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IV

Z. YAVETZ

THE URBAN PLEBS IN THE DAYS OF THE FLAVIANS, NERVA AND TRAJAN

Professor Giovannini has asked me to prepare a paper on the urban *plebs*, in the framework of a colloque on "L'opposition aux Empereurs et à l'Empire au Ier siècle (A.D.)". In order not to repeat things that I have said in connection with the Julio-Claudians, I have decided to investigate the relationship between *plebs* and *princeps* during the days of the Flavians, Nerva and Trajan. I shall not be able, however, to avoid the Julio-Claudians altogether, because I would like to bear upon two dissenting remarks made by two great historians, the late Sir Moses Finley and Professor Paul Veyne.

My paper will be divided into two main parts: in order to avoid the term 'facts', I prefer to entitle the first part "Was wir eigentlich wissen". Problems and attempts at interpretation are dealt with in the second part.

I

Nothing unusual can be discovered in the relationship between *plebs* and *princeps* in the days of Vespasian. At first,

there was fear. It was well known in the capital that Vespasian had planned to starve Rome and Italy, and the news from Cremona must have produced a shocking effect.[1] Eventually, the city populace lost faith in Vitellius,[2] turned against him, but no signs of enthusiasm for Vespasian can be detected among the urban *plebs*.[3] A modern scholar suggests that from the point of view of the populace, the Flavians were best kept out of Rome.[4] He may be right, but from what we know it appears only that the *plebs urbana* was helpless, its political power negligible, and at a certain moment there was hardly any other choice for the common people in Rome but to make their peace with Vespasian.

All seems to have gone smoothly. The man who had declared that money was the sinews of sovereignty,[5] made it clear that he had amassed money not for his own enjoyment, but for the need of the people.[6] After a short while, the *favor populi* was captured. In 70 A.D. Vespasian restored order in Egypt—the granary of the Empire [7]—and thence sent a supply of grain to Rome.[8] On reaching Rome he

[1] Tac. *Hist.* III 48; III 33.

[2] Z. YAVETZ, "Vitellius and the 'Fickleness of the Mob' ", in *Historia* 18 (1969), 557-569. The cliché of *inconstantia plebis* in its relationship to its leaders, is not typical of ancient history and has intrigued social scientists to our own days: Henri IV once said: "Le peuple m'acclame; il acclamerait aussi bien mon pire ennemi, s'il triomphait" (quoted by P. VEYNE, *op. cit.* [*infra* n. 195], 665). Cf. Nor did Frederic the Great think well of the crowds: once, while riding a horse, he was cheered by the masses. He remarked: "Setze man einen alten Affen auf's Pferd, und lasse man ihn durch die Strassen reiten, so wird das Volk ebenso zusammenlaufen", quoted in M. J. NETZER (ed.), *Preussen* (München 1968).

[3] J. NICOLS, *Vespasian and the Partes Flavianae* (Wiesbaden 1978), esp. 164 ff.

[4] R. F. NEWBOLD, "Vitellius and the Roman Plebs", in *Historia* 21 (1972), 313.

[5] Dio Cass. LXVI 2, 5: νεῦρα τῆς ἡγεμονίας.

[6] Dio Cass. LXVI 10, 3.

[7] Jos. *Bell. Jud.* IV 605; cf. II 386.

[8] Dio Cass. LXVI 9, 2a.

bestowed gifts not only upon the soldiers but also upon the civil population.[9] He provided entertainments,[10] organized games and festivals on a most sumptuous scale,[11] and boasted that he was paying for all that from his own purse.[12] Had he written his *Res gestae*, he might have repeated time and again the phrase: *Ex horreo et patrimonio meo*, or *mea pecunia* etc.

The secret of his popularity could be attributed—partly at least—to his unassuming and lenient character (*civilis et clemens*),[13] to his inclination not to avenge affronts and enmities,[14] and to his behaviour, depicted as δημοτικῶς,[15] which should be translated populist rather than democratic.

All that must have come naturally to this Sabinian *homo novus*, who paraded his former low origin and ridiculed flatterers who tried to invent a more respectable genealogy for the Flavians.[16] He made no effort to hide his lusts or cover up his vices, and had to pay a price for his misconduct.[17] But populist behaviour should not be confounded with policies. Dinner parties to support the butchers of Rome [18] and receptions in the Sallustian Gardens not only for senators, but also for common people,[19] should not lead us into error. Vespasian insisted on the traditional hierarchy in Roman society and faithfully observed the principle:

[9] Dio Cass. LXVI 10, 1a.

[10] Suet. *Vesp.* 19, 1.

[11] Dio Cass. LXVI 10, 3.

[12] Dio Cass. LXVI 10, 3a.

[13] Suet. *Vesp.* 12.

[14] *Ibid.*, 14.

[15] Dio Cass. LXVI 11, 1.

[16] Suet. *Vesp.* 12.

[17] *Ibid.*, 3 and 4, 4.

[18] *Ibid.*, 19, 1.

[19] Dio Cass. LXVI 10, 4.

Utrumque ordinem, non tam libertate inter se quam dignitate differre.[20] In his reign common people could nor even dream of acquiring political power. He was prepared to play to the galleries as long as the game was harmless. He would not mind showing some respect for popular superstitions, in which he hardly ever believed,[21] particularly if this could help him display his own charisma, but would never allow astrologers to abuse the superstitions of the commons. He would pay Latin and Greek teachers out of the public treasury,[22] but was in no mood to tolerate the activities of astrologers and philosophers.[23] He banished them without qualms and Dio's epitomizer elucidates Vespasian's decision in quite explicit terms: The philosophers tried to stir up the masses: τὸ τὰ πλήθη ταράττειν,[24] and there could be no compromise with the *contumacia philosophorum*.[25] Philosophers and astrologers were tolerated in Rome only as long as they taught youngsters from the upper classes and stayed away from the masses.[26] Once they started to mingle with the lower population they became dangerous, and no Roman *princeps* could tolerate "that breed of men who were notorious for betraying the powerful and deceiving the hopeful".[27] Vespasian was no exception and he must have been afraid of these "barking dogs" [28]

[20] Suet. *Vesp.* 9, 2 (concerning senators and knights). In general see Tac. *Ann.* XIII 27.

[21] E.g. healing a blind man by spitting upon his eyes or curing a fellow with a withered hand by stepping on it (Dio Cass. LXVI 8, 1; Suet. *Vesp.* 7, 2).

[22] Dio Cass. LXVI 12, 1a.

[23] *Ibid.*, 9, 1; 13, 2.

[24] *Ibid.*, 12, 2.

[25] Suet. *Vesp.* 13; cf. J. M. C. Toynbee, "Dictators and Philosophers in the First Century A.D.", in *G & R* 13 (1944), 43 ff.

[26] Cic. *Tusc.* II 4.

[27] Tac. *Hist.* I 22, 1; cf. F. H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia 1954).

[28] Dio Cass. LXVI 13, 3.

more than he would have been prepared to admit. On the whole, it seems that his concern for the welfare of the common people was never shaken, and it is no accident that the words "you must let me heed my poor commons" [29] were attributed to him. This was allegedly Vespasian's reply to a mechanical engineer who came up with a technical innovation which promised to transport heavy columns to the Capitol at small expense. Vespasian—so the story goes—rewarded the engineer but refused to make use of the invention, in order to secure jobs for common people.

The utterance of Vespasian turned into a "Paradezitat" for many controversies in ancient history, e.g.: was there progress or stagnation in ancient technology; [30] were public buildings constructed by free artisans or by gangs of slaves; [31] were public works in antiquity undertaken in order to provide jobs for people or were they just supposed to glorify the image of the builder and express the splendour and the power of a regime? [32]

In a non polemical chapter like this, I can only say that Vespasian is known to have promoted a large-scale building activity of his own [33] and to have repaired many ruined buildings, but inscribed on them the names of those who originally built them. [34] Nobody knows what made Vespasian spare no effort to conduct a building activity on such a

[29] Suet. *Vesp.* 18: *Praefatus sineret se plebiculam pascere.*

[30] E.g. F. KIECHLE, *Sklavenarbeit und technischer Fortschritt im römischen Reich* (Wiesbaden 1969).

[31] Lionel CASSON, in *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 15 (1978); *contra* P. A. BRUNT, "Free Labour and Public Works at Rome", in *JRS* 70 (1980), 81 ff.

[32] Gabriella BODEI GIGLIONI, *Lavori pubblici e occupazione nell'antichità classica* (Bologna 1974), esp. 132 ff.

[33] A. GARZETTI, *From Tiberius to the Antonines*, Engl. Transl. (London 1974), esp. 243 ff.

[34] Dio Cass. LXVI 10, 1a.

vast scale. Even if one admits that full employment has never been a professed ideal in pre-industrial societies, it cannot be denied that purveyance of employment for some freeborn workers must have been at least a welcome side-effect. It is generally known that the Roman people loved public munificence [35] and the fact remains that in spite of having kept the populace under strict control, Vespasian is referred to in the surviving sources as an αὐτοκράτωρ, in his oversight of the public business, whereas in all other respects he lived on a footing of equality with his subjects.[36] It is of course possible that his marvellous sense of humour and his witticisms [37] helped him diminishing the *odium* caused by some of his acts—a function brought into play by humour to our own days. But the fact remains that according to our sources, opposition against him *(assiduas in se coniurationes)* [38] originated in the circles of his best friends,[39] not among the rank and file. No violent crowd activities in the days of Vespasian have been recorded. No vociferous protests against the emperor were aired at circus or theatre performances. Nor have any mass acclamations of support for Vespasian been registered. From this point of view, a big lull characterized the years 70-79 A.D.

Using the same line of argumentation, it could be said that the days of Titus were even more uneventful. Perhaps, as Dio pointed out, due to his short reign, he was given no

[35] Cic. *Mur.* 76: *Odit populus Romanus privatam luxuriam, publicam magnificentiam diligit*, and Titus stripped his own villas in order to ornament the restored temples: Suet. *Tit.* 8, 4. Not always, however, did the poorer classes appreciate the efforts to beautify their city: see Dio of Prusa, *Or.* XL 8-9; XLV 12; XLVI 9; XLVII 11-15.

[36] Dio Cass. LXVI 11, 1: τό τε σύμπαν τῇ μὲν προνοίᾳ τῶν κοινῶν αὐτοκράτωρ ἐνομίζετο, ἐς δὲ δὴ τἆλλα πάντα κοινὸς καὶ ἰσοδιαιτός σφισιν ἦν.

[37] Suet. *Vesp.* 23.

[38] *Ibid.*, 25.

[39] Dio Cass. LXVI 16, 3.

opportunity for wrongdoing [40] and thus ended up in the memory of the Romans as *amor ac deliciae generis humani*.[41] Notorious for his cruelty before ascending the throne, Titus made enormous efforts to change his image and earn a good reputation (εὐδοξία),[42] and in almost every respect tried to please the people: his banquets were pleasant rather than extravagant, but in his munificence towards the people he was second to none of his predecessors.[43] At the dedication of the Flavian amphitheatre and baths, he gave a most magnificent gladiatorial show, exhibited 5000 wild beasts in a single day and presented a sham sea fight in the old naumachia. Suetonius emphasizes that he gave shows, not after his own inclinations, but that he took into account those of the spectators.[44] Dio, after a more detailed description of the games,[45] adds: "He would throw down into the theatre from aloft, little wooden balls, variously inscribed (one designating some article of food, another of clothing) . . . Those who seized them, were to carry them to the dispensers of the bounty, and received the article named".[46]

It was probably not only the fact that he treated the whole body of the people (*universum populum*) [47] with indulgence (*comitate tractavit*) that made him so popular, but mainly his unassuming and natural behaviour at the games: unlike Julius Caesar, who dictated letters while watching

[40] Dio Cass. LXVI 18, 3.

[41] Suet. *Tit.* 1.

