

Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog of Brad DeLong. Comments (mostly) welcome, or email me at delong@hey.com with "delong-weblog" as the subject.
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Grasping Reality with Both Hands
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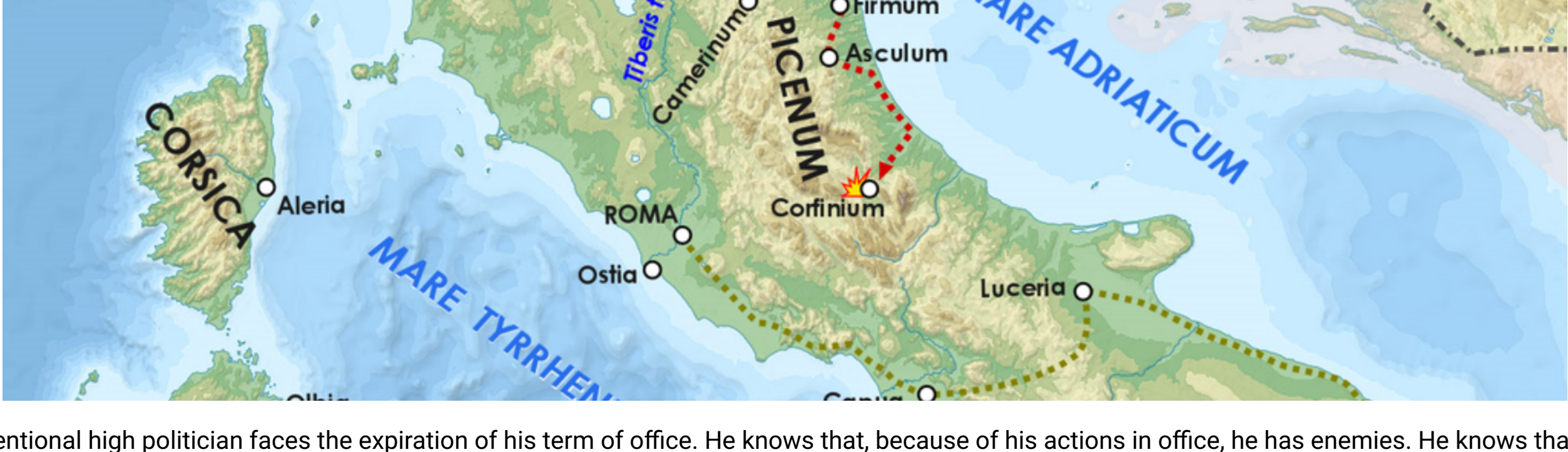
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Caesar Captures Corfinium: Liveblogging the Fall of the Roman Republic



A strongly unconventional high politician faces the expiration of his term of office. He knows that, because of his actions in office, he has enemies. He knows that his adversaries will try and convict him of crimes after he lays down his power...

Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus's deception that Pompey is coming to the Optimates' aid in Corfinium falls apart, Ahenobarbus tries to flee, Lentulus Spinther begs for his life, Caesar grants clemency to all, and adds the three Optimate and Pompeian legions to his army. Before Corfinium Caesar had had two legions in Italy to the Optimate and Pompeian six. After Corfinium (with the arrival of Legio VIII plus new recruits) Caesar has seven legions in Italy to the Pompeian three. It is now 21 Feb -49:

Gaius Julius Caesar: *The Civil War:* 'Domitius's looks, however, belied his words; indeed, his whole demeanour was much more anxious and fearful than usual. When to this was added the fact that, contrary to his usual custom, he spent a lot of time talking to his friends in private, making plans, while avoiding a meeting of the officers or an assembly of the troops, then the truth could not be concealed or misrepresented for long...

...In fact, Pompey's reply had been that he was certainly not going to put his cause in jeopardy; that Domitius had not asked his advice or consent in going to Corfinium; and that if he could get the chance Domitius should come at once with all his forces and join him. This, however, was being rendered impossible by the building of siege-works around the town.

When word of Domitius's plans got about, the soldiers in Corfinium gathered in groups in the early evening and, led by tribunes, centurions and the more reputable men of their own class, began discussing the situation. They were being besieged by Caesar, and his siege-works were almost completed; they had stood steadfastly by their commander Domitius because of their confidence in and reliance on him, and now he was proposing to abandon them all and run away. The best course, it seemed, was for them to look after themselves.

