

A PATTERN FOR REVOLUTION

It should be acknowledged at the outset that this chapter rests heavily upon a book by Crane Brinton entitled *The Anatomy of Revolution*. In this book Brinton explores the phenomenon of revolution with an eye toward similarities and attempts to show that there is a certain pattern common to political revolutions. This pattern can be compared to a "fever chart" on which *symptoms*, *crisis*, and *convalescence* are identified as the three periods through which a revolution normally passes. Brinton draws upon the French, Russian, English, and American experiences to present his comparisons and contrasts.

Symptoms

After evaluating the four revolutions, Brinton concludes that there were certain preliminary signs or symptoms which sounded the alarm of an approaching revolution. One of these symptoms was a loudly expressed discontent on the part of the middle class. Their concern was usually centered upon an economic grievance, even though they were far from being in a state of distress. Members of the middle class, merchants, manufacturers, and professional men such as doctors and lawyers were in reality, financially successful. Their discontent, as described by Brinton, was merely annoyance with certain restraints placed upon their business activities.

By using propaganda, pressure-group action, public meetings, and a few well-timed and dramatic riots to express their dissatisfaction, the merchants and manufacturers caused the restraints to appear unjust toward *everyone* in the society, not just themselves. Brinton concludes that the revolutions were not born of societies in economic depression. On the contrary, they took place in societies which were economically progressive and within which the middle class was only protesting against certain limitations placed upon their business opportunities.

Brinton also observes that in the prerevolutionary decades of the four societies the central governments began to grow very inefficient. He concludes that this circumstance must also be recognized as one of the common symptoms of revolution. A comparative study of the leadership ability of such monarchs as Charles I, George III, Louis XVI, and Nicholas II reveals that their governments became burdened with uncommonly weak rulers. An increasing number of complications, such as involvement in full-scale war or revenue extraction from its subjects, severely strained the governmental machinery, revealing its inadequacy and finally grinding it to a halt.

Brinton notes further that the four governments faced a chronic shortage of money, an additional symptom of approaching revolutions. He points out that in all four societies it was the *government* that was in financial difficulty, not the societies themselves. Brinton suggests that a government near bankruptcy in a prosperous society must have been inefficient. It is indeed an irony that these governments,

facing the expenses of modern administration, determined and collected their income through old-fashioned methods.

Brinton further observes that certain classes of people in the four societies cultivate feelings of dislike for other classes; there was, in other words, class conflict. The closer the classes were to each other on the social scale, the sharper their conflict appeared. Serfs and slaves rarely strike at the aristocracy. The masses of poor dream of *joining* the aristocracy rather than *dislodging* it. The class immediately below the aristocracy usually plants the seeds of a "class struggle." The ruling class begins to lose confidence in itself, and some of its members are actually converted to the belief that their privileges are harmful to society. It is then, suggests Brinton, that some of the "upperdogs" begin to join the "Underdogs," and the authority of the ruling class starts to crumble.

Brinton decided that the most reliable of all symptoms in the prerevolutionary decades is the desertion of the intellectuals. This group consists of authors, artists, musicians, professors, and ministers - all of who publicly express their disenchantment with things as they are. Ideas are always part of the prerevolutionary situation, and the responsibility of expressing them falls to the intellectuals. Without intellectual discontent, suggests Brinton, there would be no revolution.

All of the symptoms identified by Brinton - discontent of the middle class, inefficient government, chronic money shortages, bitter class conflict, and a desertion of the intellectuals - can be found in most normal and healthy societies as well as in those moving toward revolution. The difference is that these symptoms in a prerevolutionary society exist in great excess.

The Rising Fever

The rising fever and the period of crisis, as described by Brinton, contain four distinct phases which usually occur in the same sequential order; (1) a complete breakdown of governmental control, (2) control by the moderates, (3) control by the extremists, and (4) the reign of terror. The first two phrases constitute the stage of the rising fever. Brinton suggests that the transition from minor agitations to major actions is rarely sudden. Instead, the revolution incubates a long while, and each step is spontaneous.

