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Mark Antony's Political Maneuvers in July 44 BC

This paper argues that we should discard the prevailing notion that Mark Antony made friendly overtures to the "Liberators" late in July 44 BC (Drumann-Groebe I2 430-1; Syme, *Roman Revolution* 117-8; Pelling, *Plutarch, Antony* 158). Supposedly Antony did so to counter the surge in Octavian's popularity that resulted from his holding the *ludi Victoriae Caesaris* (20-30 July), during which the *sidus Iulium* appeared and encouraged the recognition of Caesar as Divus Iulius. The only evidence, however, that Antony may have drawn momentarily closer to the Senate late in July is furnished by (1) a cryptic allusion in Cicero (*Phil.* 1.8) to a speech of Antony's (*contio*) which came into Cicero's hands on 7 August and caused him to think of returning to the political arena in Rome, and (2) the assertion in Plutarch (*Cic.* 43.4) that Antony briefly underwent a remarkable change and conducted all affairs to please the Senate. Yet Plutarch clearly cannot serve as independent testimony because his statement simply embroideries on Cicero (so Moles p. 193), and it is the contention of this paper that Cicero deliberately misrepresents the import of Antony's speech. The issue of whether Antony held out an olive branch to Brutus and Cassius is not a trivial one because, if it can be shown that Antony toyed with abandoning his anti-senatorial policy, this would be a truly significant shift in his politics. In the view of this paper, such a shift never occurred.

If we set *Phil.* 1.8 against *Att.* 16.7.1 (of 17 Aug.), which gives nearly an identical account of how townsmen from Rhegium briefed Cicero on news from Rome after he had been cut off from reports from the capital since 17 July when he sailed from Pompeii, we find that significantly Antony's *contio* is not mentioned at all. Furthermore, since it can be shown that Cicero's informants from Rhegium must have left Rome closer to the middle than the end of July (Ramsey-Licht, *Comet of 44 BC*, p. 114 n.60), we must discard the prevailing theory that Antony's speech was somehow intended to counter the surge in Octavian's popularity resulting from the games and comet. The speech would have been big news, meriting a discussion in the letter to Atticus, if it had truly signaled a volte-face by Antony and an attempt to draw closer to the anti-Caesarian faction in the Senate. Cicero's silence in the letter and treatment of the speech only in the *First Philippic* suggests, on the contrary, that the speech fell far short of offering an olive branch to the Liberators. We need only assume that in his speech Antony may have attacked the recent demagoguery of Octavian and/or perhaps mentioned his intention to raise the issue of assigning provinces to Brutus and Cassius at the meeting of the Senate called for 1 Aug.—content that Cicero could misleadingly characterize as causing him to believe that Antony was changing political course.