between the leading forces of dictatorial money-economics and the purely political will-to-order of the Caesars', O. Spengler, The Decline of the West, Vol. II (1932), transl. C.F. Atkinson, 431, 464-5. (On 416-7, Spengler distinguishes between Napoleonism and Caesarism). The reason I have chosen not to examine in detail the comparability or otherwise of Weber's and Spengler's concepts of Caesarism is simple: Vol. II of The Decline of the West, the volume which examines Caesarism, was published in 1922, two years after Weber's death; it could therefore have had no influence on him either in a positive or a negative way. For a helpful summary of Spengler's thoughts on Caesarism see Struve, op.cit., 232-73.



### 3.4.3 (E): The definition concluded

Thus far we have established that Caesarism, in the Weberian corpus, is a social relationship involving a modern variant of charisma - occidental, political, demagogic - founded on the democratisation of the suffrage and its corollary, the mass party system, in which the masses vote for the person they find most exemplary. In the new post-'notable' situation the party machine, emotionally and materially dependent on the leader it serves, organises the masses to deliver their vote at election-times. The status and autonomy of the ordinary parliamentary deputy suffers a corresponding degradation. By contrast to an earlier era of politics, the MP becomes little more than lobby-fodder, a minion dangling on the string of the party leader's preferment and success. This is political 'democracy' as Weber conceives it.

It is a scenario which might lead one to conclude that parliament's role is confined exclusively to that of providing party leaders with a loyal retinue, and it is undeniable that this emphasis is often paramount in Weber's descriptions of modern democracy. But in other places, especially where Weber is attempting by reason and by harangue to convince his contemporaries of the dangerously outmoded character of the German parliament as measured against its British counterpart in particular, the emphasis is quite different. For then it is part of Weber's argument that a parliament armed with the constitutional powers necessary to engage in 'positive' politics, to engage that is in the responsible exercise of real power, might function as an indispensable means of Caesarist selection and control. Clearly, then, as Weber explains it, modern parliament has a double aspect: though the individual deputy may to a large extent be diminished by the party leader's prominence, a strong parliament as MPs in the collective, is potentially able to perform functions of Caesarist processing and monitoring that make it far from a redundant institution; on the contrary, if responsible Caesarism is to be achieved, a parliament engaging in 'positive' politics is absolutely vital



for the nation's well being. What I shall do now is explore more fully both sides of parliament's position, namely, its disabilities and possible capabilities. In the process it will become clearer what is specifically 'Caesarist' as opposed to just vaguely dictatorial about the modern heads of state in Britain and the U.S., the national examples that fascinated Weber and to which he constantly referred when attempting to instruct his readers.

With the coming of the democratised suffrage the mediatory and representative integrity of parliament, Weber tells us, becomes severely enfeebled. On the one hand, the hero-worshipping propensity of the masses finds its target in the person, the party leader, who knows best how to appeal to emotion and credulity; on the other hand, it is to the people at large that this leader must periodically report for endorsement or dismissal. Crucially then, the power-base of the demagogue lies in the country at large, not parliament first and foremost; and it is above parliament he stands when in government as a 'plebiscitarian dictator'.<sup>179</sup> Ostrogorski, on whose account of plebiscitary politics Weber leans heavily in Politics as a Vocation<sup>180</sup> described this effective circumvention of parliament with these words:

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179. FMW, 107 = GPS, 524.

180. As Weber was the first to admit, see FMW, 104 = GPS, 522.

The extent of Ostrogorski's impact on Weber's ideas has recently been questioned by Lawrence Scaff, 'Max Weber and Robert Michels', American Journal of Sociology, 86, 6 (1980-1), 1269-86, esp. 1279, n.11. Scaff suggests instead that James Bryce's influence was 'primary', a conclusion the author reaches on the basis of his close study of the correspondence between Weber and Michels that spanned the years of their friendship (1906-15). Scaff's point is plausibly argued, but as far as the term 'Caesarism' is concerned - at least as Weber formulates it in the parliamentary democratic context - Weber's usage is much closer to Ostrogorski than Bryce for whom Caesarism essentially denotes 'military tyranny' in the older Roscherian-like sense. See J. Bryce, The American Commonwealth, Vol. I (New York: 1910; 3rd edn.), 613-29, esp. 613-4, 623-4.

Bryce's conviction that a military tyranny was extremely unlikely in America can be interestingly compared with Disraeli's reflections on England. Writing under his pseudonym of Vivian Grey he declared in 1833: 'It seems to be impossible for a military leader to practice (cont'd over).



Raised above the levelled crowd of M.P.'s, the leaders now lean directly on the great mass of voters, whose feelings of loyalty go straight to the leaders over the heads of Members ... Always requiring to look up to some one, the English voter naturally transfers to the great leader the respect and devotion which he no longer has the opportunity or need of bestowing on the Member for the division. Here, again, the "intermediate ranks" to which Montesquieu refers are done away with or obliterated, the door being open to a sort of popular Caesarism, with which the great chief of the party has become invested. No doubt the highly magnetic personalities of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Beaconsfield have powerfully contributed to set up the Caesarean supremacy of the leaders, but it was sufficiently developed by the situation which I have just described to enable their successors, who lacked the gift of impressing the popular imagination, to obtain the usufruct of this power over the masses. This being so, the elections have assumed the character of personal plebiscites, each constituency voting not so much for this or that candidate as for Mr. Gladstone or against Lord Beaconsfield or Lord Salisbury.<sup>181</sup>

As with Ostrogorski, so Weber also found the term Caesarism nicely adapted to express the direct relationship of leader to led supposedly constitutive of modern democratic politics, and at whose heart lies the election of the Führer: 'Caesarism', Weber abbreviates in 'Suffrage and Democracy'

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180. (cont'd).

upon the passions of an insular people, to whom he can promise no conquests. If it be urged that a military despotism has already been erected in this country, I remind the respondent of the different state of society in England at present to what it was in the time of Cromwell. It appears to me that the manufacturing districts alone, which, in a moment, would supply masses of population and abundance of arms, are a sufficient security against the imposition of a military despotism', What is He? (1833; 2nd revised edn.), 11-12.

181. M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties, Vol. I (1902), transl. F. Clarke, 607-8, emphasis in original. Reasons adduced by Ostrogorski to explain the loss of prestige suffered by the ordinary M.P. included, naturally enough, the caucus system, 'which undermines the voter's respect for the M.P.'; developed forms of communication and information which put the voter in immediate contact with the leader and make the backbencher that much more individually dispensable; and a general process of enlightenment the effect of which is to make the voter more aware of the power he commands over his representative in the electoral market place.



is 'the election of the leader'.<sup>182</sup> And yet Weber's use of the term went one stage further than Ostrogorski's by applying it not just to the election of national leaders (the American President and the British Premier are cited as archetypal) but equally to the election of leaders of much smaller political units, the American city mayor being one example. As Weber puts it: 'Caesarism' means '(in the broadest sense of the word) ... the direct popular election of the head of state or head of the city, as in the United States and some of their large councils'.<sup>183</sup> Further, the designation 'Caesarism' implies something more than direct election: it also suggests a certain kind of recruitment and executive stance - in a word, administration - in which the leader himself independently appoints his officials (they are most definitely not democratically elected), selecting them 'freely and personally without regard to tradition or to any other impediments',<sup>184</sup> and ruling over them as 'the unrestrained master'.<sup>185</sup> Evidently, in this discussion of 'Caesarist' administration Weber was thinking primarily of the American scene with its spoils system - Weber describes the President ('elected by plebiscite') as 'the chief of office patronage',<sup>186</sup> - for he would have known perfectly well that, in Britain, civil service career continuity obtains for all but the very highest departmental posts. But if this latter aspect of the British tradition distinguishes the country from the American practice, what is it that both nations' political systems share which permits them to be placed

182. GPS, 279.

183. GPS, 277.

184. ES Vol. II, 961 = WG Vol. II, 707.

185. Ibid.

186. FMW, 108 = GPS, 526. And even in the American case the reference to an 'unrestrained master' is exaggeration. The overstatement is partially explained by Weber's wish to employ the word Caesarism to envelope military as well as civil relationships of super-and subordination. On the military aspect of Caesarism see the next Section.



under a joint 'Caesarist' rubric? Like his American putative counterparts, the President and the city mayor, the British Prime Minister owes his tenure, status and power to the devotion of the masses; he is their 'free trustee', and though not technically (constitutionally) directly elected to the highest office of state is actually so elected in all but form: in voting for the individual candidates who compose his party the masses are essentially and in effect voting for the leader at the party's head for it is he who inspires them and he who they wish to see govern. The parliamentary candidates are, thus, mere instrumentalities of the electorate, a means by which that electorate affirms a commitment to the person who towers over his colleagues as their chief.<sup>187</sup> Second, like his American counterparts too, the Premier's mass base affords him great autonomy in relation to both the machine that serves him and the parliament (the equivalent institution, presumably, to Congress and County Hall) at whose heads he stands. While in a 'democratised hereditary'

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187. One is reminded here of Sidney Low, according to whom 'It is the Premier who has been nominated by the choice of the people, as expressed at a general election. His associates in office, or in the leadership of the Opposition, may or may not count; a few of them do, most of them do not. Bismarck once said that the issue at a general election in Germany was für oder gegen Bismarck. And something of the sort is often true at a general election in England. It has been for or against Mr. Gladstone, Lord Salisbury, or Mr. Balfour, or some other eminent statesman who stands at the head of a party. When the plebiscite has been declared in favour of the successful leader, he is "sent for" by the Sovereign, to whom he has been in fact "sent" by the electorate', The Governance of England (1904), 156-7, emphases omitted. On 158 Low likens the 'amount of authority' exercised by men like Pitt, Peel, Palmerston (note all figures who flourished in power before the real expansion of the franchise in 1867) Disraeli and Gladstone to that of a 'dictator' - his precise words are that such figures 'may come near to being' dictators.

For a modern, if highly unoriginal, variant on this theme one may consult Lord Hailsham's 1976 Dimbleby Lecture, which caused quite a stir at the time of its delivery, though even its title Elective Dictatorship (1976) is a crib from Aristotle (op.cit., Book III, Chapter 4, 137). Hailsham's analysis only appears relatively novel in extending the idea of dictatorship to the whole House of Commons (4) but since he quickly establishes that the House is itself dominated and directed by the Prime Minister's office (5-9) we have learnt nothing of substance we could not have found in writings of the early twentieth century. It also compares unfavourably with that little gem on the expansion of the Prime Minister's powers, R.H.S. Crossman's 'Introduction' to W. Bagehot, The English Constitution, op.cit., 1-57. See esp. Crossman's comments on Britain's 'voluntary totalitarianism', 56.



monarchical system such as Britain's the 'Caesarist-plebiscitarian element is always much attenuated', particularly when compared to 'the President of the United States, whose superiority over parliament derives from his (formally) democratic nomination and election', it is certainly 'not absent', a conclusion Weber sought to illustrate with the example of Lloyd George. Lloyd George's position during the Great War, Weber maintained, was 'based not at all on the confidence of parliament and its parties, but on that of the masses in the country and of the army in the field. Parliament acquiesces (with considerable reluctance)'.<sup>188</sup> Finally, it goes almost without saying, Weber construed the American and British political systems to be similar in the extent of the enormous powers of patronage invested in their leaders.<sup>189</sup> (Had Weber been alive to witness the rule of Margaret Thatcher he would probably have had a number of correctives to offer her administration. But her populist style is precisely what he would have expected of a Prime Minister, while her mode of governance, so often criticised within and outside her party as 'presidential' perfectly conforms to his theory of modern politics).

Hence parliament's mediatory and representative role vis-à-vis the electorate is to a large extent effectively short-circuited by the modern Caesarist leader towards whom parliament feels understandably ambivalent.

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188. All of the quotes since 187 are from ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 382-3, emphasis in German original. Consider also Weber's comment that 'In the United States, equal suffrage has resulted time and again in the election, as lord mayor, of a popular trustee who was largely free to create his own municipal administration. The English parliamentary system equally tends towards the development of such Caesarist features. The prime minister gains an increasingly dominant position toward parliament, out of which he has come', ES Vol. II, 1415 = GPS, 337.

189. FMW, 106-8 = GPS, 523-6.



On the one hand, 'Every parliamentary democracy eagerly seeks to eliminate, as dangerous to parliament's power, the plebiscitary methods of leadership selection'<sup>190</sup> which inevitably prove corrosive to the power and standing of the assembly. Yet on the other hand, since the fate of the ordinary Member is inextricably tied to the fortunes and popularity of the leader, the former has a sort of perverse interest in his or her own continued subservience. Parliament's relationship to the Caesarist leader could thus be described as one of antagonistic dependence.

Does this then mean that modern parliament as an institution is without political function or relevance? To the extent that parliament, as in the case of the German Second Empire, is constitutionally reduced to a talking shop, stripped of all powers save that of the legislative veto, politically displaced by the authoritarian state bureaucracy which makes all the crucial decisions in domestic and foreign policy, and is hence 'excluded from positive participation in the direction of political affairs',<sup>191</sup> it will truly be little more than a shell, 'considered a mere drag-chain, an assembly of impotent fault-finders and know it alls'.<sup>192</sup> For in a situation in which people with the instinct for power and the capacity for independent judgement are funnelled by 'negative selection',<sup>193</sup> into vocations other than the parliamentary one, aware that all that awaits them in the chamber is frustration and emasculation; in which unofficial, often hidden, patronage by the bureaucracy and by big business vomits up a stratum of fawners and mediocrities sustained on connections and hand-outs;<sup>194</sup> in which all sorts

190. ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 382.

191. ES Vol. II, 1408 = GPS, 327-8.

192. Ibid.

193. ES Vol. II, 1413 = GPS, 334, emphasis omitted.

194. ES Vol. II, 1429-30 = GPS, 355.



of posturing intransigences are kindled through a system which prevents people from being faced with the consequences of their own behaviour; in which the parties, either because of the ideological purity of their views (e.g. the S.P.D.) or because of the fear they entertain about the material consequences for their position (e.g. the Catholic Centre) refuse to reconcile themselves to the parliamentary order, compromise and share power;<sup>195</sup> and in which the common-or-garden deputy lacks the minimal material facilities, crucially, an office and staff, to do the job properly - certainly, in a dire situation such as this, parliament will function merely as the purveyor of negative, token politics.<sup>196</sup> One will still have Caesarism, but it will be of the Bismarckian type, normatively speaking, 'bad', for all the reasons examined in Section 3.3. But parliament need not be restricted to this subaltern role, and the Caesarism it coexists with and promotes need not be of this debilitating kind.

David Beetham has rightly said that 'Weber's theory of Parliamentary government was an attempt to secure the advantages of the Caesarist leader without the disadvantages associated with Bismarck's rule';<sup>197</sup> and those advantages were no more obvious than in a strong, positive parliamentary system like Britain's. There, parliament was not only able to discharge those general functions that make the institution 'indispensable in the electoral democracies' - operating as 'an organ of public control of the

195. FMW, 111-12 = GPS, 530.

196. My account only skims the surface of the very detailed analysis Weber provides in, e.g. 'Parliament and Government', ES Vol. II, 1407-31 = GPS, 327-57 and 'Politics as a Vocation', FMW, 111-12 = GPS, 529-31. For the reader interested in the constitutional liabilities of the Second Empire that militated against a vibrant German parliament, according to Weber see ES Vol. II, 1423 = GPS, 347 (on Article 27), and, more importantly, ES Vol. II, 1410-16, 1425, 1431 = GPS, 330-8, 350, 357 (on Article 9).

197. Beetham, Max Weber, 238. Cf. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 187.



officials and of really "public" administration, as a means for the elimination of unfit top officials, as a locus for establishing the budget and for reaching compromises among parties'.<sup>198</sup> It was also in a position to produce the responsible Caesarist figure from its midst, his personality forged in the heat of party struggle, his political metal tested by his colleagues and proven on the floor of the House (and not just at the hustings), his native wit and ambition supplemented by an education derived from the parliamentary committee in which he can be expected to have learnt the arts of bureaucracy-interrogation. Naturally, the Caesarist British leader is by definition a demagogue; what matters to Weber is that, unlike Bismarck, he can both be given rein and controlled as well, and that the system of which he is part promotes in him a sense of realism and responsibility. He put it nicely in the following lines:

Today political (and military) leaders no longer wield the sword but resort to quite prosaic sound waves and ink drops: written and spoken words. What matters is that intelligence and knowledge, strong will and sober experience determine these words, whether they be commands or campaign speeches, diplomatic notes or official statements in parliament.<sup>199</sup>

Let us look more closely at the benefits a strong parliamentary system offers political leadership and national welfare from Weber's point of view. Five aspects appear to be important. First, an energetic and sturdy parliament provides 'a suitable proving ground of the politicians wooing the confidence of the masses',<sup>200</sup> a proving ground that works to lessen the possibility of leadership selection on merely 'emotional' grounds.<sup>201</sup> The Caesarist

198. ES Vol. II, 1457 = GPS, 388. Cf. ES Vol. II, 1454 = GPS 385, on parliament's irreplaceability as 'the agency for enforcing the public control of administration, for determining the budget and ... for deliberating and passing laws', emphases omitted.

199. ES Vol. II, 1419-20 = GPS, 342, emphasis in original.

200. ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 383, emphasis omitted.

201. ES Vol. II, 1459 = GPS, 391.



leader, to be sure, must show himself capable of appealing to the heart, to the idealism of his political congregation; however, if this exhausts his talent he will be a political liability. A hardy parliamentary system can be counted on to weed-out those who are demagogic 'in the negative sense of the word',<sup>202</sup> from those who combine the ability to communicate with political judiciousness, sense and sensibility.

Second, a parliament equipped with real power finds itself able to supervise the Caesarist leader once he is installed as head of the executive, monitoring his activities<sup>203</sup> within the chamber, and, by extension presumably, publicising them in the constituencies and through the media. These functions of parliament are critical if the leader is going to respect 'established constitutional arrangements'.<sup>204</sup>

Third, a parliament accustomed to flexing its muscles will help ensure the political system's continuity, a decisive role both in the event of a period in which 'no one appears to hold the confidence of the masses to a fairly general degree',<sup>205</sup> and in the event of a problem of leadership succession. As Weber puts it, 'Everywhere the problem of succession has been the Achilles heel of purely Caesarist domination. The rise, neutralisation and elimination of a Caesarist leader occur most easily without the danger of a domestic catastrophe when the effective co-domination of powerful representative bodies

202. Ibid.

203. ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 383. 'Monitoring' his activities, but not determining them: 'Weber by no means shared the view that parliament, as a free decision-making body, should prescribe policy for government, being in principle an executive committee delegated from its ranks. Weber's notion of political leadership was ... diametrically opposed to this notion. In his view the leading politician ought not to be the executive organ of the will of the parliamentary majority but something qualitatively different: a leader', Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 397.

204. ES, Vol. II, 1459 = GPS, 391.

205. ES, Vol. II, 1457 = GPS, 389.



preserves the political continuity and the constitutional guarantees of civil order'.<sup>206</sup>

This brings us to the fourth way in which a forceful parliament contributes to responsible Caesarism. Simply, it stands as the guardian of civil liberties,<sup>207</sup> a host of rights which the Caesarist leader, left entirely to his own devices, and finding them an inconvenient set of impediments to his rule, might imperiously seek to dismantle. It is a lovely touch of Weber's, who wants a dictator to provide direction to the body politic, without the police states that dictators tend to establish; the institution charged with the task of ensuring this balancing act is a strong parliament.

Fifth, and finally, the 'co-domination of powerful representative bodies', as Weber phrased it above, assures 'the peaceful elimination of the Caesarist dictator once he has lost the trust of the masses',<sup>208</sup> a related though not identical point to the one about civil liberties I mentioned just now.

These five advantages that accrue to a virile parliamentary system were important not simply as the sum of constitutional mechanisms to enable political dynamism at home, and the pursuit of an imperialist policy abroad,<sup>209</sup> but

206. Ibid.; on continuity, see also ES Vol. II, 1452, 1459 = GPS, 383, 391. Cf. Mommsen's quite proper qualification: 'The parliament's rights of control serve only to continually remind the leading politicians of their responsibility, and to have them removed when they fail, not simply when their policy differs from that of the parliamentary majority', Max Weber and German Politics, 184, my emphasis.

207. ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 383.

208. Ibid.

209. Weber's imperialism as the cornerstone of his demands for domestic political reform is given predominant emphasis in Mommsen's Max Weber and German Politics, see esp. 79, 172, 321-2, 395-6. Mommsen's thesis should be read alongside the qualifications argued by Beetham in the latter's Max Weber, 119-50.



also as the magnet to which a certain species of political animal might be attracted. A strong parliament undoubtedly conduced, in Weber's mind, to the selection and enculturation of those 'three pre-eminent qualities' he believed 'decisive' for the politician worthy of his or her vocation (three qualities besides, of course, the obligatory will to power): 'passionate devotion to a "cause", to the god or demon who is its over-lord' combined with realism; 'a feeling of responsibility' for one's cause and for the results of one's own actions; and 'a sense of proportion', ('the decisive psychological quality of the politician'), a sense, that is, of 'distance to things and men', the ability of the politician 'to let realities work upon him with inner concentration and calmness'. Of course this ideal combination of qualities, whose essence is perspective and inner discipline ('that firm taming of the soul') is not an exclusive property of any person or any system and, in any case, it is a rare individual who will prove able to bear the tensions it imposes on the psyche in its pristine form. But there are some political systems which crush potential, and others that call it forth. The ideal leader in a 'democratic' society will have gained his spurs in the latter type; he will be in a position 'to put his hand on the wheel of history',<sup>210</sup> complemented by a parliamentary structure that will

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210. All of the above quotations are from FMW, 115 = GPS, 533-4; a number of emphases have been omitted.

By failing to consider these 'three pre-eminent qualities' Mommsen badly exaggerates the extent to which Weber's portrait of 'the model politician's character had clearly Bismarckian features in many details', Max Weber and German Politics, 187. Arguably only the first of the three qualities mentioned above was possessed by Bismarck. If we wish to locate the model that in fact Weber was drawing on, it is not to Bismarck we should look but, I suggest, to no other person than Weber himself. The model politician passage in Politics as a Vocation (the passage Mommsen ignores) reads like a straight projection of Weber's own perceived qualities onto the parliamentary political arena, which is one reason he could admire the qualities so much.



be there to watch the wheel's direction and ensure that, in extremis, it can be stopped before flattening all and sundry.

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It may be recalled (see Section 3.3) that, in its Bismarckian form, Caesarism was presented by Weber as existing in a relationship of some tension to hereditary monarchy. Weber's comments on the matter, particularly on Caesarist illegitimacy, are explicit and unambiguous. On the other hand, where Weber is writing about Caesarism in a democratic, parliamentary context - the Caesarism of mass party leaders like Lloyd George - the issue of tension is muted, possibly because Weber took its existence so much for granted. Nonetheless, the thrust of his argument in both the Bismarckian and democratic-parliamentary contexts seems to have been broadly the same, namely, that however fraught the relationship might become, coexistence between Caesarism and hereditary monarchy was perfectly possible in principle; more, that where one found a constitutional monarchy, bound as in Britain to parliamentary controls, living alongside the modern party system's Caesarist leader(s), the combination was especially advantageous politically. (See ES vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 382; and footnote 70 above).

For a summary of the contents of this Section, the reader is advised to turn back to the definition outlined on pages 108-9.

### 3.5 Caesarism and the military dimension

The concept of Caesarism as Weber employed it was not restricted to a critique of Bismarck or to a view of leadership in modern mass party politics. It also made reference to the role of the military commander in history, a subject which links Weber to an older tradition of thinking about Caesarism that embraces such names as Romieu, Roscher, Bryce and Conrad among many



others.<sup>211</sup> (We shall however be seeing in Chapter 5 that the military dimension of Caesarism - irresistible owing to the career of the eponymous Caesar himself - has remained a persistent theme of theorists up to modern times).

Caesarism as a military dictatorship in the quasi-Roman sense, is a recurrent equation in Weber's work at least from the 1910-14 draft of ES onwards. It is instructive that, for instance, Weber typified the Bolshevik government in just these terms, obliquely in his statement that it represented 'an unalloyed military dictatorship, though a dictatorship not of generals but of corporals', more specifically in his likening of 'the militarist, Trotsky', to 'a soldier Caesar, not a Napoleon of generals, but a praetorian leader of corporals and privates'.<sup>212</sup> But even more noteworthy is the manner in which Weber's treatment of the military dimension of Caesarism is so often entangled in his discussions of modern political democracy. As a theorist, one's first impulse is to strive to separate the two contexts; yet to separate them for reasons of analytical clarity must not blind one from the most intriguing aspect of their compounding: Weber is stressing their similarity in certain respects.

211. See Conrad's letter to Spiridion Kliszczewski, 19 December 1885, identifying Caesarism with 'a militarism despotism' and Conrad's view that 'Socialism must inevitably end in Caesarism', G. Jean-Aubry (ed.), Joseph Conrad. Life and Letters, Vol. I (1927), 84. Cf. footnote 180 on Bryce.

The 'elected war lord', 'military leader', 'war leader' etc. is also a major constituent sub-type of 'charisma'. Respectively, FMW, 80 = GPS, 496; ES Vol. II, 1112 = WG Vol. II, 833; ES Vol. II, 1121 = WG Vol. II, 84, cf. ES Vol. II, 1113, 1114, 1116, 1124-5, 1134, 1141-2 = WG Vol. II, 834, 835, 836, 844-5, 852, 859-60. Also, the (untranslated) fragment in WG Vol. I, 228-9 on charisma in the context of warrior status groups.

212. Quoted in Mommsen, Max Weber and German politics, 277, 279 n. 333 respectively; emphasis omitted.



Weber's tendency to stretch the idea of Caesarism to incorporate both military and civil power relationships was already evident when in 3.3 we saw him speak of the two routes by which the Caesarist leader's ascent to political dominance could be secured: military and bourgeois. The incorporation is just as manifest in another of his definitions of Caesarism, part of which I quoted in the previous Section. There Weber tells us that in some American cities, the elected mayors have effected their reforms 'in a "Caesarist" fashion', which he then elucidates as follows:

Viewed technically, as an organised form of domination, the efficiency of "Caesarism", which often grows out of democracy, rests in general upon the position of the "Caesar" as a free trustee of the masses (of the army or of the citizenry), who is unfettered by tradition. The "Caesar" is thus the unrestrained master of a body of highly qualified military officers and officials whom he selects freely and personally without regard to tradition or to any other impediments. Such "rule of the personal genius", however, stands in conflict with the formally "democratic" principle of a generally elected officialdom.<sup>213</sup>

Again, in discussing 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft' we are informed that although its 'most common examples are the modern party leaders', it 'is always present in cases where the chief feels himself to be acting on behalf of the masses and is indeed recognised by them. Both the Napoleons are classical examples, in spite of the fact that legitimation by plebiscite took place only after they seized power by force'.<sup>214</sup> The usage of the concept of Caesarism here seems uncommonly strained since commonsensically one would think that 'modern party leaders' like Gladstone or Lloyd George embodied a form of rule fundamentally different from that of the two Bonapartes.

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213. ES Vol. II, 961-2 = WG Vol. II, 707.

214. ES Vol. I, 267 = WG Vol. I, 198, emphases omitted.



What can the 'Caesarian domination of military parvenus'<sup>215</sup> have in common with the likes of these British statesmen?

Considered from the perspective of Weber's universalistic ideal-type approach, there would seem to be three fundamental similarities which justify constructing the conceptual bridge joining two apparently divergent political systems, the military and the civil (as the former expresses itself, for instance, in the classical example of Napoleon I and as the latter expresses itself, for instance, in the modern mass party mode of rule). First, and essentially, both are headed by dynamic leaders governing a society undergoing, in some vague or some specific sense, a process of political democratisation. The party leaders (or city mayors) of the modern day represent a continuation, a rationalisation of a process presaged by Cromwell and those men who spear-headed or took over the French Revolution. Second, the military and civil power-relationships flagged by the concept of Caesarism, can be typified as 'anti-authoritarian' and plebiscitary: both systems derive 'the legitimacy of authority from the confidence of the ruled, even though the voluntary nature of such confidence is only formal or fictitious'(!);<sup>216</sup> both conflict to a greater or lesser extent with crown or parliament. Third, Caesarism, be it military or civil is always a form of dictatorship. We have seen this term arise in the context of Gladstone and we shall see it once more when we turn to scrutinise Weber's Reich President proposals. Weber's perception of the 'dictatorial' powers bestowed on a democratic party leader was undoubtedly heightened by his observation of the allied heads of states' behaviour in

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215. FMW, 370; no German equivalent in evidence. The statement quoted comes from a lecture delivered by Weber in 1905 to the St. Louis Congress of Arts and Science.

216. ES Vol. I, 267 = WG Vol. I, 198, emphases omitted.



the First World War,<sup>217</sup> and it may well have been their example which encouraged him to emphasise how far modernity in this respect continued an older tradition. Whatever his reasoning, the characteristic of dictatorship was also a theme he expanded upon in a more familiar setting, and in a more familiar sense, when he chose to discuss 'leader democracy' in ES, a setting which, in contrast to the analysis of the modern parliamentary leader found in 'Politics as a Vocation', has little to say about contemporary politicians. Here he declares that in a 'plebiscitary democracy',

The leader (demagogue) rules by virtue of the devotion and trust which his political followers have in him personally. In the first instance his power extends only over those recruited to his following, but if they can hand over the government to him he controls the whole polity. The type is best illustrated by the dictators who emerged in the revolutions of the ancient world and of modern times: the Hellenic *aisymnetai*, tyrants and demagogues; in Rome Gracchus and his successors; in the Italian city states the *capitani del popolo* and mayors; and certain types of political leaders in the German cities such as emerged in the democratic dictatorship of Zurich. In modern states the best examples are the dictatorship of Cromwell, and the leaders of the French Revolution and of the First and Second Empire. Wherever attempts have been made to legitimise this kind of exercise of power, legitimacy has been sought in recognition by the sovereign people through a plebiscite. The leader's personal administrative staff is recruited in a charismatic form usually from able people of humble origin. In Cromwell's case, religious qualifications were taken into account. In that of Robespierre along with personal dependability also certain "ethical" qualities. Napoleon was concerned only with personal ability and adaptability to the needs of his imperial "rule of genius".<sup>218</sup>

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217. See Weber's comments in GPS, 278 on the manner in which the highest democratic executive office transmuted, in the First World War, into 'a political military dictatorship', emphasis omitted. Cf. ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 383.

218. ES Vol. I, 268 = WG Vol. I, 199, emphasis as in German original. On the concept of dictatorship see also ES Vol. II, 1124-5 = WG Vol. II, 844-5 (on the Roman sense of dictator).

The reference in this quotation to 'Gracchus and his successors' is possibly an allusion also to Julius Caesar: the Gracchi brothers are customarily considered by historians of antiquity to be the first populares and Julius Caesar the last and greatest example of that political breed.



Historians will wince at the spectacle of such diverse regimes being forced into the procrustean bed of Weberian categories and may also more generally recoil from an analysis which envisions modern democratic politics in terms of a dictatorship. But my intention here has been merely to describe how Weber could encapsulate in one concept (though frequently in different terms) the common properties of military and civil governments such that both types could be treated in determinate respects as broadly alike.

### 3.6 Charisma and Caesarism revisited: their systematic relationship, and a methodological problem considered.

The theoretical strategy pursued thus far - the attempt to specify the contexts in which Weber uses the term Caesarism and its equivalents, and to dilate on their meaning - has involved me in a conundrum which I have avoided raising till now. Essentially, it is the problem of how far it is legitimate for one to draw willy nilly on Weber's 'political' writings, such as the wartime articles 'Suffrage and Democracy' and 'Parliament and Government', and on his 'academic-sociological' analyses - analyses in which Weber is wearing self-consciously the sober hat of a professional social scientist - as if both the political and the academic-sociological texts represent homogenous sorts of discourse. It seems to this author that an eclectic approach (it is the one that has been adopted up to this point) can indeed be justified to the extent that Weber's political and didactic writings use similar concepts, raise similar issues and draw on similar material, as so often they obviously do. Nonetheless, the homogenising method has a disadvantage just as evident: it is forever in danger of muddying the peculiarities of the political and academic modes, and hence of conflating their quite different contributions, styles and purposes. The relationship between them is, without doubt, enormously complex. On the one hand, the line between the modes is not hard and fast: all political discussion and action involves, at the very



least, some idea of what society is about and some notion of what it is socially possible to achieve; while all sociological theorising emits values, a political outlook (which is to say, minimally, a conception of power) and is often, in addition, coupled to a specifically demystificatory and emancipatory project.<sup>219</sup> Yet on the other hand the political and the academic genres are recognisably distinct. Respectively, they possess their own characteristic accents (on polemic and on pedagogy); their own singular intentionalities (intervention; explanation); their own criteria of validation (effectiveness; verisimilitude); and they address different audiences or the same audience in different roles (the citizen; the scholar specialist) through specific media (typically, the newspaper, the public address; the technical book and periodical).

That the distinction between the political and the academic is constantly being confounded in reality is nowhere more evident than in the work of Weber himself. Thus while the pugnacious 'Parliament and Government' is a clear example of the former and Part I of ES with its stark formalism an example of the latter, where is one to place a document like 'Politics as a Vocation'? As we know it in its published form (for it began life as a lecture) academic and political elements exist in the closest proximity: we witness Weber as sociology teacher (the outline of the three types of legitimate domination, the summary of Ostrogorski, etc.); as critic (of the German parliamentary system, of those who espouse absolutist ethical principles); as advocate

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219. A point made forcefully by philosophical realists (and by 'critical theorists' before them). See, for instance, R. Bhaskar, The Possibility of Naturalism (1979), 69-83, and the same author's very technical, 'Scientific Explanation and Human Emancipation', in Radical Philosophy, 26 (Autumn 1980), 16-28, not all of which I understood. See also A. Sayer, Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach (1984), 229-34.

Cf. the sensible remarks of Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 419-20.



and partisan (of a President of the Reich elected by the whole people); and as prophet of 'polar night'. And the status of 'Politics as a Vocation' is hardly tangential to what follows since most of the generalisations I will be making in this Section will hold good for all the texts known to me bar that one. However, the unavoidable artificiality of conceptual distinctions is not a reason to avoid them but only a reason for treating their formulation with care and with sensitivity, and in the end it is not implausible to admit of the different tasks, emphases and idioms of academic and political work. It was Weber, of course, who helped to make the distinction famous in social science, albeit in a form that many of us today would not accept, and who, however imperfectly, tried to live it out in his own practice. That being so, it is incumbent on us to treat the academic and political writings mindful of the tasks for which they were intended, to inquire into their specific nature, and to see what might be learned from taking their integrity seriously. Concretely, we have to explain why it is that whereas in the political writings Caesarism is Weber's preferred term for political leadership and charisma a word rarely employed, in the academic-sociological treatises, by contrast, charisma is paramount and Caesarism demoted to insignificance. A satisfactory answer to this puzzle, I suggest, depends on a detailed linguistic scrutiny of four kinds of relationship which it will be the job of the rest of this Section to elucidate: the relationship between charisma in the sociological writings and charisma in the political writings; the relationship between charisma and Caesarism in the sociological writings; the relationship between charisma in the sociological writings and Caesarism in the political writings; and, finally, the relationship between Caesarism in the sociological writings and Caesarism in the political writings.



A. Charisma in the sociological and political writings

Although 'charisma' makes a brief appearance towards the end of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1904-5), it was not until around 1913 that the concept really came to prominence in Weber's sociology, a position it would retain until at least 1919.<sup>220</sup> Insofar as the term appears at all in what I am referring to as the political writings, it merely serves the function of repeating, summarising or reinforcing what Weber has said at much greater length, and with much greater sophistication, in his sociological texts. Indeed, the only usages of the term 'charisma' in the political writings known to me come from the pages of 'Politics as a Vocation',<sup>221</sup> a document which, as I have already indicated, enjoys a special position in the Weberian

220. M. Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1930), transl. T. Parsons, 178 = GARS, Vol. I, 200. Weber also speaks of Caesarism here, with an obvious reference to Bismarck: commending 'the relative immunity of formerly Puritan peoples to Caesarism, and, in general, the subjectively free attitude of the English to their great statesmen' Weber compares that state of affairs to 'many things which we have experienced since 1878 in Germany positively and negatively.' In England 'there is a greater willingness to give the great man his due, but ... a repudiation of all hysterical idolisation of him and of the naive idea that political obedience could be due anyone from thankfulness', Protestant Ethic, 224-5, n. 30 = GARS, 99, continuation of 98, n.1.

On the use of the concept around 1913 see Part II of ES Vol. II, 1111 - 57 = WG Vol. II, 833-73, and the more difficult to date ES Vol. II, 952-4 = WG Vol. II, 700-2. Weber also includes the trinity of charismatic, traditional and legal modes of domination in the 'Introduction' to the series of essays entitled 'The Economic Ethic of the World Religions, Comparative Essays in the Sociology of Religion'. Though the 'Introduction' and the first essay of 'The Economic Ethic' series (on Confucianism, which also contains important sections on charisma) were both written in 1913, both had to wait until 1915 for publication in the Archiv. On their references to charisma see FMW, 295-6 = GARS Vol. I, 268-9, and M. Weber, The Religion of China (New York: 1951), transl. H.H. Gerth, 30-42, 119-29, etc. = GARS Vol. I, 310-25, 408-17, etc.

221. See FMW, 79-80, 106, 113, 124 = GPS, 495-6, 524, 532, 543. Arthur Mitzman, in The Iron Cage: an Historical Interpretation of Max Weber (New York: 1970), 247-8 implies that the term charisma is employed in 'Wahlrecht und Demokratie in Deutschland'. It is not. References to 'Caesarism', on the other hand, occur three times in that text, viz., GPS, 233, 277, 279.



corpus through quite clearly transcending the political and academic divide. However, common to both the political and sociological writings are three tenets which I shall now set down. This is done in the knowledge that what is to be said is far from an exhaustive account of charisma or even an ambitious one; the aim here is simply to state the fundamentals as I understand them and particularly as they compare or contrast with other concepts of leadership.

1. Charisma, in its pure form, denotes an exceptional quality possessed by a single individual who, by virtue of this quality, is able to exercise leadership over a group of admirers. Charisma is capable of assuming a variety of guises corresponding to the spheres of its influence (military, political, ethical, religious, aesthetic) but in all cases its consequence is to spectacularly affect the lives of those it touches: charisma is an inwardly revolutionary force with the power thereby to transform the material world it confronts.

This emphatically subjectivist notion of leadership not only sets Weber apart irrevocably from the Marxist tradition, based as the latter is upon some theory of 'collective agency',<sup>222</sup> in which leadership is depicted, variously, as that of a class and its allies, a vanguard party<sup>223</sup> or a culture,<sup>224</sup> or a combination of all three. It also distinguishes Weber somewhat from élite

222. This expression is taken from Perry Anderson's Arguments within English Marxism (1980), 20.

223. For the famous, though contrasting, conceptions of the vanguard party see Lenin, 'What is to be done?', Selected Works, Vol. I (Moscow: 1967), three volume edition, no translators mentioned, 102-255, esp. at 179-246 and R. Debray, Revolution in the Revolution? (1968), transl. B. Ortiz, esp. 106, 115.

224. See A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1971), eds. and transls. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith, 8-23, 168 and passim on the role of the 'organic' intellectuals and on hegemonic class culture more generally.



theory (the 'law of the small number' notwithstanding) in the sense that, for Weber, 'It is not impersonal élites, but always individual leaders who strive for power, or exercise it by means of a "Gefolgeschaft" (a following: PB) more or less strongly devoted to them as persons, though they may be assisted in ruling by a bureaucratic apparatus of some kind or other'.<sup>225</sup> The author of these lines has suggested elsewhere that Weber's conception of personal leadership reflects the influence upon him of liberalism and Nietzschean philosophy - the first proclaiming individual initiative and responsibility, the second 'the role of the creative individual in intellectual life as well as in the social and political spheres' - and so, to an extent, it does.<sup>226</sup> But it is also extraordinary how derivative Weber's sociological ideas on leadership appear when drawn alongside a thinker who is omitted from Mommsen's discussion: Gustave Le Bon.

Consider the glaring similarities, in language and in conception, between Weber's 'charisma' and Le Bon's 'prestige'.<sup>227</sup> According to Le Bon's rendition of the latter term in his Psychologie des foules (first published in France

225. W.J. Mommsen, 'Max Weber and Roberto Michels', 110, emphasis in original. Mommsen also notes the absence of the term *élite* in Weber's sociological writings; the lack of a theory of *élite* circulation à la Pareto and Mosca; and, instead, a heavy emphasis on the 'leadership principle', 'the latter always being couched in individualistic terms, the more so as it took on an increasingly plebiscitarian, if not caesaristic twist', *ibid.*

226. W.J. Mommsen, Age of Bureaucracy, 96, and also 79; cf. Mommsen's 'Zum Begriff ...', 297, and Max Weber and German Politics, 420. Actually, the relationship of Weber to both liberalism and Nietzsche is quite problematic. See for instance the interesting discussion of J.S. Mill's theory of political leadership - very different to Weber's - in S.P. Turner and R.A. Factor, Max Weber and the Dispute over Reason and Value (1984), 65-7. On Weber's debt to Nietzsche, the classic account is E. Fleischmann, 'De Weber à Nietzsche', Archives Européennes de Sociologie, 5 (1964), 190-238. I take the common view that Fleischmann's analysis is exaggerated if stimulating nonetheless. On the parallels between Nietzsche and Weber discerned by Fleischmann, see esp. 224-6, 230, 232. (The same author's contention that Weber's methodological relationship to Rickert was pretty well non-existent, 198, is completely untenable, though I shall not pursue the point here).

227. Mine is not an original observation. See R. Bocock, Freud and Modern Society (1976), 58. Bocock remarks on that page that Le Bon's 'prestige' is 'a notion close to, if not identical with, Weber's concept of "charisma"'; however, the author does not expand on this assertion.



in 1895) 'prestige' is 'a sort of domination exercised on our mind by an individual, a work, or an idea. This domination entirely paralyses our critical faculty, and fills our soul with astonishment and respect.'<sup>228</sup> 'Prestige', moreover, is not a discrete property but 'the mainspring of all authority',<sup>229</sup> - a remark that reminds one of Talcott Parsons' interpretation that 'Weber's fullest treatment of legitimacy leaves no doubt that there is no legitimate order without a charismatic element.'<sup>230</sup>

Le Bon divided 'prestige' into two parts, the second of which is particularly germane to our consideration of Max Weber. In the first place, there is 'acquired' (or what Le Bon also called 'artificial') prestige - an idea redolent of Weber's analysis of charisma's depersonalisation - which is itself charged with a dual aspect. Acquired prestige applies, on the one hand, to the influence that certain individuals prove capable of commanding because of the office they occupy or the social titles, fame or fortune that are associated with their name. Here prestige is bound up with the dazzle of symbol, spectacle and pomp: divest the judge of his gown and wig, Le Bon declares, and one immediately strips the person who wears them of half of his or her authority. And yet acquired prestige does not only cling to people and position; it also adheres to those 'opinions, literary and artistic works, etc.' whose classic status, Le Bon explains tautologously, derives from their perennial acknowledgement: the 'accumulated repetitions' regarding their value that begin at school breed a conformist mentality that numbs our faculties of judgement and perspicacity.<sup>231</sup> Hence, acquired prestige of this sort, rests upon habituation and our own native credulousness.

228. G. Le Bon, The Crowd (New York: 1960), no translator credited, 130.

229. Ibid.

230. T. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action (New York: 1949 paperback edn.), Vol. II, 665, emphasis in original.

231. Le Bon, 131. As an illustration of conformism Le Bon asserts: 'For a modern reader the perusal of Homer results incontestably in immense boredom; but who would venture to say so?' (!), 132.



In the second place, prestige may be 'personal', as opposed to 'acquired'. Personal prestige 'is a faculty independent of all titles, of all (institutionalised: PB) authority, and possessed by a small number of persons whom it enables to exercise a veritably magnetic fascination on those around them, although they are socially their equals, and lack all ordinary means of domination ... The great leaders of crowds such as Buddha, Jesus, Mahomet, Joan of Arc, and Napoleon, have possessed this form of prestige in a high degree, and to this endowment is more particularly due the position they attained.'<sup>232</sup> Moreover, coupled to these ideas, all consonant with Weber's notions - the quintessentially personalist element to prestige, the exclusivity of the leadership fraternity, the combination of religious and politico-military figures in the list of heroes,<sup>233</sup> the obedience of followers to leaders who lack, initially at any rate, the instruments of coercion to force compliance - is another which Weber would later refine, namely, Le Bon's contention that personal prestige has success as its vital sine qua non: 'The hero whom the crowd acclaimed yesterday is insulted today should he have been overtaken by failure.'<sup>234</sup> (Weber's description of the masses also shares similarities with Le Bon's but I reserve more detailed comment on that feature for the next Chapter).

It is relatively easy to find in two thinkers ideas in common; the method is notoriously hazardous in the glibness it invites. Far more difficult

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232. Ibid., 132.

233. Le Bon's paradigmatic case of personal prestige is Napoleon I (133-6), but he has earlier compared Napoleon with Julius Caesar (69). See also 54-5: 'The type of hero dear to crowds will always have the semblance of a Caesar. His insignia attracts them, his authority overawes them, and his sword instils them with fear'.

234. Ibid., 139.



to establish is proof of the causal influence of one person on another and in this particular case the evidence that can be gathered is at best circumstantial. I have no definite knowledge of when Weber first read Le Bon<sup>235</sup> - there is a cursory reference to him in chapter one, Part One of ES composed roughly the year before Weber died<sup>236</sup> - and can only guess at why, once he had read him, charisma remained his favoured term to express dynamic personal leadership. Perhaps the vogue status of 'prestige' deterred him; as a fashionable word<sup>237</sup> it might not have matched his requirements for a sanitised sociological terminology, and yet the word is by no means expunged from Weber's sociological reasoning altogether, even in a distinctly charismatic context. In one place, for instance, charisma and prestige are expressly, and contiguously, presented as synonyms;<sup>238</sup> while in another place Weber makes the point in his discussion of how the three modes of legitimate domination are historically interlaced that 'In general, it should be kept clearly in mind that the basis of every authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent "prestige"'.<sup>239</sup> Or perhaps, by the time Weber seriously got down to

235. Professor Mommsen, in personal correspondence, tells me that there is some mention of Le Bon in the letters that passed between Weber and Michels between 1908-1911 and that since Michels was very influenced by Le Bon it is reasonable to assume that Weber must have known about La Psychologie des foules at around this time. However, Mommsen is of the opinion that Weber was not directly influenced by Le Bon and that the former's individualistic approach ran counter 'in some ways' to Le Bon's assumptions. 'In some ways', perhaps; but Le Bon's remarks on personal leadership, as we have seen, betray many ideas he and Weber shared.

236. ES Vol. I, 23 = WG, Vol. I, 16.

237. See A.P. Thornton, The Imperial Idea and its Enemies (1959), 30.

238. 'Die drei reinen Typen ...', 556.

239. ES, Vol. I, 263 = WG Vol. I, 195. I have followed Roth's translation in omitting all but one of Weber's emphases, but have retained Weber's quotation marks round 'Prestige'. See also Mommsen, Age of Bureaucracy who abbreviates: '"Prestige", however, is always largely dependent on the success of the rulers; hence it will not survive any substantial failure', 85, n.10. Replace 'Prestige' by 'charisma' and the meaning of the sentence remains identical. However, see also Beetham, Max Weber, 247, n.65, who (cont'd. over).



reading Le Bon, charisma was already an established part of his sociological vocabulary - but in that case the links of influence between Le Bon and Weber become very tenuous indeed. And yet the parallels are uncanny, an observation which at the very least makes me doubt the conclusion of one authority when he says that Caesarism was the 'category that Weber generalised into the concept of charismatic authority, adding to it in the process the religious language of mission, duty, supernatural endowment, etc.'<sup>240</sup> To put the matter thus is problematical for the reason that it omits consideration of a host of other possible influences on the formation of 'charisma' - Nietzsche, liberalism, Le Bon for instance - which had no necessary connection with the concept of Caesarism but which may have been of considerably greater import for Weber's thinking on the subject of leadership. Specifically, Weber's notion of charisma seems closer to Le Bon's 'prestige' than Roscher's 'Caesarism'. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that when we attempt to come to grips with 'charisma' we are probably best advised to visualise it as the result of a compound of influences, usages of Caesarism constituting only one element to charisma's chemistry, albeit an important one. Still, whatever the source of Weber's ideas on leadership, their consequence was crystal clear: the heroic cast to Weber's construction of charisma offers little place for more ordinary mortals to stamp history with their existence. In Weber's sociology, the leader's disciples, and, at a further remove, the leader's mass-following even more,<sup>241</sup> exist only as backdrop or plinth to

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239. (cont'd).

remarks that 'The term Weber uses to describe the attitude of those subject to charismatic authority is not "Glaube" (belief), as in the other types of legitimacy, but the more emotional "Hingabe" (devotion)'. This may be significant since in the statement I have just quoted about prestige, Weber refers to the belief (and not to the devotion) that inspires it.

240. D. Beetham, 'From Socialism to Fascism ...', 177.

241. The status of the charismatic/Cesarist leader's mass following is the subject of the next Chapter.



the charismatic figure. Similarly, in Weber's political writings, their status is just as lowly. Reflecting on that passage in 'Politics as a Vocation' where Weber profiles the impact of Gladstone's charisma on the Liberal party machine over the issue of Irish Home Rule - the party machine 'fell in line with him: they said, Gladstone right or wrong, we follow him',<sup>242</sup> - Beetham draws together the most significant strands of Weber's thoughts on the leader-follower relationship as follows:

Weber's leader is an individualist; the source of his actions lies in himself, in his own personal convictions, and not in his following or associates. It is a conception which can be clearly distinguished from that according to which the leader's position depends upon his success in carrying out a programme laid down and accepted as a result of collective discussion and agreement within a group, and where this acts as a firm constraint upon his activity. In such a case the allegiance of members is primarily to the programme itself, only secondarily to the leader; the content is more important than the person. But this for Weber did not count as leadership. Someone who was elected to carry out a programme laid down by others was an official, not a leader.<sup>243</sup>

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242. FMW, 106 = GPS, 524.

243. D. Beetham, Max Weber, 231. Two other aspects of Beetham's analysis should be recorded. First, his observation that whereas in the Freiburg Inaugural, the leadership that Weber desires is 'presented in terms of leadership by a class - hopefully the bourgeoisie - and is dependent upon their achieving a wider political and national outlook as a class ... political leadership in Weber's later writings is presented as leadership by an individual, within a context of political institutions and on the basis of a political relationship with a mass electorate' (216). Beetham traces this transformation in Weber's thinking to the latter's realisation that the bourgeoisie, and every other modern class, were 'too closely bound to a particular economic function and outlook to be capable of wider political achievement which went beyond that of class interest ... Hence the need for a distinctively political elite or leadership to counteract the dominance of class and economic factors' (217). And Beetham also reminds us, secondly, that Weber's support for parliamentary democracy was conditional upon it being able to deliver the sort of leadership he believed most desirable, which is to say one capable of genuine creativity, purposiveness and independence from bureaucratic stultification. Parliamentary democracy was thus, first and foremost, not something to be valued in its own right and certainly not to be valued as a means for the devolution of power. On the contrary, parliamentary democracy was to be supported to the extent that it put power in the hands of the person who could use it best for the nation's (cont'd. over).



Weber's leader, then, in both the sociological and political writings is an exceptional personality endowed with gifts which enable him to recruit a devoted following; 'charisma' describes the quality he supposedly possesses, 'charismatic domination', the relationship between the leader and led. Charisma is not a moral quality, is not an attribute like 'virtue' in Montaigne or the 'Aristos' in John Fowles' sense of the term, capable of cultivation by us all in principle,<sup>244</sup> but rather the exclusive preserve of an elect. One is tempted to say that, for Weber, the charismatic individual is an example of human 'greatness' (which is of course not the same as goodness) but this is not the greatness Isaiah Berlin once claimed for the state of Israel's first president. According to Berlin, the 'transformation' a great man effects, 'if he is truly to deserve his title, must be such as those best qualified to judge consider to be antecedently improbable - something unlikely to be brought about by the mere force of events, by the 'trends' or 'tendencies' already working at the time - that is to say, something unlikely to occur without the intervention, difficult or impossible to discount in advance, of the man who for this very reason deserves to be described as great.'<sup>245</sup> Weber's emphasis in the concept of charisma is very different: the authenticity of charisma will be judged, not by scholars versed in the techniques of counter-

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243. (cont'd).

power-interests and international standing, and, secondarily, insofar as it protected civil liberties. The problem of reconciling freedom with dictatorship was never satisfactorily resolved by Weber, which is hardly surprising. See Beetham, 96, 101-2, 104, 106.

244. Michel de Montaigne, 'On cruelty', Essays (1958), transl. J.M. Cohen, 174-90, at 174; J. Fowles, The Aristos (1980; revised edn.), 9. Fowles, who is adapting the ideas of Heraclitus, remarks on that page: '... I hope you will understand what I mean when I say that the dividing line between the Few and the Many must run through each individual, not between individuals', emphasis omitted.

245. I. Berlin, 'Chaim Weizmann', in Personal Impressions (1982), 32-62, at 33.



factual thinking but by those people who constitute the hero's entourage and mass following; moreover, the actual reality of charisma, and its effects on the social system, are only incidental to, certainly not necessary features of, the concept under discussion.

2. Charisma is a contingent phenomenon; there is no suggestion in Weber's writings that the appearance of the charismatic individuals is socially destined to occur. He or she may arise in determinate, propitious circumstances (see 3. below) but whether or not such a person does in fact emerge must remain an open question. Again, Weber's position finds him at odds with that more mechanistic current of Marxist thought associated with a number of Engels' statements. Here is one of them which has special relevance for our topic:

Men make their history themselves, but not as yet with a collective will according to a collective plan or even in a clearly defined given society. Their aspirations clash, and for that very reason all such societies are governed by necessity, whose complement and manifestation is accident. The necessity which here asserts itself through all accident is again ultimately economic necessity. In this connection one has to deal with the so-called great men. That such and such a man and precisely that man arises at a particular time in a particular country is, of course, pure chance. But if one eliminates him there is a demand for a substitute, and this substitute will be found, good or bad, but in the long run he will be found. That Napoleon, just that particular Corsican, should have been the military dictator whom the French Republic, exhausted by its own warfare, had rendered necessary, was chance; but that, if a Napoleon had been lacking, another would have filled the place, is proved by the fact that a man was always found as soon as he became necessary: Caesar, Augustus, Cromwell, etc.<sup>246</sup>

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246. F. Engels to W. Borgius, 25 January 1894, in Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence (Moscow: 1975; third, revised edn.), transl. I. Lasker, 441-3, at 442, emphasis in original. Obviously feeling uncomfortable about such a sweeping account, Engels asks Borgius not to 'weigh each word in the above too scrupulously ... I regret that I have not the time to word what I am writing to you as exactly as I should be obliged to do for publication', 443. For a more sophisticated Marxist consideration of the problem see G.V. Plekhanov, The Role of the Individual in History (1940), esp. chapter 7 .



Weber would have found such an explanation completely untenable, as he would have done Hegel's picture of World-Historical Individuals, those instruments of Spirit moving history towards its culmination in reason, freedom and self-consciousness.<sup>247</sup> (However, Hegel's proposition that 'passion' is the inner spur of heroic deeds would have been likely to elicit from Weber an appreciative response).<sup>248</sup> On the other hand, Weber would have found much that was congenial in the claim of another theoretician that 'Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked there', and would have also been likely to endorse this same author's parody of all who believe circumstance alone can generate greatness: 'The Time call forth? Alas, we have known Times call loudly enough for their great man, but not find him when they called!'<sup>249</sup>

3. In spite of being subjectivist, Weber's account of charisma has a just claim to be called sociological for three reasons. First of all there is the recognition that though conditions may not create the person, without the 'anxiety and enthusiasm' arising from 'an extraordinary situation',<sup>250</sup> his ability to influence people in a revolutionary way is unthinkable. As a stab at causation this is admittedly very superficial but at issue here is not the adequacy of Weber's theory, only its status as broadly sociological and in this regard we can say that he does at least acknowledge charisma's social (and social-psychological) conditions of existence. Second, charisma

247. G.W.F. Hegel, The Philosophy of History (New York: 1956), transl. J. Sibree, 23-4, 29-34. The first example that Hegel gives of a World-Historical Individual is Julius Caesar (29-30); Alexander and Napoleon I are two other people he includes in this category (31).

248. Weber uses the same term in his sketch of the qualities the ideal politician should possess: FMW, 115 = GPS, 533.

249. T. Carlyle, 'On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History', excerpted in F. Stern, (ed.), The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present (1970, 2nd edn.), 101-2.

250. ES Vol. II, 1117 = WG Vol. II, 838; cf. ES Vol. II, 1121, 1132, 1142 = WG Vol. II, 841, 850, 860.



is an inherently reflexive phenomenon, its persistence forever dependent upon the frail dialectic of deed and homage. To endure, to retain its spell over heart and mind, it must continually display its powers, prove its bona fide credentials, succeed. But with charisma apostasy is never very far away from apotheosis and should triumphs succumb to disaster and the promised well-being for all believers fail to come about, the leader will find himself deserted, ridiculed and, worst of all, ordinary. In the final analysis, therefore, the charismatic figure is the captive of others' devotion: and when that devotion turns to indifference or hostility, his magic vapourises.<sup>251</sup>

Third, charisma can be seen as a sociological concept in as much as Weber focuses on its unintended, and often contradictory, consequences (which are by definition beyond the control of the progenitors) and insofar as he treats the routinisation of charisma in social arrangements as his cardinal preoccupation.<sup>252</sup> As Gerth and Mills presciently observed over thirty-five years ago, 'despite Weber's emphasis on charisma ... Napoleon, Calvin and Cromwell, Washington and Lincoln appear in his texts only in passing. He tries to grasp what is retained of their work in the institutional orders and continuities of history. Not Julius Caesar, but Caesarism; not Calvin, but Calvinism is Weber's prime concern.'<sup>253</sup>

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251. ES Vol. I, 242, Vol. II, 1114 = WG Vol. I, 179, Vol. II, 834-5.