[42] Dio Cass. LXVI 18, 2; cf. Z. YAVETZ, "Reflections on Titus and Josephus", in *GRBS* 16 (1975), 411-32.

[43] Suet. *Tit.* 7, 3.

[44] *Ibid.*, 8, 2.

[45] Dio Cass. LXVI 25 (1-4). For Titus' behaviour—*per theatra et castra*—see the important remarks of T. BOLLINGER, *Theatralis licentia* (Winterthur 1969), 36 and 47 with notes.

[46] *Ibid.*, 25, 5.

[47] Suet. *Tit.* 8, 2.

games, Titus got involved, openly displayed partiality for Thracian gladiators and bantered the people about it by words and gestures.[48] He made no heed to appear as a human being, and sympathy for him must have accrued when the people saw him cry in public.[49] That Titus took care of *frumentationes* and *congiaria*[50] must be taken for granted, but he must have been at his best after the disaster at Pompeii and Herculanum, and after the great fire that broke out in Rome in 80 A.D. Titus ordered the devastated region to be restored, bestowed upon the inhabitants not only gifts of money, but also the property of those who had lost their lives and left no heirs.[51] The appearance of a Pseudo Nero[52] in Titus' days may cast a shadow on his generally popular reign, but it should not be taken as an indication of dissatisfaction on the part of the *plebs urbana*. From their point of view, he was and remained the darling of mankind.

The relations between Domitian and the *plebs* appear to have been much more complicated, mainly because the sources in our possession do not convey a clear picture: in senatorial historiography (and there was no other)—he went down as a man rapacious through need and cruel through fear (*inopia-rapax, metu-saevus*).[53] As a man treacherous, secretive and suspicious, who admired Tiberius more than any other *princeps* in the past,[54] he was cruel and

[48] *Ibid.*: *ut fautor cavillatus est.*

[49] *Ibid.*, 10, 1; Dio Cass. LXVI 26, 1.

[50] E.g.: *CIL* VI 943: *Plebs urbana quae frumentum publicum accipit et tribus.* Cf. D. VAN BERCHEM, *Les distributions de blé et d'argent à la plèbe romaine sous l'Empire* (Genève 1939), esp. 149 ff.

[51] Dio Cass. LXVI 24 (2-3).

[52] *Ibid.*, 19, 3 B; cf. F. MILLAR, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford 1964), esp. 217-8.

[53] Suet. *Dom.* 3, 2.

[54] *Ibid.*, 20; Dio Cass. LXVII 1, 1.

bloodthirsty to such an extent, that all those who were close to him, were kept in constant fear of having their throats cut.[55] At first glance, this behaviour might appear to be the perfect recipe for winning the favour of the masses, or to quote at random just one typical cliché: "Disasters that occur to those who are apparently fortunate and rich, do not concern the common people, and sometimes even cause pleasure to certain worthless, malicious individuals, because they envy the powerful and prosperous".[56] In the case of Domitian, however, this description does not fit: Domitian never became the idol of the *plebs*, in spite of the fact that he tyrannized senators and that his policy in the spheres of entertainments and buildings, *frumentationes* and *congiaria*, was almost identical to that of his predecessors—and in certain cases he even surpassed them. An enumeration of all the details would expand this paper to an unnecessary length,[57] but mention must be made of the fact that Domitian's death, unlike Nero's was not bewailed by the common people.

The sources on this issue are inadequate and all explanations remain speculative. All we know is that after his

[55] Dio Cass. LXVII 9, 3.

[56] Herodian VII 3, 5; Juv. 8, 189-192. For other examples see Z. YAVETZ, *Plebs and Princeps* (Oxford 1969), 113-118.

[57] Details collected exhaustively in the still very valuable S. GSELL, *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Domitien* (Paris 1894; repr. 1967), 120 ff. and A. GARZETTI, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 33), 275 ff.; D. VAN BERCHEM, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 50), 150-1. There is one issue which deserves more attention than it has hitherto received: the attitude of Domitian to the habit of *sportula*. Private patrons were giving clients who called on them $6^1/_4$ *sest.* for each daily visit. Domitian suppressed these payments by patrons but revived the pre-Neronian public dinners which had been suppressed by Nero. Domitian's attempt failed, and *sportula* is mentioned again in the poems of Martial and Juvenal. For references see R. DUNCAN-JONES, *The Economy of the Roman Empire* (*infra* n. 119), 138 and A. PASQUALINI, in *Helikon* 9-10 (1969/70), 265-312. The passage Suet. *Nero* 16 should be read with Suet. *Aug.* 74. For the enormous building operation of Domitian, necessitated in part by the disastrous fire of the year 80, see a complete list in S. B. PLATNER—T. ASHBY, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (London 1929), 596.

death, his images were melted down.[58] The feelings of joy and relief among the senators do not have to be explained at length. Cruelty does not pay off and Ennius' *bon mot* seems proper: "Whom they fear they hate, and whom one hates one hopes to see dead".[59] What else could a bald headed Nero, who kept murdering the great men of the country—*vindice nullo*—expect?[60] But the senators did not dare to do away with Domitian, and the conspiracy against him was organized in the midst of his closest entourage, his former friends and his favourite freedmen.[61] Nor did the *plebs urbana* disclose any signs of opposition against Domitian. There are indications that hatred toward Domitian existed among the lower classes sometimes before his murder,[62] but Juvenal's line that only when Domitian became a *terror* to the *cerdones* he met his doom,[63] remains a riddle to me. All we know is that his death was met with indifference rather than compassion: *occisum eum populus indifferenter . . . tulit*.[64] This only strengthens the contention that the regular supply of fundamental material requirements of life is not enough to secure the goodwill of the *plebs urbana*[65] for a *princeps*.

Nerva was a good emperor: he respected the senators and the upper classes, and to use Dio's jargon, he did nothing without the advice of the foremost men (πρώτοι ἄνδρες), he made sincere efforts to please the better element (πρὸς χάριν τῶν ἀγαθῶν), honoured all good men and

[58] Dio Cass. LXVIII 1, 1.

[59] *Quem metuunt, oderunt, quem quisque odit periisse expetit* (*Fab. inc.* 402 Vahlen; = 410 Warmington; *ap.* Cic. *Off.* II 23).

[60] Suet. *Dom.* 10; 11; Juv. 4, 37-38.

[61] Suet. *Dom.* 14, 1; Dio Cass. LXVII 15.

[62] Dio Cass. LXVII 18, 1.

[63] Juv. 4, 153-4: *Sed periit postquam cerdonibus esse timendus | coeperat.*

[64] Suet. *Dom.* 23.

[65] *Plebs and Princeps* (*supra* n. 56), 138 ff.

conferred many favours upon good citizens.[66] He promised to abolish death penalties on senators but put to death all the slaves and freedmen who had conspired against their masters under previous rulers;[67] senators, however, who had behaved shamelessly in the days of Domitian (like Aquilius Regulus or Fabricius Veiento), went unharmed. Stressed relations with the army must have preoccupied Nerva, especially when the Praetorians, lead by Casperius Aelianus, forced him not only to execute the killers of Domitian, but also to thank the avengers in a public speech. The Roman *plebs*, however, was not neglected: a *sestertius* with Nerva's effigy has on its reverse a *modius* with the legend: *Plebei urbanae frumento constituto*. It is also noteworthy that on inscriptions, an imperial *procurator Minuciae*, appears along with the *praefectus frumenti dandi ex Senatus consulto*.[68] A *congiarium* to the people in 96 A.D. is recorded on coins [69] and the adoption of Trajan was made public by the emperor in the presence of the Senate and the people on the Capitol.[70] On the one hand he abolished many sacrifices, horse races and other popular spectacles,[71] but on the other hand he offered a *funeraticium*, most probably to all the recipients of the *congiaria*.[72] He granted to the very poor Romans (τοῖς τε πάνυ πένησι τῶν Ῥωμαίων) allotments of land worth 50,000,000 *sestertii*, putting some senators in

[66] Dio Cass. LXVIII 5, 4; 5, 5; 6, 4.

[67] *Ibid.*, 1, 2; Plin. *Epist.* IX 13, 4.

[68] D. VAN BERCHEM, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 50), 77 f.; cf. O. HIRSCHFELD, *Die kaiserlichen Verwaltungsbeamten bis auf Diocletian* (Berlin ²1905), 237.

[69] D. VAN BERCHEM, *op. cit.*, 151.

[70] Dio Cass. LXVIII 3, 4.

[71] *Ibid.*, 2, 3.

[72] Th. MOMMSEN (ed.), *Chronica Minora* I (Berlin 1892), 146 (the Chronographer of 354); A. DEGRASSI, *Scritti vari di antichità* I (Roma 1962), 697: *Nerva funeraticium plebi urbanae instituit*. Cf. *ILS* (Dessau) 6726 (Bergomi).

charge of the purchase and the distribution.[73] On the whole, Nerva's reign has been characterized by its generosity and munificence,[74] but the most striking contribution to social policy in antiquity was the establishment of child assistance funds (*alimenta*). Even if Nerva never put the scheme into practice, it is important to stress that sources that cannot easily be dismissed, explicitly say that "Nerva devised a scheme for girls and boys of needy parents, to be supported at public expense throughout the towns of Italy".[75] Neediness and poverty did not entitle people in ancient Rome to receive *frumentationes* and *congiaria*, and the famous *partem petam* of Piso Frugi, only shows that in this context *civitas* was more significant than *egestas*.[76] It is in this very respect that the innovation should be recognized. Augustus, who in keeping with his efforts to increase the birth rate distributed a thousand sesterces per child to those who could lay claim to legitimate sons and daughters, and enabled even children to enjoy *congiaria*,[77] did not single out the *egestosi*, but spoke in general terms of children of the common people: *e plebe* or *multitudinis suboles*. Nor does poverty appear as a binding criterion in Helvius Basila's testament, who bequeathed to the people of Atina (*Atinatibus*) 400,000 *sest.*, so that out of the income from his

[73] Dio Cass. LXVIII 2, 1.

[74] R. Syme, "The Imperial Finances under Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan", in *JRS* 20 (1930), 55-70 = *Roman Papers* I (Oxford 1979), 1-17.

[75] Ps. Aur. Vict. *Epit.* 12, 4: *puellas puerosque natos parentibus egestosis sumptu publico per Italiae oppida ali iussit.*

[76] Cic. *Tusc.* III 48. H. Bolkestein, in his classic *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum* (Utrecht 1939), 469, saw in the *alimenta* scheme, something approaching the oriental type of non reciprocal philanthropy. He attributes, though, the innovation to Trajan. For more recent studies, see especially: H. Kloft, *Liberalitas principis* (Köln 1970), 88; 96-99; 101; 105; 115; 160; 165; 170; 178; and R. Duncan-Jones, *op. cit.* (*infra* n. 119).
See also notes 144-149 below.

[77] Suet. *Aug.* 46 and 41, 2; Dio Cass. LI 21, 3.

bequest, their children were to be given grain until they reached maturity, and thereafter one thousand sesterces each.[78]

Nerva, on the other hand, did something first and foremost for the poor, and the fact that his short reign might not have permitted him to implement his legislation, should not detract anything from its importance. The documentation, from which one learns a great deal about the *alimenta*, originates from the days of Trajan: in each town included in the program, the *fiscus* made loans to farm owners at low interest rates, but the interest was paid into a special municipal fund earmarked for the support of a fixed number of children.[79] Thus, working capital was made available for well-to-do farmers on one hand, and the income from the loans provided funds for helping the poor ones raise their children.

It is unfortunate that our main source of knowledge for the relations between Trajan and the *plebs urbana*, comes from a panegyrist whose main purpose was to depict the Optimus Princeps, as beloved by the highest and lowest alike (*summis atque infimis carus*).[80] Sceptics may distrust the image of a Trajan never playing to the galleries in order to endear himself to the masses, not hesitating to suppress the mimes, who on one hand used to appear at the performances at the Circus Maximus, so that the crowds could see him, but whose behaviour on the other hand was always solemn and dignified.[81] Nevertheless, when he mounted the Capitol, the masses hailed and cheered him.[82] It is common

[78] *ILS* 977.

