Notes and Documents

The Supporters of Agrarian Reform in 133 B. C.

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In 133 B. C. a tribune of the plebs, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, proposed and eventually carried an agrarian law to redistribute public land privately held in excess of a fixed amount 1 among the poor—an act which, for a Republic that had passed through a long period of class struggle without bloodshed, would appear to be of a relatively mild nature.2 Yet, before 133 had come to an end, Tiberius and approximately three thousand of his supporters were dead, their bodies thrown into the Tiber. The events of this year have long been regarded by both ancient 3 and modern historians as marking the beginning of a revolution 4 which, when ended, had seen the passing of the Republic. The importance of these events is therefore immense, but unfortunately so are their ambiguities. Tiberius's supporters and beneficiaries are, in current scholarship, far from clearly defined. This is a most curious state of affairs, since the ancient sources would seem to have settled the matter.

The crowds poured into Rome from the country like rivers into the all-receptive sea. Buoyed up with the hope of effecting their own salvation, . . . ⁶

Henry Boren, however, in 1958 brought forward the thesis that the impetus for and the beneficiaries of the *Lex Sempronia* of 133 came from an urban setting. To Boren the agrarian legislation was an attempt to solve the problems of an overcrowded Rome beset with "unemployment, unrest, and economic depression." ⁷

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Boren has shown that the years following 146 B. C. saw much economic activity in the city of Rome, especially in the building trades. Temples, bridges, and aqueducts were built and repaired. This public activity was supplemented in the private sector as well—all made possible by the large influx of wealth brought to Rome in 146 as a result of overseas wars. By 133, however, this flurry of construction seems to have been brought to a halt. The Numantine war in Spain and the slave revolt in Sicily were both exhausting of men and wealth and provided few opportunities for booty. The 130's show no evidence for building activity, and even though the argument is from silence, Boren's view of the economic conditions in the city is probably correct. However the mere existence of the problem in no way establishes Tiberius's concern or motivation.

Both Plutarch ⁹ and Appian ¹⁰ indicate that Tiberius's agrarian law had two purposes: to restore the small farmer to his land and to provide for the continuance of the Roman military levy on its property basis. Both of these objectives are in line with the content of the law itself. Tiberius had, in addition, made the allotments inalienable so that his law would not result in a monetary windfall for the poor who might sell their allotment, but would establish a permanent reserve of manpower for the army. ¹¹ Other laws were proposed at a desperate moment when Tiberius realized that his agrarian law and perhaps his life depended on his re-election: ¹²

. . . reducing the time of military service, granting appeal to the people from the verdicts of the judges, adding to the judges, who at that time were composed of senators only, an equal number from the equestrian order . . . 13

These three new proposals were geared to obtain votes.¹⁴ That Tiberius proposed a military reform in such a situation points up the military implications of his earlier law. The number of eligible men had diminished ¹⁵ and the property qualification had already been lowered from 11,000 to 4,000 asses.¹⁶ Throughout this period large numbers of troops were required overseas.¹⁷

Measures regarding the levy had long been an objective of the more reform-minded tribunes. S. Licinius in 138 B. C. 18 and the tribunes in 151 B. C. had imprisoned the consuls for refusing to allow certain exemptions from the levy. 19 Draft reform had been and still was an explosive issue when Tiberius took office in 133.

Roman agrarian schemes arose from many motives. Overpopulation of the citizenry was the cause for some colonies.²⁰ In the late Republic there were many proposals to drain off the urban proletariat, the *sentina urbis*,²¹ and large numbers of urban poor, including freedmen, were included among Caesar's colonists.²² There is, however, evidence that the urban poor were not always receptive to these proposals.²³ Colonies were primarily sent out for military reasons—both to occupy strategic locations ²⁴ and to reward or to pension discharged soldiers. Viritane distributions of land were made to veterans in both the second century B. C.²⁵ and in the first.²⁶

Boren believes that the rural poor were dispossessed from the countryside and inexorably drawn to Rome.

