

# The Arab Spring

Once upon a time, not so long ago, millions of people living not far from here, on just the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, were unhappy. The main reason was because they were not free. There were two countries called Egypt and Tunisia, where bad men ruled them for a long time. Their rulers were called Ben Ali and Mubarak.

They thought they were better than everyone else and could just do anything they liked. In the beginning they had got to be boss because everyone else agreed, more or less, and they had friends that they asked advice from. But as time went on, they became more and more arrogant and thought they always knew best, and never asked anyone else.



*Illustration 1: I'm watching you! A big poster of Ben Ali on a building*

And although in most countries, rulers are only supposed to stay for a few years at a time to give everyone else a chance, in these countries these men stayed for 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, even 40 years. They became very vain and made everyone put their pictures up everywhere... on the walls of big buildings, hospitals, inside school classrooms, even in shops.



*Illustration 2: I see you! Mubarak looking cool in his dark glasses*

It got so that entire families growing up could never remember life before Ben Ali or



*Illustration 3: Bread again! Many poor families have to eat bread with every meal because they can't afford anything else*

Mubarak. And they tried to make people think they could go on forever. They would dye their hair black when it had gone grey, and have special operations to try and make themselves look younger, so that people would forget how long they had been ruling them. Not only that but they turned themselves into kings, and made

their families very rich by taking money that wasn't theirs, while a lot of people stayed very poor, and had to eat just bread and rice most days.

But unlike the nice kings and queens you sometimes hear about in stories, these new kings didn't do anything for anyone. They took all the nice things for themselves and lived in big, fancy palaces while lots of people lived in houses that were so small and cramped they hardly had enough room even to lie down and sleep at night, and which didn't have proper walls or roofs, so let in the rain and the wind. The rulers didn't allow children to go to school, and then called them stupid because they grew up unable to read and write. Many ordinary people couldn't even afford to see a doctor when they were sick.

But the worst thing of all was, nobody could



*Illustration 4: A nice palace for Mubarak...*



*Illustration 5: ... and how poor people live in bady made houses*

say anything about it. If anyone tried to complain, or even just suggest how things could be better, Ben Ali or Mubarak would send bullies to beat them up, and take them to prison. And the police were not like police in most countries, where they look after people and stop criminals. Instead, in these countries the police themselves were often the criminals! They would rob people, or demand some of their money just to keep their shops open. They would make people say nice things about Ben Ali, Mubarak and Gaddafi, and hit them if they didn't. Like most bullies, they often pretended they had to do this for some good reason but the real reason was they enjoyed treating people badly and bossing them about.



*Illustration 6: Don't complain! Mubarak and Ben Ali's rotten men often beat people up for no reason*

Well all this went on for years and years. It was as though these men were old wizards who had cast a spell over the people. Even though they wanted freedom and good schools and dignity, to hold their heads up high, like people in other countries they were afraid. Wherever they went, the ruler was staring down at them from some