[79] *ILS* 6675 (Veleia) and 6509 (Beneventum): see the discussion in P. GARNSEY, "Trajan's *alimenta*: Some Problems", in *Historia* 17 (1968), 367-381, with the important P. VEYNE, in *MEFR* 69 (1957), 81-135; 70 (1958), 177-241.

[80] Plin. *Paneg.* 19, 3.

[81] Esp. Plin. *Paneg.* 28, 3; 33, 2; 51, etc.

[82] *Ibid.*, 5, 3-4.

knowledge that Trajan continued the policy of *alimenta* initiated by Nerva, and even expanded it so that the *plebs urbana* might enjoy them as well. We are told that nearly 5000 freeborn children were sought out to be entered on the *alimenta* lists, thus making the rear of children a profit and a pleasure alike, at least for some people.[83] In all other respects his attitude to the urban *plebs* was similar to that of many of his predecessors: he continued energetically to endorse enormous public works, especially roads and harbours,[84] gave the *plebs* 5000 additional seats at the games [85] and made sure that while distributing huge *congiaria* —none—not even the absent—should miss their share.[86]

Summing up the details mentioned above, one might conclude that little happened and that what happened was not very exciting. The study of the relationship between *plebs* and *princeps* in the days of the Flavians, offers no new insights into the problem and the events described are not spectacular. There was no active opposition on the part of the *plebs urbana*, and even if a *princeps* was disliked, no action was taken. Under Nerva and Trajan, things were much the same. The period of the Julio-Claudians was different. Then too, the people hardly dared to revolt, and ὁ δῆμος ἔστενε καὶ ἡσυχάζεν [87] was the rule in most cases. However, one can often read in our sources how the masses expressed their joy and goodwill, sorrow and mourning, protest and anger, without resorting to violence. Reactions of the crowds at the circus and at the theatre are often recorded. This is where the masses "gave

[83] *Ibid.*, 28, 4; cf. 27, 1.

[84] *Ibid.*, 29, 2.

[85] *ILS* 286.

[86] R. Syme, *art. cit.* (*supra* n. 74), 58 = *Roman Papers* I 5; Plin. *Paneg.* 25 (3-4).

[87] App. *BC* V 68, 289.

vent to their insolence"[88] and sometimes expressed their uninhibited opinion without sparing the feelings of the emperors themselves.[89] The Julio-Claudians were apparently interested in learning the general attitudes of the urban masses.[90] They permitted in the circus what they allowed in no other place and reacted sharply only when the disorders led to bloodshed.[91] But it is also possible to enumerate a long list of violent reactions of the crowds. These were sometimes so aggressive that they ended in dead and wounded.[92]

This classification into violent and non-violent crowd reactions is a matter of convenience and bears no weight of principle. Reactions of the urban crowds could be classified and categorized in various ways and several examples are in order:

Dealing with the later Empire, A. H. M. Jones divided riots into those which arose out of shortage of food, out of rivalries between circus factions or out of religious disputes.[93] Alan Cameron,[94] on the other hand, distinguished between four categories of riots in the Late Empire: economic riots (mainly corn riots in time of famine);[95] political riots (usually demonstrations against unpopular taxes or ministers, but occasionally developing into a riot); religious riots (at church Councils and episcopal elections—often the work of monks), and just hooliganism.

[88] Tac. *Hist.* I 72.

[89] Tert. *Spect.* 16, 7.

[90] Jos. *Ant. Jud.* XIX 24. For a succinct survey see F. MILLAR, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London 1977), esp. 373-4.

[91] The details with references in *Plebs and Princeps*, 18-24.

[92] *Ibid.*, 24-32.

[93] A. H. M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964), II 694.

[94] A. CAMERON, *Circus Factions* (Oxford 1976), 271 ff.

[95] For which see esp. H. P. KOHNS, *Versorgungskrisen und Hungerrevolten im spätantiken Rom* (Bonn 1961).

This did not do for Kneppe,[96] who adopted the rather complicated terminology of Tilly[97] distinguishing between: *konkurrierende Aktionen*, when one group of people is coming up with demands that have already been formulated by or granted to others; *reaktive-kollektive Aktionen*, when a group of people requires to be reassured by the authorities that privileges granted in the past will not be abolished and not even threatened to be abolished; and *proaktive-kollektive Aktionen*, when a group of people is coming up with demands that had not been raised in the past.[98]

Be that as it may, for the period of the Flavians, problems of classification should not worry us. There is hardly anything to be classified. On the basis of the available evidence, the Roman *plebs* entered into a period of dormancy, stagnation or, at best, political indifference. This could have been the reason why in many modern works the role of the *plebs urbana* is completely neglected, or absolved in a few non committal sentences.[99] I can raise no objections to this attitude, but would like to tackle the problem from a different angle.

[96] A. Kneppe, *Untersuchungen zur städtischen Plebs des 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Bonn 1979).

[97] C. Tilly, «Hauptformen kollektiver Aktionen in Westeuropa (1500-1975)», in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 3 (1977), 153-163.

[98] See *Gnomon* 55 (1983), 441 ff.

[99] One would not expect to find reference to the *plebs* in books which deal explicitly with the upper classes like the masterly W. Eck, *Senatoren von Vespasian bis Hadrian* (München 1970), or Brian W. Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order* (Philadelphia 1979). But *plebs* is conspicuous by its absence even from special studies like *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi Vespasianei,* 2 voll. (Rieti 1981). Almost nothing in H. Bengtson, *Die Flavier* (München 1979); cf. *Gnomon* 53 (1981), 343 — or in B.W. Jones, *The Emperor Titus* (New York/London 1984). A few remarks in E. Cizek, *L'époque de Trajan* (Paris 1983), and L. Homo, *Vespasien, l'empereur du bon sens* (Paris 1949). Still important material in S. Gsell, *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Domitien* (Paris 1894). These are random examples. For a full

Let me begin with Gaston Boissier, an appropriate start at this symposium: he believed that the army, the municipalities and the provinces accepted by and large the Roman Empire. An opposition developed only among a certain group of upper class people, but even this was "une opposition indécise, dissimulée, plus tracassière qu'efficace, sans consistance et sans principes".[100] The common people, on the other hand, had nothing to fear. Moreover, "le peuple acceptait volontiers l'empire. Il l'avait aidé à naître, il en tirait de bons profits, et les empereurs n'avaient pas à craindre de trouver chez lui des mécontents".[101]

I hope that I have been able to show elsewhere, that at least as far as the Julio-Claudian period is concerned, Boissier's opinion is too simple to be true. If, on the other hand, Boissier is right about the Flavian period, i.e. dissatisfaction disappeared, hence no sign of protest in the sources, one should still ask how did all that happen and why.

This is where the conjectural part of my paper begins.

II

1. The first and obvious answer is, of course, that one cannot say with certainty that there were no outbursts of protest and violence, simply because of the inadequacy of our sources. Suetonius' biographies of Vespasian, Titus and Domitian, are by far not as elaborate as those of Julius Caesar, Augustus and Tiberius; Tacitus' *Histories* beyond Book V are completely lost, and the relevant books of

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bibliography see A. GARZETTI, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 33). Attention, however, is paid to the *plebs* in M. PANI, *Principato e società a Roma dai Giulio-Claudi ai Flavi* (Bari 1983). His observations are in my opinion correct.

[100] G. BOISSIER, *L'opposition sous les Césars* (Paris 1913).

[101] *Ibid.*, 66; cf. Tac. *Ann.* XIV 47; Dio Cass. LIX 26, 9, etc.

Dio's *History* have not come down to us intact. Epitomators are unreliable. From the *Letters* of the Younger Pliny, we can learn a great deal about innumerable subjects (starting with the daily habits of a country gentleman, and ending with the problems which faced the *coloni*—be they tenants or free peasants) however, *plebs urbana* is not one of them. There are indeed some beautiful and important passages in the writings of the relevant poets. These have been used in extenso by scholars from L. Friedländer to our own day—but they can still not serve as a substitute for a more factual and prosaic description. Had Juvenal, indeed, kept his promise, and written about the vows, the fears, the angers, the pleasures and the joys of all people (*quidquid agunt homines*),[102] things would have been different. But as has been observed long ago, Juvenal concentrated mainly on the sufferings and frustrations of freeborn middle class Romans [103] and ignored other groups of the *plebs*. Nor can the sepulchral inscriptions, collected in the sixth volume of *CIL*, provide us with satisfactory answers to our problems, or as Brunt once put it: "Inscriptions cannot make good the deficiency in literary texts".[104]

Thus one is left with an argument from silence. I prefer to assume that quiet and peaceful days leave a blank in history books anyway, and that scandals and riots do not usually go unnoticed. Had serious seditious activities on the part of the *plebs* really occurred, they would have been registered or at least hinted at in one of our surviving sources, fragmentary as they may be. Even epitomators in antiquity would have recorded noisy demonstrations or clashes between rioting mobs and soldiers, assuming that

[102] Juv. 1, 85-86.

[103] E. g. Juv. 1, 22 ff. Cf. Mart. III 16; 59; 99—on the hatred against barbers or cobblers—manumitted slaves who enriched themselves to such an extent that they were able to give gladiatorial shows.

[104] P. A. Brunt, in *JRS* 70 (1980), 84.

their readers would be more interested in these kind of stories than in a boring array of facts from the past.[105] We are thus left with the conjecture that, from the accession of Vespasian to the death of Trajan, no violent outburst on the part of the *plebs urbana* occurred.

A little comparison with the days of the Julio-Claudians may illustrate the point: on the 29th of June, 105 A.D., the consul Afranius Dexter was found dead. Nobody knew whether he had committed suicide, or had been killed by his own slaves. Moreover, it was not clear whether the slaves acted criminally (*scelere*), or in obedience to their master (*obsequio*). The Senate dealt with the problem. The Younger Pliny proposed to acquit the slaves. Another senator suggested that they should be banished to an island and a third one proposed that they should be put to death.[106] After the debate, Pliny proposed that the three opinions expressed be considered as conflicting, and therefore put to vote as three different ones. He was opposed by a temporary joining of forces between the supporters of banishment and those who proposed the death penalty. But Pliny fought back and explained that it seemed strange to him that a fourth senator, who had proposed a compromise, i.e. banishment for the freedmen and death for the slaves, should be obliged to divide his vote.[107] Pliny carried his point: the proposer of the death sentence dropped his own proposal and supported that of banishment. The important legal implications of this case cannot detain us here [108]—since we must turn to a similar event in the days of Nero—which caused a huge riot.

[105] E. g. Juv. 7, 98 ff.

[106] Plin. *Epist.* VIII 14 (12-26).

[107] *Ibid.,* VIII 14, 15.

[108] See A. N. SHERWIN-WHITE, *The Letters of Pliny* (Oxford 1966), 461-466.

In 61 A.D., Pedanius Secundus, the *praefectus urbi*, was murdered by one of his slaves.[109] According to an old republican custom, not only the slave who had committed the crime was supposed to be punished. All the domestics of the household were to be executed, so that the others might take heed.[110] But in 61 A.D. things were not as smooth as in 105 A.D. *Rumor* must have spread in the city of Rome that the authorities were contemplating to punish severely all those who belonged to the *familia* of Pedanius Secundus. Indeed, while the Senate was deliberating, an assembly of the populace (*concursus plebis*) bent on protecting so many innocent lives, brought matters to a point of sedition, and the Senate was besieged (*usque ad seditionem ventum est, senatusque [obsessus]*). C. Cassius, a die-hard conservative jurist, urged the senators not to submit to compassion and resist courageously the pressure put on by the demonstrating crowds: slaves, according to his view, could be restrained only by terror (*conluviem istam non nisi metu coercueris*: *Ann.* XIV 44), and should faint-heartedness prevail, the masters would be in constant danger of their lives. Another senator, however, Cingonius Varro, proposed that all freedmen, who lived under the roof of Pedanius Secundus, be banished from Italy. Meanwhile, the demonstration outside the Senate must have gone wild, and the populace threatened to resort to stones and firebrands (*conglobata multitudine et saxa ac faces minante*). Nero had no other choice but to intervene. He opposed the proposal of Cingonius Varro, which was therefore dropped right away. He also issued an edict reprimanding the people and insisted on the punishment of the slaves only: he lined the route (along which the condemned were to be led to their execution) with detachments of soldiers, and order was restored.

