

Marius sulla and the social war history essay



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In this paper, I will attempt to explain the driving forces between Marius, Sulla and The Social War. It would be simplistic to write that the Social War was just a conflict between Rome and its allies. The events leading up to the conflict and its ramifications were both complex and numerous. To understand the Social War, we need to first understand the political, social and economic pressures that would cause Rome to be at war with its allies, but also set political precedents that would lead to multiple civil wars leading to the suicide of the republic. I will also write about Gaius Marius and Lucius Cornelius Sulla and the impact that both men had on Rome.

Roman society was classified into two groups, patricians and plebeians. In the early republic, the patrician aristocracy had a monopoly of power. This monopoly included membership in the senate and access to the executive offices such as consul and praetor. To ensure that qualified people were running the state, offices were to be held in a particular order known as the *curus honorum*. Both the minimum ages and intervals between offices were specified and this led to the creation of a career path of professional politicians. Both consuls and praetors had *imperium*, which gave them the ability to preside over the assemblies and control of the military. In an emergency, a dictator would be appointed for a defined time, usually six months or for the duration for a specific emergency. A dictator had almost “unlimited military, executive, and judicial power” (L&R 37).

In a series of events we group together into the struggle of the orders, the plebeians were able to gain access to some of the magistracies and membership in the Senate. As large sums of money were required for Roman politics, only the wealthiest of the plebeians were able to benefit. The

majority of plebeians voted with their groups of tribes or centuries and their votes and not only did they counted for less than the votes of the wealthy and they would vote last, which would ensure that the wealthy could dominate any issue being voted on.

During the struggle of the orders, the plebeians won the right to elect their own officers to preside of the meetings of the concilium plebis. These officers would be known as tribunes and they would be granted veto powers that included halting business anywhere in the political process. They were also made inviolable and the person who violated this agreement could be killed with no legal ramification. The concilium plebis was eventually granted the ability to pass laws bypassing the Senate and consuls.

The veto power of the tribunes, abuse of the dictatorship, ignoring the cursus honorum and factional politics was going to cause some unintended effects which lead to major problems for Rome.

Growing from a single city-state to an empire was driven by the need for land and to provide a buffer between Rome and its enemies. Part of this land became public and was used for farms or the creation of colonies. Some of the conquered peoples were given full Roman citizenship, while others were given less than full citizenship which included other rights including marriage and trade. Most of the conquered provided soldiers to aid in the defense of Rome. As with the Roman legions, these soldiers were not professional soldiers, but were recruited when needed. Since there was a property qualification, most of the soldiers were farmers. This was an ideal situation as most wars were short in duration and local in geography. After the

campaigning season, most would retire to their farms at the end of a campaign. This system broke down as the wars became longer in duration and started being fought in greater distances from Rome. While the Italian soldiers fought alongside the Roman legions, they received less booty and rewards for their actions. We can see how this might lead to stress when examining military disasters such as Canne where a large numbers of allied soldiers were killed. Why do they deserve less booty for the same work?

A side effect of this expansion, large numbers of prisoners of war were brought to Italy to be sold as slaves. From Appian, we learn about the Rise of the Latifundia and the effects it had on the military, economy and political system. With the large influx of slave labor, it became more cost effective to replace small yeoman farmers with giant slave driven estates. As small farmers were the backbone of the legion and with longer wars overseas, it became apparent that many would not be able to farm the land that they owned. These farms fell into ruin and rich landowners pushed people off their farms. As we learned from the Hopkins theory, the increase of slaves directly led to greater numbers of free laborers not being able to find work. These workers found themselves in Rome not able to find gainful employment and subsiding on handouts.

During this period of expansion, money and wealth poured into Rome. Roman Senators were barred from commercial opportunities and a new class of people were created called the Equites. The equestrians used this wealth to control the political process and elections were bought and sold. Groups of equestrians bid on the right to collect taxes in some of the newly conquered areas. These groups would pay their winning bid to the state and then go

and collect the taxes from the remote provinces by whatever means necessary. This tax-farming system was not a fair system and had built in corruption and inefficiencies that would cause civil unrest leading to enemies of Rome such as Mithridates of Pontus to incite rebellions.

The proletariat, people with no material wealth or land that were displaced by slave labor ended up in Rome or other Italian cities with little way to support themselves. The change to large estates producing cash crops made it impossible for small farmers to compete and they ended up at Rome and other Italian towns. The distribution of wealth was extreme and riots and disorder became a more frequent occurrence. Once these farmers lost their land, they no longer qualified for military service. This would lead to problems in the future as more demands were placed on the military to expand the Empire.

In the early years of the republic, most senators were tied together by marriages and other family obligations. The pressures on the state as outlined above caused the senate to break into factions. The factions were known as the optimates and the populares. The optimates believed that the traditional approach to government with the senate at the core was the best way to lead Rome forward. The populares promoted their causes at the direct expense of the senate. The interesting point here is that the members of both parties were part of the same nobility.