. . . how many . . . veterans could endure the old family farm after service in Greece or Asia? Soldiers who became acquainted with city life often preferred its numerous opportunities and varied activities to the farm.²⁷

But the lure of the big city is nowhere evident; in fact, the sources would indicate the reverse situation. Cicero ²⁸ and Cato ²⁹ both regard agriculture as the only occupation worthy of a free man, nor is this merely an aristocratic prejudice, but seems to have existed among the freeborn poor themselves.³⁰ The veterans on discharge from the army were from the time of Marius on given allotments of land.³¹ This was not a substitute for cash.³² Caesar and Flavius had proposed purchasing land for Pompey's veterans from the new revenues from Asia.³³ It would have been expeditious, if money was all that was required, to eliminate the purchase and simply distribute the money as donatives.³⁴

Moreover, the evidence for the drift to Rome is later than

the 130's and is found after the dole was initiated. Although the first grain law was enacted in 123 B. C. by C. Gracchus, it was not in continuous operation, nor did it provide free grain, which came with Clodius's law of 58 B. C. Sallust states that in the 60's ". . . young men who had maintained a wretched existence by manual labor in the country, tempted by the public and private doles had come to prefer idleness in the city" ³⁵ The other evidence for a drift of rural population to Rome comes later than 58. ³⁶ Livy, however, refers to the migration of Italians to Rome in the early second century B. C. ³⁷ P. A. Brunt points out that Italians with the *ius migrationis* could gain citizenship by settling anywhere in the *ager Romanus*, not just in the city itself. ³⁸ Therefore, this migration, if not anachronistic, would not necessarily demonstrate the lure of the city. ³⁹

The population of Rome at this time was increasing. The construction of the Marcian aqueduct and the repairs of the Aqua Appia and Aqua Anio more than doubled the water supply of the city. 40 The evidence, however, is substantial that the population was made up not primarily of those indigenous to Italy, but rather of those of foreign origin, slaves and former slaves. Dionysius of Halicarnassus felt that slaves had gradually replaced native Romans in all occupations but two: farming and fighting. 41 Marion Park has collected a substantial number of references relating to the acquisition and deportation to Italy of vast numbers of slaves.42 Livy states that the treasury by the year 209 B. C. had accumulated four thousand pounds of gold from the five per-cent manumission tax on freedmen.43 Scipio Aemilianus referred to the urban plebs as not being native to Italian soil; 44 and the inscriptions from the Republic and early Principate, being primarily tomb inscriptions of the lower classes, leave the impression that the urban plebs was to a great extent servile in origin. 45 Lily Ross Taylor has found in her study of inscriptions from the Republic, that approximately seventy-five per-cent are of freedmen,46 while in the republican epitaphs of the same population in Italian towns, thirty-seven per-cent belong to freedmen.47 The pervasiveness of slavery is apparent. Sulla in 81 B. C. freed and armed ten thousand slaves of those proscribed to serve as his bodyguard.⁴⁸ Caesar even makes reference to the personal slaves of his soldiers.⁴⁹

Industry and commerce, as shown by Hermann Gummerus, were largely in the hands of freedmen and slaves.⁵⁰ Indicative of the inscriptional evidence are the following studies: Park in an examination of the makers' marks on table-ware, mostly from Arretium, finds that of the thirteen owners of factories, all are freeborn, except possibly two or three freedmen, and that of the 132 workers, 123 were slaves, eight or nine were freedmen; ⁵¹ there is no evidence for free labor. J. Johnson in his study of the inscriptions at Minturae concludes that slave labor was the backbone of Italian industry.⁵² Moreover, Tenney Frank has determined that most of the small shop owners in Rome were freedmen.⁵³

In the building industry, slave labor also played a part, although it seems not to have been as pervasive. M. Licinius Crassus (cos. 70) used a building and wrecking crew of five hundred slaves,⁵⁴ and in the Empire two groups of imperial slaves were available for work on the aqueducts.⁵⁵ Frontinus further states:

Freedmen,⁵⁷ however, are also attested, as are free men.⁵⁸ Because of the fluctuations in building activity it would have been more profitable to have hired freedmen or free men for the unskilled work, rather than to have maintained gangs of slaves the year round. These men, as shown in the inscriptions, would have been predominately freedmen or the sons of freedmen. Many of those freed would not have been skilled, but former domestic servants who had been employed as litter-bearers, personal attendants, etc.⁵⁹ These people would have been forced to make a living from whatever unskilled employment they could find. Even after Clodius's grain law the public rations were only five *modii* a month.⁶⁰ The elder Cato gave his slaves three to four and one-half *modii*.⁶¹

