

Lesson7: Ben Ali Era & The Tunisian Revolution

The Text :

From 1987 to 2011, Tunisia was ruled by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who came to power after removing the former president, Habib Bourguiba, in what is known as the “Medical Coup.” During the early years of his rule, Tunisia experienced economic growth, improvements in infrastructure, and a rise in tourism. However, despite these developments, political life remained tightly controlled.

Ben Ali’s government was known for strong censorship, limited freedom of expression, and restrictions on political opposition. Elections were not free, and the ruling party, the RCD, dominated the political scene. Over time, corruption increased, especially involving Ben Ali’s family, who were accused of taking control of important sectors of the economy. Many young Tunisians, despite graduating from universities, struggled to find jobs, leading to frustration and anger.

The situation reached a breaking point in December 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor from Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire after police harassment and humiliation. His act became a symbol of injustice and sparked widespread protests across the country. Demonstrations spread to cities like Kasserine, Sfax, and finally the capital, Tunis.

Protesters demanded jobs, dignity, freedom, and an end to corruption. Despite attempts by Ben Ali to calm the situation, the demonstrations grew stronger. On 14 January 2011, Ben Ali fled Tunisia, marking the end of his 23-year rule and the beginning of a new political era. The Tunisian Revolution inspired similar uprisings across the Arab world, giving birth to the movement known as the Arab Spring.

Vocabulary Activity

Words	Definitions
1. Censorship	a. Unfair treatment or lack of fairness
2. Opposition	b. A sign or representation of a larger idea
3. Corruption	c. Illegal or dishonest behavior, especially by people in power
4. Harassment	d. To have control over something

5. Demonstrations	e. Limiting or controlling what people can say or publish
6. Symbol	f. Public protests or marches
7. Injustice	g. Behavior that annoys or pressures someone
8. Dominated	h. Political parties or groups that disagree with the government
9. Infrastructure	i. Limited rules that control what people can do
10. Restrictions	j. The basic systems such as roads, water, and electricity
11. Frustration	k. A political system where one leader has complete control
12. Autocratic	l. A feeling of anger or disappointment caused by problems

Comprehension Questions (with Answers)

1. How did Ben Ali come to power in 1987?
2. Why were many Tunisians unhappy during Ben Ali's rule despite economic growth?
3. What happened to Mohamed Bouazizi, and why was his act important?
4. What were the main demands of the protesters during the revolution?
5. When and how did Ben Ali's rule come to an end?
6. How did censorship affect journalists and ordinary citizens?
7. Why did economic growth not improve the lives of all Tunisians?
9. How did the government try to respond to the protests before Ben Ali fled?
11. How did the Tunisian Revolution influence other Arab countries?
12. What changes were expected in Tunisia after Ben Ali left the country?

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which sector improved during the early years of Ben Ali's rule?
 - a. Space exploration
 - b. Agriculture only
 - c. Tourism
 - d. Banking only
2. The RCD was:

- a. The main political party that controlled the government
- b. A sports club
- c. A student group
- d. An international organization

3. One major challenge for young Tunisians was:

- a. Lack of schools
- b. Too many job offers
- c. Free access to all services
- d. Difficulty finding jobs after graduation

4. The Tunisian Revolution inspired:

- a. Only economic reforms in Europe
- b. No changes outside Tunisia
- c. The Arab Spring in several countries
- d. A new Olympic sport

5. Which of the following best describes Ben Ali's government?

- a. Fully democratic
- b. Authoritarian with limited freedoms
- c. Open and free
- d. Controlled by citizens

6. What triggered the initial protests in Sidi Bouzid?

- a. A debate in parliament
- b. A new education law
- c. The act of Mohamed Bouazizi
- d. A public festival

7. One of the protesters' main slogans was:

- a. "More taxes now!"
- b. "Work, Freedom, National Dignity"
- c. "We want more tourism"
- d. "Electricity for all"

8. Censorship in Tunisia mainly affected:

- a. Media, journalists, and internet users
- b. Only sports clubs
- c. Clothing shops
- d. Weather forecasts

9. What happened on January 14, 2011?

- a. A new constitution was published
- b. Parliament dissolved itself
- c. Ben Ali left Tunisia
- d. Elections were held

10. The rise of corruption was mainly linked to:

- a. Foreign tourists
- b. Ben Ali's family network
- c. University students
- d. Farmers and fishermen

Fill-in-the-Gaps

Use the words: freedom – corruption – protests – unemployment – censorship – dignity

- 1. Many young people suffered from high, even after finishing university.
- 2. Tunisians demanded more and an end to government control of the media.
- 3. Bouazizi's act became a symbol of and social injustice.
- 4. The increase in among government officials made citizens angry.
- 5. The spread from Sidi Bouzid to many other Tunisian cities.
- 6. Controlling newspapers and the internet is an example of

Discussion Questions

- 1. In your opinion, what is the most important factor that led to the Tunisian Revolution? Why?
- 2. How can corruption affect the daily lives of citizens?
- 3. Do you think social media can play a role in political change? Give examples.
- 4. What lessons can other countries learn from the Tunisian Revolution?
- 5. Is economic growth enough without political freedom? Explain.