[109] Tac. *Ann.* XIV 42.

[110] References for *SC Silanianum* in *Plebs and Princeps*, 29 ff.

The similarity between the incidents of 61 and 105 A.D. is obvious. In both cases masters were found dead, allegedly killed by their slaves, and in both cases the Senate took up the issue. But this is where the similarity ends and the differences appear to be far more striking:

a) In 61 A.D. nobody seemed to have doubted that Pedanius Secundus had actually been murdered by one of his slaves. In 105 A.D., however, the cause of the death of Afranius Dexter could not be established without serious doubts. There was a possibility of suicide with servile assistance (*obsequio*). Some senators may have believed that it was the duty of a slave to prevent his master's suicide, and that others rejected this point of view, therefore,

b) The atmosphere in the Senate of 105 A.D. was much more moderate and this is why the more lenient approach of the Younger Pliny could win the day. The hardliners remained a minority, and in order to survive, the supporters of death penalty had to drop their proposal and settle for banishment.

c) In 105 A.D. the emperor did not have to interfere with the deliberations of the Senate. The discussion was civilized and law and order in the Capital was never in jeopardy, because

d) As opposed to 61 A.D., the atmosphere among the crowds too was peaceful, and the Senate was permitted to discuss the issue without being threatened by a menacing mob.

This is where the analysis based on what we know must stop, and conjecture begins. The distinction must explicitly be made, since nobody knows why the masses took to the streets in 61 A.D. and why they acquiesced in 105 A.D.: it is possible that in 105 A.D., security precautions had been taken well in advance, and that the organization of a demonstration had been thwarted in the first place. It is

also possible, that contrary to 61 A.D., in 105 nothing leaked from the deliberations of the Senate, and the apathy of the crowd should be ascribed to lack of information rather than to acquiescence. One may just as well conjecture that in 105 the commons knew exactly what was going on in the Senate, but that this time they were pleased with what they knew. One guess is as good as another.

The problems concerning 61 A.D. are no less complicated. We know nothing of the composition of the multitude that assailed the Senate. We do not know the identity of the ringleaders, if there were any at all, or was it perhaps a spontaneous outbreak of unruly masses? Tacitus (our only source) did not endeavour to examine more carefully the deeper causes which led to this violent event. He did not have to, because he believed that he understood the problem: according to him, mobs could sometimes show signs of pity for the afflicted and the weak, just as at other times they were capable of unbounded cruelty: *Ut est mos, vulgus mutabile subitis et tam pronum in misericordiam quam immodicum saevitia fuerat.*[111]

When I dealt with the problem some eighteen years ago, I pointed out the difficulties, tried to separate as sharply as I could facts from opinion, posed more questions than answers, and eventually came up rather timidly (even awkwardly) with three conjectures: that in 61 A.D. the Roman *plebs* did not demonstrate for better conditions for the slaves,[112] that occasionally Roman masses took action when some elementary justice had been violated, and that this could have been an appropriate case because so many innocent people would have had to be put to death,[113] and

[111] Tac. *Hist.* I 69; cf. II 29; III 32; *Ann.* XV 64, etc. Even Ammianus Marcellinus XIX 10, 3 admits that sometimes mobs are by nature inclined to mercy.

[112] *Plebs and Princeps,* 30.

[113] *Ibid.,* 34.

that one may assume that among the demonstrators there were many freedmen.[114]

Some years ago, Sir Moses Finley, alluding to what I had written, criticized in a footnote my lack of incisiveness.[115] In his own text, however, the difference between us originates in his total lack of doubt. Incisively, and with the ease of a master, Finley turns my conjectures into facts. He asserts that the plebeian riots after the murder of Pedanius Secundus did not aim at slavery as an institution, but only at saving the lives of individuals. He also admits that the common people in Rome were capable of showing compassion, but his main point is that the demonstration could be explained by the fact that many of the demonstrators may have been freedmen or slaves themselves.[116]

I must stick to my old, more hesitant, approach and in the next pages I shall attempt at explaining the acquiescence of the masses in the days of the Flavians, Nerva and Trajan. My explanation is, hopefully, not in conflict with the evidence, but conjectural it is.[117]

2. I assume that between the accession of Vespasian and the death of Trajan, the corn supply to the city of Rome

[114] *Ibid.*, 35.

[115] M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York/London 1980), 173 n. 43.

[116] *Ibid.*, 103.

[117] See A. Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography* (New York 1966), 110; R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt 1979; und seitdem mehrfach), 153: "... die Quellenkontrolle schliesst aus, was nicht gesagt werden kann, etc."; 204 ff., besonders 206: "Streng genommen kann uns eine Quelle nie sagen, was wir sagen sollen. Wohl aber hindert sie uns, Aussagen zu machen, die wir nicht machen dürfen. Die Quellen haben ein Vetorecht. Sie verbieten uns, Deutungen zu wagen oder zuzulassen, die aufgrund eines Quellenbefundes schlichtweg als falsch oder als nicht zulässig durchschaut werden können ... Quellen schützen uns vor Irrtümern, nicht aber sagen sie uns, was wir sagen sollen." I am grateful to Dr. Karl Joachim Holkeskamp for turning my attention to this quote.

was regular and undisturbed, and that the distribution at the Porta Minucia was well organized and went on smoothly. Moreover, occasional *congiaria* and frequent amusements on an enormous scale contributed to the calm atmosphere that prevailed in the Rome of those days. Thus one of the main causes (but by no means the only one) of protests and riots had been successfully removed.

In an affluent society, preoccupied by energy problems, discrimination of women and 'Umweltverschmutzung', one is gratified if reminded that "grain in antiquity was what oil is to the world today".[118] We owe a great deal to a number of scholars who have drawn our attention to some very earthly and prosaic problems which must have preoccupied not only the authorities but also many thousands of people in ancient Rome. The purchase and collection of grain in the provinces (especially Africa, Egypt, Sicily and Sardinia), the transportation to Puteoli and Ostia—and from there to the city of Rome, the storage of enormous quantities of grain in *horrea* and the distribution to those who were entitled to receive it—are just few of the most striking issues.[119]

The common people in the city of Rome, however, were hardly aware of the difficulties faced by the *decumani* when collecting tithes in the provinces, and transporting the grain to the sea, of the dangers faced by the *navicularii*

[118] L. Casson, "The Role of the State in Rome's Grain Trade", in *The Seaborne Commerce of Ancient Rome. Studies in Archaeology and History*, ed. by J. H. D'Arms and E. C. Kopff (Rome 1980), 21-33.

[119] I benefited from many studies, but can mention only the most important ones: R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia* (Oxford ²1973); R. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1974); L. Casson, "Harbour and River Boats of Ancient Rome", in *JRS* 55 (1965), 31, and *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (Princeton 1971). I. would like to stress especially the importance of G. Rickman's, *Roman Granaries and Store Buildings* (Cambridge 1971), and *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome* (Oxford 1980). From older books still classic: O. Hirschfeld (n. 68) and D. van Berchem (n. 50). Recently: P. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker (eds.), *Trade and Famine in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge 1983).

either from stormy seas or pirates or both, of the difficulties encountered during the unloading of the grain from the big ships to the riverboats and of the difficulties of supervising the work of the *saccarii*, *urinatores* and *mensores*. They just expected to be fed by the authorities and if all the necessary grain could not be supplied free of charge, the rest had to be made available to them on the market at low prices. They did not, and could not know exactly which agency was supposed to take care of the corn supply. In the days of the Republic, the highest magistrates would be blamed for grain shortages; since the days of Augustus, the emperor would be held responsible. In 75 B.C., because of an *annonae intolerabilis saevitia*, hungry crowds chased the consuls in the Forum (and not the *aediles* who were in charge, among other things, of the *cura annonae*), and in 51 A.D. the emperor Claudius (not the *praefectus annonae*) was attacked personally. He managed to escape only with difficulty into his palace through a back door.[120] It hardly mattered that since the days of Julius Caesar, two special *aediles ceriales* had been created and since the crisis of 22 B.C., two ex praetors acted as *praefecti frumenti dandi ex senatus consulto*.[121]

The emperors must have been aware that good relations between *plebs* and *princeps* depended largely on well organized supply of food. "This duty, senators—wrote Tiberius— devolves upon the *princeps*. If it is neglected, the utter ruin of the state will follow".[122] Tiberius knew his history well: the common people in Rome never believed that the Senate could avert or even cope with a crisis of grain supply. In 57 B.C., Pompey had to be given an *omnis*

[120] Sall. *Hist.* fr. 3 (Kurfess); Tac. *Ann.* XII 43; Suet. *Claud.* 18, 2; *Plebs and Princeps*, 28.

[121] Suet. *Aug.* 37. The *aediles ceriales* were not abolished.

[122] Tac. *Ann.* III 54 (6-8).

potestas rei frumentariae toto orbe terrarum.[123] In 22 B.C. Augustus was faced with a similar problem. The populace, plagued by famine and disease, stormed the Senate, shut the senators up in the *curia*, threatened to set the building on fire and burn everyone in it, unless Augustus be appointed *dictator*. The *princeps* calmed the situation by accepting the *cura annonae*.[124] This may have been the main reason for the strong wish expressed by the *plebs urbana* to have the *princeps* in their midst. They felt unsafe when he left the city for a long period of time, because they were afraid that during his absence, another shortage might occur and that the Senate alone could not handle the situation.[125]

At first, many senators were outraged by the *frumentationes*—"To give a beggar is to do him an ill service" [126]—must have been an old maxim of the upper classes, following the belief that poverty is caused by laziness. This is why they considered the Gracchan *lex frumentaria* to be an unforgivable waste of public resources, food being supplied without making the *plebs* work for it and thus encouraging their *inertia*.[127] But eventually they had to give in, and even Cato the Younger had to compromise and propose a corn dole for the poor and landless *plebs* in 62 B.C.[128] Cicero found a salutary formula: a *lex frumentaria* which was *modica... et rei publicae tolerabilis et plebi necessaria* [129]—was acceptable. This, translated into plain political language, simply meant that an acceptable *lex frumentaria* should be proposed by a man trusted by the Optimates.

[123] Cic. *Att.* IV 1, 6-7; Dio Cass. XXXIX 9, 3; Liv. *Perioch.* 104.

[124] *Plebs and Princeps,* 26.

[125] Tac. *Ann.* XV 36: *rei frumentariae angustias, si abesset, metuenti.*

[126] Plaut. *Trin.* 339.

[127] Cic. *Tusc.* III 48; *Sest.* 103; *Off.* II 72; App. *BC* II 120, 503-507.

[128] Plut. *Cat.Mi.* 26, 1.

[129] Cic. *Off.* II 72.

