



2011 Egyptian Revolution

In 2011 in Egypt, protestors part of what would later be dubbed the “Arab Spring,” inspired by the success of similar protests in Tunisia, launched a movement against the reigning government of Hosni Mubarak. After thirty years of absolute rule by Mubarak, the people of Egypt decided that they would take to the streets, not in armed revolution, but in peaceful action. Even in the face of violence from the police and military, they did not forego their non-violent methods, and in the end forced the resignation of a dictator, and the implementation of democratic elections, through the mobilization of their collective powers and the revocation of their consent to the system of government. Despite the unrest that came later, the achievement of overthrowing 30 years of dictatorial government through protest is still an incredible feat, the impact and value of which cannot be overstated for both the people of Egypt and all those around the world who take a stand against power.

As many political theorists have noted throughout history, governments, and indeed all human power structures are made up of individuals, and predicated on the consent of the people they rule, either consciously or implicitly. Everyone from Gandhi to Machiavelli has articulated in one way or another that those who rule do so only with the consent of their people, and that that consent can be revoked. Some, like Machiavelli give the example that people can, and often do, simply assassinate those rulers that they do not believe capable of leading. However, examples like the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 tell a different story.

What happened in Egypt was a situation in which the people pulled their support for the government without the need for violence. Workers left their posts, bringing economic activity to a standstill in major cities, and the people in the streets made for an unavoidable delivery of their message as they occupied public space and surrounded seats of regime power such as courts and government offices.

The outspoken idealism and fearless nonviolence, even as police and military officials attacked and shot at and around protestors in attempts to get them to disperse sent a clear and undeniable message to the government that the will of the people could not be subdued. As well, the protestors’ commitment to nonviolence made it much easier for them to win over members of the public who had remained neutral in previous attempts at removing the government, because of the perception of armed rebels as being as bad, if not worse, than the problems of the incumbent regime.

By taking actions like occupying parks and squares, and marching in the streets was a much more palatable approach to change for many people, and when contrasted with the often violent and panicked responses from the government, served to bring forward a great deal of grassroots support for the resistance. In turn, this popular support was capitalized upon by organizers using social media and other communication networks facilitated by the proliferation of smartphones, to ensure that word of events spread, and that the movements of government forces could be tracked in real time to help mitigate safety risks to the demonstrators. For a while, after realizing that the people could not be dissuaded through intimidation,



President Mubarak attempted to hold on to power by making small concessions, such as appointing a vice-president, and agreeing to hold democratic elections at the end of his term. However, these small steps towards democracy were seen as too little by the vast majority of those involved in protest, and served only to re-invigorate calls for Mubarak's resignation. This culminated in his ousting from power and the instillation of a temporary military government with the promise of elections to soon follow. Wary of the political anger that had been displayed, the military government did eventually hold elections and instigate sweeping reforms, as well as charging more than 700 senior police officials for roles in the deaths of protestors during uprising.

Though hardly free of problems, and certainly not an end to the social issues within the country, this victory for the Egyptian populace was an incredible feat of collective courage and political organizing, that served as the inspiration for the 'Arab Spring' movements across many other nations in the area. It stands as a monument to the power of collective action and political engagement, and a reminder to the world that even without violence, change is possible if there is a will for it.

written by Jonathan Carroll

Additional information:

Encyclopedia Britannica: Egypt Uprising of 2011
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Egypt-Uprising-of-2011>

Al Jazeera: Timeline Egypt's Revolution
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html>