252. ES Vol. I, 246-54, Vol. II, 1121-57 = WG Vol. I, 182-88, 841-73.

253. FMW, 55. Peter Worsley, in his otherwise excellent The Trumpet Shall Sound (1970 edn.), seriously understates, it seems to me, the sociological nature of Weber's concept of charisma: see 274-80, 285-97, esp. 293-4. Worsley's own development of the notion, designed to underscore 'the social significance of the leader as symbol, catalyst and message-bearer' (293) was one that I found particularly shrewd and persuasive nonetheless.



B. The relationship between charisma and Caesarism in the sociological writings

This relationship can be briefly attended to. In the sociological writings such as ES and the studies of the world religions charisma is prodigiously in the ascendant as a description of the leader-led bond, while Caesarism, as an idea, remains Lilliputian by comparison, and is explicitly mentioned as a term only rarely.<sup>254</sup> Furthermore, if one concentrates on the chapters specifically devoted to the analysis of charisma in ES we notice a tangible discrepancy in the versions there presented: the 1913 draft refers to 'Caesarism' or 'Caesarist' twice;<sup>255</sup> its 1918 and 1919 counterparts, not at all, the word 'Caesarism' having been entirely displaced by the vocabulary of 'Führer-Demokratie', 'plebiszitäre Führerdemokratie', and 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft',<sup>256</sup> expressions which, as I have previously argued, are virtually identical semantically with a number of Weberian senses of Caesarism. Those words, and Caesarism itself in the 1913 version (in the latter, incidentally, there is only one reference to 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft' and it is specifically linked to 'Caesarism',<sup>257</sup>) possess little independent status in the sociological texts; as Weber explains them to us he does so as mere derivatives or adjuncts of the master term/concept of charisma. And as derivatives one would naturally expect them to share the most significant properties of charisma, which is exactly the case, even in contexts where charisma is not specifically mentioned. Thus, in Weber's chapter on Bureaucracy in Part II of Economy and Society

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254. As in ES Vol. II, 961, 986, 1126, 1130 = WG Vol. II, 707, 726, 846, 849; and FMW, 296 = GARS Vol. I, 269. Also see FMW, 370, for which I lack a reference to the original. If 'Politics as a Vocation' is included in the category of sociological/academic writings, see FMW, 106 = GPS, 523.

255. Respectively, ES Vol. II, 1126, 1130 = WG Vol. II, 846, 849.

256. See 'Die drei reinen Typen ...', 558, and WG Vol. I, 198-9 = ES Vol. I, 267-9.

257. ES Vol. II, 1126 = WG Vol. I, 846.



we are informed that 'Caesarism' amounts to the '"rule of the personal genius"', 'who is unfettered by tradition',<sup>258</sup> a comment that immediately makes us recollect the qualities possessed by the bearer of the gift of grace.

C. The relationship between charisma in the sociological writings and Caesarism in the political writings.

In the political writings, too, Caesarism is projected in such a way as to remind us constantly of what Weber says about charisma in his sociological discussions: we are told of Caesarism's succession problem;<sup>259</sup> a number of men named Caesarist also appear as embodiments of charisma in Weber's formal sociology, for instance Gladstone,<sup>260</sup> Napoleons I and III,<sup>261</sup> and Pericles;<sup>262</sup> Caesarism is depicted as a highly personalised form of domination resting on mass emotionality, just as charisma is mooted as being;<sup>263</sup> and both modes of legitimation are designated acclamatory.<sup>264</sup> However, contrasts between Weber's treatment of Caesarism in the political interventions and his treatment of charisma in the sociological treatises are also evident. First, not only does Caesarism itself assume primary importance in the political writings as Weber's favoured leadership term, but its presence actually seems to banish charisma (as a word) almost entirely from the sphere of its influence: apart from 'Politics as a Vocation' 'charisma' is never mentioned in Weber's self-consciously political pieces. Thus Caesarism's humble place (as a word)

258. ES Vol. II, 961-2 = WG Vol. II, 707.

259. ES Vol. II, 1457 = GPS, 389.

260. Compare FMW, 106 = GPS, 524, with ES Vol. II, 1132 = WG Vol. II, 851.

261. Compare ES Vol. II, 1451-2 = GPS, 382, with ES Vol. I, 244, 266-70, ES Vol. II, 1126, 1149 = WG Vol. I, 181, 198-201, WG Vol. II, 846, 867. See also, 'Die drei reinen Typen ...', 556.

262. Actually called a 'demagogue' in FMW, 96 = GPS, 513, called 'Caesarist' and demagogic in ES Vol. II, 1130 = WG Vol. II, 849. See also 'Die drei reinen Typen ...', 556.

263. Compare FMW, 106-7 = GPS, 524-5 with, inter alia, ES Vol. I, 269, ES Vol. II, 1117, 1130 = WG Vol. I, 199-200, WG Vol. II, 837, 849.

264. Compare ES Vol. II, 1451 = GPS, 382, with ES Vol. II, 1127 = WG Vol. II, 847.



in the sociological-academic texts where charisma stands supreme is juxtaposed to its much grander position in the political discourses. Second, the theme of illegitimacy which is such a feature of the political texts that deal with Caesarism is an issue of no real substance in the context of charisma. Moreover, even where Weber raises the question of Caesarism's illegitimacy in ES he does so only vaguely and in a most casual way.<sup>265</sup> Third, whereas in the war time polemics Bismarck's Caesarism is cited again and again by Weber in castigatory tones, Bismarck is the one figure conspicuously excluded from Weber's list of charismatic personages. (One might add that the academic-sociological writings which mention Caesarism also signally fail to consider Bismarck as a Caesarist figure). To the best of my knowledge there are no examples of Weber calling Bismarck 'charismatic', though he does entertain an expression of the great Junker which he also employs with regard to the 'Caesarist' Napoleon I, a person, of course, who is vaunted as charismatic by Weber: I am thinking here of Weber's description of Napoleon I's and Bismarck's rule as that of a 'genius',<sup>266</sup> a word, parenthetically, that Weber was fond of using, in both the sociological and political sources, to characterise Caesarism more generally.<sup>267</sup>

D. The relationship between Caesarism in the sociological writings and Caesarism in the political writings, and some general questions answered.

The most prominent aspect of this relationship has already been dealt with: Caesarism, the term that Weber uses as early as November 1884 (see footnote 32 above), and continues to use until virtually the end of his life in the framework of his political discussions and diatribes has, by 1919, become supplanted in the sociological-academic writings (it was never of

265. Twice: ES Vol. II, 986, 1130 = WG Vol. II, 726, 849.

266. On Napoleon see ES Vol. I, 244, 268 = WG Vol. I, 181, 199; on Bismarck see ES Vol. II, 1387 = GPS, 302.

267. See, respectively, ES Vol. II, 961-2 = WG Vol. II, 707, and ES Vol. II, 1387 = GPS, 302.



great prominence there in any case) both by the terminology of 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft' and its correlates, and simultaneously absorbed as an idea into the wider notion of charisma. How is one to explain this discrepancy between Caesarism's relatively high-standing in the political writings, and its inferior status in the sociological ones? What happened to make Caesarism de-materialise in the 1918 and 1919 versions of the three types of legitimate domination? Why, if Caesarism had become redundant as a sociological term, should Weber have chosen to retain its services as a political foil? Why, if charisma is Weber's preferred sociological terms for the leader-follower bond is its employment, outside the sociological texts, restricted to 'Politics as a Vocation'? I believe the answer to all these questions is of one piece, and that is why its clarification has been left until the other three sorts of relationship (A, B, C) had been scrutinised; however, because Weber himself nowhere comments on the choice of vocabulary he happens to use that concerns us here, it is more than usually necessary to underline the hypothetical character of my explanation.

'Caesarism's absence in the 1918 and 1919 typologies of legitimate domination has to be put, I suggest, in a methodological context.<sup>268</sup> Let us recall that Weber's objective in the sociological writings was not simply to inform his specialist audience about the social character of the world but also to provide it with a model of how social information should be processed and presented. For him, sociology was to eschew value-judgement and be scientific in Weber's understanding of that term: dispassionate in its formulations; saturated in empirical knowledge; modest in its claims and

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268. The reader who feels a bit confused about these different versions of the typologies (which, like their 1913 predecessor, contain the vital sections on charisma) may benefit by turning back to page 110 where they are referred to more fully.



its conclusions; driven by that demonic passion to learn yet able to discipline that passion once the choice of subject matter for research had been decided upon so to prohibit *parti pris*; and generally prudent and controlled. That Weber often breached his own rules is well known, but not the point here. What is the point is Weber's sociological design, clearly apparent in Part I of ES, the 'Conceptual Exposition' ('Soziologische Kategorienlehre'),<sup>269</sup> the Part which also contains the 1919 version of the analysis of charisma; for in that Part Weber marks out, like nowhere else in his work,<sup>270</sup> the ground of sociology as a discipline and demonstrates what such a science of meaning is to be like and how methodologically it is basically to proceed. Part I is the closest Weber ever got to articulating a manifesto for sociology, and under the grey turgidity of its prose and its interminable model-building pulsed a crusading purpose. Admittedly, as manifestos go, it is at times reticent and even self-deprecatory. Does Weber not disclaim, in the Preface to Chapter 1, methodological novelty for the terms and concepts he is about to use in that Chapter and by extension in the whole of Part I? Does he not declare that he has simplified his language in order to make it more comprehensible and accessible? Indeed he does say these things. But while the first remark is rendered delusive by the sentence that immediately follows it ('The method ... attempts only - ! - to formulate what all empirical sociology really means when it deals with the same problems'), the second stands qualified by Weber's own concession that his account may seem 'pedantic', that 'The

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269. Part I was written between 1918-20, Part II between 1910-14: see Roth's 'Introduction' to ES Vol. I, c, lxxv respectively.

270. The importance of the earlier 'Ueber einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie' (1913), GAW, 427-74 = 'Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology' Sociological Quarterly, 22 (1981), 151-80, transl. Edith Graber, is not in dispute here, but that text is not anything as comprehensive as the 'Soziologische Kategorienlehre'. More importantly, though it has a little to say about the meaning of legitimacy and domination, it has absolutely nothing to say about the three types of legitimate domination.



most precise formulation cannot always be reconciled with a form which can readily be popularised. In such cases the latter aim has had to be sacrificed'.<sup>271</sup>

Now Caesarism, being a word so protean and politically combustible, was not the sort of term suitable for the likes of ES Part I which required instead (even if it did not, could not, succeed perfectly in meeting this requirement) a more anodyne language to do the sort of work Weber wished it to perform. Moreover, Caesarism's unsuitability as a technical term might also have been compounded by the fact of its inclusion nonetheless in other textbooks with social scientific aspirations (Roscher's Politik; Schäffle's Bau und Leben) with which Weber would have been compelled to engage and criticise if he were to use the word in such a way as would conform with his professed goal of formulating 'what all empirical sociology really means when it deals with the same problems'. Sometimes a word or distinction is so fundamental that Weber cannot avoid taking on the opposition, as he does with Knapp's notion of money,<sup>272</sup> or, indirectly, with Marx's concept of class.<sup>273</sup> In other cases, however, Weber is able to by-pass confrontation through coining or adapting far less charged notions such as 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft' and its cognates, words which Weber might have thought not only more adequately express, when contrasted to the anachronistic 'Caesarism', the realities of modernity (and are thus more obviously honed to the craft of the sociologist) but also are relatively denuded of the more excitable, often pejorative meanings inhering within 'Caesarism'.

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271. ES Vol. I, 3 = WG Vol. I, 3.

272. ES Vol. I, 184-93 = WG Vol. I, 140-5.

273. ES Vol. I, 302-7 = WG Vol. I, 223-7.



The virtue of charisma as a term, on the other hand, was that it was a word with which few people, sociologists included, would have been acquainted. Affording ample scope for sociological definition and elaboration, it provided Weber with both a blank cheque of sorts, and a route of escape from the unruly preconceptions tenanted in the house of Caesarism. Naturally, this was not charisma's only merit. 'Caesarism' was invariably linked, perhaps necessarily so, to the political realm: the council or state. Its orbit of meaning was hence commensurately circumscribed, a restriction that could only be reinforced by the marriage of the term to a particular historical person or group of persons. By dint of this semantic confinement, Caesarism could never have furnished the more general, more abstract, tool Weber required to theorise his third mode of domination. His ideal-type trinity needed a more latitudinous and inclusive third concept than Caesarism could offer, one which could accommodate all that was known as Caesarism but much, much more besides. And this was to be charisma's role, for charisma could traverse in giant paces a vast territory of devotional relationships, from state leadership over a mass of people at one extreme (Napoleon), to the artistic leadership exercised over an aesthetic coterie (Stefan George and his circle) at the other; it thus possessed the versatility lacking in 'Caesarism' to bestride macro and micro situations. Moreover, the religious dimension of leadership, mostly absent from 'Caesarism', could be conveyed generously in a term like charisma which, through its Biblical origins, came equipped with its own numinosity.

'Charisma', then, presented itself as an attractive alternative to 'Caesarism' because it was not bowed down under the weight of previous controversy; because it allowed elbow room, as Weber saw it, for scientific formulation; and because it was capable of encapsulating the plurality of leader-led relationships that Weber was keen to depict. Insofar as Weber wrote as a founder of sociology, engaged in the formative process of creating



a value-judgemental-free comparative discipline it is natural that Caesarism is, in his sociology, generally downgraded as too polemical and too narrow a term for his technical purposes, and significant also that in the 1919 'Kategorienlehre' (and the 1918 section on 'The three pure types of legitimate domination', which is little more than a dress-rehearsal for the section on the same subject in ES Part I), where Weber is setting out the lexicon and basic concepts of sociology, Caesarism disappears altogether as a word, supplanted by the vocabulary of 'plebiszitäre Herrschaft' and swallowed whole by the corpulent charisma. By contrast, insofar as Weber wrote as a propagandist, as a liberal-nationalist partisan, as a person determined to take a stand in public affairs, it is just as natural that Caesarism should have been retained for that sort of discourse, and charisma - which would have been far more esoteric to the layperson of Weber's time, educated or otherwise, than it is to our own - omitted from discussion or mention. It figures, too, that a piece like 'Politics as a Vocation', which straddles the pedagogical and polemical idioms should have employed virtually the whole gamut of terms considered in this chapter - Caesarism, charisma, plebiscitary democracy, plebiscitary domination/rulership, leader-democracy - which in the more strictly academic and strictly political writings are quite rigorously separated. We may surmise that Weber could have expected the audience of, say, the Frankfurter Zeitung, to know what 'Caesarism' amounted to, especially where Weber's context helped to make his meaning transparent. Finally, since 'Caesarism' referred above all to a political formation, it seems reasonable to venture that, in Weber's mind, political discourse was the most apt forum within which to speak its name.

### 3.7 The Reich President

In the period during and immediately after the First World War Weber's political interventions reached their crescendo. There was much to fill the liberal nationalist with anger, sadness and foreboding: the highly



publicised rantings of an intemperate emperor unrestrained by a national parliament which thereby revealed its own impotence; the irresponsibility of pan-German agitation, atavistic and hysterical; the unrealistic expectations that cleaved to the demands for unlimited submarine warfare; the machinations of the Supreme Command; the Brest-Litovsk debacle; and of course the great defeat itself and its aftermath - Wilson's humiliating cat-and-mouse diplomacy, naval mutiny at Kiel and at other ports in north Germany, revolution in Berlin, insurrection in Bavaria. Faced with all of this Weber had not hesitated to ventilate his opinions with a frankness that impressed most who knew of them. But Weber's sphere of action was limited. As a scholar by vocation he was obliged to engage in politics through the media intellectuals customarily use, the public lecture, the congress speech and report, the memorandum to persons of influence, the newspaper article (in November-December 1918 he was actually living in Frankfurt as the political adviser for the Frankfurter Zeitung) with the intention of moulding informed opinion in conformity with his own. He could only hope that policy-makers would listen to his arguments and be persuaded by their logic; he had frustratingly to accept that such impact as he made would inevitably be vicarious. But in December 1918, and thus a good five months before the presentation of allied peace conditions which the German delegation at Versailles would eventually be compelled to accept, Weber was given the opportunity to do more than air his political preferences for Germany's constitutional future in the ebullient atmosphere of a public debating hall or in the columns of a prestigious daily paper, addressing his fellow citizens alternately as sage and as prophet. For, at Hugo Preuß' instigation, Weber was invited to join the committee charged



with the responsibility for drafting what would become known as the Weimar Constitution:<sup>274</sup> at last the man of letters might become truly a man of palpable political influence. And if political influence was Weber's aspiration, as certainly it was, the committee's deliberations and conclusions were not wholly to disappoint him. As we shall see, even after six drafts of the constitution, the last two conditioned by heated discussion on the floor of the Reichstag, the final product endorsed on 31 July 1919, would carry in some limited respects a recognisably Weberian stamp.

Directly preceding and following his cloistered involvement in Preuß' committee, Weber wrote a series of constitutionally-oriented articles in which he publicly campaigned for a plebiscitarian Reich President. These post-war writings - anticipations and shadows of the position Weber adopted in the constitutional committee itself - are of particular relevance for this thesis because, as Beetham points out, they signal a major revision of Weber's view of the form leadership should take in his nation's political reconstruction. Such wartime analyses as 'Parliament and Government' had 'looked for a political leader to emerge from within Parliament itself', and had argued that a vigorous parliamentary democracy of the English type was the model system in which leaders could be groomed, lent scope for their own independent initiative, yet remain monitored by their colleagues among other interested groups, and replaced when public confidence in them had dried up. Weber's post-war contributions, however, insisted that the 'necessity for a leader to provide decisive political direction and a focus for national unity could now only

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274. The background of Preuß' own appointment as convening chairman can be found in G. Schulz, Zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur. Verfassungspolitik und Reichsreform in der Weimarer Republik, Vol. I (Berlin: 1963), 123-4. Also 125-8 where, somewhat tendentiously, Preuß' 'dogmatic' romantic-idealist constitutional conceptions are contrasted with Weber's more 'empirical', rationalist approach.



be met by divorcing him from Parliament and giving him a separate power base in a direct presidential election'.<sup>275</sup> Weber, in effect, had given up on the German parliament as a recruiting ground for national leadership. The prime reasons for what would prove to be an irrevocable disenchantment can be seen as the reverse side of the coin which impelled Weber to argue for a Reich President elected not by Parliament (as happened, to Weber's great consternation, on 11 February 1919, when Friedrich Ebert was exalted to the Republic's highest executive office) but by the people as a whole. The rest of this Section will attempt a summary of Weber's contentions on this subject, together with a consideration of their relationship to his notion of Caesarism. Two published sources are especially pertinent for understanding Weber's constitutional change of heart: first, the series of articles printed originally in the Frankfurter Zeitung during November and the first week of December 1918, then issued by the same paper's publishing house as a pamphlet entitled 'Germany's Future Constitution' in January 1919;<sup>276</sup> second, the piece for

275. Beetham, Max Weber, 232, my emphasis. While Beetham believes the post-war writings 'substantially revised' Weber's earlier (1917) views on the locus of leadership formation, W.J. Mommsen points to an element of continuity: according to Mommsen, 'Weber permitted the leading politician a plebiscitary-charismatic precedence vis-à-vis his party as well as parliament ... as early as 1917-18', Max Weber and German Politics, 184, n. 170; cf. xv, 186, 187, 364, Chapter 10. Nonetheless Mommsen himself seems actually to come quite close to Beetham's position when Mommsen says, for instance, that between 'Parliament and Government' and 'Politics as a Vocation' 'a major step in the development of Max Weber's political views took place, especially in his estimation of parliament' (ibid., xx cont. of n.4), or when he concedes that 'In 1917, the implicit restriction of the power of parliament in favour of rule by a charismatic leader was not yet fully manifest; in 1918-19 it became central', ibid., 340.

276. 'Deutschlands Künftige Staatsform' reprinted in GPS, 436-71. For Mommsen, the articles that make up 'Germany's Future Constitution' were 'a milestone along the way to the Weimar constitution. Through them, Weber achieved considerable influence on the enactment of the Weimar constitution ...', Max Weber and German Politics, 334. (The entire chapter on 'Weber and the Making of the Weimar Constitution' is superb). An even greater opportunity for Weber to have influenced the new constitution was missed when he failed to be appointed by Ebert to the post of Secretary of State of the Interior; details in ibid., 301. 'Probably, Max Weber himself never learned of this greatest political opportunity of his life', 301, n.68.



the Berliner Börsen-Zeitung of 25 February 1919 simply dubbed 'The Reich President'.<sup>277</sup>

In these texts Weber specifies a number of reasons why 'It is essential that the future President of the Reich be elected directly by the people'.<sup>278</sup> First of all, only a President so chosen, Weber maintains, will be able to affirm the identity and the unity of the infant Republic in the teeth of those divisive particularisms that hover round its cradle threatening to asphyxiate the new state at birth: the fledgeling's protectors will be few, its enemies many. There is the centrifugal particularism arising from Germany's Federal make-up in which a Bundesrat (Federal Council)<sup>279</sup> will inevitably elevate the demands of the Republic's constituent states above the national interest and, in the process, hamper the power-ability of the Reichstag,

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277. 'Der Reichspräsident', also reprinted in GPS, 486-9; translated by G.C. Wells as 'The Reich President', Social Research, 53, 1 (1986), 128-32. Evidence of the interest this article provoked and of Weber's efforts to reach as wide an audience as possible is shown by the fact that it was also printed in two other papers at around the same time, i.e. the Heidelberger Zeitung of 27 February and the Königsberger Hartungsche Zeitung of 15 March: details in Martin Riesebrodt's painstakingly compiled 'Bibliographie zur Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe', in Prospekt der Max Weber Gesamtausgabe (Tübingen: 1981), 16-32, see esp. 30.

The impact of Weber's Reich President proposals is helpfully put into context by Mommsen. Apparently, the thrust of constitutional reformist thought in the years before the fall of the Hohenzollerns was in the direction of a constitutional parliamentary monarchy based on English practice, an idea much in line with Weber's own wartime writings. But with the collapse of the dynasty there was at first no clear idea about what a republican constitution should look like. 'For this reason, Max Weber's powerful conception of a plebiscitary Reich president as head of the executive and the guarantor of Reich unity, with a Reich parliament supporting him, aroused great respect and interest', Max Weber and German Politics, 346.

278. 'Reich President', 128 = GPS, 486.

279. Under the Weimar Constitution this body was transmuted into the so-called Committee of States: see Koch, op.cit., 264.



especially its capacity to select and promote national leaders;<sup>280</sup> of all the states, Prussia is the most worrying in this regard, for Berlin will not be easily reconciled to the loss of its hegemonic position in Germany as a whole.<sup>281</sup> There is the quite literal provincialism of regionally based parties which can be counted on to continue to fragment the political process in Germany. And connected to this there is the electoral parochialism that follows from proportional representation, an electoral system whose consequence, Weber feared, would be to transport wholesale the scramble for economic advancement into the political arena through interest groups compelling the parties to place the former's preferred candidates at the head of the party list: 'Parliament will thus become a body within which those personalities who care nothing for national politics set the tone, and who, in the nature of things, will rather act according to an "imperative" mandate from those with particular economic interests. It will be a parliament of philistines - incapable of being in any sense a place where political leaders are selected.'<sup>282</sup>

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280. 'Reich President', 128, 131 = GPS, 486, 488-9; cf. FMW, 113-4 = GPS, 532. Though Weber remained a committed federalist (Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 334-8) he nonetheless believed that the new German state would require a unitarian element to offset federalism and provide a much needed factor of cohesion; the Reich President, elected directly by the whole people, was to be that cohesive factor. On the connection between Weber's federalism and plebiscitarianism see Mommsen, ibid., 337, 339-40.

281. Weber believed that the breaking-up of Prussia into regional states as a means of stemming its power was impracticable. Instead he preferred the idea of 'counterweights in constitutional law against the actual predominance of Prussia', GPS, 450, emphasis in original. The office of Reich President can, I think, be construed as such a counterweight to Prussia and, as remarked on in the previous footnote, to federalism more generally.

On Weber's earlier, 1917 proposals for instituting another kind of counterweight to Prussian predominance - the parliamentarisation of the Bundesrat (esp. through the removal of Article 9, para. 2 of the Reich constitution) see Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 172-89, esp. 176. On Weber's later thoughts on reconciling federalism and unitarianism, ibid., 334-40, 356-8, 370-1. Cf. the critical remarks of Schulz, op.cit. 131.

282. 'Reich President', 130 = GPS, 487-8. In 'Germany's Future Constitution' Weber says that proportional representation is tolerable 'in normal times' i.e. in a period of relative social peace, but its overall effect is to weaken 'unified political leadership' something crucially needed to overcome Germany's current social travails. He adds, 'Applied to government (cont'd. over).



Such a parliament cannot be expected to generate or cultivate greatness and should not, concomitantly, be in a position to decide who will reach the President's office. Only a President elected directly by the citizenry, that is elected 'in a plebiscitarian way and not by parliament' can become 'the safety-valve of the demand for leadership.'<sup>283</sup> If the danger of particularism so evidently 'cries out for a bearer of the idea of the unity of the Reich',<sup>284</sup> only through a 'headship of state which indubitably rests on the will of the whole people without intermediaries'<sup>285</sup> can that danger be institutionally averted.

The second reason Weber campaigned for a Reich President elected by the whole people hinged on his assessment of Germany's economic plight. Structural transformations, including a dose of 'socialisation', would be essential for Germany's post war economic recovery and it was vital for their implementation that they were seen to be endowed with the authority and

282. (cont'd).

formation, a proportional system would be the radical opposite of any dictatorship. That will be differently judged according to one's economic, social and political views.' See GPS, 462 (I have omitted a number of emphases). Cf. FMW, 114 = GPS, 532: '... in its present form, proportional representation is a typical phenomenon of leaderless democracy', and ES Vol. II, 1443 = GPS, 372, on coalition government.

283. FMW, 114 = GPS, 532. Cf. GPS, 457: 'A Reich President supported by the revolutionary legitimacy of popular election, who would stand opposite the Reich corporate bodies in his own right, would have an incomparably greater authority than one who was parliamentarily elected', emphasis in original. (Wolfgang Mommsen interprets the phrase 'revolutionary legitimacy' as code for charismatic legitimacy: 'Zum Begriff ...', 310).

284. 'Reich President', 131 = GPS, 488.

285. 'Reich President', 128 = GPS, 486.



legitimacy that a President chosen in Weber's preferred manner alone could provide.<sup>286</sup> The President, Weber editorialised, should be no parliamentary manikin, no mere figurehead, but actually just the opposite: a democratic dictator helping to create the conditions in which fundamental change would be possible. It was a point Max Weber threw in the face of the Social Democrats like vitriol claiming, absurdly, that his prescription for the nation's sickness was analagous to their view of the dictatorship of the proletariat: 'Let the Social Democrats remember that the much-discussed "dictatorship" of the masses does indeed require the "dictator", chosen by them, to whom they subject themselves just as long as he retains their confidence.'<sup>287</sup> Without a President elected by the demos, symbolising the unity of the nation, and acting accordingly,

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286. GPS, 457, 462, 486. This 'socialisation' had, for Weber, nothing to do with socialism: see Beetham, Max Weber, 248, n. 80, and Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 298-300, esp. 299-300, n. 65.

One finds an echo of the resort to a directly elected executive as a strategy for political and economic transformation in an essay by the leader of the British SDP, though I am not suggesting that David Owen is an avid reader of M. Weber: 'There is no doubt that if there was the slightest chance of bringing it about, the quickest way of changing the total political configuration would be to make a change as radical as General de Gaulle did with the Fourth Republic - elect the Prime Minister directly, though retaining the monarch as head of state, while leaning further than France did towards the US system with its federal structure and explicit separation of power between the executive and the legislature. But this is wishful, escapist thinking. Britain would have to be at or on the cliff edge of economic disaster before such a radical shift could have even a chance of implementation', David Owen, 'Enough Conservatism with a Big and Small "C"', in A Future That Will Work (1984), 177-92 at 178. Max Weber, one may surmise, felt Germany had not just reached this 'cliff edge' but had actually gone over it.

287. 'Reich President', 129 = GPS, 487. That the Reich President's office entailed a form of dictatorship was also well understood by Preuß himself. Referring in 1924 to the far-reaching powers invested in the President under Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution Preuß stated that his preference was 'to preserve as much scope as possible for the constitutional dictatorship'. He added portentously: 'The chances are that it will be needed even more than before'. Carl Schmitt was another person who saw the President as a dictator. On all this see A. Dorpalen, Hindenburg and the Weimar Republic (New Jersey: 1964), 169-70 and (on Schmitt) Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 381-9. Moreover, cf. Weber's parallel discussion on dictatorship and socialisation in ES Vol. I, 278 = WG, Vol. I, 206-7.



'the reconstruction of our economy, on whatever foundation, is impossible',<sup>288</sup> was Weber's grim conclusion.

Third, Weber envisaged in a plebiscitarian president the institutional prerequisite, though not the guarantee, of strong, creative, personal leadership. Bound to parliament in his selection of government ministers the President would nonetheless remain free to formulate his own initiatives, and as the representative of millions 'would often be superior to the respective party majority in parliament, all the more superior the longer his period of office.'<sup>289</sup> Recent elections had shown, Weber declared, that the German parliamentary party response to a strong personality was overwhelmingly negative, manifesting a combination of plain 'very petty-bourgeois hostility .... to leaders',<sup>290</sup> and fierce resistance among entrenched party veterans to the spectre of 'socialisation'.<sup>291</sup> Parliament could thus not be expected to supply the leaders Germany so urgently needed. The alternative was clear, as Weber noted in a passage which sheds some additional autobiographical light on his change of attitude to Parliament:

Previously, in the authoritarian state, it was necessary to advocate the increase of the power of the parliamentary majority, so that eventually the significance and thus the standing of parliament would be enhanced. Today the situation is that all constitutional plans have fallen victim to an almost blind faith in the infallibility and omnipotence of the majority - not the majority of the people but of the parliamentarians, which

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288. 'Reich President', 129 = GPS, 487.

289. GPS, 458.

290. FMW, 114 = GPS, 532.

291. GPS, 458. Weber stresses that it is the veteran (eingearbeiteten) politicians who are resisting leadership - and they are the dominant voice in parliament - not party politicians in general for whom, after all, 'popular election (of the Reich President) creates a change in the form of selection for official patronage'; it does not stop official patronage, the oxygen of the ambitious deputy, as such.



is the opposite, but equally undemocratic, extreme. We must restrict the power of the popularly elected President as always ... But let him be given firm ground under his feet by means of the popular election. Otherwise every time there is a parliamentary crisis - and where there are four or five parties involved these will not be infrequent - the whole edifice of the Reich will totter.<sup>292</sup>

Weber conceded that a popular election of the head of state could conceivably in the future lead to the re-establishment of a dynasty but because he believed that system to have been so profoundly discredited in Germany by the war, he did not rate a second coming as a particularly likely, or even very important, prospect.<sup>293</sup> A far greater problem that would have to be confronted in the short and medium term, on the other hand, concerned the dearth of those 'outstanding political leaders who can influence (wirken auf) the masses', a problem consequential upon 'our long inner impotence'.<sup>294</sup> Commanding personalities with insight, will and vigour do not appear overnight. Moreover Weber was certain that a parliamentary-type election of the Reich President, say, on the model of the French Third Republic where the President was chosen by both chambers of the National Assembly, or on that of the Swiss collegial based system with its rotating Presidency,<sup>295</sup> would only aggravate an already dire situation, and for the same reason: both options were

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292. 'Reich President', 131 = GPS, 488.

293. GPS, 458.

294. Ibid., emphasis omitted.

295. Ibid., 460-1.



incompatible with firm, coherent and creative leadership because both (but especially the latter) militated against that ingredient that Weber returned to again and again: 'the responsible personality'.<sup>296</sup>

Weber understood well enough that there would be a range of political interests repelled by his ideas; he knew that a species of parliamentarian would be 'loth to make the sacrifice of self-denial required to allow the choosing of the highest organ of the Reich' to pass out of its hands. But, he warned:

it must happen, and the movement in that direction is unrelenting. Let not democracy put this weapon of agitation against parliament into the hands of its enemies. Just as those monarchs who limited their own power at the right time in favour of parliamentary representation were not only acting in the noblest but also in the shrewdest fashion, so may parliament voluntarily recognise the Magna Carta of democracy, the right to the direct election of the leader. If the ministers remain strictly bound to its confidence, parliament will not have cause to regret this. For the great movement of democratic party life which develops alongside these popular elections will benefit parliament as well. A President elected by means of particular constellations and coalitions of parties is politically a dead man when these constellations shift. A popularly elected President as head of the executive, head of office patronage, and perhaps possessor of a delaying veto and of the authority to dissolve parliament and to call referenda, is the guarantor of true democracy, which means not feeble surrender to cliques, but subjection to leaders chosen by the people themselves.<sup>297</sup>

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296. Ibid., 461, emphasis in the original; cf. ES Vol. I, 278-9 = WG Vol. I, 206-7. Cf. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 341 who comments on Weber's debt to the US presidential model: 'The Reich president, supported by plebiscitary legitimacy like the American president, ought to constitute the head of the executive, unlike the situation in the French republic, whose chief of state was limited to purely representative functions and where the executive authority was the exclusive province of a cabinet responsible to parliament.' Nonetheless, as Mommsen maintains, the Weberian Reich President departs from the American presidential model in a number of ways, the most important of which for our purposes is the concept of the Reich President as an 'elected monarch': ibid., 342-4.

297. 'Reich President', 132 = GPS, 489. Weber's definition of 'true democracy' in this last sentence is profitably compared with his famous remarks to Ludendorff recorded in Marianne Weber, op.cit., 653.



Though Max Weber's brother Alfred would later write with regret to (an unsympathetic) Theodor Heuss of his kin's 'disturbing' Reich President proposals, describing them as a lamentable 'slide into romanticism',<sup>298</sup> the person who was the object of this concern had shown, in December 1918, no little satisfaction about the Preuß proceedings in general and his role in them in particular. A letter penned to Marianne the day after the commission's work had been concluded, though in the interregnum before the first draft had been composed, positively oozes self-congratulation: 'All right, the Reich constitution is ready in principle, and it is very similar to my proposals',<sup>299</sup> he boasted, and sure enough the Weimar Constitution, when it eventually came legally into force on 14 August 1919 did undeniably enshrine a number of Weber's preferences. Wolfgang Mommsen has described Weber's participation in the constitutional committee ('the delivery room of the Weimar constitution') as 'his greatest hour',<sup>300</sup> though, as Mommsen also

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298. Cited in E. Baumgarten's collection of extracts and documents, Max Weber: Werk und Person (Tübingen: 1964), 550. Alfred's letter to his President is dated 11 April 1958, but since the former died shortly after the letter was sent Heuss never wrote a formal reply. He did, however, allude to the letter in his memoirs only to rebut Alfred's charge: Max Weber's goal, Heuss insisted, had been the pragmatic one of constitutional-political flexibility (551).

299. Marianne Weber, op.cit., 640, emphasis in original. The remark caused one indignant commentator to retort: 'What amazing presumption! A few intelligent, learned, and experienced people meet and believe they can decide upon the principles of a constitution which is meant to be the political framework for sixty millions. It is true that Preuß only received drafting instructions, but considering the fact that this first draft was already in print on January the 3rd (1919), it is probably correct to say that never has a constitution been drafted so quickly', J.P. Mayer, Max Weber and German Politics (1956; 2nd edn.), 99.

300. Max Weber and German Politics, 355 (both quotes).



reveals, one should be careful not to exaggerate Weber's influence and success. A number of Weber's proposals concerning the Reich President's standing were in fact either amended or rejected both in the committee itself, where other voices prevailed, and in the legislative process that followed.<sup>301</sup> Crucially, a liberal conception of 'balance of powers' which owed much to the influence of Robert Redslob and found support in Preuß, displaced the more Caesarist projections of Max Weber; the political independence of the Reich President for which Weber had pressed so insistently was accordingly quite extensively curtailed.<sup>302</sup> Nonetheless Weberian residues were still discernible in the final draft of the constitution, particularly as it related to aspects of the Reich President's status.

First, the demand for the President to be elected by the totality of eligible German citizens (male and female) was attained in Article 41 which said just that.<sup>303</sup> Prince Max von Baden called this particular circumvention of parliament Weber's political 'great deed'.<sup>304</sup> Second, the duration of the President's tenancy of office was fixed to a period of seven years - another of Weber's recommendations.<sup>305</sup> Third, just as Weber had urged that

301. Ibid., 356-81.

302. On Redslob's proposals and his influence, ibid., 348-52. On how Weber's Caesarist proposals for the Reich President were quite radically qualified by the committee and, in parliament, by the Social Democrats, see, respectively, ibid., 353-4, 376-8.

303. The Constitution is reprinted in R. Schuster (ed.), Deutsche Verfassungen (hereafter DV) (Munich: 1978) 99-131. For Article 41 (which contains the added stipulation that eligibility applies to all who are thirty-five or over) see 107. (Article 1 had declared that sovereignty resides in the people, 99). The word 'Reich', which sits rather uncomfortably with the promulgation of a Republic, was retained in the Constitutional terminology. (Thus: 'Das Deutsche Reich ist eine Republik', from Art. 1).

304. Cited in Mayer, op.cit., 100. Yet cf. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 353.

305. Compare GPS, 458 with Art. 43, para. 1, DV, 107. The first draft of the Constitution had suggested a ten year period: see Koch, op.cit., 266.



the Reich President be invested with the powers to initiate referenda (so as to enable decisive action in the event of party deadlock) so did this proposal also come to be realised in the Weimar Constitution's final draft.<sup>306</sup>

The subsequent career of the Reich President proposals need not concern us here;<sup>307</sup> nor is it necessary to rehearse the debates concerning the historical relationship of Weber to fascism:<sup>308</sup> ultimately we can do nothing more than speculate on the latter issue, and one's method, one's historical focus, and one's assumptions about human agency will all affect the conclusions one reaches. We do know that Weber took no interest in the notorious Article 48,<sup>309</sup> but even if he had it is possible that the significance of this draconian Article for subsequent events has in any case been overstated. Article 48, it is true, entitled the Reich President to 'suspend the seven most important basic rights, if he considered it necessary, namely liberty

306. Though not quite in the form Weber originally desired. See Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 368-9, 376-7. Also compare GPS, 457 with Art. 25 and Art. 74, para. 3, in DV, 104, 112. On other aspects of Weber's influence on the Constitution see Mayer, op.cit., 99-100, and Marianne Weber, op.cit., 640-1.

307. It is Mommsen's view that although Weber's Reich President proposals were, constitutionally, 'only partially implemented ... Weber's theory ... had a great deal of impact' later. 'The efforts during the Weimar period to build up the power of the presidency at the cost of the rights and responsibilities of the Reichstag relied significantly upon Weber's theory of plebiscitary-charismatic rule. During the 1920s it gained in influence and contributed significantly to the theoretical legitimization of the praxis of presidential government', Max Weber and German Politics, 381-2, emphasis mine.

308. I cannot improve upon the sensible remarks in Mommsen, ibid., 381-9, 408-10, 413, 425-6, and in Beetham, Max Weber, 238-9.

309. Mommsen, ibid., 377-8.



of the individual (Art. 114), inviolability of one's home (Art. 115), secrecy of one's mail (Art. 117), freedom of opinion (Art. 118), freedom of assembly (Art. 123), freedom of association (Art. 124) and the right to property (Art. 153)',<sup>310</sup> these formidable powers and others besides enabled between 1919 and 1932 the enactment of '233 pieces of emergency legislation'.<sup>311</sup> But the President could not be an absolute dictator. The third paragraph of the offending Article actually invested in parliament a sanction compelling the President to withdraw his emergency measures if the Reichstag so requested,<sup>312</sup> while other articles also allowed for Presidential constraint.<sup>313</sup> Moreover, over-preoccupation with Article 48 may itself blind one to other aspects of the Constitution which, though having nothing to do with the President as such, arguably had a more serious impact on later history: thus it is Hannsjoachim Koch's contention that Article 76, which stipulated that the constitution could be altered by a bill with at least two-thirds Reichstag support, was the really decisive instrument, in the last analysis, in constitutionally establishing the Third Reich.<sup>314</sup>

On the other hand one can feel on firmer ground in locating the distinctively 'Caesarist' themes emergent in Weber's constitutional suggestions. The President, we have seen, is to be a personal leader of authority, elected

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310. Koch, op.cit., 306.

311. Ibid., 307.

312. Ibid., 306.

313. See esp. Art. 43, para. 2 (on suspension) and Art. 59 (on impeachment), DV, 107, 109 respectively.

314. Koch, op.cit., 269-70, 298, 306-9.



'without intermediaries', that is to say, elected directly by the people.<sup>315</sup>

His power to dissolve parliament in extremis and take his case through referenda to the masses, enshrines the plebiscitarian medium of acclamation and the plebiscitarian mechanism of legitimation.<sup>316</sup> He is also a 'dictator', a noun Weber elsewhere employs in relation to the Caesarist

315. Cf. ES Vol. II, 1452 = GPS, 382, 'Every kind of direct popular election of the supreme ruler and, beyond that, every kind of political power that rests on the confidence of the masses and not of parliament ... lies on the road to these (the reference is to Napoleon I and III: PB) "pure" forms of Caesarist acclamation', emphasis in German original omitted.

316. It would be misleading to imply that the plebiscite is exhausted by these functions even if for Weber it was. The contrast between Weber and Hobson is instructive in this context. For Weber the referendum is expeditious in its place - as a method of endorsement of decisions that have been made elsewhere - but is a disaster if extended to the wider sphere of legislation. His arguments against the plebiscite, if it is conceived as an instrument of 'direct democracy', are various. The plebiscite, he objected, is inadequate for the technical reasons that it only lends itself to dichotomous Yes-No alternatives thus affording no means of thrashing-out the party compromises that are required in a state composed of multiple values and interests; that it is unable to deal with the complicated procedures entailed in fixing the budget or drafting a law; that, unlike a parliamentary vote of no-confidence, it has no method of ensuring the resignation of incompetent persons since the plebiscite is not constructed to specify the reasons for the decision it arrives at, nor is there a mechanism open to it for replacing those who are no longer trusted by responsible and more adept representatives; that the plebiscite is useless as a mode of selection of trained officials and as a watchdog of their performance; that, where the plebiscite is used to elect officials, the technical qualifications of the latter for office are rarely a consideration; that the sheer amount of political involvement that the plebiscite necessitates eventually results in the apathy or lassitude of the population; and that, in any case, the very nebulosity of the voters often means the rule of more compact interest-groups who through a dexterity as perfidious as it is hidden determine the result of the referendum in advance: see, on all this ES Vol. II, 1455-7 = GPS, 386-8. Crucially, where the plebiscite-referendum is employed ostensibly to maximise popular participation, the effect is not only to weaken what Weber believed to be paramount - 'the autonomous role of the party leader', ES Vol. II, 1456 = GPS, 387 - but also to encourage stasis. According to Weber, the referendum on laws 'has an effect which is politically exactly the opposite to a plebiscitary presidential election. For, according to all experience, it is a thoroughly conservative political means: a strong hindrance to the rapid advance of legislation', GPS, 462, emphasis in original.  
(cont'd. over).



leader.<sup>317</sup> It is thus perfectly appropriate for Eduard Baumgarten to entitle his short section on Weber's constitutional proposals: 'Der Reichspräsident: cäsaristische Demokratie',<sup>318</sup> and just as apt for Wolfgang Mommsen also to agree on an identical equation.<sup>319</sup> Naturally, there is nothing to stop anyone from designating the Reich President as a 'charismatic' figure if they so wish. In the sociological writings, as I argued in 3.6, Caesarism

316. (cont'd).

J.A. Hobson's view was very different. The great organicist advocate of New Liberalism envisaged referenda as a means of collectively involving the citizenry in the decisions that most affected them. Their role was not to be one of mere ratification; instead 'direct democratic control' was to supplement representative government. Hobson hoped that an increase in referenda, conjoined with other reforms (particularly the inauguration of proportional representation, and the destruction of the House of Lords' power of veto) would engender a vibrant body politic - its parts relating to one another through consultation and participation - armed to resist and reduce what he referred to as 'Cabinet autocracy', a state of affairs in which a few people held in their hands the governance of the country. That state of affairs 'might easily lead to Caesarism, where a magnetic party leader either succeeded in capturing the imagination of the populace or in engineering a supremacy among competing politicians', J.A. Hobson, The Crisis of Liberalism (1909), 12. Unlike Weber, then, Hobson strove to avoid Caesarism, though like him, saw referenda's part in the legal process as inimical to a concentration of power in one or more leaders, an institutional blockage that Weber naturally deplored. Hobson, too, recognised the conservative possibilities of referenda but believed this was a price worth paying when costed against its democratic benefits. He wished to see the referendum implanted as a normal organ of democratic political rule; Weber, on the other hand, confined its worth to exceptional situations and its utility to the statecraft of an exclusive club of personages, e.g. the President or party leader.

317. See FMW, 106 = GPS, 523; cf. FMW, 107 = GPS, 524, ES Vol. 1, 268 = WG Vol. 1, 199.

318. Op.cit., 549.

319. Max Weber and German Politics, 340, 343-4, 353, 366.



actually becomes ingested into charisma and in those same texts, furthermore, the Presidential office is explicitly characterised as a charismatic one.<sup>320</sup> The concepts of charisma and Caesarism are complementary ones. Even so, Caesarism was the word that Weber preferred to use in his political discourse and Caesarism is itself conceived by Weber as a political sub-type of his wider leadership concept; hence, 'Caesarist' appears that much more precise a designation of the Reich Presidential powers Weber was so keen to see constitutionally established.

### 3.8 Conclusion

What I have chiefly sought to show in this Chapter is the multi-dimensionality, the kaleidoscopic quality of Weber's usages of, and ideas about, Caesarism. We have seen that while Caesarism as Bismarckism (negatively populist, intimidating, illegitimate) is generally condemned by Weber, the Caesarism of the British Prime Minister and American President, operating in a healthy parliamentary/congressional system finds Weber's sometimes resigned, sometimes enthusiastic endorsement. We have seen, also, that an older, more familiar meaning of Caesarism which refers to a dictatorial military leader emerging in the process of 'democratisation' is retained in Weber's thinking; and that Caesarism is evident too in Weber's advocacy of an independent, strong and directive Reich President.

This modulation of usage is only a problem if we decide to make it one; if, in other words, we assume that Weber's thinking about Caesarism must be at some deep level integrated and consistent. I have already indicated at a couple of junctures of this thesis that I see no reason why we should

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320. ES Vol. I, 219 = WG Vol. I, 162; 'Die drei reinen Typen ...', 552. In the political texts that deal with the Reich President neither the term 'charismatic', nor the term 'Caesarist' is employed.



be committed to such an assumption. One quite properly expects consistency in Weber's discussions of charisma, or rationality, or social action because with those concepts he took enormous care, constantly re-formulating them to furnish ever greater precision. But the status of Caesarism is very different in this regard since Weber only rarely attended to it, as a term, in a self-conscious and methodical manner.

Moreover in vain do we look for a dramatic break in Weber's employment of the word, even if some developments are readily apparent. The description of the Prime Minister and the American President as Caesarist figures, is a relatively late formulation of the concept: nascent in the earlier (1910-14) sections of ES, it receives bolder elaboration in the 1917 articles that constitute 'Suffrage and Democracy' and 'Parliament and Government'. The theme of military Caesarism, cursorily referred to in Weber's 1905 St. Louis Congress paper<sup>321</sup> is, again, evident in amplified form in 'Parliament and Government' (and - though here strictly in the guise of 'plebiscitary democracy' - in the 1919 version of the 'Types of Legitimate Domination'). On the other hand, references to Bismarck as a Caesarist figure span virtually the whole of Weber's career as political commentator from 1884 onwards. (The Reich President is not called 'Caesarist' by Weber, to the best of my knowledge, though Caesarist elements of Weber's proposals are clear enough, as previously demonstrated. One need only add here that since the Reich President was only a constitutional possibility in a Republic it is anachronistic to look for any Weberian anticipation of the Reich President's role in the context of the pre-war Second Reich).

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321. See footnote 215 above.



All these developments apart, the truly striking feature of Weber's treatment of Caesarism is the contiguosness of the various usages: instead of sequentially displacing one another, they appear often to thrive in close proximity - as in 'Parliament and Government', for instance, where discussion of Bismarckian Caesarism coexists with military Caesarism and its mass party democratic counterpart. What transformation there is in Weber's handling of 'Caesarism' is more markedly terminological. In the sociological writings, Caesarism as a word is successively demoted to, and eventually altogether ejected by, 'plebiscitary democracy' and its derivatives, while as a concept it is incorporated in 'charisma'. Conversely, in the political writings Caesarism retains, as both concept and word, a relatively high profile. This linguistic asymmetry, it was argued in 3.6 D, was probably the consequence of a methodological strategy in which practical/political and academic considerations played the major roles.

This Chapter has quite deliberately restricted itself to narrative and explanation; the minutiae of words and meanings has been our prime concern so far. The next chapter will be more critical in tone and emphasis and will be reflecting upon some of the big questions that lay dormant in the previous discussion. In particular the substratum of assumptions that forms the basis of all of Weber's concepts of Caesarism - the formula Mass = Emotion = Irrationality - will be explored in some detail. However before closing one sphere of analysis and embarking on another, we may wish to ponder on the impasse in which Weber's political thought on leadership ended. From Weber's earliest days as a political thinker we saw him attempt to confront the negative-Cesarist legacy of Bismarck. His solution was a virile and energetic parliament which would simultaneously contain the proletariat, promote Germany's power-interests abroad, preserve civil liberties and engender 'positive' Caesarist leadership. But with the Reich President analysis we



turn full circle: Weber is back with the Great Man, a marginalised parliament, and the menace of authoritarianism.<sup>322</sup> Weber's intellectual circumrotation derives directly from the premium he places on leadership, and from his belief that collective forms of initiative and control - democracy in its most substantial sense - are impossible or undesirable. Just as parliament is ultimately to be judged by its ability to produce leaders of the Caesarist type, so ultimately is it to be subordinated to a Personality where that leadership role fails, and civil liberties left hostage to the dictates of an individual purporting to rule in the people's name.

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322. Weber did suggest the referendum as a means of disposing of a tyrannical President, subject to a determinate majority agreement of the Reichstag: GPS, 458. 'We must ensure', Weber said, 'that whenever the President of the Reich attempts to tamper with the laws or to govern autocratically, he sees the "noose and gallows" before his eyes'. He added, 'We must restrict the power of the popularly elected President as always, and ensure that he can intervene in the machinery of the Reich only in case of temporarily insoluble crises (by suspensory veto, and by calling upon civil service ministries) and in other circumstances only by calling a referendum', both quotes, 'Reich President', 129, 131 = GPS, 487, 488. However, the restrictions on the President are only vaguely defined and since Weber had manifestly little confidence in either parliament or the people as a locus of political energy the sanctions he does suggest carry very little conviction.



## Chapter 4

### Of Caesarist Leadership and the 'Irrationality' of the Masses

'There are in fact no masses;  
there are only ways of seeing  
people as masses'<sup>1</sup>

Raymond Williams

#### 4.1 Introduction

Every theory of political leadership perforce supposes some notion of the behaviour and capacities of the led. This Chapter attempts to (4.2) spell out in detail how one such theory, that of Max Weber, envisaged the characteristics of those who form the subjects of Caesarism, those 'masses' from whom the Caesarist leader derives his legitimacy and over whom he rules in the really quite spurious guise of their agent. My concern is essentially with the question: What properties, according to Weber, must the masses possess for them to be the social material of the Caesarist figure's designs and to be, in addition, the perpetual subordinates of politics? We shall see in the process of answering this question that the study of the masses as crowds is actually excluded from Weber's sociological categories, victim of a sort of conceptual lock-out or interdiction. 4.3 evaluates, empirically and logically, the plausibility of Weber's description of mass behaviour, concluding that his analysis falls badly at both fences. Nonetheless, wishing to defend Weber against some of his critics, I argue in 4.4 that though he (wrongly) attributes to collective behaviour an irrationality it does not inherently (or I believe normally) possess, the charge of irrationalism levelled at Weber cannot rigorously be sustained. Finally, 4.5 puts in a

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1. R. Williams, Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (1975; orig. 1958), 289.



plea of mitigation for the concept of irrationality itself, my contention being that its highly questionable use in particular cases - specifically in relation to collective behaviour - is not a sufficient basis for rejecting the notion in toto. On the contrary, I shall endeavour to show that 'irrationality' remains a fundamental category for sociology in as much as it serves, simultaneously, as a warning against hubris, as a tool of social criticism, and as a pointer to the reform of institutions incompatible with human welfare and happiness.

#### 4.2 The 'irrationality' of the masses

Weber's commitment to democracy<sup>2</sup> was always heavily qualified by the perception, fundamental to his political outlook, that government directed by the bulk of the people was an impossibility in large, modern, technologically complex and socially heterogeneous states. Part of this view no doubt derived from his sociological investigations into modern 'democratic' parties which seemed amply to corroborate the law of the small number and underscore the centrality of leadership in the plebiscitary political order. But there was another part to Weber's view probably even more important than the one just mentioned, and its explication is vital if we are to comprehend fully the basis of Weber's wider dismissal of the possibilities of authentically popular and participatory politics: it concerns his understanding of the social psychology of the masses.

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2. It is instructive to contrast Weber's profession to be a 'resolute follower of democratic institutions' (FMW, 370) with GPS, 489, and Marianne Weber, op.cit., 653, where democracy seems to amount to little more than the subjection of the masses to leaders the former have themselves chosen.



'Mass' and 'masses' are used by Weber in subtly different, though often complementary and coinciding, senses. These senses are hard to disentangle largely because any particular usage can compound a number of them, but crucial for our analysis are the following. First there is the idea of mass as a purely numerical, anonymous aggregate which in its very amorphousness cuts across all other social divisions (of class, status, occupation, etc) which as mass it effectively obliterates. This is the mass 'as such', 'irrespective of the social strata which it comprises in any given case'.<sup>3</sup> In this sense,

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3. ES Vol. II, 1459 = GPS, 392. Weber's comment on the mass 'as such' actually appears to infract his methodological strictures against reifying collective concepts which, he once said, 'have particularly unwholesome effects' when 'taken from the language of everyday life.' Normally, Weber insists on decomposing collective concepts into the constituent phenomenal elements to which they supposedly refer as, for instance, in the case of the expression 'interests of agriculture' which Weber breaks down into 'the countless conflicts of interest taking place among the cattle breeders ..., grain growers, corn consumers, corn-using, whiskey-distilling farmers' and so on: '"Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy' in M. Weber, The Methodology of the Social Sciences (hereafter Methodology) (New York: 1949), eds. and transls. E.A. Shils and H.A. Finch, 49-112, at 108 (both quotes) = GAW, 146-214, at 210. However, the mass 'as such' is a collective concept of the crassest kind. Charitably it might be said that the reference to the mass 'as such' does not come from a self-consciously sociological context, but from a political one, and that in the latter methodological prescriptions do not apply. And yet if the expression is to have anything more than a merely polemical charge, if, in other words, it is intended to denote some empirical, social reality, then it seems reasonable to demand on grounds of consistency that it conforms to Weber's own prescriptions on how that social reality is to be conceptualised.

On collective concepts, see also ES Vol. I, 14 = WG, Vol. I, 10: 'When reference is made in a sociological context to a state, a nation, a corporation, a family or an army corps, or to similar collectivities (mass? PB), what is meant is ... only a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons', emphasis in original. See also ES Vol. II, 1460 and 'Socialism' (in Eldridge, op.cit.), 219 = GPS, 392 and GASS, 518 where Weber speaks in the most cavalier way of the 'interests' of Germany, and compare this with his remarks in Methodology, 109-10 = GAW, 211-12 on 'state-interests'.



every person, whatever their level of intelligence, their disposition or their social background is potentially or in fact a member of a mass. 'Mass' refers to some indeterminate and atomistic number of people and may be devoid of any notion of assemblage, as revealed by such expressions as the 'mass' of the electorate or 'mass administration'.<sup>4</sup>

Second, a 'mass' might become tantamount to what Georges Lefebvre once called a 'pure crowd', (i.e. 'an involuntary and ephemeral aggregate of individuals like those who collect around a railroad station when a train is due, or in a street or public square at the moment when schools, offices and factories pour out their population which mingles with shoppers and passers-by')<sup>5</sup> or what Le Bon dubbed a 'psychological crowd' - by which he meant an agglomeration of people whose combination results in certain emergent properties the consequence of which is to engender a sort of collective personality.<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking, a crowd is a distinct sort of mass in that it involves some spatial location, some social intercourse and some numerical density: crowds 'gather' in shopping arcades, in theatres, on football terraces for instance; they involve congregation. In crowds, the orthodox patterns of societal super- and subordination do not obtain, largely because our contact with fellow crowd members is brief and inevitably non-articulated. A crowd, therefore, is a special kind of mass though like the mass 'as such' it may contain the most diverse and heterogeneous social strata. The study of how our membership in a crowd affects our conduct is the subject-matter of 'crowd psychology' which may or may not be in the Le Bonnian mode.<sup>7</sup>

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4. See, e.g. ES Vol. I, 285 = WG Vol. I, 212; ES Vol. II 951 = WG Vol. II, 700.

5. G. Lefebvre, 'Revolutionary Crowds' in J. Kaplow (ed.), New Perspectives on the French Revolution (New York: 1965), transl. J. Kaplow, 173-90, at 175.

6. Le Bon, The Crowd, op.cit., 23-34.

7. ES Vol. I, 23 = WG Vol. I, 16. In The Crowd Le Bon posits what he calls 'the psychological law of the mental unity of crowds' which affects all individuals in a crowd irrespective of 'their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence', op.cit., 26-7. Perhaps Weber was thinking of this 'law' when he made his comment about the mass 'as such'.



