



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Plebeians campaign at Sacred Mount for economic and political rights, Ancient Rome, 494 BCE

*Time period notes: 495 to 494 BCE (exact dates not known, but the campaign probably lasted about one year)*

(495 BCE)

Before A.D.

to: (494 BCE)

Before A.D.

**Country:** Italy

**Location City/State/Province:** Rome

**Location Description:** The Sacred Mount

**Goals:**

Political representation and protection of the plebeians from debt and servitude

### Methods

#### Methods in 1st segment:

- 030. Rude gestures
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

#### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 030. Rude gestures
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

#### Methods in 3rd segment:

#### Methods in 4th segment:

- 121. Refusal of public support
- 135. Popular nonobedience
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

#### Methods in 5th segment:

- 121. Refusal of public support
- 135. Popular nonobedience

### **Methods in 6th segment:**

- 070. Protest emigration (hijrat)
- 119. Economic shutdown
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 135. Popular nonobedience

## **Classifications**

### **Classification:**

Change

### **Cluster:**

Democracy

Human Rights

### **Group characterization:**

- Plebeians (the common people) in Ancient Rome

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

### **Leaders:**

Not Known

### **Partners:**

Not Known

### **External allies:**

Not Known

### **Involvement of social elites:**

Not Known

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

### **Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Plebeians

### **Groups in 2nd Segment:**

### **Groups in 3rd Segment:**

### **Groups in 4th Segment:**

### **Groups in 5th Segment:**

### **Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *About 2 months*

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

**Opponents:**

The Senate, Consuls, and Patrician ruling class

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not Known

**Campaigner violence:**

Some plebeians used violence against creditors

**Repressive Violence:**

Not Known

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

The plebeians won political representation and protection from debt, servitude, and the total political power of the Patrician class when they won the right to elect Tribunes.

The campaign grew to encompass almost the entire plebeian class, a huge majority of the Roman population

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The plebeians made up the majority of the citizen population of Ancient Rome and occupied the economic range anywhere below the ruling Patrician class and above the slave class. A Senate made up of 100 men from traditional patrician families and 200 conscripti, selected from other wealthy families, ruled the Roman Republic, which began in 509 BCE. The Senate elected two Consuls with executive authority to oversee the city's day-to-day governance for a one-year period.

Military conscription was required of all male plebeians and the only time they were given the chance to vote on political issues was as part of a military regiment. In 495 BCE, plebeians were also forced to pay war taxes and harbor dues. This, in addition to the inability to care for farms and shops during military service, forced many plebeians into poverty and insurmountable debt.

In court cases against such debtors, Appius Claudius, one of the Consuls for the 495 BCE term, would arbitrate severe sentences, forcing debtors into servitude to their creditors. The second Consul, Servilius, had promised the people that no Roman citizen could be placed in servitude that would prevent military service. When groups of plebeians approached Servilius to take a stronger stand, however, he would not go against the wishes of the Patrician Senate and Consul Claudius. Plebeians could not receive the desired protection from their government.

After discovering Servilius' unwillingness to protect the plebeians from debt and slavery, plebeians took matters into their own hands. When debtors were brought to court, large groups of plebeians would rush to the courthouse and yell and make large amounts of noise so that they drowned out the Consul as he announced the sentence. Afterwards nobody would obey the sentencing so that the debtor would go free. During that time there were also acts of violence against creditors going on at the time.

When new Consuls were elected in March 494 BCE, they were unable to control the population. The Senate appointed a Dictator to enforce order. After a short war with a neighboring tribe, the Dictator stepped down because he was unable find a moderate way to deal with the struggle between the plebeians and Patricians.

The plebeians began to disobey the rules and orders of the Senate and new Consuls. The plebeians, who powered most of

Rome's economy, shut down shops, farms, and centers of production and left the city. While economic activity was essentially halted in the city, the plebeians set up camp on the Sacred Mount, 3 miles outside of Rome.

The Patricians were unable to do anything in the city without a working class of people besides the slaves, gave in to the plebeians' demands after several days. The Senate set up the political position of Tribune. Plebeians would elect two tribunes to oversee the political desires of the plebeian population. Tribunes had the ability to veto Consular decisions within the city and acted as a safeguard to unbridled Patrician political power. The position was only open to plebeians. Originally the soldiers in military regiments elected the Tribunes, but after twenty years all male plebeians were able to vote for Tribunes.

The plebeians finally had a formal outlet for political expression, and a powerful one at that, because the Tribunes could overrule the Consuls. The tactic used at the Sacred Mount was referred to as secession; it was used again by the plebeians in 449 BCE to bring about the publishing of written laws, known as the Twelve Tables.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

Second Secession in 449 BCE (2)

### Sources:

Cowell, F.R. *The Revolutions of Ancient Rome*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1962. pp. 21-29, 38-43.

Gene Sharp. *Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973.

### Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Max Rennebohm 12/12/2009

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