

### The Tribunes and their Manipulation

Source: Dion. Hal. RA 8.87, 9.1. Translated by Earnest Cary. In *The Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus*. Loeb classical library. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1937.

*The development of the unique role of the tribunate of the plebs is a topic taken up by every ancient commentator who strays into the time of the early Republic, always to reinforce a particular view of why the Republic evolved as it did. The actual facts are not known.*

Those elected consuls for the ensuing year<sup>1</sup> were M. Fabius, son of K.,<sup>2</sup> the younger brother of the consul who conducted the election, and L. Valerius, the son of M.,<sup>3</sup> the man who had accused Cassius, who had been thrice consul, of aiming at tyranny and caused him to be put to death.<sup>4</sup>

These men, having taken office, asked for the levying of fresh troops to replace those who had perished in the war against the Antiates, in order that the gaps in the various centuries might be filled; and having obtained a decree of the senate, they appointed a day on which all who were of military age must appear. Thereupon there was a great tumult throughout the city and seditious speeches were made by the poorest citizens, who refused either to comply with the decrees of the senate or to obey the authority of the consuls, since they had violated the promises made to them concerning the allotment of land. And going in great numbers to the tribunes, they charged them with treachery, and with loud outcries demanded their assistance.

Most of the tribunes did not regard it as a suitable time, when a foreign war had arisen, to fan domestic hatreds into flame again; but one of them, named C. Maenius, declared that he would not betray the plebeians or permit the consuls to levy an army unless they should first appoint commissioners for fixing the boundaries of the public land, draw up the decree of the senate for its allotment, and lay it before the people. When the consuls opposed this and made the war they had on their hands an excuse he says not granting anything he desired, the tribune replied that he would pay no heed to them, but would hinder the levy with all his power.

And this he attempted to do; nevertheless, he could prevail to the end. For the consuls, going outside the city, ordered their generals' chairs to be placed in the near-by field;<sup>5</sup> and there they not only enrolled the troops, but also fined those who refused obedience to the laws, since it was not in their power to seize their persons. If the disobedient owned estates, they laid them waste and demolished their country-houses; and if they were farmers who tilled fields belonging to others, they

stripped them of the yokes of oxen, the cattle, and the beasts of burden that were on hand for the work, and all kinds of implements with which the land is tilled and the crops gathered.

And the tribune who opposed the levy was no longer able to do anything. For those who are invested with the tribuneship possess no authority over anything outside the city, since their jurisdiction is limited by the city walls, and it is not lawful for them even to pass a night away from the city, save on a single occasion, when all the magistrates of the commonwealth ascended the Alban Mount and offer up a common sacrifice to Jupiter in behalf of the Latin nation.

This custom by which the tribunes possess no authority over anything outside the city continues to our times. And indeed the motivating cause, among many others, of the civil war among the Romans which occurred in my day<sup>6</sup> and was greater than any war before it, the cause which seemed more important and sufficient to divide the commonwealth, was this—that some of the tribunes, complaining that they had been forcibly driven out of the city by the general<sup>7</sup> who was then in control of affairs in Italy, in order to deprive them henceforth of any power, fled to the general<sup>8</sup> who commanded the armies in Gaul, as having no place to turn to.

And the latter, availing himself of this excuse and pretending to come with right and justice to the aid of the sacrosanct magistracy of the people which had been deprived of its authority contrary to the oaths of the forefathers, entered the city himself in arms and restored the men to their office....

The following year,<sup>9</sup> a dispute having arisen between the populace and the senate concerning the men who were to be elected consuls, the senators demanding that both men promoted to that magistracy should be of the aristocratic party and the populace demanding that they be chosen from among such as were agreeable to them, after an obstinate struggle they finally convinced each other that a consul should be chosen from each party. Thus K. Fabius, who had accused Cassius of aiming at a tyranny, was elected consul,<sup>10</sup> for the second time, on the part of the senate, and S. Furius on the part of the populace,<sup>11</sup> in the seventy-fifth Olympiad, Calliades being archon at Athens, at the time when Xerxes made his expedition against Greece.

They had no sooner taken office than ambassadors of the Latins came to the senate asking them to send to them one of the consuls with an army to put a check to the insolence of the

<sup>1</sup> For 483 BCE.

<sup>2</sup> M. Fabius K. f. Vibulanus, consul in 483 and 480 BCE.

<sup>3</sup> L. Valerius Potitus, consul 483.

<sup>4</sup> S. Cassius Vecellinus: see "Treaties of Alliance with Rome's Neighbors," below.

<sup>5</sup> The Campus Martius.

<sup>6</sup> I.e., the civil war between Caesar and Pompey.

<sup>7</sup> Pompey.

<sup>8</sup> Caesar.

<sup>9</sup> 482 BCE.

<sup>10</sup> K. Fabius Vibulanus was consul in 484, 481, and 479 BCE.

<sup>11</sup> S. Furius Medullinus Fusus, consul 481.

Aequians, and at the same time word was brought that all Tyrrhenia was aroused and would soon go to war. For that nation had been convened in a general assembly and at the urgent solicitation of the Veientes for aid in their war against the Romans had passed a decree that any of the Tyrrhenians who so desired might take part in the campaign; and it was a sufficiently strong body of men that voluntarily aided the Veientes in the war. Upon learning of this the authorities in Rome resolved to raise armies and also that both consuls should take the field, one to make war on the Aequians and to aid the Latins, and the other to march with his forces against Tyrrhenia.

All this was opposed by S. Icilius,<sup>12</sup> one of the tribunes, who, assembling the populace every day, demanded of the senate the performance of its promises relating to the allotment of land and said that he would allow none of their decrees, whether they concerned military or civil affairs, to take effect

unless they should first appoint the decemvir so fix the boundaries of the public land and divide it among the people as they had promised.

When the senate was at a loss and did not know what to do, Ap. Claudius<sup>13</sup> suggested that they should consider how the other tribunes might be brought to dissent from Icilius, pointing out that there is no other method of putting an end to the power of a tribune who opposes and obstructs the decrees of the senate, since his person is sacred and this authority of his legal, than for another of the men of equal rank and possessing the same power to oppose him and to order to be done what the other tries to obstruct.

And he advised all succeeding consuls to do this and to consider how they might always have some of the tribunes well disposed and friendly to them, saying that only method of destroying the power of the college was to sow dissension among its members.

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<sup>12</sup> The MSS. give this name here and below as Sicilius. Livy calls him Licinius.

<sup>13</sup> Ap. Claudius Sabinus Inregillensis, consul 495, a defender of the prerogatives of the patricians.