Third, 'mass' may shade into the notions of 'the masses' or 'the mob' and implicated in both these ideas is a complex magma of innuendo and allusion. One theme is simply subordinate groups or classes. Another theme is specific groupings within subordinate classes who have resisted political integration or whose behaviour reveals a breakdown in the structure of political integration: that is to say, groupings who remain politically unorganised, undisciplined and unorchestrated by professional, 'responsible', socialist politicians or trade-union leaders. The words or ideas here in question are invariably inflected by the tonality of disapprobation, contempt or alarm (and often all three simultaneously) particularly, of course, in the evocation of 'a mob',<sup>8</sup> (a term which, as Raymond Williams points out, has since the nineteenth century come to denote the spectre of an 'unruly crowd').<sup>9</sup> The mass in the sense of mob refers to that section of the socially disadvantaged and unpropertied<sup>10</sup> whose insurgent, spontaneous street behaviour, particularly characteristic of Latin societies,<sup>11</sup> is dangerously amenable to the demagogue of syndicalist predilection and hence dangerously out-of-respectable-political-control. (A prime sense of mass is of 'a body of material that can be moulded or cast' - as in the kneading of dough - and it is probably this root meaning, with its easy analogy of a demagogue moulding a group of people in conformity with his agitational designs, that provides the conceptual bridge between mass on the one hand, and crowd, masses and mob on the other).<sup>12</sup>

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8. Roth's translation of 'Strassenherrschaft', ES Vol. II, 1460 = GPS, 392.

9. R. Williams, 'Masses', in Keywords, 158-63, at 159.

10. This comes across clearly in ES Vol. II, 1460-1 = GPS, 393.

11. ES Vol. II, 1460 = GPS, 392; cf. FMW, 394 = GPS, 274, and, for Le Bon's view of Latin crowds, op.cit., 39 and 54.

12. Williams, Keywords, 159. On other meanings of 'mass' in Weber, see Beetham, Max Weber, 103.



For the rest of this Chapter I shall not normally distinguish carefully between these different meanings for the simple reason that in Weber's hands, mass-crowd-mob often merge imperceptibly. Furthermore, common to all the meanings is a thought which binds them together in a broadly coherent framework, and which is the key to understanding the depth of Weber's dismissal of popular, participatory politics. According to Weber the mass is handicapped by an inherent and crippling disability: it is 'irrational'.<sup>13</sup>

Encompassed by this term are a host of ideas which together jointly define it, but since irrationality is such a notoriously troublesome word it is perhaps helpful to begin by saying immediately what Weber is not, I think, suggesting. He is not claiming that the mass/masses is/are especially (i.e. as mass/masses) prone to entertaining contradictory desires<sup>14</sup> or contradictory beliefs and projects.<sup>15</sup> Nor would Weber wish to make the much

13. The German 'Irrationalität' is more ambiguous than its nearest English equivalent (irrationality). In German it is possible for 'Irrationalität' to encompass either conduct which is markedly anti-rational (the usual English sense), or conduct which is neutral with respect to rationality (rendered by the English expression 'non-rationality') or some mixture of both. In principle, Weber could have been using the idea of non-rationality when he described mass behaviour. The context reveals otherwise: where Weber chooses to discuss the issue of the masses he seeks constantly to impugn the reasoning ability of that ensemble; hence the English 'irrationality', with all its negative insinuations, is a perfectly appropriate translation of Weber's 'Irrationalität'.
14. Jon Elster takes as his model of contradictory desires the case of the slave-owner in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. The contradiction within the slave-owner's mind is to want something contradictory, 'unilateral recognition'. And this is contradictory, and irrational, because 'You cannot force someone to respect you, even though you can try to do so. The master would like to have both the satisfaction deriving from the recognition accorded to him by the slave and the satisfaction deriving from his absolute power over the slave', J. Elster, Logic and Society. Contradictions and Possible Worlds (1978), 72.
15. See J. Elster, Ulysses and the Sirens. Studies in Rationality and Irrationality (1979) Chapter IV, esp. 172-9. We can take self-deception - a belief and a project - as an example here. 'The paradigmatic case is the dictator telling his underlings "I do not want to know the details": even though he does know that there are unsavoury details to be known, the lack of specific knowledge permits him to say to himself and to others that he has no knowledge of such things occurring. The ability of millions of Germans to overlook the extermination of Jews can be explained on this model....', 178.



stronger claim that the objects of his discourse are 'mad', if by this word one is applying the criteria recently enunciated, in a very different context, by Ronald Aronson: they do not, in other words, especially display a systematic derangement of perception, intention and affect.<sup>16</sup> Instead, his sometime agnosticism notwithstanding,<sup>17</sup> Weber wishes to impute the following necessary characteristics:

a. myopia and homogenisation: the '"mass" as such (irrespective of the social strata which it comprises in any given case) thinks only in short-run terms. For it is, as every experience teaches, always exposed to direct, purely emotional and irrational influences. (It has this in common, incidentally, with the modern "self-governing" monarchy, which produces the same phenomena). A cool and clear mind - and successful politics, especially democratic politics depends, after all, on that - prevails in responsible decision-making the more, 1) the smaller the number of decision-makers is, and 2) the clearer the responsibilities are to each of them and to those whom they lead'.<sup>18</sup> Weber's view has palpable similarities to Le Bon's contention (though not to his anthropology) that in crowds, where 'the heterogeneous is swamped by the homogenous', the reasoning capacity is all but effaced: crowds are 'incapable both of reflection and reasoning'.<sup>19</sup> In short, crowds are foules.

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16. R. Aronson, 'Social Madness', Radical Philosophy 40, Summer 1985, 13-19.

17. See M. Weber, Protestant Ethic, 26, 70-1, 78 and esp. 194, n.9: 'A thing is never irrational in itself, but only from a particular rational point of view. For the unbeliever every religious way of life is irrational, for the hedonist every ascetic standard, no matter whether, measured with respect of its particular basic values, that opposing asceticism is a rationalisation', = GARS Vol. I, 11, 54-55, 62, 35, n.1.

18. ES Vol. II, 1459-60 = GPS, 392. Elsewhere Weber, writing of the members of the Berlin and Munich governments, remarked: 'You can work with the people as individuals, but as a mass they are stupid, as always', Letter to Mina Tobler of 29 November 1918, quoted in Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, op.cit., 297.

19. Le Bon, op.cit., 29, 67.



The statement of Weber that I quoted also implies another aspect of mass irrationality: namely,

b. spontaneity and fitfulness.<sup>20</sup> Together a and b. form the antithesis of Weber's idea of rationality as denoting such traits as purposiveness and calculation, and the capacities for abstract and universalistic thought.<sup>21</sup>

c. disorganisation: 'completely irrational ... is the unorganised "mass" - the democracy of the streets'.<sup>22</sup> This component idea, closely related to that of amorphousness, contrasts with that sense of rationality which is equivalent to systematic thought and action.<sup>23</sup>

d. passivity: 'it is not the politically passive "mass" that produces the leader from its midst, but the political leader (who) recruits his following and wins the mass through "demagogy"'.<sup>24</sup> This is at the antipode of that view of rationality as exhibiting human control.<sup>25</sup> More than this, passivity is of course the opposite of one of Weber's most important sociological categories, namely, social action.

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20. Cf. Le Bon, 36-50 on the impulsiveness, mobility, irritability, suggestibility and credulity of crowds.

21. These elements, among others, are teased-out of Weber's usages of 'rationality' by Arnold Eisen in 'The meanings and confusions of Weberian "rationality"', British Journal of Sociology, 29, 1 (March 1978), 57-69, at 57-61.

22. ES Vol. II, 1460 = GPS, 392; cf. FMW, 395 = GPS, 275. Note that Weber sees disorder and emotionalism as emanating from 'above' e.g. from the German emperor.

23. Eisen, op.cit., 60.

24. ES Vol. II, 1457 = GPS, 389; cf. FMW, 99 = GPS, 517.

25. Eisen, op.cit., 59.



Weber argues in Chapter 1 of ES that 'Social action is not identical either with the similar actions of many persons or with every action influenced by other persons'.<sup>26</sup> People putting up their umbrellas as it begins to rain is thus not social action - i.e. conduct meaningfully and intentionally oriented to other people - but is just a form of collective response to the elements. Weber views crowd behaviour analagously. As he remarks: 'It is well known that the actions of the individual are strongly influenced by the mere fact that he is a member of a crowd confined within a limited space. Thus, the subject matter of studies of "crowd psychology", such as those of Le Bon, will be called "action conditioned by crowds".'<sup>27</sup> To be a member of a crowd, and to behave as a member, need not involve 'any meaningful relationship' between those with whom one associates or emulates, rather the effect on the individual of a crowd is better construed as one of quasi-natural influence. The same applies in regard to imitation. Here the individual's conduct is 'causally determined by the conduct of others, but not meaningfully'.<sup>28</sup>

The conclusions to be drawn from this description are actually quite startling. The behaviour of individuals in a crowd, and imitation too, is not social action, because instead of being a purposeful reciprocal relationship it is a behaviour that is causally determined, a form of reaction. Its only relevance for social action is as an occasional condition of the latter; its only significance for sociology as a science of meaning is as a potential condition to be taken into account when interpreting genuine social action and measuring its degree of conformity to the norms of instrumental and value

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26. ES Vol. I, 23 = WG Vol. I, 16.

27. Ibid.

28. ES Vol. I, 24 = WG Vol. I, 17, emphasis in original.



rationality. But the crowd as such, collective behaviour as a phenomenon in its own right, falls outside sociology's concepts and therefore outside of sociology's remit as a discipline. To put the matter bluntly, in Weber's sociology the masses, in their manifestation as crowds, do not exist as an object for comprehension. But this is not the end of it. For if the masses are not an object of sociology, in a sense neither are they the object of political science since Weber actually defines politics as 'any kind of independent leadership in action'.<sup>29</sup> Even granted the dual meaning of 'Politik' to embrace both 'politics' and 'policy' this is extraordinary because it must mean that the behaviour of crowds - which as we have seen are typified as destitute of meaning and purpose, presumably crucial components of independent leadership in action - is lacking a political content. The rioters of Brixton and Toxteth would be surprised to be informed of this, as would those who are currently facing police bullets in Soweto, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg.

At one point Weber seems to draw back from the brink of expelling crowds from his sociology. The 'behaviour of crowds and imitation', he says 'stand on the indefinite borderline of social action'<sup>30</sup> and one can suppose that the border may not always be too distant from properly sociological concerns. Moreover Weber adds, 'Sociology, it goes without saying, is by no means confined to the study of social action; this is only, at least for the kind of sociology being developed here, its central subject matter, that which may be said to be decisive for its status as a science'.<sup>31</sup> But this will hardly comfort

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29. FMW, 77 = GPS 493, emphasis in original.

30. ES Vol. I, 24 = WG Vol. I, 17.

31. Ibid.



us. We are not told what could constitute a valid object of sociological inquiry and yet lie outside the sphere of social action, while Weber's statement regarding sociology's status as a science leaves us with the shabby consolation that should we as sociologists seek to dispense with the concept of social action, we should also have to give up our pretensions to being scientists.<sup>32</sup>

I will be showing presently how crowd behaviour does, in any case, actually conform to Weber's own concept of 'social action' in a number of respects, but for the moment let us return to the attempt to elicit from the Weberian corpus what, exactly, is irrational about mass conduct. The fifth component appears to be its:

e. explosive emotionalism, a claim which stands in some tension with the previous point about mass passivity (even if it conveys the old prejudice of mass fickleness and wild oscillation of mood and countenance). The memorable reference here is to 'the blind (planlose) fury of the masses' whose post-war syndicalist mood Weber feared might 'activate the equally emotional and senseless cowardice of the bourgeoisie, just as the beneficiaries of uncontrolled bureaucracy hope'.<sup>33</sup>

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32. For some other examples of how Weber's logical categories affect his view of the masses, and how, more generally, a politics is inscribed within these same categories, see the probing remarks of Paul Hirst in Social Evolution and Sociological Categories (1976) esp. 76, 87, 89.

33. ES Vol. II, 1460-61 = GPS, 393.

Weber's earlier (1906) opinion of the masses under Social Democrat leadership was in essentials no different. See his comments on the masses' 'emotional hysteria' the consequence of which is to militate against sound economic and political thought and action: 'Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Demokratie in Russland', GPS (3rd edn.) 33-68, at 65. Wolfgang Mommsen quotes some interesting notes of Weber's which reveal the latter's belief that his own disdain for the masses was shared by Marx. Of Marx he wrote: 'Ruler by nature with unlimited personal ambition and without compassion. Belief in his mission for domination of minds. This, and not rule of the masses, was in fact his goal. Contempt for his associates and the masses', Max Weber and German Politics, 131, n.163, emphasis in original. See also ibid., 278 for Weber's view of mass movements.



This quotation may encourage the reader to think that the emotionalism Weber is here referring to is a momentary one, era-specific, and that to accord it a category of its own is a distortion. Moreover, the bourgeoisie are also dubbed 'emotional', and previously so was '"self-governing" monarchy'. However 'emotionalism' is not in Weber's perception an evanescent and contingent feature of the mass as un/disorganised collectivity or crowd or subordinate group but rather seems to be a definitive, inherent feature whose result is 'irrational' behaviour.<sup>34</sup> The masses '(b)y themselves', Weber says in his sociology of religion, 'have everywhere remained engulfed in the massive and archaic growth of magic - unless a prophecy that holds out specific promises has swept them into a religious movement of an ethical character',<sup>35</sup> and 'by themselves', Weber appears to say in his sociology of politics, the masses are everywhere engulfed by their emotions until some charismatic individual, who both reflects their desires and anxieties while also disciplining them, holds out specific promises which sweep the masses into a social movement of a political character. The emotions of the masses are a recurring theme of Weber's explanation for the rise of charismatic figures in history<sup>36</sup> and even where charismatic domination 'congeals into a permanent structure', that is, becomes depersonalised, it can still erupt 'in short-lived mass emotions with unpredictable effect, during elections and similar occasions.'<sup>37</sup>

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34. Weber's contention that irrationality is caused by the emotions is examined in 4.3; in the meantime see ES Vol. I, 6 = WG Vol. 1, 5.

35. FMW, 277 = GARS Vol. I, 248-9. Weber's remarks are uncritically endorsed in Bryan Turner's 'Theodicy, the career of a concept' in the same author's For Weber: Essays on the Sociology of Fate (1981), 142-76, at 159.

36. See, inter alia, ES Vol. II, 1115, 1117, 1121, 1132 = WG Vol. II, 835, 838, 841, 850-1.

37. ES Vol. II, 1146 = WG Vol. II, 864.



The mass 'as every experience teaches (is) always exposed to direct, purely emotional and irrational influence', a phenomenon which, like 'irrational crowd instincts',<sup>38</sup> is again, naturally, the antithesis of rationality as Weber conceived it.

Corresponding to the masses' irrationality, and feeding on it, is the irrationality of charisma itself. If the charismatic leader rides to power on the back of people experiencing such emotions as enthusiasm, excitement or distress and exhibiting a devotion to the leader of 'a highly emotional type',<sup>39</sup> - particularly evident among those who constitute the leader's close following (disciples, bodyguard, personal staff), the so-called charismatic community<sup>40</sup> - charisma in turn is marked by an 'irrational' property: for it is a form of rule 'not managed according to general norms, either traditional or rational, but, in principle, according to concrete revelations and inspirations';<sup>41</sup> as Weber puts it succinctly elsewhere, 'charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules'.<sup>42</sup>

38. ES Vol. II, 1459-60 = GPS 392; FMW, 394 = GPS 274. Lest it be thought that the latter quote is taken out of context, consultation with the passage from which the quote is extracted will show that Weber, in it, is not challenging the concept of 'irrational crowd instincts', but only its relevance for the German case because such instincts 'rule politics only where the masses are tightly compressed and exert pressure: in the modern metropolis, particularly under the conditions of neo-Latin urban forms of life. There the civilisation of the cafe, as well as climatic conditions, permit the policy of the "street" ... to lord it over the country from the capital'.

39. ES Vol. I, 269 = WG Vol. I, 199-200.

40. ES Vol. I, 243 = WG Vol. I, 180. Note that a concomitant of being part of a charismatic leader's close following is rational and moral degradation: the followers that make up the party machine, for instance, succumb to 'soullessness' and 'intellectual proletarianisation' while their motives, when not ruled by ecstasy are 'if viewed ethically ... predominantly base', FMW, 113, 125 = GPS, 532, 544. (The comment about baseness occurs specifically in the context of the human 'machine' required by 'the crusader', rather than that of the more conventional party machine. There is no reason to think, though, that Weber would have seen any significant difference in the moral and intellectual status of the followers of both).

41. FMW, 296 = GARS Vol. I, 269.

42. ES Vol. I, 244 = WG Vol. I, 181.



Thus, unlike traditional or rational-legal modes of domination whose principle of rule and legitimacy rests on certain durable, tangible and consistent features of social life (custom and law respectively) both charisma and its mass base are inherently unstable, the first in the sense of being non-rule bound, the second in the sense of being emotional. The mortar that bonds their relationship amounts essentially to the devotion charisma is able to command, a devotion contingent on its ability to provide spectacular proofs of divinity and heroism; yet, as Weber tells us, such a power has a tendency to be exceedingly short-lived.

Weber's remarks on the irrationality of the masses and of charisma form only a small part of his discussion of the meaning of irrationality and its significance in human life. His analysis of the concept in his methodological writings is fascinating and important, though I shall avoid a detailed commentary on it here: my focus is on the notion's relevance for understanding Weber's politics. Nonetheless I shall end this Section by noting, though not exploring, some of the ideas that Weber assimilates to 'irrationality' so that a reader interested in this aspect of Weber's thought may pursue it all the more readily. Foremost among the ideas equated with 'irrationality' are: the non-interpretable, inexplicable or unintelligible domains of human conduct;<sup>43</sup> human incalculability and unpredictability;<sup>44</sup> conduct which is deemed 'inaccessible to causal explanation',<sup>45</sup> or deemed lacking in social meaning;<sup>46</sup> experiences which

43. Roscher and Knies, 125, 238 n.10 = GAW 67, 46, n.1.

44. Ibid., 120, 125, 193; Methodology, 124; and 'Some Categories ...', 154 where irrationality becomes equivalent to an actor ignoring processes which are in principle objectively calculable or the same actor experiencing his rational thought overcome by a group panic. In a very dense passage on the same page Weber seems to divide irrationality into objective and subjective components. Respectively GAW, 64, 67, 133, 226, 432-3.

45. Roscher and Knies, 193 = GAW, 133.

46. Hinted at in ES Vol. I, 23-4 = WG Vol. I, 17.



are incommunicable, that is to say which 'cannot be adequately reproduced by means of our lingual and conceptual apparatus' but which constitute knowledge all the same;<sup>47</sup> and speculative, as opposed to rule-governed, regular (economic) conduct.<sup>48</sup> It is certainly true that in most of the above contexts the point of Weber's analysis is to argue that human conduct and experience do not necessarily or usually partake of irrationality in those senses; in addition Weber contends that freedom of the will is not the same as irrationality, that emotions can be understood, that mystical experiences can have important historical consequences. However, in the process of refuting the proposition that human conduct can be totally reduced to irrationality Weber provides us with a convenient catalogue of senses of what irrationality might possibly mean, and it is this catalogue that I have attempted cursorily to record. (The concept of 'ethical irrationality', omitted from the discussion so far, is treated in 4.5 below).

#### 4.3 Towards an historical and logical critique of Weber's assumptions concerning the irrational masses.

Unlike many thinkers one could mention, Weber always in principle acknowledged the inevitably fallibilist nature of his constructs. If frequently his sociological pronouncements had a distinctly ex cathedra ring to them, at least he realised their theoretically heuristic status, appreciating that truth is a process, a quest, not a terminus. As he remarked, 'Every scientific "fulfilment" raises new "questions"; it asks to be "surpassed" and outdated. Whoever wishes to serve science has to resign himself to this fact'.<sup>49</sup> In

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47. Protestant Ethic, 233, n.66 = GARS Vol. I, 112, n.4; cf. Roscher and Knies, 270-1, n.84 = GAW, 120, n.1.

48. Protestant Ethic, 20, 76 = GARS Vol. I, 7, 61.

49. FMW, 138; cf. Methodology, 105 = GAW, 576, 207, emphasis in original.



the light of this statement it seems fair, then, to ask whether Weber's own theories have been outdated. Specifically, have Weber's assumptions concerning the character of mass conduct stood the test of time? (I think we should call his musings on this subject 'assumptions' because their relatively loose and fragmentary form do not add up to a system of rigorously related postulates that one expects from a theory proper).

Research conducted since the 1950s by social historians and social psychologists of collective behaviour generally converges in the broad conclusion that such behaviour is not intrinsically or normally irrational (in any of Weber's senses a. to e.). It is therefore astonishing to find some of the greatest contributors to the study of this area respectfully citing Max Weber's name as if he could be counted among the vanguard of that more sympathetic and sophisticated perspective on the crowd which today (thanks to the real pioneers' efforts) challenges the crusty prejudices of old. Thus George Rudé remarks that sociologists 'having learned from ... Weber, have, on the whole, a better record' in their understanding of the crowd than thinkers influenced by the traditions of Michelet on the one hand, and Burke and Taine on the other, traditions which for all their differences share a basic stereotypical perception of 'the crowd as a disembodied abstraction and not as an aggregate of men and women of flesh and blood'.<sup>50</sup> However, there can be few views of the crowd more stereotyped or more lacking in basic humanity than Max Weber's, while, in fact, his overall depiction of that assemblage is in any case not so very far removed from those of Burke and Taine.<sup>51</sup>

(Perhaps the reason for this misunderstanding in Rudé's case results from an extrapolation in which Weber's remarks on social action - emphasising

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50. G. Rudé, The Crowd in History, 1730-1848 (1981 revised edn; orig. 1964), 9.

51. As Rudé presents those views in Ibid., 8.



the centrality of choice, purpose, motive - are thought applicable to his substantive sociology or even his political writings but, as I have already shown, the masses have no real sociological or political status as social actors in the Weberian scheme of things). And Charles Tilly is another example of a major theorist of mass conduct who pays his compliments to Weber without seeming to appreciate how foreign Weber's approach actually was to the whole idea of 'collective action'.<sup>52</sup>

But it is not just the advances in our knowledge produced by 'history from below' which cast the darkest doubt on the judiciousness of Weber's position on collective behaviour. There is a logical problem at the very heart of his thinking as well. To Weber mass conduct is irrational primarily because it is emotional. The symmetry of affect and unreason is never questioned by Weber: emotions are the cause of irrational conduct. A 'fit of rage' is irrational conduct.<sup>53</sup> Revenge 'is affectually determined and thus in a certain sense irrational.'<sup>54</sup> The sociologist who subscribes to Weber's approach will find it expedient to 'treat all irrational, affectually determined elements of behaviour as factors of deviation from a conceptually pure type of rational action', though naturally this 'does not involve a belief in the actual predominance of rational elements in human life'; the expedient

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52. C. Tilly, From Mobilisation to Revolution (1978), 37-9; 'Collective violence in European perspective', in H.D. Graham and T.R. Gurr (eds.), Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives (1979), 83-118, at 112. Which is not to say that Tilly's analysis is uncritical of Weber; it is certainly critical, but says nothing about Weber's perception of crowd behaviour as irrational. Tilly actually mentions Weber as a founding father of a tradition which opposes the 'irrational' collectivity thesis, but I am afraid no such theoretical paternity can be demonstrated.

53. ES Vol. I, 9 = WG Vol. I, 7.

54. Ibid.



is only 'a methodological device'.<sup>55</sup> All these comments display a perception of irrationality as the consequence of emotional states. But do they imply something stronger, that to exhibit emotional behaviour is to exhibit behaviour which is essentially irrational? I am personally aware of no statement by Weber to the effect that emotionality might itself, in determinate respects and in determinate conditions, be rational. On the other hand I do know of at least one statement which suggests that Weber does see the emotions as necessarily irrational in the responses they produce, for instance 'The more we ourselves are susceptible to such emotional reactions as anxiety, anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, love, enthusiasm, pride, vengefulness, loyalty, devotion, and appetites of all sorts, and to the "irrational" conduct which grows out of them, the more readily can we empathise with them'.<sup>56</sup> I am going to argue in what follows that the equation of emotionality and irrationality is logically false. And if it is false in its own right, then it will simply not do either as part of a description of collective behaviour.

Taken together, the historical and logical criticisms to be levelled against Weber's thinking about mass behaviour form the fundamental part of

55, ES Vol. I, 6-7 = WG Vol. I, 5.

56. ES Vol. I, 6 = WG Vol. I, 5, my emphasis. See also Weber's reference to 'irrational factors of all sorts, such as affects and errors ...' (*ibid*); his statement on 'substantive irrationality' and law in ES Vol. II, 656 = WG Vol. I, 507 ('Lawmaking and lawfinding are substantively irrational ... to the extent that decision is influenced by concrete factors of the particular case as evaluated upon an ethical, emotional, or political basis rather than by general norms') emphasis in original; his 'irrational emotional factors' elision in ES Vol. I, 8 = WG Vol. I, 6 and ES Vol. II, 1150 = WG Vol. II, 868; and the comments in Roscher and Knies, 159, and Methodology, 125 = GAW, 100, 227. Finally, consider the following remark in ES Vol. I, 9 = WG Vol. I, 7: '...(W)e have a motivational understanding of (an) outburst of anger if we know that it has been provoked by jealousy, injured pride, or an insult. The last examples are all affectually determined and hence derived from irrational motives'.



my objection to the concepts of Caesarism as he employed them. The common denominator of those concepts is, after all, precisely a view of the mass as inevitably incapable of meaningful participation in politics because of the irrationality that massing per se entails. Unable to engage in politics as social actors, as an involved and reflective public equipped with the wit and the means to take a major role in shaping and deciding their destinies, the masses alienate their will to the Caesarist leader (a military hero, a party politician) who rules in their place. It follows from this perspective that political democracy, taken literally, is a futile value pursued by those absurdly ignorant of their sociological ABC. Yet what if Weber is wrong in his perception of the masses? What if they differ in important respects from the characteristics he imputes to them? What if his arguments are empirically specious? Surely then the conceptual superstructure erected upon the presumption of mass irrationality - namely, the idea of Caesarist leadership - must itself begin to look decidedly rickety, and the existence of 'Caesarism' as a putative political formation must also appear far from ineluctable. Naturally others, more historically informed than the present author, may well prefer to adopt alternative critical strategies: they may for instance reject the utility of a term which aspires to cover such a range of socially disparate and discontinuous states and epochs; they may refute its application with regard to certain historical personages (e.g. Bismarck and Gladstone). But although I will in Chapter Five of this thesis be setting out what seems to me the most sensible historical usage of 'Caesarism', it is the premises on which Weber's ideas rest that I find most unconvincing and most damaging to his case, and it is these my present argument will be especially concerned to target.

One last comment before I begin to flesh-out my criticisms. The bulk of the empirical materials upon which I shall draw are derived mainly from



studies of crowd behaviour. Perfunctorily, a crowd may be defined as 'a "face-to-face" or "direct contact" group and not any type of collective phenomenon, such as a nation, a clan, caste, political party, village community, social class, the general "public", or any other "collectivity too large to aggregate"'.<sup>57</sup> A crowd is hence a word 'referring to highly diverse conditions of human assemblage: audience, mob, rally, and panic all fall within the definition of crowds.' Common to those diverse conditions is the existence of 'human beings in sufficiently close proximity' such that their 'aggregation comes to influence behaviour.'<sup>58</sup> Now my focus on crowd research as the basis upon which to criticise Max Weber might be open to two sorts of objection. First it might be maintained that Weber himself said little about crowds, and there is some very superficial truth in this: the most literal German rendition of the English term 'crowd' (Menschenmenge) is indeed rarely in evidence in the contexts that most directly concern me. But this observation is not vital. For one thing, Weber's references to 'the rule of the street' or 'the democracy of the street' certainly do conjure up parallels with what, in this country, we call pejoratively 'mob rule' (a mob being, as we tend to think, a name for a particularly vicious sort of crowd).<sup>59</sup> For another, the word 'Masse' in German already linguistically embraces the English 'crowd' or the French 'foule'. This explains why English translators of Weber's work have felt free to move between 'mass' and 'crowd' where the context seemed

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57. Rudé, op.cit., 3.

58. S. Milgram and H. Toch, 'Collective behaviour: crowds and social movements', in G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (eds.), Handbook of Social Psychology (1969; 2nd edn.) Vol. 4, 507-610, at 509.

59. See ES Vol. II, 1460, FMW, 394-5 = GPS, 392, 274.



to suggest it (for instance, Gerth and Mills de-code 'Masseninstinkte' alternately as 'mass' and 'crowd' instincts<sup>60</sup>) and also makes comprehensible why the first (1908) German translation of Le Bon's classic could be aptly entitled Psychologie der Massen.<sup>61</sup> (Weber actually calls Le Bon's crowd psychology 'Massenpsychologie' in chapter 1 of ES.<sup>62</sup>). In any case, there is nothing particularly eccentric about Weber's failure to distinguish rigorously between the two ideas or words since their broad identification was a commonplace from about the middle of the 19th century onwards. John Stuart Mill furnishes one such example when he affirmed famously that 'At present individuals are lost in the crowd ... The only power deserving the name is that of masses, and of governments while they make themselves the organ of the tendencies and instincts of the masses.'<sup>63</sup> Le Bon himself casually employed 'mass' and 'crowd' interchangeably;<sup>64</sup> Freud found 'Masse' more than adequate to convey both ideas.<sup>65</sup> With Lukács we are back to the practice of Le Bon.<sup>66</sup>

60. FMW, 394 = GPS, 274.

61. Cf. the comments of J. Viertel in The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research's Aspects of Sociology (1973), transl. J. Viertel, 82, n.3.

62. ES Vol. I, 23 = WG Vol. I, 16.

63. J.S. Mill, 'On Liberty', in M. Lerner (ed.), Essential Works of John Stuart Mill (New York: 1961), 255-360, at 314. See also the comments in A. Briggs, 'The language of "mass" and "masses" in nineteenth-century England', in B.E. Martin and D. Rubinstein (eds.), Ideology and the Labour Movement (1979), 62-83, esp. 68 (on Mill).

64. Le Bon, op.cit., 15, 17-18, 19, 20-1, 78, 89.

65. S. Freud, 'Group psychology and the analysis of the ego', in J. Strachey ed. and transl., The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (1955), Vol. XVIII, 69-172. Freud uses the single term 'Masse' to render 'both McDougall's "group" and also Le Bon's "foule", which would naturally be translated "crowd" in English': translator's note, 69.

66. G. Lukács, 'Freud's psychology of the masses' in G. Lukács, Reviews and Articles from Die rote Fahne (1983), transl. P. Palmer, 33-6.



And though, in more modern times crowd behaviour is recognised as a narrower concept than that of 'mass phenomena', it is still thought of as the latter's most tangible and arguably most important social manifestation.<sup>67</sup>

The second objection to my procedure that it is possible to anticipate might run as follows. Even granted all of the above, surely the pertinent mass that Weber usually speaks of in his discussion of the Caesarist leader's base is the mass electorate, not a crowd? What relevance for Caesarism as a concept, then, can the study of crowd behaviour have? In response to this query it is worth pointing out to begin with that the 'mass electorate' (like the mass 'as such') is an empirical phantom, a generalisation of such abstraction that it effectively eliminates consideration of types of behaviour conditioned by class, confession, region, occupation, gender and ethnicity which modern Weberians rightly regard as determinants important in their own right; in fact the idea of the mass electorate is precisely one of those invidious 'collective concepts' that Weber so stridently demands we avoid as serious sociologists. The concept of 'mass' is similarly ethereal. What we therefore require is some sort of manifestation of so-called mass conduct which can be empirically studied, and one which affords the investigator a particular mass configuration against which to test Weber's notion of universal mass irrationality, and crowds meet this requirement admirably. (One could also study voting behaviour). Furthermore, in analysing crowd behaviour we should actually be confronting Weber's theses on the irrational-emotional masses on their strongest ground. After all, if the mass as electorate is irrational-emotional in its existence as a relatively dispersed, atomised, amorphous

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67. See S. Milgram and H. Toch, op.cit., and R.W. Brown, 'Mass Phenomena' in G. Lindzey (ed.), Handbook of Social Psychology (1954), Vol. 2, 833-76, esp. 840 ff.



social aggregate, then how much more irrational-emotional one would expect the mass to be as crowd, caught up in the enthusiasm of activity, assembled and supposedly receptive to demagogic manipulation, apparently ready for any irresponsibility that as individuals its members might deplore. In particular, the riotous crowd should come closest to an approximation of Weber's irrational mass, especially the pre-modern (and non-western) riotous crowd who, one might suppose, are at a greater distance from 'rational-legal domination' and rationality generally, than their modern (occidental) counterparts. Conversely, if Weber is wrong about the crowd the probability is high that he is mistaken elsewhere, specifically in his abstract presumptions about the mass electorate whom as we saw in the last Chapter are for Weber the inescapable subjects of modern Caesarism, 'positive' or 'negative'.

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Pace Max Weber, 'every experience' does not teach that the '"mass" as such ... thinks only in short-run terms' being 'always exposed to direct, purely emotional and irrational influence' (a. above); experience is a far more subtle instructress than that. It shows, to begin with, that the mass in both modern and pre-industrial eras evinces a remarkable degree of collective reflexivity, a point fully appreciated and generously documented by Tilly in his classification of European 'collective violence' (a species of mass phenomena) into 'backward-looking' and 'forward-looking' sub-types. The former, typical of pre-industrial society, or society undergoing the turbulent transition to industrialism, involves 'communal groups or loosely organised members of the general population (acting) against representatives of those who hold power, and tend(s) to include a critique of the way power is being wielded'. The disturbances that flow from this critique may be various, including 'forcible occupation of fields and forests by the landless, the revolt against the tax collector, the anticonscription rebellion, the food



riot, and the attack on machines'. But their common thread is a reaction to and a rejection of some change or other which is regarded as depriving those involved in the disturbance 'of rights they had once enjoyed'.<sup>68</sup> By contrast 'forward-looking' collective violence is quintessentially modern. Here one is dealing with such phenomena as the violent demonstration and strike ( - some forms of guerilla activity might also fall under this rubric) in which the participants, customarily joined together in often quite complex associations 'with relatively well-defined objectives', regard themselves as struggling 'for rights due them, but not yet enjoyed'.<sup>69</sup>

Now the very existence of crowds with the capacity for, on the one hand, memory, and on the other, anticipation, and on both counts purposive, goal-oriented conduct is a very long way indeed from the Weberian view of myopic irrationality which looks by comparison markedly ill-informed and outdated. Indeed, Tilly, summarising the dominant emphasis of collectivity research remarks that 'Students of conflict, a contentious lot themselves, have moved from wrangling over whether collective violence is a normal, rational phenomenon to discussing how rational it is, and what sort of rationality it involves'.<sup>70</sup> Weber himself never made this move.

Foremost among those scholars who proved less reluctant to do so were social and economic historians of the ilk of George Rudé, Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, Richard Cobb and Edward Thompson, and their picture of the crowd profoundly discredits the Weberian perspective on it, even if Weber himself rarely receives a mention in their work. Take for instance Thompson's seminal investigations into the English crowd of the eighteenth century. Insisting that 'it is only the short-sighted historian who finds the eruptions

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68. Tilly, 'Collective Violence ...', 91.

69. Ibid., 97.

70. Ibid., 112, emphasis in original.



of the crowd to be "blind",<sup>71</sup> and recoiling from that mechanistic, reductionist tradition of interpretation through whose lenses crowd behaviour becomes little more than the spasmodic and spontaneous (see Weber b. above) reaction to (economic, in this case; economic and political in Weber's) stimuli, Thompson shows how the English crowd possessed its own distinct 'moral economy', that is, 'a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community',<sup>72</sup> through which the hardship of the poor was refracted and comprehended: it was an 'outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as actual deprivation' that occasioned the direct action of its number.<sup>73</sup> Hence, the English food riots that punctuated the eighteenth century are rendered explicable not through the emptiness of a person's belly causally and automatically propelling him or her to furious activity, but as a result of social dynamics intrinsic to that particular society at a particular stage of its existence. Central to those dynamics was a pattern of expectations predicated on a 'paternalist model of the marketing and manufacturing process - the traditional platonic ideal appealed to in Statute, pamphlet, or protest movement - against which the awkward realities of commerce and consumption were in friction'.<sup>74</sup> The model in question 'existed in an eroded body of Statute law, as well as common law and custom', and according to its prescriptions 'marketing should be,

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71. E.P. Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture', Journal of Social History, 7 (1974), 382-405, at 398.

72. E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', Past and Present, 50 (February 1971), 76-136, at 79. The concept of 'moral economy' is applied to the South Indian crowd in D. Arnold, 'Looting, Grain Riots and Government Policy in South India, 1918', Past and Present, 84 (1979), 111-45, at 114.

73. Thompson, ibid

74. Ibid., 83.



so far as possible, direct, from the farmer to the consumer.'<sup>75</sup> As the century wore on, the model inevitably came into increasing collision with free market ideas and practices, but it retained considerable resonance for the poor just the same providing a benchmark against which commercial abuses might be measured and a source of legitimation for action against those responsible for the commission of such abuses. Practices that infringed the model - especially heinous were deemed to be the adulteration of bread, export of corn abroad or to other domestic localities in times of dearth, the compulsion to buy in bulk, the use of dubious weights and measures - and occupations seen to benefit from infraction, among which the miller and the middleman were regarded as prime culprits, became targets of righteous anger. And when the crowd's anger broke with the paternalist model by taking direct action and transmuting into riot, it was not normally of the explosive emotional kind (e. above) that the Weberian portrait of collective behaviour might lead one to imagine. First, the riot had an objective: to 'set the price' of bread (the English equivalent of the 'taxation populaire'<sup>76</sup>) in conformity with the so-called 'Book of Orders', a codification of emergency measures that had been instigated between the years 1580-1630 to relieve chronic scarcity and which 'empowered magistrates (with the aid of local juries) to survey the corn stocks in barns and granaries; to order quantities to be sent to market; and to enforce with severity every part of the marketing, licensing and forestalling legislation.'<sup>77</sup> Second, the crowd exploited in a calculating,

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75. Ibid. emphasis in original. 'The farmers should bring their corn in bulk to the local pitching market; they should not sell it while standing in the field, nor should they withhold it in the hope of rising prices. The markets should be controlled; no sales should be made before stated times, when a bell would ring ... Dealers were hedged around with many restrictions ... against forestalling, regrating and engrossing ...'.

76. G. Rudé, 'The "Pre-Industrial" Crowd', in Paris and London in the 18th Century (1969), 17-34, at 24. The 'taxation populaire', 'took the form of a violent invasion of markets, granaries, flour-mills and bakers' shops in the course of which the crowd, or its "local" leaders' would insist 'that the baker, miller or farmer reduce the price of his wheat or bread or flour to a "just" or traditional level'.

77. Thompson, 'Moral Economy ...', 108-9.



if defensive, manner the paternalist-traditionalist system which in so many other respects exploited it: the gentry magistrates who embodied the paternalist model were constrained to recognise the legitimacy of claims which interlaced with their own culture or which derived directly from it.<sup>78</sup> Third, the crowd's action was not usually wild, indiscriminate or unselective but in fact remarkably disciplined, restrained and 'honest'<sup>79</sup> (on the latter Thompson tells of 'the many occasions when carts were stopped on the roads, their contents sold, and the money entrusted to the carter'<sup>80</sup>). And fourth, conduct was deliberately adapted to and designed for the situation in which people found themselves. For, to be 'one of a crowd, or a mob, was another way of being anonymous, whereas to be a member of a continuing organisation was bound to expose one to detection and victimisation. The eighteenth century crowd well understood its capacities for action, and its own art of the possible. Its successes must be immediate, or not at all. It must destroy these machines, intimidate these employers or dealers, damage that mill, enforce from their masters a subsidy of bread, untile that house, before troops came on the scene'.<sup>81</sup>

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78. In a companion article Thompson expands upon the complex interdependency of genteel (patrician) and plebeian culture, the 'field of force' in whose tensions and pull both gentry and the poor lived out their struggles and cooperation: 'The price which aristocracy and gentry paid for a limited monarchy and a weak State was, perforce, the licence of the crowd. This is the central structural context of the reciprocity of relations between rulers and ruled', 'Patrician Society ...', 403.

79. For the details see 'Moral Economy ...', 111-13. Other studies of crowd behaviour have indicated that violence is predominantly aimed at property rather than person: see, inter alia, Rudé, '"Pre-Industrial" Crowd', 27, E. Abrahamian, 'The Crowd in Iranian Politics, 1905-1953', Past and Present, 41 (1968), 184-210, at 208, and Arnold, op.cit., 126.

80. Thompson, 'Moral Economy ...', 113.

81. Thompson, 'Patrician Society ...', 401.



Thompson's analysis, with its focus on the crowd 'sui generis ... operating within the complex and delicate polarity of forces of its own context',<sup>82</sup> is exceptional in the power of its writing, the sensitivity that animates it, and the unforgettable picture of eighteenth century English culture and society that its canvas depicts; but its primary subject matter, (crowd) motive, purpose and calculation - the very stuff of Weberian 'social action' theory - finds copious corroboration elsewhere. The reciprocity of ruler and crowd/mass, for instance, involving calculation and modulation on both sides, has received a fascinating treatment in a study of the Roman theatre and games, the butt of Juvenal's infamous 'bread and circuses' jibe and of all subsequent taunts and dismissals of the deranged and decadent crowd. Its author demonstrates how in a post-republican political system bereft of popular assemblies and elections, the theatre and games offered the crucial space in which popular demands, complaints and irreverences might be voiced and transmitted. A play might witness actors deploying, and audience responding to, subversive double entendres, as in the case when the reference 'to "an old goat licking the does" was twisted into an allusion to Tiberius' supposed debaucheries on Capri.'<sup>83</sup> Another stratagem, more important, was the presentation of petitions 'to the emperor at the circus and theatre - petitions to which he was morally obliged at least to reply'.<sup>84</sup> The institution

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82. Ibid., 398. Thompson extends his argument in 'Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?' in Social History, 3, Part 2 (1978), 133-65, esp. 144 ff.

83. A. Cameron, Bread and Circuses: The Roman Emperor and his People (1973) 4. (This is the text of Cameron's 'Inaugural Lecture in Latin Language and Literature' delivered at King's College, London on 21 May 1973). On plebeian 'counter-theatre' see Thompson 'Patrician Society ...', 400-1; on the symbolism of popular protest see Thompson, 'Eighteenth-century English Society ...', 158-61.

84. Cameron, ibid., 5.



of the petition was embedded in a complex structure of ritual and expectation and 'it was a rash ruler who ignored or (worse) slighted such manifestations of public opinion'.<sup>85</sup> If petitions were refused explanations were expected to be forthcoming, a 'tablet from the emperor's own hand'<sup>86</sup> being deemed the most courteous medium of imperial communication, a herald one of the most offensive. From the stance of the emperor, conversely, the theatre and games had their own distinct advantages: they acted as foundries of legitimation and aggrandisement; they functioned as a conduit of information relaying the crowd's mood, and as a safety-valve of aggression: 'The emperor who allowed the people to get away with murder in the theatre was seldom troubled by real plots';<sup>87</sup> and they afforded the emperor with the golden opportunity to cultivate civilitas, that precious ability 'to behave in a natural, unassuming way, as a citizen among his fellows. If an emperor could but master the popular touch, at the games he could be his own propaganda incarnate. The Roman people were in no doubt that monarchy was what they wanted, but they wanted a Republican monarch'.<sup>88</sup>

Had Weber examined more scrupulously the relation of rulers to the 'broader dominion' of the ruled instead of concentrating virtually exclusively on the relation of leader to the 'élite central group' consisting of close deputies and disciples;<sup>89</sup> had he investigated thoroughly, in just one case,

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., 6.

87. Ibid., 9. 'It is at any rate suggestive that those who suppressed such verbal treason most harshly - Gaius and Domitian - eventually succumbed to the real thing'.

88. Ibid., 10. 'This great truth was early seen and exploited by Augustus, profiting as so often from an error of Caesar. Caesar had been criticised for dealing with his correspondence at the games ... Augustus was careful to do nothing but watch'.

89. The expressions in quotation marks are taken from N. Elias' discussion of 'charismatic, conquering rule' as it contrasts with 'defensive, conserving rule', in The Court society (1983), transl. E. Jephcott, 121-30.



the manifold reciprocity of rule instead of restricting his comments to the merest generalities concerning the formal conditions of obedience and rejection; had he, in short, applied even the most elementary phenomenology to his sociology of (especially charismatic) domination, Weber would have discovered a 'mass' far removed from the crass emotionalism-irrationality he took for granted. Since powerful personalities often harbour powerful prejudices, one can be fairly confident that political predilection played its part in Weber's own restricted vision. Yet, as I argued earlier, the blinkers are also methodological: the crowd as one type of 'mass' falls outside Weberian sociology's province of study and comprehension. Where this mass dares to intrude on to the scene, in Weber's political writings, it appears overwhelmingly as an extant or potential factor of disturbance that requires external management. The crowd's own reasons for its conduct, on the other hand, are never explored, the 'democracy of the street' is an object of abuse not understanding or sympathy. But with understanding can come sympathy and the study of, say, riotous behaviour, commonly viewed as the most 'mindless' of conduct, has repeatedly rendered it explicable both in terms of its participants' perceptions about and experiences of their environment (political, cultural, economic, demographic, topographical) - whether one be referring here to the Luddite machine breakers of early nineteenth century Lancashire or to the Toxteth youth of 1981<sup>90</sup> - and in terms too of the structural forces constituting that environment and nurturing riotous protest, ancient and modern.<sup>91</sup> I would want to say, as most sociologists would, that the 'initiating motives'<sup>92</sup> fuelling the action of the crowd cannot

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90. See P.J. Waller, 'The riots in Toxteth, Liverpool: a survey', in New Community, IX, Part 3 (1981), 344-53, esp. 346.

91. On the structural conditions conducing to crowd violence in ancient Rome, see P.A. Brunt, 'The Roman Mob', in M.I. Finley (ed.), Studies in Ancient Society (1974), 74-102, but esp. 80,84.

92. The phrase belongs to Milgram and Toch, op.cit., 577.



be expected to provide us with an exhaustive or sufficient explanation of the conduct in question, though it would be a particularly arrogant social scientist who ignored the crowd's own explanations, which may be eminently reasonable, for its behaviour. (I am aware of no account, for instance, of the American Watts riot of August 1965 which contradicts the explanation given of it by those participants of the disturbances, interviewed by Milgram and Toch, who cited police brutality, hostility to white exploitation, unemployment, hopelessness, etc. as the springs of action for the tumult that followed the famous catalytic arrest.<sup>93)</sup> Certainly, we require supplementary investigation to uncover structural causes of collective behaviour, be it riots or peaceful conduct, which its members may be unconscious of. But the point is that Weber provides neither phenomenology nor structural analysis of any mass political behaviour, unless the formalistic remarks relating to the conditions of emotional receptivity and rejection of the charismatic leader's demagoguery are to count as the latter. Serious, also is: Weber's too-ready acceptance of Le Bon's view of crowd homogeneity (see a. above), which is today, following the work of 'emergent norm' theorists<sup>94</sup> a subject of great contention; Weber's underestimation of the crowd's capacity to throw up leadership from within itself (see d. above);<sup>95</sup> while his comments on the irrational, 'unorganised "mass" - the democracy of the streets' (see c. above) are profoundly misleading. If Weber is saying that the crowd is unorganised in the sense of not being institutionalised then this is true by definition, though why this is irrational is puzzling. Presumably it is because of the consequences of this conduct such as myopia, homogenisation, spontaneity and so on but, as I have indicated,

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93. Ibid., 574-6.

94. For a summary of this theory see ibid., 553-5.

95. See Rudé, 'The "Pre-Industrial" Crowd', 20.



such research as we have on 'mass' conduct either refutes or heavily qualifies this picture. Or if Weber is implying, by his remarks, that the mass lacks organisation per se, and if by mass he means crowd, then this is just plainly false: the mass as crowd certainly does possess its own structure, albeit of an informal and transient sort, a structure composed and guided by expectations or norms of conduct, which regulate, channel and direct its collective behaviour.<sup>96</sup>

Let us bring together the threads of this section's discussion so far and draw out its implications for 'Caesarism'. Lest I be misunderstood I must say that my argument is not that the mass-crowd is governed by perfect rationality, whatever that might mean; nor is it that crowds cannot behave irrationally in certain cases: again, depending on one's criteria, they may do. Still less do I intend to sentimentalise the crowd,<sup>97</sup> for I have said nothing about collective forms of action (e.g. mob lynchings, 'necklace' killings, football thuggery) which will revolt all decent sensibilities. Moreover, we would be wise always to match our understanding of the crowd with compassion for its victims, including its guilty victims. My argument is rather that the evidence on mass behaviour that is accessible to us overwhelmingly and dramatically conflicts with Weber's formulations about it. It would be nice if one could utilise here research which explored the dynamics of mass conduct during the era of Weber's own maturity, particularly during and immediately after the Great War, in Germany, but I am not conversant with this literature. Nonetheless, I see no reason to suppose that its findings

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96. One might also wish to speak of a 'collective mentality', as Lefebvre does, though this would of course be anathema for a Weberian. On the collective mentality of the popular movement in the French Revolution, with its characteristic features of levelling, optimism, ardour, anxiety and hope, see Lefebvre, op.cit., 182-90.

97. Which seems to me to be the mistake of G. Pearson in his 'Goths and Vandals - Crime in History', Contemporary Crises, 2 (1978), 119-39.



would be markedly at variance with the host of other studies on collective behaviour which reveal an entity far more rational (purposive, calculative, abstracting) and socially complex than Weber ever knew. One suspects that most collective behaviour is governed by some form or other of 'moral economy'.

What of Caesarism, then, especially as it relates to modern mass politics? The mass-crowd as assemblage is certainly a different collectivity from the mass as electorate, though in Weber's time, perhaps more so than in ours, electoral politics meant people gathering in work places and at meetings to contest issues and interests. What is striking about Weber's account of the electorate, however, is how much it is presented in virtually identical terms to that of the crowd, to 'the democracy of the streets'. We are told that the electorate under Caesarism is 'passive';<sup>98</sup> we are informed of its gullibility, its receptivity to 'demagogy',<sup>99</sup> and the 'emotional means' employed to persuade it: in fact Caesarism is directly likened to a "dictatorship resting on the exploitation of mass emotionality".<sup>100</sup> The Caesarist leader, whether he be of the negative-Bismarckian type or the positive-Anglo-Saxon type, is irreplaceable for the most part because of the emotional-irrational nature of the masses, a property that Weber accepts as a datum. Whether it exists in assemblage or in loose aggregate the mass is irrational by virtue of its existence as mass or of the process of massing. My argument contrariwise has involved attempting to show that in the form in which the mass reveals itself most visibly, most tangibly, and in which Weber's assertions about it should be most triumphantly vindicated - that is, as crowd - the mass is a very different creature to the one disclosed in Weber's remarks; and

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98. FMW, 99 = GPS, 517.

99. Ibid., 106 = Ibid., 523.

100. Ibid., 107 = Ibid., 525.



in the form in which it reveals itself in elections we have no reason to think it behaves less rationally than Weber erroneously claims it does when constituted as a crowd. Once we dynamite Weber's premise of the irrational mass and are able to demonstrate that mass conduct forms part of a total system of relationships which it both conditions and responds to, Caesarism begins to lose its gloss of modern inevitability. Questions begin to be raised about the system and its possibilities for change, not the mass as some given thing. And, in this new context, Caesarism in Weber's thought starts to look very much as I think it actually is: a concept heavy with ideological prejudice but sociologically flimsy, a concept which only reveals a partial truth about modern politics, which it hypostatizes and employs in such a way as to effect a closure on other political options: people are frequently manipulated, though they need not be with a more open political system; people do wish for leadership, though leadership can be various and more or less democratically enabling; parties do function habitually as mere power machines or leadership image makers, but they are also the vehicles of reform and could become conceivably the vectors of political education in the widest and most generous sense. Caesarism, in Weber's hands, extinguishes the alternatives which democratic theory and practice, not sharing Weber's negative view of popular culture and popular capacities, has always strained to establish. The task is massive and the current climate unfavourable to democracy's extension, economically and politically; but there is nothing in Weber's work to convince us that the task is hopeless and the goal absurd.

Towards the beginning of this Section I gave notice of my intention to criticise Weber's contentions concerning the irrational masses on both empirical and logical grounds. The first part of that task is now schematically complete. My next objective is to argue that Weber's view of mass irrationality, the consequence of 'Massenemotionalität', is also conceptually mistaken because



it turns upon a false identification of irrationality and emotion. The identification is false not only because there is much that may be called irrational which is not in any way emotional (i.e. structures and processes such as, debatably, capitalism or the arms race); but also because the equation supposes a gulf between reason and affect<sup>101</sup> which is signally implausible. It is implausible on the following grounds.

In the first place, emotions and reason are often to be found in alignment: they may coincide or coalesce. We feel sympathy for the unemployed and anger about the starving because we know of the conditions they must endure; we fear proximity to a hammerhead shark because of what we have learnt about that creature's human-eating proclivities; we are touched by respect for the person whose integrity we discover. We 'ponder in our hearts' (to adapt an observation of Luke - 2:7 - describing Mary's consternation at the events surrounding the nativity) the matters that most concern us. In all these examples intellect and emotion lie in accord; put differently, there does not seem to be anything self-evidently irrational about the feelings just depicted. Second, our emotions may act as an incubator of surmise and theory, a point that comes across forcefully in a recent account of how Leopardi's unhappiness, the result of 'the experience of deformity and disease ... (became) a formidable instrument of cognition' enabling the poet to arrive at the perception 'of the heavy weight of the determination exercised by nature over man', and at the view that 'Man is a "vanishingly small part of the

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101. According to Turner, 'Weber accepts the Kantian dichotomy of reason and emotion', op.cit., 158. I do not know whether this truly is a dichotomy of Kant's but can agree that the reason-emotion antinome is a recurrent feature of Weber's thought.



universe".<sup>102</sup> Third, and related to this previous point, emotions and reason may be said to interact persuasively. Hence we are able to change our minds through our emotional experiences and, though this may be less frequent and a longer and more tortured process, alter our responses because of what we have come to know. It might happen, for example, that our resentment against an inflicted injustice leads us to suspect, when we hitherto had not, the scrupulousness of a law-enforcement agency. Conversely, less virulent forms of racism, say, are amenable to being combatted and overcome through the exposure of their false assumptions or disastrous consequences and the 'heart searching' this can trigger (though, just as often, one emotional state is superseded because of the jarring effect of another upon it<sup>103</sup>). I am not suggesting for a moment that people can mechanically re-cast their feelings on the basis of the knowledge they possess. But I do believe we may yet confound the pessimists. The fact that, in our daily lives, our prejudices about our fellows are often refuted through contact with them heralds a message of hope: we are open to improvement: the doors of maturity have not yet been bolted to exclude us: we are capable of a change of heart because we are capable of changing our minds. To be sure, as Anja Meulenbelt reminds us in one of her novels, emotions often follow years behind our heads, but follow they can, and not infrequently do.

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102. The quotations come from S. Timpanaro, 'The Pessimistic Materialism of Giacomo Leopardi', New Left Review, 116 (July-August 1979), 29-50, at, respectively, 36, 35, 37. Also 34-5: 'It was not primarily in response to a logical line of argument that Leopardi arrived at a conception of Nature as a force of evil, but under the impact of concrete experiences that were themselves new in kind, and resisted systematisation within the framework of "historical pessimism". These consisted in a deterioration of his state of health (in the spring of 1819) and in an accentuated sense of unhappiness he had felt even before that date on account of his physical deformity'.

103. See the stimulating comments in J. Glover, Causing Death and Saving Lives (1977), 26-35, and on the whole question of the relationship between reason and feeling the excellent essays of Mary Midgley in Heart and Mind: The Varieties of Moral Experience (1981), esp. 4-7, 76-102.



Next, emotional commitments may serve as the critical spur to the quest for knowledge and the pursuit of truth.<sup>104</sup> Karl Popper has said that 'Without passion we can achieve nothing - certainly not in pure science. The phrase "the passion for truth" is no mere metaphor'.<sup>105</sup> I find this convincing and believe it shows once more the completely artificial divide that some have erected in their dichotomisation of reason and emotion.

Fifth, and finally, modern psychology reveals that feeling is not merely a reactive state, as Weber so often represents it, but part of a dynamic process of evaluation and assessment. This presumably is the meaning behind Bowlby's remark that 'feeling is a phase of an appraisal process, in a way analogous to that in which redness is a phase of iron when heated' and his conclusion that 'Feeling, attention, and consciousness go together'.<sup>106</sup>

104. It will also be obvious that feelings may be the spur to rational practical action. The indignation Bob Geldof expressed at the social and political policies that allow famine in Africa was not only perfectly rational (justifiable) but actually led to a practical intervention that was rational too, if by rational one means 'any thought, feeling or act that promotes the adequate functioning of the whole of which it is part', and if one sees the starving as 'part' of the human species, which surely we must. The quotation is derived from E. Fromm, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness (1977, 353. Fromm calls 'irrational that which tends to weaken or destroy the whole' and in his interpretation it is perfectly possible to speak both of rational ('life-furthering') and irrational ('life-thwarting') instincts and passions: 352-4. On the identification of irrationality with destructiveness, see also H. Marcuse, 'Industrialisation and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber', transl. J.J. Shapiro, in Negations (1968), 201-26, at 207, and H. Marcuse, One Dimensional Man (1972 paperback edn.), 1.

105. K. Popper, 'The logic of the social sciences', in T.W. Adorno (ed.), The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology (1976), transls. G. Adey and D. Frisby, 87-104 at 97.

106. J. Bowlby, Attachment and Loss Vol. I (Attachment) (1971; orig. 1969), 152, 153.

The view of the complementarity of reason and emotion defended here contrasts with the theory, popularised by Koestler, that posits a 'chronic conflict between rational thought and irrational belief', A. Koestler, Janus: A Summing Up (1978), 11. Koestler's reflections on reason and emotion rest upon his analysis of the 'schizophysiological' asymmetry between on the one hand the archaic part of our brain, i.e. the limbic system 'concerned with instinctive and emotional behaviour', and on the other hand the neocortex 'which endowed man with language, logic and symbolic thought' and which developed rapidly over the last (cont'd. over).