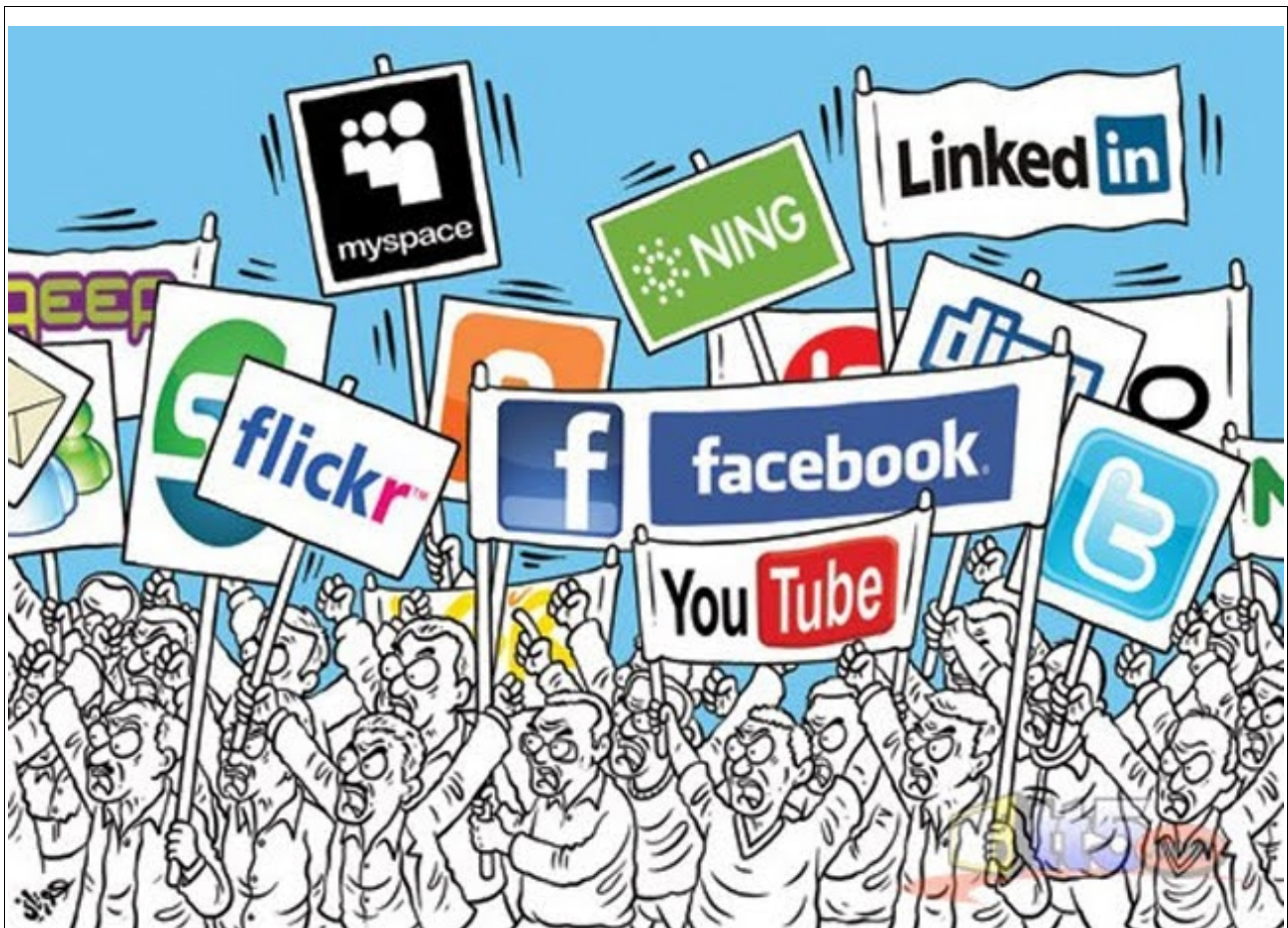
huge poster, and his bad men were right there in the street, ready to hit them if they tried to change anything.

Until one day, somebody said enough is enough. Just before Christmas, a young fruit seller called Mohammed protested when Ben Ali's men in his town hit him. The next day, his friends and family protested. The day after that the entire town protested. The day after that all the other towns in the region protested, and a few days after that the entire country of Tunisia was protesting in the streets. The peaceful revolution spread like wildfire, and many of the protesters went every day to the Internet to post what they had seen or witnessed during the day, so that everyone would know. The most important thing was for everyone to be in it together, and to know that although it might be scary to go out and face bad men with weapons, they were not alone.



*Illustration 7: We want to be free! Protesters gathered in one place to stand up to the bullies and give each other courage*

People went down into the streets to find each other and the courage to say enough is enough! Ben Ali sent all his bad men against the people, but the more they were beaten up, the more the people became brave. They had no weapons and didn't attack anyone but they refused to go home, and refused to stop protesting in the streets, telling Ben Ali to go away. They started to tell each other jokes about him, pointing out the silly things he said, drawing cartoons of him, and singing songs about their own freedom.



*Illustration 8: Read it, see it, live it! Many of the protesters used the Internet to tell the world what was happening*

