

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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The Optimate Faction Arms for War, & Illegally Usurps Provincial Imperium: 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...

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 propraetorial 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:

Gaius Julius Caesar: *The Civil War:* 'Caesar's friends were not given time to acquaint him with these events, while the tribunes were given no chance of protesting at the threat to themselves, or even of retaining, in the exercise of the veto, their most fundamental right, which Lucius Sulla had not taken away from them; and whereas in the old days those notoriously unruly tribunes had been wont to look ahead anxiously to the end of several months of exercise of authority, in the present instance the tribunes were given only six days in which to secure their own safety...

...The Senate had recourse to that ultimate decree of emergency, which was never employed before except when the city was on the verge of destruction and when everyone expected inevitable ruin at the hands of unscrupulous law-makers. The decree ran:

The consuls, praetors, tribunes of the people and proconsuls in the vicinity of the city shall take steps to see that the State suffer no harm...

and was recorded on the seventh of January.

And so, not counting the two election days, during the first five days after Lentulus's entry into office on which meetings of the Senate could be held, resolutions of the harshest and most severe nature were passed concerning Caesar's command, and concerning those distinguished officials, the tribunes of the people. The latter at once fled from Rome and went to join Caesar, who was then at Ravenna, awaiting a reply to his very moderate demands and hoping that some human sense of justice might make a peaceful settlement possible.

During the following days, the Senate met outside the city, and Pompey pressed the same policy that he had indicated through Scipio. He praised the courage and steadfastness of the Senate; he revealed the strength of his own resources, announcing that he had ten legions ready; he claimed, moreover, to have reliable information that Caesar's troops were disaffected and could not be induced either to defend him or to follow him.

Remaining business was put at once to the Senate, and it was decided to levy troops throughout Italy and to make Pompey a grant from the treasury. It was also proposed that King Juba [of Numidia] should be given the title 'ally and friend', but Marcellus refused to tolerate this at present; another proposal, that Faustus Sulla be sent speedily to Mauretania, was blocked by the tribune Philippus.

On the rest of the business, there are senatorial decrees in the records. The provinces—two consular, the rest praetorian—were assigned to private individuals. Syria was allotted to Scipio and Gaul to Lucius Domitius, while Philippus and Cotta were passed over, by private agreement, and no lots were cast for them; praetors were sent to the rest. Then, without waiting for their commands to be referred to the people for ratification, the governors donned the military cloak, made the usual vows, and departed. The consuls, before they left the city, had their attendants going about in the city and on the Capitol in military cloaks, something which had never happened before and was contrary to all ancient practice. Troops were being levied all over Italy, weapons were being requisitioned, and money was exacted from the Italian towns and carried off out of temples with complete disregard for the distinction between divine and human...

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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...

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>: '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... The Beginning of Caesar's 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-optimate-faction-rejects-caesars-compromise-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. 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-optimate-faction-arms-for-war-illegally-usurps-provincial-imperium-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: '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... 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 propraetorial 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...

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