

King Donald should take a lesson from King Canute

Published: January 12, 2026, 9:23 pm

Donald Trump has declared himself King in the USA. He should take a lesson from history. King Canute of England, Denmark and Norway knew there were limitations on regal power. Trump does not. That's why he's bound to fail.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42z5COInD_Q?si=zHj4Al7KrYeXRuC3

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=xbzhj-180e554-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

The world is getting used to the idea that Donald Trump thinks he's King Donald. He's already said so on his own social media account. He's declared, "Long live the king", and he very clearly was referring to himself. So, King Donald we have. 250 years after the USA put in place a constitution to guarantee that they would never be subject to a king again, Trump thinks that's precisely the role that he has.

It is an extraordinary situation to have arisen, and some very clear indication of the fact that Trump really does think that he has delivered a coup, which is overturning everything that the USA thought it knew about its own constitution.

But I want to stand back for a minute. And just think about the fact that we now have King Donald because I want to tell the story of another king. An English king. An English king from a long time ago. King Canute, and he had a problem with troublesome advisors. Trump might, at some point, begin to recognise the relevance of this story.

Those advisors believed that Canute was omnipotent. He could do anything. Whatever he said should happen. And the advisors to Trump do, I think right now think, that is also the case. I also suspect that Trump thinks that's the case, which is particularly worrying, but Canute was undoubtedly wiser than Trump. Canute knew that he was not omnipotent and to prove the point, as many schoolchildren in the UK will know, he went to the coast.

He sat on the shoreline in his throne, which I suspect was not that grand, and told the tide not to come in. And all his advisers stood behind him, lined up as Trump does, put his people around him when he's signing something in the White House, and they stood and watched to see what would happen.

And of course, the tide came in as Canute knew it would.

He wasn't daft.

He wasn't like Trump.

He didn't think he could rule nature, as Trump clearly does, because he thinks he can say that climate change isn't happening, and according to him, it isn't when very obviously it is.

No, Canute did this precisely to prove the fact that he was not omnipotent. There were things beyond his control about which he could do nothing.

He was a wise king who realised that there are limitations to power and compromises that have to be made because some things out there will not respond to whatever he says. King Donald has not learned that lesson as yet.

And this is why we are heading for tears before his regime, rule, governorship, whatever he wishes to call it, might be over. How he comes down from power, we don't know, because we aren't sure that he's going to allow elections again. But that he will come down from power is certain.

It may simply be because he's quite an old man, and he looks like a very unfit man, and he may just simply die in the job. But whatever it is that brings Trump and his acolytes down from power, it will certainly happen. And the biggest reason why it will happen, and why it may happen sooner than we expect, is because Trump does not realise that there are limitations on what he can do.

Right now, he's creating chaos. He's going into government departments, one after

another, and sacking people.

They sacked the nuclear inspectors and suddenly realised the US system of nuclear protection can't exist without nuclear inspectors.

They sacked the people who were doing the job of trying to control avian flu, which is causing mayhem across America right now, and has led to a doubling of the price of eggs, which is deeply unpopular, and then realised they can't control avian flu without those people and they desperately need them back.

They're sacking people everywhere. The Internal Revenue Service is the latest agency to suffer cuts. And it won't be alone.

The point is quite simple. The cuts that are being put in place by Trump and Musk, and others, are designed to create chaos. But systems can't survive chaos. There are powers beyond their reach which will create reactions. The tide will still come in. The world will continue.

The US government will require taxation revenue.

Nuclear power will continue to need regulation.

Avian flu does not recognize the power of Donald Trump to say it should cease.

There are issues, which he will have to tackle in the real world, which will not respond to a memo from the White House.

And that is also true in Europe, Ukraine, defence, and so many other issues, including, of course, USAID, where he has undermined the entire USAID program, in the process destroying much of the country's soft power, and giving China free reign to intervene in much of Africa, which is going to fundamentally change the nature of the political economy of the world for a long time to come.

This process of releasing the wrecking ball will bring Trump down along with a lot else.

He doesn't realise, as he should do, as Canute did, that he has to tread carefully within a world where there are constraints on his power. And until he does, then He's going to continue to cause havoc. When he does, it will be too late for him to put things right because no one's going to trust him to rebuild what he has destroyed. So, when he goes, it will be time for him and his style of government to be replaced.

I don't know when that time is, but I think we should take a lesson from Canute.

We should realise that government, fundamental as it is, important as it is, important as Canute was as a king, is not going to overturn the realities of life which will go on from before he came into his reign and after he left it.

King Donald is a transitory force in US politics. Those who think they might follow in his wake, take the lesson from Oliver Cromwell, who tried to put his son Richard Cromwell in charge of the English government in 1658, when Oliver Cromwell died, having been Lord Protector, having replaced King Charles I in 1649. And Richard Cromwell had to flee the country within two years, because the mayhem was too difficult for him to manage.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we will go back to the way that government was before Donald Trump came into office. I actually don't want us to because, quite clearly, there were many things very wrong with the way in which the US government was managed prior to the inauguration of Trump. We could list those things forever.

Neoliberal government has failed the people of the USA by not delivering them the things they want. So, let's not pretend we're going back to where we were, but let's anticipate that wise heads will be required to recognise that government needs a new role, working within the constraints of things like climate change, to deliver for all the people of the USA. And that, at some time, this will have to happen.

In a battle between King Donald and King Canute, there's no doubt that at the end of the day, Canute has to win. Trump may not want to recognise that yet. The world is in a panic about his power right now. But sanity will prevail. Trust me. We have to believe that is the case. Because if not, then there's no hope. And I live in hope.