On manumission the freed slave passed into the clientage of his patron 62 and could expect some aid from this quarter. A patron in the Empire was either compelled to supply the barest subsistence or employment for his freedmen.63 While the patron in the Republic was under no legal compulsion, the mos maiorum would have produced a similar effect. However, as Martial attests, this dole was neither very generous nor always forthcoming.64

The sources are consistent in mentioning a large foreign element in the political bodies of the Republic. Q. Cicero in a letter to his brother Marcus recommends cultivating the freedmen because of their influence in the Assembly. M. Cicero's statement that Piso obtained his command without a single vote cast by a free man is obviously an exaggeration, but it must have had some basis in fact. The assembly made reference to is the Centuriate. This assembly, being based on wealth, would seemingly allow many freedmen in the city to exert real political power. They, however, do not seem to have held the key even in elections in this body, possibly showing that most of them were in fact poor. Q. Cicero spends far more of his time urging his brother to seek out the voters of the equestrian order resident in the rural tribes.

While in the Centuriate Assembly freedmen and their descendents had some influence, this was not the case in the assemblies arranged by tribes, where tribunes were elected and legislation passed. In these assemblies membership was based on residence. Here the state was divided into thirty-five tribes, each tribe having one vote no matter how large its constituency. Since 169 B. C. all freedmen had been confined to the four urban tribes. Freedmen being so confined would pass this status on to their descendents, who could only arrange a transfer to a rural tribe if they had property in that tribe and a willing censor. The tribal assemblies were in this period controlled by wealthy rural tribesmen living in or near Rome.

Freedmen, moreover, owed the moral duty of obedience and support to their patrons.⁷² They and their descendents were expected to maintain *fides* to their manumitter and his family.⁷³ The client was therefore bound to his patron if not

financially, at least morally. This would make itself felt most readily in the assemblies where until Carbo's law in 131 B. C. there was no secret ballot. Without rural support of some kind, Tiberius would have been completely unable to enact his legislation or even to get elected. The urban mob could cause commotion in public meetings ⁷⁴ and many filled the rival gangs, ⁷⁵ but they could not pass legislation.

The rural poor were still present in the second century B. C. Latifundia and slave-labor had not developed to such an extent as to spell their exclusion. In 100 B. C. there was a conflict of interest and even rioting between the rural and urban populations over a scheme of viritane land distribution. Saturninus relied on support from the countryside, while his opponents organized the city-dwellers. Catiline's revolt enjoyed success throughout Italy, with the rural poor being his most loyal followers. Catiline was also able to raise troops in 63 B. C. from his tenantry, as was Pompey in 82 B. C., and Domitius Ahenobarbus in 49 B. C.

C. Gracchus in his first election for the tribunate (for 123 B. C.) was supported by a large outpouring of rural citizens, so many that they could not all be housed in Rome. Against Popilius Laenas he again sought support in the country districts. Gaius, like his brother, was concerned with the common soldiers, passing a law that clothing should be furnished at public cost and that no one under seventeen would in the future be enrolled. He, however, appears to have learned from his brother's death, for he also courted the urban poor, by lowering the market price of grain; and the equestrians, by giving them numerous construction projects and equal status in the courts with the senators.

Varro states that it was more economical to hire gangs of free workers for seasonal work and that many poor still tilled their own fields.⁸⁷ Cato, a second century B. C. source, mentions those who work in the fields for a share of the crop; ⁸⁸ the Sabine estate of Horace employed eight slaves and had five sections rented by tenants; ⁸⁹ and Cicero's property was rented out in small holdings.⁹⁰ In the slave revolts in Sicily ⁹¹ and in Italy, free men from rural districts are recorded as joining the slaves.⁹²

That free people must have been somewhere in the country-side is evident from the areas listed as undergoing the military levies. In Rome, where freedmen and their descendents were in the majority, only in emergencies were they drafted into the army, as in 296 B. C., 3217 B. C., 4 and 90 B. C. 5 Even after Marius set aside the property qualification, few levies were applied to the city of Rome. Of the forty-two references compiled from the sources by P. A. Brunt, only two levies are specifically on the city of Rome (with but a very few other possibilities). 6 Military reform would not therefore be a pressing issue with the urban plebs, most of whom were certainly landless and therefore ineligible. 7 Tiberius's followers, however, defended their claims for public land by recounting their military service.