For a short while, Augustus had some second thoughts about the corn dole. To quote his own words: "I was strongly inclined to do away for ever with the distributions of grain, because through dependence on them, agriculture was neglected. But I did not carry out my purpose, feeling sure that they would one day be renewed through the ambitious desire for popular favour".[130] Augustus 'nationalized' not only the strive for military glory but also the aspiration for popularity among the *plebs urbana*. The fate of Cornelius Gallus and Egnatius Rufus was supposed to teach the others a lesson. The policy of Augustus was followed by all his successors, and very rarely did an emperor dare to withdraw from the *plebs* a benefit previously granted. Not because of misgivings that actions taken by masses to repair a lost privilege might some time in the future be classified as a "reaktive-kollektive Aktion"—but due to plain commonsense, formulated by a Syrian slave: *Cui semper dederis, ubi neges, rapere imperes.* [131]

The Flavians did not have to start from scratch. They simply followed by the book the example of their successful predecessors. The populace must have appreciated the quick restoration of the normal food supply in 70 A.D., taking into account the miseries that had befallen the Capital during the year of four emperors.[132] The information gathered from Dio, Suetonius and several inscriptions—quoted above [133]—must be seen in this context, and Rickman's conjecture that the first clear evidence for the emergence of a *fiscus frumentarius* dates from the days of the

[130] Suet. *Aug.* 42, 3.

[131] Publil. Syr. *Sent.* 88.

[132] Tac. *Hist.* I 73; III 48.

[133] See esp. notes 50 and 57.

Flavians, makes sense to me.[134] In order to make it work more efficiently, the *fiscus* was staffed by *tabularii* and a branch office established at Ostia.

Nerva continued the policy of *frumentationes* and initiated *alimenta* which were put into practice by Trajan.[135] The Optimus Princeps might pose a problem to those who would like to stereotype his conquests beyond the Carpathian mountains and beyond the Euphrates, as an attempt at diverting the attention of the *plebs* from internal miseries to successes on battlefields. As a matter of fact, few emperors paid so much attention to the welfare of the *plebs urbana* and to the agricultural and commercial prosperity of Italy as Trajan. I would therefore not reject outrightly as sheer propaganda, the statement that in the arts of peace anyone has hardly equalled Trajan in popularity.[136] There is a lot of truth in it.

Claudius of course was the first to tackle the problem of a harbour for Rome, since Julius Caesar's plans remained unfulfilled. But in Claudius' days the problem was not solved and in 62 A.D. a ghastly storm caused the sinking of some 200 ships loaded with grain in the harbour.[137] Trajan took up the matter again, and it should go to his credit that at last, protection was afforded to the ships as they unloaded their goods for Rome.[138] He also added a new harbour at Terracina, and extended privileges to those who were in the *collegium* of the bakers, provided that they baked 100 *modii* daily throughout a period of three years.[139] He

[134] G. Rickman, *The Corn Supply* (*op. cit. supra* n. 119), 78 n. 44, with *ILS* 1540-1544.

[135] See above notes 75, 79 and 83.

[136] Fronto *Princ.hist.* p. 210 Naber = p. 199 Van Den Hout = II p. 216 Haines: *pacis artibus vix quisquam Traiano ad populum, si qui adaeque acceptior extitit.*

[137] Tac. *Ann.* XV 18, 3.

[138] For a lucid description of the technical details see G. Rickman, *The Corn Supply,* 18, with full bibliographical references.

[139] G. Rickman, *op. cit.,* 90.

may have also been the first to license the *corpora* of the *navicularii*—which led later in the Second Century to various privileges granted not only to *pistores* but also to *mercatores, frumentarii* and *olearii*.[140]

Trajan's concern for the corn supply, is known not only thanks to a passage from Pliny's *Panegyricus*,[141] but also from an inscription which tells us that the emperor appointed T. Flavius Macer to act as *curator frumenti comparandi in annonam urbis* especially in order to buy corn for the city of Rome in Numidia.[142]

The sculpture in the Roman Forum representing the emperor seated on a platform in a toga, with the personified Italia and two children before him, may be of course regarded as a piece of propaganda, just like the coins of the period which represent the same scene.[143] Yet I would like to suggest that this should not diminish the social implication of the *alimenta*.

Nobody knows what the original intentions of the legislators were, when they introduced the *alimenta*. Some think that the emperor did it just in order to strengthen his own position, and in order to support their view, they quote a passage from Pliny: "If he neglects his poorer subjects, he protects in vain his leading citizens, he will become a head cut from a body (*desectum corpore caput*)".[144] Others believe that the emperor did it "mehr als ein Akt der Politik als aus reiner Menschenliebe".[145] Many scholars

[140] *Ibid.*, 90-91.

[141] Plin. *Paneg.* 29, 4-5.

[142] G. Rickman, *op. cit.*, 85.

[143] M. Hammond, "A Statue of Trajan represented on the Anaglypha Traiani", in *Memoirs of the Amer. Acad. in Rome* 21 (1953), 127.

[144] Plin. *Paneg.* 26, 6.

[145] For a brief and excellent discussion see: A. R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (London 1968), 108 ff.; cf. H. Kloft (n. 76) and H. Bolkestein (n. 76).

are convinced that the emperors expected that through the *alimenta*, the citizen body would increase and the new recipients would be brought to serve in the army: *Ex his castra, ex his tribus replebuntur.*[146] But there are still others who stress the economic aims of the legislators—like the encouragement of agriculture in Italy and the grant of loans for small landowners in Italy.[147] For Martin Nilsson, this was the greatest measure of social reform known in history, but W.E. Heitland could find no evidence that it had more than a palliative effect.[148]

Since I can contribute nothing to this controversy, I must restrict myself to a few points which are beyond doubt—but are essential to my argument. Nobody will deny Kloft's assertion that the *alimenta* were a "finanzielle Hilfsmassnahme für die verarmte Jugend Italiens" but the *plebs urbana* must have been impressed mainly by Trajan's initiative to provide help to 5000 children in Rome.[149] The psychological effect of such a move should not be underestimated and it must have boosted the emperor's popularity.

These were not the only measures that calmed the city population. They knew that in times of natural catastrophes they could count on imperial aid:[149a] *congiaria*, distributed pretty regularly during the reign of the five emperors under consideration, enabled the common people to buy first of all food products which were not included in the *frumentationes* [150] (like oil, salt, olives, fish, pickle and vinegar)—and

[146] Plin. *Paneg.* 28, 5 and 26, 3-5: the fact that in Veleia 246 boys as opposed to 35 girls received the allowances, is brought up to sharpen the point.

[147] *Contra:* R. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire,* 297 ff.

[148] M. P. Nilsson, *Imperial Rome* (Repr. New York 1962), 336 and W. E. Heitland, *Agricola* (Cambridge 1921), 271 and 296.

[149] Plin. *Paneg.* 28, 4, with R. Duncan-Jones, *op. cit.,* 293.

[149a] Suet. *Vesp.* 17; *Tit.* 8, 3; Dio Cass. LXVI 24, 3, etc.

[150] Titus' *congiarium* was distributed in 80 A.D.; Domitian's in 83, 89 and 93, Nerva's in 96 and Trajan's in 99, 103 and 107. An extra 75 *denarii* on top of the

which were taken into account even in the diet of a slave.[151] Shows and regular amusements of various kind [152] kept them in a good mood and a vast building activity provided occasional jobs and enhanced the popularity of the *princeps*. Tiberius was criticized for having done neither,[153] the Flavians, Nerva and Trajan did both, but this is not enough to explain the social tranquillity of those days.

3. A history of the *plebs urbana* in ancient Rome has never been written, and perhaps not by accident. This was the most amorphous social group which could be categorized neither as an *ordo* nor as class. It was not even a status group marked by an emotional consciousness of unity. It was of course part of the entire *plebs Romana* which included the *plebs rustica* as well,[154] but this leaves us only with the very vague concept that all those who belonged neither to the *ordo senatorius* nor to the *equites* were considered as *plebs*, a definition that survived in poetry and not in a juridical text:

> Est animus tibi, sunt mores est lingua fidesque
> sed quadringentis sex septem milia desunt:
> plebs eris.[155]

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corn dole and the regular income is quite considerable, if indeed the average daily wage was one *denarius*. All references on *congiaria* conveniently collected in D. VAN BERCHEM, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 50), 149-152 and H. KLOFT, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 76), 92 ff.

[151] Cato *Agr.* 56-58.

[152] See above notes 10, 11, 18, 19, 32, 33, 35, 43, 44, 45 and 47.

[153] Suet. *Tib.* 47, 1: *Princeps neque opera ulla magnifica fecit... neque spectacula omnino edidit*; cf. *Plebs and Princeps,* 107.

[154] See lately the important contributions of P. GARNSEY, "Peasants in Ancient Roman Society", in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 3 (1976), 221 and also his *Non-Slave Labour* (quoted in n. 194 below).

[155] Hor. *Epist.* I 1, 57-59. Gaius, *Inst.* I 3: *plebs autem a populo eo distat,* etc., fits only the early history of Rome.

The *plebs urbana* consisted thus of Roman freeborn citizens who did not surpass the *census* of 400,000 *sest.*, and of ex-slaves, who became part of the *plebs frumentaria* upon their manumission.[156] By the same token, a wealthy contractor or a well-to-do shopkeeper with a census of 300,000 *sest.*, a manumitted slave who became a teacher of rhetoric and philosophy, a freeborn porter (*saccarius*) who served the riverboats on the Tiber, and a beggar—belonged, without differentiation, to the *plebs urbana*.

It is therefore understandable that scholars preferred to deal with certain aspects concerning the life and customs of the *plebs urbana*, rather than with a general history. It is of course clear that never did the *plebs urbana* act as a monolithic group and Tacitus' distinction between the *pars populi integra et magnis domibus adnexa*—as opposed to the *plebs sordida* [157]—is valid not only for the year of the four emperors, but this is certainly not the only distinction. It cannot be denied that during the period of the Julio-Claudians, the more vociferous groups left their mark in history. I submit now the conjecture, that the acquiescence that characterized the period of the Flavians, Nerva and Trajan, was due to an atmosphere of content and hope for further amelioration which prevailed among one group of the *plebs urbana* and one of resignation and fear which dominated other groups.

Thornton Veblen once tried to explain why a revolution never broke out in America: "The lower classes are not at sword's point with the upper. They are bound up with them by the intangible but steady bonds of common attitudes. The workers do not seek to displace their managers. They seek to emulate them. They themselves acquiesce in their general judgement that the work they do

[156] Pers. 5, 73 et *schol.*: *Romae autem erat consuetudo, ut omnes, qui ex manumissione cives Romani fiebant, in numero civium Romanorum frumentum publicum acciperent.*

[157] Tac. *Hist.* I 4 with *Plebs and Princeps*, 141-155.

is somehow less dignified than the work of their masters. Their goal is not to rid themselves of a superior class—but to climb up to it".

Mutatis mutandis, of course, this was the situation in Rome in the second half of the First Century A.D. In spite of legal distinctions between the various *ordines*, a considerable degree of flexibility was permitted and this was successfully exploited by a rather large group of manumitted slaves. Nobody doubts that Roman society enabled people to rise from the gutter *ad fastigia rerum*, and a manumitted slave who ended up as the owner of five shops in Rome is not an invention of Juvenal's.[158] Social mobility in Rome has recently become the topic of some very important studies,[159] but since the experts themselves tell us that the phenomenon cannot be measured statistically—I must content myself with a few general remarks. Tacitus exaggerated when he stated that the number of freeborn declined to such an extent, and the number of freedmen became so numerous, that the senators hesitated to mark them out by special dress, lest the small number of freeborn in the city become apparent.[160] But it is a fact that legal limitations were never able to stop a steady flow of slaves into the lower classes of ancient Rome. The *lex Julia* of 18 B.C. forbade freedmen to marry into senatorial families, but it did not interfere with marriages between freedmen and freedwomen and non senatorial Roman citizens.

It is today commonplace to admit that the number of manumitted slaves among the *plebs urbana* was considerable,

[158] Juv. 1, 105-106.

[159] E.g. P. R. C. Weaver, "Social Mobility in the Early Roman Empire", in *Past and Present* 37 (1967), 3 with references to the pioneering articles of Keith Hopkins. For a salutary scepticism on ancient statistics: F. G. Maier, "Römische Bevölkerungsgeschichte und Inschriftenstatistik", in *Historia* 2 (1953/54), 318-351.