At first, the Marsi, not knowing about Domitius's intended flight, disagreed with this view and took possession of that part of the town which seemed best fortified; indeed, the disagreement grew so heated that they almost resorted to weapons. Presently, however, by an exchange of messengers between the two groups, the Marsi too were informed of the truth. Thereupon, the whole army unanimously had Domitius brought out and, surrounding him and putting him under guard, they sent a deputation from their own ranks to Caesar, saying they were ready to open the gates and take orders from him, and that they would surrender Domitius alive into his hands.

Caesar was fully aware of the importance of taking possession of the town and bringing the cohorts into his own camp as soon as possible, before bribes, or a renewal of courage, or some false rumours, should make the men change their minds; for he knew that in warfare slight events can often turn the scales and produce serious reversals. However, he was afraid that the entry of his troops into the town, in the mood of licence engendered by night, might lead to looting; on receipt of the message, therefore, he commended those who had brought it and sent them back to the town, with orders that careful guard was to be kept on the walls and gates. For his own part, he stationed his men around the partly-built earth-works, not at fixed intervals as during the preceding days, but in a continuous line of sentries and guard-posts, within touching distance of each other and covering the whole length of the works.

He sent the prefects and military tribunes around the guard-posts with injunctions to keep a look-out not only for sallies from the town but also for stealthy exits by individuals. Indeed, not a single one of his troops was indifferent or lazy enough to take any rest that night. So keen was their anticipation of the final settlement that each found his thoughts and feelings caught up with some question or other. What was going to happen to the people of Corfinium, to Domitius, to Lentulus? What would happen to the rest? How would each man fare?

Towards the end of the night, Lentulus Spinther called down from the walls to our men on guard, saying that he would like to be allowed to have an interview with Caesar. He was given permission and escorted from the city, although Domitius's men did not leave him until they had brought him right into Caesar's presence. He pleaded for his life, begging to be spared, and reminding Caesar of their old friendship and of all the benefits he had received at Caesar's hands.

Caesar interrupted his speech: 'I did not leave my province with intent to harm anybody. I merely want to protect myself against the slanders of my enemies, to restore to their rightful position the tribunes of the people, who have been expelled because of their involvement in my cause, and to reclaim for myself and for the Roman people independence from the domination of a small clique.'

Lentulus was so reassured by this speech that he asked permission to return to the town. 'The fact that I have been granted my life will bring great comfort and hope to the others; some have been so terrified that they have been driven to think of violence against themselves.' He was given permission; and went.

At dawn, Caesar ordered all the Roman senators and their families, the military tribunes and the knights to be brought out to him. There were five senators, Lucius Domitius, Publius Lentulus Spinther, Lucius Caecilius Rufus, Sextus Quintilius Varus, a quaestor, and Lucius Rubrius, as well as the son of Domitius and several other youths, and a large number of Roman knights and councillors summoned by Domitius from the local towns.

When these were produced, Caesar protected them from the insults and jeers of the soldiers and, merely commenting briefly that he had received no thanks from them for the great benefits he had bestowed on them, he set them all free. The magistrates of Corfinium brought him six million sesterces, a sum which Domitius had brought and deposited in their treasury; these he restored to Domitius, to show that he had as little eagerness to take money as to take human life, even though it was clearly public money and had been given by Pompey for paying the troops.

He ordered Domitius's soldiers to take the oath of allegiance to himself and, on the same day, after spending seven days at Corfinium, he did a full day's march, going to Apulia via the territories of the Marrucini, the Frentani and the Larinates.

.#history #livebloggingthefalloftheromanrepublic #politics #2020-07-25

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_Foreshadowing from Gaius Sallustius Crispus: <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/foreshadowing-from-gaius-sallustius-crispus-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: A strongly unconventional high politician facing the expiration of his term of office. He knows that there is a very high probability that, because of his actions in office, his adversaries will try and convict him of crimes after he lays down his power. Let us start with some foreshadowing from Gaius Sallustius Crispus...