Tiberius's agrarian law benefitted tenants and rural laborers who wished to own their own land. It would have provided the small freeholders, such as the former soldier described by Livy as subsisting on one iugera of land,99 with the opportunity to exchange a smaller farm for one of perhaps thirty iugera.100 Even though the lot of the poor countryman had decayed, there was still a livelihood to be made on the land. Migration to the city would have meant leaving whatever security might exist to go and compete with the already swollen sentina urbis for the occasional work available. It is equally unlikely that the urban resident with no knowledge of agriculture would be receptive to viritane distribution, especially since the land was inalienable and would make him eligible for military service. Formal colonies would at least have established an urban area.101 The urban poor would probably have been more receptive to a grain dole. Grain had in the past been distributed at less than market prices. 102 While, as shown, the relief of urban overpopulation and economic distress could be a cause for agrarian reform, the evidence is conclusive that in 133 B. C. it was not.

NOTES

^{1.} App. B. C. 1. 9; Livy Per. 58.

^{2.} Plut. Ti. Gr. 9. 2.

^{3.} App. B. C. 1. 2; Plut. Ti. Gr. 20. 1.

- 4. R. E. Smith, Service in the Post-Marian Roman Army (Manchester, 1958), believes the Gracchi not only marked its beginning, but were also its cause.
- 5. D. C. Earl, Tiberius Gracchus: A Study in Politics (Brussels, 1963), 42, among others, feels they were residents of the city of Rome. Alvin Bernstein, Rural Crisis in Italy and the Lex Agraria of 133 B. C. (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Cornell, 1969), 87, D. Brendan Nagle, "The Failure of the Roman Political Process in 133 B. C.," Athenaeum, XLVIII (1970), 373, and P. A. Brunt, "The Army and the Land in the Roman Revolution," Journal of Roman Studies, LII (1962), 73, all feel they were residents of the countryside.
 - 6. Diod. 34/35. 6. 1. Loeb translation.
- 7. Henry C. Boren, "The Urban Side of the Gracchan Economic Crisis," American Historical Review, LXIII (1958), 902.
 - 8. Ibid., 893-896.
 - 9. Plut. Ti. Gr. 9. 5.
 - 10. App. B. C. 1. 11.
 - 11. App. B. C. 1. 10, 27.
 - Plut. Ti. Gr. 16. 1; App. B. C. 1. 14.
 Plut. Ti. Gr. 16. 1-2. Loeb translation.
- 14. Lily Ross Taylor, "Appian and Plutarch on Tiberius Gracchus' Last Assembly," Athenaeum, XLIV (1966), 246, and P. Fraccaro, Studi sull'età dei Gracchi (Città di Castello, 1914), I, 146, have shown that this second legislative program was intended to appeal to the more prosperous rural tribesmen resident in Rome and to those on the army lists.
- 15. Tenney Frank, An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome (Baltimore, 1933), I, 216.
 - 16. Polyb. 6. 19. 3; Livy 1. 43. 7.
- 17. In Spain: App. *Iber.* 45-48, 56-57, 61, 64, 65, 76, 97; Livy *Per.* 52-53, 55; in Macedonia: Livy *Per.* 50; in Africa: App. *Lib.* 75.
 - 18. Livy Per. 55; Cic. De Leg. 3. 20; Frontin. Strat. 4. 1. 20.
 - 19. Livy 43. 14. 2-3; 43. 15. 7f.; Per. 48; App. Iber. 49.
 - 20. Livy 27. 9. 11; Polyb. 2. 24. 10; Vell. 1. 14. 1.
 - 21. Cic. De Leg. Agr. 1. 22; 2. 70; 97; Ad Att. 1. 19. 4; Dio 38. 1. 3;
- 7. 6; Suet. Iul. 42. 1; Dion. Hal. 4. 24.
 22. Suet. Iul. 42; Strabo 381; App. B. C. 2. 94; Dio 38. 1; Pliny N. H.
- 3. 3. 12; CIL II. 5439; VIII. 977; X. 6104.
 23. Cic. De Leg. Agr. 2. 71.
- 24. App. B. C. 1. 7; Cic. De Leg. Agr. 2. 27; see especially E. T. Salmon, "Roman Expansion and Roman Colonization in Italy," Phoenix, IX (1955), 63-75.
 - 25. Livy 31. 4. 1-3; Polyb. 2. 21. 7-8.
 - 26. Vell. 1. 15. 5.
 - 27. Boren, "Urban Side," 893.
 - 28. Cic. De Off. 1. 150-151.
 - 29. Cato De Agric. praef. 1-4.