The problem of military recruitment was addressed by lowering the level of property required and then by reducing the number of men in each legion. Tiberius Sempronius Grachus, tribune of the plebs in 133 BC published an

agrarian law (lex Sempronia agraria) to distribute public land (ager publicus) more fairly to encourage the farming of land by free men rather than slaves. This would have broadened the recruitment base for the Roman army.

Tiberius Gracchus proposed that large landowners who were on public land (ager publicus) illegally should be compensated and the land should be divided up into smaller parcels and given to the landless citizens. Gracchus took his bill directly to the tribal assembly of the Plebs instead of the senate. T. Gracchus established a land commission to administer the resettlement program. This committee was made up of himself, his brother and his father-in-law, Appius Claudius. As the law was passed through the tribal assembly, the senate decided not to give any money towards the land commission that would buy and divide this land.

From Plutarch, we learn that when the kingdom of Pergamum was left to the Roman people by Attalus III, Gracchus brought a bill to the council of the Plebs to take the money to fund the land commission. When this bill was vetoed by another tribune, Gaius Octavius, he was physically removed from the assembly in clear violation of his sacrosanctity. This was without precedent and this undermined one of the core principles of Roman government, collegiality.

Financial and foreign affairs were traditionally handled by the senate and T. Gracchus' proposal brought these functions to the people and bypassed the senate. In my opinion, T. Gracchus was attempting to take control of Rome and diminish the power of the senate. From Appian, we learn that T. Gracchus then decided that he would stand for another term as Tribune. He

was now attacking another core principle of Rome, limited tenure of office. This led his opposition to believe that he was looking to become a tyrant and he was murdered by Scipio Nasica, a member of the Senate. T. Gracchus demonstrated methods for future politicians using the power of the people's assembly. The senate demonstrated that you could kill your political enemies when required and not be held accountable. The land bill continued on after his death and number of citizens with land increased but only was a temporary solution to the problem.

During the time between the death of T. Gracchus and the election of his brother Gaius to the tribunate in 123 BC, the situation for the Italian allies worsened. The town of Fregellae revolted and was crushed. Unlike T. Gracchus, Gaius passed bills in a variety of areas beyond land reforms. He arranged for grain to be sold below cost to the people known as the *lex Sempronia frumentaria*. He instituted road building and public works to provide jobs for the masses. He proposed colonies overseas (as not to upset the Italian allies) and to stimulate industry in Italy. He gave the equites control of the extortion court and awarding them the right to contract for tax farming the province of Asia.

C. Gracchus wanted to extend full Roman citizenship including voting rights to the population of the surrounding area of Latium and to give all allied states in Italy the rights enjoyed by the Latins. This led him to become unpopular with the urban plebs who wanted to protect their rights and benefits from outsiders. Support for C. Gracchus was breaking down rapidly.

From Appian, we learn that the Senate was able to reduce his power by backing Marcus Livius Drusus to outbid him in winning the favor of the mob. He passed a law to give free grain to the masses. Instead of putting a colony in Carthage, he recommended twelve in Italy. Instead of giving Roman citizenship to Latium and giving Latin rights to other allied states, Drusus proposed that all Italians get full citizenship. The mob deserted C. Gracchus and he was not elected again for Tribune. The Senate passed *senatus consultum ultimum*, which was a declaration empowering the consuls to do whatever was thought necessary to protect the republic. The Gracchans were crushed and C. Gracchus committed suicide. The Senate never passed many of the proposals from Drusus and the problems continued.

The war in North Africa against Jugurtha was going badly for Rome for a variety of reasons including suspected corruption of the nobility sent to deal with Jugurtha and the success of guerrilla tactics against the standard legionary formations. In response, the Senate appointed Quintus Caecilius Metellus to take command of the Jugurthine War. Gaius Marius came from a wealthy equestrian family from Arpinum and served as praetor under his patron Quintus Metellus in North Africa. In 107 BC, Marius decided to run for the consulship and returned to Rome. He appealed to both the equestrian order and the urban plebs who wanted a quick end to this war and if he was elected he would replace Metellus as commander. He was given command by the plebeian assembly which was contrary to tradition.

To win against Jugurtha, Marius reformed the entire Roman army. He changed the method of recruitment by removing the property qualifications and opening the legions to all citizens. This would solve the short-term

problem but cause serious issues in the future. For example, in the existing model of the legions, the state need not worry about resettling soldiers when they were finished, as most returned to their farms. In this new system, most of the new soldiers had nothing to return to. They were loyal to any commander who would lead them to booty. This shift tightens the relationship between army commander and the troops at the expense of the bond between the soldier and Rome. This would cause each army commander to appeal to the senate and people after each war to acquire and provide land in which to retire to. Factional politics would cause delays and this situation would not be solved until Augustus made for the automatic distribution of land to discharged soldiers.