Does all this mean, then, that emotions can never be irrational? Not at all, though even here an important qualification is called for. Some emotions may indeed be considered irrational, perhaps intrinsically, if one is willing to employ the term 'irrationality' in Erich Fromm's sense to mean 'life-thwarting'.<sup>107</sup> Hatred, unbridled envy or jealousy, uncontrollable malice are all self-destructive, even though the feelings may all be explicable, as in the case of a Jew who hates Nazis, or that of a man who feels the most extreme jealousy when someone he desires desires someone else. However there are other emotions, and they form the bigger and more interesting category, which are only irrational contingently. Here one is thinking of the influence an emotion might have in determinate conditions; one is thinking of that emotion's range of manifestations, its modes of exercise, and the consequences it gives rise to, consequences some of which might be irrational and others not; and where the word 'irrational' is used rather differently to the Frommian notion: namely, to refer to an example of conduct in which what the actor would otherwise know, through intellectual reflection, to be the appropriate sort of behaviour is overruled by a force which springs, directly or indirectly, from some emotional state or commitment. (Hatred, envy, and jealousy can also function in this way, but the emotions one is now thinking of are not

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106. (cont'd).

half million years. The new brain was not an evolutionary transformation of the old, but a superimposition on it. The lack of integration 'gave rise to a mentally unbalanced species in which old brain and new brain, emotion and intellect, faith and reason, were at loggerheads', 9-10. Being a social theorist as opposed to a neurophysiologist I am not going to contest the facts of an old and new brain; the inferences that are drawn from such facts, however, do seem to me to be dubious since, as I have shown, there are many situations in which emotion and reason are in harmony. One also recoils from an analysis which, claiming to be scientific, regurgitates an old prejudice. For Koestler 'the group-mind is dominated by a system of beliefs, traditions, moral imperatives, with a high emotive potential regardless of its rational content; and quite frequently its explosive power is enhanced by its very irrationality ... (T)he group-mind must function on an intellectual level accessible to all its members: single-mindedness must be simple-minded. The overall result of this is the enhancement of the emotional dynamics of the group and simultaneous reduction of its intellectual faculties', 94-5, emphasis in original.

107. See note 104 above.



inherently self-destructive or 'life-thwarting'.) Love, for instance, is not irrational per se - far from it; but it can become so when it leads to self-deception, and then we say that 'love is blind'. Devotion is not perforce irrational; but it can become so if it loses all justification. In both these cases, the adjective 'irrational' appears apposite because it describes a process or situation in which rationality is over-ridden, circumvented, ignored; in which an actor will not 'listen to reason'; in which the grounds for the emotional commitment seem misplaced through being overtaken, as it were, by events. Conversely it seems plausible to say that human rationality asserts itself wherever an emotion is corrected through evidence that discloses the feeling in question to be 'unreasonable', that is, to rest upon a mistaken or inaccurate knowledge foundation, as when my 'passionate loyalty to the partisan leader suddenly cracks when I am convinced that his actions can only mean betrayal.'<sup>108</sup> Bernard Williams, reflecting on those instances when what we know or could choose to know is at loggerheads with what we feel and do, 'when considerations which show the emotion to be inappropriate fail to displace it', concludes that such behaviour is not irrational because it is emotional; it is irrational because it exemplifies the workings of an irrational emotion. That observation is helpful, provided we remain clear of the distinction between what might be thought of as essentially irrational emotions, and those which are only irrational contingently,

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108. B. Williams, 'Morality and the emotions' in his Problems of the Self (1973), 207-29 at 224. Williams's argument complements that of Bowlby since the former is also keen to demonstrate the dual nature of emotions: emotions are not just 'states to which we are subject' but are also 'productive of action', 223.



i.e. those which facilitate and prompt, and which may have occasion to eventuate (though do not of necessity eventuate) in conduct inimical to reasoned thought and behaviour.

Before we return explicitly to Max Weber, and the relevance of the above for his notion of mass irrationality, let me furnish just one illustration of what it means to speak of contingently irrational emotions, because I am conscious that the examples so far given will probably be too bald to convince the reader of the argument I am attempting to make. Consider Hitler's decision to postpone operation Barbarossa, the attack on Russia, as it is described by the journalist-historian William Shirer.<sup>109</sup> According to Shirer, the backdrop and precipitating cause of the delay was Hitler's fury at the March 26-7 (1941) coup in Belgrade which toppled Cvetković's government and removed Paul, the Prince Regent, from the throne. The incident had followed 'negotiations' between Hitler and Paul earlier in that month which had resulted in Yugoslavia's endorsement of the Tripartite pact (originally signed in Berlin on 27 September 1940, the signatories being Germany, Italy and Japan). When the coup, led by top ranking Air Force officers commanding wide popular support, was successfully launched and Peter, the heir to the throne, declared King, it became evident to Hitler, Ribbentrop and others that Yugoslavia was not willing to accept the passive, client status that the German Nazis demanded of it. Hitler, taking the affair as a personal affront, exploded, and in his rage came to make a number of sudden decisions that would prove in the longer term disastrous to the fortunes of the Third Reich. In order that his wrath be satisfied, Hitler directed his generals to destroy Belgrade

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109. W.L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (1964 edn.; orig. 1959).



through bombing and invasion; and for this to take place, operation Barbarossa was delayed for four weeks. Here is Shirer's commentary:

This postponement of the attack on Russia in order that the Nazi warlord might vent his personal spite against a small country which had dared to defy him was probably the most catastrophic single decision in Hitler's career. It is hardly too much to say that by making it that March afternoon in the Chancellery in Berlin during a moment of convulsive rage he tossed away his last golden opportunity to win the war and to make of the Third Reich ... the greatest empire in German history ... Field-Marshal von Brauchitsch, the Commander in Chief of the German Army and General Halder, the gifted Chief of the General Staff were to recall it with deep bitterness but also with more understanding of its consequences than they showed at the moment of its making, when later the deep snow and sub-zero temperatures of Russia hit them three or four weeks short of what they thought they needed for final victory. For ever afterwards they and their fellow generals would blame that hasty, ill-advised decision of a vain and infuriated man for all the disasters that ensued.<sup>110</sup>

It is true that Shirer's remarks are somewhat ambiguous, implying both high-ranking military complicity in the decision<sup>111</sup> and downright opposition to it. For the purposes of my argument, however, I am going to assume that Hitler took his decision against the advice of his military commanders and I am also going to assume that the Yugoslavian coup did not pose any intractable challenge to Hitler's lines of communication and that, therefore, the attack on that country was not strategically necessary as a priority. If all this is accepted (as well as the accuracy of Shirer's description of course) then we have a case here for arguing that Hitler's emotions got the better of him in such a way as to have facilitated irrational conduct. Note that the emotions of rage and fury mentioned in this account are not inherently

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110. Ibid., 986; cf. 992-3.

111. Brauchitsch and Halder were at the meeting of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) when the original decision was taken (on 27 March).



irrational: it is easily possible to imagine a number of instances when these extremes of anger are 'appropriate' responses to extreme situations; they only become tainted with irrationality in so far as their effect is 'hasty' and 'ill-advised' decisions; when 'personal spite' routs caution, prudence and calculation.<sup>112</sup>

There are two final observations that should be added. First, that in discussing the particular content, timing, purpose etc. of the decision taken by Hitler and his High Command there is nothing that in any way approaches substantive rationality: in moving, that is, from the issue of the emotional underpinning of some of Hitler's commands to the ends of all of them, the concept 'rational' becomes singularly grotesque and inapplicable - for only the most twisted and immoral definition of that term could encompass the objectives of mass enslavement and extermination of the indigenous populations of Yugoslavia and Russia or anywhere else.<sup>113</sup> This does not mean, however,

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112. There is abundant evidence to support the thesis that much of Hitler's direction of the Russian campaign was 'irrational' in this and other senses. See, for instance, Halder's comments on Hitler's handling of the 1942 German offensive: 'The continual underestimation of enemy possibilities ... takes on grotesque forms and is becoming dangerous ... Pathological reaction to momentary impressions and a complete lack of capacity to assess the situation and its possibilities gives this so-called "leadership" a most peculiar character.' And 'Hitler's decisions ... were the product of a violent nature following its momentary impulses, which recognised no limits to possibility and which made its wish-dreams the father of its acts', cited in *ibid.*, 1094. 'Irrational' may be an inadequate word with which to describe this conduct; 'mad' may be more apt.

113. Contrast the impoverished analysis of rationality by J. Garnett ('One cannot ... comment on the rationality of "suicide" or "survival" or "security" as human goals'), 'Strategic Studies and its Assumptions' in J. Baylis et. al., Contemporary Strategy: Theories and Policies (New York, 1975), 3-21 at 17, with the more humane thoughts in Barrington Moore's Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt (1979), 440-9. In particular, see Moore's distinction between 'rational' and 'predatory' authority and his definition of rational conduct as 'any form of activity for which in a given state of knowledge there are good reasons to suppose that it will diminish human suffering or contribute to human happiness without making other human beings miserable', 440.



that Hitler lacked a 'rationale' for his deeds (in the Yugoslav incident, if Shirer is right, it was the desire for personal revenge as well as the more general aim of teaching that nation a lesson in the follies of resistance it would never forget); nor does it mean that 'rationalisations' could not be found to justify each and every error: Hitler simply resorted to the convenient excuse of insisting, often at monotonous length, that the pusillanimous German people had yet again failed him in reneging on their historical destiny.

Second, one should beware of confusing the evident 'logic' of Hitler's policies with their non-existent rationality.<sup>114</sup> If Barbarossa is taken as an example it is clear that this operation had a double logic (at least) - if one means by that a relatively coherent (i.e. internally consistent) strategy with defined intentions and goals. The narrow logic, as the OKW Directive 21 indicates, was 'to erect a barrier against Asiatic Russia on the general line Volga-Archangel';<sup>115</sup> the broader logic was the conquest of all Europe (requiring, obviously, the neutralisation of the Soviet Union) in order that the Nazi demand for 'living space' in the East be satisfied.<sup>116</sup>

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114. This confusion is made in a different context by the expert on forest legislation quoted in Boris Komarov's very sad The Destruction of Nature in the Soviet Union (1978), transls. M. Vale and J. Hollander, 69-70. The man whom Komarov (a pseudonym) quotes recounts how he became physically ill as he beheld the destruction of the cedars, larches and firs near Krasnoiarsk. The trees were cut down in their hundreds of thousands and were then left to rot because although there were no freight cars to transport the wood, the forestry trust's plan had to be completed. For the unnamed expert 'The horrible thing was not the absurdity of the madness but its rationality'. This unfortunate man really means 'social logic' not rationality.

115. See H.R. Trevor-Roper (ed.), Hitler's War Directives: 1939-45 (1966 edn., orig. 1964), 94. No translator cited.

116. It could also be said that Hitler's directives obeyed the 'logic' of fascist expansionism (i.e. the potential inscribed within its particular ideology); or that the invasion of Russia took on a 'logic' of its own (i.e. evolved through a quasi-autonomous momentum). However, these sort of logics differ from the sort I mentioned in the main text in that the latter are all intentional logics.



The purpose of this Section has been to show that on both empirical and logical grounds Weber's view of the irrational masses runs into severe difficulties. Empirically his position can be questioned by showing that mass conduct is not intrinsically irrational but to the contrary possesses a number of features consistent with the formal constituents of 'social action' as that concept is enunciated in ES. And logically his position fails in the spurious equation it supposes between irrationality and emotionality, a supposition that underpins Weber's conception of mass conduct. To the extent that his concepts of Caesarism are based on a perspective that socio-logically disenfranchises the masses, that depicts mass conduct to be irrational, and which concludes that because of this irrationality a far-reaching popular, participatory politics is impossible, Weber's concepts are, I suggest, dubious in the extreme. And though it is perfectly true that Caesarism in Weber's thought involves much more than the above, it seems to this author that the irrational masses notion is the fundamental one, the corner-stone of Weber's argument, the foundation upon which the various layers of his account rest: Caesarism, military or civil, positive or negative, comes about because of the entry of the masses into politics, attendant upon revolution or/and the democratisation of the franchise and the related emergence of the modern party system. Caesarism is made necessary because of the nature of those masses. (The purely technical obstacles to participatory democracy that Weber mentions - size, complexity, heterogeneity, of state and society - are actually secondary to Weber's contentions about mass irrationality and dependent upon them since it is, again, in good measure precisely because the mass is irrational-emotional that those obstacles could never be conceivably overcome.)

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The two Sections that follow have little directly to do with Caesarism and charisma and hence call for some prior remarks defending their relevance. Originally, it was my intention to include them as Appendices but with the passing of time they assumed considerably greater importance for my thinking about Max Weber and about social science in general than hitherto they had, so much so that I am now reluctant to see their content marginalised in the thesis' periphery. 4.4 is intended to be read essentially as an extended rider on what has gone on before. Specifically, it seeks to rebut that designation of Weber as an irrationalist which is so common in the critical secondary literature that deals with him,<sup>117</sup> and to which my own critical analysis might have seemingly lent credence. Now the label of irrationalism as attached to Weber is either sloppy or misleading. It is sloppy where it is being used broadly to mean that Weber's theories allow for, or are based upon, certain ideas pertaining to the existence of non-rational elements in science, human behaviour and human history, because this label leaves no place for those of us who likewise believe in the reality of such elements but who shun irrationalism proper, as I shall presently define that term; for I believe that one can simultaneously admit of irrationality and desist from irrationalism, just as one can readily concede the biological grounding of human conduct or the fact of human malevolence without being foredoomed thereby either to biologism or misanthropy. This will become clear presently. Moreover, the irrationalist tag is misleading because it implies by a sort of guilt through association that Weber is actually something he is not:

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117. See, for instance, P. Hirst, op.cit., 64; B. Hindess, Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences (1977), 39; S. Clarke, Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology (1982), 228; G. Lukács, The Destruction of Reason (1980), transl. P. Palmer, 601-19, whose remarks are taken up by Hirst and Hindess. Parenthetically, both Clarke and Lukács see charisma as an aspect of Weber's 'irrationalism' (Clarke, 228, Lukács, 619).



as will be shown, Weber is mostly at a far remove from that mode of thought which is the hall-mark of the irrationalist perspective. In short, then, this Section seeks to demonstrate that the assimilation of Weber to irrationalism is mostly erroneous, notwithstanding Weber's own cock-eyed and reactionary view of the 'irrational' masses and 'irrational' charisma.

With 4.5, on the other hand, the intention is to complement the strategy I adopt in the penultimate Chapter of this thesis where I outline the ways in which Caesarism might, for all its problems as a concept, still have some purchase for the social scientist who wants to work with it. Similarly I want the present Chapter to end on a constructive note too, seeking-out irrationality's potentiality as a concept. The emphasis of the last two Sections was on being sceptical about or critical of the notion's value in certain respects, particularly as a description of mass conduct, but I would not like the reader to think that it is part of my view that irrationality itself is a mere chimera, or that I entertain an 'over-rationalised' perception of humanity. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am convinced that 'irrationality' is an idea full of insights into both social relationships and the human condition; as such it would be a negative and foolish, not to say unsatisfying, thesis which left these insights ignored.

#### 4.4 Was Weber an 'irrationalist'?

To answer this question coherently we clearly require some systematic definition of what, exactly, irrationalism might be, but this prerequisite is not so easy to attain as one might think. In the first place, the term is habitually employed in the most casual and loose of senses (invariably accompanied by opprobrium); and second, the range of uses is prodigiously diverse. Hence readers of social theory enquiring into the phenomenon of irrationalism will find themselves informed that it either amounts to or at the very least fundamentally involves: relativism, itself understood



in a plethora of senses?<sup>118</sup> the acceptance of a rigid, false antinomy between knowledge and being;<sup>119</sup> an air of philosophical resignation to problems which, though in principle amenable to resolution within, say, a dialectical framework, are deemed equivalent to intractable mysteries;<sup>120</sup> 'a tolerance or even a preference for the realm of the unconscious';<sup>121</sup> a conception of realms of social reality inaccessible to theoretical analysis;<sup>122</sup> a disconsolate pessimism.<sup>123</sup> In addition, the spectre of irrationalism has been spotted in territories of social thought spanning a quite astonishing range of philosophical positions. It has been observed in empiricism,<sup>124</sup>

118. See, for example, Bhaskar's depiction of 'judgemental relativism', i.e. 'the incorrect thesis ... which asserts that all beliefs (statements) are equally valid, in the sense that there can be no (rational) grounds for preferring one to another ... (A)cceptance of judgemental relativism inevitably leads to some or other form of irrationalism', Bhaskar, Possibility ..., 73, emphasis omitted.
119. Thus Colletti speaks of Weber's attachment to 'either a dualism between knowledge and life, between science and reality, or - what is the same thing - irrationalism', 'Marxism and Sociology', in L. Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin (1972), transls. J. Merrington and J. White, 3-44, at 40. Compare with Lukács, Destruction ..., 99-100.
120. Lukács, ibid. Lukács' work contains many of the usages mentioned by other authors in this Section; relativism in particular is often related by him to the irrationalist problematic.
121. H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society. The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930 (1974; orig. 1959), 35. Hughes is absolutely right to find the indictment of irrationalism as applied to Weber misleading and inappropriate: 35-9.
122. K. Mannheim: 'On the Interpretation of Weltanschauung', in Mannheim's Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge (1952), transl. P. Kecskemeti, 33-83 at 39. Mannheim declares that 'we cannot accept that extreme form of irrationalism which holds that certain cultural facts are not merely a-theoretical but are radically removed from any rational analysis'.
123. H.M. Enzensberger, 'Two Notes on the End of the World', in New Left Review, 110 (July-August 1978), transl. D. Fernbach, 74-80, at 76-7.
124. I am thinking of Popper's remark that the empiricist problem of induction resulted in Hume's adoption of 'an irrationalist epistemology'. Hume's answer to the problem 'led him to the conclusion that argument or reason plays only a minor role in our understanding. Our "knowledge" is unmasked as being not only of the nature of belief, but of rationally indefensible belief - of an irrational faith'. K. Popper, Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach (1972), 4-5, emphasis omitted. Popper cannot resist adding the barbed footnote: 'Since Hume, many disappointed inductivists have become irrationalists (just as have many disappointed Marxists)', 5, n.9.



pragmatism,<sup>125</sup> conventionalism,<sup>126</sup> Lebensphilosophie,<sup>127</sup> and, for all their internal heterogeneity, romanticism and existentialism (the latter in both its Christian and atheistic variants).<sup>128</sup> Finally, irrationalism, it is possible to find oneself assured, has insinuated itself into the ideology of various social classes or strata. Its breeding ground is held to be the reactionary bourgeoisie in the period of late capitalism; the masses; and even those usually respected purveyors of knowledge, the scientific community.<sup>129</sup>

It is not my intention to attempt to bring a semblance of order to this chaos, principally because I am sure that, in the unlikely event of success, one would actually end up structuring features from the above list which are just plain obscurantist: for instance I cannot figure out what is distinctively irrationalist about pessimism or about a 'tolerance' for the unconscious realm as opposed to just pessimistic or tolerant about such

125. Lukács, Destruction ..., 17.

126. See Imre Lakatos' criticism of Kuhn's 'irrationalism' in 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes', in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds.), Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (1970), 91-196 at 93. On 178 Lakatos draws a familiar analogy when he declares that in 'Kuhn's view scientific revolution is irrational, a matter for mob psychology', emphasis omitted.

127. Gareth Stedman Jones and Steven Rose are two authors who make the connection between the philosophy of life (also known as 'vitalism') and irrationalism. See, respectively, 'The Marxism of the Early Lukács', in NLR (eds.), Western Marxism: A Critical Reader (1977), 11-60, esp. 26, 45-8; and The Conscious Brain (1976; 2nd, revised edn.; orig. 1973), 361-66. See also G. Lichtheim, Lukács (1970), 26.

128. E. Balibar, 'Irrationalism and Marxism', New Left Review, 107 (January-February), 1978, transl. P. Camiller, 3-18, esp. 6.

129. Ibid., 5-7. Balibar voices certain reservations about an interpretation of the bourgeoisie which pictures them automatically donning irrationalism in their crisis phase, but it appears to be the instrumentalism of this formulation that he doubts, not its ultimate veracity.



stances. What I think we need to do, having registered the ambiguities entailed in the concept, is to construct a clear and unequivocal working definition of our own, and this is what I shall now seek to provide.

'Irrationalism' can be defined as a specific philosophy of life and of society, a world-view, which emerged in Europe in the late eighteenth century and which has been with us, in varying intensity and prominence, ever since. The classic geographical site of early irrationalism is France,<sup>130</sup> though parallel ideas surface in all the nations of Europe in the wake of the French Revolution, escalating urbanisation, and the concomitant geographical and social penetration of capitalist commodity relationships: the ashes of old ways bestowed on the priestly intelligentsia of irrationalism the hallowed powder with which to mark their gloomy acolytes. Irrationalism was originally the tormented cry of the ancient regime; an emotional barricade constructed to defy the future. And its prime ideological target was the legacy of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment philosophes were qualified secularists, admirers of Graeco-Roman antiquity, debunkers of the medieval scholastic traditions, critics of seventeenth century Rationalism who nonetheless generated in their wider criticism of the prevailing order identifiable criteria by which a society was to be judged as rational or irrational,<sup>131</sup> enthusiastic proponents of the progressive and emancipatory role of experimental science, and champions of freedom and equality for citizens with property.

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130. A. Soboul, The French Revolution, 1787-1799 Vol II (1974), transls. A. Forrest and C. Jones, 563-68.

131. Five of these criteria are listed and explored in that splendid book by F. Fehér, A. Heller and G. Márkus, Dictatorship over Needs: An Analysis of Soviet Societies (1983), 238-41.



The history of irrationalism has yet to be written, and such a history would have to begin with the recognition that as a philosophy it is far from being monolithic. Nonetheless, some synchronic analysis quite readily reveals certain elemental postulates of the irrationalist perspective of which the following are probably the most conspicuous.

I. Its belief in the utter inadequacy of human reason (as both concept and putative organ of cognition) as a mode of acquiring knowledge about the (particularly spiritual) world. This belief has a weak form and a strong one. In the first, which Lukács finds in the work of Jacobi and the mature Schelling,<sup>132</sup> it amounts to the assertion that what is really worth knowing (e.g. God, the essence of art, etc.) cannot be grasped by reason in its conceptual, mediatory and discursive aspect, but, on the contrary, can only be divined through a direct understanding; that is, an understanding which is in some sense immediate, intuitive, homologous. But there is also a strong form of the aforementioned belief, found in Nietzsche's radical dissolution of the faculty of reason itself. Thus in Beyond Good and Evil Nietzsche describes 'thinking' as 'the relationship of (our) drives to one another', in this way affirming his hyper-physicalist theory of human behaviour in general; while elsewhere he dismisses both the notion and discipline of logic.<sup>133</sup>

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132. Lukács, Destruction ..., 116-8, 142-5.

133. F. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil (1973), transl. R.J. Hollingdale, 48. Cf. Hollingdale's own Nietzsche (1973), 127-34. Since Nietzsche was a convinced atheist he obviously could not believe in the possibility of producing knowledge of the spiritual world; this distances him from those irrationalists, like de Maistre, who were Christian metaphysicians.



II. Its contention that human reason is either unable to cope with the world or that in the attempt to do so it creates its own (necessary) mystifications. Joseph de Maistre, the Restoration theorist, furnishes a vivid illustration of the former claim. He once reflected:

Human reason left to its own resources is completely incapable not only of creating but also of conserving any religious or political association, because it can only give rise to disputes and because, to conduct himself well, man needs beliefs, not problems. His cradle should be surrounded by dogmas; and, when his reason awakes all his opinions should be given ...<sup>134</sup>

Alternatively, on the subject of reason's inescapable creation of illusions, it is again Nietzsche who arrives at this startling conclusion.<sup>135</sup> In the irrationalist scheme of things it is instinct, tradition or religious faith which fashions, directs and gives meaning to the world. Irrationalists may quarrel among themselves over which of that triumvirate is the most worthy and awe-inspiring; but, whatever their differences, all factions are united in their agreement about the subaltern status of reason in the cosmic order - if reason can be said to exist at all.

III. Its view that human individuals are not independent, free-willing beings capable of choices of any significance, but rather the carriers of God's or Providence's or Nature's Plan. 'Nature' in this context, refers to the laws governing organic matter which propel men and women to think and act in ways that are beyond their comprehension and their mastery. Thus Barrés:

134. J. de Maistre, excerpted in J.S. McClelland (ed.), The French Right (1970), 45, transl. J. Lively.

135. 'The falseness of a judgement is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgement ... The question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-breeding; and our fundamental tendency is to assert that the falsest judgements (to which synthetic a priori judgements belong) are the most indispensable to us, that without granting as true the fictions of logic ... mankind could not live - that to renounce false judgements would be to renounce life, would be to deny life'. Op.cit., 17.



The sovereign individual with his intelligence and his ability to seize on the laws of the universe! This idea must be destroyed. We are not in control of our own thinking. Our thoughts are not the products of our own individual intelligence; they are the physiological translations of primeval physiological dispositions. Our moral judgements and our reason are merely elaborations of these dispositions in particular circumstances.<sup>136</sup>

I think I - III are the key features of irrationalism but let us not forget also the politics this philosophy invariably spawns, for irrationalism flirts with a mélange of reactionary ideologies and prejudices all of which are fundamentally hostile to democracy. Notable here, singly or in combination, are atavism and racism (see the 'blood and soil' völkisch theories of proto- or bona fide fascists like Rosenberg, Gobineau and Chamberlain); militarism (for example, de Maistre's advocacy of war as 'divine'); and, of course, élitism: irrationalists counter the ideal of popular sovereignty with their own affirmation of monarchical or aristocratic rule - aristocratic in the orthodox, quasi-feudal warrior sense, or in the sense of a 'wiser minority', contrasted to 'the Herd',<sup>137</sup> or in the apocalyptical sense made famous in the idea of the Supraman.

This exercise helps clear the ground upon which it is possible to establish that Weber was overwhelmingly not an irrationalist. First, Weber's interpretive sociology accords instrumental-technical reason and science a major role in social life. He recognises, as clearly as any one has, the significance of science in extending human control over the environment, in contributing

136. In McClelland, op.cit., 162, transl. M.W.B. Corwin.

137. D.H. Lawrence, Movements in European History (1971; orig. 1921), 312. Lawrence saw the herd and the wiser impulses existing both in relation to determinate social strata and within, also, the human psyche. As he put it: 'Every man has two selves among his manifold Self. He has a herd-self, which is vulgar, common, ugly, like the voice of the man in the crowd. And he has a better self, which is quiet, and slow, and which is most of the time puzzled. From his better self, he is almost dumb. From his herd-self, he shouts and yells and rants', ibid.



to rigorous thought, and in achieving self-clarity with regard to one's objectives.<sup>138</sup> He insists that freedom (of action) and rationality are intrinsically bound up with another,<sup>139</sup> such that freedom is both real and has rationality as a necessary condition of its realisation. Irrationalists, conversely, deny freedom and reason. With irrationalists he concedes the place for 'direct understanding' but not only qualifies this through his rejection of extreme intuitionism and vitalism,<sup>140</sup> but also through being adamant that it is the far richer 'explanatory understanding' which the sociologist worthy of his or her vocation must pursue. Not that Weber rejects intuition altogether; quite properly he refers to the importance of intuition as a basis of hypotheses in a passage notable for its anticipation of Popperian conjecturalism (though Weber remains firmly within the classical empiricist tradition insofar as he subscribes to a verificationist view of testing).<sup>141</sup> At the same time he remarked elsewhere that 'the idea' is normally a product of the combination of enthusiasm and hard work,<sup>142</sup> a position that once more reveals the gap between Weber and irrationalism since for the latter

138. FMW, 150-1 = GAW, 591.

139. '(W)e associate the highest measure of an empirical "feeling of freedom" with those actions which we are conscious of performing rationally - i.e. in the absence of physical and psychic "coercion", emotional "affects" and "accidental" disturbances of the clarity of judgement, in which we pursue a clearly perceived end by "means" which are the most adequate in accordance with the extent of our knowledge, i.e. in accordance with empirical rules', Methodology, 124-5, emphasis omitted = GAW, 226-7; cf. Roscher and Knies, 191-8 = GAW, 132-7. The linkage between reason and freedom in Weber's thought is interestingly discussed in K. Löwith, Max Weber and Karl Marx (1982), transl. H. Fantel, eds., T. Bottomore and W. Outhwaite, 43, 49, 52.

140. See his scornful remarks in Roscher and Knies, 238, n.10 = GAW, 46, n.1 and Protestant Ethic, 29 = GARS Vol. I, 14.

141. '(T)he really great advances in knowledge in mathematics and the natural sciences ... all rise intuitively in the intuitive flashes of imagination as hypotheses which are then "verified" vis-a-vis the facts i.e. their validity is tested in procedures involving the use of already available empirical knowledge and they are "formulated" in a logically correct way. The same is true of history ...', Methodology, 176 = GAW, 278.

142. FMW, 135-6 = GAW, 573-4.



knowledge is generally held to be the consequence of some inspirational empathetic relationship between subject and object.

There is a second set of senses in which Weber's work can be seen to be profoundly alien to irrationalist premises. Most blatantly it shuns a hard and fast dichotomisation of knowledge and being - if anything, because of his own brand of Kantianism, Weber's method is forever prone to dissolving the latter into the former.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, his theory of society is individualistic, anti-essentialist and formally (though often not in practice) anti-determinist, and also founded on a conception of agency which owes nothing to organicism or physicalist psychology. To adapt a nice distinction formulated by Göran Therborn we might say that Weber is interested above all in human 'subjectivity' as contrasted to human 'personality or character structure'.<sup>144</sup> What interests Weber, in other words, is less the psychological constants of the human make up and more those cultural patterns which are socially, spatially, and temporally distinct: the process of rationalisation in the west, for instance. But what about Weber's élitism, then? Surely this nails his colours to the mast of irrationalism? I think not. Weber's élitism has undoubtedly a number of complex sources, psychological as well as political and sociological, but in my judgement a cardinal reason for it lay in his perception of the inability of mass associations to rule a polity. In case that comment looks perilously close to a tautology let me phrase the argument a little differently: irrationalism is certainly élitist in its political manifestations, but not all élitism is irrationalist - if it were, the notion of the vanguard party, for instance, would make Bolshevism irrationalist,

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143. Cf. Methodology, 64, 68, 71-2 = GAW, 161, 166, 169-70.

144. G. Therborn, The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology (1980), 15-16.



which is an absurdity given the strong rationalist tenor of its Marxist ideology. Both Weber's and the Bolshevik's élitism rested on their view that the masses, of themselves, were incapable of either rational governance or correct revolutionary consciousness, an attitude which in the former case eventuated in resignation to Caesarism or 'plebiscitary leader democracy', and in the latter case culminated first in a Jacobin-type dictatorship and later a totalitarian despotism.<sup>145</sup> One might even argue that extreme rationalism itself has an elective affinity to anti-democratic practice because rationalism can encourage the belief in its bearers that the truth has been revealed to those willing or able to see it, and that failure by others to see it requires education, discipline and paternalistic watchfulness. Weber was neither a rationalist nor an irrationalist though he was an élitist; the matter in my opinion is as straightforward as that.

#### 4.5 Importance of the concept of irrationality

The fact that the concept of irrationality has been abused (e.g. Weber on the 'irrational' masses) is quite properly cause for treating the idea with caution. Many people might wish to abandon it altogether but for the present author this would be a grave mistake. Whence, then, positively, lies the value of a notion whose acceptance must commit one to a position seriously at odds with monistic rationalism, though which need not, should not, result in the anti-rationality stance of the irrationalist? The value of the concept, it can be suggested, is that of perspective - it complements Pascal's counsel against 'Two excesses: to exclude reason, to admit nothing but reason',<sup>146</sup> - and that of disclosure. Specifically, irrationality is

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145. I follow here the nomenclature of Heller, in Fehér, et.al., op.cit., 142.

146. Pascal, Pensées (1966), transl. A.J. Krailsheimer, 85.



an idea which conveys three sorts of message: first, a message of caution the consequence of which is to encourage a sense of reality about the human condition and its travails, without, however, the social apologetics that the claim to realism normally entails; second, a message of polemic and judgement aimed at social institutions and practices whose existence or functioning is inimical to human welfare; and third, a message concerning the explicatory and emancipatory potential of the human sciences. Max Weber was probably more sensitive to the first of these messages than any other classical social scientist, though his method and politics disabled him, though not all of his followers, from open receptivity to the second and the third.

#### 4.5.1 Against hubris: irrationality and the human condition

Irrationality is a cautionary concept because it reminds us of the limits of reason, which in this context means the limits of our powers of control over, and knowledge about, nature, social relationships and ourselves. Irrationality reminds us of human imperfectibility, weakness, and of necessary unhappiness. As a consequence it is profoundly anti-panglossian: we do not live in the 'best of all possible worlds'; anti-utopian (in the superficial, negative sense of that term): the world will always approximate to some degree of Hell in which people 'are on the one hand the tormented souls and on the other the devils in it';<sup>147</sup> and anti-fundamentalist, fundamentalism

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147. A. Schopenhauer, 'On the suffering of the world', in Essays and Aphorisms (1970), transl. R.J. Hollingdale, 41-50, at 48.

After writing this passage I came across an interesting comment by R. Bendix. He notes that, according to Weber, 'utopians militate against the possible by demanding the impossible as the only rational course in a totally irrational world. Weber's work means to me that it is more human and more predictable to continue our struggle with the imperfections of rationality, that this attitude keeps open more chances for the opportunities of individual choice compared with the prospects of unremitting manipulation. It is for all that a sober view of the human condition, anticipating adversity, and he would not have it otherwise. Sixty years after his death, who can honestly say that he was mistaken?', (Cont'd. over).



of any kind being the deceit perpetrated by insecurity against the intellect, an absurd simplification of reality more akin to a personality disorder than a reflexive politics or thought-system. Further, consonant with the acceptance of irrationality are a set of attitudes to live by: engaged stoicism, but not defeatism and passivity since all around is to be witnessed needless unhappiness caused by oppression, exploitation and injustice which it is in our power to correct and should be, in conscience, our duty to correct; irony but not misanthropy since our species is capable of good (altruism, compassion, self-sacrifice, the creation of beauty): though Swift was right to puncture our pride still we are not, I think, his Yahoos, 'making no other use of Reason than to improve and multiply (our) vices',<sup>148</sup> even if vices we have a-plenty; scepticism but not cynicism (bile masquerading as insight); a sense of fallibility and ambivalence towards complexity, which is not the same thing at all as a charter for nihilism.

Three facts about the human condition may be adduced to support the above assertions. The first concerns what Weber called 'the ethical irrationality of the world', which I shall interpret narrowly to refer to the existence of 'undeserved suffering, unpunished injustice, and hopeless stupidity',<sup>149</sup> that is, to the existence of all things which are morally indefensible from the standpoint of any secular, humanistic standards. (Weber believed that

147. (cont'd).

'What Max Weber Means to Me', in R.M. Glassman and V. Murvar, eds., Max Weber's Political Sociology (1984), 13-24, at 24, emphasis in original. Bendix underestimates in the above comments the diversity of utopian thinking and the ambivalence of some of its practitioners; nonetheless, as a criticism of a brand of utopianism his remarks are well made.

148. J. Swift, Gulliver's Travels (1967; orig. 1726), 327. Of pride see the savage depiction on 345.

149. FMW, 122 = GPS, 542.



the problem of 'the irrationality of the world', which theodicy seeks to account for, 'has been the driving force of all religious evolution'.<sup>150</sup>) A great cellist is struck down by a disease of the central nervous system, while a murderous concentration camp doctor spends the rest of his days in relative comfort in a South American state. A loved child is run down by a motor vehicle and killed. An heroic kindness goes unrecognised. By all the canons of reason things like this should never happen, yet they happen all the time and - discounting theodicy - have no purpose.

Second, the concept of irrationality alerts us to energies and ultimate commitments which themselves can neither be fully rationally comprehended nor completely mastered. A term often used to attempt to convey the existence of these driving, motive-forces impelling our behaviour is 'demonic', a most revealing adjective. Goethe used the word to signal 'that which intelligence and reason cannot account for', a force 'external to my (rational? PB) nature but to which I am subject' which finds expression in events (i.e. those which are 'empirically and rationally inexplicable') and in great personalities: Napoleon, Mozart and Paganini for example.<sup>151</sup> The idea of the demonic also recurs in Weber's work: 'We shall set to work and meet the "demands of the day"', he wrote in the concluding lines to Science as a Vocation, 'in human relations as well as in our vocation. This, however, is plain and simple, if each finds and obeys the demon who holds the fibres of his very life'.<sup>152</sup> We know some of the demons who held the fibres of Weber's life:

150. FMW, 123 = GPS, 542.

151. Goethe, op.cit., 229. Also 189, 230, 232.

152. FMW, 156 = GAW, 597. Weber's notion of the demonic is not, incidentally, comparable with Baudelaire's view of the 'satanic' dimension of humankind which is little more than a variety of Manicheanism. See Enid Starkie's Baudelaire (1971; orig. 1957), 669 where the writer is quoted thus: 'In every man, at all times, there are two simultaneous tendencies, one towards God, the other towards Satan. The invocation to God, or spirituality, is a desire to climb ever higher; that to Satan, or beastiality, is the joy in the fall' (transl. PB).



the scholarly impulse and German nationalism are two of the most obvious. But 'demons' express themselves in different forms to different people. One of Britain's greatest twentieth-century socialist writers reflected on his demon in the following words:

Looking back through the last page or two, I see that I have made it appear as though my motives in writing were wholly public-spirited. I don't want to leave that as the final impression. All writers are vain, selfish, and lazy, and at the very bottom of their motives there lies a mystery. Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand. For all one knows that demon is simply the same instinct that makes a baby squall for attention. And yet it is also true that one can write nothing readable unless one constantly struggles to efface one's own personality.<sup>153</sup>

The third aspect of the human condition which breathes relevance into the idea of irrationality turns on human vulnerability, an insight beautifully captured in the poetry of Leopardi and handsomely developed in Timpanaro's materialism. I find myself in complete agreement with the latter's insistence on the autonomy of the 'biological level', on the 'invincible reality' of 'physical ill' which 'cannot be ascribed solely to bad social arrangements' and which will forever be an obstacle, a necessary obstacle, to human happiness. No social order, including communism, can effect 'a decisive triumph over the biological frailty of man',<sup>154</sup> a frailty that includes the experience of illness, decrepitude, natural disaster and neurosis.<sup>155</sup> Freud put it well when he wrote:

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153. G. Orwell, 'Why I write', in Orwell, op.cit., 180-88, at 187-8.

154. S. Timpanaro, On Materialism (1975), transl. L. Garner. The expressions in quotation marks come respectively from 43, 20, 20, 20, 63.

155. I leave to one side those disorders which have as their characteristic feature the constant attempt to control reality, but see R.L. Palmer, Anorexia Nervosa (1980), esp. 34 and the case cited there.



We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to other men. The suffering which comes from this last source is perhaps more painful to us than any other. We tend to regard it as a kind of gratuitous addition, although it cannot be any less fatefully inevitable than the suffering which comes from elsewhere.<sup>156</sup>

Timpanaro, in another book, has shown himself to be a shrewd and amusing Marxist critic of Freud. But Freud's reference to social relations as a source of inescapable unhappiness, an idea that some Marxists might find problematical or frivolous, seems to me incontestably to be right and important. Naturally, I am not alluding to the misery that flows from class society, all of which could be said to be totally unnecessary. Rather I mean those recurrent features of our relationships with others which we cannot control and which bring with them all manner of anguish: a friend is disloyal, a project fails, a love goes cold, a parent has her most cherished values rejected by her child: none of these things lie totally within our dominion as conscious, purposive, rational beings: all of them bring us pain. Finally, there is one other element to human vulnerability which I should mention here, one which also reveals the limits of our reason; and this is the weakness we show when we allow ambition or wealth to corrupt our judgement and our convictions. There is a splendid passage in Democracy in America where Tocqueville recounts the story of meeting a man, a Frenchman who had made his fortune as a planter in Pennsylvania, who forty years previously 'had been a great leveller and an ardent demagogue'. The man in question,

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156. S. Freud, Civilisation and its Discontents (1963), transl. J. Riviere; ed. J. Strachey, 14.



however, had undergone a remarkable transformation. He had become an arch-capitalist, a staunch believer in social hierarchy, a stickler for social order and law, a man unashamed to quote the New Testament in support of his political arguments. Tocqueville's description of his own astonishment at hearing the rich planter articulate these views is irresistible:

I listened and marvelled at the feebleness of human reason. A thing is true or false; but how can one find out amid the uncertainties of knowledge and the diverse lessons of experience? A new fact may come and remove all my doubts. I was poor, and now look, I am rich; if only prosperity, while affecting my conduct, would leave my judgement free! In fact, my opinions do change with my fortune, and the lucky circumstances of which I take advantage really do provide that decisive argument I could not find before.<sup>157</sup>

#### 4.5.2 Irrationality as polemic; irrationality and social science

It is possible that the reader, reflecting on the previous Sub-Section, will come away with an impression about the concept of irrationality which it has emphatically not been my intention to suggest. The notion so far adumbrated might appear as a sort of testament to its time, the doleful 1980s, argument not for action but for retreat into fantasy or consumption, the Gay Science having succumbed as it were to the Maudlin Philosophy. From that perspective we might ask with John Donne

(C)an there be worse sickness, than to know  
That we are never well, nor can be so?  
(An Anatomy of the World, 94-5).

and, answering in the negative, withdraw from reality.

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157. A Tocqueville, op.cit., Vol. I, 353. In an earlier paragraph on the same page Tocqueville remarks that 'One must go to America to understand the power of material prosperity over political behaviour, and even over opinions too, though those should be subject to reason alone.' Other aspects of unhappiness e.g. the experience of boredom, our desires for contradictory things (excitement and security) are also of significance but I cannot go into them here.



But 'irrationality' beckons us not to withdraw but only to cultivate a sense of proportion about what it is possible to achieve. Fundamental to that sense of proportion is the recognition that there is also much we can and should achieve to better both our own situation and that of our fellow humans (and species which are not human). In other words, the concept of irrationality has nothing in common with the concept, say, of fate, as Turner interprets it, an idea which does, indeed, encourage anaesthesia of the will<sup>158</sup> and which in addition can have no sociological purchase at all: it is no more possible to have a 'sociology of fate' (the sub-title to Turner's collection of essays on Weber) than it is to have a sociology of gravity. 'Irrationality' on the other hand, has a component to it which, in relation to social structures and processes in particular, sensitises us to social wrong and incites us to act remedially. Moreover, as will become apparent, the notion of irrationality also assigns social science a specific intellectual task, itself imbued with an inherent political content. I shall now deal with these matters in turn.

As related to social structures and social processes, the concept of irrationality is inescapably value-laden, that is to say normative; concretely,

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158. It encourages passivity and paralysis, I must stress, in Bryan Turner's handling of the concept, though as part of a necessitarian world-view, in which a person might deem himself an instrument of God or History, the idea of fate could function as an impetus for action.

The Weber that Turner presents us with in his hagiography is actually highly unattractive. When we are told, for instance, that in Weber's estimation the corollary of being 'overwhelmed' by the technological and political forces of modern society is an attitude of 'stoic resignation' rather than 'active engagement' (For Weber, 102, 176), or that while Weber 'condemns modern capitalism ... he steadfastly refuses to hold out any hope of a more desirable future' (368), the reader would be forgiven for thinking that this kind of approach amounts to the sociology of the impasse, yet Turner parades Weber's terminal disposition as if it were a virtue worthy of our applause.



it is a concept that condemns a state of affairs. To say, for instance, that the nuclear arms race is irrational, is to say that there is something rotten about it, which thinking people will find unpalatable and will wish to correct; the concept at the same time as it condemns thus urges us to action. That is the first thing to appreciate about the notion of irrationality in the context of social structures and processes: it is pejorative and implies the need for transcendence. But there is more to the concept. To begin with, the mode of condemnation does not amount to mere abuse. Rather, in saying that something is irrational one is actually delineating it quite precisely; one is saying in what ways it is irrational and in what ways too its irrationality might be arrested or erased. If one reverts to the example used above, when critics of the nuclear arms race claim that it is irrational (as they often do) their remarks may be interpreted to mean that the process in question is (a) out of control;<sup>159</sup> (b) opaque to our understanding;<sup>160</sup> (c) destitute of any good (positive) purpose;<sup>161</sup> and (d) inimical to the pursuance of other possible (and possibly better) options.<sup>162</sup> And once this irrationality is admitted a practical goal logically

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159. E.g. E.P. Thompson, 'Notes on exterminism, the last stage of civilisation', New Left Review, 121 (May/June) 1980, 3-31. On 3 Thompson writes of the events pushing us towards war as possibly 'irrational' (his term), 'being willed by no single causative historical logic ... but are simply the product of a messy inertia'. Also, see his later definition of 'irrational' to mean 'forces which overshoot the matrix of rational interest in which they are nurtured, which acquire, for a time, an independent momentum of their own'; 'Revolution in a cold climate', END Journal, 8 (1984), 24.

160. E.g. S. Zuckerman, Science Advisers, Scientific Advisers and Nuclear Weapons (1980). See his comment on those people working in the nuclear arms laboratories who 'have succeeded in creating a world with an irrational foundation ... They have become the alchemists of our times, working in secret ways which cannot be divulged', 11.

161. Thus, for R. Aronson, 'we can describe only as mad the undeniable fact that, as time goes by, the preparations only increase to destroy civilisation itself', The Dialectics of Disaster: a preface to hope (1983), 262, emphasis in original. (Aronson prefers the much stronger word 'mad' to convey this process believing 'irrationality' to be 'woefully inadequate to describe ... the universe of nuclear weapons', 264).

162. See M. Kaldor, The Disintegrating West (1979) and her remark that international 'insanity is only the product of a conflict in which there is no sane solution', 208.



and politically follows. Hence the goal of the peace movement, witnessed in its activity, is the attempt to strive for a world-order which transcends this irrationality; or, put in a more affirmative manner, to attempt to strive for a more rational world. (a) By involving people from all walks of life in a multi-faceted, lateral, decentralised mass campaign, the peace movement articulates its demand for political accountability and public control to halt the arms race; (b) by scrutinising Government furtiveness, questioning the legitimations of the political and military establishments and raising public awareness of the issues at stake, the movement attempts both to demystify and inform; (c) by pointing to the absurdities of policies and weapons-systems which make war more likely, the movement shows the bomb's pointlessness; and (d) by proposing nuclear-free zones, détente, non-nuclear (and non-provocative) defence policies alternatives are presented which go beyond the stasis of cold war ideological thinking. In this way the language of irrationality describes and condemns a state of affairs and simultaneously secretes a formally (the contents may be rationally disputed) rationalising and emancipatory project. That irrationality is capable of doing this job is, one should add, dependent on an important condition, namely that the epithet 'irrational' is being applied to (social) structures and processes which are not constants of the human condition but, to the contrary, are temporal, contingent and in our power to change. This is not quite to say that all things that are social are in our control, individually or collectively - none of us is able to decide upon the character of our primary socialisation; it is only to say that much that is social is amenable to transformation by us both as conscious individual actors and as members of institutions (parties, trade unions, churches etc) or popular movements, and that the arms race, for instance, is one of those phenomena potentially within our dominion.



To sum up this point about 'irrationality' as polemic: the concept in question is intrinsically descriptive, normative and practical; its province is that part of sociality which is capable of human management.

I have just argued that 'irrationality' as applied to certain social structures and processes paradoxically implies not a fatalistic resignation or passivity towards reality, but actually a rationalising and emancipatory stance towards it. I now want to argue that social science is also implicated in a rationalising or/and liberatory practice whenever it finds itself in confrontation with social structures and processes it deems irrational. My suggestion is, and of course it is not original in its broad claim, that social science is constantly - I am tempted to say immanently - engaged in a meta-political endeavour, using 'meta' to denote the deep structure and thrust of social science's activity, in recognition that in everyday life and practice most social scientists are not, qua social scientists, consciously putting their work to political purposes. To put some flesh on these skeletal abstractions let us step back a little and consider more closely the meaning of irrationality.

'Irrationality' is a concept which may refer to beliefs,<sup>163</sup> desires, actions and social structures/processes, among other things, though an author of a philosophically 'realist' or 'substantialist' persuasion,<sup>164</sup> like myself, will be particularly interested in the fourth category of 'irrational' entities

163. On 'irrational' beliefs see Elster as cited in footnotes 14 and 15. Also the interesting classification by S. Lukes, 'Some problems about rationality', in Essays in Social theory (1977), 121-37, esp. 132.

164. The term 'substantialist' comes from T. Johnson, C. Dandeker and C. Ashworth, The Structure of Social Theory (1984), esp. Chapter 4. My theoretical debt to these authors is immeasurable, though they are not responsible for the use I have made of their ideas.



I mentioned just now: social structures and processes. Nonetheless, the general concept of irrationality, by virtue of which any concrete object can be designated 'irrational', contains within it two fundamental dimensions which we need carefully to elucidate. The first is a realist dimension; that is to say, we speak of a thing (e.g. a commitment, an institution) as being irrational because of certain properties that inhere within it. The second dimension of irrationality can be called interpretive. Here irrationality refers not to a thing which thought seeks to comprehend, but to the process of comprehension itself. Thus we might say that something is irrational insofar as it appears absurd, crazy, weird to our understanding, ineffable. This interpretive dimension of irrationality refers therefore to the knowledge state of the observer, resting primarily on our cognitive failure and inadequacy, not to the object which we are attempting incompetently to make sense of.

'Interpretive' irrationality is itself a stratified notion. It can involve temporal or permanent aspects. Temporal: where what was once imagined to be irrational becomes, through explanatory procedures or discoveries, comprehensible. Permanent: if the belief can be sustained that there are some things which, because of the feebleness of human reason, must forever be beyond our ken. To say that does not of itself entail the judgement that the things beyond our ken are 'realistically' irrational. It simply means that they are mysterious, in the same sense that, for the believer, God's purposes are mysterious.<sup>165</sup> In addition, interpretive irrationality connotes a duality of standpoint. What might from the perspective of the observer look irrational (bizarre) might, from the perspective of the subject engaged in, for example, an action be considered perfectly rational

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165. Cf. L. Tolstoy, War and Peace (1978), transl. R. Edmonds, 717, on 'the irrational events of history, that is to say, events the intelligence of which we do not see'; also 1350: 'The higher the human intellect soars in the discovery of possible purposes, the more obvious it becomes that the ultimate purpose is beyond our comprehension'.



(appropriate). Conversely, what might from the standpoint of an individual's experience seem irrational - say, a compulsion or phobia - might from the standpoint of the specialist observer (e.g. a psycho-analyst) appear rational (but here in the sense of 'understandable-in-the-circumstances').

In the light of the above analysis what does it mean to assert, as I did, that social science has, tendentially, a rationalising and emancipatory edge to it? The evidence for the assertion is all around us. First social scientists have displayed institutions and processes to be 'realistically' irrational and, given the normative component of this idea, stated the need for their transcendence. The paradigm here is Marx's Capital for in those volumes Marx not only identifies the 'secret' of capitalist production (surplus-value extraction) thus making the obscure mechanism of exploitation explicable; he also specifies, in broad terms, capitalism's inhumanity and the means whereby human control is to be attained, namely through social crises and political forms of organisation which will culminate first in a socialist revolution and, eventually, in the association of direct producers. Moreover, in subjecting capitalism to critique Marx forces us to focus our attention on a range of alternatives to the prevailing labour process and social order: for instance, alternative forms of economic calculation, attenuation and reorganisation of the division of labour, abolition of the repressive state apparatuses, and so on. In fact so much of the Marxian economic corpus can be read as an exposé of both axes of irrationality (realist and interpretive) precisely because what concerned Marx was the necessarily fetishised guise that commodities assume as they circulate in the capitalist market-place. That tradition of critical theory which takes Marx as its founding father and whose project is, as it sees it, human liberation is constantly engaged in revealing capitalism (and increasingly actually-existing-



socialism also) to be 'realistically' irrational and often 'interpretively' irrational as well.

Yet once we turn exclusively to interpretive irrationality, in the senses previously defined, we travel way beyond the boundaries of Marxian analysis to envelope a great plurality of social scientific approaches, for so much social science is concerned with proving that what seems irrational, in its arcane and obscure form:

i. is actually intellectually explicable within a certain theoretical approach and the analytical tools the latter affords, the implication here being that while one perspective, because of its assumptions, might be blind to species of phenomena, another perspective might be highly sensitised to them.<sup>166</sup>

ii. could be made explicable (e.g. its causes disclosed and modes of operation demystified) to actors presently experiencing disorientation and anxiety owing to their perception of a world governed by fate, chance and other forces beyond their ability to fathom or steer. This was the 'promise' of sociology extolled so passionately by the great C. Wright Mills in his attempt to elucidate the linkages between '"the personal troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structure"'.<sup>167</sup>

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166. See Freud's explanation of parapraxis (slips of the tongue) which, before him, were typically viewed simply as errors, in S. Freud, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1975), transl. A. Tyson, esp. chapters 1-5. Cf. R. Boudon, The Logic of Social Action (1981), 2: 'Pareto's definition (of nonlogical action - PB) appears to me to be very important to the extent that it expresses in depth one of the fundamental intentions of sociologists: to analyse and explain action and, more generally, behaviour which seems irrational to the (non-sociological - PB) observer'.

167. C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination (1970; orig. 1959), 14; cf. 15-29, 182-91.



iii. is only irrational because the onlooker has failed to grasp the motives, expectations and mode of reasoning of the subjects involved. The subjects in question have in the past included panic-stricken French peasants;<sup>168</sup> militant trade unionists;<sup>169</sup> and even Conservative cabinet ministers and Treasury mandarins!<sup>170</sup>

Working backwards, and in précis: Social science practice is constantly engaged in one or other of two levels of activity (and there are some approaches working at both levels simultaneously). At the first level, social science illuminates and rationalises the object under investigation, showing that what appears (interpretively) irrational is in fact not so. At the second level, social science suggests liberation wherever it reveals that social structures and processes are intrinsically (realistically) irrational. Naturally, in their everyday work, social scientists might treat these levels in a discrete fashion, confining their attention to the former. On the other hand, there are some traditions (of which Marxism is the most important) which encompass both levels at once, and some social structures (of which capitalism may be the most important) which especially invite such a theoretical and practical embrace.

Figure 2 schematises the properties and potential of social science in regard to irrationality.

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168. C. Lefebvre, The Great Fear of 1789 (1973), transl. J. White, esp. the episode described on 54-6 and the author's explanation of it; also see Rudé's remark, in the Introduction, that the Fear '(t)o its disconcerted contemporaries ... was a total mystery', 1.

169. J. Goldthorpe, 'The current inflation: towards a sociological account', in F. Hirsch and J.H. Goldthorpe, eds., The Political Economy of Inflation (1978), 186-214, esp. 195 where he says: '... the ambition of any sociological inquiry must ... be to show how the actions of rank-and-file employees, union leaders, governments, etc. are, if not rational in the economist's sense, still intelligible: that is to say, express a logic which is adequate from the actor's point of view, in the situation in which he finds himself, and which at the same time is apprehensible by the "outside" observer', emphasis in original.

170. A. Glyn and J. Harrison, 'Destructive, but far from mindless', New Statesman, 27 June 1980, 961-2.



Figure 2

Representation of the relationship between Social Science and the study of 'irrational' social structures/processes.

|                               | <u>DESCRIPTION OF<br/>STRUCTURE/PROCESS</u>          | <u>SCIENTIFIC-PRACTICAL<br/>GOAL</u>   |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| <u>INTERPRETIVE DIMENSION</u> | Irrational in that it is opaque and incomprehensible | Explication: to establish human understanding (i.e. illuminatory and rationalizing consequence) for:<br>a. agents involved<br>b. observers of agents<br>.<br>.<br>.<br>.<br>.<br>.<br>.<br>.<br>.<br>. |
| <u>REALIST DIMENSION</u>      | Irrational because of its very nature                | Transformation: to regain or attain human control (i.e. liberatory consequence)  |

Description.....Recommendation

NB The vertical broken line denotes a. that not all social scientific approaches make the linkage; and b. that, outside of the context of social science, the connection between knowledge and control is highly complex. For one thing we need to consider the view 'that things were generally done first and that it was only a long time afterward that somebody asked why they were done', C. Jung, Man and his Symbols (1978; orig. 1964), 65. For another, knowledge itself is not the exclusive property of the scientist: see the helpful distinction between 'technical' and 'practical' knowledge, in M. Oakeshott, Rationalism in Politics (1962), 7-13; and A. Giddens' contrast between 'practical consciousness' and 'discursive capabilities', in his Central Problems in Social Theory (1979), 57.



#### 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have endeavoured to show that Weber's description of the 'irrational' masses is empirically dubious and logically flawed; to the extent that he bases his concepts of Caesarism on such a description, his analysis must be deemed severely problematical. Nonetheless, Weber's erroneous comments on mass conduct notwithstanding, I went on to suggest that he was not by any rigorous measure an irrationalist, a tradition of thought which is actually quite foreign to Weber's own theoretical standpoint.

Finally, I contended that the abuse of irrationality as an idea does not warrant the deduction that the concept per se is redundant or ridiculous since in fact its utility is threefold: it is cautionary, polemical and exists as challenge and opportunity for the practice of social science; in short, 'irrationality' has significant mileage for the sociologist. But the question remains: Can the notion of Caesarism also do some intellectual work for us? The attempt to answer this question is the subject of the next Chapter.



## Chapter 5

### 'CAESARISM' AFTER MAX WEBER, AND A WORKING CONCEPT PROPOSED

#### 5.1 Introduction

Two key objectives have dominated my discussion of Caesarism up till now. First, my aim has been to examine aspects of, and interpretations of, Caesarism's nineteenth century career as a term and concept. Second, I have endeavoured to describe the meanings, investigate the status, and evaluate the cogency of the word/idea in the thought of Max Weber. In both cases I have been afforded the luxury of reflection and assessment of other people's work, and indeed there is still more exegesis to come in the pages that follow. But with this Chapter the onus falls squarely on me to be constructive: my task, in short, is to determine the character of Caesarism as a 'real-object' and to suggest how empirical social science might best comprehend it.

While Caesarism (as was argued in Chapter 2) has long since lost the appeal of a word which once incited widespread argument and contention, as a technical, scholarly term it lingers on. Sections 5.2 to 5.5 critically review a selection of post-Weberian academic usages. My approach is to say that although this literature can at times be empirically inaccurate or needlessly recondite, most of the attempts at formulation to be considered reveal basic positive or negative principles which, once elicited, aid us in our quest for a concept of Caesarism with sensible application. 5.6 then devotes itself to grasping the nettle: in it I advance a re-definition of Caesarism which aspires to be consistent with the Chapter's previous criticisms and exhortations; which strives to be historically grounded; and which seeks to identify Caesarism as a species of populism.