- 30. F. M. De Robertis, Lavoro e lavoratori nel mondo romano (Bari, 1967), passim.
- 31. App. B. C. 1. 29-32; Plut. Sulla 28. 3; Dio 54. 25. 5; Cic. De Leg. Agr. 2. 54.
 - 32. Smith, Service, 52.
 - 33. Cic. Ad Att. 1. 19. 4; Dio 38. 1. 5.
 - 34. Brunt, "Army and Land," 82.
 - 35. Sall. Cat. 37. 5. Loeb translation.
- 36. App. B. C. 2. 120; Suet. Aug. 42. 3; Varro R. R. 2. Whenever migration to Rome is mentioned in the sources it is invariably tied to the grain dole.
 - 37. Livy 39. 3. 4-6; 41. 8. 6.
 - 38. Brunt, "Army and Land," 70.
- 39. A. H. McDonald, "Rome and the Italian Confederacy (200-186 B. C.)," *Journal of Roman Studies*, XXXIV (1944), 21, accepts Livy's ev dence, but maintains that it was Latin artisans and not displaced farmers who were migrating to Rome.
 - 40. Frontin. De Aq. 1. 7.
 - 41. Dion. Hal. 2. 28; cf. Livy 6. 12. 5.
- 42. M. E. Park, The Plebs in Cicero's Day (Cambridge, Mass., 1921), 32.
 - 43. Livy 27. 10. 12.
 - 44. Vell. 2. 4. 4; Val. Max. 6. 2. 3.
- 45. Lily Ross Taylor, "Freedmen and Freeborn in the Epitaphs of Imperial Rome," American Journal of Philology, LXXXII (1961), 113, 132.
 - 46. Ibid., 118.
- 47. Ibid., 128. T. Frank, "Race Mixture in the Roman Empire," American Historical Review, XXI (1916), 689-708, from a perusal of the same inscriptions feels that ninety per-cent of the city's population were freedmen. This evidence cannot be used in such a definitive manner (see Taylor). These inscriptions, however, would indicate that the freedman population would be substantial and therefore that their descendents would have represented a high percentage of the freeborn as well.
 - 48. App. B. C. 1. 10. 100.
 - 49. Caes. B. C. 3. 6.
- 50. Hermann Gummerus, "Industrie und Handel," in A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, and W. Kroll, Real-Encyclopädie d. klassischen Altertumswissenschaft (1893-), IX, 1500-1509; also A. M. Duff, Freedmen in the Early Roman Empire (New York, 1958), 109-115, and Susan Treggiari, Roman Freedmen During the Late Republic (Oxford, 1969), 91-106.
 - 51. Park, Plebs, 79ff.
- 52. Jotham Johnson, Excavations at Minturae (Philadelphia, 1933), II, 111.
 - 53. Frank, Economic Survey, I, 379.
 - 54. Plut. Crass. 2. 4.

55. Frontin. De Aq. 98, 116-117.

56. Frontin. De Aq. 96. Loeb translation. This statement may refer to the second century B. C., but it cannot refer to any period later than 33 B. C. when the charge of the aqueducts was taken from the censors and given to special commissioners.