Years just preceding the actual outbreak of revolution witness a crescendo of protests against the government. These protest ultimately reach a breaking point with some highly dramatic test of force such as the battle of Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts, the storming of the Bastille in Paris, or the Petrograd riots in Russia. Out of such an act, the revolutionary spirit is crystallized. At this point in the revolution, the breakdown of governmental control is nearly complete, and Brinton suggests that the reason for the breakdown stems from the government's growing financial weakness.

Brinton concludes that there is a tendency in revolutions for power to move from right to center to left - or from conservatives to moderates to radicals. The second phase of the rising fever finds the moderates taking control of the governmental machinery and attempting to supply short-term solutions to many of the problems. Faced with the difficult tasks of reforming existing institutions, drafting a new constitution, and fighting an armed enemy, the moderates prove to be a very weak group and usually lose their control within a relatively short span of time. Moderate control is clearly exhibited in the Kerensky government in Russia in 1917, and also in France beginning with the October days of 1789. But the American experience does not easily lend itself to this pattern, a fact which Brinton admits in several instances. It has been suggested, however, that the moderates took control in the American Revolution at the First Continental Congress. Brinton holds that the American Revolution stopped short of the succeeding stages and the moderates were never ousted from power.

Crisis

Revolution reaches its crisis on the "fever chart" as it moves into the third phase, which Brinton identifies as the control of the extremists. This phase occurs when a forceful minority with unscrupulous means overthrows the moderates. These extremists are few in number, well disciplined, fanatically devoted to their cause, and against all forms of vice in their newly created republic of virtue. The extremists gained control in Russia with the collapse of the Kerensky government in 1917, in France with the arrest of the Girondists in 1793, and in England through the combination of the Battle of Preston Pans and Pride's Purge in the House of Commons in 1648. Again, the American Revolution does not clearly follow the pattern.

Brinton detects in all of the revolutions, during both moderate and extremist control, the common characteristics of a dual government - each attempting to lead the people. In the case of the English Revolution, it was Charles I competing against the Long Parliament. During the American Revolution, the town meetings and the royal government were opposing each other. The moderates and Jacobins challenged each other in the French Revolution, and Kerensky struggled against the Bolsheviks to see who would lead the citizens of Russia.

The period of crisis is intensified when the revolution reaches the fourth phase, the reign of terror. Sheer momentum carries the revolution to this point. This phase is characterized by an inexperienced government which runs into trouble and usually resorts to violence as a method of solving its problems. Purges become commonplace. In addition, the government normally becomes involved in a civil or foreign war. Because of the drop in agricultural production and a hesitation on the part of businessmen to make capital investments, the country also experiences a sharp economic crisis. Severe internal class struggles are still another characteristic of the reign of terror. Brinton believes that by the time of the terror the different antagonistic groups within the society have polarized into the revolutionists in power and the somewhat mixed bloc of their enemies. These internal struggles are reflected

in the Puritan-Cavalier contest, the Whig-Tory struggle, the Jacobin-aristocrat opposition, and finally the Bolshevik-Whites and Kadets conflict. The reign of terror is normally the shortest phase of all.

The Revolutionists

What kind of people become revolutionists? Pursuing the analogy of a "fever chart," Brinton characterizes them as "carriers" of the fever.

Many people have a tendency to "type" certain kinds of individuals. For instance, movie stars are considered attractive, glamorous, and wealthy; college professors are frequently described as pipe smokers, absent-minded, and impractical. Because of the unpleasant overtones carried by the term, Americans often "type" a revolutionist as a failure in life who has become a wild-eyed, unshaven, loud-mouthed bomb thrower. To classify revolutionists objectively is extremely difficult, but Briton concludes that the commonly held view of a revolutionary "type" is definitely not confirmed.

