

# Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog of Brad DeLong. Comments (mostly) welcome, or email me at [delong@hey.com](mailto:delong@hey.com) with "delong-weblog" as the subject.  
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- Grasping Reality with Both Hands
- Archives
- Highlighted
- Previously Featured
- Edit Posts
- Coronavirus
- Market Made for Man...
- Note to Self: Slavery Course Topics...
- Grand Narrative: The 20th Century...
- Reading Big, Difficult Books...
- Why Are University of Chicago Professional Republicans so Stupid?...

## Cementing Caesarian Control of the Center of the Empire: Late March -49: 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: Caesar and his legates solidify their position in control of Sardinia, Sicily, and Italy. The Senate refuses to try to mediate between him and Pompey. So Caesar decides to head for Gaul and then Spain.

It is now 18 Mar -49. Caesar is master of Italy. The Optimate faction have lost their political authority and their connections to their webs of clients, and are either rustivating in the Italian countryside or supplicants to Pompey in Greece. The Pompeian armies are split, in Spain and in Greece, with Caesar in the middle:

**Gaius Julius Caesar:** *The Civil War:* "[Caesar] ordered the chief magistrates of all the Italian townships to collect ships and have them conveyed to Brundisium. He sent his lieutenant Valerius to Sardinia with one legion and sent Curio to govern Sicily with two, with further orders to take his forces to Africa once he had secured Sicily. Sardinia was in fact the province of Marcus Cotta, and Sicily of Marcus Cato, while Tubero was due to take over Africa as his allotted province.

As soon as the people of Caralis in Sardinia heard that Valerius was being sent to them, even though he had not left Italy yet, they spontaneously expelled Cotta from their town. Cotta panicked, realizing that the whole province shared their feelings, and fled from Sardinia to Africa.

In Sicily, Cato was displaying great energy in getting old ships repaired and ordering the towns to supply new ones. He had his lieutenants out in Lucania and Bruttium, enlisting Roman citizens, and was trying to raise a certain number of cavalry and infantry from the Sicilian towns. When these preparations were nearly complete he heard of the approach of Curio and complained in a public speech that he had been abandoned and betrayed by Pompey. Pompey had undertaken an unnecessary war when everything was in a state of total unreadiness and, when questioned by himself and others in the Senate, he had declared that he was fully prepared and ready for war. Having made his protest, Cato fled from the province.

Valerius and Curio thus obtained provinces without governors and made their way to them with their armies.

When Tubero arrived in Africa, he found Attius Varus in command there. Attius, as we related above, on losing his cohorts at Auximum, continued his flight and went straight to Africa. Finding the province without a governor, he had of his own initiative taken command, and had made up two legions by holding a levy, an undertaking on which he was able to embark thanks to his familiarity with the people and the locality, and the experience of the province which he had gained a few years previously, when he had been governor there after his praetorship. As Tubero approached Utica with his ships, Attius denied him access to the town and its harbour, refusing even to allow him to land his son, who was ill, but forced him to lift anchor and depart.

After making these dispositions, Caesar distributed his troops among the neighbouring towns to spend the remaining time resting while he himself went to Rome.

He summoned the Senate and detailed the wrongs done him by his enemies. He declared that he had sought no exceptional privilege; he had been content to wait for the statutory interval between consulships, and to have the rights accorded to all citizens. A proposal had been put forward by the ten tribunes that he should be allowed to be a candidate in absence, and this had been carried, even though his enemies spoke against it, and Cato in particular opposed it bitterly, following his old tactics and dragging the dispute out for days. 'Pompey', he said,

was consul then; if he disapproved, why did he let the bill go through? If he approved, why has he prevented me from availing myself of the people's generosity? I think I showed extreme forbearance, in actually suggesting myself that the armies be disbanded, although this would have meant a loss of position and power for me. The vindictiveness of my enemies can be seen in their refusal to submit themselves to the demands they made of someone else, and in their readiness to cause a universal upheaval rather than give up control of their armies.

I was wronged, by the confiscation of two of my legions; I was insulted and outraged by the interference with the rights of the tribunes; yet I offered terms, I asked for a meeting—and I was refused.

Therefore I earnestly ask you to join with me now in taking over the government of Rome; if timidity makes you shrink from the task, I shall not trouble you—I shall govern by myself.

Envoys must be sent to Pompey to discuss terms. I am not frightened by his recent statement in this assembly, that the sending of deputations merely enhances the prestige of those to whom they are sent and reveals the fears of the senders. These are the reflections of a weak and petty spirit. My aim is to outdo others in justice and equity, as I have previously striven to outdo them in achievement.

The Senate agreed to the sending of a deputation, but they could find no one to send. Everyone was afraid for himself and shirked the task; for they all remembered how, when Pompey was leaving Rome, he had said in the Senate that he would draw no distinction between those who remained in Rome and those in Caesar's camp. Three days were spent in discussion and excuses.

What was more, Lucius Metellus, a tribune of the people, had been suborned by enemies of Caesar to postpone a decision on this matter and to hold up any other business that he might try to transact.

Caesar found out this plot, after several days had been wasted, and to save spending any more time he gave up the rest of his projected business and left Rome for Further Gaul.

.#history #livebloggingthefalloftheromanrepublic #politics #2020-07-26

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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/turns-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)* <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-optimates-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-optimates-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 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...

*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* <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/the-optimates-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 Corfinum* <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-besieges-domitius-in-corfinum-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 Corfinum. On 09 Feb -49 Domitius decided to stand at Corfinum rather than retreat to the south of Italy. So he wrote to Pompey... urged that the Optimate faction join its military forces together at Corfinum 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"?...

*Caesar Captures Corfinum* <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-captures-corfinum-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus's deception that Pompey is coming to the Optimates' aid in Corfinum 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 Corfinum Caesar had had two legions in Italy to the Optimate and Pompeian six. After Corfinum (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..."

*Pompey Refuses to Negotiate & Flees to Greece* <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/pompey-refuses-to-negotiate-flees-to-greece-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Pompey flees to the southern Adriatic port of Brundisium. Caesar catches up to him and begs him to negotiate. Pompey refuses and flees to Greece. Caesar decides not to follow, but to turn and first defeat the Pompeian armies in Spain. It is now 18 Mar -49...

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