57. CIL I. 1734.

58. Suet. Vesp. 18; Cic. Ad Att. 14. 3. 1.

59. Treggiari, Freedmen, 143.

60. P. A. Brunt, "The Roman Mob," Past and Present, XXXV (1966), 18.

61. Cato De Agric. 56.

62. Dion. Hal. 4. 24; see E. Badian, Foreign Clientelae (264-70 B. C.) (Oxford, 1958), 2-4, 10.

63. Dig. 38. 2. 33.

64. Mart. 4. 26; 9. 85; 10. 75.

- 65. Cic. De Orat. 1. 38; Flacc. 17. 66; App. B. C. 2. 120; Suet. Iul. 84. 5.
 - 66. Comm. Pet. 29-30, 51.

67. Cic. Pis. 57.

68. Comm. Pet. 3, 17, 18, 24, 30-32, 50; see Lily Ross Taylor, Party Politics in the Age of Caesar (Berkeley, 1949), 58-59.

69. Livy 9. 46. 10; 40. 51. 9; 45. 15. 1-7; Per. 20; Plut. Flam. 18. 1. Tiberius's father was the censor responsible. One of the favorite programs of the populares was the redistribution of the freedmen throughout the tribes (Livy Per. 77. 84; Asc. Mil. 45B, 52C). There is no evidence for such activity on Tiberius's or Gaius's part.

70. Taylor, Party Politics, 54-55.

71. Taylor, "Last Assembly," 245-246. This is shown by the constant wooing of the equestrians by Tiberius (Plut. Ti. Gr. 16. 1-2) and Gaius (Plut. C. Gr. 5. 1; 6. 3).

72. Max Kaser, Roman Private Law, trans. by Rolf Dannenburg (Durban, 1968); see note 62 above.

73. Duff, Freedmen, 39; Dig. 48. 4. 7.

74. Cic. Flacc. 17. 66; Ad Att. 14. 10. 1.

75. Cic. Sest. 114; Mil. 25; Ad Quint. 1. 2. 5.

76. App. B. C. 1. 30-33; Cic. Pro Balbo 48.

77. App. B. C. 1. 30, 31.

78. Cic. Cat. 2. 17-23; Sest. 9; Sall. Cat. 27. 1; 28. 4; 36. 1; 42. 1; 73. 5; Plut. Cic. 10. 3; 14.

79. Sall. Cat. 59. 3.

80. Plut. Pomp. 6. 3; Vell. 2. 29; App. B. C. 1. 80.

81. Caes. B. C. 1. 34, 56.

- 82. Plut. C. Gr. 3. 1.
- 83. Gell. 1. 7. 7.

84. Plut. C. Gr. 5. 1.

85. App. B. C. 1. 21-22; Plut. C. Gr. 5. 1; cf. 12. 3-4. The status of Gaius's colonists cannot be adequately determined. It is interesting,

however, that Plutarch contrasts Gaius's colonists, calling them "respectable," with those of Livius Drusus, terming these "poor" or "needy" (Plut. C. Gr. 9. 2).

86. Plut. C. Gr. 5. 1; 6. 3.

87. Varro R. R. 1. 17. 2-3; also Cato De Agric. 1. 2, 3, 4; 5. 4; 144-146. The references to tenants, day laborers, etc., come primarily from the first century B. C., but this is understandable in view of the fullness of first century sources as compared with the dearth of those of the second century B. C. There is no evidence that would suggest that economic conditions had changed so as to exclude free residents from the countryside in the second, but to encourage them in the first. The fact that both Cato (second century B. C.) and Varro (first century B. C.) often speak of the same circumstances would seem to refute such a dichotomy; see Brunt, "Army and Land," 73.

88. Cato De Agric. 136-137.

89. Hor. Epist. 1. 14. 1.

90. Cic. Ad Att. 13. 9. 2.

91. Diod. 36. 2. 6.

92. App. B. C. 1. 117.

93. Livy 10. 21.

94. Livy 22. 11. 8. 95. App. B. C. 1. 49.

96. Brunt, "Army and Land," 85.

97. This was true until 107 B. C. when the property requirement was eliminated.

98. App. B. C. 1. 10.

99. Livy 42. 34.

100. Lex Agr. 14.

101. Earl, Tiberius Gracchus, 42; Bernstein, Rural Crisis, 57, 92.

102. Livy 30. 26. 5-6; 31. 50. 1; 33. 42. 8.