***The Anatomy of Revolution***

**by**

**Crane Brinton**

Crane Brinton wrote *Anatomy of a Revolution* in 1938; it was reprinted in 1956 and added to in 1964. He put forth a model of revolution that he applied to the English Revolution of the 1640s, the American, French and Russian revolutions.  His idea of revolution was an overthrow of power, which led to extremists coming to power, then a subsiding into a more moderate time. He likened it to a fever that rises due to complaints among a people. Symptomatic of that fever is the breakdown of the body of power. The fever rages; then it is made clear that the people cannot tolerate the fever, and this rage is replaced with an improved body of power along with a new dictator who takes on many of the characteristics of the original regime. Brinton’s idea of a revolution is in fact a very specific schedule of events that are supposed to take place. It shows the change, the fever, and the resolution of revolution.

Brinton notes how the revolutions followed a life-cycle from the Old Order to a moderate regime to a radical regime, to Thermidorian reaction.  (The name *Thermidorian* refers to 9 Thermidor Year II (27 July 1794), the date according to the French Revolutionary Calendar when Robespierre and other radical revolutionaries came under concerted attack in the National Convention.)

Brinton posited that there were four common stages to all revolutions:

I. Stage One: Preliminary Stage Symptoms – The “*Ancien Regime”*or Old Order

·         Gap between what perceive they should have in a period of generally rising standards of living and what people really have

·         It is the government that is economically weak, not necessarily the country itself which is often experiencing more productive economic growth; employer class has grievances against government

·         Class Antagonism – there is a conflict between the old regime and new forces

·         People from all social classes are discontented, feeling restricted by society, religion, the economy, and/or the government

·         People are beginning to think of themselves as belonging to a social class and there is a growing bitterness between social classes; the ruling class is divided and inept

·         Intellectuals are alienated from the Old Regime – reformers speak out against the government and look to a revolutionary ideal world

·         Politically weak – the government is ineffective and cannot enforce policy; inept ruler; can’t respond to needs of society

·         The upper class is divided and inept -some members of governing class join with opposition groups

·         The government cannot organize its finances correctly and is either going bankrupt or trying to tax heavily and unjustly in the face of resistance

·         Government is unable to get enough support from any group to save itself

·         First concrete actions are taken against the unpopular regime and leads to dramatic opposition between old and new with new winning a striking victory

·         The revolution is led by small, active, able body using the majority which feels grievances, but there is no real centralized planning

·         The government ultimately is led to use force to prevent revolution, but always employs it on the principle of “too little, too late.

·         Common soldiers sides with civilians, not ruler

·         First stage of revolution ends in joyous honeymoon phase

II. Stage Two: First Stage Symptoms - Moderate Regime

·         Financial breakdown

·         Symbolic actions/Dramatic events – rallying point against the old regime; government protests increase

·         Role of force – the government cannot repress the rebellion

·         Dual Sovereignty – there is a better organized and obeyed government

·         Moderates Attain Power – e.g., make a new constitution; fight a war

·         Once in power, moderates are much more divided than when they were in opposition

·         Moderates and more radical revolutionaries begin to clash; for a period there is a system of dual sovereignty with each group holding power

·         Power moves from Right > Center > Left with government becoming more concentrated as power moves to the Left

·         The government formed by the moderates come to share the unpopularity of the old regime because it refused to reject all the old ways

·         Moderates grant their enemies freedoms of speech, press, and assembly and the radicals take advantage of this to take control of the revolutionary government.

·         The moderates are opposed both by the right and left; they are fighting in a war which they botch.  The pressures of war, especially a losing war, destroy the moderates.

III. Stage Three – Crisis Stage Symptoms – the Radical Regime

·          Extremists have control over revolutionary organizations that they can turn against the government; oust any of their opponents

·         Radicals Take Control (*coup d’etat*) – small number of devoted, disciplined radicals govern

·         They’re able to win because they are well-organized, disciplined, principled, and fanatical, with almost a religious sense of vocation; they have high ideals and contempt for inhibitions and principles which most people have

·         War (civil and foreign)

·         Once in power work to quash all groups even those to the left of the winning group

·         Centralization of Power in a Revolutionary Council Dominated by a Strong Man

·         Once in power, the radicals have no qualms about the ruthless use of force; often face some sort of civil war that they must quell

·         They establish a dictatorship and the life of the average citizen is changed

·         Terror and Virtue – forced conformity or punishment; gospel of revolution; There is a passion for renaming things to match the new revolutionary spirit; quasi-religious faith aggravates emotions to a fever pitch

·         Rulers are ascetic and idealistic and attempt to erase vices, demanding perfection to create a new society.

·         Conditions are aggravated by economic crises as well as long-held prejudices and class antagonisms; government is actually quite inefficient

IV. Stage Four – Recovery Stage Symptoms – Thermidorian Reaction

·         Slow, uneven return to quieter times – first convalescence from the fever of revolution

·         Radicals are repressed; moderates gain amnesty

·         Life begins to return towards normal

·         A strong man emerges and assumes great power

·         The new dictator will ultimately bring back a revised version of the old regime, maybe even restoring of its personnel and leaders

·         Radicals and radicalism are denounced and become scapegoats for the difficulties of the new government

·         The new regime continues to spread its power through aggressive, imperialistic nationalism

·         Power now moves Left > Right with repression of former revolutionaries

·         People react against austerity from Stage Three and search for pleasure