The ordinary revolutionist is obscure and nameless. But through a detailed study of the membership in the Jacobin Clubs of the French Revolution, Brinton determined that the rank-and-rifle revolutionists, at most times, numbered approximately sixty percent middle class, thirty percent working class, and ten percent peasants. Obviously, revolutionists do not represent the dregs of society. The mob, the rabble, and the riffraff are recruited for street fighting, but they do not run the revolution - not even a so-called "proletarian revolution."

A glance at a random list of revolutionary leaders from the four episodes reveals a cross-section of society which cannot be neatly cataloged into any one social or economic group.

English:

Cromwell	Country gentleman
Hampden	Country gentleman
Lilburne	Gentry
Ludlow	Graduate of Trinity College
Milton	Professional author
Pym	Country gentleman
Rogers	Clergyman
Sexby	Military career
Winstanley	Gentry

American:

J. Adams	Lawyer
S. Adams	Merchant
Dickinson	Lawyer, farmer
Hancock	Merchant
Henry	Lawyer
Jefferson	Lawyer, planter

Otis	Lawyer
Paine	Publicist
Revere	Silversmith
Washington	Planter
Warren	Physician

French:

Bailly	Astronomer
Brissot	Publicist
Camus	Lawyer
Condoreet	Marquis, philosopher
Danton	Barrister
Desmoulins	Journalist
Fouche	Physics professor
Lafayette	Nobleman, military officer
Lavoisier	Chemist
Marat	Journalist
MMirabeau	Nobleman
Monge	Mathematician
Robespierre	Lawyer

Russian:

Dzerzhinsky	Polish nobleman
Guchkov	Merchant
Kalinin	Peasant
Kerensky	Lawyer
Lenin	Lawyer
Pokrovsky	Historian
Miliukov	Historian
Stalin	Student, priesthood
Sverdlov	Chemist
Tereschenko	Sugar millionaire
Trotsky	Intellectual

Most of the revolutionary leaders fall between the ages of thirty-five and forty years and possess a fair amount of wealth. A further study of the characteristics of the revolutionists reveals that almost without exception they are self-centered. Revolutionists are habitually jealous of each other and always try for center stage. They are reckless performers who always play for the galleries. These criteria, however, should not be considered a stereotype. Eric Hoffer, in his book *The True Believer*, concludes that revolutions are prepared by "men of words," that revolutions are brought to fulfillment by "fanatics," and that revolutions are tamed and reduced by "practical men of action." This conclusion implies that there are three distinct kinds of revolutionists. However, Brinton believes that distinguishing the moderates

from the extremists helps very little in trying to discover the kinds of men who become revolutionists.

The following revolutionary catechism evolved from the decades just prior to the revolution in Russia. It was designed by a professional revolutionary named Nechayev, and has provided substantial guidance to modern revolutionists around the world. Any student who wishes to understand the meaning of revolution in the twentieth century cannot ignore this important document. It stands as an unparalleled example of fanaticism.

THE REVOLUTIONARY CATECHISM

A. The Duties of the Revolutionary toward Himself

1. The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no business affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property and no name. Everything in him is wholly absorbed in the single thought . . . for revolution.
2. The revolutionary knows . . . he has broken all the bonds that tie him to the social order and the civilized world.
3. The revolutionary despises all doctrines . . . He knows only one science: the science of destruction . . . all day and all night he studies the vital science of human beings . . . The object is . . . the surest and quickest way of destroying the whole filthy order.
4. The revolutionary despises public opinion.
5. The revolutionary is . . . merciless toward . . . the educated classes. Between him and them there exists a relentless war to the death.
6. All the gentle sentiments of kinship, love, friendship, gratitude and even honor must be suppressed in him and give place to the cold passion for revolution.

B. The Relations of the Revolutionary toward his Comrades

1. The revolutionary can have no friendship . . .
2. . . . The revolutionary must rely solely upon himself. In carrying out acts of destruction each one should act alone.
3. Always be ready to sacrifice a co-worker for the cause of the revolution.

