HARDING
UNIVERSITY
University Communication and Marketing

Book Review/Report on

The Anatomy of Revolution

By Crane Brinton

Revised and Expanded Edition 1938, 1952, 1965

Author: Robert Mead

For Dr. Raymond Muncy

Test makeup for Western Civilization class after missing a test on October 18, 1971

as I was 2 hours late for class Fall
semester 1971.

Harding College (Not yet a university)

Due Date Spring Semester 1972

Report submitted to History Department on October 30, 2025 *(Just* a little *late)*

Introduction

The "Anatomy of Revolution" is an historical analysis written by Crane Brinton in 1938 with updates in 1952 and 1965, copyright by Prentice Hall, Inc. in 1965. The author states in his preface, his aim is "to establish, as a scientist might, certain first approximations of uniformities" with the 4 revolutions selected for the study.

This review will show that the author successfully demonstrates that there are several common elements involved in each of the revolutions studied. Through his analysis of 4 "successful revolutions in modern states" the reader is informed of details of each revolution. In a very scientific, and interesting manner, the author takes the reader through each of the similarities as they relate to the revolutions.

This edition of the book includes additions to the original publication in 1938 which was very early in the Russian revolution. Several key events, such as World War II, happened after this date and the author did an excellent job including these events in the updated publication, especially with the addition of an epilogue to the 1965 edition.

This review may seem like a book report at times as I will spend some extra time with book details. I feel that a simple review will not fulfill my obligation to complete this assignment. I will include more details of the analysis along with my commentary. I will try to give enough detail to demonstrate the value of the author's analysis.

Summary

In The Anatomy of Revolution, Crane Brinton details key elements which he found to be common in each of four revolutions he chose. The four revolutions examined in this book are: "the English Revolution of the 1640's, the American Revolution, the great French Revolution, and the recent present revolution in Russia". The introduction does an excellent job of explaining why these revolutions were studied.

Using scientific methods, the author explains details of each revolution structured into chapters devoted to each of the various stages of the revolutions. While doing this the reader is immersed

in details of history which are seldom studied in courses taught in high school and college. The author is careful to be objective, as a doctor or scientist would be, and points out times when any of the revolutions may have diverged from the common elements he has proposed. The bibliography cites over 150 references which are "intended solely as a guide to individuals or groups who may wish to attempt the difficult but rewarding study of revolutions." As anyone can see, the study of revolutions over a period of two to three centuries would require a vast array of resources to get an accurate account of the subject.

Analysis of the Authors Argument and Evidence

Throughout this book the author does a great job of clarifying the main arguments he is analyzing. The goal is to analyze the sudden substitution of one group in charge of running a government with another group not running the government

The author admits it is difficult to maintain a detachment from the subject of human affairs, but he is successful in maintaining the detachment. As the title of the book suggests, the use of scientific methods is very important throughout. The "Anatomy" of Revolution implies that the subject will be approached with a detailed look into each of the revolutions. Anyone who has taken an anatomy class will remember the dissection of various animals with the objective outcome of understanding details of each.

The author's extensive use of sources is impressive. Since most of the revolutions studied took place over 200 years ago there is a tremendous number of studies and writings to analyze. 3 of the revolutions have been studied extensively perhaps because they were in societies with values placed on freedom of expression.

The Russian revolution is more difficult because it happened more recently, only 20 years before the first edition of this book, and the Russian government has not been as open with information. The author addressed this with updated editions and an epilogue in 1964. With the changes in the Russian government since 1964 and the release of volumes of information that was previously not available a follow-up edition would be very interesting.

Most people reading this book will learn new details of what was happening in the countries involved. These details not only include the revolution aspect, but the history of the individual nations as well as the world at the time leading up to the revolution, during the revolution, and after.

Although the author attempts to cover the subject thoroughly, he admits that even science may be changed with further study. Science is based on skepticism. Science involves looking at facts and using your mind to interpret those facts. The author effectively presents evidence to support his findings.