[160] Tac. *Ann.* XIII 27; cf. App. *BC* II 120, 503-507, and Juv. 3, 81 ff.; 131 ff.

that on the whole the freedmen did well, but that only very few became millionaires, lived ostentatiously and thus made their whole class a target for scorn and hatred. Some of them remained clients of their old patrons, others became independent,[161] many of them held important positions in the various branches of the Roman economy and the imperial bureaucracy.[162] The latter were certainly of higher social status than most of the freeborn *plebs* and this was just another reason why they were utterly detested by envious natives. Successful freedmen must have considered themselves as a meritocracy, ascribing their successes to their skills and their personal ability. They certainly were proud of their achievements. Unlike the thousands of poor *ingenui*, who were buried in mass graves (*puticuli*), many freedmen could afford expensive gravestones with elaborate inscriptions emphasizing their occupation and above all the *tria nomina* of a Roman citizen.[163]

The earning of Roman citizenship by these successful ex-slaves, was no mere thing, and it was highly appreciated by their children and grandchildren. As imperial bureaucrats they were loyal servants of the emperor, as private businessmen they were devoted patriots of the Empire. They had no political ambitions and appeared to be quite happy that somebody else allowed them leisure enough to spend on their own business. [164] In a society in which no

[161] For a brief and excellent survey see: G. E. M. DE STE CROIX, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquest* (London 1981), 174 ff.; P. GARNSEY, "Independent Freedmen and the Economy of Roman Italy under the Principate", in *Klio* 63 (1981), 359-371.

[162] P. R. C. WEAVER, *Familia Caesaris* (Cambridge 1972), esp. 199 ff. with a full bibliography.

[163] L. ROSS TAYLOR, "Freedmen and Freeborn in the Epitaphs of Imperial Rome", in *AJPh* 82 (1961), 113 ff. For *puticuli* see Hor. *Sat.* I 8, 10.

[164] See the marvellous formulation in Arist. *Pol.* V 8, 1308 b 30 ff. on the οἱ πολλοί, who are pleased to be out of government.

deity was held in such reverence as money, they let money carry the day—*vincant divitiae*.[165]

But money alone could not make up for the discriminations they must have suffered in their daily social intercourse. In a society based primarily on *status*, they were not accepted socially—and this explains the important role played by successful freedmen in the various *collegia*. Caesar and Augustus had curtailed the free right of association and legitimized only the Collegia consecrated by antiquity or by peaceful character. Since the days of Trajan—and certainly later in the Second Century A.D.—new Collegia were authorized and the role of freedmen among the *mercatores* and *navicularii* is well known. That the Collegia flourished as centres of social intercourse rather than as protectors of the various trades they represented, has been recognized long ago. Many joined the Collegia not only to escape the dullness of their loneliness, but as Dill once put it:"... cultivated their social feeling, heightened their self-respect".[166] No manumitted slave was proud to have become one of the *plebecula urbana*. But it must have been quite prestigious to introduce oneself as a *magister, curator, praefectus, praeses* or *quaestor* of a respectable *collegium*. An impressive title in a lower order may become a substitute for not being accepted into a higher one.

What can be said with certainty is that this group (negligible in numbers as it may have been) was not rebellious and loathed violence. Their station and wealth enabled them to dissuade many others (especially their friends

[165] Juv. 1, 110; cf. 3, 163; 3, 182, etc. Compare Hor. *Sat.* I 1, 62; Petron. 137, 9: *quisquis habet nummos, secura naviget aura*; cf. 77, 6: *assem habeas, assem valeas, habes habeberis . . . qui fuit rana, nunc rex est.*

[166] S. Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (London ²1919), 253; W. Liebenam, *Zur Geschichte und Organisation des römischen Vereinswesens* (Leipzig 1890); J.-P. Waltzing, *Etude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains* I-IV (1895-1900; Nachdr. 1970).

and clients) from rioting and to deter the seditious from taking to the streets.

It is time to say something about the middle class *ingenui*, who from various points of view were much worse off—psychologically at least, if not materially. For a long period of time, the Roman *plebs* was a privileged class, especially as long as they could look down on slaves and foreigners. Those times were gone for ever. They were still conquerors of many lands, but the provinces were far away and they must have felt miserable when they saw in their close vicinity people, who were once below them—and who could exceed them and leave them, at least status wise, far behind.

This is best expressed in Juvenal's poetry when he speaks of a barber, under whose razor the poet's youthful beard used to grate—and who became the owner of a number of villas, while Juvenal had to remain in his apartment,[167] or of men, once hornblowers at provincial shows, who later held shows of their own, winning the applause of the *vulgus*,[168] or of a charioteer who made as much money as hundred lawyers,[169] or a winning jockey, who lived better than a professor.[170]

This does not mean that these angry *ingenui* were all paupers. Certainly not. They simply did not have money enough to keep the standard of living they coveted.[171] These were typical *mécontents*—who were angry because food was expensive, rents exorbitant, and because in order to fill the bellies of their slaves, they had to content themselves with frugal dinners.[172] They lived in constant dread

[167] Juv. 10, 225-226; cf. 1, 24-25.

[168] 3, 34 ff.

[169] 7, 113-114.

[170] 7, 242-243.

[171] Juv. 11, 11; esp. 7, 136 ff.; cf. Mart. III 30.

[172] Juv. 3, 166-167: *magno hospitium miserabile, magno | servorum ventres.*

of fires, of falling houses, of cut-throats and night burglars,[173] and the only outlet for their grudges and disillusions was an implacable hatred against all the foreigners who were once brought to Rome as slaves,[174] like the one who once "wore a papyrus around his loins" and now has become wealthier than his freeborn neighbour.[175]

They were not convinced by the teachings of a Dio of Prusa, who tried to impress common people that poverty was no hopeless impediment to an existence befitting free men willing to work with their hands. And they must have smiled with contempt at the idea that to be poor, was no worse and no more unfortunate than to be rich.[176] Their only chance to advance was through army service,[176a] but this road seemed pretty unattractive to the urban *plebs*. Most recruits came from the *plebs rustica* and Italian municipalities.

Thus, they had no choice, but to resign themselves to their fate, but they were bitter and reacted with nervousness—sometimes with hysteria—whenever they felt deprived of their old privileges. Some of them might have been dragged into the streets by an even lower group of the *plebs urbana*, those really poor who had nothing to lose. But on the whole, these middle class *ingenui* were not a revolutionary group either. They cannot be considered as an opposition to the emperor, not because they loved him, but because they hated many of the senatores even more. Actually, under the Flavians, even the *plebs sordida* or *infima plebs* acquiesced. They did no longer take to the streets and

[173] Juv. 3, 7-9; 193 ff.; 302-305, etc.

[174] Juv. 2, 166-167: *venerat obses, | hic fiunt homines.*

[175] Esp. the *Third Satire (passim)*.

[176] Dio Chrys. *Or.* VII 103 and 115.

[176a] B. Dobson, "The Centurionate and Social Mobility during the Principate", in *Recherches sur les structures sociales dans l'Antiquité classique,* Colloque Caen 1969, introd. de C. Nicolet (Paris 1970).

refrained even from expressing their grievances in the circus and in the theatre. The suppression of the mimes must have become policy since the days of Domitian,[177] and the spectators were so strictly supervised that Pliny praised the rabble for damning the perverted art of the mimes,[178] but the truth is that they were all afraid. During the year of the four emperors, it was not only disclosed that *posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri*,[179] but also what could happen if enraged and vindictive soldiers would be let loose on a helpless and defenceless civilian population. No-one has described the nightmare more artfully and more convincingly than Tacitus:

> "Neither the *populus*, nor the rabble uttered a word, but their faces showed their terror and they turned their ears to catch every sound. There was no uproar, no quiet, but such a silence as accompanies great fear and great anger".[180]

This description is actually sketching the toppling of Galba by the Othonians, but fear and anger, disappointment and frustration must have doubled and tripled when the Vitellians overthrew the Othonians, only to be cut into pieces a few months later by the adherents of the Flavians. A trauma like this is not easily obliterated. The *mécontents* among the civil population—and *mécontents* there were—finally realized in 69 A.D. that against this kind of armed forces they stood no chance. The massacre of Cremona is a case in point.

Of course, even before the Flavians, popular upheavals were no match for the armed forces, yet under the Julio-Claudians the guards were brought in only in cases of

[177] Suet. *Dom.* 7, 1; cf. Dio Cass. LXIX 6, 1 as opposed to Hadrian's days.

[178] Plin. *Paneg.* 46, 2.

[179] Tac. *Hist.* I 4.

[180] Tac. *Hist.* I 40; cf. 41.

utmost need and to a pretty limited extent. After 69 the feeling must have prevailed that on the slightest disturbance, the emperor would not hesitate to put into play the guards, and Tacitus knew that when he wrote "that a dispatch of a praetorian cohort, several executions, and order would be restored at once".[181] Enraged masses could not stand up against rods and drawn swords.[182] It is a fact, that under the Flavians, Nerva and Trajan, the authorities were not even confronted by this kind of challenge, and I would therefore like to interpret against this background the 16th unfinished satire of Juvenal:[183] No civilian could hope to get justice against a soldier, especially when the latter belonged to the praetorian guard. If he were to complain that a soldier had beaten him up, he would appear in front of a "hob nailed centurion as a judge, and a row of jurors with brawny calves sitting before a big bench". Even if the judge would find the soldier guilty, he would be afraid of punishing him because his whole cohort would become his enemies.

Hence, it was almost impossible to indict a soldier, since it was very difficult to find a man who would dare to testify against the honour of a soldier, while it was easy to find a man ready to testify against a civilian.[184] No wonder, therefore, that no civilian dared to thrash a soldier, but if thrashed, he would hold his tongue. He would not have dared to exhibit to the *praetor* the teeth that have been knocked out, the black and blue bumps upon his face, or

[181] Tac. *Ann.* XIII 48, 3.

[182] Tac. *Ann.* XIV 61.

[183] P. Ercole, «La Satira XVI di Giovenale», in *Athenaeum* N. S. 8 (1930), 346-360; G. Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (Oxford 1954); J. Ferguson (ed.), *Juvenal: The Satires* (New York 1979), 323 ff.; J. Gérard, *Juvénal et la réalité contemporaine* (Paris 1976).

[184] Juv. 16, 29-34.

the one eye left, which the doctor holds out no hope of saving.[185]

In the days of Petronius, the Roman male "behaved like a lion as long as he was at home. In the forum, he became a little fox".[186] If Juvenal's satire is not completely out of touch with real life, we would have to assume that in the days of the Flavians, Nerva and Trajan, the civilians who belonged to the lower orders of society—turned into rabbits.

III

There is one more question to be clarified: what was the political role of the *plebs urbana* during the reign of the five emperors under consideration? Or did they turn into a "Lumpenproletariat" without any political role at all? In the Fourth Century A.D., Ammianus Marcellinus depicted the urban *plebs* as a bunch of idle drunkards, who spent their nights in pubs and their days sleeping in the shades of the awnings of the theatre. Others played dice and watched the races. Ammianus' general tone and his choice of words show that he loathed the repugnant eating and drinking habits of the lower classes, their abhorrent smells and their abominable behaviour, e.g.: "They make disgusting sounds by drawing back the breath into their nostrils, and they can stand up open-mouthed for hours, in sunshine and in rain, examining minutely the good points or the defects of the charioteers and their horses".[187] This passage, and several others, are actually not different from Juvenal's much quoted lines[188]—and the question arises whether

[185] Juv. 16, 7-12.

[186] Petron. 44, 14: *Nunc populus est domi leones, foras vulpes.*

[187] Amm. XIV 6, 25.

