

THE REPUBLIC IN CRISIS

By the 3rd century BC, the plebeians were playing a much bigger part in the government of Rome. Some patrician senators began to feel threatened, and tensions grew between the people and the patricians. From the 2nd century BC, one crisis followed another, plunging the Republic into a period of turmoil and bloodshed.

Great Roman generals were given a parade - or triumph - to celebrate their victories. This scene shows a typical triumph.

LAND MATTERS

As Rome began building up an empire, men had to spend long periods of time overseas fighting in the army, and they weren't able to farm their land. The farms fell into disrepair, and many of them were bought up by rich landowners, who used slaves to do all the work.

Without land or jobs, lots of country people drifted into Rome, where they remained out of work and desperately poor. Since only landowners were allowed to fight in the army, there was soon a shortage of soldiers too.

Soldiers wearing laurel wreaths shouted, "Io triumphe!" (behold the triumph).

In 133BC, a tribune named Tiberius Gracchus suggested that any land that had been illegally seized by the rich should be given to poor city dwellers. But many senators were violently opposed to this, because a lot of the land belonged to them. Riots broke out, and Tiberius was clubbed to death. In 123BC, Tiberius's brother Gaius was elected tribune. He also planned to help the poor, but - like his brother - he was murdered.

A slave held a laurel wreath over the general's head. It was his job to repeat in the general's ear, "Remember, you are just a man."

The general rode in a golden chariot. His face was painted red and he carried an olive branch.