The book is divided into 9 chapters with an epilogue for the 1964 edition. After the introduction each chapter looks at elements within the revolutions which point toward conformities of each. The areas discussed are: The old regimes, the first stages of the revolutions, the types of people involved in each revolution, the rule of moderates after the initial phases of the revolution, the change of power to the extremists in the revolution, reigns of terror and virtue in each revolution, and what the author refers to as "Thermidor" which is the return to quieter times and stable government with the new rulers. The summary then brings everything together in a very concise manner. With this there is an understanding that further study is always needed.

The Epilogue: 1964 explores the changes in the Russian revolution as well as what the revolutions really

accomplished. Since much had changed in Russia the author updates the readers on how these changes may affect his original writings. This is where another update would be welcomed.

While exploring each of these topics the author is always being careful to be objective as a scientist and often compares the revolutions to different stages of an illness. Reference to a fever is often used.

As an introduction to the fever theme the author states "We shall regard revolutions as a kind of fever.". He also states that, like revolutions, nobody wants to have a fever. When discussing revolutionists, he compares them to carriers of a sort of fever. When analyzing the accession of the extremists the fever is in the crisis stage with moments of improvement before getting worse.

And in the end a convalescence from the fever occurs with possible relapses.

It is obvious that not all the revolutions analyzed included all the conformities in the same way. The author is very careful to point out where there are differences.

The author also concludes that the achievement of government efficiency is really the king uniformity. The revolutions end the worse abuses of the government. The revolutions were all made in the name of freedom. They were directed toward tyranny of the few toward the rule of the many, even if the results are not obvious at times.

Some of the authors "discoveries" seem obvious. Like discontent among the people, economic issues within the government, and a government that doesn't function well according to the people being governed.

However, there are also surprising details of the conformities that are not what one would think. It is pointed out that many

of the conditions discussed are always a part of society, but in these revolutions, they become something more.

Some of the details that were revelations to a non-historian like me are:

• Although there was discontent with the government in each of the revolutions the discontent is caused not from need but from expectations that there should be more. "The more prosperous the peasants, the more discontented."

• We often think of revolutionists as extremists, but the author argues that they are mostly ordinary citizens who are convinced over time that a change is needed.

• In the summary chapter the author proposes that these revolutions mainly changed the people in charge which resulted in improvements to the government. However, "social arrangements that most intimately and immediately touch the average man that the actual changes effected by our revolutions seem slightest."

• The structure of the family remained the most stable and most persistent things in our western civilizations, even in Russia.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Unlike traditional accounts of history viewed as a freshman in college, the author does research much like a scientist trying to discover something new. He is very persistent in finding and interpreting facts. His writing is very engaging and relevant to the topics. He makes the history of the revolutions interesting and fresh. He does not just present facts of the times.

The author goes into enough detail so most people will gain knowledge of revolutions in general, and the specific revolutions studied. When context is needed the author adds the necessary details. The author does reference some historical facts that require more research but it is not possible to include the many details needed in a work such as this. To get a full understanding the many reference materials sited are available.

As I was reading this book, which I read many times over the many years of procrastination, I was always analyzing the existing state of the world, and particularly the many issues in the United States. Always asking which

conformities are present in 2025. This is one of the values of this publication.

Now in the United States the allegiance of the intellectual to change may be relevant. Our society is more prosperous than ever even with recent financial concerns but there is a feeling that things are not fair. Ordinary citizens want to make changes to the way the government runs. Some intellectuals are trying to control aspects of society which effectively prevent a large portion of the population from feeling that they are able to participate in decisions made that affect them.

One of the concluding statements from the authors summary is: "These four revolutions exhibit an increasing scale of promises to the 'common man'-promises as vague as that of complete 'happiness' and as concrete as that of full satisfaction of all material wants, with all sorts of pleasant revenges on the way."

The book is interesting. It is engaging and the style is easy to follow. Most students in general and especially in history will learn from the content of this book.