Pompey's Strategy and Domitius' Stand <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/urns-pompeys-strategy-and-domitius-standnoted.html>: In his *The Civil War* Gaius Julius Caesar presented "just the facts" in a way that made Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus look like a cowardly and incompetent idiot. The attractive interpretation is that Ahenobarbus was just trying to do the job of defeating Caesar, but had failed to recognize that Pompey was not his ally. Pompey, rather, was somebody whose first goal was to gain the submission of Ahenobarbus and the other Optimates, and only after that submission was gained would he even think about fighting Caesar. Still an idiot, but not an incompetent or a cowardly one: **Alfred Burns** <https://github.com/braddelong/public-files/blob/master/readings/article-burns-pompey.pdf>: 'In early 49, the alliance confronting Caesar consisted of the old republican senate families who under the leadership of [Lucius] Domitius [Ahenobarbus] tried to maintain the traditional institutions and of Pompey who clung to his own extra-legal position of semi-dictatorial power. Both parties to the alliance were as mutually distrustful as they were dependent on each other...

Caesar Offers a Compromise Solution (or So Caesar Says): Liveblogging the Fall of the Roman Republic <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-offers-a-compromise-solution-or-so-caesar-says-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: The Beginning of Caesar's *Commentaries on the Civil War*, in which Caesar says that he had proposed a compromise solution to the political crisis.... 'The dispatch from Gaius Caesar was delivered to the consuls; but it was only after strong representations from the tribunes that they gave their grudging permission for it to be read in the Senate. Even then, they would not consent to a debate on its contents, but initiated instead a general debate on 'matters of State'... Scipio spoke... Pompey, he said, intended to stand by his duty to the State, if the Senate would support him; but if they hesitated and showed weakness, then, should they want his help later, they would ask for it in vain...

The Optimate Faction Rejects Caesar's Compromise <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/the-optimite-faction-rejects-caesars-compromise-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Caesar narrates the reasons that the leaders of the Optimate faction—Cato, Lentulus, Scipio, and Pompey—worked hard to set the stage for war, and how the majority of Senators in the timorous middle were robbed of the power to decide freely, and driven reluctantly to vote for Scipio's motion to rob Caesar of his protections against arrest and trial...

The Optimate Faction Arms for War, & Illegally Usurps Provincial Imperium <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/the-optimite-faction-arms-for-war-illegally-usurps-provincial-imperium-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Caesar narrates: Whatever norms he may or may not have broken during his consulate—in order to wrest land from the hands of corrupt plutocrats and grant it to the deserving—he says, the Optimate faction does much worse. In the first seven days of the year of the consulate of Lucius Cornelius Lentulus Crus and Gaius Claudius Marcellus Maior, the Optimate faction goes beyond norm-breaking into outright illegality. And to that they add impiety. They illegally seize power, as they grant themselves proconsular and praetorial imperium over the provinces, without the constitutionally-required popular confirmation of imperium. They impiously violate the separation of church and state by seizing temple funds for their own use. They thus incur the wrath of the gods. And they incur the enmity of all who believe in constitutional balance, as opposed to armed plutocratic dictatorship...

Caesar Presents His Case to the 13th Legion, & Negotiates Unsuccessfully with Pompey <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-presents-his-case-to-the-13th-legion-negotiates-unsuccessfully-with-pompey-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-rep.html>: Caesar presents his case to the 13th Legion, and wins its enthusiastic support. Caesar and Pompey negotiate, but Pompey refuses to give up his dominant position. He holds imperium over Spain and commanding the ten Spanish garrison legions, while also residing in the suburbs of Rome and thus dominating the discussions of the Senate. Pompey refuses to commit to setting a date for his departure for Spain...

The Optimate Faction Panics and Abandons Rome: Liveblogging the Fall of the Roman Republic <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/the-optimite-faction-panics-and-abandons-rome-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: 'Caesar narrates: The Optimate faction panics at a rumor of Caesar's approach, and flees from Rome with the looted Treasury reserve. The towns of Italy support Caesar. Even the town of Cingulum rallied to Caesar, even though its founder Titus Labienus, Caesar's second-in-command in the Gallic War, had deserted Caesar for his earlier allegiance to Pompey. And Pompey's attempts to reinforce his army by recruiting veterans who had obtained their farms through Caesar's legislative initiatives did not go well...

Caesar Besieges Domitius in Corfinium: Liveblogging the Fall of the Roman Republic <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-besieges-domitius-in-corfinium-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: 'Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus began raising troops, and by the start of February -49 had 13000 soldiers in the town of Corfinium. On 09 Feb -49 Domitius decided to stand at Corfinium rather than retreat to the south of Italy. So he wrote to Pompey... urged that the Optimate faction join its military forces together at Corfinium to outnumber and fight Caesar. Pompey disagreed. Why did he decide that he, Pompey, "cannot risk the whole war in a single battle, especially under the circumstances"?...

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