## 5.2 Caesarism and 'Oriental Despotism'

The designation of Caesarism as an Oriental despotism is a coinage of Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills in their book Character and Social Structure,<sup>1</sup> and emerges as part of their taxonomy of 'Democracies and Dictatorships'. They begin by defining Oriental despotism in general to refer to a system of domination centred on bureaucratic, monopolistic control of the means of life, particularly irrigation complexes, and then proceed to outline two types of Oriental despotism, of which 'Sultanism' is one (bureaucratic control operating from within the structure of the harem) and 'Caesarism' is the other. The sum of what they have to say about Caesarism is as follows:

The Caesarism of Rome's empire was based upon an imperial bureaucracy of army officers and tax farmers. The Diocletian Empire is the clearest example of an imperial bureaucracy led by hereditary dynasties and punctuated by military usurpers. It was a theocracy with Caesar as god. The military order was important, as a chronic state of war was necessary to provide slaves for the economy. Public financing was shifted from taxes to services in kind. A money economy broke down as the area of domination spread, so the centre of gravity shifted inland. The rich, who provided the liturgies, fled from the cities and, going to country estates, rusticated.<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of problems with this exposition, and at least two lessons to be learned from it. The first problem is that Caesarism itself is nowhere actually specified: we are told not what Caesarism is, but rather what it was 'based upon'. Then there is the puzzling question about why Caesarism should be considered Oriental. Perhaps the authors are thinking about the transfer of the seat of the Empire from Rome to Byzantium (Constantinople) in A.D.324. But not only would this development, of itself, be a weak

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1. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Character and Social Structure (1954).

2. Ibid., 210, emphasis omitted.



reason for designating 'Caesarism' Oriental, that transfer was inaugurated not by Diocletian, to whom they refer, but Constantine. Perhaps, even more obliquely, they are alluding to a claim made frequently in the scholarly literature on Roman antiquity, that Julius Caesar had intended, before his life was cut short by murder, to establish an Alexandrian, eastern Hellenic monarchy, with himself as a god.<sup>3</sup> However, this claim is impossible to prove and, at best, was an aspiration, not a plan fulfilled. Third, what of those periods before Diocletian, notably during Augustus' Principate when Roman politics was not 'punctuated by military usurpers'? Presumably this could not be 'Caesarism' in Gerth and Mills' terms, though the political system, in a broad sense, was 'despotic' and Augustus was a Caesar. Fourth, the reader is struck by the eclecticism of the account. Caesarism appears to encompass bureaucracy, militarism, theocracy, services in kind, the breakdown of a money economy, a rusticated rich, without us ever knowing - and we are entitled to know since Gerth and Mills have charged themselves with the task of formulating a category of despotism - how those features relate to one another. Without this knowledge the type offered by the authors is, I am afraid, impossible to operationalise and we are left with a ragbag of social phenomena loosely associated with the 'Diocletian Empire', based on an interpretation of the facts which will not stand close examination.<sup>4</sup>

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3. For the debate on this see Yavetz, Julius Caesar and his Public Image details op.cit., 25-30.

4. A similar account (in some respects) of 'oriental despotism' can be found in K.A. Wittfogel's (later) Oriental Despotism (New Haven: 1957), esp. 208-12. On Gerth and Mills' definition of Bonapartism as a Western despotism, see op.cit., 211-12: 'The middle-class revolutions of England and France brought forth Bonapartism - a Cromwell and a Napoleon - to stabilize their revolutionary attainments. Kemal Ataturk, regarded as the creator of modern Turkey, might be compared with Napoleon. The military juntas of Spanish-American countries, or Pilsudski's regime of colonels in Poland between the wars, are different forms of dictatorship in largely agrarian and debtor countries. "Bonapartism" means a one-man rule on the basis of acclamation. Yet we should remember that these despotisms are not totalitarianism: they are not based on one single mass party, they do not manage the complexities of a corporate capitalist economy in terms of a planned economy set up for a chronic state of war', emphasis omitted.



Yet the problems encountered in Gerth and Mills' analysis are themselves instructive as negative benchmarks; specifically, they help generate a couple of principles which should, I suggest, inform any conceptualisation of Caesarism which seeks to be tenable.

A. The concept should be capable of delineating, as specifically as possible, the Caesarist regime's political character, as distinct from merely hinting at it or simply stating baldly its conditions of existence.

B. An adequate concept of Caesarism should be faithful to the historical record, should conform, in other words, to the facts i.e. statements recognised to be true by virtue of the authoritative empirical evidence adduced in their support.<sup>5</sup>

### 5.3 Of 'Simple', 'Totalitarian' and 'Caesaristic' Dictatorships

A much richer and more sophisticated attempt to construct a social scientific concept of Caesarism than that offered by Gerth and Mills was bequeathed to us by the political and legal theorist Franz Neumann in an essay written shortly before his death.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to Gerth and Mills (though they are not mentioned by name) Neumann is unwilling to describe Caesarism as a 'despotism': like 'tyranny', another word to which he objects,

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5. 'It does not follow that, because a mountain appears to take on different shapes from different angles of vision, it has objectively either no shape at all or an infinity of shapes. It does not follow that, because interpretation plays a necessary part in establishing the facts of history, and because no existing interpretation is wholly objective, one interpretation is as good as another, and the facts of history are in principle not amenable to objective interpretation', E.H. Carr, What is History? (1964), 26-7.

6. 'Notes on the theory of dictatorship', in F. Neumann (ed. H. Marcuse), The Democratic and the Authoritarian State, op.cit. The essay was left unfinished by Neumann who died before he could complete or revise it.



'despotism', he says, lacks precision and furthermore is 'emotionally charged'; parenthetically, Neumann also mentions the oriental overtones of the word. His preferred designation for Caesarism is 'dictatorship' by which he understands 'the rule of a person or a group of persons who arrogate to themselves and monopolise power in the state, exercising it without restraint.'<sup>7</sup> I will be saying something in a moment about Neumann's concept of Caesarism, but before this can be done we need to examine carefully the master notion of which Caesarism is but one variant: that of 'dictatorship'.

By defining 'dictatorship' in the way that he does above, Neumann comes face to face with an anomaly arising from a tension between the original and the contemporary meaning of the word, an anomaly, one should add, which he never satisfactorily resolves. In its original Roman sense (and as Neumann was aware), a 'dictatorship' was not arrogated by someone, but was conferred on them - it could be a person or group of persons - as an extraordinary, albeit perfectly legal, office: the dictatorship was a magistracy enshrined within the Republican constitution together with such other magistracies as the consulate, the praetorship, the aedileship, the quaestorship, the censorship and the tribunate, to mention only the most important.<sup>8</sup> The dictator's primary function (he was usually an ex-consul) was what today we would call crisis management, particularly in times of foreign war or civil strife when decisive action was required, and when the rule of one person was felt to be better adapted to deal with the emergency than the

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7. Ibid., 233.

8. For a helpful discussion of the functions and powers of these respective magistracies, see H.F. Jolowicz, Historical Introduction to the Study of Roman Law (1967), 43-55.



more cumbersome collegiate governmental system. The dictator was empowered with wide-ranging civil and military prerogatives.<sup>9</sup> For instance, he was freed from the restraints of the tribunician veto; could not be held responsible for his (legal) actions once having relinquished the office; could raise without further ado more than four legions - a right denied, in normal times, to a military commander without the express permission of the senate; 'could convoke any of the assemblies and preside over them, and this power extended to the senate';<sup>10</sup> could issue decrees which in effect had the force of law; and generally possessed formidable judicial rights of arrest and execution.

However, and returning now to Neumann's definition, the powers vested in the dictatorship, though wide-ranging, were hardly untrammelled, hardly exercised 'without restraint'. The dictator's authority was limited to a period of six months duration, the regime it instituted therefore being strictly temporary. And, furthermore, the scope of the dictator's jurisdiction was constitutionally circumscribed: for example, he had no authority to interfere in civil cases and was not permitted to declare war or entitled to tamper with the constitution itself.

Neumann was acquainted with these facts; indeed he specifically recognises many of them in his essay. But having done so he decides to jettison the original meaning of dictatorship and, as we have seen, redefine it. His impulse to do so is understandable, when one thinks about it, in that once Neumann has rejected 'tyranny' and 'despotism' as working alternatives, he has few familiar concepts left with which to express his thoughts apart from the modern idea of dictatorship - which certainly does suggest 'the

9. See Clinton Rossiter's chapter on the Roman dictatorship in his Constitutional Dictatorship (Princeton: 1948), 15-28. The remainder of this paragraph is based on Rossiter's account.

10. Ibid., 25.



rule of a person or a group of persons who arrogate to themselves and monopolise power in the state, exercising it without restraint.' In addition, Neumann wishes to emphasise the different character of the early Republican dictatorship to that of Sulla and Caesar where constitutionalism becomes increasingly a sham. (The affinity between the concepts of dictatorship and Caesarism is especially strong given Julius Caesar's almost constant occupation of the office from 49 B.C. till his death in 44 B.C.). Yet whatever Neumann's reasons for re-defining 'dictatorship', it is arguable that a potentially clear and precise concept has been muddled, though perhaps the attempt to preserve the older meaning is now a lost cause. One sympathises with Medvedev's grumble that:

in current political literature and in the political practice of the last hundred years, the distinctions between the terms "dictatorship", "tyranny" and "despotism" have been eroded. Nowadays they are virtually synonymous expressions. The various regimes of Mussolini, Hitler, Salazar, Franco, Somoza, Duvalier and Stroessner are referred to not by the name of tyranny, despotism or fascism but as "dictatorships". All of these, incidentally, avoided any time limit. Some of them were transferrable by heredity from father to son, and, although the dictatorships of Hitler, Mussolini, Salazar-Caetano and Somoza did not go on forever, they came to end not because the dictator himself abdicated "on the expiry of the specified period" but because he was overthrown by war or revolution.<sup>11</sup>

Conceivably, 'tyranny' and 'despotism' could have actually done the job that Neumann wished to be done by the term he finally settled on since those former concepts are certainly redolent of many of the insinuations carried by the modern sense of dictatorship: insinuations of illegitimacy, abuse or termination of the rule of law, a monopolistic power structure,

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11. R. Medvedev, 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat', in Leninism and Western Socialism (1981), 29-93, at 41.



the role of a usurpatory leadership, etc.<sup>12</sup> Finally, we cannot be convinced that Neumann's definition of dictatorship avoids the alleged generality and 'emotionally charged' nature of tyranny and despotism, which were the reasons put forward by him for avoiding these concepts. As we have seen, Neumann's own definition is far from clear in its consequences, while few words are more 'emotionally charged' than the everyday sense of dictatorship to which Neumann wittingly or not gives credence.

At last we can turn to Neumann's account of 'Caesaristic Dictatorship'. Neumann depicts Caesarism as a type of dictatorship occupying a logically intermediate position in a triad. 'Simple dictatorships', which he mentions first, are those where power is exercised by an individual (e.g. absolute monarch) or group (e.g. a junta or caudillo) by virtue of 'absolute control of the traditional means of coercion only i.e. the army, police, bureaucracy and judiciary'.<sup>13</sup> It is a sort of dictatorship that flourishes in countries and historical periods distinguished by minimal mass involvement in politics and low political awareness, 'where politics is the affair of small cliques who compete for favours and hope to gain prestige and wealth by association with the dictator'.<sup>14</sup> Social control exercised by the dictatorship tends to be limited, haphazard and generally rudimentary. 'Totalitarian dictatorships'

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12. Cf. Aristotle, Politics, details op.cit., 170, on the 'third type of tyranny': 'Any sole ruler, who is not required to give an account of himself, who rules over subjects all equal or superior to himself and rules to suit his own interests and not theirs', a kind of government to which 'No one willingly submits ... if he is a free man'. Also, Rousseau, The Social Contract (1913 Everyman edition), transl. G.D.H. Cole, 234: 'In the exact sense, a tyrant is an individual who arrogates to himself the royal authority without having a right to it ... Tyrant and usurper are thus perfectly synonymous terms'. Rousseau adds: 'In order that I may give different things different names, I call him who usurps the royal authority a tyrant, and him who usurps the sovereign power a despot. The tyrant is he who thrusts himself in contrary to the laws to govern in accordance with the laws; the despot is he who sets himself above the laws themselves. Thus the tyrant cannot be a despot, but the despot is always a tyrant'.

13. Neumann, op.cit., 235.

14. Ibid., 236.



which Neumann describes last, are all-encompassing. Totalitarian dictatorships are not modern creations, unique to the twentieth century; according to Neumann we find instances of them in Diocletian's regime,<sup>15</sup> and as far back as fourth century B.C. Sparta. But they only develop their full and fearsome potential when, as political formations in an industrial society, they are harnessed to modern technology and science. Under totalitarian government social controls are pervasive: the rule of law is undermined and eventually extinguished as a 'police state' reigns unchecked; power becomes concentrated in the hands of a 'monopolistic state party'; all of civil society's branches are permeated by, and brought under the supervision of, this party which deliberately sets about atomising and isolating the individual by breaking his/her established social, cultural and biological ties, and then proceeds to reintegrate him/her in a hierarchical social structure governed by the leadership principle. Essentially, then, in a totalitarian dictatorship so-called, the line separating state from society virtually disappears as the latter suffers total politicisation - in effect the private sphere is absorbed into the state apparatuses - and loss of autonomy.<sup>16</sup> Germany under Nazism, and the Soviet Union since the Bolshevik takeover (though particularly the post-1928 regimes) are paradigmatic of totalitarian dictatorships.

'Caesaristic dictatorships', as distinct from the other two sorts, arise in situations where an individual is 'compelled to build up support, to secure a mass base, either for his rise to power or for the exercise of it, or for both.'<sup>17</sup> Or in other words Caesaristic dictatorships are

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15. Cf. Donald Dudley's Roman Society (1975), which refers to the period A.D. 193-337, as that of the 'totalitarian state', 263-94.

16. Neumann says on 248 that 'under modern conditions every dictatorship tends to be a totalitarian dictatorship'.

17. Ibid., 236.



a (non-necessary) product of 'democratic' conditions or at least conditions in which the populace is vocal and cannot be ignored. This dependence on the multitude distances Caesarism from 'simple' dictatorships where, as we saw, politics is for the most part confined to the dictator, his notables and sycophants; and Caesarism differs from totalitarianism in that unlike the latter the division between the private and public spheres, though under pressure, remains relatively intact. However, totalitarianism, we are told does possess a 'caesaristic element',<sup>19</sup> though this is no reason for conflation: for 'Up to the nineteenth century at least, caesaristic dictatorship does not necessarily lead to a totalitarian system, nor is the totalitarian state necessarily the result of a genuine caesaristic movement'.<sup>20</sup>

But it is not just dependence on the masses that is definitive of Caesaristic dictatorship. Coupled to it is a quintessentially personal element; as Neumann says, 'caesaristic dictatorship ... as the name indicates, is always personal in form.'<sup>21</sup> This is not quite the same thing as saying that the caesaristic leader will be perforce charismatic, though this is what Neumann implies when he says that 'in all caesaristic and totalitarian movements' is to be witnessed 'the masses' identification with a leader, the hero'.<sup>22</sup>

Aside from the intrinsic 'democratic' and personal features of Caesaristic dictatorship, there are two further aspects of Neumann's discussion that are worth noting. The first concerns the sort of individuals classified by him under his Caesaristic category. As we might expect, Julius Caesar

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18. Cf. F. Neumann, Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944 (New York: 1983; orig. 1942, 1944), 195-99.

19. Neumann, 'Notes of the theory ...', 245.

20. Ibid., 243-4.

21. Ibid., 236.

22. Ibid., 253.



and Augustus figure as members of the club; so do such post-twelfth century personages as Cola di Rienzo, Savonarola, Cromwell, the two Napoleons, Mussolini, Hitler and Peron.<sup>23</sup> More surprisingly, on the other hand, is the inclusion of a number of individuals who flourished centuries before the rise to power of the Caesars, i.e. King Agis IV, King Cleomenes III, and Pisistratus.<sup>24</sup> For Neumann, then, Caesarism is a phenomenon that has existed intermittently from the fifth century B.C. to our own time, and the adjective 'Caesaristic' has, accordingly, pan-historical applicability.

The second aspect of Neumann's analysis I wish to highlight is his contention that Caesarism has a class dimension. This dimension is dealt with very sketchily in Neumann's essay. He suggests that in terms of class relationships 'the function of dictatorship may be related to three basic and recurring situations':<sup>25</sup>

i. Where an insurgent, disenfranchised social class is aspiring to power, influence and representation, but where the extant authorities are doggedly resistant to these claims, Caesarism may be purely transitory if the class in question is politically mature; or Caesarism may become protracted indefinitely if that class is immature. An example of the former possibility is the role played by Cromwell and Robespierre in the English and French revolutions respectively in which it was the bourgeois class that aspired to power.

(Neumann adds that in these instances the new commanding class 'will for various reasons demand a liberal political system'.<sup>26</sup>) An example of the latter is the dictatorship initiated by Lenin.

ii. 'The second case is the attempt of a social class threatened with decline and striving to preserve its status and power. Dictatorship may then arise

23. Ibid., 241-3.

24. Ibid., 237-8.

25. Ibid., 250.

26. Ibid.



as an attempt to preserve the status quo. The most striking examples are Sparta, to a lesser extent the half-hearted efforts of Napoleon I, and probably the regimes of Franco and Peron'.<sup>27</sup>

iii. The third situation concerns the attempt of a 'doomed' class to reverse the existing social and economic order, 'and to install a political system that would restore them to their old pre-eminence. This is the kernel of the German and Italian Fascist movements'.<sup>28</sup>

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Neumann's analysis of Caesarism is ambitious and stimulating.

In reading it (and adding to A. and B. on 276) one is prompted to suggest that a satisfactory concept of Caesarism should

C. pay due cognisance to class relationships and consider, more generally, the question of Caesarism's position vis-a-vis the 'masses'; and should also

D. have the space to accommodate the personalist, 'heroic' capacity that Caesarist leaders appear to possess.

On the debit side, Neumann's analysis is probably too ambitious, and a single concept too constrictive to include the diverse careers of the men Neumann mentions. (Hence Pisistratus, Cola di Rienzo and Lenin - collectively referred to as manifestations of Caesarist figures fronting immature or weak 'disenfranchised and insurgent social classes' - come across to this author as particularly awkward political bed-fellows.) We need to build a concept of Caesarism which does justice to the empirical material, as opposed to suffocating it in generalisations. There is also the fact that

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27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 251.



Neumann's notion is subject to continual slippage. At one moment Caesarism is a dictatorship; at another it is an 'element';<sup>29</sup> at yet another it is a 'movement'.<sup>30</sup> A final criticism one might level at Neumann's handling of the concept concerns his incongruous inclusion in it of figures who hail from epochs before Julius Caesar's own. Either Caesarism is an exemplar of a distinct type of political formation (and Neumann accepts that the concept was derived from Julius Caesar<sup>31</sup>) or it is not. If it is an exemplar it is novel ipso facto, and backward extrapolation is illegitimate. If it is not an exemplar, then the personal nomenclature is misleading and 'Caesarism' should be replaced by another name which established the political archetype. The negative principle that can be drawn from this observation is the obvious one that a sensible concept of Caesarism should

E. eschew anachronism.

#### 5.4 Crisis, Compromise and Coalition: Caesarism as an Equilibrium of Class Forces

Despite Marx's own antipathy for the concept of Caesarism (see Appendix), many other Marxist thinkers have not hesitated to use it. We have already seen the Frankfurt School's Franz Neumann develop the notion in his triad of forms of dictatorship. However, probably the most sustained attempt to work out a theory of modern politics in which Caesarism plays a major role has flowed from the pens of those influenced by Gramsci, and this Section seeks to describe and evaluate their contributions.

Gramsci's own writings on Caesarism are marked by the appalling prison conditions of their composition; it is unreasonable to expect the sort of clarity and coherence most academics have the opportunity of bringing

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29. Ibid., 236, 245.

30. Ibid., 244, 253.

31. Ibid., 238.



to their work if they have only the desire to do so. Much of Gramsci's political analysis, as is well known, is fragmentary and is coded to deceive the censor, a fact which adds to the labours of interpretation. A voice is frequently crying out to be heard yet what it is saying is often ambiguous.

'Caesarism', Gramsci writes:

can be said to express a situation in which the forces in conflict balance each other in a catastrophic manner; that is to say, they balance each other in such a way that a continuation of the conflict can only terminate in their reciprocal destruction. When the progressive force A struggles with the reactionary force B, not only may A defeat B or B defeat A, but it may happen that neither A nor B defeats the other - that they bleed each other mutually and then a third force C intervenes from outside, subjugating what is left of both A and B.<sup>32</sup>

Put differently, Caesarism 'always expresses the particular solution in which a great personality is entrusted with the task of "arbitration" over a historico-political situation characterised by an equilibrium of forces heading towards catastrophe'.<sup>33</sup> It is however important to appreciate, according to Gramsci, that Caesarism is by no means a uniform or monolithic phenomenon; its historical formation and significance are not always and everywhere the same. Notably, Caesarism can be either progressive or reactionary. 'Caesarism is progressive when its intervention helps the progressive force

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32. A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1971), eds. and transls. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, 219.

33. The link between Caesarism and a 'great personality' is also hinted at on 210-11 where Gramsci writes of 'charismatic "men of destiny"', and 'the charismatic leader'. Gramsci's and Weber's usages of Caesarism are very different, though Gramsci mentions Weber in the 'Notebooks' and cites the locus classicus of the latter's examination of Caesarism i.e. 'Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany': 19, 228 (both unnumbered footnotes). On the other hand, could Gramsci's use of the term 'charisma' have been inspired by Weber (remembering that 'charisma' is not a term that Weber uses in 'Parliament and Government')? Gramsci does refer, in another place, to 'The Protestant Ethic' (338) but though Weber mentions 'charisma' once there its meaning is only hinted at.



to triumph, albeit with its victory tempered by certain compromises and limitations. It is reactionary when its intervention helps the reactionary force to triumph'.<sup>34</sup> Heroic manifestations of the former include Caesar and Napoleon I; of the latter, Napoleon III and Bismarck.

So, as a first approximation,<sup>35</sup> Caesarism is at once 'a situation' of a determinate kind, and a 'solution' to that situation in which the instrument is an individual of a special stamp. Yet in the paragraph immediately following the claim that Caesarism 'always expresses the particular solution in which a great personality is entrusted with the task of "arbitration" etc.',<sup>36</sup> Gramsci qualifies his position in a passage much quoted by his disciples.

It now seems that:

A Caesarist solution can exist even without a Caesar, without any great, "heroic" and representative personality. The parliamentary system has also provided a mechanism for such compromise solutions. The "Labour" governments of MacDonald were to a certain degree solutions of this kind; and the degree of Caesarism increased when the government was formed which had MacDonald as its head and a Conservative majority.<sup>37</sup>

Further, Caesarism may exist in 'various gradations' such that, for example,

Every coalition government is a first stage of Caesarism, which either may or may not develop to more significant stages (the common opinion of course is that coalition governments, on the contrary, are the most "solid bulwark" against Caesarism).<sup>38</sup>

34: Gramsci, ibid., 219.

35. Gramsci remarks that 'Caesarism is a polemical-ideological formula and not a canon of historical interpretation', 220, a comment difficult to square with the rest of Gramsci's very theoretical-historical account.

36. Emphasis mine.

37. Ibid., 220.

38. Ibid.



To the 'progressive' and reactionary' couple, Gramsci adds another dualism. Caesarism may be qualitative, which is to say so innovatory, so revolutionary that its appearance and career declare the historical transformation from one type of state to another (again, Caesar and Napoleon I are proffered as illustrative). Or, as evident in the regimes of Napoleon III and Bismarck, Caesarism may be purely quantitative, representing 'only "evolution" of the same type (of state: PB) along unbroken lines.'<sup>39</sup>

Overlap between the 'progressive'-'reactionary' and 'qualitative'-'quantitative' distinctions is discernible though never made absolutely explicit. Progressive Caesarism would appear to be qualitative, evidence for this being first, Gramsci's reference to Caesar and Napoleon I<sup>40</sup> in both cases, and second a comment that Gramsci has made earlier stating that 'restorations in toto do not exist'<sup>41</sup> - suggesting thus that a qualitative leap forward ('The Caesarism of Caesar and Napoleon I ... represented a passage in which the innovations were so numerous, and of such a nature, that they represented a complete revolution'<sup>42</sup>) is never matched by a qualitative leap backward. Reactionary Caesarism is therefore in a sense quantitative, and sure enough Napoleon III (though not Bismarck) is mentioned in this context. Confusingly, however, Gramsci then adds to his progressive-reactionary couple a third term: Caesarism may also be 'of an intermediate and episodic character'.<sup>43</sup>

Three more features of Gramsci's analysis of Caesarism can be recorded. To begin with, and like so many other authors this thesis has considered,

39. Ibid., 222.

40. To be precise, Gramsci portrays the Caesarism of Caesar and Napoleon I as possessing 'a quantitative/qualitative character', but it is the qualitative aspect that his discussion highlights.

41. Gramsci, 220.

42. Ibid., 222.

43. Ibid.



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42. Ibid., 222.

43. Ibid.



Gramsci relates Caesarism to the armed forces, for him, an arm of the bureaucracy. Gramsci's discussion of the military in the notes entitled 'Observations on certain aspects of the structure of political parties in periods of organic crisis'<sup>44</sup> is intriguing. Here he argues that 'military influence in national life means not only the influence and weight of the military in the technical sense' - i.e. the General Staff or officers pursuing their own interests as a group -, 'but the influence and weight of the social stratum from which the latter (especially the junior officers) mostly derives its origins'.<sup>45</sup> The prime, though not exclusive, social class basis of military influence Gramsci locates is 'the medium and small rural bourgeoisie'<sup>46</sup> whose conditions of life - particularly its familiarity with superintending and ordering-around (e.g. peasant) dependents, its rentier income, its hostility to town culture and urban bourgeoisie - especially conduce to military organisation and military political solutions. The observation that militarism amounts to more than the open, material or technical role of the army, or the role of the 'man on horseback', that militarism has a class dimension, 'is indispensable for any really profound analysis of the specific political form usually termed 'Caesarism' or Bonapartism - to distinguish it from other forms in which the technical military element as such predominates, in conformations perhaps still more visible and exclusive'.<sup>47</sup> This suggests, albeit cryptically, that though Caesarism can be expected to have a strong military element, it is more than a military government, a government of '"great" generals',<sup>48</sup>

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44. Ibid., 210-18.

45. Ibid., 214-5.

46. Ibid., 212.

47. Ibid., 215.

48. Ibid.



as in the case of the Spanish experience.<sup>49</sup> Caesarism must be related to the class or classes that sustain it and also to a 'formally organic, political and social ideology'.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, and this is the second of the features of Gramsci's analysis that we need to explore, Caesarism in general, and its military element in particular is not a static phenomenon. Importantly, post-Napoleon III Caesarism is not as dependent on the military factor as its forbears were.

In the modern world, with its great economic-trade-union and party-political coalitions, the mechanism of the Caesarist phenomenon is very different from what it was up to the time of Napoleon III. In the period up to Napoleon III, the regular military forces or soldiers of the line were a decisive element in the advent of Caesarism, and this came about through quite precise coups d'état, through military actions, etc. In the modern world trade-union and political forces, with the limitless financial means which may be at the disposal of small groups of citizens, complicate the problem. The functionaries of the parties and economic unions can be corrupted or terrorised, without any need for military action in the grand style - of the Caesar or 18 Brumaire type.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, speaking now more generally, 'In the modern world, Caesarist phenomena are quite different, both from those of the progressive Caesar/Napoleon I type, and from those of the Napoleon III type - although they tend towards the latter.'<sup>52</sup> Thus previously, under Napoleon I for instance, the contending progressive and reactionary forces might eventually amalgamate - 'albeit after a wearying and bloody process' - whereas in the contemporary era 'the equilibrium with catastrophic prospects occurs not between forces

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 216.

51. Ibid., 220.

52. Ibid., 222.



which could in the last analysis fuse and unite ... but between forces whose opposition is historically incurable and indeed becomes especially acute with the advent of Caesarist forms', an allusion, one supposes, to the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat, a struggle based on the structurally incompatible and irreconcilable interests of the classes involved such that no rapprochement is possible comparable to that between various fractions of property owners.<sup>53</sup> The contradiction between labour and capital, the inability of ultimate compromise, means that the dominant class must explore all avenues open to it so to secure its position, as well as striving to exploit the weaknesses of its class enemy through security measures among others: 'this is why it has been asserted that modern Caesarism is more a police than a military system'.<sup>54</sup>

The third and final aspect of Gramsci's discussion of Caesarism that merits comment is this. Gramsci points out that since every dominant 'social bloc' is necessarily an alliance of not always symmetrical ideologies and interests, it is always possible that one group within the bloc will desire a Caesarist solution to a political problem while another group will resist it. This, for Gramsci, was the significance of the Dreyfus affair:

not because it led to "Caesarism", indeed precisely for the opposite reason: because it prevented the advent of a Caesarism in gestation, of a clearly reactionary nature ... (T)he Dreyfus movement ... was a case in which elements of the dominant social bloc itself thwarted the Caesarism of the most reactionary part of that same bloc. And they did so by relying for support not on the peasantry and the countryside, but on the subordinate strata in the towns under the leadership of reformist socialists (though they did in fact draw support from the most advanced part of the peasantry as well).<sup>55</sup>

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53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 223.



Gramsci was a profound thinker but are his comments on Caesarism profound? Definitely there are general insights to distill. The class location of Caesarism gains central position as an issue and reaffirms our own principle C (see 5.3., 284). The military factor is given purchase, as I will later argue it must be. The discussion is nuanced with Gramsci on his guard against 'sociological mechanicism'.<sup>56</sup> But there are problems. The treatment of Caesarism is embryonic, evasive and, as we have seen, lacks consistency in places. The progressive-reactionary distinction introduces into the concept of Caesarism an unhelpful, politically tendentious metaphysic, whereas my inclination is to keep the formulation of Caesarism uncompromisingly secular in orientation. Gramsci's comments on parliamentary Caesarism are another area of difficulty. What are we to make of his statements about Caesarism's relationship to party coalition and compromise? Superficially, not a great deal, for the truncated nature of Gramsci's remarks offer us generalisation but very little detail. On the other hand we do have at our disposal the work of some of Gramsci's followers who have made strenuous efforts to apply just these ideas (of Caesarist coalition and compromise) to twentieth century British politics. By turning to their investigations we may gain some inkling into the potential of Gramsci's approach on this issue at least.

Two authors who have recently attempted to elaborate on Gramsci's idea of Caesarism and apply it to British history are Bill Schwarz and Stuart Hall. Their concern is not with a thoroughgoing and systematic extension

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56. Ibid., 222. 'It would be an error of method ... to believe that in Caesarism ... the entire new historical phenomenon is due to the equilibrium of the "fundamental forces". It is also necessary to see the interplay of relations between the principal groups (of various kinds, socio-economic and technical-economic) of the fundamental classes and the auxiliary forces directed by, or subjected to, their hegemonic influence. Thus it would be impossible to understand the coup d'état of 2 December without studying the function of the French military groups and peasantry', ibid.



of the concept in all its manifold Gramscian manifestations; instead they extricate from Gramsci's discussion the observation that Caesarism may represent a situation of class compromise and political coalition as a response (or 'solution') to a major crisis of state, particularly a rupture of representation between social classes and their parliamentary agents.

Insofar as Schwarz is interested in Caesarism<sup>57</sup> it is in regard to that period, 1915-1922, when British politics were dominated by a series of coalition governments, led initially by Asquith (May 1915-December 1916), but for the most part by Lloyd George (December 1916-November 1918, November 1918-October 1922). The composition of these governments included at different times Liberals, Lloyd George Liberals, Conservatives and members of the Labour Party whose galvanisation followed the failure of the right-wing populist tariff reform movement to win over a mass anti-Labour, anti-socialist constituency; the crisis of confidence that afflicted the nation's rulers in a period of accelerated social change; and the attendant disillusionment with the instabilities that seemed to dog two-party politics in this age. The details of Schwarz's historical reconstruction need not concern us, though it is important to note that the period of coalitionism with which he is concerned is inserted into a broader context, namely, 'the crisis of liberal hegemony':<sup>58</sup> a crisis or number of crises which struck state, civil society and ideological conceptions alike from the 1880s onwards, and which paralleled the recomposition of capital, the struggles for the

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57. B. Schwarz, 'Conservatism and "caesarism", 1903-22', in M. Langan and B. Schwarz, (eds.), Crises in the British State, 1880-1930 (1985), 33-62.

58. The quote is taken from an article written with S. Hall in the volume referred to above, and entitled 'State and society, 1880-1930', 7-32, at 11, emphasis omitted.



extension of the franchise and for women's rights, and the growing rejection of the laissez-faire society (a rejection which went hand-in-hand with the development of the idea, and to some extent the institutions, of collectivism).

What we need to determine is Caesarism's place in all this.

By caesarism I refer to a political situation characterized by the following features: first, a protracted crisis of representation; second, the strength of opposition forces ranged against the state; third, the exhaustion of the resources for the power bloc to construct and command its own popular interventions; and fourth, the concentration of power at one point in the state. These features led Gramsci to observe that "every coalition government is the first stage of Caesarism". In such a situation the state representatives are captured by their own logic of constraining popular struggles and recomposing the apparatuses of the state internally and administratively. From this perspective comes the understanding of "various gradations of caesarism" and of parliamentary caesarism without the classic hero, without the "Caesar" or "Bonaparte".<sup>59</sup>

The lack of precision of these comments is not helped by other statements Schwarz makes about Caesarism. We are informed that Caesarism may exist in an 'incipient' mode and are expected to accept that it did so from the late 1880s.<sup>60</sup> (There was actually a coalition government consisting of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists spanning June 1895-December 1905 under the Prime Ministerships of, first, Salisbury and, beginning in 1902, Balfour; we are not given any indication whether these administrations are to be deemed Caesarist, 'incipient' or otherwise.) As 'a political situation' Caesarism is not confined to a type of government, a coalition government, even if the latter is its most tangible expression. Caesarism can exist as a 'configuration of political forces',<sup>61</sup> and such a configuration became especially evident after the constitutional crisis of 1910 when the nation's most prestigious and influential political leaders attempted to find a consensus

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59. 'Conservatism and "caesarism"', 46.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.



solution to their mutual travails. The 1915-1922 coalitions, the culmination of earlier attempts to bridge political differences seem to mark the apotheosis of Caesarism in Schwarz's account<sup>62</sup> though this conviction stands in some tension with Gramsci's own remark, slightly misquoted by Schwarz, that 'Every coalition government is a first stage of Caesarism', suggesting as it does that Caesarism's apotheosis is subsequent to the establishment of a coalition. Of greater clarity is the significance attributed to the coalition period in question, and thus the importance of Caesarism itself. For in the 'long, defensive period of coalition governments from 1915-22:

the old party formations finally dissolved and regrouped; the syndicalist challenge was confronted and repelled; labour, its internationalism broken by the war, was constitutionalized into the alternative party of government; state intervention in the economy hastened the transition to monopoly forms in some sectors; and the system of industrial conciliation, with the state as "neutral" mediator<sup>63</sup> between capital and labour, was fully institutionalized.

By 1922 Caesarism was on the wane; thereafter 'the gradations of Caesarism slowly decreased',<sup>64</sup> only to be resurrected in the figure of Ramsay MacDonald and his 1931-35 coalition. 'This new phase of parliamentary caesarism held until 1945 when a newly formed popular movement generated by the war had the effect of finally breaking, 'from below', the political log-jam and completing the diffusion of coalitionism and caesarism'.<sup>65</sup>

62. Ibid., 50, and 53: 'The character of the government from 1918 to 1922 was one of unremitting reaction, in which there occurred a momentary fusion of the caesarist elements which had marked political developments in the previous decade'.

That the Lloyd George coalitions were Caesarist is also accepted by Robin Wilson who, in addition, re-emphasises Gramsci's comment that 'coalition government is a first stage of Caesarism': see his 'Imperialism in Crisis: the "Irish Dimension"', in Langan and Schwarz, op.cit., 151-178, at 164.

63. 'State and society', 28.

64. 'Conservatism and "caesarism"', 59.

65. Ibid., 60.



The penchant of neo-Gramscians to equate coalitionism and compromise with Caesarism has not been limited to their theorisation of pre-1945 administrations. Caesarism, in one reckoning, is thriving in the 1980s, its current reincarnation being the Social Democratic Party.

Writing in an article first published in the April 1981 edition of Marxism Today, later reprinted in a collection of articles on Thatcherism, Stuart Hall argues that the advent of the SDP 'represents a significant re-grouping of parliamentary forces' which the Left in Britain needs carefully to consider.<sup>66</sup> As one would expect from a commentator of Hall's perspicacity - his 1979 pieces on Thatcherism were strikingly prophetic and iconoclastic documents - the SDP's emergence as a political factor is treated with the seriousness later events would fully vindicate. More questionable, on the other hand, is the utility of the categories Hall chooses to employ and their influence on his judgement.

In his view, the SDP's 'appearance as an independent force ... signals a crisis and break in the system of parliamentary representation'.<sup>67</sup> This crisis, to which the SDP's rise is due, is one of political and social authority; its root cause is a condition in which (Hall is quoting Gramsci) 'the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested or forcibly extracted the consent of the broad masses'.<sup>68</sup> The 'major political

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66. S. Hall, 'The "Little Caesars" of Social Democracy', in S. Hall and M. Jacques (eds.), The Politics of Thatcherism (1983), 309-21. Quotation is on 310. Hall's original article was composed and published some six months before the formation of the Liberal-SDP Alliance; hence his remarks pertain exclusively to the SDP. (The reprinted article in The Politics of Thatcherism, a slightly amended version of the Marxism Today piece, mentions the Alliance on its first page but this is an editorial up-dating only; the significance of the Alliance remains totally untheorised in the amended version.)

67. Ibid., 310.

68. Ibid., 311 = Gramsci, op.cit., 211.



undertaking' in question here is the arrest of Britain's industrial/economic decline and, as things stand, one attempt to deal with Britain's plight has visibly, irredeemably miscarried, while another attempt is beginning to founder. The first strategy alluded to is that of 'Social Democracy Mark I' canonised in the Wilson-Callaghan years. Definitive of Social Democracy Mark I are the commitments to the mixed-economy, incomes policy, neo-Keynesianism and corporatism which, together, have presented a particularly unattractive statist version of socialism no longer acceptable to great constituencies of the British electorate.<sup>69</sup> The second strategy ostensibly designed to turn-round the British economy is, of course, that advanced by the 'radical right'. In its own terms, Thatcherism has had some famous triumphs. It has succeeded in dampening down wage militancy and disciplining the work force through the threat of unemployment; it has steadily ensured the erosion of trade union power through legislation designed to strip those associations of their legal immunities; it has championed management's prerogative to manage; and it has begun to roll back public ownership in its programme of privatisation.<sup>70</sup> However,

in the one, essential thing that matters - the Great Economic Reversal - things have not gone the Government's way. Inflation is lower, but the dole queues refuse to diminish and the level of economic activity is bumping along the bottom showing no inclination - despite persistent rumours <sup>71</sup> of a last minute recovery - to make a significant rise.

Enter the SDP. Capitalising on a situation characterised by growing electoral disenchantment with both Labour and Conservative Parties, and by extension with two party politics in general, the SDP are admirably placed to present themselves as an authentic alternative. The image they project

69. "Little Caesars", 311.

70. Ibid., 311-12.

71. Ibid., 312.



combines energy with emolience.<sup>72</sup> Their claim to the mantle of mould-breakers suggests a radicalism and astringency which Thatcherism in its own way and own language has busily been promoting; both positions castigate the poverty of Labourist programmes. Yet unlike Thatcherism, the SDP project themselves as healers, as conciliators, as centrists who appreciate that conviction politics must, if it is to be morally acceptable to the basic decency and good sense of the British people, come with the social balm only SDP policies make possible. 'Toughness and tenderness' - the political elixir that Dr. David Owen would later prescribe to the British public - is thus presaged in the original SDP enterprise. However, according to Hall, the SDP agenda, when dissected, is both vacuous and derivative. It is vacuous because the SDP's talismen of 'participatory democracy' and 'decentralisation' are phoney; behind the slogans lies no real intention, perhaps no real capacity, to mobilise the mass of the people for democracy and to confront the power-structure.<sup>73</sup> And the SDP's agenda is derivative because, on inspection, its articles of faith are in many respects the same ones that betray its collectivist Labour Party origins: its managerialism, its reaffirmation of incomes policy, its sympathy for neo-Keynesianism, its commitment to the EEC and to NATO.<sup>74</sup> Only in the SDP's 'final break with the historic Labour-trade union connection' and 'working class politics' can it claim to be substantially novel,<sup>75</sup> but for the break to be successful the new party must build a distinctive, viable and reliable political constituency of its own, a task which, at the time Hall was writing, it had yet to do. Expressed in the concepts of Gramscian theory, the SDP embody a 'transformist solution'.

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72. Ibid., 316.

73. Ibid., 320.

74. Ibid., 316-17.

75. Ibid., 316.



Transformism is the authentic programme of the moderate left in a period of progressive political polarisation along class lines. Its function is to dismantle the beginnings of popular democratic struggle, to neutralise a popular rupture, and to absorb these elements passively, into a compromise programme. Its true novelty is that it conflates the historic programmes of the classic, fundamental parties of the left and right. It is the restoration of the old through the appearance of constructing something new: "revolution" without a revolution.<sup>76</sup> Passive revolution "from above" (i.e. Parliament).

Hall then moves to reflect on the significance of this situation, and in so doing provides his own interpretation of Caesarism:

Since the break-up of the great Liberal formation in the early years of this century, the British political system has shown an increasing tendency, in periods of crisis, to turn to Caesarist solution (sic). "Caesarism" is a type of compromise political solution, generated from above, in conditions where the fundamental forces in conflict so nearly balance one another that neither seems able to defeat the other, or to rule and establish a durable hegemony. Gramsci reminds us that "Caesarist" solutions can exist without "any great 'heroic' and representative personality" - though in the earlier period there were indeed contenders for the role "above party and class". But, he adds, "The parliamentary system has also provided a mechanism for such compromise solutions. The 'Labour' governments of MacDonald were to a certain degree solutions of this kind ... Every coalition government is a first stage of Caesarism .<sup>77</sup>". The Social Democrats are our "little Caesars".

Finally, Hall applies these reflections to the conjuncture of 1981:

In a period when the discipline of unemployment is sending a shiver of realism through the labour movement, it may seem over-optimistic to argue that we now confront a situation of stalemate between the fundamental classes. Yet this does once more seem to be the case. Thatcherism lacks the economic space or the political clout to impose a terminal defeat on the labour movement. The working class and its allies are so deep in corporate defensive strength that they continue to provide the limit to Thatcherism despite

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76. Ibid., 320.

77. Ibid., 320-1, emphasis in original.



the current state of disorganisation. Irresistible force meets the immovable object. On the other hand, the labour movement lacks the organisation, strategy, programme or political will to rule. So far it has failed to act as the magnet for new social forces, thereby itself embracing new fronts of struggle and aspiration. It still shows no major sign of reversing its own long decline. Such statements (sic:<sup>78</sup> presumably this should read 'stalemates': PB<sup>79</sup>) are ready-made for the appearance of grand compromise.

I have taken the unusual step of providing extensive quotation because a number of criticisms I am about to make are levelled specifically at the above statements. By letting Hall explain his position in his own words I hope to avoid any charge of misrepresentation.

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At least three aspects of Hall's and Schwarz's accounts are open to question. In the first place there is no compelling reason indiscriminately to assimilate coalitionism to Caesarism in the manner Schwarz, following Gramsci, is in particular wont to do. The assertion that 'Every coalition government is a first stage of Caesarism' (my emphasis) contains, along with astonishing exaggeration, a teleological premise the consequence of which is to neglect illegitimately the specific nature and range of possibilities of coalitions as political formations. The teleological premise hinges on the belief that coalitions are best thought of not in their own right as enduring institutions but as indicative of a political interregnum; they are staging posts between a crisis on the one hand and its resolution on the other. Coalitions are responses to crises and attempts to resolve them, exceptional strategies designed for exceptional situations. Now this

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78. The version of this article in Marxism Today, April 1981 (11-15) also reads 'statements', 15.

79. "Little Caesars", 321.



perception of coalitions and their 'function' may well be accurate with regard to a specific set of cases; what cannot be assumed, however, is that the description above admits of universal application: coalition governments are not necessarily crisis governments, nor are they necessarily heading in any direction whose goal is extrinsic to them. In the majority of Continental countries which have experienced coalition and minority governments since the Second World War, for example, such an arrangement has not for the most part been a temporary, exceptional affair, an expedient response to immanent or extant catastrophe, but rather part of the normal, expected operation of the political process.<sup>80</sup> One has only to examine the post-1945 history of the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Scandinavian countries, Holland and Belgium to establish how institutionalised coalition processes are in these nations (though this is not to say, naturally, that coalition politics in these states has proceeded smoothly and without drama). To make without qualification the claim, then, that coalition governments are everywhere a first stage of Caesarism (or a first stage of anything else for that matter), to insist on this as a theoretical datum, is to ignore both the normalcy of the coalition situation in certain political environments and the conditions of existence peculiar to it - notably proportional representation - which need have nothing whatsoever to do with crises of hegemony, class stalemates etc. The British experience in which a period of extremity has been the prelude and trigger to coalition governments (the military imperative, untheorised in the account of Schwarz, should not be underestimated), in which coalitions have appeared erratically and spasmodically, cannot be construed sensibly as prototypical and, besides, the concept of coalition itself demands

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80. See V. Bogdanor (ed.), Coalition Government in Western Europe (1983), for a mass of useful details.



disaggregation. That coalitions are not unidimensional structures is evident from Britain's own political history since 1895. An examination of Figure 3 is sufficient to establish this. More generally, as Bogdanor points out, coalition governments can be divided into (a) Governments of National Unity, where the majority of parties combine to tackle a situation - for example, war or economic crisis - deemed potentially perilous to nation and state; (b) alliances which figure as 'a prelude to the fusion of parties'; (c) and so-called 'power-sharing' coalitions - unfamiliar in Britain though a common factor in Continental politics - in which 'two or more parties, none of which is able to gain an overall majority on its own, combine to form a majority government'.<sup>81</sup> In this last type of coalition the ruling parties retain their individual identity as competitors for votes and as representatives of distinct ideological and economic interests. Moreover, apart from coalition governments, there are also what Bogdanor calls 'parliamentary coalitions' - e.g. the 1977-78 Lib-Lab pact - where a minority government secures, subject to the requisite compromises in policy, the agreement of one or more rival parties to lend support to the administration for a determinate period<sup>82</sup> - and 'electoral coalitions' (such as that of the Liberal-SDP Alliance). Electoral coalitions are predicated upon an arrangement by distinct parties, designed to promote their cooperation and mutual political welfare, 'providing for the mutual withdrawal of candidates so as to avoid splitting the vote'.<sup>83</sup>

Coalitions, then, are a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Coalitionism as 'a first stage of Caesarism' simply fails to recognise this fact.

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81. V. Bogdanor, 'Introduction', 1-15, ibid., at 12.

82. Ibid., 5-7.

83. Ibid., 7.



Figure 3: Coalitions and electoral pacts in Britain since 1895

Coalition governments

| Dates of Formation and Dissolution | Prime Minister   | Parties Comprising Coalition  | Type of Coalition  |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| June 1895-December 1905            | Lord Salisbury, 1895-1902<br>A.J. Balfour, 1902-1905                                     | Conservatives and Liberal Unionist  | Prelude to fusion, achieved in 1912.   |
| May 1915-December 1916             | H.H. Asquith   | Liberals, Conservatives and Labour  | Wartime government of national unity   |
| December 1916-November 1918        | David Lloyd George   | Lloyd George Liberals, Conservatives and Labour                                       | Wartime government of national unity   |
| November 1918-October 1922         | David Lloyd George   | Lloyd George Liberals, and Conservatives  | Attempted fusion, but dissolved by Conservatives, 1922   |
| August 1931-May 1940               | J. Ramsay MacDonald, 1931-1935; Stanley Baldwin 1935-1937; Neville Chamberlain 1937-1940 | National Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Nationals, and until September 1932, Liberals | Attempted government of national unity. Prelude to fusion of National Labour and Liberal Nationals with Conservatives (1945 and 1966 respectively) |
| May 1940-May 1945                  | Winston Churchill  | Conservatives, Labour and Liberals  | Wartime government of national unity   |

Electoral pacts without coalition

|                                | Component parties  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1903: Gladstone-MacDonald pact | Liberals, and Labour Representation Committee (later Labour Party) |
| 1981-1986                      | Liberals and Social Democratic Party (SDP) Alliance                |

Source: V. Bogdanor, 11 (see footnote 81); updated.



A second major flaw in the neo-Gramscian perspective on Caesarism is revealed when we turn to consider the soundness of Hall's remarks, summarised a few pages back. The reader will recall that Hall's focus is less on coalitionism (at the time he wrote his article on Caesarism the Alliance had not yet been formed) and more on the 'transformist' solution to Britain's social and economic predicaments that the SDP purportedly represents. Caesarism is a part of this solution, a parliamentary centrist compromise initiated from above whose condition of possibility is class deadlock: the 'fundamental forces in conflict', locked in combat neither are in a position convincingly to win, leave open the door to a Caesarist alternative, namely, Social Democracy Mark II.

Let us put to one side the thorny issue of the sociological utility of defining Caesarism as a 'solution'; like Max Weber my own view is that politics and the state are best defined by the means specific to them,<sup>84</sup> as contrasted to the ends they fulfill, but I recognise that this is a bone of contention which requires in its justification an extended logical argument of the sort this Chapter will not attempt to provide. Let us also not quibble too much over the ambiguity of the expression 'fundamental forces' though it does constitute a source of partial bewilderment. At one moment the expression seems to refer to classes; at another to parties (Hall as a virulent anti-instrumentalist cannot assume automatic correspondence between these notions and the structures they profess to denote); while his illustration of what is in opposition lacks conceptual symmetry: thus in the last of the three longish passages that I quoted earlier (see pages 299-300 above),

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84. 'Sociologically, the state cannot be defined in terms of its ends. There is scarcely any task that some political association has not taken in hand, and there is no task that one could say has always been exclusive and peculiar to those associations which are designated as political ones ... Ultimately, one can define the modern state sociologically only in terms of the specific means peculiar to it, as to every political association, namely, the use of physical force', FMW, 77-8 = GPS, 493-4, emphasis in original.



and following his reference to 'fundamental classes', Hall actually then proceeds not, as one would expect, to counterpose labour to capital but rather labour (the 'working class and its allies') to 'Thatcherism' - a politico-ideological formation. Consider instead Hall's most central point in relation to Caesarism that the 'transformist' SDP, as Caesarism recrudescant, emerges and is sustained because of a condition of class stalemate 'in a period of progressive political polarisation along class lines'. Events since 1981 have dramatically and decisively undermined the credibility of this proposition as an explanation of (in his terms) the Caesarist phenomenon. The chief reason must already be obvious: it is that although it can categorically be shown that a situation of stalemate and polarisation no longer obtains today (it is dubious that it did in 1981, but let that pass) the Caesarist SDP is still with us and shows no sign of disappearing from the British political landscape.

No-one, least of all Hall, who has been observing British politics over the last few years could seriously support the contention that our situation in 1986 is one of equilibrium between 'the fundamental forces in conflict'. The evidence points to a very different conclusion. The strength of the British labour movement, the influence of Labour and socialist party politics, has markedly declined since 1981, while the forces ranged against the left have steadily established their ascendancy. Indicators of the labour movement's present subordinate position in the power structure are numerous, but the most important include: its failure in June 1983 to see elected a Labour administration, only to witness instead a landslide Conservative victory in which Labour 'lost one in five of its already low number of votes' and presided over a 'massive defection of supporters of



all classes, ages and genders';<sup>85</sup> the ongoing impact of the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts which have stripped from trade unions important legal immunities and have to all intents and purposes outlawed secondary picketing; the inexorable upward climb of unemployment to, even on official figures, 3.2 million,<sup>86</sup> and the effects of this on morale, trade union membership and industrial militancy; the crushing defeat inflicted on the miners, typically regarded as the labour movement's most formidable arm, in 1984-85 and the recriminations that have followed; a privatisation programme (nineteen companies since 1979) that has gone ahead in the teeth of bitter trade union resistance; and the erosion of civil liberties entailed in, for instance, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and foreshadowed in the draconian provisions of the Public Order Bill (which allow the police, among other things, powers to restrict the routes of demonstrations, specify the number of people who may lawfully assemble, and confine even further the already limited scope of peaceful picketing.) This catalogue could be supplemented; the sectors of education, local government and social services, the position of women and black people reveal facts that attest vividly to a 'working class and its allies' manifestly on the defensive. The 'corporate strength' spoken of by Hall has succumbed to enervation. Over the same period, the SDP has advanced as a political force. Invigorated by its electoral pact with the Liberals, it has gained in stature from some famous Alliance by-election

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85. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Labour's Lost Millions', Marxism Today, October 1983, 7-13, at 7, emphasis omitted. Hobsbawm's assessment continues: 'Only 35% of skilled workers voted Labour: down by more than a quarter. Only 39% of trade unionists supported the party they had founded: a similar drop. Women had shown a slight swing to Labour in 1979, but in 1983 they abandoned the party at a greater rate than men. 41% of the young (first-time voters aged 18-22) had chosen Labour in 1979 ... But in 1983 ... (o)nly 17% of first-time voters chose Labour, 3% less than chose the Alliance, 11% less than the Tories - while almost half did not bother to vote at all. Of those who bothered to vote only 29% put their cross against Labour candidates', 7, emphasis in original.
86. See the Department of Trade and Industry's British Business, 11-17 July 1986, 98.



victories (in this parliament, Portsmouth South, Brecon and Radnor, Ryedale); holds the balance in a host of local councils; while opinion poll ratings consistently suggest that between 20-30 per cent of the electorate would be inclined to vote for Alliance candidates at an imminent general election.

This profile - a severely weakened working class, Labour Party and socialist movement juxtaposed to a thriving Social Democracy - is one which directly contradicts Hall's theorisation of Caesarism; the discursive and material conditions of Caesarism, as Hall presents them, have dramatically changed yet the SDP continues to flourish. Similarly the 'political polarisation along class lines' to which Hall referred, a constitutive pre-requisite/feature of Caesarism, has also proved chimerical. As one commentator has recently remarked, the striking factor of contemporary British politics is its 'fissiparous' quality, the fragmentation of class allegiances and growth of calculative and instrumental attitudes to politics which is the very opposite of the 'polarisation' Hall speaks of. 'At all points on the political compass there is a secularisation of loyalties, a vertical disintegration of authority, a Balkanization of thought'.<sup>87</sup>

The bulk of my argument thus far has been designed to show that, even in its own terms, the Gramscian equation of Caesarism with coalitionism, SDP centrism and the rest is unconvincing. My third and last major criticism of the Gramscian approach is directed towards its use of the term Caesarism itself. The objection here is that the word Caesarism is employed in an almost wholly obscurantist manner. Put at its simplest: what bearing on the career of Julius Caesar does Hall et al.'s usage actually have? Why Caesarism? What possible connection to the historical Caesar can be ascertained

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87. R. Samuel, 'The Lost World of British Communism', New Left Review, 154, (November-December) 1985, 3-53, at 1, 2. The political fissiparousness of which Samuel speaks is lucidly documented by him on 1-14 of this article.



in such features as parliamentary coalition, centrist compromise and Social Democracy? Hail Divus Julius and William Rodgers! Now the predictable response to this will be to say that Gramsci himself employed Caesarism in a manner sufficiently elastic to include figures who were not in themselves great personalities, but this begs the question whether he was right to do so. (We have also seen that Gramsci is in any case ambivalent on this point.) My own view, to be defended later, is that an acceptable concept of Caesarism must confront the issue of the social-psychological dimension of leadership that Julius Caesar himself so brilliantly exemplified; and that to countenance a notion of Caesarism without a personalist element makes as little sense as speaking of 'capitalism' about a social system devoid of commodity production: in both cases a key meaning inscribed in the word has been obliterated. The actuality of Caesar as an individual, in short, must be integral to a term/concept which bears his name. The absurdities that are otherwise liable to flow from a usage which flippantly discounts the word's central referent could be no more evident that in passages of Schwarz's article where Caesarism is contrasted to populism,<sup>88</sup> even though Caesar was in his own lifetime recognised as the populist par excellence, and for very good reason (more on this in 5.6). We should not be slaves to concepts, nor should we be afraid to amend or develop them where they are found to be lacking. On the other hand, an elaboration which ends up as the antithesis of the relevant eponym has clearly gone too far, and down that road lies fatuity and nonsense: like making 'Reaganism' the semantic equivalent to, say, 'a foreign policy contrived to promote detente and end

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88. 'Conservatism and "caesarism"', 46, 50.



the arms race', or rendering 'Thatcherism' as 'a political programme whose historic task is the restoration of trade union power'.<sup>89</sup> Accordingly I suggest that we integrate into our alternative analysis of Caesarism the requirement (principle F) that the concept at issue bears a close and demonstrable relationship to the eponymous Caesar himself.

### 5.5 Culture, Civilisation and Caesarism: the Riencourt thesis

My survey of post-Weberian concepts of Caesarism ends with some considerations on a book which stands firmly and unapologetically in the tradition of philosophy of history. The book in question is Amaury de Riencourt's The Coming Caesars, first published in 1958.<sup>90</sup> I shall begin by summarising its thesis and once that is done shall explain why I believe that Riencourt's approach to

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89. I have not yet been able to find a British reference to Thatcher as Caesarist though Hugo Young hints at a broad Roman connection when he writes derisively of 'the Thatcher Imperium', The Guardian, 29 April 1986. At least one Continental interpreter, however, has not shared the reticence of his British counterparts. Edgardo Bartoli, explaining the Westland affair to an Italian audience, remarks that the incident revealed 'Mrs. Thatcher's Caesarism ... in crisis', La Repubblica 26/27 January 1986. Perhaps glimmering that even to the Italian public the meaning of 'Caesarism' might not be completely transparent, Bartoli is forced to elucidate: it is Thatcher's 'decisionism', her predisposition to by-pass the legitimate rights of her cabinet members as a collegial body to make policy, her bossy 'presidential' style of leadership, which evidently is in crisis. (Thanks to Marina Orsini for alerting me to and for translating this article).

