

THE INSTITUTE FOR ANACYCLOSIS

EXCERPT FROM
THE GRACCHI, MARIUS, AND SULLA
BY A.H. BEESLY

1886 A.D.

Note: This text provides a high-level description of key trends and events which set the stage for Rome's transition from republic to empire following the Gracchi's failed attempt to rehabilitate the middle class. Beesly also draws parallels between English and Roman political development, in a passage which correlates with the base sequence of Anacyclosis (i.e., one-few-many). This text contains other concepts which merit specific attention. First, it is important to recognize as Machiavelli did that Anacyclosis completes its course only within a sufficiently "closed system", and that foreign competition and interference constantly disturb what would otherwise be the natural course of internal sociopolitical development. It is not a coincidence that the sequence of political revolution completed its course in Rome only after Rome had attained uncontested sovereignty within its sphere of operations, that is, the Mediterranean Basin. This also explains one of the main reasons why the full sequence of Anacyclosis is not often or everywhere observed even though segments of the sequence have been everywhere seen: because there are few examples of a single integrated and stable political entity subduing all significant threats and achieving supremacy within its sphere of operations for long enough for the base sequence of political revolution to run its course. In fact, Rome may be the only such example in history. Second, the recognition that oligarchy undergoes a change in its nature into plutocracy, as "new money" challenges then merges with "old money" is also noteworthy. This is reflected in The Institute's revised model of Anacyclosis which more heavily emphasizes class conflict than Polybius' original model. Third, Beesly's omission of democracy in his description of Rome as transitioning from oligarchy to plutocracy and then back to monarchy ("Caesarism") is a matter of emphasis (and debate, since scholars debate the degree to which the Roman republic was democratic). However, further below in his analogy to English political development, Beesly recognizes that oligarchy is forced to share political power with democracy, and recognizes the role of the middle class in this achievement. Finally, Beesly says, as Aristotle, Machiavelli, Madison, and Marx have in various ways said, that socioeconomic tension, whether expressed as conflict between rich and poor, between democracy and oligarchy, between the people and the great, between those with and without property, between capital and labor, have been a persistent latent – if not overt – feature of political conflict through the ages.

Chapter I. Antecedents of the Revolution.

During the last half of the second century before Christ Rome was undisputed mistress of the civilized world. A brilliant period of foreign conquest had succeeded the 300 years in which she had overcome her neighbours and made herself supreme in Italy. In 146 B.C. she had given the death blow to her greatest rival, Carthage, and had annexed Greece. In 140 treachery had rid her of Viriathus, the stubborn guerilla who defied her generals and defeated her armies in Spain. In 133 the terrible fate of Numantia, and in 132 the merciless suppression of the Sicilian slave-revolt, warned all foes of the Republic that the sword, which the incompetence of many generals had made seem duller than of old, was still keen to smite; and except where some slave-bands were in desperate rebellion, and in Pergamus, where a pretender disputed with Rome the legacy of Attalus, every land along the shores of the Mediterranean was subject to or at the mercy of a town not half as large as the London of to-day. Almost exactly a century afterwards the Government under which this gigantic empire had been consolidated was no more.

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Side by side with those external events which made Rome mistress, first of her neighbours, then of Italy, and lastly of the world, there went on a succession of internal changes, which first transformed a pure oligarchy into a plutocracy, and secondly overthrew this modified form of oligarchy, and substituted Cæsarism. With the earlier of these changes we are concerned here but little. The political revolution was over when the social revolution which we have to record began. But the roots of the social revolution were of deep growth, and were in fact sometimes identical with those of the political revolution. Englishmen can understand such an intermixture the more readily from the analogies, more or less close, which their own history supplies. They have had a monarchy. They have been ruled by an oligarchy, which has first confronted and then coalesced with the moneyed class, and the united orders have been forced to yield theoretical equality to almost the entire nation, while still retaining real authority in their own hands. They have seen a middle class coquetting with a lower class in order to force an upper class to share with it its privileges, and an upper class resorting in its turn to the same alliance; and they may have noted something more than a superficial resemblance between the tactics of the patres and nobiles of Rome and our own magnates of birth and commerce. Even now they are witnessing the displacement of political by social questions, and, it is to be hoped, the successful solution of problems which in the earlier stages of society have defied the efforts of every statesman. Yet they know that, underlying all the political struggles of their history, questions connected with the rights and interests of rich and poor, capitalist and toiler, land-owner and land-cultivator, have always been silently and sometimes violently agitated. Political emancipation has enabled social discontent to organize itself and find permanent utterance, and we are to-day facing some of the demands to satisfy which the Gracchi sacrificed their lives more than 2,000 years ago. With us indeed the wages question is of more prominence than the land question, because we are a manufacturing nation; but the principles at stake are much the same. ...

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