THE ANATOMY OF A REVOLUTION

Crane Brinton wrote Anatomy of a Revolution in 1938; it was reprinted in 1956 and added to in 1964. His idea of revolution was an overthrow of power which led to extremist coming to power, then a subsiding into a more moderate time. He likens 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 and a happier people. 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. This model and definition says two things: that revolution is a process, and that not much essentially alters from pre-ú post-revolution. His theory, however, was based on revolutions prior to 1945. Also Brinton was very specific in his approach to defining a revolution and how it functions.

The Anatomy of Revolution outlines the “uniformities” of four major political revolutions: the English Revolution of the 1640s, the American the French, and 1917 Russian 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.)

Phase One: Preliminary Stage Symptoms (The Old Order)
1. Economically weak - the government has deficits and must tax
2. Politically weak - the government is ineffective and cannot enforce policy; inept ruler
3. Intellectuals desert - reformers speak out against the government
4. Class Antagonism - there is a conflict between the old regime and new forces

Phase Two: First Stage Symptoms (Moderate Regime)
1. Financial breakdown
2. Symbolic actions/Dramatic events - rallying point against the old regime; government protests increase
3. Role of force - the government cannot repress the rebellion
4. Dual Sovereignty - there is a better organized and obeyed government
5. Moderates Attain Power - e.g., make a new constitution; fight a war

Phase Three: Crisis Stage Symptoms (Radical Regime)
1. Radicals Take Control (coup d’etat) - small number of devoted, disciplined radicals govern
2. War (civil and foreign)
3. Centralization of Power in a Revolutionary Council Dominated by a Strong Man
4. Terror and Virtue - forced conformity or punishment; gospel of revolution

Phase Four: Recovery Stage Symptoms (Thermidorian Reaction)
1. Slow, Uneven Return to Quieter Times - first convalescence from the fever of revolution
2. Rule by a Tyrant
3. Radicals Repressed; moderates gain amnesty
4. Aggressive Nationalism