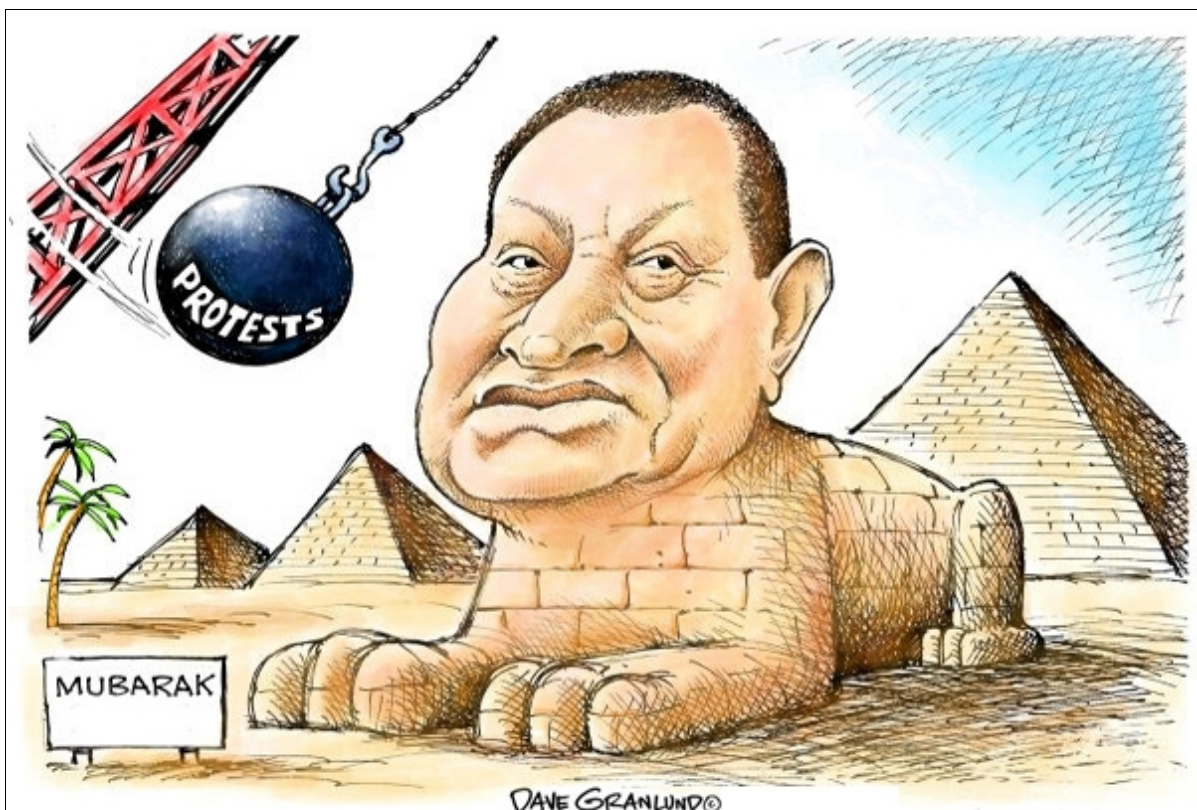
The spell was broken. Winter turned into spring and after just three weeks of this, Ben Ali fled his palace in disgrace and went abroad.

Just a few days after that, the people of Egypt did the same thing with Mubarak. They had heard what had happened in Tunisia because, like the Tunisians, Egyptians are

Arabs and so they speak the same language and share the same culture. And they said to themselves, “if our cousins in Tunisia can do it, why can't we?”.

They gathered first in hundreds, then in thousands, then in millions, in the main squares of the big cities and sang songs and shouted for Mubarak to leave like Ben Ali did. Just like Ben Ali, Mubarak also had rotten police, not like normal police, who beat up the peaceful protesters, but just like their cousins in Tunisia, every time they were beaten up, the people in Egypt became even braver.

“We are staying and you are going,” they sang, and “Go, Pharaoh, go!” a joke about how Mubarak was making himself a god like the old Pharaohs of Egypt. Mubarak kept making speeches on TV telling the people how lucky they were to have him, what a hero he was, and how only he knew how to take care of them. But the millions and millions of brave men and women knew different. Mubarak's spell over them had been broken just like Ben Ali's in Tunisia, and they too told jokes about him and made funny cartoons. And everyone in Egypt put their stories on the Internet too, so that everyone else would know, just like in Tunisia.



Cartoon : Dave Granlund

*Illustration 9: Egyptians started to make fun of Mubarak by joking that he was one of the old Pharaohs instead of being afraid of him*

Mubarak tried to get the soldiers in the army to beat up the people even more. But the leaders of the army were wise and refused, saying the people in the streets were their brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters, and they would never treat them badly.

And so the people won by sheer force of their peaceful bravery. Mubarak could no longer get anyone to obey him and had to leave his palace, just like Ben Ali had in Tunisia.

And the people had the biggest street parties ever in their countries, and strangers hugged each other and laughed and cried all at the same time

they were so happy. It was like a dream. Nobody could believe that they had beaten the tyrants! And although before, people from Tunisia and Egypt had been embarrassed to say where they were from, now they became proud. You are Egyptian, lift up your head, they would say to each other, and they wore badges and put stickers on their cars to show they had been part of The Arab Spring, the protests that had removed the bad men. Things were not easy just



*Illustration 10: A soldier carrying a child: Egypt's army heroically refused to use violence against their own "brothers and sisters"*



*Illustration 11: This lady and her husband got married right in the middle of the protests because they wanted their wedding to be part of the Arab Spring!*

because they had got rid of Ben Ali and Mubarak, though. They had been ruling them for so long that nobody else quite knew how to take care of things. And the rulers themselves had made sure nobody else could take their place by whispering lots of bad stories to different people, to make them distrust each other, and keeping lots of secrets to themselves.

But in the days and weeks that followed victory, slowly people got used to life after the dictators, and they began to build a new future. It will take time but everyone in Tunisia and Egypt are determined to make their countries where everyone has the same opportunities as people in other countries – the right to go to school, to be looked after when you are sick, to start a family, and to make a living without being stolen from. And most of all, the right to say what you think, who you think is right and wrong, and to choose the government.



*Illustration 12: We won! Happy protesters wandered round like in a dream in the first few days after they got rid of Mubarak*

Just like we do.