[188] Juv. 10, 78-81.

there was no difference between the urban *plebs* of the First Century A.D. and that of the Fourth Century? Did history, in this particular process, come to complete standstill—like the "moon in the valley of Ayalon" in the days of Joshua—or do we have to dismiss these accounts as typical clichés, based on the prejudices of the upper classes and on the belief that the distribution of corn drew all the lazy, the beggars and the vagrants to Rome?[189]

Dio of Prusa, however, contradicts Juvenal and tells us that in order to survive, nobody could remain idle 365 days a year. Life in Rome was hard, and one had to pay for everything but for water; commodities were expensive, rent was high, clothing and household belongings were not included in the *frumentationes*.[190] Of course, there was a certain number of idlers and beggars who lived on alms and had "neither a toga, nor fire, nor a bed, nor key, nor dog, nor cup nor slave, nor maid",[191] but I have not seen in the last forty years a book or an article written by a specialist still supporting the theory of the *Lumpenproletariat*. Marx never said so,[192] E. Ch. Welskopf and W. Seyfarth in East Germany and N. Maschkin and E.M. Schtajerman in the Soviet Union, never doubted that a significant part of the urban *plebs* had to work (at least part time), in order to support themselves.[193] For Western scholars, non Mar-

[189] E.g. App. *BC* II 120, 503-507.

[190] Dio Chrys. *Or.* VII 105-106. Cf. *Dig.* XXXIV 1, 6: *Javolenus libro secundo ex Cassio: Legatis alimentis cibaria et vestitus et habitatio debebitur, quia sine his ali corpus non potest.*

[191] Mart. XI 32.

[192] K. Marx, *Das Kapital,* Vol. III p. 865. For the *Lumpenproletariat* theory see e.g.: Sir Charles P. Lucas, *Greater Rome and Greater Britain* (Oxford 1912), 103; I. C. I. de Sismondi, *A History of the Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, Longman, n.d.).

[193] E. Ch. Welskopf, *Die Produktionsverhältnisse im Alten Orient und in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Berlin 1957); E. H. Schtajerman, *Die Krise der Sklavenhalterordnung im Westen des römischen Reiches* (Berlin 1964); W. Seyfarth, *Soziale*

xists and Marxists alike, this has not been a problem at all, or to quote just at random—F. de Martino: "Un grande numero fosse addetto alle attività produttive".[194]

If the *Lumpenproletariat* controversy has been satisfactorily settled, the dissent on the political role of the *plebs* continues. Before the appearence of P. Veyne's stimulating book,[195] the argument that the Roman *plebs* in the days of the Empire were offered food and pleasure in exchange for political passivity, was pretty common. After many years of ongoing corruption—the *plebs urbana*, once heavily involved in politics, gave up its strive for *libertas* and became politically indifferent. But this brings us back to Juvenal, who deplored the fact that the people who once used to bestow commands and consulships, eventually completely lost interest in politics and longed only for bread and circuses. And this is precisely what Ammiamus Marcellinus had to say some 250 years later: "As opposed to the *vetera plebs* of old days"—which was neither presumptuous nor regardless of old time freedom, for the *plebs* of his own days—the circus Maximus became "their temple, their

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Fragen der spätrömischen Kaiserzeit im Spiegel des Theodosianus (Berlin 1963); N. A. Maschkin, *Römische Geschichte* (Berlin 1953), esp. 525.

[194] F. de Martino, *Storia della costituzione romana* IV 1 (Napoli 1962), 311 ff. For important studies on the diversity of occupations of the urban *plebs* see *Plebs and Princeps,* 1 n. 1. Lately P. A. Brunt, "Free Labour and Public Works at Rome", in *JRS* 70 (1980), 81; and P. Garnsey (ed.), *Non-Slave Labour in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge 1980), esp. S. M. Treggiari. G. E. M. de Ste Croix never spoke of a *Lumpenproletariat* in his work (see *supra* n. 161), 179-204, nor did the late I. Hahn of Budapest, for whose work I have expressed my admiration in the French edition of my *Plebs and Princeps* (Paris 1984), 215. I myself have argued against the thesis of a *Lumpenproletariat* in the late Republic and early principate since 1958 (in *Latomus* 17, 501).

The most important evidence is collected in T. Frank, *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome* V (Baltimore 1940), 185 ff. esp. 234 ff., and a list of 167 urban *collegia* can be found in J.-P. Waltzing, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 166), IV 1-48. For the importance of the patronage see: G. Clemente, «Il patronato nei collegia dell'Impero Romano», in *SCO* 21 (1972), 191.

[195] P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque* (Paris 1976).

dwelling, their assembly and the height of all their hopes".[196] Some 150 years ago, Dureau de la Malle summed up the situation: "On jetait du pain au peuple, comme le gâteau dans la gueule de Cerbère, pour l'empêcher de mordre».[196a]

Paul Veyne—if I understand him properly—is not satisfied with these stereotypical answers. He rejects the term "dépolitisation" and by introducing the concept "évergétisme" he asserts that it is neither redistribution, nor ostentation nor even "dépolitisation". "Le pain et le cirque n'étaient pas donnés au peuple en vertu d'une éternelle nécessité d'équilibre du contrat social, mais en vertu d'un pacte historique, qui est propre à la société antique".[197] Veyne's vigorous insistence in clearly distinguishing the *proprium* of each phenomenon in antiquity, without allowing it to be blurred with modern concepts and prejudices, has made his readers reflect time and again about problems which might have appeared at first sight simple and obvious. This is the great merit of the book and the following should not detract anything from its stimulating values. In my book *Plebs and Princeps* I argued that in spite of the political weakness of the *plebs urbana* in the days of the Julio-Claudians, the urban masses were not an entirely negligible factor. For the emperors it was important that the common people be well disposed towards them and to this end they directed a considerable part of their propaganda.[198]

Paul Veyne thinks that the term "imperial propaganda" "n'est pas très heureux".[199] "Expression" would be,

[196] Amm. XXVIII 4, 29; cf. T. KLEBERG, *In den Wirtshäusern und Weinstuben des antiken Roms* (Berlin 1963).

[196a] A.J.C.A. DUREAU DE LA MALLE, *Economie politique des Romains* (Paris 1840), II 309.

[197] P. VEYNE, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 195), 94.

[198] *Plebs and Princeps*, 132.

[199] P. VEYNE, *op. cit.*, 661.

according to him, more appropriate, and he explains: "Il ne peut y avoir de propagande et de dictature que dans les sociétés à opinion publique... Quand Caligula ou Commode se font acclamer par la plèbe au cirque, au théâtre ou dans l'arène, ce n'est pas pour un but politique matériel, mais pour le seul plaisir de se faire acclamer et de régner absolument dans les cœurs". He also speaks of "le désir de régner aussi dans les consciences, et pas seulement d'être obéi". He rejects the term propaganda also because "une propagande met en condition une opinion pour lui faire faire ou accepter une entreprise politique: elle la mobilise pour l'arracher à l'apolitisme". And this was not the case in ancient Rome.

In a footnote he writes: "Yavetz estime que les empereurs cultivaient leur popularité auprès de la plèbe pour l'appui que celle-ci pouvait leur donner; les choses me semblent moins rationnelles".[200]

I admit right away that the relationship between *plebs* and *princeps* is not as rational as one might think. I was just unable to find an appropriate formulation for my hunch and have hinted at Tacitus' obscure *inanis favor* in order to adumbrate some sort of a sixth sense by which one leader was preferred to another.[201] I am aware that this is not the solution to this complicated problem, but am not convinced that Veyne's "pacte historique" will lead us any further. I could accept another of his subtle observations: "Le gouvernement n'accordait pas du cirque au peuple pour le dépolitiser; mais, à coup sûr, il l'aurait politisé contre lui s'il lui avait refusé le cirque".[202]

If this represents Veyne's basic view, I am in no disagreement with him and would like to make the following concluding remarks.

[200] *Ibid.*, 775 n. 386.

[201] *Plebs and Princeps*, 43 n. 9; Tac. *Hist.* II 30 and I 53.

[202] P. VEYNE, *op. cit.*, 94.

1) The relationship between *plebs* and *princeps* in the second half of the First Century A.D. cannot be properly evaluated unless the cumulative effect of the ruler cult on the *plebs urbana* is taken into account. The flow of the Orontes into the Tiber is more than a statistical problem. Price has recently shown that religious rituals in honour of the emperors in Asia Minor should not be artifically separated from the political system.[203] I have no doubt that a similar effort for the city of Rome would be just as rewarding, in spite of the scantiness of the sources, and may show that for the *plebs urbana*, the emperor was much more than just another political head of state.

2) I would also like to reserve my final judgement on the political indifference of the *plebs urbana*—until more attention is paid to the role of the *plebs* in the Second and Third Century A.D. The acquiescence of the *plebs urbana* during the reign of the five emperors, dealt with in this essay, did not become common feature until the days of the "Hungerrevolten" of the Fourth Century treated by Kohns. A superficial glance at the history of the Second and Third Centuries will show that Hadrian could not disregard the *plebs* after the execution of the consulars and Marcus Aurelius was in a similar position during the rebellion of Avidius Cassius. Between the Cleander affair in 186 and Gordian III in 238, the *plebs urbana* occasionally played an active role in politics, especially during the days of Pertinax and Didius Julianus. I have always been intimidated by the *SHA*. However, it appears that there will be no other choice but to plunge into those cold waters [204] in order to understand what revived the occasional outbursts of the *plebs*.

[203] S. R. F. PRICE, *Rituals and Power. The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984).

[204] I. HAHN, «Zur politischen Rolle der stadtrömischen Plebs unter dem Prinzipat», is a mere sketch. So is: W. SEYFARTH, «Von der Bedeutung der Plebs in der Spätantike», in *Die Rolle der Plebs im spätrömischen Reich* (Berlin 1969), 7 ff.

3) I know that public opinion in antiquity is something completely different from public opinion in a modern dictatorial state. I am also aware that there is no adequate Latin or Greek term for public opinion, but this does not mean that the ancients were unaware of the problem. I have tried elsewhere to explain the importance of *fama* and *existimatio* in political life—especially in the days of Julius Caesar [205]—let me therefore start with a quotation from a letter written by Tiberius:

> "Ceteris mortalibus in eo stare consilia, quid sibi conducere putent; principum diversam esse sortem, quibus praecipua rerum ad famam derigenda".[206]

I do not believe that the emperors exerted their *liberalitas* just because they wanted to conquer the hearts of their subjects, expecting nothing in return and contenting themselves with being loved.

It would be strange to assume that Publilius Syrus was the only one who knew that "only wicked or foolish people think that benefactions are granted for nothing" [207] and Seneca's maxim, that *beneficium* issues from the donor and returns to him [208] was kept secret from the Roman emperors. *Ideengeschichte* is indeed a tricky field as Namier has once reminded us, and one should beware of mistaking an idea that one encounters in the writings of an intellectual, for what actually happened in history. Without contradicting Veyne's "Donner est le geste royal par excellence",[209] is it too far fetched to assume that at least someone in the close entourage of the emperor knew what Fronto had

[205] *Julius Caesar and his public image,* Engl. Transl. (London/New York 1983).

[206] Tac. *Ann.* IV 40, 1.

[207] Publil. Syr. *Sent.* 80: *Beneficia donari aut mali aut stulti putant.*

[208] Sen. *Benef.* I 3, 4; cf. *Dial.* VII (*De vita beata*) 24, 2.

