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# 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- to 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