The neo-Gramscian designation of the Thatcherite experiment (and its 1960s and 1970s radical right antecedents) is famously expressed in the concept of 'authoritarian populism' coined by Stuart Hall. Unlike Hall's reflections on the SDP, his analysis of Thatcherism has generally been extremely impressive and illuminating. The literature on 'authoritarian populism' is now vast, but see especially S. Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', originally in Marxism Today, January 1979, amended version in Hall and Jacques (eds.), op.cit., 19-39; S. Hall, 'The Battle for Socialist Ideas in the 1980s', Socialist Register 1982, eds. M. Eve and D. Musson, 1-19; and the debate between Hall and Jessop et al. in New Left Review (NLR) 147, (September-October) 1984, 32-60, NLR 151, (May-June) 1985, 115-24, NLR 153, (September-October) 1985, 87-101.

90. A. de Riencourt, The Coming Caesars (1958).



Caesarism is one we should not seek to emulate. Since the comments that follow are for the most part concentrated on just one work I shall, where suitable, revert to an earlier practice (designed to reduce the number of footnotes) of inserting page references into the main body of the text.

This is Rencourt's argument. The western world is on the brink of Caesarism, the culmination of a long process of social evolution and biocyclical development in which American Civilisation has triumphed over European Culture. This triumph is not one of conquest; nor is it the replacement of one society by another. Rather European Culture and American Civilisation represent different phases of the same society, broadly approximating youthful vigour and old age respectively. American Civilisation is the supercession of an earlier European Culture, but both belong to an identical human societal stock. The 'human society' which constitutes the western world is 'an entity in its own right, endowed with a life of its own, a collective life greater and far more lasting than the lives of the separate individuals who belong to it: it is a spiritual organism' (9-10). As such it is 'compelled to follow certain biological laws throughout its historical development: it is born, grows, blooms, decays, and eventually dies' (10; cf. 349). By tracing the operation of these laws we can interpret the past, judge the present and predict the future.

That these biological laws are no figment of the author's imagination is made evident by historical reflection. This reveals that the cycle the western world has been undergoing since the middle ages is a direct equivalent of a previous evolutionary rotation: 'Superimposing the thousand years of Greek Culture that started in Homeric days with the thousand years of European Culture that started at the dawn of the Gothic age, we can roughly estimate our present historical position' (11). The estimate is ominous. Europe is in irreversible economic, moral and political decline, its youthful



vitality all but spent; American power and influence is inexorably on the rise: 'The twentieth century is the dramatic watershed separating the Culture behind us from the Civilisation that lies ahead' (ibid). As that Civilisation becomes increasingly ossified, Caesarism is the result: the concentration of western power in the office and person of the chief executive.

The key terms of the above analysis are Culture, Civilisation and Caesarism. Let us now examine them a little more closely, concentrating on the unit that Riencourt himself deals with at some length, the 'human society' of America and Western Europe.

#### Culture:

predominates in young societies awakening to life, grows like a young organism endowed with exuberant vitality, and represents a new world outlook. It implies original creation of new values, of new religious symbols and artistic styles, of new intellectual and spiritual structures, new sciences, new legislation, new moral codes. It emphasises the individual rather than society, original creation rather than preservation and duplication, prototypes rather than mass production, an aesthetic outlook on life rather than an ethical one. Culture is essentially trail-blazing.<sup>91</sup>

#### Civilisation, by contrast,

represents the crystallization on a gigantic scale of the preceding Culture's deepest and greatest thoughts and styles, living on the petrified stock forms created by the parent Culture, basically uncreative, culturally sterile, but efficient in its mass organisation, practical and ethical, spreading over large surfaces of the globe, finally ending in a universal state under the sway of a Caesarian ruler: India's Asoka, China's Shih Huang-ti, Egypt's Thutmose II, Babylon's Hammurabi, pre-Columbian Peru's Inca Roka, Mexico's Aztec emperor Itzcoatl, Islam's Turkish sultans, and Rome's Caesars who organised under their personal rules the universal societies toward which all the higher Cultures tend when they pass into Civilisations.<sup>92</sup>

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91. Ibid., 10.

92. Ibid., 10-11.



In a previous cycle Greece constituted the Mediterranean world's epoch of Culture, Rome the epoch of Civilization; in the current cycle the New Greece is Europe, while the New Rome, master of all it touches, is the United States of America. Signs of the decline of European Culture were plainly apparent as far back as the Renaissance, signs of the rise of the new Civilization tangible in the European Puritan communities that first landed on the Eastern Seaboard during the seventeenth century. Shades marking transitional stages between waning Europeanism and American ascendancy are many and complex. But in the twentieth century, particularly after the Second World War, American Civilization has really come into its own, stark and devoid of complicating Cultural admixtures. Its Civilisation is identical to that of Rome in the latter years of the Republic - democratic, equalitarian, impersonal, standardised, urban, philistine, unitary, conservative and behaviouristically-minded, pragmatic, hero-worshipping, effeminate;<sup>93</sup> and the consequence of these Civilisation traits is also more than likely to parallel Rome's experience: America is soon to witness its own Caesars.

I shall not dwell on the causes Riencourt posits to explain the decline of Europe and the rise of America; this would take me too far from my subject. What interests me more directly is why American Civilisation should eventuate in Caesarism, an organic accretion of power condensed in the office of the chief executive, the President. Riencourt offers two major reasons - 'internal' (domestic) and international - to account for the approaching American Caesarism. In the first place, American Civilisation, like all previous Civilisations, is democratic and equalitarian in social structure and moral temper, suspicious of all aristocracies, even those of talent. Internally, American Civilisation is a mass, lowest-common-denominator, anonymous society, and yet just because of these properties Americans constantly seek psychological compensation

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93. Ibid., 269-91, where all these features are mentioned.



in a father figure who is able to relate directly, and in a personalised manner, to ordinary people. A political assembly such as the Congress is completely unable to provide a collective substitute for this psychological craving since an assembly 'is after all only a reproduction in miniature of (the people's) own faults and weaknesses' (329). Besides, 'the larger the masses, the more they display feminine traits by emphasising emotional reactions rather than rational judgment. They instinctively tend to look for masculine leadership as compensation - the leadership they can find in a strong man' (ibid).<sup>94</sup>

At the same time, the growth of democratic Civilisation brings with it 'the development of imperial expansion, military might, and foreign commitments' which all 'increase the power of the American Executive' (ibid). Wars and foreign crises naturally enhance the powers of the President against the Congress, while the President's position as Commander in Chief of his own country, his dominant position, mediated by his agents, in NATO, etc., all make him virtually omnipotent.

Riencourt is willing to acknowledge that a number of American Presidents - for instance, Grant (174), Coolidge, Harding and Hoover (221) - found themselves subordinates to Congress; he is also aware of the constitutional provision, voted by Congress after the Second World War, stipulating that no person can be President for more than two terms. But the general trend of social development is towards Caesarism, and no weak President or constitutional amendment is going to halt or reverse that process. And it is a process: Caesarism is not the outcome of a violent revolution; it is not the result of a coup d'état which then installs a temporary dictator as society's overlord. Caesarism 'is a slow, ... unconscious development that ends in a voluntary surrender of a free people escaping from Freedom to one autocratic master' (5).

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94. Emphasis in original. The emotional masses-Caesarism equation recurs throughout the book, but see esp. 148-9, 152-3.



In America's case, Caesarism is the consummation of a development which became discernible under Jackson's term of office (146-58) when the President emerges as a veritable Roman 'Tribune', representing 'the whole people as opposed to local and particular pressure groups and privileged minorities entrenched in legislatures, senates, and other assemblies' (78). Lincoln (166) and Franklin Roosevelt (232-46)<sup>95</sup> confirmed the trend and strengthened it such that the President increasingly becomes 'the indispensable man' (336) on whom, as an heroic personality, the nation's mood and desires are focused, and on whom, also, the people rely to champion their interests against those of 'Big Money', i.e. high finance and the multinational corporations (148).

Like Romieu, Riencourt insists that Roman Caesarism really commenced with Augustus (where it ended we are not informed); Julius Caesar is presented to us only as a forerunner of the imperialist-democratic system which bears his name. Similarly, past Presidents of the New Rome, such as Jackson and F. Roosevelt, are also described as pre-Cesarist figures, important anticipations of total power, no doubt, but still not the real thing. The first authentic American Augustus has still yet to attain office but the path to his supremacy is even more obstacle-free than it was in Rome of the Republic. This is not only because the American Tribunate resides in one person, rather than being dispersed among several as it was in the antique equivalent. It is also because 'democratic equality, with its concomitant conformism and psychological socialisation, is more fully developed in the United States than it has ever been elsewhere at any time' (340). Moreover, 'Caesarism in America does not have to challenge the Constitution as in Rome or engage in civil warfare and cross any fateful Rubicon. It can slip in quite naturally, discreetly, through constitutional channels' (340-1).

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95. Cf. ibid., 253, 257, 259, 263-5 on F. Roosevelt as a Caesarian-like figure.



The future looks bleak. American Caesarism is inevitable, but our responses to it are not predetermined. We may choose to abdicate our responsibilities and allow modern Caesarism total dominion, in which case the technology of future imperialist expansion will probably end in the nuclear holocaust. Or we may act in such a way as to modify Caesarism's worst features, and attempt to harness technology for constructive purposes.<sup>96</sup> However, we will only be truly safe from Caesarism when we manage to break the cycle in which our human species has hitherto turned. This will entail nothing less than a complete overcoming of our animal nature, and our entry 'into a new "geological" age'.<sup>97</sup>

All philosophies of history, Riencourt's included, raise peculiar difficulties for the social scientist who wishes to appraise them, but one difficulty is paramount: as inherently metaphysical constructions, in which facts pose as symbols, these philosophies are not strictly speaking amenable to empirical criticism at all. Evidence which sits (one would think) uncomfortably with the philosophical schema is easily rendered compatible with it by invoking a range of theoretical integrative devices. For instance, and as we have already seen, those American Presidents who remained captives of Congress are simply dismissed as insignificant aberrations from the main Caesarist trend. Or consider Riencourt's belief that Americans are fundamentally of a behaviourist, empiricist mental disposition. Nothing will shake him of this conviction, even when he has to acknowledge the fundamentalist and ecstatic strain in 'American' thought. As he puts it: 'The fact that many native American institutions ... proclaim the exact opposite (of behaviourism) means only that they are contrast-phenomena, psychological compensations for the prevailing American outlook on life' (277). With Riencourt, aspects

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96. Vagueness in the original, Ibid., 12.

97. Obscurity in the original, ibid., 327.



of social reality that appear to depart from his philosophical characterisations are invariably secondary or 'superficial' (280).

Yet even deprived of empirical criteria with which to judge his thesis, there are still good reasons to find oneself unconvinced by Riencourt's argument and to conclude that his approach to Caesarism is unattractive. One might, for instance, find slightly comical an argument which, in order to make evident the connections between Greece-Europe, Rome-America, is compelled to engage in some extraordinary historical contortions. Some examples: Rome experienced 'a rudimentary Industrial Revolution in the second century B.C.' (171); F. Roosevelt's 'alliance with Edward Flynn, boss of the Bronx, was comparable to Caesar's reliance on Clodius' machine against Milo's "Tammany Hall"' (240); the 'New Deal started in Rome when Caius Gracchus pushed through his Lex Frumentaria (242); the 'north side of Rome's Forum had become the Classical world's "Wall Street"' (244). Or one might be amazed to read that Rome's early imperialism was defensive and reluctant (71, 113); that Republican Rome was a society experiencing 'steady democratisation' (109); that Rome was an 'open' society (123). And there are other aspects of Riencourt's interpretation of history and of Caesarism that the reader may find off-putting. There is the hyperbole: Americans 'research endlessly but rarely contemplate' (278).<sup>98</sup> There is the crassness ('an increasingly feminine public opinion will look increasingly for a virile Caesar': 289), the occasional non sequitur ('Doctrinaire socialism of the European type has no possibility of development in America because it already exists as a psychological reality': 281) and contradiction: 'hero worship and bossism are marked American features' (341), yet Americans 'have no feeling of awe or reverence for other human beings' (ibid)!<sup>99</sup> And most

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98. Emphasis omitted.

99. For other dubious propositions see ibid., 319, 346, 350.



of all there is the bathos - one works one's way through over three hundred pages of text to find only ten actually devoted to the Roman Caesars (the paradigm case, let us recall, of those Caesars destined to be resurrected in our own epoch) and the lion's share of those pages are themselves concentrated almost exclusively on one figure, Augustus.<sup>100</sup>

All this does not encourage confidence in Riencourt's general approach, even though one is more than willing to agree that the President's powers are formidable, that the direct election of the President by the people as a whole invests his office with a legitimacy which can seriously undermine Congressional authority,<sup>101</sup> that a President possesses the capacity to destroy our planet. But there are many other approaches which could and do accommodate such insights without making us hostage to a theory with all sorts of undesirable consequences. Chief among those undesirable consequences is the commitment to a view which construes societies as unitary Subjects<sup>102</sup> governed by cyclical motion. This is not, in my judgment, a compelling historical perspective and, in the case of Riencourt's treatise, it fails even to provide the extended analysis of Caesarism the book's title seemed to promise.

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100. Riencourt's account of Augustus contains statements which are quite simply fantastic. For instance: If Octavian 'became Augustus, invested with the full "imperial" dignity inherited from his adoptive father, it was because public opinion wanted it so, not because of his own personal ambition', 336. See also 338 where Augustus is depicted as a 'representative' of 'the new dominant middle class'. I know of not a single modern historian of this period who would sanction such remarks.

101. Cf. A.M. Schlesinger Jr. on the 'plebiscitarian' presidency of Richard Nixon: The Imperial Presidency (New York: 1973), 247-8. Schlesinger's analysis is critically reviewed by T.L. Lowi, 'Presidential Power: Restoring the Balance', Political Science Quarterly, 100, 2 (1985), 185-213.

102. The problems to which this commitment leads have been well rehearsed by P. Hirst and P. Woolley in their Social Relations and Human Attributes (1982). See for instance their comments on Hertz, 28-31.



## 5.6 Caesarism as a form of populism

The previous Sections of this Chapter have established a number of principles which, I have argued, require being respected if we are serious in our quest to construct an empirically credible concept of Caesarism. Admittedly, those principles are in themselves all fairly banal, but then it is surprising how often in social science the obvious is flagrantly ignored. They are re-stated below as they emerged from the foregoing critical analysis, and hence without the imposition upon them of any order of priority. A tenable notion of Caesarism should:

- A. be capable of delineating the Caesarist regime's political character
- B. be factually accurate
- C. locate the class context of Caesarism
- D. identify the personal, 'heroic' attributes of Caesarist leadership
- E. avoid anachronism
- F. bear a clear relationship to the eponymous Caesar himself.

Needless to say, one could add to these postulates; moreover, mere conformity to them could still issue in a concept of Caesarism which is logically problematic, empirically useless, or discursively controvertible. But they do at least suggest certain minimal guidelines which I take as axiomatically important to abide by, while their explicit presentation offers the reader a check-list against which to assess the consistency or otherwise of my own formulation. This will not preclude criticisms of my own concept of Caesarism which fall outside the principles recorded above; to the contrary, it should make such problems as there are, and which I have failed to anticipate, all the more glaring.

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The rest of the Chapter seeks to present an alternative concept of Caesarism, building on the insights of authors already examined in this



thesis but distinct from any of their contributions taken in isolation. My contention is that Caesarism is most sensibly construed as a form of populism, a proposition I shall attempt to establish through historical analysis. However it is well known that populism is itself a confused and much-banded-about term and the wisdom of pressing upon it still more conceptual baggage might be immediately open to doubt and disputation; clearly, before we can confront our empirical material the theoretical status of populism must be elucidated. We are therefore fortunate in having our task made that much easier by the appearance in recent times of two works (one book, one essay) which have made a significant contribution to setting the co-ordinates of this complex concept. The authors of these works are Margaret Canovan and Ernesto Laclau; and by way of preparation for the notion of Caesarism that is to come, let me examine their ideas, though only insofar as they are germane to our own topic.

#### 5.6.1 Canovan and Laclau on 'populism'

Canovan maintains that a recurrent error of previous theorisations of populism has been the mistaken endeavour to reduce what is a manifold set of phenomena to a single, unitary core or entity, be it one kind of social movement, a specific class or class ideology, or even an historical process, such as modernisation, to which populism is seen as a response. She suggests that we treat the term 'populism' as referring to a range of phenomena, connected by 'family resemblances'.<sup>103</sup>

The two broad families Canovan locates in the relevant literature on populism and, to some extent, in the real world outside she calls 'agrarian' and 'political'. The former populism 'is a kind of rural radicalism', a

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103. M. Canovan, Populism (1981), 7.



'type of movement with a particular kind of socioeconomic base (peasants or farmers), liable to arise in particular socioeconomic circumstances (especially modernisation of one sort or another) and perhaps sharing a particular socioeconomic programme.'<sup>104</sup> So, with 'agrarian populism', it is the rural character of a social movement that is emphasised, its 'socioeconomic' causes and conditions of existence, aspects which help distinguish this type of populism from its 'political' counterpart in which the accent 'is much less upon any particular socioeconomic base or setting, and much more upon political characteristics. When the term is applied to devices of direct democracy like the referendum, to mobilisation of mass passions, to idealisations of the man in the street, or to politicians' attempts to hold together shaky coalitions in the name of "the people", what those who talk of "populism" have in mind is a particular kind of political phenomenon where the tensions between the elite and the grass roots loom large'.<sup>105</sup>

That 'agrarian' and 'political' populisms are not internally homogenous categories but actually subsume a number of discrete sub-types under their respective rubrics will become clear presently. Note at this stage, however, that even the basic distinction is one that is often compounded in reality. A case in point is the farmers' radicalist populism which emerged in the United States in the early 1880s as the 'Farmers' Alliance' movement, and whose dénouement was the extraordinary, if short-lived, People's Party.<sup>106</sup>

Consisting of a movement whose geographical base was the Southern and Western states, this brand of populism was a bold and imaginative response/initiative to: the abuse of power perpetrated by the railroad corporations; debilitating credit difficulties aggravated by the 'crop-lien' system, and by the post-

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104. Ibid., 8.

105. Ibid., 9.

106. The rest of this paragraph is an abstract of ibid., 17-58.



Civil War return to the gold standard; and the evident failure of extant political parties to represent farming interests. The Farmers' Alliance, with its stress on retail co-operatives, its rhetoric of hard-working, honest, simple 'producers' versus plutocrats, parasites and idlers, its alignment of farmers with industrial (particularly railway) workers against those who were thought to profit from the people's misery, its demands for concerted government action 'against the monopolists in charge of transport and money',<sup>107</sup> coupled to the belief that the only legitimate government was a 'people's' government, was a movement that shook the foundations of conventional American party politics. Yet, ironically, it was the formation of the farmers' own party which accelerated the demise, rather than the progress, of the populist movement itself. After some initial success in the 1892 Presidential election, when the People's Party's candidate, James Weaver, secured in excess of one million votes, the Party began to disintegrate over two key problems it proved unable to transcend: the sectional divide of North and South could not be bridged to form a national party (the ideological hostilities provoked by the Civil War remained intense, and ethnic prejudices strong); nor could a consensus be established on the question of whether and how the Party should widen its appeal to attract a broader constituency of support. By the end of the century the People's Party was finished as a political force of any consequence, though aspects of the Farmers' Alliance programme lived on within the communities that had first made it flourish, and within, too, a Democratic Party which had succeeded in July 1896 in outmanoeuvring their rival by nominating William Jennings Bryan, a veteran quasi-populist figure, as the Democratic Presidential candidate, and by adopting some of the more vote-catching aspects of the People's Party's policies.

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107. Ibid., 28.



This sketch of farmers' radicalism indicates how 'agrarian' and 'political' elements of populism may fuse together: farmers' radicalism sprung from the soil it cultivated; it was a social movement, with a definite programme, grappling imaginatively with the 'socioeconomic' problems that confronted it, of which corporate exploitation in a period of expanding capitalist accumulation was the most severe. Simultaneously, the movement 'also had a prominent political aspect as a grass-roots revolt against the elite of plutocrats, politicians and experts. Populists were passionately democratic, evincing a Jacksonian faith in the common man and a stress on popular control over government'.<sup>108</sup> They created their own party. Caesarist populism we will see later, also possesses 'agrarian' and 'political' dimensions, though the precise character of these differs in major respects from the sort of populism we have just been examining.

The distinction between 'agrarian' and 'political' populisms discussed in Canovan's book generates the following typology:<sup>109</sup>

#### Agrarian Populisms

1. farmers' radicalism (e.g. the U.S. People's Party)
2. peasant movements (e.g., the East European Green Rising)
3. intellectual agrarian socialism (e.g., the narodniki)

#### Political Populisms

4. populist dictatorship (e.g. Peron)
5. populist democracy (i.e., calls for referendums and "participation")
6. reactionary populism (e.g., George Wallace and his followers)
7. politicians' populism (i.e., broad, nonideological coalition-building that draws on the unificatory appeal of "the people").

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108. Ibid., 58.

109. Ibid., verbatim, 13.



For a sustained analysis of these populisms in all their uniqueness and variety the reader should consult Canovan's book itself. I shall not attempt a précis of it here, nor shall I describe or enlarge upon her interesting use of Wiles' ideas to show how populist 'elements' can be detached from one another, or combined to form determinate populist 'syndromes' (e.g. authoritarian populism, revolutionary populism).<sup>110</sup> Instead, restricting myself to those points with most direct relevance for Caesarism, let me concentrate on only one of the sub-types mentioned above, namely, 'populist dictatorship' for it is in that category that I believe 'Caesarism' is most appropriately inserted.

Common to all populisms, including populist dictatorship, are two fundamental themes: populisms universally involve 'some kind of exaltation of and appeal to "the people", and all are in one sense or another antielitist'.<sup>111</sup> Despite appearances, this statement does not introduce back-door reductionism into the concept because, as Canovan points out, these two themes are, by themselves, actually too nebulous to constitute any single species of populism. As she says '"the people", ... is one of the slipperiest concepts in the political vocabulary, capable of meaning many different things in different circumstances. It can refer (as it did in narodnichestvo or in Peasant Party rhetoric) to the peasants; to the "producers" of U.S. Populist platforms; to Peron's descamisados;<sup>112</sup> to the electorate ...; to the nation; to everyone except one's political opponents; or quite frequently (and often deliberately) to no determinate group at all'.<sup>113</sup> Antielitism is only 'marginally more

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110. Ibid., 291-3. The article of Peter Wiles that Canovan believes 'represented a theoretical breakthrough' is his 'A Syndrome, Not A Doctrine: Some Elementary Theses on Populism', in G. Ionescu and E. Gellner (eds.), Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics (1970), 166-79.

111. Canovan, ibid., 294.

112. = 'the "shirtless ones", Argentina's equivalent of the sans culottes', ibid., 144.

113. Ibid., 295.



precise', though 'the rhetoric of the underdog, the pathos of the "little man", his struggles, and his virtues'<sup>114</sup> would seem to be a constant. But what is actually necessary to constitute a populism is not the simple coalescence of these ambiguous motifs but the way they are specifically enunciated and attached to other social elements; it is the ensemble of these motifs or elements which, only in their totality, comprise any specific populism. Hence, with regard to 'populist dictatorship', which Canovan abbreviates as 'the familiar phenomenon of a charismatic leader who builds a dictatorship by appealing past the established elite and political system to "the people"', the decisive elements which mark off the category and the ensemble it designates as unique are the combination of: a. a specific kind of leadership or regime which is at once autocratic, genuinely popular to subordinate groups,<sup>115</sup> and vocal in its claim to embody popular sovereignty (its legitimising principle); b. a related kind of mobilisation from above, which is not tantamount to saying that the masses so mobilised are merely the passive and irrational instruments of the populist demagogue.<sup>116</sup>

It is significant that in the category of 'populist dictatorship' Canovan chooses to place not only Peronism and the Populism of Huey Long, examples with which she deals at some length, but also Caesarism and Bonapartism, though about the latter two specimens she has, regrettably, nothing to say.<sup>117</sup> The omission is comprehensible; a book can only cover so much material. Nonetheless, as regards Caesarism at any rate, her pointer seems to be well founded, subject to certain qualifications. These are that we reaffirm the intersection of 'agrarian' and 'political' populisms, a stratagem which her flexible typology can easily accommodate: Caesarism is unthinkable

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114. Ibid., 295, 297.

115. Ibid., 150.

116. Ibid., 142.

117. Ibid., 137.



without the mobilisation of an army whose legions comprised a small-holding peasantry and rural proletariat whose most constant demand was land; that we amend slightly, perhaps pedantically, her category to read 'populist autocracy' in recognition of the problems (already highlighted in 5.3) the concept of dictatorship seems prone to occasion; and that we supplement Canovan's ideas to take account of one very pertinent observation of Ernesto Laclau. The first two of my riders will be integrated into the concept of Caesarism as I shall subsequently develop it; the third let me attend to now via a detour necessary for its contextualisation.

If Canovan is happy to view populism in a relatively catholic way, Laclau's preference is to employ the concept in a much more circumscribed manner. From his perspective, populism is strictly an aspect of the ideological realm, though he recognises that social movements function as bearers of ideology and to that extent may also, in a casual sense, be called populist. In Laclau's rendition of the term, '"populism" alludes to a kind of contradiction which only exists as an abstract moment of an ideological discourse',<sup>118</sup> or, in other words, populism is that component of a class ideology (any class ideology) defined by its specific mode of address/rhetoric ('interpellation'), namely a popular-democratic mode which posits 'the people' as an antagonistic force in implacable opposition to the power bloc and its ruling culture. Every aspect of this definition is integral to Laclau's argument. Populism is not an ideology in its own right, but part of an ideology. Populist interpellations are not necessarily wed to any particular class ideology,<sup>119</sup> nor are all 'popular-democratic' interpellations populist. They

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118. E. Laclau, 'Towards a Theory of Populism', in the same author's Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory (1977), 143-98, 176. Laclau's approach to the question of ideology is examined more fully in another essay printed in this book, i.e. 'Fascism and Ideology', 81-142, esp. 100-11.

119. For the context see ibid., 160, 166.



only become so when they symbolically present the relationship between people and power bloc as one of indissoluble contradiction or antagonism; and such populist interpellations only become effective to the extent that they resist the attempt of dominant classes to incorporate them into the prevailing moral-political order. Cultural and political supremacy (hegemony) is conditional on the ruling class, or, more precisely, its commanding fractions,<sup>120</sup> being constantly able to assimilate adversarial discourses and practices, emasculating their radical potential, and transforming them into humdrum, semi-respectable, manageable 'simple difference'.<sup>121</sup> Populism is an assault on this respectability, prompted by, while at the same time profoundly exacerbating, a crisis within the power bloc itself. As Laclau explains:

This crisis can either be the result of a fracture in the power bloc, in which a class or class fraction needs, in order to assert its hegemony, to appeal to "the people" against established ideology as a whole; or of a crisis in the ability of the system to neutralise the dominated sectors - that is to say, a crisis of transformism. Naturally, an important historical crisis combines both ingredients. What should be clear, however, is that the "causes" of populism have little to do with a determinate stage of development, as functionalist theses suppose.<sup>122</sup>

Moreover, the response to the crisis will differ according to whether the populism that greets it springs from the dominant or dominated classes:

When the dominant bloc experiences a profound crisis because a new fraction seeks to impose its hegemony but is unable to do so within the existing structure of the power bloc, one solution can be a direct appeal by this fraction to the masses to develop their antagonism towards the State ... this was the case with Nazism ... For the dominated sectors, ideological struggle consists in an expansion of the antagonism implicit in democratic interpellations and in an articulation of it with their own class discourses" (Mao and Tito are cited as examples of leaders of the dominated class who recognised the importance of populist discourse: PB).<sup>123</sup>

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120. David Fernbach clarifies this term in his Introduction to Marx's Surveys from Exile, details op.cit., 11: 'The German "Fraktion" has the primary meaning of a parliamentary party, but Marx also uses it for sections of a class that are the basis of different political parties'. Laclau, like most neo-Gramscians, tends to use the term in the second sense identified by Fernbach.

121. Laclau, op.cit., 161.

122. Ibid., 175, emphasis omitted.

123. Ibid., 173-4.



This sketch of Laclau's position enables me now to focus on that contribution of his which I think needs to be integrated into Canovan's overall framework. What I have in mind is the implications that follow from his remark, quoted earlier, that 'the "causes" of populism have little to do with a determinate stage of development, as functionalist theses suppose'. Populism, in the form that Laclau defines it, is capable of emerging in any modern 'serious crisis'.<sup>124</sup> But if populism is not intrinsically related to 'a determinate stage of development', then, potentially, we might be able to locate it in a variety of epochs and modes of production. In short, Laclau's approach enables us to de-couple the concept of populism from the modern era (the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), and encourages us to search for incidences of the phenomenon which pre-date that period. It is true that Canovan hints at such a possible extension of the concept in her reference to Caesarism and Bonapartism, but then the Caesarism and Bonapartism she alludes to appear in her text more as categorial devices i.e. synonyms for 'populist dictatorship')<sup>125</sup> than real historical social structures. Laclau is less ambiguous though to be sure his comments remain largely suggestive,<sup>126</sup> waiting for others to enlarge upon them. It would have been useful to have had more guidance on this matter than we actually receive from him; but Laclau has helped release us from the shackles of modernist assumptions, and for that we can only be grateful.

Having said this, I should add that in every sense other than the one I have just identified I believe Canovan's analysis is either the equal of Laclau's or actually advances the discussion beyond the latter's position.

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124. Ibid., 176. He adds 'in Western Europe'.

125. See Canovan, op.cit., 260.

126. See his remarks on Jacobinism in op.cit., 116-7, esp. n. 40, 174-5; and, more obliquely, his judgement on Thomas Münzer, 167-9.



Let me conclude this digest of their ideas by showing what I mean so that my own concept of Caesarism, dependent as it is upon an interpretation of populism, will be the more understandable.

Both authors, of course, grant the importance of a certain kind of rhetoric ('interpellation') as constitutive of populist discourse: for Canovan this is the 'exaltation of and appeal to "the people"', together with an empathetic celebration of 'the underdog'; for Laclau it is a specific kind of 'popular-democratic' mode of public address. Both sense the inherently hostile payload that populist language carries: populism is anti-*élitist*, is studiously and frankly antagonistic to the 'power bloc'. There is also partial accord on the conditions that underlie populism. Laclau stresses social crises; so does Canovan, though because of her more expansive definition of populist phenomena she can also admit into her categories variants which may actually thrive in mundane times,<sup>127</sup> or which may even become institutionalised in state and civil society: e.g. the 'populist democratic' processes of initiative, recall and referendum that operate in the Swiss system, and to a lesser extent in California.<sup>128</sup> Both recognise the link between populism and ideology but whereas Laclau's stance completely restricts his analysis to the ideological arena, Canovan, crucially, extends her concept of populism to cover social movements, political styles and regimes.<sup>129</sup> Finally, both theorists discern that populism may be mobilised from above or from below<sup>130</sup>

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127. Thus her category of politicians' populism, a style of politics in which politicians 'claim to speak for the whole people rather than for any faction', Canovan, op.cit., 260.

128. Ibid., 172-224.

129. 'Populist dictatorship' is just such a regime.

130. An example of the former would be populist dictatorship; examples of the latter include the previously cited Farmers' Alliance and the post-First World War, eastern European peasant movement known as the Green (Up)Rising, on which see ibid., 112-35.



(populism of the dominant or dominated classes), yet, once more, Canovan's treatment allows for more interpretative plasticity than Laclau's. Laclau's emphasis is set firmly on the manner in which classes and class fractions employ populist language and techniques; inasmuch as individual leaders of populist 'movements' appear in his schema, they do so in a purely residual way. Peron, for instance, is dissolved as a man into Peronism; he appears as the sum of his conditions, the agent and mouthpiece of populist interpellations. Similarly Hitler, Mao and Tito receive only passing mention; their leadership qualities are bracketed for the purposes of the discussion. Canovan's attitude is quite different. Though clearly aware that populist mobilisation from above must, by definition, have a social base to mobilise, though conscious that such mobilisation must, to be effective, attract allies and represent determinate social interests, she in addition makes much more prominent the ambitions, capacities and actions of individuals who become great leaders precisely through their ability to exploit populist possibilities in times of crisis.<sup>131</sup> This observation, confirmed constantly in world history and world politics is, for me, vital. For it alerts us to the fact that domination is not only sought and achieved by classes, fractions of classes and élites; it is also sought and achieved by those individual men and women whose primary political purpose in life is their own self-aggrandisement and pre-eminence. To put the matter bluntly: Hitler (a populist figure in Laclau's account) did not rule on behalf of monopoly capital, whatever consequences his rule had for that capital formation; he ruled for himself and crushed mercilessly any sign of genuine opposition from whatever quarter it came. Julius Caesar is not in the same autocratic

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131. For this reason she devotes considerable portions of her book to outlining the careers and programmes of such men as Stamboliski, Peron, (Huey) Long, (George) Wallace and (Enoch) Powell.



league as Hitler, even if 1,192,000 of his enemies are reckoned to have perished in the wars he prosecuted<sup>132</sup> (this figure excludes the number of Roman citizens who fell) - but like Hitler he was no one's or no class's tool or stooge.

#### 5.6.2 An alternative concept of Caesarism proposed

'Caesarism' may be defined as a form of populism provoked by a major social crisis and distinguished by the following combination of characteristics:

- i. It is a pre-modern populism 'from above' which feeds off agrarian and urban discontent and which, correspondingly, mobilises social forces from both countryside and city.
- ii. Like all populisms it employs the antagonistic rhetoric and address of 'the people' versus the élite or power bloc, and displays, moreover, a personal style and manner that is accessible to, and popular with, the subordinate classes.
- iii. The political regime that this kind of populism establishes is of a military and autocratic sort.
- iv. The aforementioned populist political regime is marked by a leadership which evinces a rare syncretic quality, that is, it proves capable of enlisting and holding together heterogeneous elements of state and society which, without such leadership, would remain socially dispersed.

The narrative that ensues will seek to develop these points, though I must once more underline the consideration that the populist nature of Caesarism emerges from, and is determined by, all four 'elements' in concert. Caesarist populism, in other words, is a structure; as such, it derives its character from the unity of its parts.

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132. M. Gelzer, Caesar, Politician and Statesman (1968), transl. P. Needham, 284, whose source is the Elder Pliny.



- i. Nature of the social crisis; mobilisation from above of agrarian and urban discontent.

The general social crisis that shook the foundations of the Roman Republic and finally reduced it to rubble is our necessary point of departure. Only if we understand the nature of this crisis will we be able adequately to locate Caesarism's conditions of possibility. In what follows all dates, unless otherwise specified, are B.C.; and the genealogical divisions demarcated conform to conventional periodisation: we shall speak of the Early Republic (509-287),<sup>133</sup> the Middle Republic (287-133),<sup>134</sup> and the Late Republic (133-31).<sup>135</sup>

Republican Rome collapsed from within fundamentally because its own city-state institutions proved in the long run incapable of coping with the consequences of imperial expansion.<sup>136</sup> Three consequences of empire building are particularly important for our subject: the growth of a proletarian army that would come increasingly to look to victorious generals to reward it with booty, cash and, crucially, land; hardship among the rural small holders and the urban plebs; and the emergence of men, the so-called populares,

133. The first date supposedly marks the overthrow of the Etruscan dynasty and the creation of the republic; the second, the final act in the struggle of rich plebeians to break into the citadel of senatorial power: henceforth they and their erstwhile patrician enemies would rule the Republic together, and the élite of both orders would constitute the Roman 'nobility' i.e. 'descendents of all those who at some time had held the highest public office, whether in the form of the dictatorship, the consulship, or the consular tribunate', M. Gelzer, The Roman Nobility (1969), transl. R. Seager, 52.

134. The latter date symbolises the importance that historians of antiquity attach to the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus and the agrarian reform movement he inaugurated. More on him below.

135. By choosing 31 (in which Octavian effectively vanquished Antony's forces at the battle of Actium) I am guided by Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 350.

136. In this interpretation I follow Gelzer, Caesar (op.cit.), 6-26, and P.A. Brunt, Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic (1971), chapter 1.



who would mobilise the discontent of the subordinate classes to challenge the senatorial oligarchy.

During the Early and for most of the Middle Republic, the Roman army had been composed in the main of a rustic, citizen militia, the majority of whom would have been small peasant farmers. In those days, excepting periods of great emergency, military service was restricted to those (sedentary) citizens who owned sufficient landed property to be registered by the census in the Roman state's five class system, itself internally stratified on a property basis. Men who belonged to these five 'classes' were known as assidui, and were expected to provide arms and accoutrement commensurate with their means. The remainder of the citizenry were the proletarii or capite censi who, unable to afford martial equipment, were debarred from military service as a general rule, though a major threat to Rome which required supplementary forces would witness the state itself defraying the costs of their military requirements. This happened for instance in the Second Punic War of 218-201 (the war against Hannibal).

As the Republic historically developed, however, an expedient was steadily transformed into a convention. Assidui suffered marked depletion; proletarii, concomitantly, increased in number and were probably already the majority of citizens by the time of Hannibal's depredations.<sup>137</sup> War - the engine of Rome's imperial might, the medium and instrument of her awesome power - inflicted a heavy toll of the small farmer. He might fall in battle, or die of disease. He might return to his farm after a long campaign overseas to find it in total disarray, fields unploughed, crops unpicked, abandoned

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137. Brunt, op.cit., 13-14.



by those charged to look after it in his absence. The farm itself might have been devastated by war and requisition, or by roaming gangs. If he was lucky enough to avoid these catastrophes, bad harvests might strike him down or drive him further into debt and dependence (he might, for example, be reduced to someone's bondsman.) At the same time, the state's demand for military manpower was increasing and only the swelling ranks of rustic proletarii would be able to satisfy it. Provinces had to be won and garrisoned; enemies repulsed. To begin with, the Roman state responded to the situation portrayed above through a formalistic fiction. By lowering the census property qualification, proletarii could artificially be elevated into a higher station (i.e. the fifth class, though of course they would still require military provision), a practice that has been well documented by Emilio Gabba in his study of census manipulations and their significance.<sup>138</sup> To Gabba, the process of property qualification reductions affords a window from which to view 'the stages in the (rural: PB) proletarianisation of the Roman citizen militia'<sup>139</sup> and the rise 'of military professionalism of which the chief characteristics may be defined as continuity of service and a mercenary outlook'.<sup>140</sup> Marius' much-discussed contribution to the reform of the army structure must be seen in this context. Essentially, Marius stripped away the old pretences and, as consul in 107, and then again from 104-100 (entrusted

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138. E. Gabba, 'The Origins of the Professional Army at Rome: the "proletarii" and Marius' reform', in his Republican Rome, The Army and the Allies (1976), transl. P.C. Cuff, 1-19.

139. Ibid., 5. Gabba claims that there were, pre-Marius, two major reductions in the census minimum, the first around 214-212, the second around 133-123 (ibid., 5-7). That interpretation of the census figures is, however, contested by Brunt in his 'The Army and the Land in the Roman Revolution', Journal of Roman Studies, 52, (1962), 69-86 at 74, n.55.

140. Gabba, op.cit., 11. The word 'continuity' is misleading if one follows Brunt's view that the average length of time a man would serve in the legions during the Late Republic would probably be about six to seven years ('Army and Land', 80-1). Both authors would nonetheless agree that, in comparison to the old militia system in which assidui were to be discharged after a year, terms of service were protracted.



respectively with the task of defeating Jugurtha and, afterwards, the Cimbri and Teutones) brazenly resorted to openly recruiting soldiers (volunteers, to boot) from the propertyless. Breaking with the farce of census casuistry, he also intensified the extent to which the army became proletarianised, full of men of the sort described by one authority as 'the younger sons of yeomen whose farms brooked no subdivision, tenants who wished to own rather than rent land, and day labourers whose work in the fields hardly sufficed for subsistence'.<sup>141</sup> After Marius, the legions would be solidly proletarian in composition; the conscripted would still, however, outnumber volunteers.<sup>142</sup> The creation of standing-armies, stationed for long periods in the provinces was, as Gelzer puts it, 'a development with far-reaching social and political consequences':

For the emergence of the soldier committed to serve for as long as he was fit for service immediately faced the state with the problem of providing for the veteran. According to Roman concepts this was, in the first instance, a question of providing him with land. The generals were faced with the duty of championing this claim, but at the same time they gained a new and imposing clientela. As a result the figure of the victorious general acquired political power of unprecedented dimensions, and it is clear that the greatest danger for the (senatorial: PB) oligarchy lay in the increased power that could now be won by individuals in this way.<sup>143</sup>

Land distribution and land allotments were the natural demand of those who still eked out a meagre living from the land, and of those who had left it, voluntarily or through compulsion, to join the army. (Brunt says that the Italian regions most affected by rural poverty and debt are 'almost a catalogue of the recruiting areas for the Roman legions'.<sup>144</sup>) The power of ambitious generals to enlist a personal following would have been seriously undermined had the senatorial oligarchy, to whom Gelzer refers, taken even

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141. Brunt, 'Army and Land', 72.

142. Brunt, Social Conflicts, 15.

143. Gelzer, Caesar, 9-10.

144. 'Army and Land', 73.



the most basic precautions. The senate could have responded to the plight of the impoverished through a limited distribution of public land; the army's loyalty to the Republic could have been fostered by ensuring that 'the state would pay (it) regular bounties on discharge';<sup>145</sup> Augustus saw the wisdom of such a move and acted on it.<sup>146</sup> Instead, myopic and unsympathetic, Rome's ruling class did nothing; and, with a growing sense of alienation from Republican institutions, the rural plebs donned armour, glanced cynically at their rulers, and hitched their fortune to the military juggernaut of the commander who seemed best placed to ease their burdens. In the final analysis 'it was the soldiers who brought down the Republic'.<sup>147</sup> And since these soldiers 'were nearly all recruited from the country folk',<sup>148</sup> one might say that the Republic was destroyed by the rural proletariat. One would immediately have to add: led by generals; their role in bringing down the Republic was indispensable and, ultimately, decisive.

The second consequence of imperial expansion - rural and urban plebeian hardship - overlaps to some degree with the first. We have already seen the existence of a growing rustic proletariat and have explained the plight faced by the small peasant farmer. But the latter's problems were made even more grave by another development of the Middle and Late Republic. I will turn to this now, and then afterwards direct some comments towards the position of the Roman urban proletariat.

The primary source of private profit in the Middle and especially the Late Republic lay in the exploitation of the 'provinces'. These were conquered

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145. Brunt, Social Conflicts, 110, my emphasis. Cf. 122, and Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 357-8.

146. A.H.M. Jones, Augustus (1970), 110-12.

147. Brunt, 'Army and Land', 70.

148. Brunt, Social Conflicts, 8. Urban plebs formed only a fraction of the men serving in the legions. Freedmen, constituting the majority of plebs in Rome in the Late Republic, were ineligible for military service (though an emergency might see them being conscripted), and those free born urban citizens who were drafted into the army procured for themselves a reputation for being refractory and undisciplined.



regions outside Italy, like Asia (modern Turkey and Syria), Spain and northern Africa over which a (usually proconsul) governor was granted imperium - military and jurisdictional authority with a broad discretionary remit<sup>149</sup> to ensure order abroad, to protect Roman citizens resident there, to promote the development of Roman and Latin colonies,<sup>150</sup> and generally to add to the prestige and influence of the imperial power. The indigenous peoples of these areas, for whom the Roman state had little solicitude, paid a heavy price for being provincials; the rapacity of governors and their staffs was notorious. Verres' three year governorship of Sicily is reputed to have milked from the unfortunates in his sphere of influence assets worth ten million denarii; Caesar, whose reputation as a governor was never sullied by official charges of extortion, could still make enough money in his tenure in Hither Spain to repay his considerable debts (Jones reckons five or six million denarii) and have enough left over to become a rich man.<sup>151</sup> The wealth flowed from a variety of channels, and governors were by no means the only beneficiaries.

If governors might enrich themselves through the seizure of booty (e.g. the pillaging of temples), the sale of slaves and hostages, bribes 'from foreign potentates and communities for political services' rendered,<sup>152</sup>

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149. See the Appendix to P.A. Brunt and J.M. Moore (eds.), Res Gestae Divi Augusti (1967), 83-5, esp. 83 for the contrast between imperium and mere potestas.

150. On the political status of the Roman and Latin colonies, see H.H. Scullard, From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome from 133 B.C. to A.D. 68 (1976; fourth edn.), 16-19.

151. A.H.M. Jones, 'Ancient Empires and the Economy: Rome', in the same author's book (ed. P.A. Brunt), The Roman Economy. Studies in Ancient Economic and Administrative History (1974), 115-39, at 117, 119. Converting denarii into modern currency is arithmetically hazardous but Brunt says that, in the second century, 400 denarii possibly represented the value of 'a cottage, garden and some personal belongings', Social Conflicts, 14.

152. Jones, 'Ancient Empires', 117.



and the like, other Roman senators, and equites too, could also make fabulous fortunes out of the provinces.<sup>153</sup> Senators might act as bankers, lending money at extortionate rates of interest to those who would otherwise default on their tax payments;<sup>154</sup> equites also would lend money, though their revenue could be expanded in other ways as well. An important group within the equites was the stratum of publicani, usually the richest men of their order,

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153. I will not rehearse here the conflict between equites and senators that had occasion to ignite from time to time in the Middle and Late Republic. It is dealt with in detail by Brunt in Social Conflicts, 69-73, 87-8, 95-6 and in his important paper 'The Equites in the Late Republic' in R. Seager (ed.), The Crisis of the Roman Republic (1969), 117-37. Suffice it only to note that the conflict turned, first, on the monopolistic position of the senate to grant state contracts to equites, and to insist on the original provisions of the agreement being fully observed (equite contractors would sometimes request that the agreement be revoked or amended if the execution of the contract were proving onerous); and second, on the struggle to control the law (especially the extortion) courts. One might also add that equites wished to be treated by senators with a dignity befitting their wealth. In virtually every other respect the two orders' interests, including their economic interests, 'were identical', Brunt, Social Conflicts, 69; both groups desired a stable and hierarchical society, and, crucially, both invested their excess wealth in land. They belonged to the same, economically dominant, landed, propertied class, and were often bound by ties of friendship, marriage and culture. Originally, 'equites' ('knights') denoted those men who formed the army's citizen cavalry (Jolowicz, op.cit., 77), but in the Late Republic the term referred simply to 'all free-born citizens outside the Senate worth 400,000 HSS or more', Brunt, 'Equites', 117 (HSS = sesterces; 400,000 HSS = 100,000 denarii). Apart from that stratum within their order known as the publicani (see below), equites were in principle eligible for senatorial office: Marius and Cicero hailed from equite families. Pre-Sulla, only few equites rose to the senate, a body which up to that time was almost caste-like in its exclusivity; after Sulla's dictatorship in the 80s, increasing numbers of equites were recruited, though at first few managed to attain anything better than the lower magistracies. However, 'from Caesar's time they swarmed into the curia' (ibid., 120), occupying the highest positions, and, from then on, increasingly displaced the hitherto supreme nobility.

154. e.g. the 'provincial communities and client kings' mentioned by Jones, op.cit., 118.



who gained their livelihood through tax-farming (in the absence of a civil service to collect taxes the Roman state was compelled to privatise this function),<sup>155</sup> and through other state contracts, auctioned under censorial supervision every five years.<sup>156</sup> Awarded to the highest bidder, state contracts covered mining, public works and army supplies, and profits could be vast. A significant portion of this yield would be frittered on hedonistic pursuits - luxury articles of all kinds; exotica and erotica. But as Jones makes clear:

most of the recipients wished to put a part of their profits into the only permanent form of capital known to the ancient world, land. There was thus built up a great demand for land, primarily Italian land, which was probably the most important cause of the growth of latifundia,<sup>157</sup> at the expense of the small holdings of the peasantry.

The plight of peasant proprietors was made more serious by a related development: the massive influx of slaves that accompanied military domination and piracy. Slaves became eminently affordable and, as an economically viable proposition, were imported into Italy in prodigious quantities. The figures are staggering. Brunt conjectures that, by 28, the combined number of slaves in Italy had reached '3,000,000 as against 4,000,000 free persons'.<sup>158</sup> They were found various employment by their masters: in workshops, in a domestic capacity; slaves 'even predominated as secretaries, accountants and doctors'.<sup>159</sup> But the majority of them probably ended up in the chain

155. The tax system was radically overhauled, and the power of the publicani dramatically curtailed, by Augustus. See Jones, Augustus, 95, 118-9; cf. Brunt, 'Equites', 135 who shows the process starting under Caesar.

156. See Brunt, Social Conflicts, 69.

157. Jones, 'Ancient Empires', 121; cf. 123, 124: 'Those who profited from the Empire were the senatorial and equestrian classes in Italy ... Their acquisition of land led to the pauperisation of many of the Italian peasantry. The Italian lower classes lost rather than gained by the Empire. Many of them lost their land and were recompensed only by cheap corn if they migrated to Rome, or meagre pay in the army'.

158. Social Conflicts, 18.

159. Ibid.



gangs that serviced the latifundia of the Late Republic. These massive estates of the wealthy gradually swallowed up the land of poorer farmers who, now also priced out of the labour market by slaves as cheap as they were plentiful, declined into ruin. Some of the dispossessed drifted into Rome; others joined the legions.

So far I have concentrated almost exclusively on the plight of the rural plebs. But what of their urban subordinate class counterparts? What were their grievances and what part did they play in the Republic's downfall?

Imperial expansion was not totally without benefit for the city of Rome's plebs. Provincial exploitation subsidised cheap corn and public works; retail opportunities opened up as Rome became the centre of the Mediterranean world; and employment might be found in private and public building construction, in the assembly and repair of ships, or in the houses of the rich and powerful. On the other hand, the increasing use of slaves also 'must have caused severe unemployment or chronic under-employment among the free poor',<sup>160</sup> Other causes of economic hardship are conveniently itemised by Zwi Yavetz who mentions 'the burden of debts, the increase in the rate of interest, the housing shortage (resulting from the collapse of homes, from fires, or the flooding of the Tiber), the increase in rents, the rigorous collection of taxes, and, above all, the distress brought about by famine.'<sup>161</sup> To some degree, such famine was itself directly attributable to the growth of empire. Owners of latifundia were tempted to concentrate production in profitable viniculture (particularly grape and olive) or pasturage, thus increasing the capital city's reliance on foreign import of cereals from, say, Africa or Egypt. The significance of such imports must not be exaggerated;

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160. Ibid., 38.

161. Z. Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps (1969), 33.



indigenous cultivation in the Italian countryside was still widespread.<sup>162</sup>

Yet it was nonetheless mostly produced for local consumption, and where pirates interrupted trade, or military commanders blockaded Rome with non-senate controlled fleets, the results for the urban plebs could be dire.

They were not helpless and, indeed, in response to their extremities evinced a great deal of what one might call situational rationality. Outright rebellion was out of the question where troops remained loyal to the senate. Riots were put down with viciousness and cruelty. But where riot proved ineffective, the plebs would resort to other means of pressure: they might stop work (if they had work) or, if they owned small shops, close them; they might shout or curse at the objects of their hatred; they might raise insulting effigies, smash statues, post up seditious proclamations at night or carve their anger into inscription.<sup>163</sup> The theatre and circus, as we saw in the last Chapter, provided arenas in which public opinion could be given expression; and elections, too, could sometimes have their effects. It is nonetheless undeniable that the crowd's actions were also profoundly limited by its cultural background as well as by the structure of Roman society. Rome though a Republic, was not a democracy and the lack of democratic practices militated against leadership from below (tribunes would invariably be, in the Late Republic, men of the propertied class). Quasi-political guilds that might organise resistance were constantly subject to repression,<sup>164</sup> and no urban plebeian social movement of protracted duration ever arose (though of course many plebeian demands remained more or less constant).

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162. Brunt, Social Conflicts, 26-7; cf. 121.

163. On all this see Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps, 9-21, and passim.

164. A good discussion of the types of guilds (collegia) can be found in Yavetz, Julius Caesar and His Public Image, 85-96.



A compact of poor urban citizens with slaves never materialised, though there is some evidence of the former's sympathy for the suffering endured by the latter at the hands of the dominant class.<sup>165</sup> Also of major importance was the existence in Rome (and elsewhere) of the clientela system which, so to speak, structurally disorganised the urban masses. This system of patron-client reciprocity was deeply embedded in Roman culture and society, and was taken with great seriousness by both parties.<sup>166</sup> Patrons were expected to defend their clients in court, for instance, and often did so; some economic remuneration and social welfare functions might also devolve onto the patron. Clients (who were often freedmen, morally and legally bound to their former master) would, for their part, provide the patron with a retinue, with muscle if he needed it to deal with competitors in the Forum, and with pliant instruments in the voting assemblies. According to Ste. Croix:

Even during the Republic, where political activity by the lower classes was still possible in some degree, many individuals, out of obedience to their patrons or in deference to their known attitude, must have been diverted from participating actively in political class struggle, and even induced to take part on the side of those having interests directly opposed to their own. One of the proverbs in the collection of Publilius Syrus, a Late Republican, declares that "To accept a favour (beneficium) is to sell one's freedom".<sup>167</sup>

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165. See the Pedanius Secundus incident of A.D.61 (and thus after the fall of the Republic) recounted by Yavetz in Plebs and Princeps, 29-31.

166. The following comments are restricted to the clientela system insofar as it affected individuals; however, the system could, and with the warlords often did, extend to communities, cities and regions.

167. Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 342; Cf. 343 where the author also observes that there 'were in fact many situations where a relationship which was in reality that of patron and client in some form would not be so called, for fear of giving offence'; thus 'a real gentleman would expect to be called his patron's "friend" (amicus), not his client ...'. The extent of the clientela is often obscured by these norms of politeness.



Not that one should underestimate the urban plebs. They could, opportunity permitting, impose themselves effectively on a political situation<sup>168</sup> and were 'capable of imperilling any government by actively joining a rival leader';<sup>169</sup> politicians in Rome had to take account of them. Yet I suspect that most historians of antiquity would agree with one of their most distinguished colleagues when he wrote that, contrasted with the rustic army we described earlier, the urban plebs played 'a subsidiary role in the Revolution'.<sup>170</sup> Class primacy in the destruction of the Republic goes to the country folk. But the rural plebs, every bit as much as their urban class brethren, could not make the 'Revolution' alone. The influence of both subordinate classes on the Roman political and social system was indirect;<sup>171</sup> they required mobilisation by class outsiders to realise their hopes for a better life. They found such leadership in generals and men who came to be called populares (who might also be generals themselves). It is to this latter group that we must now devote our attention.

The convulsions which threatened the Republic from below were made immeasurably more dangerous for the ruling class by divisions within itself,<sup>172</sup> which became ever more apparent after 133, (the year that marks Tiberius Gracchus' historic tenure as tribune). The split between populares and

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168. e.g. 'when they drove Cinna out of the city and set in train the series of events that led to Sulla's dictatorship, when they carried the Gabinian law by violence and thus gave Pompey his great command which proved fateful for the Republic, and when their continual turbulence in the 50s finally promoted the accord between Pompey and the optimates from which the civil war of 49 issued', Brunt, Social Conflicts, 152-3.

169. Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps, 73.

170. Brunt, Social Conflicts, 152.

171. Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 371; cf. 352.

172. The point receives emphasis in ibid., 359.



optimates is a major discussion point in the literature on this period, and one is tempted simply to refer the reader to the sources. But since Julius Caesar is generally acknowledged as the most successful and 'the most consistently popularis of all the great leaders',<sup>173</sup> and since his career and regime is at the centre of our discussion in this Section, we must forego a cursory treatment and deal with the topic at hand in a little detail.

It is first necessary to make clear that the distinction between optimates and populares relates neither to class nor order. Optimates and populares came from the same economically and politically dominant landed propertied class; and were members also of the senate or/and nobility.<sup>174</sup> It is not even possible to distinguish the categories on a 'fractional' basis.<sup>175</sup> In addition, one must avoid the anachronistic temptation to view the dissension between optimates and populares as one deriving from 'party' differences: in Rome of the Republic there simply was 'no large-scale party organisation, no party caucus or ticket, and no fixed party line';<sup>176</sup> political alliances were temporary, ad hoc, and entered into for personal and family advancement.<sup>177</sup> Finally, to view optimates as aristocrats and populares as democrats would also be erroneous: both were social and political aristocrats;<sup>178</sup> both

173. L.R. Taylor, Party Politics in the Age of Caesar (Berkeley: 1949), 15; Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 362, on Caesar as 'the greatest of the populares'.

174. Taylor, op.cit., 12, 20-1, 192-3, n.52.

175. See my footnote 120.

176. Taylor, op.cit., 12.

177. Of course personal advancement is a factor in 'party' politics as well. But in Rome this characteristic predominated. Ideologically based parties were unknown.

178. As Gelzer says, it is significant that the nomenclature of optimates and populares was 'applied only to the politicians and never to their supporters, whom each side called upon for help in the struggle for votes in the popular assembly', Caesar, 13.



would have found in equality the most abnoxious of ideals. Rather, the opposition between optimates and populares is probably best envisaged as a conflict respectively between, on the one hand, a majority grouping within the ruling class who were determined to protect the power, dignity and exclusivity of the senate as a collegial body, and to ensure the preservation of the political and social status quo;<sup>179</sup> and, on the other, those individuals also within the dominant class who were intent on breaking with senatorial tradition in certain respects. Members of this latter 'group', which consisted of such individuals as Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, Saturninus and Glaucia, Sulpicius Rufus, Marius Gratidianus, Catiline, Clodius and Julius Caesar,<sup>180</sup> professed their commitment to agrarian and urban reform; 'provided the essential leadership without which the struggles of the lower classes could hardly have emerged at all at the political level'<sup>181</sup> (they were greatly respected by members of the lower classes and were often worshipped after their - usually bloody - death as heroes of the common people); and, finding senatorial oligarchical government too constricting for their own ample personal ambition, showed themselves willing to overturn its collective hegemony.<sup>182</sup> Optimates were thus conservatives; populares were radicals. And while I have spoken above of the latter as a 'group', they formed one only in a typological sense: in reality, they were a series of 'prominent

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179. 'The nucleus of the optimates was the small clique of nobles ... who more or less monopolised the highest offices and dominated the Senate, but they had wide support among the propertied class, even as Cicero says, prosperous freedmen; otherwise they could not have maintained their unbroken hold on the higher magistracies', Jones, Augustus, 2.