C. The Relations of the Revolutionary toward Society

1. He should not hesitate to destroy any position, any place or any man in this world. He must hate everyone and everything in it . . . All the worse for him he has any feelings for parents or friends . . . he is no longer a revolutionary if he is swayed by them.

2. He must live within society while pretending to be completely different from what he really is, for he must penetrate everywhere, into high classes, middle classes, the literature, the military, the government and even the churches.

3. The social order must be split into categories. The first category are those who must be put to death without delay . . . violent and sudden death will produce panic in the government, depriving it of its will to action by removing the clearest supporters . . .

4. The third category consists of many brutes in high position distinguished neither by cleverness nor energy . . . they must be exploited in every possible way; they must be implicated in our affairs, their dirty secrets must be found out, and they must be transformed into slaves . . . their influence, connections and wealth will provide an inexhaustible treasure . . .

D. The Attitude of the Revolutionist toward the People

1. He must increase and intensify the evils and miseries of the people until their patience is exhausted and they are driven to a general uprising.

2. The only form of revolution beneficial to the people is one which destroys the entire state to the roots.

3. Our task is terrible, total, universal and merciless destruction.

Convalescence

After the energy of the period of crisis has exhausted itself, the revolution enters a period of recovery. Brinton offers the conclusion that the phenomena of reaction and restoration are inevitably a part of the process of revolution. Revolution has a tendency to weaken the law, customs, and habits which ordinarily bind a society together. One of the striking characteristics of the period of convalescence is the establishment of a strong-man rule. It requires a dominant personality and perhaps even the use of force to reunite the society and restore law and order. To accomplish this task the English called upon Oliver Cromwell, the Americans on George Washington, the French on Napoleon Bonaparte, and the Russians on Joseph Stalin.

The most violent leaders of the reign of terror are quickly eliminated by exile or by death and become the scapegoats for those in power. The pressures are then relaxed and amnesty is gradually granted to some of the former moderates and even to some of the conservatives. For instance, in the English and French revolutions, the Stuarts and Bourbons were actually restored to power. Economic suffering among the citizens is usually worse during convalescence than during the last years of the old regime or even during the reign of terror. In dress, in amusements, and in daily living the citizens completely abandon the "republic of virtue" established by the extremists. Ironically, another of the characteristics of convalescence is the establishment of a formal, organized religion.

Brinton suggests that the period of convalescence began in France with the execution of Robespierre in 1794. Convalescence is commonly referred to as the "Thermidorian period" because Robespierre was executed during the month of Thermidor on the new French calendar, originally the month of July. In England, Thermidor may have started with the dissolution of the Rump Parliament in 1653; in the case of the Russian Revolution it has been suggested that the formation of the new economic policy in 1921 provides a logical beginning. Even in the United States, which Brinton believes did not undergo the same sort of crisis as the other countries and did not have a real reign of terror, the decade of the 1780's exhibits in incomplete form some of the marks of the Thermidor period.

The obvious question to raise at this point is, "Does the patient emerge from the fever stronger or weaker?" In the end it appears that the revolution fades out and in a sense comes full circle. Perhaps the definition of "revolution" by the astronomer and the mechanic as one complete cycle is not far from the mark.

What difference has the revolution made in the society as a whole? Some people have been killed; the worst of the old system is ended; there is a shift in the power and property structure of the society; some new ideas emerge, come into focus, and become operative. But actually life goes on very much the same and the ruling class begins justifying the status quo all over again. Many times revolution is simply a mechanical change rather than a chemical one, which may mean that there wasn't any revolution after all. This thought becomes all the more provoking when one notes that revolutions usually occur where the greatest amount of freedom already exists.

Brinton did not try to produce an absolute pattern to explain all revolutions. He is first to admit that there are as many differences as there are similarities in the four revolutions he examined. His work, however, cannot be ignored. He has contributed one of the finest and most provocative studies available on the phenomenon of revolution, and it is nearly impossible to do justice to the study of any western revolution without consulting the work of Crane Brinton.