

THE INSTITUTE FOR ANACYCLOSIS

EXCERPT FROM  
ROMAN ANTIQUITIES  
BY DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS

C. 7 B.C.

*Note: This text reproduces part of a speech given in the Roman senate shortly after the foundation of the Republic by the dictator Manius Valerius Maximus, who had a reputation for moderation, in connection with the first secession of the plebs in 494 B.C. This text contains, among other things, a brief description of Anacyclosis, and an appeal to the principle of the mixed constitution.*

Book VII, 54-56

... Then Manius Valerius, who was the greatest friend to the plebeians of all the senators and had shown the greatest zeal for the accommodation, upon this occasion also openly espoused their cause and delivered a speech, composed with much thought, in which he censured those senators who would not permit the commonwealth to remain united, but sought to divide the plebeians from the patricians and for trifling causes to rekindle the flames of strife. He then commended those who held that there was but one advantage to be considered and that the common advantage, and regarded everything else as secondary to harmony; ... He then indulged in many lamentations and enumerated the most important and the most obvious evils that befall states in times of dissension.

When he had related all these evils with many tears — tears that were not feigned and affected, but genuine — this man who was eminent for the dignity both of his years and of his merits, perceiving that the senate was moved by his words, proceeded then with confidence to deliver the remainder of his speech. “If any of you, senators,” he said, “are disturbed by the thought that you will be introducing a pernicious custom into the commonwealth if you grant the populace the power of giving their votes against the patricians, and entertain an opinion that the tribunician power, if considerably strengthened, will serve no good purpose, let them learn that their opinion is erroneous and their surmise is the opposite of what it should be. For if anything is going to be the means of preserving this commonwealth and insuring that she shall never be deprived of her liberty or her power, but shall ever continue to be united and harmonious in all respects, the most effective instrument will be the populace if taken as partners in the administration of affairs; and what will benefit us above everything will be, not to have a simple and unmixed form of government administering the state, whether monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy, but a constitution combined out of all of these. For each of these forms by itself alone very easily ends in wantonness and lawlessness; but when all of them are duly combined, the element which is inclined at any time to make innovations and to overstep the customary bounds is held in check by the element which is self-restrained and remains true to its own character. Thus monarchy, when it becomes cruel and insolent and begins to pursue tyrannical measures, is overthrown by a few good men. And an oligarchy composed of the best men, which is your present form of government, when it has become elated by reason of its wealth and its bands of partisans, and pays no regard to justice or to any other virtue, is overthrown by a prudent democracy. And when a democracy that is moderate and governs in accordance with laws begins to be disorderly and lawless, it is taken in hand by the strongest man and set right by force. You, senators, have devised all the precautions possible to prevent the monarchical power from degenerating into tyranny, for you have invested two men instead of one with the supreme power of the commonwealth, and though you have entrusted this magistracy to them, not for an indefinite time, but only for a year, you nevertheless appoint, to keep watch over them, three hundred patricians, at once the best and the oldest, of whom this senate is composed. But you do not seem as yet to have appointed any

to watch over you yourselves, to insure your remaining within proper bounds. Now as for you, I have no fear so far that you will permit your minds to be corrupted by the magnitude and number of your blessings, since you have only recently delivered the commonwealth from a long tyranny and because of the long and continuous wars have not yet had leisure to grow insolent and wanton. But with regard to your successors, when I consider how great changes the long course of time brings with it, I am afraid that the men of power in the senate may introduce some change and, unnoticed, transform the government into a tyrannical monarchy.

“If, then, you admit the populace also to a share in the government, no evil will arise for you here. But the man who aims at greater power than the rest of his fellow-citizens and has formed a faction in the senate of all who are willing to share his disaffection and his crimes (for when we are deliberating concerning the commonwealth we ought to foresee every likely contingency), this great and august person, I say, when called upon by the tribunes to appear before the popular assembly, before the lowly and humble people, will have to give an accounting of both his actions and his purpose, and if found guilty, suffer the punishment he deserves. And lest the people themselves, when vested with so great a power, should grow wanton and, seduced by the demagoguery of the worst men, make war upon the best citizens (for it is in the masses as a rule that tyranny springs up), some person of exceptional sagacity, created dictator by you, will guard against this evil and will not allow them to do anything lawless; for, being invested with absolute and irresponsible power, he will cut off the diseased part of the commonwealth and will not permit that which is as yet uninfected to be contaminated; he will reform in the best manner possible the habits, usages and aims of the citizens, and appoint such magistrates as he thinks will govern the south with the greatest prudence; and having effected these things within the space of six months, he will again become a private citizen, receiving no other reward for these actions than the honour. ...”

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