180. I take the names directly from Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 353.

181. Ibid., 351-2.

182. One sees the sense of Brunt's comment when he declares: 'Perhaps no populares, at least after the Gracchi, were sincere; perhaps all sought only to satisfy their ambition or that of their leader. But ... their personal motives, which it may be hard to determine, are less significant than the real grievances and genuine discontents on which they could play', Social Conflicts, 95.



individual politicians' as opposed to 'a compact body of men having substantially the same outlook on major political issues' such as the optimates comprised.<sup>183</sup>

If one turns to the antique sources for enlightenment on the meanings of optimate and popularis one discovers that the terms in question are infused with sociological description and moral pontification in roughly equal doses. Cicero's Pro Sestio - the classic text - may serve to illustrate the point. There we are instructed that the optimates include such people as senators, those who comply with senatorial policy, those classes from which the senate is recruited, citizen residents of the Italian municipalities and countryside, businessmen and freedmen (the list is of course ludicrously all-encompassing) or, 'in a few words' all those 'who are neither criminal nor vicious in disposition, nor frantic, nor harassed by troubles in their households'; optimates are good citizens, men 'who are upright, sound in mind', men whose goal is public order and the dignity and prestige of the commonwealth.<sup>184</sup>

By contrast populares are those 'who wished everything they did and said to be agreeable to the masses'<sup>185</sup> and who, evidently, were successful in their designs: Cicero states that men like the Gracchi and Saturninus were 'applauded in the theatre; they obtained by votes whatever they had striven for; their names, their words, their looks, their bearing, were objects of popular affection'.<sup>186</sup> So much the pity then that these populares suffered from 'a sort of inborn revolutionary madness',<sup>187</sup> and naturally gave offence to loyal, 'serious and honourable men'.<sup>188</sup>

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183. Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 352; cf. R. Syme's review, 'M. Gelzer, Caesar der Politiker und Staatsmann', orig. 1944, reprinted in R. Syme, Roman Papers Vol. I (1979; ed. E. Badian), 149-71, at 151-2.

184. Cicero, Pro Sestio (Cambridge, Mass.: 1958), transl. R. Gardner, at xlv. 97-8 (= pages 167-9).

185. Ibid, xlv. 96 (= page 167).

186. Ibid, xlix. 105 (= page 179).

187. Ibid, xlvi. 99 (= page 171).

188. Ibid, xlix. 105 (= page 179).



Happily, not all historians of this period have felt bound to echo Cicero's prejudices; instead they customarily describe the populares in terms of their programme, their methods and their rhetoric.

The programme of the populares, enacted sporadically from 133 to Caesar's death in 44, contained a series of recurrent features which have been admirably summarised by Ste. Croix:

agrarian measures of one kind or another, including above all the distribution of land to the poor or to army veterans, whether in individual lots or in the form of colonies; the supply of corn to poor citizens living at Rome, either free or at a low price (frumentationes); the relief of debt; and defence of the democratic elements in the constitution, such as they were, especially the privileges of the tribunes and the right of appeal (provocatio). All these policies were anathema to the oligarchs.<sup>189</sup>

We might add to this that it was typically populares who championed the Italian 'allies' in their struggle for the political privileges that citizenship conferred; and that it tended to be populares too who sought some kind of minimal protection for provincials against at least the worst abuses of senatorial and equite extortion.<sup>190</sup>

The methods employed by populares also distinguished them from their optimates opponents. Optimates expected that magisterial bills and decrees should first be subject to senatorial discussion and permission before they were submitted to the assemblies. Though the senate originally and in constitutional principle was supposedly only a consultative body to which the king, later the two consuls, might have recourse as they saw fit, with the evolution of the Republic the senate assumed through an accretion of convention ever greater authority; by the beginning of the late Republic there was no question

189. Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 352.

190. Jones, Augustus, 3. On the political status of the 'allies' (socii) see Jolowicz, op.cit., 63-66.



but that the senate was the power-house of the Roman empire.<sup>191</sup> Threats to its supremacy as an organ of domination were bloodily repressed by the senate's agents;<sup>192</sup> magistrates who only usually served for one year at a time, but would become by virtue of their tenure life long members of the senate, had good reason to accept senatorial restrictions and prerogatives. Populares scoffed at such presumption. 'None of them claimed indeed that the people at Rome, as at Athens, should control all policy and even routine administration; but they all asserted the sovereign right of the people to decide any question that might be referred to it, and rejected the optimate claim that the prior sanction of the Senate was required'.<sup>193</sup> Populares saw themselves as the sovereign people made flesh and, where ever possible, strove to become tribunes, an office with important rights attached. A tribune's person was inviolable. He had extensive powers of veto and arrest which could be used to confound or coerce other magistrate colleagues. He might intervene to secure a citizen from the clutches of a magistrate. Crucially tribunes had powers to introduce legislation and to summon meetings (over which they were also entitled to preside) both of the plebeian assembly and of the so-called contiones: discussion gatherings in which the public could, with the tribune, debate issues, candidatures and laws (extant or anticipated). In a political system in which the space of public debate was severely curtailed by legal restrictions on assembly, the power to convoke contiones was of especial value.<sup>194</sup> Populares, as tribunes, would exercise

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191. Jolowicz, op.cit., 27-55 for this interpretation, together with an excellent dissection of senatorial powers.

192. Examples would include the murder of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, and the crushing of the Catiline conspiracy.

193. Brunt, Social Conflicts, 94.

194. On all this, see Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 335-6.



that power to maximum advantage. Their ideas and policies could be addressed to the people directly; in such a manner might the blocking-tactics of a fractious and obstructive senate be circumvented.<sup>195</sup> And where it was constitutionally impossible for a popularis to become one of the ten annually-chosen tribunes - a citizen of patrician birth was ineligible for the office (hence Caesar was excluded) - he would be compelled to act by proxy. As we shall see momentarily, this was what the greatest popularis of all was continually constrained to do.

The foregoing paragraph has already to some degree hinted at the nature of the rhetoric employed by populares. The touchstone of their discourse and 'fiery orations',<sup>196</sup> was the sovereignty of the people, though this was not the sovereignty of direct democracy. Populares were not championing the rights of the people to participate actively in the formulation of state policy or in the running of government; what they had in mind was 'the sovereign right of the assembly to decide any matter that might be put to it, without the sanction of the Senate'.<sup>197</sup> Closely identifying themselves with the people's right in this regard, indeed projecting themselves as the embodiment of popular sovereignty (insofar as it could be said to have meaning), populares emphasised the division in society and state between the optimates, on the one hand, and a homogenous bloc of citizens on the other. Populares invoked the antagonistic imagery of them-us, faction-people, and crystallised the alternative between enslavement and liberty.<sup>198</sup> Sometimes

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195. See R. Syme, The Roman Revolution (1974 reprint; orig. 1939), 16; and Taylor, op.cit., 22.

196. Taylor, op.cit., 22.

197. Brunt, Social Conflicts, 94-5.

198. Cf. Syme, Roman Revolution on 'libertas', 'a vague and negative notion - freedom from the rule of a tyrant or a faction', 155. The word was widely and cynically used: 'Nobody ever sought power for himself and the enslavement of others without invoking libertas and such fair names'.



the legitimating principle to which populares appealed might just refer to 'the people'; at other times 'The Senate and the People' might ideologically be summoned. If anything the charge of the latter was more powerful than mention of 'the people' alone. For by emblematically unifying senate and people the populares could isolate even further that gang who stood outside this grand conception, accused of 'oppressing the Republic and exploiting the constitution in its own interests'.<sup>199</sup>

If the sincerity of the populares is a matter for speculation,<sup>200</sup> the consequences of their ambitions and of the reform 'movement' they spearheaded are indubitable. Roman politics after the Gracchi brothers' tribuneships would never be the same again. 'The Gracchi exposed all the divisive forces in Roman society, and their reforms and ruin set in train the events that culminated with the fall of the Republic'.<sup>201</sup> The Gracchi, and the populares that followed them, provided the essential leadership for the urban and rural discontented, and could also count on support from the Italian 'allies', the provinces and, from time to time, the equites. Men who comprised the populares were a varied sort and their individual careers are illuminating. We shall in what follows only deal with one of them; but in his genius and in his achievements he had no peer.

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In the preceding narrative I have been concerned to show how Rome's empire building resulted in a severe social crisis (or, correctly, series of crises). Agrarian hardship was one of our main themes,<sup>202</sup> particularly

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199. Ibid.

200. See my footnote 182.

201. Brunt, Social Conflicts, 92.

202. See Canovan's category of 'agrarian populism'.



as it translated itself into a rustic, proletarianised army demanding land on retirement, and dependent on a commander to realise that aspiration. The plight of the urban plebs also received consideration, but we observed that their role in the destruction of the Republic, if important, was nonetheless second to that of their rural subordinate class counterparts. As we also saw, both urban and rural pleb discontent was mediated, mobilised and directed by leaders of dominant class location (generals or populares or men who were both simultaneously). These leaders, reformers and individuals for whom senatorial government was too constraining for their autocratic ambition, deepened the crisis by splitting their own ruling class. The consequent dissension eventually destroyed the Republic.

I have dedicated a significant amount of space to these issues because Caesar's career, personal style, rhetoric and regime as the popularis-general par excellence is, I believe, inexplicable without a context. (I also wanted to show the affinity between the concepts of popularis and populism.) In moving, however, to elements ii, iii, and iv of our definition of Caesarism, our discussion can be more focused and more economical as well.

#### ii. Caesar's populist rhetoric and style.

It has already been indicated in passing that Julius Caesar (100-44) was both a popularis and a general; hence the points emphasised in i. above - mobilisation from above of agrarian and urban distress by men who claim to represent the people against a faction - automatically apply to him. But this is too vague. Caesar was not any popularis or any general. He was a supreme example of both species and his genius resided in the unparalleled brilliance he brought to the combination. The concept of Caesarism must reflect this fact. In what follows I shall enlarge upon Caesar's populist rhetoric and style, leaving comments about the military aspect till element



iii. of the definition. But let us also clarify at this juncture a possible source of confusion. According to Yavetz, 'From 63 there was no doubt among the wider public that Caesar had chosen the via popularis'.<sup>203</sup> 5 December 63 was the date on which Caesar eloquently sought to persuade the senate not to execute the Catilinarian conspirators, a plea which might have succeeded but for Cato's even more eloquent demand for the death sentence.<sup>204</sup> (Catiline had been highly popular with the crowd.) Caesar's popularis allegiances and sympathies, his popularis credentials were evident to most from this time onwards (i.e. till his death). Caesar's populist regime, on the other hand, occupies only the last few years of his life: the period of autocracy and 'dictatorship' (49-44). Before that time though Caesar is certainly a populist figure he does not control the state, notwithstanding his election to the consulship in 60. In 60-59 he had to share dominion. By contrast, in 49, faced with a senate that sought to strip his powers and to threaten his life, Caesar crossed the Rubicon, plunged Italy into civil war and, in the same year, became master of Rome. Of the military and autocratic nature of Caesar's regime I shall speak in iii; his populist persona, which encompassed his regime, but also preceded it, is my subject here.

At first glance Caesar appears an improbable populist candidate. He came, after all, from redoubtable patrician stock, and was proud to advertise in the funeral oration he delivered for his aunt Julia (in 69) the Julians' descent from kings (the Marcii Reges) and from Venus herself. Since the Caesars were a branch of the Julians they could with justice claim 'both the sanctity of kings, who reign supreme among mortals, and the reverence due to gods, who hold even kings in their power'.<sup>205</sup> Such a man with such

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203. Plebs and Princeps, 44. Cf. Gelzer, Caesar, 54 who agrees on this date as a watershed. Yet see also Gelzer, 20, and especially 32-3 where Caesar's popularis proclivities are implied to have been apparent as early as 68.

204. The incident is well discussed in Gelzer, Caesar, 50-3.

205. Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars (1979 illustrated edition), transl. R. Graves, 15.



a lineage could have become a pillar of the optimate establishment had he but wanted to do so.<sup>206</sup> Caesar cannot therefore be assimilated to a situation of the sort described by Laclau (quoted on 326 above) in which 'a new fraction seeks to impose its hegemony but is unable to do so within the existing structure of the power bloc'.<sup>207</sup> This was not Caesar's position. Had Caesar been an equite perhaps Laclau's framework would have more explanatory force. But Caesar was of the same class and class fraction of the optimates he first pilloried and later politically destroyed. No necessary social or political obstacles barred him or other populares from the highest senatorial offices. His class or class fractional location did not require him appealing directly to 'the masses', did not require an attack on legitimacy. It is true that Caesar's family had Marian connections: Caesar's aunt Julia had been the widow of the great quasi-popularis general. Moreover, Caesar's first wife Cornelia (she also died in 69) was the daughter of another famous popularis figure: Cinna.<sup>208</sup> But in the shifting alliances that made up Roman Republican politics, popularis family associations or allegiances could readily be shed (or adopted and shed, as Pompey's career attested); and, at least up to the Catilinarian conspiracy, Caesar's career was open-ended. In any case, as already indicated, the populares themselves derived from the same class and rank as their optimate opponents.

I shall not trace step by step the career of Caesar as a popularis; the reader interested in that development is referred to Gelzer's book on Caesar - by common consent the greatest biography of the man this century - where the subject is handsomely treated. Nor shall I here expatiate on

206. Gelzer, Caesar, 28.

207. Laclau, op.cit., 173.

208. On Sulla's unsuccessful attempt to coerce Caesar into terminating his marriage with Cornelia, see Gelzer, Caesar, 20-1.



the reasons that motivated Caesar to assume the popularis mantle. Personal ambition seems to have been the dominant factor, but then Caesar's intentions are of less sociological significance than the consequences of his actions. It is on the latter that I shall now, albeit selectively, concentrate.

We get a vivid picture of Caesarean populist rhetoric and interpellation from the commentaries that comprise the Civil War. (I use the term 'rhetoric' loosely and without the negative connotations that attach to the adjective 'rhetorical'. Caesar's commentaries are anything but florid and declamatory; controlled simplicity is their definitive feature.)<sup>209</sup> The Civil War was not, it appears, published in Caesar's lifetime;<sup>210</sup> it cannot therefore be assigned causal status (as propaganda) in the explanation of Caesar's rise to power. The significance of the document lies elsewhere. What it shows is how Caesar wanted publicly to project himself and, presumably, did so project himself wherever, context allowing, political capital might thereby be acquired. Caesar's political shrewdness is legendary, his antennae renowned for their sensitivity.<sup>211</sup> It is therefore possible to hypothesise

209. Simplicity in oratory as well as in the written word would, of course, only have magnified his effectiveness as a popularis. On his oratory and oratorical training, see J.F. Gardner's Introduction to Caesar, The Conquest of Gaul (revised 1982 edn.), transl. S.A. Handford (revisions by Gardner), 7-26, at 25. Also see Gelzer, Caesar, 23.

210. The Gallic War (= The Conquest of Gaul), Caesar's other book of commentaries, was published in 51 but populist interpellation is absent from its pages. This is what we would expect. In 51 Caesar had yet to experience his final rupture with the optimatus dominated senate; he was still pursuing constitutional means to achieve his objectives. Reconciliation was his desire, albeit on terms that would guarantee his dignity and personal security. An antagonistically phrased diatribe against the senate would have wrecked this strategy. Even so he cannot resist the occasional barbed comment e.g. the speech he puts in the mouth of Ariovistus (the chieftain of the Suebians) which implies widespread senatorial treachery in Rome: see Gallic War I. 44 = Conquest of Gaul, page 53. Cf. Gelzer on Caesar's 'special talent for putting his opponents in the wrong and making them appear as absurd fanatics', Caesar, 38; also 78, 98.

211. One must not, however, exaggerate this quality. In the last years of his life Caesar evinced a damaging insensitivity on more than one occasion: e.g. his, greatly resented, dismissal of the tribunes Flavius and Marullus; his badly bungled personalised attack on the deceased Cato; his inability to quash rumours of his royal aspirations.



that the Civil War also reveals something important about Roman society, namely its receptivity to the populist discourse in which Caesar engaged; without such social receptivity the populist passages in the Civil War would have been completely pointless.

The Civil War - probably drafted by Caesar in Egypt in 47<sup>212</sup> - exemplifies all the classic populist ideological motifs. There is the claim of Caesar to be representing and defending popular sovereignty: the senate had attempted to usurp his military command six months prematurely and haul him back to Rome 'although the will of the people had been that I should be admitted as a (consular: PB) candidate in absentia at the next elections'.<sup>213</sup> The commencement of the civil war, he protests innocently to Lentulus Spinther, was not of his doing: 'I did not leave my province with intent to harm anybody. I merely want to protect myself against the slanders of my enemies' and 'to restore to their rightful position the tribunes of the people, who have been expelled because of their involvement in my cause'.<sup>214</sup> Added to this populist theme, is another - the polarisation of corrupt, tyrannical élite versus downtrodden mass. Hence Caesar must reclaim for himself 'and for the Roman people independence from the domination of a small clique'.<sup>215</sup> The only ostensible oddity is the way that Caesar keeps bringing his own personality, dignity and reputation constantly into his rhetoric. He says to the soldiers of the Thirteenth legion: 'I ask you to defend my reputation and standing against the assaults of my enemies';<sup>216</sup> he declares that the

212. Gelzer, Caesar, 191, n.1.

213. Caesar, The Civil War (1967), transl. J.F. Gardner, I, 9 (= page 40). Also: 'it pained me to see the privilege conferred on me by the Roman people being insultingly wrested from me by my enemies', ibid.

214. Ibid., I, 22 (= pages 46-7).

215. Ibid (= page 47). Cf. Gelzer, Caesar, 190: 'Caesar's propaganda now tirelessly repeated that the state was being enslaved by a small group obstinate in its hatred towards him, while he himself stood for the free expression of their will by the Senate and the popular assembly. Thus he hoped to be able to discredit his opponents in the eyes of public opinion...'.<sup>216</sup>

216. Civil War, I, 7 (= page 39). Cf. ibid, I, 85 (= page 78) with the constant repetition of the word 'me'.



senate's mistreatment of him threatens his prestige, and prestige 'has always been of prime importance to me, even outweighing life itself'.<sup>217</sup> It is the egoism of these statements that first strikes the reader, not their populist content. But Lily Ross Taylor grasped well their deeper meaning: Caesar's discourse is stressing the inseparability of his cause from that of the people's. 'Caesar and the people were one, and ... he was liberating both, se et populum Romanum, from the factio paucorum, the tyranny of an oligarchy. Caesarism meant the identification of the Roman people with Caesar'.<sup>218</sup> This is populism in its most pristine form. The identification emerges again in Caesar's description of an incident that took place in the battle of Pharsalus. He quotes the veteran ex-centurion Crastinus rallying his fellow soldiers with the cry: '"Follow me, you who were formerly in my company, and give your general the service you have promised. Only this one battle remains; after it, he will recover his position, and we our freedom."'<sup>219</sup> Caesar's position and freedom for the common person: the destinies of both are rendered indivisible in such a remark.

Caesar's populist rhetoric or mode of address was complemented by a personal style and manner which helped intensify the devotion of ordinary people to his person. The army, composed in the main of rustic plebs, was dedicated to him because of his fortitude and courage,<sup>220</sup> his proven concern

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217. Ibid., I, 9 (= page 40).

218. Taylor, op.cit., 163.

219. Civil War, III, 91 (= page 152), my emphasis.

220. Yavetz, Public Image, 160-4.



for agrarian reform,<sup>221</sup> his ability to win and reward his veterans,<sup>222</sup> but also because of his charm: he would customarily refer to his fighting men, not as 'soldiers' but as 'comrades'.<sup>223</sup> And this charm is the clue to Caesar's popularity with the urban plebs as well.

What was the crux of Caesar's capacity to so engage the mass of his contemporaries in Rome? Was it his outstanding generosity that made people warm to him? To some extent, yes: Caesar was 'famous for his lavishness in bestowing bounties'.<sup>224</sup> On the other hand many of the nobility in the last years of the Republic, seeking to shore-up support, distributed extensive largesse, yet none of them attained a public stature comparable to Caesar's. Perhaps, then, we should search for the secret of Caesar's popularity in the reforms he instituted during his regime. Certainly aspects of his policies and legislation would have endeared him to the crowd. He attended to the question of rents; he sought measures to reduce the burden of indebtedness; he re-settled 80,000 of Rome's poorest citizens on colonies abroad; he attempted to create employment in public works.<sup>225</sup> At the same time, however,

221. Evident since the agrarian laws (two of them) he instigated in his consulship of 59. Gelzer, Caesar, 71-83, for details.

222. Writing of the benefits conferred on members of Caesar's Gallic army, Brunt remarks: 'Booty had enriched them already, and they hoped to grow richer. They were not disappointed'. As dictator, 'Caesar roughly doubled the pay of all soldiers, ... His veterans were to receive on discharge not only parcels of land but gratuities of 5,000 or 6,000 denarii at his triumph in 46, with proportionately more for officers. Their attachment to him outlasted his life; they were passionate for revenge on his assassins', Social Conflicts, 142.

223. Suetonius, op.cit., 38. Disloyalty from the ranks would immediately provoke a change of interpellation. See Caesar's reference to men of the mutinous Tenth legion as 'citizens' (ibid, 39; cf. Gelzer, Caesar, 263), and the impact this cold formality had on their spirits.

224. Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps, 43.

225. On all this see ibid., 45-7.



Caesar curbed the people's electoral influence, studiously avoided a revolutionary stance of debt cancellation, and upheld the rights of private property holders;<sup>226</sup> no one is even sure of the effectiveness of his policies to combat unemployment.<sup>257</sup> If Caesar's programme does not adequately account for the widespread affection in which he was held, to what other explanations should we have recourse? Caesar's military prowess was legendary: his victories in Gaul enthralled the Roman populace, while his invasion of the mysterious Britain caused a sensation.<sup>228</sup> But Rome had a history of great generals and, during Caesar's lifetime, Pompey's reputation too was formidable.<sup>229</sup> Besides, greatness on the battlefield was no guarantee of domestic esteem: Mark Antony, for instance, was hated by the Roman plebs.<sup>230</sup> Or what about Caesar's ability to thrill ordinary people with spectacle? Could this make intelligible the popularity he enjoyed? It must have had some effect, yet according to the author who has made a thorough study of Caesar's 'public image', 'the festivities and games instituted by Caesar were impressive but not unusual'.<sup>231</sup> Finally, one can discount as a factor of special importance

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226. Most modern historians of antiquity would agree with Syme that, insofar as private property was concerned, 'Caesar was not a revolutionary', Roman Revolution, 52.

227. Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps, 47. Caesar's reduction of those entitled to receive gratis the corn dole from 320,000 to 150,000 does not seem to have adversely affected the Roman plebs. 'Account must be taken of the fact that many needy persons left to settle overseas (in the colonisation programme: PB) ..., while large numbers fell in the civil war', ibid., 46.

228. Gelzer, Caesar, 116, 131, 177.

229. Pompey was a failure as a popularis: Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps, 49-51.

230. Ibid., 64-5, 69-70, 71-2.

231. Yavetz, Public Image, 167. The sumptuousness and extravagance of Caesar's entertainment is described on 166-7. According to Yavetz, 'Caesar did not discover any new means of dealing with the Roman masses - he only changed the scale', 167. Cf. Plebs and Princeps, 47-8.



Caesar's claim to divine lineage; the urban plebs were sceptical people who required acts to convince them that men were gods.

Now all the above mentioned characteristics of Caesar's public persona would have helped establish him as a great man, but they are insufficient, even in combination, to explain the singular popularity he managed to attain. Yavetz, whose interpretation I have been following, locates one quality as decisive in translating all other factors into authentic popular goodwill and devotion: an attribute Cicero would refer to (disparagingly, of course) as levitas popularis.

The politician with levitas has the ability to mix easily with members of the class socially below him whom he treats with courtesy but never reserve. He is a people's man, unaffected with the stiff and distant formality that comes with gravitas. His sincerity is transparent: he cares for the people not for what he can gain from them but for what he can achieve on their behalf. In consequence he sides with the small person against the arrogance and power of the mighty. He cares for the people's needs and amusements but is careful not to humiliate them or offend their pride. He takes care that his bearing and carriage show no sign of disrespect for the dignity of the ordinary person.<sup>232</sup>

According to Yavetz, Caesar had cultivated this ability to a supreme degree, though even with him lapses were evident on occasion.<sup>233</sup> Usually, however, his image was as 'a friend of the people', attentive to their sensibilities and desires.<sup>234</sup> Playing on the loathing of the people for

232. Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps, 51-2, 98, 106, 137-9. My description is a montage of these pages.

233. His habit of dealing with his correspondence during the games was felt to be rude.

234. Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps, 53; cf. 51: 'Caesar missed no opportunity and spared no effort to show the Roman plebs that he was their friend and protector'.



the senatorial aristocracy,<sup>235</sup> Caesar lampooned the oligarchs, humiliating them vicariously for a public which had little opportunity for such action itself. So far as the mass of the plebs was concerned, republican 'liberty' meant the liberty of a gang to exploit them; the man who could strike out at this gang with impunity would be bound to win the estimation of the plebs Romana. Of Caesar's generosity we have already spoken. He coupled this to a comportment which was careful to give the proper signal: 'Not once did he give public expression to an offensive attitude of scorn and contempt',<sup>236</sup> towards those social subordinates he professed to serve. Unlike his protégé Mark Antony, Caesar managed to win the affection of both army and plebs (Antony's brutality to the common people of Rome made him a figure of detestation);<sup>237</sup> unlike Pompey, Caesar was not burdened down by the liability of gravitas.<sup>238</sup> Like all great populists he was seen to stand for the 'little man', and his accessible public manner was ideally suited to gaining such a reputation.

Let me conclude this part of our definition of Caesarism (ii) with three observations. As I mentioned earlier, Caesar was of the patrician order and therefore unable to qualify for the ten man tribunate.<sup>239</sup> The

235. Ibid., 64, 76, 139.

236. Ibid., 64.

237. Antony, 'being contemptuous of the plebs, ... paid attention only to the veterans', ibid., 70. On Antony's brutality see, e.g. 64-5.

238. Ibid., 49-51.

239. On the controversy over whether Caesar was ever granted during his lifetime the tribunicia potestas, see ibid., 54-5.

Though Caesar could not qualify for the tribunate he could still attempt to work through it and, indeed, assiduously did so. Tribunes who acted as his agents included Rullus, Labienus, Vatinius, and, arguably most importantly, Curio and Antony. On Caesar's use of the tribunes as a vehicle for his own career see Gelzer, Caesar, 42, 45, 69, 173, 176-9, 182, 189-90, 309-10.



role of tribune would surely have been advantageous for his career and prestige because this magistracy of the plebs could only have strengthened his claim to stand as the condensation and expression of the oligarchically abused majority. Even so, the tribunate remained a vital legitimising principle for Caesar's actions in the civil war. Caesar's wish to stand in absentia for the consulship of 48 had received the backing of a tribunate law and the senate's attempt to frustrate that law could be construed as a breach of the popular mandate. Furthermore, the senate had overridden the tribunate veto of 49, the purpose of which had been to block Pompey's assumption of dictatorial powers. In that context Caesar was able to declare his desire 'to restore to their rightful position the tribunes of the people'<sup>240</sup> and thus project himself as the people's protector. (The connection between himself and popular authority is also emphasised when Caesar writes that 'The men of the Thirteenth legion clamoured that they were ready to avenge the wrongs done to their general and to the tribunes'.<sup>241</sup>) He had been blessed with 'the people's gift' and no one was going to steal it from him.<sup>242</sup>

The second point I should like to make is this one. To say that Caesar was a populist figure is not to say that he was at all times popular. Gelzer cites a number of occasions when Caesar attracted the antagonism and hostility of the plebs,<sup>243</sup> though it seems that popular anger was relatively quick in subsiding. (Needless to say, the hostility of the optimates to Caesar was more or less constant from the Catiline days onwards.) Nonetheless, it will be obvious that even if Caesar had been a popular figure this would

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240. Civil War, I, 22 (= page 46).

241. Ibid., I, 7 (= page 39).

242. Ibid., I, 9 (= page 40); cf. Gelzer, Caesar, 185, and 151-2, 180.

243. Gelzer, Caesar, 79, 88, 149, 209-10, 319-20.



not of itself have made him a populist. Populism entails a specific rhetoric and style of the kind I have previously described; popularity, on the other hand, may spring from a variety of sources.

Finally, though still on the subject of popularity, it is a commonplace to observe that during the last couple of years of Caesar's life he showed signs of losing his popular touch. Caesar, for instance, acted imperiously towards the tribunes and in so doing threatened to alienate popular support.<sup>244</sup> His Anticato - a personalised attack on a man who came to symbolise Republican virtue - looked mean, and seems to have backfired. His kingly appearance could begin to look distinctly removed from the renowned levitas. Yet when all is said and done the facts seem to be that the common people were profoundly moved, indeed traumatised, by Caesar's murder. Their response to his death is eloquent testimony to the extraordinary public standing Caesar achieved and retained till (and after) the end. The conspirators' hope or belief that the people would support the tyrannicide failed completely to materialise: 'the masses remained faithful to their leader'.<sup>245</sup> When, on the day of Caesar's funeral (20 March, five days after the assassination) Caesar's body was displayed in the Forum, a wave of outrage broke through the crowd. Antony's speech, contrary to Shakespeare's depiction, was low key as opposed

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244. Details in Yavetz, Public Image, 192-4, 199-200, 207. Yavetz notes (194) that 'Even though the masses remained loyal to Caesar's memory, the anti-Caesarian tribunes were still popular after the Ides of March'.

245. As they tended to remain to all the populares: Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 353-4 for evidence of the erection of statues, the formation of cults, the establishment of shrines, etc. which followed the killings of popular champions. The intense and protracted devotion the plebs exhibited for their fallen leaders contradicts the common view of mass fickleness. Yavetz's Plebs and Princeps can be read as a sustained critique of the mass fickleness theorem. (The quote in the main text is from Plebs and Princeps, 64).



to inflammatory, but it did not subdue feelings of revulsion and anger.

Immortalisation of Caesar was practically instantaneous. Writes one historian,

'The common people in Rome were prompted by a strong desire to institute some worship of their venerated leader, and indeed religious-sacral traces may be discerned in all the events associated with Caesar's funeral'.<sup>246</sup>

Suetonius recounts that people later 'raised a substantial, almost twenty-foot high column of Numidian marble in the Forum, and inscribed on it: "To the Father of His Country". For a long time afterwards they used to offer sacrifices at the foot of this column, make vows there and settle disputes by oath taken in Caesar's name'.<sup>247</sup> Caesar's reputation was also augmented by transcendental intervention when, on the first day of games instituted by Octavian to commemorate the dead man, 'a comet appeared about an hour before sunset and shone for seven days running. This was held to be Caesar's soul, elevated to Heaven'.<sup>248</sup> Official recognition of Caesar as a god followed (in 42), though dedication of his temple would have to wait till Octavian's sixth consulship in 28.<sup>249</sup>

Lastly, without the special popularity that clung to Caesar's name it would be impossible to understand why Octavian, the adopted son and heir of the murdered autocrat, seized on that name as avidly as he did. From the time in 44 when he accepted the inheritance and adoption, Octavian always called himself, and was customarily known by others as, 'Caesar'. 'He might have taken the additional name Octavianus, but never did, preferring to

246. Plebs and Princeps, 69.

247. Suetonius, op.cit., 45.

248. Ibid.

249. See A.D. Nock, 'Religious developments from the close of the Republic to the reign of Nero', Chapter XV of the Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. X (1934), eds. S.A. Cook, F.E. Adcock and M.P. Charlesworth, 465-511, at 471. Nock's analysis of ruler-worship, in this same chapter, is extremely interesting: 481-9.



identify himself completely with his adoptive father'.<sup>250</sup> In later years, it is true, Octavian (he received the title of Augustus in 27<sup>251</sup>) attempted to distance himself ideologically from the revolutionary origins of his rule,<sup>252</sup> but initially he had shown no such ambivalence. His purpose was revenge and glory. Caesar's badge and blessing commended itself to the people and, crucially, to his adoptive father's veterans.<sup>253</sup> Octavian would use both groups to promote his triumphant ascent to supreme power.

I have tried in this part of the definition of Caesarism to show the populist nature of Caesar's rhetoric (interpellation) and personal manner. We have seen that Caesar invokes the people-élite dichotomy, affirms his own position as embodiment of the sovereign people's will, and, through his levitas comports himself in a manner excellently adapted to win the people's affections. These attributes were exercised by Caesar during his regime and before it. But just as no person can live on bread alone, so can no autocrat depend solely on public favour to secure his administration. Caesar's populism required, to win and sustain it in power, armed force, a compliant senate, and a society bereft of foci of resistance. These features of his regime are dealt with next.

250. Jones, Augustus, 13; cf. xi, 24, 32-3.

251. 'Augustus' and 'princeps civitatis' (which Octavian was also called) are words which do not lend themselves well to accurate translation, but see Nock, op.cit., 483 who says that 'Between man and god (Augustus) represents just such a compromise as does princeps between citizen and king'. Cf. Brunt and Moore, Res Gestae (op.cit.), 55 (on princeps) and 77-8 (on the 'three nuances' of the name Augustus.)

252. The ambivalence, and its consequences for propaganda during the Principate, is brought out in R. Syme's, 'A Roman Post-Mortem. An Inquest on the Fall of the Roman Republic', orig. 1950, reprinted in Roman Papers, Vol. I (op.cit.), 205-17. 'The artifice of Augustus is patent. He exploited the divinity of his parent and paraded the titulature "Divi filius". For all else, Caesar the proconsul and Dictator was better forgotten', 214.

253. Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 354; Jones, Augustus, 13.



iii. Military and autocratic character of the regime.

The founding and continuation of Caesar's regime was dependent on the army he commanded. Without the support of his Gallic legions he could never have conquered Rome; without armed might to back his popularis pretensions he would have been utterly destroyed by Pompey. No one understood this, of course, better than Caesar himself, as one of his own remarks attests. On the field of Pharsalus, Pompey's army in tatters, he would say of his vanquished enemies: 'They brought it on themselves. They would have condemned me regardless of all my victories - me, Gaius Caesar - had I not appealed to my army for help.'<sup>254</sup>

Naturally, all political regimes, ancient or modern, rely in the last instance on armed force. But there are three good reasons to especially stress the military dimension in the case of Caesarism. One is acknowledging, first of all, that Caesar was the greatest of popularis generals and, arguably, one of the greatest generals of all time.<sup>255</sup> Second, one is saying that Caesar (that 'aspirant to autocracy based upon the sword'<sup>256</sup>) attained power because ultimately he was able to seize it by force, by a military coup d'état. Octavian would come to supremacy through similar means, but this expedient would not be necessary for the remainder of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Thirdly, if one underlines the military aspect of Caesarism it is to recognise that Caesar's regime was always overshadowed by war. In the years between 49-44 Caesar spent not in excess of sixteen months actually resident in Rome;<sup>257</sup> the rest of the time was devoted mostly to campaigning,

254. Suetonius, op.cit., 27.

255. Ibid., 34-5. On Caesar's military prowess see Yavetz, Public Image, 161-5; Gelzer, Caesar, 198, 235-6, 243-4; Brunt, Social Conflicts, 142.

256. M. Rostovtzeff, Rome (1975 reprint; orig. 1927), transl. J.D. Duff, 148.

257. Taylor, op.cit., 172.



since even after Pompey's defeat in 48, there were major dangers in Egypt and Spain to contend with. He met these dangers in person and before his life was cut short was planning an expedition against the Parthians.

A docile senate was another manifestation and pre-requisite of Caesar's autocracy. Its submission would be secured by various means. Increased in size from 600 to 900 members by an influx of Caesar's adherents - mainly equites from the Italian towns, supplemented by a clutch of provincials<sup>258</sup> - the senate could now be expected more faithfully to reflect the will of its overlord: as the senate's number expanded so its powers declined. The government of an oligarchy was replaced by that of a clique, or cabinet, with Caesar at its head; that Caesar 'made his most important decisions in meetings with his reliable friends L. Cornelius Balbus, C. Oppius, C. Matus, A. Hirtius and C. Vibius Pansa was an open secret'.<sup>259</sup> Concomitantly, the senate's input into policy making diminished; the body which had once been the seat of government was reduced to the undignified position of talking-shop and rubber-stamp.<sup>260</sup> Nor was senatorial contumacy much in evidence. Caesar's consecutive occupation of the consulship from 46-44 was grumbled

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258. For the best discussion on this see R. Syme, 'Caesar, The Senate, and Italy', orig. 1938, reprinted in Roman Papers, Vol. I, 88-119, esp. 96-110; cf. Roman Revolution, 78-96. Caesar also promoted, to the outrage of the oligarchy, centurions and freedmen to the senate but, as Syme's prosopographical researches show, the number of men who came from those groups was tiny.

259. Yavetz, Public Image, 172-3; cf. 196; also, Gelzer, Caesar, 273-4.

260. The extent and pace of Caesar's legislative programme was extraordinary: between 49-44, thirty eight laws, decrees, and other measures are 'associated with Caesar's name', Yavetz, Public Image, 57. It is little wonder then that 'there was not enough time to keep to the usual complicated procedure. In particular he often shortened the transactions of the Senate by merely informing the senior members of his plans and, if he called a meeting of the whole body, he simply announced his decisions to it and without any discussion these were then entered in the archives as senatorial decrees', Gelzer, Caesar, 290.



at but it proceeded without concerted opposition - until March 44; while, in the same period,<sup>261</sup> the master of Rome's de facto supremacy was lavishly decorated with senate-dispensed honours. Gelzer's catalogue of the honours bestowed on Caesar in the autumn and early winter of 45 gives some idea of their scale and will tolerate selective quotation:

He was granted the title of pater patriae, his birthday was declared a public holiday and statues of him were to be set up in all the temples of Rome and the municipalities ... The month of his birth Quinctilis received the name of Julius, and a tribe was to bear his name. His dictatorship and censorial authority ... were extended for life.<sup>262</sup> To his honorary tribunician rights inviolability (sacrosanctitas) was expressly added.<sup>263</sup> His son or adopted son was to be designated pontifex maximus, a veiled recognition of hereditary monarchy, as was also his use of the name Imperator. ... All the senators swore an oath that they were ready to protect his life. New officials on entering their posts had to swear to abide by the acts of his administration, and his future governmental actions were declared valid in advance ... The divine image in his likeness which was carried in the circus procession was to receive a holy resting-place (pulvinar) like other deities, and a pediment like that on temples was to be set on his house. The new god was to be honoured as divus ... Julius in a separate temple together with Clementia. Antony was appointed his priest (flamen). In contrast to all other mortals, when<sup>264</sup> the time came, Caesar was to be buried inside the city.

In such a manner did the senate solemnise its own redundancy. Yet an obedient senate was insufficient for Caesar; his dominion required that other nodal points of resistance be neutralised. The bulk of the collegia were outlawed. During the last years of the Republic these guilds and clubs had functioned as primitive electoral associations, employing intimidation

261. Gelzer, Caesar, 278, 315-7.

262. Gelzer says that 'Dictator perpetuus, a new concept and one incompatible with the Republican constitution, in essentials amounted to the same as rex but avoided this hated word', ibid., 320.

263. Yet see my footnote 239 above.

264. Gelzer, Caesar, 315-7.



where persuasion proved ineffective, and providing a popularis like Clodius with an organisation to attack the senate.<sup>265</sup> With the dissolution of the guilds Caesar was giving notice that, under the new regime, no populist competition was to be permitted. The popular assemblies fared better. Their formal existence was never challenged, but Caesar took care that they should, wherever possible, arrive at the right decisions. He added to the arsenal of his powers the right to nominate half of the yearly magistrates (consuls excluded)<sup>266</sup> and invariably Caesar's authority was such that 'nomination' meant election would follow; it transpires that 'in practice all elections degenerated more or less to formalities'.<sup>267</sup>

Caesar's power inside and outside the senate seemed irresistible; his constitutional status as dictator even put him beyond the reach of the tribunes who, in any case, were mostly his creatures. In the end he was struck down by men he believed to be his allies, if not his friends. The significance of his murder should not be exaggerated: only about sixty senators appear to have been involved in the conspiracy: they were not the vanguard of a widespread revolt, not even a majority senatorial revolt. Moreover, one should never let the bloody conclusion to Caesar's regime obscure one of the latter's more extraordinary features, namely Caesar's own largely successful attempt to construct and then to maintain what one author has called a 'superclientele' of 'senators and citizens alike'.<sup>268</sup> We have to ask the question: What enabled such a superclientele to be built

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265. See Yavetz, Public Image, 85-96.

266. Suetonius, op.cit., 30.

267. Gelzer, Caesar, 309.

268. Taylor, op.cit., 174.



and to persist as long as it did? Military force, and autocratic power (the subjects of element iii of our definition) no doubt partially explain the phenomenon; so do the interests of the parties involved. But then force and autocracy is more liable to atomise than it is to build, while the parties just mentioned (see below) were farraginous and full of faction. To account for this achievement we must look more closely at Caesar's leadership qualities.

iv. Caesar's syncretic political leadership.

A remarkable aspect of Caesar as a leader was his ability - evident both in his rise to power and once the regime was established - to unify and galvanise under his direction a social alliance of forces whose interests were in many respects irreconcilable. This quality of the man and the regime has been much commented on; but no-one has illustrated it better than Yavetz in his book on Caesar's public image. As he says, 'Caesar never based his support on a single stratum of society, and he knew how to establish his personal authority by complicated manoeuvres between groups who were often 'opposed to one another'.<sup>269</sup> In this final part of our definition of Caesarism let me first enlarge upon the nature of Caesar's coalition, and then proceed to examine some of the skills that made it possible. My debt to Yavetz and Syme will be obvious throughout.

The heteroclite character of Caesar's following (in the period immediately before and during the regime) becomes clear as soon as one begins to probe its social composition. On one side we have groups from the dominant classes. We see financially embarrassed tribunes, consuls and other senators willing to join Caesar's clientela for gold bled from Gaul.<sup>270</sup> We see young publicists,

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269. Public Image, 178.

270. Syme, Roman Revolution, 62.



'orators and poets', sickened with the oligarchy, aligning themselves with Caesar.<sup>271</sup> We witness the remnants of the Marians, ambitious and anti-optimate, joining Caesar's 'party'.<sup>272</sup> Some fifty-five nobles are among Caesar's supporters in the civil war, as compared with around forty who attached themselves to Pompey.<sup>273</sup> Equites, with bankers prominent among them, gave Caesar financial support and formed his close circle of advisers, spies and agents: 'Many of the bankers were already personal friends of Caesar: it may be presumed that he gave them guarantees against revolution'.<sup>274</sup> Provincials, colonists and Italian 'allies' flocked to Caesar's banner seeking a quid pro quo in the political rights, and economic opportunities, that full citizenship would bestow on them.<sup>275</sup>

These groups were in themselves diverse; historic snobberies, differences in rank and sometimes regional background lent them centrifugal momentum. But Caesar managed to recruit them to his cause, and make it appear that his fate and their objectives were inextricably bound together. He did not stop there. For on the other side he also procured the support of the dominated classes, or at least major sections of them. His legions - the rural plebs in armour - were offered cash, booty and, on retirement, land; if Caesar's generosity to his men during the Gallic campaigns gave weight to the credibility of his promises, his victory in the civil war materially confirmed the sincerity of those declarations.<sup>276</sup> Equally, Caesar the popularis offered the urban plebs the chance of a better economic existence (their grievances were considered above) and the possibility of seeing humbled

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271. Ibid., 62-3.

272. Ibid., 65.

273. Yavetz, Public Image, 172.

274. Syme, Roman Revolution, 71-73, at 73.

275. Ibid., 74-5. On the foreign kings or monarchical aspirants who supported Caesar, see 76.

276. Details in Yavetz, Public Image, 166.



the hated aristocracy. Both rural and urban plebs were meant to view Caesar as an extension of themselves; it is probable that they did. Caesar's regime did not revolutionise their conditions, nor did it destroy the élite they so despised; but it did address their most serious complaints, and made them feel that Caesar was their man.

Yet here we come to the riddle of Caesar: he was no-one's man and everyone's man (everyone's except that of the diehard Republicans, and after the war they were few). An array of skills and qualities help explain his integrative achievement. Of his levitas we have already spoken: this recommended him to ordinary folk. At the same time Caesar was careful not to alienate the propertied class. Those among them who had joined his enemies he strove publicly to forgive: Caesar's clemency was proverbial. It was also informed by practical, political calculation. The mercy he showed at Corfinium in February 49 and thereafter reassured those nobles who had joined the oligarchy's cause but were now having second thoughts: hearing that Caesar would countenance no summary execution and that private property was being respected (i.e. not confiscated) they began to drift back to Rome.<sup>277</sup> Caesar proclaimed loudly and persistently that his ultimate aim was social harmony: he would insist that 'he was not fighting to annihilate his enemies, but to reconcile their differences with as little bloodshed as possible, and so to pave the way for a final pacification of a Roman world that had been convulsed by a series of violent crises'.<sup>278</sup> It is likely that Caesar's clementia derived from more than sheer cynicism; but its consequence was in most cases to bind his enemies in chains of obligation. Cato saw the ensnarement that

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277. Gelzer, Caesar, 201-2; cf. 243: Caesar 'developed the "clemency" which he had practised hitherto into a fundamental and extensive policy of reconciliation towards the vanquished'.

278. Ibid., 217.



Caesarian forgiveness entailed when he wrote: 'I do not wish to be indebted to the tyrant for his illegal actions: for he is acting against the laws when he pardons men over whom he has no sovereignty as if he were their master'.<sup>279</sup> Cato took his own life and thereby refused Caesar's clementia; the majority of his peers preferred to take Caesar's clementia and thereby save their lives and their property.<sup>280</sup>

The propertied class were wooed in other ways too. The colonisation programme Caesar put into operation removed tens of thousands of the poorest citizens from the city of Rome, so reducing considerably the scope for popular agitation. Repression of the collegia would have been welcomed, while the reduction in the number of citizens eligible for the corn dole must have warmed the hearts of those who viewed free grain distribution 'as detrimental, as superfluous, as encouraging the plebs to indolence, and as exploiting the aerarium (treasury: PB) to the last farthing'.<sup>281</sup> Even the settlement of Caesar's veterans was done with maximum sensitivity to the rights of those already living on the designated land. Confiscation was selective, for instance targeted against those among the Pompeians who had remained inveterate enemies of Caesar. Compensation was available to many of those on whose land the veterans were to dwell. Furthermore, veteran allotments were not to form a bloc which would menace non-veteran farmers already resident in the assigned settlement region: veterans were to be spread among these established farmers in a manner supposedly conducive to social peace.<sup>282</sup>

279. Ibid., 269.

280. I must be careful to put the moral obligation that clementia might foster in its recipients into perspective: the group of around sixty senators who conspired to kill Caesar comprised 'mainly men pardoned' by him: Taylor, op.cit., 175.

281. Yavetz, Public Image, 158, summarising Cicero's opinion.

282. Ibid., 141-2. The ulterior motive behind this dispersal policy was to prevent the veterans 'when opportunity offered, from plotting revolts', ibid.



Men of property had other reasons not to be alarmed at Caesar's regime. Caesar's approach to the debt and rent question was moderate;<sup>283</sup> indirect taxes levied on the province of Asia remained to be farmed by the publicani (who also appear to have gained by the import tax on foreign goods that Caesar's administration imposed);<sup>284</sup> and the opportunities for profit were generally boosted by the (temporary) end of civil war and a tamed populace in Rome.

The alliance of social forces that Caesar forged was a tremendous accomplishment. As we know, it eventually failed: the limits of Caesar's syncretism are starkly revealed by his murder. A section within the senate remained steadfast in its Republican commitments, implacable in its opposition to 'the tyrant'. Caesar's levitas offended this group, his contempt for senatorial authority outraged its number.<sup>285</sup> But it was a small group he estranged and that is something we should remember. In my view, the truly extraordinary thing is that Caesar's integrative achievement occurred at all, and then lasted for almost six years. The accomplishment is not to be dissolved into its conditions for while the conditions were there for a number of people to take advantage of, only Caesar managed to do so convincingly. A contrast with Pompey helps illuminate the argument. Pompey was, like Caesar, a great general; like Caesar also he had a mass clientela; and he had the backing of the 'legitimate' government during the civil war. Yet Pompey, not Caesar, was defeated, though initially Caesar's army was smaller than the one Pompey could command. To explain both Caesar's victory and the regime he proved able to establish one would want, naturally, to

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283. Ibid., 132-37, 150.

284. Ibid., 103-4, 151-2.

285. On Caesar's inability to mollify (and hence ultimately to contain) this group, see Gelzer, Caesar, 292, 299-300, 301-3, 320, 331.



invoke a range of causes. Military strategy and tactics, for example, would figure prominently in any sensible account. But one would also have to say that Pompey was a complete failure as a syncretician. Hence Cicero complained to Atticus: 'Is there a more wretched spectacle than that of Caesar earning praise in the most disgusting cause (causa), and of Pompey earning blame in the most excellent; of Caesar being regarded as the saviour of his enemies, and Pompey as a traitor to his friends?'<sup>286</sup> Apparently Pompey's oratory also earned him little credit. About one of Pompey's speeches Cicero remarked that it was 'of no comfort to the poor or interest to the rascals; the rich were not pleased and the honest men were not edified'.<sup>287</sup> To which Yavetz immediately appends the comment: 'Caesar would not have let such an opportunity slip away. He would have obliged everyone, at least for a short time'.<sup>288</sup>

Caesar's syncretic ability - of which his levitas, clementia, military talent, political astuteness were all integral components - is not marginal to the concept of Caesarism as it is here being presented; it is fundamental to it. For without that syncretic ability Caesar's regime would have been impossible to fashion or maintain. The social conditions provided the forum in which that ability could practice and play; they did not necessitate it. Caesarism required the brilliance of Caesar.<sup>289</sup>

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286. Quoted in Yavetz, Public Image, 174.

287. Quoted in ibid., 15.

288. Ibid. In the paragraph that follows Yavetz's comment he uses the term Gleichschaltung (roughly, 'synchronisation') to typify Caesar's integrating ability. I prefer the term syncretic, ugly as it is, because it does not carry the fascist and totalitarian associations of Gleichschaltung. My tutor Clive Ashworth was instrumental in helping me formulate the idea of syncretic leadership.

289. Cf. Yavetz, Public Image, 183; cf. 164 on Caesar's 'many-faceted personality', and 163 with its reference to 'Caesar's versatility' and his 'chameleon-like qualities'.



This ends my definition of Caesarism; the reader wishing a summary of it is advised to turn back the pages to the beginning of 5.6.2 (330) where the original formulation will be found. Before I close this Chapter, however, I must draw out of it two aspects which deserve brief deliberation. The first concerns the applicability of my concept of Caesarism to other Roman rulers; the second pertains to how, approximately, the new concept compares and contrasts with other usages outlined in this thesis.

On the first issue my inclination is to keep the notion of Caesarism fairly exclusive, extending it (with certain reservations) to Augustus but no further; nonetheless I am happy to concede that my limited knowledge of Roman history may be encouraging me to be unduly conservative. The continuity between the regimes is undeniable. Both seized power by a military coup d'état (Augustus in 32). Augustus' regime (firmly installed only after the battle of Actium in 31 and enduring till Augustus' peaceful death in A.D. 14) perpetuated and perfected the fraud of his adoptive father's administration: monarchical power, though now enormously augmented,<sup>290</sup> camouflaged itself with republican form. Like Caesar too, Augustus was a popular figure with the ordinary Roman people: he enjoyed levitas and received the great honour of tribunicia potestas.<sup>291</sup> Furthermore, if anything Augustus surpassed Caesar's ability as a syncretician: he possessed what Pliny the Younger called humanitas which may be rendered as the capacity to endear 'oneself to the lowly while at the same time winning the affection

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290. On the range of Augustus' powers see Jones, Augustus, 55, 60-1, 80-7, 92-3, 106-9; cf. Syme, Roman Revolution esp. 404-5, 406, 475.

291. On the controversy over when this was granted see Brunt and Moore, Res Gestae, 10-11. (The authors settle on 23).



of the eminent'.<sup>292</sup> Tacitus put the matter somewhat differently but the import of his observation was the same:

He seduced the army with bonuses, and his cheap food policy was successful bait for civilians. Indeed, he attracted everybody's goodwill by the enjoyable gift of peace. Then he gradually pushed ahead and absorbed the functions of the senate, the officials, and even the law. Opposition did not exist. War or judicial murder had disposed of all men of spirit. Upper-class survivors found that slavish obedience was the way to succeed, both politically and financially. They had profited from the revolution, and so now they liked the security of the existing arrangement better than the dangerous uncertainties of the old regime. Besides, the new order was popular in the provinces. There, government by Senate and People was looked upon sceptically as a matter of sparring dignitaries and extortionate officials.<sup>293</sup>

Yet even with Augustus one is reluctant to attach the label of Caesarism without qualification. This is not just because Augustus, unlike his adoptive parent was indifferent as a military leader.<sup>294</sup> Nor is it only because much of Augustus' popularity with the people was essentially second-hand, derived from his being Caesar's son and heir.<sup>295</sup> It is primarily because though Augustus had occasional recourse to the populist rhetorical mode,<sup>296</sup> no-one would claim that he was an anti-optimate popularis. I remain unsure of the significance of these reservations for my concept.

As for the rest of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, matters are more simple; none of them even approximate to Caesarism as I have formulated that notion.<sup>297</sup>

292. Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps, 102; cf. Public Image, 213 where it is stated flatly that Caesar himself lacked humanitas.

293. Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome (1982 reprint; orig. 1956), transl. M. Grant, 32.

294. See Jones, Augustus, 10, 25, 31, 66, 82. Antony and Agrippa were the commanders on whom Augustus' most famous victories depended.

295. A point made by Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 354, 362, 371.

296. The very first paragraph of Augustus' Res Gestae says that in 44 'I successfully championed the liberty of the republic when it was oppressed by the tyranny of a faction', in Brunt and Moore, Res Gestae, 19.

297. The comments that follow are typologically, as opposed to chronologically, based.



Tiberius was unloved by the people despite all his attempts at ingratiating, Claudius was respected but remained aloof. Caligula and Nero were hugely popular but proved to be totally without syncretic capacity: Nero lost the support of the army leaders and the senate, while Caligula's antics began by alienating the senate as the price of winning popular acclaim, but then lost popularity also as his cruelty became less discriminate. Whether any post-Julio-Claudian emperors merit the title of Caesarist is a question to which, because of ignorance, I have no answer; whilst silence may also be the most judicious response to the person who enquires after modern applications of Caesarism: Peron springs to mind but this is the territory of specialists in modern populism and only they can decide whether Caesarism, as I have re-cast it, has any contemporary empirical validity.

I shall return to the implications of my minimalist position on Caesarism in the Conclusion (5.7) but for the moment let me turn my attention to the second issue I promised to address: how my concept compares and contrasts with other usages surveyed in this thesis. It must suffice only to speak in general terms.

The definition concurs with all those authors (and they are the majority) who have stressed the military<sup>298</sup> and autocratic character of Caesarism,

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298. Caesar's name continues to evoke the idea of great military leadership: see, for instance, William Manchester's American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964 (1979), esp. 8. Despite this, theorists of the military tend not to have developed a concept of Caesarism, though the notion of 'praetorianism' has gained wide currency among them. See, for instance, D.C. Rapoport, 'A Comparative Theory of Military and Political Types', in S.P. Huntington, (ed.), Changing Patterns of Military Politics (New York: 1962), 71-101, esp. 72-4; A. Perlmutter and V.P. Bennett (eds.), The Political Influence of the Military (New Haven: 1980), Part II; S.E. Finer, The Man on Horseback (1976), 187.



yet it departs from most of them in declaring that Caesarism was not the product of democracy: Rome was never that. Caesarism arose out of a crisis of what today we would call imperialism; assigning Caesarism's existence to the institutions of the common people is a travesty and an historical libel.

This brings me to two other ways in which my own concept differs from most non-Marxist usages, and especially from Max Weber. First, and needing no further comment, the 'irrationality of the masses' theme is purged from the new concept's formulation. And second, the issue of 'plebiscitarian' acclamation is for me relatively unimportant in reflecting upon the meaning of Caesarism. In the Roman Republic there were indeed plebiscita but their working and significance has to be rightly understood. Plebiscita were decrees or resolutions with the force of law passed by the concilium plebis, an exclusively plebeian-in-composition tribal<sup>299</sup> (i.e. territorially based) assembly. The concilium plebis was a sovereign body empowered to pass laws and elect magistrates though, confusingly, this assembly did not monopolise sovereignty (legislative or electoral) but rather had to share it with two other main bodies:<sup>300</sup> the similarly tribally based comitia tributa which consisted of plebeian and patrician citizens; and the comitia centuriata, also of mixed (plebeian and patrician) composition, but founded on timocratic criteria i.e. on the wealth one owned.<sup>301</sup> Notwithstanding their peculiar

299. 'There were thirty-five tribes in the Roman state, four urban and thirty-one rural', Taylor, op.cit., 50; yet cf. Brunt, Social Conflicts, 62.

300. I here omit consideration of the comitia curiata, a fourth assembly, because by the Late Republic its political power had waned to virtual insignificance: see Jolowicz, op.cit., 16-18, 23.

301. For details of this body's five 'classes' and the 'centuries' into which the classes were subdivided, see ibid, 18-19.



electoral prerogatives,<sup>302</sup> all three bodies voted on legislative matters in an identical manner: bills submitted to the assemblies could not be amended but had to be voted on in their entirety. (Discussion in the actual assembly place itself was also prohibited.) But here the vague similarity with modern referenda<sup>303</sup> ends, since the unit of voting was not an individual person, casting a ballot which counted equally with other individual persons; the unit of voting was a collective agent - either a tribe (concilium plebis, comitia tributa), weighted heavily in favour of the rural populace, or a timocratic class (comitia centuriata) weighted heavily in favour of the richest citizens. Hence the mass, atomised plebiscitary electoral constituency of Weber's Caesarist leader is absent from the Roman scene, and the analogy of plebiscitum with the modern plebiscite is extremely imperfect.

There are other ways in which the notion of Caesarism as I have interpreted it may be likened to and distinguished from previous formulations. It affirms with Weber among others - here, against crude Marxist usage - the importance of personality in politics, though at the same time I have sedulously avoided using the word charisma to speak of Caesar's genius; charisma, with its mystical aura and its negative evaluation of the capacities of ordinary

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302. That is, they were each charged with the election of specific magistrates: details in ibid., 23.