[209] P. Veyne, *op. cit.,* 228; cf. H. Kloft, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 76), 89-96, with Plut. *Praec. ger. reip.* 29 ff., 822 A ff.

known? Especially that the Roman people were held fast by two things above all, the corn dole and the shows, and that the *congiaria* were a weaker incentive than the shows, since the former conciliated the *plebs* simply and individually, whereas the latter kept the whole populace in good humour.[210]

The emperors knew what they were doing. They endeared themselves to the masses by various methods, because they understood that even the weak could cause trouble. They never intended to strengthen the political power of the *plebs urbana*,[211] and did not need the support of the masses in elections or legislation. They made tremendous efforts to keep them *in bonis artibus* in order to use them as a last resort against hostile senators and rebellious praetorians. This did not happen very often, but during the peaceful intervals the populace had to be kept in good humour, and it had to parade its admiration for the emperor—so that defiant senators might take heed. There was of course no conscious policy of "dépolitisation", but the best illustration of what actually happened is represented in the Pylades story: when reprimanded by Augustus for scandalous behaviour, he is supposed to have replied: "It is to your advantage, Caesar, that the people should devote their spare time to us".[212]

[210] Fronto *Princ.hist.* p. 210 Naber = II p. 216 Haines = p. 200 Van Den Hout: *Congiariis frumentariam modo plebem, singillatim placari ac nominatim, spectaculis universum «populum conciliari»*.

[211] Plut. *Praec. ger. reip.* 32, 824 C.

[212] Dio Cass. LIV 17, 5; Macr. *Sat.* II 7, 19.

DISCUSSION

M. Momigliano: I return to my elementary fact. The Roman State was still the Roman *respublica*: the Roman *respublica* was based on the voting power of the Roman people. When the voting power was curtailed rather than abolished, the Roman *populus* had to be kept alive somehow—as a sign of the existence of the Roman *respublica*. Perhaps the *plebs urbana* was the *Ersatz* for the *comitia*; but I wonder whether this sentence has a real meaning. In any case such a mass of people surrounding the imperial residence in Rome was more dangerous than the corresponding groups of Antioch or Alexandria. Finally a question: what was the importance of circus factions, if any in Rome, in the period you considered?

Mme Levick: I should like to reiterate what Professor Momigliano has said about the importance of the *comitia*. It may have been too important to be abolished altogether, however we interpret the *tabulae Hebana* and *Ilicitana*. When Caligula restored elections to the people he may have counting the people as a counterweight to the Senate with whom he had rather deal. The failure could have been due more to collusion between senatorial candidates for the consulship (cf. Tac. *Ann.* I 81 *ad finem*) than to indifference on the part of the people. The *comitia* seem to have survived little changed: *longum illud carmen* is what Pliny praises Trajan for enduring (note too that Flavius Sabinus' election in the eighties had been announced by a *praeco*), and even until Dio's time, as he mentions the lowering of the flag on the Janiculum. *Contiones*, as informal assemblies called by a magistrate, also continued—at the instance of emperors. This is speculative reconstruction. But the status of the *comitia* suffered a real practical blow at the beginning of Vespasian's reign, when he began counting his *dies imperii* for the day of his proclamation by the army in the East.

M. Timpe: In diesem Vortrag sind für mich klare Anschauungen und deutliche Konturen über einen Gegenstand entwickelt worden, der mir bisher nebulos und kaum erkennbar schien. Ihre Analyse bringt mich auf Fragen, die hier relevant sein könnten, wenn sich zu ihnen etwas sagen lassen sollte:

1) Wie ist das Verhältnis der *plebs urbana* zu den Prätorianern in flavischer und trajanischer Zeit, also nach der Zäsur von 69/70 zu beurteilen, über das ja in julisch-claudischer Zeit einiges zu sagen ist? Lässt die Schweigsamkeit der Quellen vielleicht auf eine Entpolitisierung dieses Verhältnisses schliessen?

2) Welche Bedeutung für die Beziehungen der Kaiser zur *plebs urbana* mag es haben, dass mit dem Zusammenschmelzen der alten Nobilitätsfamilien die grossen Klientelen verschwanden, von denen noch im frühen 1. Jhdt. die Rede ist (z.B. bei Piso: Tac. *Ann.* III 9)? Der Patronat der Kaiser über die *plebs* muss immer grösser und konkurrenzloser, aber auch immer weniger konkret geworden sein.

3) Ist es vielleicht von Belang, dass die Kaiser des 2. Jhdts., Trajan und Hadrian, soviel von Rom abwesend waren, auf Feldzügen oder Reisen? Es könnte sein, dass ihre Beziehung zur *plebs urbana* sich damit teils durch ihre Abwesenheit, teils weil sie im Heer und den Provinzen einen anderen Rückhalt hatten, verschob.

M. Raaflaub: Unter Ihren Erklärungsversuchen zur Friedfertigkeit oder Passivität der *plebs urbana* nach 69 überzeugt mich derjenige der regelmässigen Fürsorge der Kaiser für die Bedürfnisse des Volkes. Vespasian hatte zudem wie seinerzeit Augustus nach einem furchtbaren Bürgerkrieg Frieden geschaffen, und von Domitian ist ja bekannt, dass er sich intensiv um das Volk in Rom und Italien gekümmert hat. Von Ihren andern Punkten bin ich nicht so überzeugt. Wie stellen Sie sich vor, dass die Minderheit erfolgreicher Freigelassener die grosse Mehrheit ihrer 'Standesgenossen' zum Ruhigbleiben hätte überreden können, wenn diese nicht nur vage unzufrieden, sondern über konkrete Missstände tief empört gewesen wären? Und der Faktor der Furcht: Gewiss hatten die Soldaten 68/69 auch unter der römischen Bevölkerung gewütet, aber das war im Zusammenhang eines Bürgerkrieges. Demonstra-

tionen und Unruhen in Rom in Friedenszeiten waren etwas ganz anderes. Dieser Faktor hätte m.E. nur den von Ihnen postulierten Einfluss haben können, wenn Vespasian sich mehrmals der Prätorianer bedient hätte, um das Volk in die Schranken zu weisen. Davon aber wissen wir, wie Sie selbst sagen, nichts. Die Bedeutung dieses Faktors ist also nicht zu verifizieren; ich würde mich auf Fürsorge und Popularität des *princeps* beschränken.

M. Zehnacker: Votre exposé pose entre autres la question de savoir dans quelles conditions les empereurs étaient accessibles. Jusqu'à quel niveau social ou à quel degré de responsabilité collective (*vicomagistri*, dignitaires des *collegia*, p. ex.) pouvait-on espérer obtenir une *admissio* au palais? En dehors des *ludi*, l'empereur pouvait-il être approché durant ses déplacements, à Rome même ou ailleurs (p. ex. Néron, pendant ses tournées en Campanie ou en Grèce)? Sénèque raconte à Lucilius (*Epist.* 77, 18) un bref échange de propos entre Caligula et un vieux détenu, sur la *via Latina*; la cruauté des paroles de Caligula (*"Nunc enim" inquit "vivis?"*) a été colportée par le *rumor*. Le talent ou la bonne volonté des empereurs — affaire de goût personnel mais aussi de charisme — ont pu alimenter ainsi leur popularité ou leur discrédit auprès des humbles.

M. Eck: Die Bedeutung der Beziehungen zwischen *plebs* und *princeps* ersieht man an einigen Episoden in der Domitians *vita* bei Sueton. Angeblich soll Domitian seine Frau wiederaufgenommen haben, weil das Volk es so von ihm verlangte. Andererseits wird berichtet, Domitian habe einen Familienvater, der sich bei Spielen des Kaisers ironische Äusserungen erlaubt hatte, unmittelbar in der Arena den Hunden vorwerfen lassen. Offensichtlich aus solchem Verhalten heraus, ist dann zu erklären, dass das Volk bei seinem Tod sich *indifferenter* (Suet. *Dom.* 23, 1) verhält.

Mme Levick: Professor Yavetz has made a most important point in insisting on the store set by the *plebs* on *"quomodo dat"*. Would he think it legitimate to read (at least) two factors into this attitude?

a) Because in certain addresses, such as those of Ti. Gracchus, they had been treated with the respect that their constitutional position demanded, they came to see that respect as their due: *dignitas* operated even at the lowest level of society.

b) Courtesy in giving demonstrated regard and gave promise of future gifts, discourtesy did not; and the *plebs*, unlike the upper strata of society, which looked back to a golden past, had hope only in the future (hence their preoccupation with young and untried members of the imperial family).

M. Eck: Dass neben *contiones* die *comitia*, jedenfalls formal, in der 2. Hälfte des 1. Jhdts. weiter bestanden haben müssen, ergibt sich neben unserer Kenntnis der unter Nerva erlassenen *lex* vor allem aus den Hinweisen in den *Arvalakten* zum Jahre 69 (*CIL* VI 2051) *ob comitia consularia imp. Othonis, ob comitia trib. potestatis, ob comitia pontificatus*, was sich zum Jahre 81 für Domitian wiederholt (*CIL* VI 2060). Solche *comitia* setzen formal eine geordnete Volksversammlung voraus. Und muss man nicht auch Ähnliches aus der Erwährung von *iuniores* bzw. *seniores* noch bei der Tribusorganisation im 2. Jhdt. n.Chr. (*CIL* VI 10219; 1104; 199; 200) erschliessen? Natürlich sagt dies nichts über politische Wirksamkeit, aber doch vielleicht über die formale Fortdauer aus.

M. Giovannini: M. Momigliano a rappelé tout à l'heure que la plèbe urbaine représentait d'une certaine manière le *populus Romanus* tout entier, à une époque où celui-ci ne jouait plus aucun rôle politique. En fait, la *lex de imperio Vespasiani* montre que formellement les empereurs détenaient leurs pouvoirs en vertu d'une *lex* votée par les comices et que, par conséquent, le *populus Romanus* est resté juridiquement le souverain, le vrai maître de l'Empire. Sans doute ces comices n'étaient-ils plus qu'une fiction, comme l'étaient déjà au temps de Cicéron les comices curiates; mais il est certain que les empereurs ont délibérément maintenu cette fiction et que cela a joué un rôle dans leurs relations avec la plèbe de Rome.

M. Yavetz: I am grateful for the remarks, criticisms and questions. Allow me to say something on the major issue, which came up in the discussion, and refer especially to the remarks of Professor Momigliano and B. Levick:

In my paper I mentioned almost *en passant* that the adoption of Trajan was made public by the Emperor in the presence of the Senate and the people (Dio Cass. LXVIII 3, 3-4). May I quote the passage in full: "ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ τῆς τε βουλῆς καὶ τοῦ δήμου τῶν Ῥωμαίων καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ Μᾶρκον Οὐλπιον Νέρουαν Τραϊανὸν ποιοῦμαι". I have quoted the passage in full only to admit my ignorance. I do not know what Dio (or his *epitomator*) meant to say when he used the term δῆμος in this context. Nor do I know what Plutarch meant, when he wrote that Icelus informed Galba that the praetorians, the Senate and the people had proclaimed him emperor (Plut. *Galba* 7, 2). Do we have to believe *tum primum e campo comitia ad patres translata sunt* (Tac. *Ann.* I 15), and that Caligula's attempt to revive the *comitia* failed? (Dio Cass. LIX 9, 6: τὰς ἀρχαιρεσίας τῷ τε δήμῳ καὶ τῷ πλήθει ἀπέδωκε).

The basic question remains: What were *comitia* from the days of Vespasian to Trajan? The plain fact that the term is occasionally mentioned, does still not tell us how *comitia* were convened and who participated in them. It is of course possible that the conservative Romans never abolished the *comitia*, just as they never abolished the *lex curiata de imperio*. But does this mean that the *comitia* were more than their ritual or does it mean that the Emperor regarded the *comitia* as a political power which had to be taken into account in his deliberations? Not knowing the answer to this question I have left it out completely in the second and third chapters of this essay. I believe that 'people' in the days of the Flavians was nothing more than a *contio*. But I cannot provide good evidence for my view. It has always been my feeling that neither Emperor nor Senators were inclined to grant more political power to the *comitia* and that the following passage from Plut. *Praec. ger. reip.* 32, 824 C, represents the view of the ruling classes: "Of liberty the common people have as much as our rulers grant them, and perhaps more would not be better for them." For a different approach see P.A. Brunt, "Lex de imperio Vespasiani", in *JRS* 67 (1977), 95-116.