

Comparative Political Process
Topic : First Generation of Theories of
Revolution
PSC-C201

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In order to understand theories of revolutions, one has to study four distinct phases, or "generations, namely;

- ✓ **First Generation** of Theories of Revolution (1920s and 1930s) (Crane Brinton, Lyford P. Edwards, George Sawyer Pettee)
- ✓ **Second Generation** of Theories of Revolution (1950s and 1970s) (James C. Davies, Ted Robert Gurr)
- ✓ **Third Generation** of Theories of Revolution (1970s and 1980s) (Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, Barrington Moore Jr.)
- ✓ **Fourth Generation** of Theories of Revolution (1990s-onwards) (Jack Goldstone)

- ✓ The **First generation** from the 1920s and 1930s may be termed the “Natural History of Revolutions” School.
- ✓ This school led by comparative historians like Crane Brinton, Lyford P. Edwards and George Sawyer Pettee.
- ✓ Their works largely based on description of the major revolutions, particularly the French revolutions of 1789.
- ✓ Crane Brinton was prominent theorist among them.

Crane Brinton



Crane Brinton's Stages of Revolution

- ✓ A number of people have analyzed revolution in detail.
- ✓ One of the best known works is '**The Anatomy of Revolution**', by Crane Brinton, which first appeared in 1938.
- ✓ Crane Brinton was an American historian of France.
- ✓ In his book, '**The Anatomy of Revolution**', Brinton compared revolution to a fever.
- ✓ In this respect, a revolution is not a positive phenomena, it is something to be avoided and cured, when and if, it occurs.

- ✓ This is due to the fact that "*nobody wants to have a fever*" (Brinton, 18)
- ✓ However, fever, and Revolution, "*in itself is a good thing....for the organism that survives it. ...The revolution destroys wicked people and harmful and useless institutions*" (18)
- ✓ Crane Brinton analyzed four revolutions, namely, Glorious Revolution (1688), the American Revolution (1776) the French Revolution (1789), and Russian Revolution (1917).
- ✓ And, he found that all revolutions had four common stages. These stages are as follows;

Phase One-Preliminary Stage (The Old Regime)

- ✓ In the first stage, where symptoms are shown before the outbreak.
- ✓ Some things that can happen in this stage are:
 - ✓ economic crisis,
 - ✓ sense of government injustice
 - ✓ weak rulers and half-hearted “reform”,
 - ✓ intellectual opposition,
 - ✓ class division and antagonism and
 - ✓ defeat or recruitment of armed forces by revolutionaries.

Symptoms

- ✓ **Economically weak** - the government has deficits and must tax
- ✓ **Politically weak** - the government is ineffective and cannot enforce policy; inept ruler
- ✓ **Intellectuals desert** - reformers speak out against the government
- ✓ **Class Antagonism** - there is a conflict between the old regime and new forces

Phase Two-Rising Fever (Moderate Regime)

1. This is the escalation of the anger felt by the middle class. The people rise up against the government.
2. The current government can not repress the rebellion.
3. A new government is created, led by the middle class. They will try to replace the old government

Symptoms

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 **(Radical Regime)**

1. The revolutionary new government tries to violently overthrow the old government.
2. There is a lot of violence and efforts to spread the revolution. Opposition is squashed.
3. The revolution is fragile because popular support is needed and economic conditions are poor.
4. The old government tries to hold onto power.

Symptoms

1. Radicals Take control (coup d'état) - 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

1. The revolution ends and the country enters a period of recovery. The old government is successfully overthrown.
2. A strong ruler comes to power and the new government begins the process of stabilizing the country.
3. Life in the country begins to return to normal.

Symptoms

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.

Crane Brinton & The Anatomy of Revolution

Moderate Period

- 1789-1792
- “Age of Montesquieu”
- **Constitutional Monarchy**
 - Liberal moderates in control
- National Assembly/Legislative Assembly
- Limited Change
- Limited enfranchisement

Radical Period

- 1792-1794
- “Age of Rousseau”
- **Republic**
 - Strong central government
 - Radicals in control
- Convention
- Major Change
- Total enfranchisement
- Terror
- Command economy
- Utopian/ idealized vision

Thermidorian Period

- 1794-1799
- “Age of Smith”
- **Oligarchy**
 - Moderates Bourgeoisie government
- Directory
- Reactionary stage
- Idealized visions of Rev forgotten
 - Period of decadence
- Free Market economy
 - High Inflation
- Reliance on Strong Man

Restoration Period

- 1799-1804
- “Age of Voltaire”
- **Enlightened Despotism**
- Consulate
- Government centralized with enlightened ideals
- Old Order returns to power

THE END