303. On the various sorts of referenda, see Canovan, op.cit., 192-202.

304. See Jolowicz, op.cit., 18-19, and Taylor, op.cit., 55-57 for details of the weighting system as it related to wealth. On the counting procedure of the assemblies, see Jolowicz, 16, and note also his remark: 'We thus have the strange result that in the later republic there were three bodies all equally capable of passing binding statutes, three sovereign legislatures, as we should call them, the comitia centuriata and tributa, consisting of the same people, though organised differently, and the concilium plebis, consisting almost entirely of the same people (for the patricians must by 287 have become a numerically insignificant minority), and meeting like the comitia tributa by tribes', 22-3.



folk, carries associations which this author finds unacceptable. Following Roscher, in some ways the most lucid of thinkers on our subject, I have tried to make my concept capacious enough to accommodate Caesar's 'janus-faced' appeal; thus the significance I attribute to syncretism. On the other hand my distance from Roscher's global ambitions for the concept (an ambition he has shared with many thinkers: Romieu, Schäffle, Spengler, Riencourt immediately come to mind) will be obvious. I have wished to place Caesarism firmly in its time, and my concept has no expectations built into it that Caesarism is predestined to repeat itself as a stage in the historical cycle. 'Finally, with Marxist thinkers, I have located Caesarism within crisis and class struggle, though pace Gramscians like Schwarz I have stressed that Caesarism is most definitely a form of populism. Let me also add that Caesarism is only a 'coalition' in the loosest of senses: an alliance of forces, certainly, but one under the syncretic autocracy of one person and his circle. The absorption of 'Caesarism' into twentieth century parliamentary coalition politics remains for me historically muddled and generally bizarre.

Other similarities with or divergences from previous notions of Caesarism could no doubt be enumerated. No-one is more conscious than I of the debts my concept owes to those whose insights I have appropriated and those who, in compelling me to disagree with them, have spurred me to think afresh. In the last analysis, however, the influence of other usages is of less significance than the new concept's own empirical and methodological solidity. Is it credible in its own right? The answer to that question is one for my readers to decide.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This Chapter began by reviewing a plurality of post-Weberian interpretations of Caesarism and found all of them wanting in some respect or other. Drawing



on the theory of populism, an alternative concept of Caesarism was then proposed, which aspired to be compatible with guidelines (principles A-F) that had emerged from previous critical analysis. Caesarism, it was argued, is best envisaged as an agrarian-political, pre-modern form of populism: military, autocratic and syncretic. In relation to Canovan's classification of populism, Caesarism could be said approximately to belong to her 'populist-dictatorship' variant. No claim was made that the new concept of Caesarism had application beyond the reigns of Caesar and Augustus.

Towards the end of the last Chapter I said that my intention in this one was to determine whether or not Caesarism might do any intellectual work for the contemporary social scientist. The minimalist position I have adopted might suggest that I have reached a negative conclusion about Caesarism's utility as a concept, but the implications of my stance are not quite as pessimistic as they seem. First, the new notion I have formulated does provide, I believe a more adequate description of a phenomenon - Caesarean politics and its background - than we have been offered hitherto. Previous usages of Caesarism have for the most part restricted themselves to analogy, but the basis of that analogy can often be shown to be historically inaccurate and therefore profoundly misleading. Second, the refurbished notion of Caesarism is explicit in its assumptions and I hope in its presentation. It thus enables social scientists to use it, where they find it applicable, or (and this has its own validity for a word so badly abused as Caesarism) refrain from using it where its inappropriateness is patent. Finally, Caesarism as here presented can be seen to vindicate the explanatory potential of 'populism' and may help us in clarifying the range of populisms from Caesar to Thatcher and beyond.



## Chapter Six

### GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In this brief, closing Chapter let me extract only the most general conclusions about Caesarism which have emerged from previous discussion.

As a word of contestation and philippic, as, in Gramsci's phrase, 'a polemical-ideological formula',<sup>1</sup> Caesarism offered us access into some of the most momentous preoccupations and struggles of the second half of the nineteenth century. Caesarism played a modest part in helping to define, express and circumscribe a social agenda whose items included the meaning of democracy, the role of 'the masses' in a modern polity, and the present and future of domination. In short, the study of Caesarism can be seen as a contribution to the understanding of political languages, rhetorics which both convey and constitute our experiences and delimit our sense of what it is humanly possible to achieve as political actors. There is much more to be done in this area - the work of Skinner, Richter, Pocock, Williams and Stedman Jones has already produced major advances in our knowledge - and its fruits promise to be rich and plentiful.

In respect of Max Weber, the analysis of Caesarism had above all a complementary function: it offered modifications, hypotheses and addenda to an already massive literature concerned with his politics, sociology and logic; it sought to tackle, and thereby elucidate, a province of Weber's thought, hitherto largely disregarded as an explicit object of inquiry. Again, the issue of language and its transformations, this time in the work of one author, was a major issue. The account of Caesarism in the Weberian corpus exposed its multi-dimensional and, to some extent,

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1. Gramsci, op.cit., 220.



Figure 4

CONCEPTIONS OF CAESARISM

| AUTHOR          | REPRESENTATIVE PERSONALITY  | BASIC POLITICAL MAKE-UP  | ROOT CAUSE/CONDITION   |
|-----------------|---|--|--|
| Bagehot         | Julius Caesar, Napoleon I and (esp.) III  | Direct, plebiscitary monarchy; democratic despotism; Benthamite despot   | Not clear  |
| Gerth and Mills | Diocletian (?)  | Oriental despotism; theocracy  | Monopolistic control of means of life; imperial bureaucracy and tax farming system               |
| Gramsci         | Misc., but includes Julius Caesar, Napoleon I and III, Bismarck                                       | Arbitrationist; a situation and a solution; may be progressive or reactionary, qualitative or quantitative; may be heroic or mundane (eg. parl. coalition) | Class equilibrium in a period of extant or impending catastrophe                                 |
| Hall            | SDP Gang of Four  | Transformist, centrist compromise; coalition (see also Gramsci)  | Polarisation and stalemate of 'fundamental classes'; crisis of representation (see also Gramsci) |
| Mommsen         | Julius Caesar   | (Salutary) absolute military monarchy  | Slavery, absence of republican-constit. representation; oligarchic absolutism                    |
| Namier          | Napoleon I and III, Boulanger, Mussolini, Hitler  | Demagogic, anti-constitutional, corrupt, militaristic dictatorship; form of political imitation  | Frenzy of people living in a period of social collapse and disorientation who crave a saviour    |
| Neumann         | Misc. but includes Julius Caesar, Augustus, Cleomenes, Pisistratus, Cola di Rienzo, Savonarola, Peron | Dictatorship with popular support  | Political influence of the masses, usually in a period of social crisis/disintegration           |



| AUTHOR    | REPRESENTATIVE PERSONALITY  | BASIC POLITICAL MAKE-UP   | ROOT CAUSE/CONDITION   |
|-----------|---|---|--|
| Riencourt | Misc. but includes Asoka, Shih Huang-ti, Thutmose III, Hammurabi, Inca Roka, Augustus and post-Augustan emperors; American presidents of the future | Autonomous, virtually all-powerful chief executive  | Growth of world empire plus mass democracy; decay of 'Culture' and consolidation of 'Civilisation'       |
| Romieu    | Augustus and post-Augustan emperors   | Rule of Force; military autocracy   | Rise of democracy and liberalism attendant on the emergence of the bourgeoisie                           |
| Roscher   | Misc. but includes Julius Caesar, Napoleon I and III  | Janus-faced military tyranny  | Degeneration of democracy  |
| Schäffle  | Napoleon III  | Tyranny; Roman emperor system   | Anarchy of civil war between aristocrats and democrats, rich and poor following the collapse of kingship |
| Schwarz   | Misc. but includes Lloyd George, Baldwin, N. Chamberlain, Churchill   | Coalition government (see also Gramsci and Hall)  | Crisis of (liberal) hegemony (see also Gramsci and Hall)   |
| Weber     | Misc. but includes Gracchus brothers, Cromwell, Napoleon, Bismarck, Gladstone, Lloyd George, US mayor and President                                 | Leader democracy; political charisma; military commander; Caesarism may be positive or negative | Transformation of charisma in a democratic, anti-authoritarian direction                                 |



disarticulated character; it also revealed how the notion of Caesarism was predicated on a caricatured perception of mass irrationality, a perception which Weber shared with a host of his contemporaries and which, of course, remains widespread today.

Finally, just as I sought to rescue 'irrationality' from the maltreatment of Weberian usage and to exonerate it as a concept, so the attempt was also made to distill from 'Caesarism' a meaning with empirical credibility. Figure 4 presents a simplified summary of the more important of the bewildering variety of interpretations of Caesarism that I have encountered in my research. When contrasted with most of these my own formulation of Caesarism as a species of populism looks decidedly unambitious, hardly a notion with grand applicability. This will detract from the excitement that Caesarism can hope to command, but it just may help promote a sense of reality about its true social scientific potential.



APPENDIX

'BONAPARTISM' IN THE THOUGHT OF KARL MARX  
(AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO WEBER'S 'CAESARISMS')

The task of this Appendix is the very limited one of indicating how Marx's analyses of 'Bonapartism' stand in intellectual relationship to Weber's views on Caesarism. The consequences of this deliberately narrow focus is the omission of a number of areas and problems which, though important in their own right, would require a separate doctoral thesis to do them justice. Hence I do not attempt in what follows a comprehensive account of Marx's own reflections on 'Bonapartism' (a word, actually, Marx only rarely employed) of the sort that has already been the subject of, for example, Hal Draper's study;<sup>1</sup> nor do I address the question of the consistency or otherwise of the 'conjunctural' enquiries into the origins, conditions of existence and structure of Louis Napoleon's rule with Marx's more general theory of state/civil society/economy relations;<sup>2</sup> nor am I able to expand here on the visible, and sometimes quite radical, departures from Marx's own pronouncements on the Bonapartist phenomenon taken by Engels and by later Marxist theorists.<sup>3</sup>

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1. H. Draper, op.cit. The two other major studies on Bonapartism in the thought of Marx (and Engels) are M. Rubel, Karl Marx devant le Bonapartisme (Paris:1960), and W. Wippermann, Die Bonapartismustheorie von Marx und Engels (Stuttgart: 1983).

2. A hostile and simplistic account is M.E. Spencer, 'Marx on the State: The Events in France between 1848-1850', Theory and Society, 7 (1979), 167-198.

3. See, for instance:

a. Engels's treatment of Bismarckian Bonapartism, summarised in Draper, op.cit., 410-427, and the references cited there.

b. Lenin on the Karensky coalition Provisional Government as Bonapartist, in 'The Beginning of Bonapartism' and 'They do not see the wood for the trees', Collected Works Vol. 25 (Moscow: 1964), 219-222, 251-56 respectively. No translator's name provided. (The plebiscitary component of 'Bonapartism', of some considerable importance for Marx, is absent from Lenin's analyses).

c. Gramsci, op.cit., 210-23; the idea of 'progressive' and 'reactionary' forms of 'Caesarism' finds no parallel in Marx's thought. (cont'd over).



Finally I shall desist from the attempt to evaluate empirically and logically Marx's thoughts on the French political scene of the 1850s and 1860s; shall avoid commenting on 'Bonapartism's' supposed location in a taxonomy of so-called exceptional states;<sup>4</sup> and shall eschew, also, empirical comparison

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3. (cont'd).

d. Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution (1977 edn.) transl. M. Eastman, 663-68 (on Karensky); The Revolution Betrayed, op.cit., 277-9 (on the 'Stalin regime' as 'a variation of Bonapartism - a Bonapartism of a new type not before seen in history'); The Struggle against Fascism in Germany (1975), translators various/unknown, esp. chapters 8, 11, 12, 19, 23 & 24. Trotsky's brilliant analyses of the rise of fascism deploy 'Bonapartism' as a key concept, though not always consistently: thus while in January 1932 Trotsky implied that the Brüning government was Bonapartist (ibid., 126), by September 1932 Trotsky has changed his mind under the influence of events: 'In its time, we designated the Brüning government as Bonapartism ... that is, as a regime of military-police dictatorship ... Were we to be exact, we should have to make a rectification of our old designation: the Brüning government was a pre-Bonapartist government. Brüning was only a precursor. In a perfected form, Bonapartism came upon the scene in the Papen-Schleicher government', ibid., 262-3, emphasis in original. It is noteworthy, too, that Trotsky's interpretation of 'Bonapartism' contains elements which are profoundly different from Marx's own statements on the origins and evolution of the Second Empire. For instance, Trotsky envisages Bonapartism emerging in Germany, 'the most advanced capitalist system in the conditions of the European impasse', ibid., 110; for Marx, on the other hand, it is France's immature social and economic system that helps explain the rise of Louis Bonaparte. Or again: according to Trotsky, Bonapartism in Germany precedes both working class collapse ('The working class is split; it is weakened by the reformists and disoriented by the vacillations of its own vanguard, but it is not annihilated yet, its forces are not yet exhausted. No. The proletariat of Germany is powerful', ibid., 133 - Trotsky is writing of Brüning's regime) and a massive political backlash from the petty bourgeoisie (ibid., 251-57). Marx's analysis, in the French context, was very different: under 'Bonapartism' the proletarian organisations are entirely smashed, while the 'Bonapartist' regime of Napoleon III follows the defeat of the petty bourgeoisie.

e. Thalheimer's position on Bonapartism and fascism, usefully described and assessed in M. Kitchen, 'August Thalheimer's Theory of Fascism', Journal of the History of Ideas, 34 (1973), 67-78, and the references cited there.

4. The most important theorisation since Engels was provided by Nicos Poulantzas: see esp. The Crisis of the Dictatorships (1976), transl. D. Fernbach, 90-126; also, Fascism and Dictatorship (1974), transl. J. White, 313-335.



and contrast between 'Bonapartism' on the one hand, and Bismarck's regime and fascism on the other.<sup>5</sup>

Our task, though strictly and artificially circumscribed, is challenging enough. This is not only because of the plurality of meanings that Caesarism assumes in Weber's work, but also because the stylistic character of Marx's own formulations - simultaneously journalistic, historical, theoretical and polemical - lends his ideas a complexity and an ambiguity which resist neat encapsulation. Emphases are apt to change both within particular articles, as well as between them, according to the level of analysis Marx chooses, the episode he elects to consider, and the targets of his critique or lampoon. Moreover, as Napoleon III's regime changed, so Marx's interpretation to some extent changed with it, though the crucial transition of the regime from 'dictatorship' to increased liberalisation in the 1860s was to the best of my knowledge never theoretically integrated into Marx's account of the Second Empire.<sup>6</sup> (What people often refer to as Marx's theory of 'Bonapartism' is, if it can be called a theory at all, one which only really deals with the period 1848-1858 in any detail or with any conceptual sophistication; Marx's 1871 comments on the Second Empire in 'The Civil War in France' for the most part repeat and reinforce the conclusions he reached in the fifties). In short, it is even more than usually necessary to underline the qualification that any digest of points of the kind I am about to extract from Marx's writings is set down at the price of being simplistic.

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5. The inapplicability of the model of Bonapartism for the Bismarckian system is cogently argued by Allan Mitchell, 'Bonapartism as a Model for Bismarckian Politics', op.cit.; on the similarities and differences between Bonapartism and fascism, see M. Kitchen, Fascism, op.cit., 71-82.

6. Cf. J. Dülffer, 'Bonapartism, Fascism and National Socialism', Journal of Contemporary History, 11 (1976), 109-28, at 111.



1. Weber's practical endorsement of the term/concept 'Caesarism' in a modern milieu is flatly rejected by Marx.'

Concluding the 1869 preface to the second edition of 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', Marx wrote:

Finally, I hope that my work will contribute towards eliminating the current German scholastic phrase which refers to a so-called Caesarism. This superficial historical analogy ignores the main point, namely that the ancient Roman class struggle was only fought out within a privileged minority, between the free rich and the free poor, while the great productive mass of the population, the slaves, formed a purely passive pedestal for the combatants. People forget Sismondi's significant expression: the Roman proletariat lived at the expense of society, while modern society lives at the expense of the proletariat. The material and economic conditions of the ancient and the modern class struggles are so utterly distinct from each other that their political products also can have no more in common with each other than the Archbishop of Canterbury has with the High Priest Samuel.<sup>8</sup>

Marx's opinion could not have been registered more unequivocally: 'Caesarism' is a fatuous and misleading concept as applied to the 'economic conditions' and the 'political products' obtaining in 'modern society'. But note, furthermore, that Marx's strictures are not merely confined to rebutting spurious analogies between the 'Caesarism' of ancient Rome and (by implication) the regime of the French Second Empire; his objection seems to be the much more fundamental one that the concept of Caesarism is wrongly applied to any modern

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7. Though Marx was not entirely consistent in his repudiation: in a New York Tribune article, he had 'referred to the Bonapartist regime as "the Caesarism of Paris" ...', Draper, op.cit., 466 (exact reference not supplied).
  8. Surveys from Exile, op.cit., 144-5, emphasis in original. Ironically Marx's own censure is itself historically inaccurate: the slaves were, in Marxist terms, involved in class struggle, as Marx, in other contexts, was the first to recognise. (For discussion of this point, together with references, see Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 64).



social or political formation. It follows, then, that Marx would have disclaimed as a matter of course at least two out of three contexts in which Weber explicitly used Caesarism as a descriptive term, i.e. those of Bismarck's governance and the rule of mass-party leaders.

2. The heroic, personal leadership quality, central to all of Weber's usages of Caesarism, is radically downgraded in Marx's analysis of 'Bonapartism'.

(I shall feel free to use this shorthand term, but will continue to place it in quotation marks, so to remind the reader that this is our abbreviation of a multifaceted phenomenon and was not normally Marx's own).

For Marx, Louis Bonaparte, as an individual, is a complete non-entity, a buffoon, a parody of his great uncle; if the nephew possesses what Weber called 'charisma' it is a consequence not of his acts, but of his name.<sup>9</sup> Writing many years after the composition of The Eighteenth Brumaire, Marx was explicit on what he himself deemed to be the crucial strength of his own analysis, when contrasted with those of contemporaries like Victor Hugo and Proudhon. Unlike the former, Marx's analysis had avoided presenting the coup as 'a bolt from the blue', as 'a single individual's act of violence'; unlike the latter, a mechanical historical determinism had not been allowed to usurp the place of contending class forces and their effect. For 'I show how ... the class struggle in France created circumstances and conditions which allowed a mediocre and grotesque individual to play the hero's role'.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Cf. V.M. Perez-Diaz, State, Bureaucracy and Civil Society. A Critical Discussion of the Political Theory of Karl Marx (1978), 48.

10. Surveys from Exile, 144, emphasis in original.



Class struggle, in determinate mode of production and social formation conditions, is the Marxian key to explaining the rise of the Second Empire; moreover, 'Bonapartism' is less a concept pertaining to the role of the individual in history, and more one alluding to a specific form of state. Let us take each of these levels in turn, recognising that such a typology of 'levels' represents an heuristic, exegetical strategy which imposes a great deal more coherence on Marx's thought than it actually contains. Only after this exercise is completed will it be fully possible to appreciate the extent of the divergence between Marx's view of 'Bonapartism' and the concepts of Caesarism that Max Weber outlined.

## 2.1 Conditions of existence of 'Bonapartism': Mode of Production and Social Formation

### 2.1.1 Mode of Production

As David Fernbach notes in his Introduction to a collection of Marx's political writings largely devoted to the Bonapartist phenomenon, 'The starting-point of Marx's explanation is the relatively undeveloped character of French capitalism'.<sup>11</sup> Numerous aspects of this economic immaturity are discussed in Marx's texts.

Consider, for instance, Marx's argument that a signal feature of French society in the period between the Restoration and 1851 was the weakness of industrial capital relative to both landed capital, dominant under the Bourbon ('Legitimist') monarchy of Charles X (1815-30), and finance capital, whose representatives directed state power under the Orleanist monarchy of Louis Philippe (1830-1848) and who, in addition, constituted the most politically influential 'fraction' of the bourgeoisie under the February Republic.<sup>12</sup>

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11. Ibid., 10.

12. Ibid., 165, and 'The Class Struggles in France: 1848 to 1850', transl. P. Jackson, in ibid., 35-142, at 46.



This configuration of capitals, with industrial capital the subordinate partner, was to have serious repercussions for the proletariat's capacity successfully to stage the insurrection of June 1848, and, later, to resist the Bonapartist 'dictatorship'; a weak industrial bourgeoisie results in a weak working class.

In general, the development of the industrial proletariat is conditioned by the development of the industrial bourgeoisie. Only under the rule of the bourgeoisie does it begin to exist on a broad national basis, which elevates its revolution to a national one; only under the rule of the bourgeoisie does it create the modern means of production, which also become the means of its revolutionary liberation. It is only the rule of the [industrial: PB] bourgeoisie which serves to tear up the material roots of feudal society and level the ground, thus creating the only possible conditions for a proletarian revolution.<sup>13</sup>

This statement reflects Marx's belief that industrial capital represents the most progressive of all capital fractions in the sense that its consolidation and extension signifies the growing simplification of the class structure. But in France, the 'struggle against capital in its highly developed modern form - at its crucial point, the struggle of the industrial wage-labourer against the industrial bourgeois - is ... a partial phenomenon'.<sup>14</sup> The industrial proletariat of Paris may be strong enough to exert its power and demonstrate its revolutionary élan at a time of emergency; but outside the capital city, the proletariat, 'crowded together in separate and dispersed industrial centres ... is almost submerged by the predominance of peasant farmers and petty bourgeois'.<sup>15</sup> The proletariat's victory over their class antagonists far

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13. One must be cautious in speaking, as I have, of the economic immaturity of France. When contrasted with the rest of the Continent, French industry and the French industrial bourgeoisie are 'more highly developed' and 'more revolutionary' than their European counterparts, ibid., 46, emphasis mine. On the other hand, when measured against the English model, French industrial capitalism is, according to Marx, in its infancy: see ibid., 111.

14. Ibid., 46.

15. Ibid.



from being a foregone conclusion is instead dependent upon its success in winning over to its struggle 'the mass of the nation', i.e. the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie.

We shall be returning to the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie presently, but an observation on the former class is instructive at this point since its widespread existence provides further evidence of the nascent character of industrial capitalism. The significance of the small-holding peasant proprietor for 'Bonapartism' in political and ideological terms is well known, but how is it to be expressed economically? Marx is clear about the different status enjoyed by the free peasant proprietor and his feudal predecessor, and Marx is just as lucid about the role of the Great Revolution in the peasant's emancipation.<sup>16</sup> But if the (small-holding) peasant is not living under feudal conditions, under what conditions is he living? The answer would seem to be: under conditions of transition between feudalism and capitalism, under conditions, that is, still undergoing in major sectors of the peasant economy the process Marx in Capital calls 'primitive accumulation'.<sup>17</sup> Now it is true that Marx does not explicitly use this concept in the articles on France, at least as far as I know. But the description of the peasants' situation in The Eighteenth Brumaire, and the formulations in Part Eight of Capital Vol. I evince many significant parallels. Primitive accumulation comes about in conditions where the immense majority of the population are either free peasants owning means of production or artisans and craftsmen engaged in

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16. Cf. ibid., 241: 'After the first revolution had transformed the peasants from a state of semi-serfdom into free landed proprietors, Napoleon confirmed and regulated the condition under which they could exploit undisturbed the soil of France, which had now devolved on them for the first time ...'.

17. See Capital, Vol. I (1976), transl. B. Fowkes, 873, 876.



simple (petty) commodity production. Primitive accumulation amounts to the transformation of this situation, a decisive shift towards the capitalist mode in which the direct producers are separated from their means of livelihood and their labour-power becomes increasingly commodified. In the first half of the nineteenth century small peasant property and petty bourgeois commodity forms cling on doggedly in France; but Marx leaves us in no doubt that their days are numbered, being steadily undermined by the capitalisation of agriculture, the growth of industry and their social corollaries - peasant indebtedness and bankruptcy.<sup>18</sup> To the extent, however, that the peasants are an economic factor of importance so, too, are they commensurately a political one, affording a central basis for the entire state executive, whether Bonapartist or otherwise. As Marx puts it:

By its very nature, small peasant property is suitable to serve as the foundation of an all-powerful and innumerable bureaucracy. It creates a uniform level of relationships and persons over the whole surface of the land. Hence it also allows a uniformity of intervention from a supreme centre into all points of this uniform mass. It annihilates the aristocratic intermediate levels between the mass of the people and the state power. On all sides, therefore, it calls forth the direct interference of this state power and the interposition of its organs without mediation.<sup>19</sup>

To sum up: an immature industrial capitalism, a weak proletariat outside Paris, a vast predominance of petty bourgeois and peasant property economic relationships are all unmistakable signs of the undeveloped nature of French capitalism. These features at the mode of production level, and their fateful consequences for state formation, set the most general boundaries in which the struggles in France were to be fought out.

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18. Compare ibid., 877-95 with Surveys from Exile, 241-3.

19. Surveys from Exile, 243.



### 2.1.2. Social Formation

#### The Dominant Classes

The history of the dominant classes in the period that concerns us is the history of their fusion in the Republic and their subsequent decomposition and demise. This trajectory formed one vital condition for the establishment of the Bonapartist state.

Marx insists on a special economic affinity between financial and large landed capitals, an association based on their mutual interest in speculation in, for example, mines, railways and government bonds.<sup>20</sup> No such nexus, on the other hand, characterised the relationship between finance and industry. On the contrary, while high finance benefited from the fiscal crisis of the French state under the July monarchy (state indebtedness leading to the latter's reliance on bankers and the Bourse), industry, especially its manufacturing sector, suffered: the failure of the government to balance its revenue with its expenditure resulted in increased taxation. Increased taxation, by inflating production costs and lowering consumption capacity, resulted in lower profits. And it was this structural antagonism which motivated, Marx tells us, the decision of the industrial bourgeoisie to challenge finance capital's effective state domination and to oppose a regime, the July monarchy, that was the incarnation of finance's economic and political hegemony.<sup>21</sup>

Yet if financial and industrial capitals were divided among themselves over the question which of them was to rule the French polity,<sup>22</sup> they were

20. For Marx the affinity is a systemic one and not, thus, confined to France: 'The combination of large landed property and high finance is in general a normal fact, as evidenced by England, and even Austria', ibid., 110, emphasis in the original.

21. Ibid., 36-41, 110-11.

22. I am making no attempt to disguise the instrumentalism of much of Marx's discussion of the class-state relation. Cf. 38 ('the financial aristocracy made the laws, controlled the state administration, exercised authority in all public institutions ...').



agreed on the essential point: the proletariat had to be liquidated as a political force. It was this determination that cemented the interests of property together. And it was the Republic that provided the conditions for the (albeit unevenly) collective rule of capital.<sup>23</sup> The means of representation for the 'unity' of financial, landed and industrial fractions was the Party of Order, an alliance of Bourbons and Orleanists, under the direction of the agents of finance. But the coalescence of capitals was not to last. Within two and a half years of its foundation, the Republic lay in ruins. The Party of Order had broken up into its original components; the spectre of competing dynastic claims had been resurrected; and a legitimisation crisis was in full swing. By allowing the Republic to be destroyed, the conditions of bourgeois rule as a whole were destroyed.<sup>24</sup> How was this disaster made possible?

It was made possible first, and most ironically, by the destruction of the proletariat and petty bourgeoisie as political forces; second, by crises within the power bloc. We will be examining the defeat of the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie more fully when we come to the section on the Subordinate Classes. Let us only note here that the destruction of their political organisations and the severe curtailment of their strength in civil society had two dire consequences for the shape of the Republic and thus for the basis of bourgeois rule. On the one hand, it removed two sources of resistance to state encroachment; on the other hand, by inviting the state to intervene in the suppression of the subordinate classes, the bourgeoisie encouraged the state's imperiousness and immeasurably strengthened its grip over polity and civil society alike.<sup>25</sup> The Party of Order was in an unhappy

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23. Ibid., 215.

24. Ibid., 215-22.

25. 'In its struggle with the people the Party of Order is continually obliged to increase the power of the executive. Every increase in the power of the executive office increases the power of its bearer, Bonaparte', ibid., 139.



predicament. It mistrusted state ambition, but it required the state to keep subaltern groups in check. Impaled on the fork of its own dilemma, the Party of Order was forced to oversee a drastic erosion of its own power, witnessed in the proliferation of crises that followed the beginning of 1849 (the dissolution of the National Guard; the dismissal of the Barrot-Falloux ministry; the dismissal of Changarnier, the anti-Bonapartist general; etc.).

The crises within the power bloc assumed a number of forms in the short life of the Republic. First, a crisis of credibility, which arose from the Party of Order's connivance in the expulsion of members of the Montagne (the petty bourgeoisie's parliamentary representatives) in June 1849. From then onwards, its own claims to parliamentary immunity, when menaced by Louis Bonaparte, would count for little. Moreover:

The humiliating procedural rules to which it subjected the Montagne exalted the status of the President of the republic in the same measure as it degraded the individual deputies. By stigmatising an insurrection for the protection of constitutional provisions [ - the Montagne had attempted to impeach Bonaparte for the unconstitutional use of his powers: PB] as an anarchistic attempt to overthrow society it forbade any appeal to the weapon of insurrection on its own part if ever the executive power should behave unconstitutionally towards it.<sup>26</sup>

Second, the power bloc suffered a crisis of representation which itself had a number of aspects. Most significant were: a) a compound fracture within the Party of Order where Legitimists and Orleanists not only once again became recognisable as distinct and separate entities, their parliamentary fusion broken, but also underwent within each fraction a new decomposition;<sup>27</sup> b) a series of splits between party and class (i.e. between the Party of Order and extra-parliamentary middle class groupings) and between ideologues and class. In short 'Representatives and represented faced each other in mutual incomprehension'.<sup>28</sup> Steadily, the Party of Order was deserted by

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26. Ibid., 181.

27. Ibid., 218-19.

28. Ibid., 221.



both financial and industrial capitals who interpreted the struggles between executive and legislature as disturbances to stability and order and who nervously came to hanker after the repression of their one-time political proxies by the President of the Republic.<sup>29</sup>

Third, the haemorrhages of credibility and representation were aggravated by the trade crisis of 1851. Though economic in origin,<sup>30</sup> the causes of the trade crisis were construed not as a product of capitalist relations but rather as attributable 'to purely political causes, to the struggle between the legislature and the executive'.<sup>31</sup> The economic problems, compounded by those already mentioned and by others besides,<sup>32</sup> threw the extra-parliamentary bourgeoisie into frenzy and panic. Their fear hammered home to them the inescapable conclusion: 'Rather an end with terror than a terror without end'.<sup>33</sup>

We can say in summary, then, that the crises of the dominant classes amounted to the gradual relinquishment of their political power to a state that could protect them from below; the de-legitimation of the Party of Order as the price for its support in the repression of the Montagne; the abandonment of the Party of Order by the bourgeois fractions outside parliament; and the panic-stricken response of the propertied class to the 1851 trade crisis. Through a process of quite dramatic attrition the bourgeoisie's political strength and will had been worn away. 'Without a ministry, without an army, without the people, without public opinion' and, indeed, without

29. Ibid., 221-24.

30. Marx explains the trade crisis as a manifestation of capitalist over-production, ibid., 226. Cf. E. Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory (1962), transl. B. Pearce, 345-59 for a helpful description of the Marxist theory of capitalist economic cycles. (Overproduction is construed as one 'moment' of the economic rotation. Thus: economic recovery: boom and prosperity: overproduction and slump: crisis and depression: economic recovery: etc.).

31. Surveys from Exile, 225.

32. Including fears of re-emergent popular tumult, ibid., 227.

33. Ibid., 228, emphasis omitted.



its own classes behind it, the Party of Order was emasculated. Outside of parliament, meanwhile, French capital had delivered itself into the hands of Bonaparte by vesting his administration with the extraordinary powers required to smash the subordinate classes. Paradoxically, the political interests of the French bourgeoisie had:

compelled it daily to increase the repression, and therefore to increase the resources and the personnel of the state power; it had simultaneously to wage an incessant war against public opinion and mistrustfully mutilate and cripple society's independent organs of movement where it did not succeed in entirely amputating them. The French bourgeoisie was thus compelled by its class position both to liquidate the conditions of existence of all parliamentary power, including its own, and to make its opponent, the executive, irresistible.<sup>34</sup>

#### The Subordinate Classes

The Bonapartist state is, in Marx's analysis, unthinkable without the prior defeat of the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie, and the support of the peasantry. Let us examine these classes in turn.

We have already seen that the proletariat, though a social force to be reckoned with in Paris, was in the main weak elsewhere owing to the undeveloped nature of French industrial capitalism. Numerically, the working class nowhere near matched the preponderance of peasantry and petty bourgeoisie in the French social formation; structurally, it remained dispersed, inarticulate and disorganised outside of the major cities. Nonetheless the proletariat had been a key factor in the February Revolution, its pressure being crucial

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34. Ibid., 186. Marx returns to this theme in 'The Civil War in France', in K. Marx, The First International and After, (1974), ed. D. Fernbach, 187-236 (no translator's name for 'The Civil War in France' provided), at 208; 'In their uninterrupted crusade against the producing masses they were ... bound not only to invest the executive with continually increased powers of repression, but at the same time to divest their own parliamentary stronghold - the National Assembly - one by one, of all its own means of defence against the executive'.



in the establishment of the Republic. But its victory was both partial and Pyrrhic. It was partial insofar as the intervention of the proletariat was accomplished to a large extent under the ideological and political leadership of sections of the bourgeoisie; the working class could not effect its own revolution.<sup>35</sup> And the proletariat's victory was Pyrrhic because 'By dictating the republic to the Provisional Government, and through the Provisional Government to the whole of France, the proletariat immediately came into the foreground as an independent party; but at the same time it challenged the whole of bourgeois France to enter the lists against it'.<sup>36</sup> The ominous rumblings coming from discontented, ambitious and militant working class circles in, for example, the Assembly and clubs, convinced the bourgeoisie that the proletariat could not be contained. It had to be eliminated politically.

It is useful here to distinguish between the causes, means and consequences of the defeat of the proletariat in June 1848. The fundamental cause has already been mentioned: the political and organisational immaturity of the workers in the context of a weak industrial capitalism. Now add to this the perceived threat of the working class to bourgeois rule, combined with the fear of members of the petty bourgeoisie for their property, and one has the link between the cause and the means of defeat. A number of groups participated in the carnage of the June days, but of major importance were the petty bourgeoisie, forming the bulk of the National Guard,<sup>37</sup> the lumpenproletariat, mobilised in twenty-four battalions of Mobile Guards,<sup>38</sup> and

35. Surveys from Exile, 45.

36. Ibid., 43.

37. 'No one had fought with more fanaticism in the June days for the salvation of property and the restoration of credit than the Parisian petty bourgeoisie - café and restaurant proprietors, marchands de vins, small traders, shopkeepers, craftsmen, etc. The shopkeeper had gathered his strength and marched on the barricade in order to restore the flow of business from the street into the shop', ibid., 65.

38. Marx's famous definition of the lumpenproletariat can be found in ibid., 197. Also, on lumpenproletariat and youth, 52-3.



the army.<sup>39</sup> Corresponding to the proletariat's drubbing on the streets was its destruction in parliament: for the immediate future it had been overwhelmed as a political force of any magnitude.

With this defeat the proletariat passed into the background of the revolutionary stage. Whenever the movement appeared to be making a fresh start the proletariat tried to push forward again, but it displayed less and less strength and achieved ever fewer results.<sup>40</sup>

With subsequent prosecutions of working class leaders, the movement degenerated, allowing a host of more dubious characters to step into the organisational vacuum. Associated with the general decline in working class political energy was the trend towards 'doctrinaire experiments' such as Proudhonist exchange banks, the growth of parochial craft unionism, and the emergence of a reformist leadership within the proletariat. Illustrative of the injury inflicted on the working class's morale and organisation was the passivity it displayed in the face of Faucher's electoral bill of May 1850, a piece of prospective legislation which promised to abolish universal suffrage and impose a three year residence qualification on the remaining electors. The electoral law:

barred the proletariat from the very arena of the struggle. It threw the workers back into the position they had occupied before the February revolution: they were again outcasts. By allowing themselves to be led by the democrats in face of such an event, by their ability to forget their revolutionary class interest in a situation which was momentarily comfortable, they renounced the honour of being a conquering power, gave themselves up to their fate, and proved that the defeat of June 1848 had rendered them incapable of fighting for years; they proved that, for the time being, the historical process would again have to go forward over their heads.<sup>41</sup>

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39. Ibid., 154.

40. Ibid., emphasis in original.

41. Ibid., 194, emphasis in original.



The last consequence of the working class's political collapse concerns the nature of the Republic itself after June. It was now more than ever a bourgeois Republic. From then till its own perdition, the big middle class, led by finance capital and its agents, would attempt to rule alone.

Yet it was not only the President who frustrated that ambition; the petty bourgeoisie, too, both extra-parliamentary and within the National Assembly, had become restive. The position of this class in the interregnum marking June 1848 and Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état is described by Marx as one of growing alienation from, and hostility to, the Republic. Not only did it find itself increasingly threatened with bankruptcy, but also on the receiving end of a series of discriminatory measures, including the abandonment of progressive taxation, virtually designed to arouse its anger and indignation.<sup>42</sup> Parliamentary representation lay in the charge of the Montagne (led by Ledru-Rollin) but it was on the streets that the petty bourgeoisie's power was to be finally broken. The immediate cause of their nemesis was a series of clashes between the Montagne and the President, Louis Bonaparte, over the latter's unconstitutional use of his office. The dispute culminated in the tabling of a bill of impeachment against the President and his ministry for their part in sanctioning the bombardment of Rome. After the bill had been rejected by the Assembly on 12 June 1849, a demonstration was called for the following day providing the Party of Order and the executive with a golden opportunity to rid themselves of a social irritant whose impudence could no longer be tolerated. The petty bourgeoisie were met with force and convincingly routed. In the aftermath it became obvious that they had incurred a triple reversal in their fortunes. With the expulsion from the Assembly of many of the Montagne's members, parliamentary influence was at an end for the foreseeable future. Outside parliament, the Montagne was rebuffed

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42. Ibid., 65-66.



by its own class. And the petty bourgeoisie's armed might was also terminated with the dissolution of the Paris Artillery and a number of legions of the National Guard.<sup>43</sup> In all these ways, the menacing arm which had proved so effective against the proletariat a year earlier was itself cut off.

The significance of this liquidation of proletariat and petty bourgeoisie as political forces lay in the crushing of two bastions of resistance to the Bonapartist challenge that was to come.

No account of the events in France of this period can be complete without consideration of the class most closely and positively identified with the emergence of the Bonapartist state: the peasantry. We have already seen that, according to Marx, a general relationship existed between small peasant property and state power. But Marx also points to a more specific relationship obtaining in which Louis Bonaparte achieves a singular, special status in the imagination of the peasantry. For Marx, the peasantry, particularly its small-holding section, had recognised something of their own physiognomy when, in December 1848, they had voted for Louis as President of the Republic.<sup>44</sup> Marx interprets this phenomenon as the victory of an image - 'For the peasants Napoleon was not a person but a programme'<sup>45</sup> - and of a fantasy: 'The nephew's obsession was realised, because it coincided with the obsession of the most numerous class of the French people'.<sup>46</sup> Napoleon I had reinforced and extended the tendency towards small peasant property which had attended the decline

43. Ibid., 177-78, 182-83.

44. Perez-Diaz, ingeniously, if perhaps somewhat fancifully, argues that Marx is here offering 'a "peasant variant" of a theory of the fetishism of the state ... (A) "subject" (the peasant class) projects or transfers its "essence" (its political resources or power) on to an alien object (the state, or one state institution, the president). And, in so doing, this subject becomes powerless, to the point not only of losing actual control of the object, but also of losing the consciousness of having produced this object in the first place. Op.cit., 46-47.

45. Surveys from Exile, 72. Cf. Wellington's comment on Napoleon I: 'Napoleon was not a personality, but a principle', cited in F. Markham, Napoleon (New York: 1963), 257.

46. Ibid., 239.



and then collapse of the feudal estates. In Louis Bonaparte, Marx claims, the peasants imagined a reincarnation had taken place, one that would save them from the burden of taxation and mortgage. The attraction of Bonaparte had its conditions of existence, too, in the life experiences induced by peasant small-holding; in a celebrated passage,<sup>47</sup> Marx argues that the isolation of the small peasant proprietor, itself an effect of the low division of labour permitting no application of science and no diversity of skills; his self sufficiency and lack of community; the productive and ecological stumbling blocks to political organisation; and so on, all militate against the possibility of concerted self-representation through parliament. Having no institutionalised mode of influence on the body politic, it was natural that the peasants should vote for Bonaparte to represent them: 'They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented'.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, Louis Bonaparte required the peasants' adulation; without it, the plebiscites he inaugurated to vindicate his actions first as President, then as Emperor, would have back-fired disastrously.

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So far, in this Section on Social Formation conditions, I have been exclusively concerned to portray the types of struggle that preceded and contributed to the formation of the Bonapartist state. We have seen how both dominant and subordinate classes (excepting the peasantry) spent their strength and vigour in the battles against each other, and we have seen the consequences of this in social exhaustion and paralysis. These battles encouraged

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47. Ibid., 238-9.

48. '... the state power does not hover in mid-air. Bonaparte represents a class, indeed he represents the most numerous class of French society, the small peasant proprietors', ibid., 238, emphasis omitted. Marx qualifies this statement on 240: 'the Bonaparte dynasty represents the conservative, not the revolutionary peasant: the peasant who wants to consolidate the condition of his social existence, the smallholding, not the peasant who strikes out beyond it.'



the state to grow and gradually appropriate the powers and functions of the warring classes: Marx would say in 'The Civil War in France' that the empire 'was the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation'.<sup>49</sup> Finally, I remarked on the importance of the peasantry as a basis of Bonaparte's electoral success and plebiscitary legitimation. Now we must turn to consider two other sources of power, linked to the class struggle though analytically distinguishable from it, which constituted important political preconditions of Bonaparte's coup and subsequent emperorship.

#### State Centralisation; The Structure of the Republican Constitution

The advancement of state centralisation in France, and in particular the expansion of the bureaucratic and military apparatuses, is presented by Marx as proceeding in four clearly discernible historical phases. The process begins with the demise of feudalism and the emergence of the absolutist state:

The seignorial privileges of the landowners and towns were transformed into attributes of the state power, the feudal dignitaries became paid officials, and the variegated medieval pattern of conflicting plenary authorities became the regulated plan of a state authority characterised by a centralisation and division of labour reminiscent of a factory'.<sup>50</sup>

The second phase came into effect with the Great Revolution of 1789 and the rule of Napoleon I. It involved the elimination of

all separate local, territorial, urban and provincial powers in order to create the civil unity of the nation. It had to carry further the centralisation that the absolute monarchy had begun, but at the same time it had to develop the extent, the attributes and the number of underlings of the governmental power. Napoleon perfected this state machinery.<sup>51</sup>

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49. First International, 208.

50. Ibid., 237.

51. Ibid.



Next, the Bourbon and Orleanist monarchies:

only added a greater division of labour, which grew in proportion to the creation of new interest groups, and therefore new material for state administration, by the division of labour within bourgeois society. Every common interest was immediately detached from society, opposed to it as a higher, general interest, torn away from the self-activity of the individual members of society and made a subject for governmental activity, whether it was a bridge, a schoolhouse, the communal property of a village community, or the railways, the national wealth and the national university of France.<sup>52</sup>

Finally,

the parliamentary republic was compelled in its struggle against the revolution to strengthen by means of repressive measures the resources and centralisation of governmental power. All political upheavals perfected this machine instead of smashing it.<sup>53</sup>

This 'evolution' of state power is significant for our subject insofar as it indicates the historical antecedents of 'Bonapartism'; in a very real sense, 'Bonapartism' marks a continuation of a long process as opposed to being a fundamental rupture with the past.

Continuity is also evident, moreover, though this time between the pre- and post-coup Bonapartist periods, in the character of the Republican constitution drafted in the period of the Constituent National Assembly (4 May 1848 to 28 May 1849). The relevance of the constitution was the juxtaposition it created of two relatively independent sources of authority, namely the Legislative Assembly and the President. The former, elected by universal manhood suffrage, controlled legislation and was empowered with the ultimate decisions on issues of 'war, peace and commercial treaties' and 'the right of amnesty'.<sup>54</sup> The latter, also elected by universal manhood suffrage was endowed 'with all the attributes of royal power, with the authority to appoint and dismiss his ministers independently of the National Assembly, with all the instruments

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52. Ibid., 237-38, emphasis in original.

53. Ibid., 238.

54. Ibid., 160.



of the executive power in his hands, and finally with the right of appointment to every post ... He has the whole of the armed forces behind him'.<sup>55</sup> The consequence of this constitutional bifurcation, Marx says, was the creation for the President of an independent plebiscitary base which immensely amplified his personal authority. Indeed, the Republican constitution provided:

for its own abolition by having the President elected by the direct suffrage of all Frenchmen. Whereas in the case of the National Assembly the voters of France are divided among its seven hundred and fifty members, they are here, on the contrary, concentrated on one individual. While each individual deputy represents only this or that party, this or that town, this or that bridgehead, or merely the necessity of electing some appropriate member of the seven hundred and fifty, in which case neither the issue nor the man is closely inspected, he, the President, is the elect of the nation, and the act of electing him is the great trump which the sovereign people plays once every four years. The elected National Assembly stands in a metaphysical relation to the nation, but the elected President stands in a personal relation to it. No doubt the National Assembly manifests in its individual deputies the multifarious aspects of the national spirit, but the President is its very incarnation. Unlike the Assembly, he possesses a kind of divine right; he is there by the grace of the people.<sup>56</sup>

Thus the Republic prefigured and contributed to Bonaparte's apotheosis. The coup, ironically, was a logical extension of the Republican constitution, just as the further centralisation of power under the Second Empire bore witness to a lineage traceable back to the days of absolutism.

## 2.2 'Bonapartism' as a specific form of state domination; tensions and contradictions within the Bonapartist state

Marx, as has already been suggested, envisaged the political ascent of Louis Bonaparte as both a continuation and a consummation of a statism deeply engrained within French society since at least the eighteenth century;

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55. Ibid., 160-61.

56. Ibid., 161-62, emphasis in original.



many elements of 'Bonapartism' were by no means original to the 1850s. Nonetheless, Marx also believed that the coup marked a transition to something novel, a rupture in the form of domination. The term 'Bonapartist' attempts to give expression to this new element. Borrowing a distinction of Nicos Poulantzas' one is able to say that 'Bonapartism', in Marx's analysis, represents a new 'form' rather than a new 'type' of state.<sup>57</sup> The Bonapartist state, in other words, is clearly a capitalist 'type' state insofar as it encourages commodity production<sup>58</sup> and functions within the institutional separation of economic and political structures characteristic of capitalist society. However this capitalist 'type' of state has undergone a distinctive mutation: it has assumed a quite specific 'form'. The evidence in Marx's texts to support the contention that the state immediately before and especially after Bonaparte's coup has metamorphosed into a new form is threefold. His comments reveal the occurrence of significant changes:

- a) within the state apparatuses, involving alterations in the social composition of state personnel - hence 'Bonapartism' sees a massive influx of, for example, lumpenproletarian and clerical elements - and the regression of many state offices into private hands.<sup>59</sup>
- b) between state apparatuses, amounting to shifts in their relative power positions. This had begun during the Republic (the removal of the Party of Order's ministries and their supersession by hacks of the chief executive; the loss of the Party of Order's control over the army, as evidenced in the dismissal of Changarnier, and over the president) but was accelerated and intensified after the coup of 2 December 1851. Most important in this context

57. N. Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes (1973), transls. T. O'Hagan et al., 147-153.

58. Cf. Surveys from Exile, 245.

59. Ibid., 243, 247.



is the enhanced influence of the bureaucracy<sup>60</sup> and the military: it 'seems that the state has returned to its most ancient form, the unashamedly simple rule of the military sabre and the clerical cowl'.<sup>61</sup> Writing in 1858 Marx is even more emphatic on the centrality of the military arm of state to 'Bonapartism': 'France', he says, 'has become the home of Pretorians only'; 'the rule of the naked sword is proclaimed in the most unmistakable terms, and Bonaparte wants France to clearly understand that the imperial rule does rest not on her will but on 600,000 bayonets'.<sup>62</sup> At this stage in his thinking about 'Bonapartism' Marx had become convinced that while all class-based political systems remain dependent on the army, the Bonaparte regime was distinctive in being a state designed for the army itself in opposition to the whole of civil society: 'Under the second Empire the interest of the army itself is to predominate. The army is no longer to maintain the rule of one part of the people over another part of the people. The army is to maintain its own rule, personated by its own dynasty, over the French people in general ... It is to represent the State in antagonism to the society.'<sup>63</sup>

60. Ibid., 243.

61. Ibid., 149. Cf. 184, 244; and First International, 208.

62. Quoted in Draper, op.cit., 453-54, from Marx's New York Tribune article, 'The Rule of the Pretorians', of 12 March 1858. (This has still not been reprinted in its English original). Pages 451-59 of Draper are very illuminating. He points out that Marx, in another N.Y.T. article, this time of 23 December 1858, dubbed the Bonaparte state a 'military and bureaucratic despotism' (451), even writing of 'military despotism, the rule of the Caesars' (456). Cf. Marx, Grundrisse (1973), transl. M. Nicolaus, 651 on 'the despotism of the Roman Caesars'.

63. Quoted in ibid., 454-55, emphasis omitted. On the position of the army under the Second Empire, see T. Zeldin, France 1848-1945. Politics and Anger (1979), 154-56. The whole chapter on 'Bonapartism' in this book is excellent. For Zeldin the Second Empire was not 'a militarist regime, for the army did not run the country', 154. On just who did, see the same author's superbly detailed The Political System of Napoleon III (1958).



c) between state and society, involving:

i. a specific form of rule and legitimation. When Marx is writing about the Bonapartist state in 'The Eighteenth Brumaire' (first published in 1852) and in 'The Civil War in France', the emphasis of his analysis is not so military-centred as it is in the likes of 'The Rule of the Pretorians'. What he tells us in the former two articles is something different. 'Bonapartism' is not the rule of a party or a class or class fraction; indeed it is a despotism against social classes, including the bourgeoisie.<sup>64</sup> Rather it is the rule of a clique, composed of members of the military and civil bureaucracy, clergy and lumpenproletariat.<sup>65</sup> Thus: '(Bonaparte) has been forced to create, alongside the real classes of society, an artificial caste for which the maintenance of his regime is a question of self-preservation'.<sup>66</sup> Moreover just as Louis Napoleon can in the fifties dispense with parliament, so he can dispense too with parliamentary legitimation. In its place stands the plebiscite. 'The Empire, with the coup d'état for its certificate of birth' and 'Universal suffrage for its sanction',<sup>67</sup> is keen to be a plebiscitary Empire; hence the plebiscites in 1851, to endorse the coup, in 1852, to approve the assumption of the imperial title, and in 1870, to confirm Napoleon's reorganisation of parliament.

ii. a distinct state-economy relation, though Marx changed his mind about what, exactly, this entailed. In 'The Eighteenth Brumaire' the Bonapartist state is portrayed as a disruptive factor in the economy: Bonaparte 'brings the whole bourgeois economy into confusion ... creates anarchy itself in

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64. Surveys from Exile, 235. Cf. 245 'Bonaparte is the executive authority which has attained power in its own right ...'.

65. Ibid., 243-46.

66. Ibid., 243.

67. First International, 208.



the name of order';<sup>68</sup> while in 'The Civil War in France', reflecting on the entire life of the Second Empire, Marx can say that 'Under its sway, bourgeois society, freed from political cares, attained a development unexpected even by itself. Its industry and commerce expanded to colossal dimensions ...'.<sup>69</sup>

In summary: though 'Bonapartism' does not constitute a new type of state - it is capitalist - it does evince a new form, evident in the changes that can be seen to have occurred within the state agencies, between them, and between state and society.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, what of the Bonapartist state's instabilities? In the writings of the fifties Marx points to four problems which the Bonapartist state can expect to encounter. First, the small holding peasantry, burdened with new taxation and driven increasingly into pauperism, will steadily come to lose their enthusiasm for the 'Napoleonic idea'; their interests are developing ever more apparently in 'opposition to capital' and in harmony with those of that other oppressed class, the urban proletariat.<sup>71</sup> Second, the bourgeoisie's eclipse as a political factor, is going to be only temporary. True, Bonaparte 'is only where he is because he has broken the political power of (the) middle class, and breaks it again daily. He therefore sees himself as the opponent

68. Surveys from Exile, 248-9.

69. First International, 208. On the political economy of 'Bonapartism', see R. Magraw, France 1815-1914: The Bourgeois Century, (1983), chapter 5.

70. Evidence for a new form of state might also be adduced by changes in the relationship between the French state and its international rivals, but this was not a theme that Marx himself developed. Engels, on the other hand, did mention this in, for instance, his 1891 introduction to 'The Civil War in France', and in his 1895 introduction to 'The Class Struggles in France', Marx-Engels Selected Works (1968), 251 and 647-8 respectively. No translator(s) mentioned. Engels here alludes to the military adventurism and expansionism of the Second Empire, from its campaigns in Crimea (1854-5) through to its wars against China (1856-58, 1860) and its expeditions against Syria (1860-61) and Mexico (1862-67), and culminating in its confrontation with Prussia.

71. Surveys from Exile, 242-3.



of the political and literary power of the middle class. But by protecting its material power he recreates its political power'.<sup>72</sup> Third, in the attempt to represent all and sundry, Bonaparte and his state produces confusion and insecurity for all social classes and promotes their discontent. Thus:

The contradictory task facing the man explains the contradictions of his government, the confused and fumbling attempts to win and then to humiliate first one class and then another, the result being to array them all in uniform opposition to him.<sup>73</sup>

All these previous observations derive from 'The Eighteenth Brumaire'. In 'The Rule of the Pretorians', on the other hand, we are notified of a fourth problem facing Bonaparte: the prominence of the army endangers Bonaparte's own position because it exposes him to coups from his own commanders: 'In proclaiming himself the chief of the Pretorians, he declares every Pretorian chief his competitor'.<sup>74</sup> (The reader may recall that Roscher made a similar point about the Caesarist leader).

So in Marx's view 'Bonapartism' is inflicted with various tensions and contradictions none of which it will be able to resolve.

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This brings me to the end of my description of Marx's analysis of the Bonapartist state. I have endeavoured to show that 'Bonapartism' is the product of a definite mode of production and social formation conditions in which weak industrial capitalism and the debility born of class struggle combined to provide Louis Bonaparte with his opportunity. Supported by the peasantry, the Bonapartist state rules as a bureaucratic-military despotism against social classes but one, whose inner contradictions will be its eventual

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72. Ibid., 245.

73. Ibid., 246.

74. Quoted in Draper, op.cit., 455.



undoing. The contrast with Weber's notions of Caesarism, all predicated on (though not exhausted by) the heroic, personal capacities of great leaders of men and women, could hardly be greater. Napoleon III, in Marx's analysis, is subsumed by his conditions; he is a symbol without substance; a cipher of events and forces beyond his making and control.<sup>75</sup> The above discussion also enables us to delineate other respects in which Marx's and Weber's analyses of 'Bonapartism' and Caesarism conflict.

3. The concept of 'Bonapartism' is devoid of the perception that the masses are irrational.<sup>76</sup>

For example, if the working class fails in the June days to wrest power from the state, it is because its struggle is not successful; if its struggle is not successful this is because of the strength of other classes (and state agencies) lined up against it, and its relative immaturity owing to the undeveloped character of French industrial capitalism. In short Marx provides a social explanation of 'collective behaviour' in its relationship to 'Bonapartism' for the most part absent in Weber's theorisation of Caesarism. Marx is forever stressing the range of social possibility of mass conduct; the very emphasis on struggle in his political writings highlights the importance he attributes to working class activity and engagement. With Weber, conversely, mass irrationality destines the bulk of the people to remain outside of the political arena, passive and acclamatory, a paradoxical fact given the still widespread opinion that it is Weber, not Marx, who is the sociological champion of human agency.

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75. Whether Marx was right to downgrade so drastically Louis Bonaparte's role in the making of the Bonapartist state, or Louis's personal qualities, is of course another matter entirely.

76. Not that Marx is beyond making censorious, and sometimes highly prejudiced, comments about specific groups of the downtrodden, e.g. the lumpenproletariat and the peasantry. Cf. Ste. Croix, Class Struggle, 371, 627, n.57.



4. While 'Bonapartism' is a crisis state, rendered exceptional in its political autonomy, 'Caesarism' is normal.

Marx wrote 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', and lived most of his life, in a time before the emergence of modern political parties. This is one reason why Marx's analyses of the state require considerable amendment and why Weber's political writings, by contrast, so often mesh with contemporary experience. Now where Weber speaks of say, Lloyd George or the American President, he takes it for granted that such Caesarism as they personify is part of the mould of mass party politics, born of an age of democracy. For Marx, however, 'Bonapartism' is a deviant phenomenon, a state markedly unusual in its alienation from, yet domination of, civil society.<sup>77</sup>

5. 'Bonapartism', Caesarism and 'bureaucratic authoritarianism'

'Bonapartism' and 'Caesarism' are concepts consonant with one another in as much as both underline the military factor in politics and the plebiscitarian mode of legitimation found in bourgeois states. Moreover, to the extent that 'Bonapartism' can be typified as 'bureaucratic authoritarian',<sup>78</sup> it accords reasonably well with Weber's Bismarckian variant of Caesarism. On the other hand, Anglo-Saxon Caesarism, though authoritarian in a general sense, is not itself deemed to be a kind of bureaucratic rule; to the contrary, Weber defends British Prime Ministerial Caesarism, for example, because, among other things, it is a counterweight to the influence of Saint Bureaucratus.

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77. See the sensible remarks of Ralph Miliband, 'Poulantzas and the Capitalist State', NLR, 82 (November-December), 1973, 83-92, esp. 90-1.

78. This is Perez-Diaz's designation, op.cit., 36, 112-13, n.7.



My intention in this Appendix has been to outline the more salient differences of perception between Marx and Weber on the concepts of 'Bonapartism' and Caesarism respectively. Whether 'Bonapartism' has any value as a concept with which to understand current political realities, is a question about which I remain, for the moment, agnostic.



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