

The Stages of Revolution

Crane Brinton has identified several stages in political revolution.

STAGE ONE: Revolution by Moderates

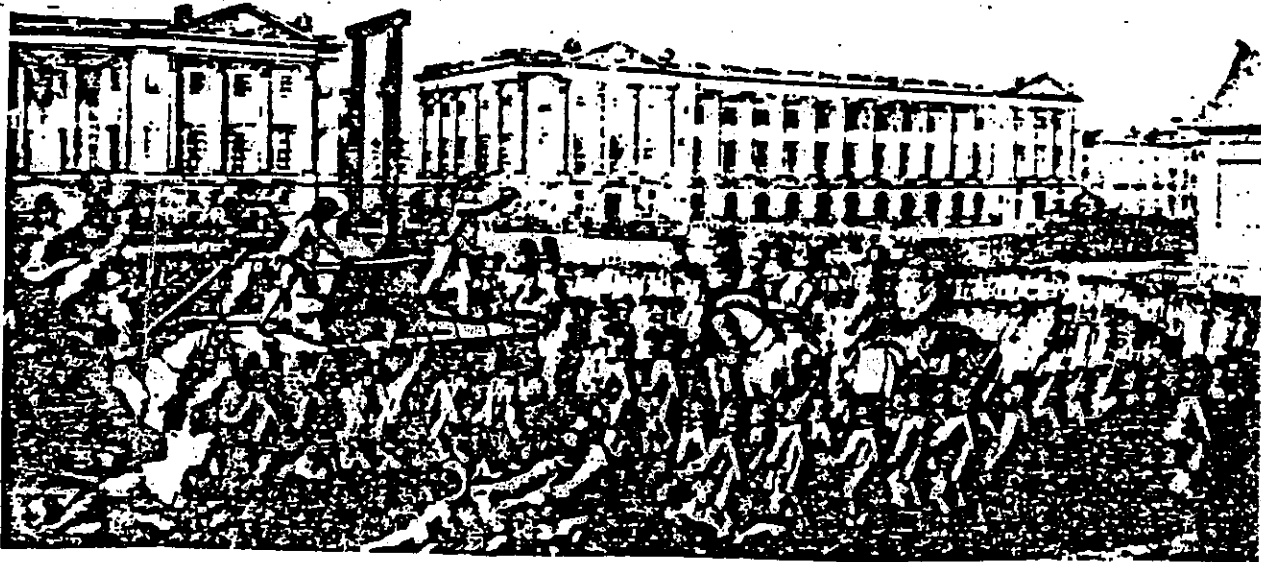
This stage is dominated by middle-class reformers who take control of a government but fail to establish a new working government because of a series of crises which they cannot control.



Bourgeoisie

STAGE TWO: Rule by Extremists

In this stage, power is seized by radicals who use or at least threaten violence. A "reign of terror" suppresses all dissenting persons, and massive changes are attempted.



STAGE THREE: Reaction by Conservatives

This stage is marked by a desire to return to some of the old pre-revolutionary ways in reaction to the abuses of the radicals. Reactionaries often take power and themselves use violence against the radicals.



The Causes of Revolution

Let's begin with Crane Brinton's ideas about the causes of revolutions. He said, "Our normal healthy society will not be one in which there are no criticisms of government, no gloomy sermons on moral decay of teenagers, no utopian dreams of a better world, no strikes, no extremists, no attacks on civil liberties." All that we can expect of what we call a healthy society is that there should be no excess of these things which he mentioned and that people should think and behave as if they feel that, with all its faults, their society is a going concern, that it is working.

If this is true, what then is an unhealthy society, one that is prone to revolution and that may be on the verge of revolution? Mr. Brinton points out certain characteristics which he found in all of the major societies to have major revolutions--i.e. England, France, Russia, and America.

1. The governments were all short of money. That is, they had a "feudal" system of collecting taxes and were trying to run a modern government with it.
2. Because of the unfairness in the collection of taxes, people complained bitterly about the taxes.
3. The governments were very inefficient.
4. The governments favored one section of the society over another--i.e. the landed nobles over the poor or middle class.
5. Intellectuals in the society lost their allegiance to it and wanted to change it; they were alienated from it.
6. Members of the ruling classes (the nobles and other elite) lost confidence in themselves as members of that class.
7. Moreover, they began to see that the privileges of their classes were harmful to society.
8. The classes distrusted and even hated each other.
9. The career advancement opportunities for the middle class (white collar, professional, artist) seemed to be at a standstill.
10. The economic power was separated from the political/social power--i.e. The middle class had the money but the nobles (landed aristocracy and elite) had the political/social power.

According to Crane Brinton...a quiz

Part I - (Circle the letter of the best answer.) According to Crane Brinton, a healthy society is one in which

- A. there are no problems.
- B. the people have serious concerns about their future.
- C. people have utopian dreams of a better world.
- D. revolutions happen on a regular basis.
- E. the people feel that, with all its fault, it is working.
- F. the people never question its values.

Part II - (Circle the letter of the best answer.) According to Crane Brinton, which one of the following is NOT a characteristic of an unhealthy society?

- A. The government is inefficient.
- B. The wealthy landowners are favored by the government over the lower and middle classes.
- C. Career advancement for the middle class comes to a standstill.
- D. The government is short of money.
- E. Intellectuals are alienated from society.
- F. Classes distrust and even hate each other.
- G. The wealthy landowners have more than their fair share of political power.
- H. The method of collecting taxes is unfair.
- I. Members of all classes come together against the government.
- J. Members of the ruling class lose confidence in themselves as members of that class.

Part III - Below are the three stages of revolution--according to Crane Brinton. However, they are not in order, and there is an extra stage which obviously does not belong. In the blanks, indicate the order of the three stages (1, 2, and 3), and put a 0 in front of the foil.

_____ Radicals seize power--often through the use of violence--and attempt to make massive changes in the government.

_____ Reactionaries attempt to make significant changes by overthrowing the present government.

_____ Moderate reformers take control but fail to establish a new working government.

_____ Conservatives take power in a desire to return the government to some of the pre-revolutionary ways.