Marius led a highly successful series of campaigns against Jugurtha and finally brought him to justice. From "The Jugurthine War" by Sallust, we learn that the capture of Jugurtha was handled by his Quaestor Lucius Cornelius Sulla and Bocchus I of Mauretania. He was captured and paraded through the streets in Gaius Marius' Triumph and then starved to death in jail. Marius did not reward Sulla or even advertise his involvement in the capture and this was the beginning of some bad blood between them.

M. Livius Drusus who was a tribune of the Plebs in 91BC came forth with a plan which was backed by the Senate to reduce the power of the equestrians. The plan was two fold, first he would restore control of the courts to the Senate and the top 300 equestrians would be made senators. He would also give the Italian allies full Roman citizenship as he knew that it was inevitable that they would become citizens, he wanted to make sure it was done to the benefit of the Senate.

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L. Marcius Philippus who opposed these reforms had Drusus murdered and had his reforms thrown out. This caused a small section of the Italian allies to join and revolt. The problem was that these allies were trained and disciplined in warfare the same way as the Romans and they were not easy to defeat.

To prevent this rebellion from spreading, the lex Plautia-Papiria and the lex Pompeia of 89 BC granted full citizenship to all Italians living south of the river Po and granted limited citizenship to the Transpadanes of Cisalpine Gaul. This cut the legs out of the rebellion and it lasted a short time longer. From Appian, we learned that instead of putting the new citizens equitably distributed among the 35 tribes of Rome, they were put into 8 new tribes, which voted last. As the majority was obtained from the 35 tribes that voted first, their vote was useless.

As consul for 88 BC, Sulla was going to war against Mithridates, the king of Pontus. Marius had a tribune named Sulpicius assign him as a commander against Mithridates. This legislation was passed using violence and a small private army. This was against the law and Sulla marched on Rome with his legions. Sulla drove Marius from Rome and killed Sulpicius. Sulla then left Rome to fight Mithridates and left his consular successor, Lucius Cornelius Cinna in charge of Rome. Cinna ends up being driven from Rome and raises an army in the South and was joined by Marius who raised an army in the North. They took Rome by force and initiated a bloodbath against their enemies. They were declared consuls for 86 BC, the second time for Cinna and the seventh for Marius. Marius dies a few days after assuming office.

Cinna then reelects himself consul for 85 and 84 BC. In this period, Sulla was formally outlawed and exiled. Sulla continues his campaign against Mithridates successfully and arranges the murder of Cinna by his own troops in 84 BC. In 82BC, Sulla marches on Rome joined by the families who had suffered at the hands of Marius and Cinna. During the fighting, both consuls were killed and Sulla was made dictator.

Unlike earlier dictatorships with a normal tenure of six months, Sulla was given special powers for reestablishing the state and he organized the murder of all opponents by declaring them outlaws for as long as he thought necessary. His main targets were the equestrians who supported his enemy Marius. Sulla seized their wealth and gave it to his veterans or friends. People would find out they were on the list when it was posted and immediately people would target them for the bounty. This was known as the proscriptions. If you gave any help to the outlaws in any way, you were targeted as well. Rome was unsettled since your name could come up on a list for no apparent reason and it was quite common for people to be targeted for no other reason except for wealth. It was a joke at the time to say that someone's summer villa killed them. From Appian, we learned that Sulla became a tyrant as his dictatorship was not limited to a short period. Sulla allowed the election of consuls, but this was for show. Sulla had complete control of Rome.

Sulla restored the Senate's right to veto legislation passed by the Council of Plebs, wiping out most of the tribunes power. He gave the Senate power to select magistrates for posts in provincial government. Anyone that had held the tribunate would be automatically excluded from holding other offices,

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making this a dead end job and removing this as a source of long term power and from being a source on opposition from the Populares. He expanded the senate with three hundred equestrians to broaden the base for juries and positions. He also reinforced the lex annalis, which regulated the minimum ages for each office, so no one would reach consulship before their early 40s. He also enforced an interval of ten years between tenures of the same office and limited people to one office at a time. In his reform of the judicial system, he removed the administration of justice from the popular assemblies and built a system of permanent courts. The juries would be provided by members of the senate.

In 79 BC, Sulla resigned from office and died the following years. While Sulla was not the first General to rise to power at the head of an army, he continued this alarming trend for the Republic. Since the soldiers owed their livelihoods and retirement grants to him, they were loyal to him alone. This issue would come up from this point to the end of the Republic, with Generals buying the loyalty of their troops and using those troops to help further their aims politically in Rome. He eventually laid down the supreme power but not before he ensured that the populares would no longer be able to control Rome without check.

Most of the reforms to the senate were reversed shortly after his death and today, Sulla is remembered somewhat as a villain for marching on Rome twice and for the destabilizing effects of the proscriptions. Many of the precedents set during this period were used to great effect by Pompey, Crassus, Caesar and many others. The stresses on the republic were too

much to repair in place and it took two more civil wars, two triumvirates and the son of a god to resolve the issues of the republic by replacing it.

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