

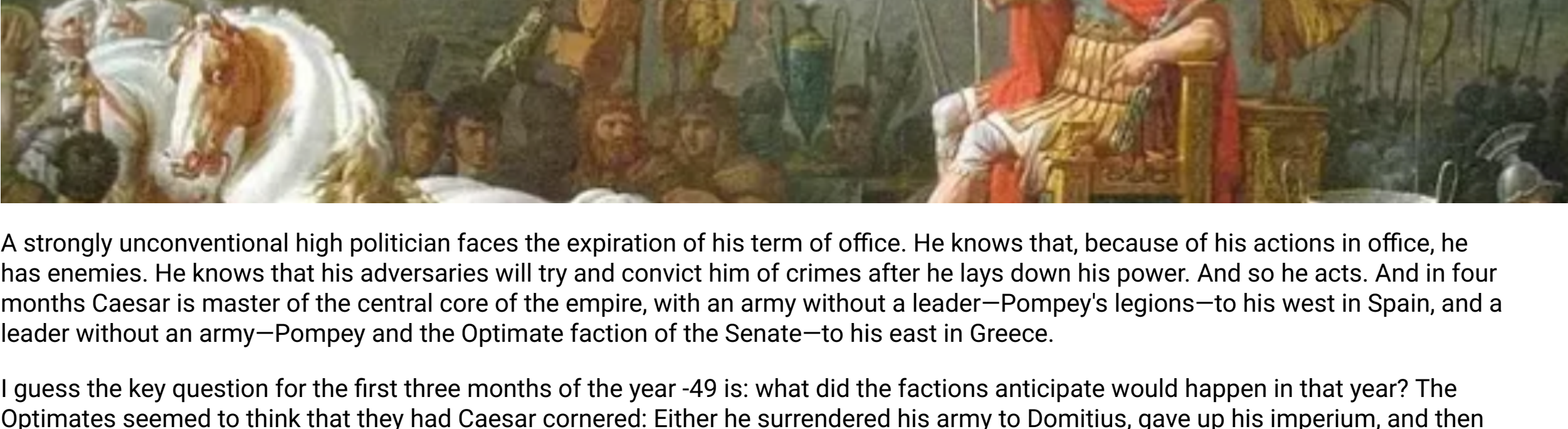
Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog of Brad DeLong. Comments (mostly) welcome, or email me at delong@hey.com with "delong-weblog" as the subject.
RSS feed.

Also on twitter [@delong](#). Since 1999.

- Grasping Reality with Both Hands
Market Made for Man...
- Archives
Note to Self: Slavery Course Topics...
Why Are University of Chicago Professional Republicans so Stupid?...
- Highlighted
Grand Narrative: The 20th Century...
- Previously Featured
Grand Narrative: The 20th Century...
- Edit Posts
Reading Big, Difficult Books...
- Coronavirus

Reflecting on the First Three Months of -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. And so he acts. And in four months Caesar is master of the central core of the empire, with an army without a leader—Pompey's legions—to his west in Spain, and a leader without an army—Pompey and the Optimate faction of the Senate—to his east in Greece.

I guess the key question for the first three months of the year -49 is: what did the factions anticipate would happen in that year? The Optimates seemed to think that they had Caesar cornered: Either he surrendered his army to Domitius, gave up his imperium, and then submitted to trial, conviction, and exile; or he tried to use his Gallic War army against the Senate and was quickly crushed between Pompey's army in Spain and Pompey's legions of recalled veterans in Italy.

Cicero appears to have believed that either the Senate surrendered to Cesar and let him become consul, In which case he put Cataline's conspiracy into action but legally,cancelled debts, and then ruled With the support of his electoral coalition of mountebank ex-debtors and ex-veterans to whom he had given land; or Caesar did not surrender and the Senate called upon Pompey, Who would then crush Cesar militarily but follow up with proscriptions and executions after which he would rule as a second Sulla.

What is not at all clear to me is what Pompey thought would happen. Was he planning to withdraw from Italy and so destroy the clientale and patronage links of the Optimates, after which he could crush Caesar between his eastern and his Spanish armies and then rule unhindered? "Why do you speak of laws? We carry swords!" Did he just not think that Caesar would dare invade Italy with only one legion, and so get caught with his pants down? Was he surprised by the absence of opposition to Caesar in the towns of Italy, and given Caesar's popularity—and Pompey's lack of veteran forces save two legions that had recently been in Caesar's army—then decide the safer course was retreat to Italy and mobilization?

My guess, reading between the lines of Plutarch, is that Pompey found himself allied with the Senate in January-February of -49, but not in command of anything—as shown by Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus's behavior at Corfinium, attempting to trap Pompey into fighting alongside him in central Italy. And so he retreated to Greece, where he was in undisputed command.

#highlighted #history #livebloggingthefalloftheromanrepublic #politics #2020-07-28

html <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/reflecting-on-the-first-three-months-of-49-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>

edit html <https://www.typepad.com/site/blogs/6a00e551f08003883400e551f080068834/post/6a00e551f0800388340263ec2aa0a8200c/edit>

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 [Ahenonbarbus] 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...

Marcus Tullius Cicero's Take on the First Three Months of -49: Liveblogging the Fall of the Roman Republic <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/marcus-tullius-ciceros-take-on-the-first-three-months-of-49-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: 'We have a primary source for the start of the Roman Civil War in addition to Gaius Julius Caesar's deceptively powerful plain-spoken "just the facts" narrative in his Commentaries on the Civil War—a narrative that is also a clever and sophisticated lawyer's brief. Our one other primary source: Marcus Tullius Cicero's letters to his BFF Titus Pomponius Atticus. Caesar, in his *The Civil War*, makes himself out to be reasonable, rational, decisive, and clever. Cicero, in his Letters to Atticus is a contrast. He lets his hair down. He is writing to someone he trusts to love him without reservation. He is completely unconcerned with making himself appear to be less flawed than he appears. And the impression he leaves is absolutely dreadful: he makes himself out to be erratic, emotional, dithering, and idiotic...

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-republic.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 Corfinium <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"??...

Caesar Captures Corfinium <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-captures-corfinium-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: 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...

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...

Cementing Caesarian Control of the Center of the Empire: Late March -49 <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/cementing-caesarian-control-of-the-center-of-the-empire-late-march-49-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Caesar, now that the Pompeians and the High Optimates have fled, offers to share power with the dysfunctional Senate but, filibustered and vetoed by Optimate tribunes, he consolidates his hold on the center of the empire and heads for Spain...

Posted on July 28, 2020 at 19:24 in #highlighted, #politics | [🔗 Permalink](#) | [🗨 Comments \(0\)](#)

Comments

Comment below or sign in with [Typepad](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) and more...

(You can use HTML tags like <i> and to style your text. URLs automatically linked.)

Email address is not displayed with comment.

Name

Email Address

Web Site URL

Post

Preview

POWERED BY [TypePad](#)

Donate

🔍 Search

Submit

>About Brad DeLong

Brad DeLong's Short Biography