1968: The Prague Spring.
2010-the present: The Arab Spring.
2014: The Cotterill Spring?
1968: The Prague Spring
First Secretary of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubček, creates one of the first fissures in the Iron Curtain. He instigates small reforms of economic decentralisation and a shift toward liberalisation of the paralysing grip of Moscow on the most western of its puppet regimes. The new freedoms granted Czech citizens with a press and media without censorship, in what was colloquially known as ‘Socialism with a human face’.

Further plans were drawn up to devolve powers to regions such as Bohemia, split the country in two (the Czech Republic and Slovakia were recreated – about the only reform to survive the year) and even allow other political parties to re-form and enter true elections. This “unique experiment in democratic Communism” (natch) sent Leonid Brezhnev’s posse into paroxysms of fear: open the door, even just a crack, to one satellite state of socialism running things its own way and the whole of Eastern Europe will be getting ideas above their station. Something had to be done to rein in Dubček and his progressives.

The nomenklatura in Prague sought to “reassure Moscow that the Soviet leadership had nothing to fear from events in Czechoslovakia (ČSSR), indeed that they had everything to gain from the newfound popularity of the Czech Communist Party and renewed faith in a rejuvenated socialist project” (Tony Judt).

But, after failed negotiations, nearly a quarter of a million Warsaw Pact troops entered the ČSSR on August 20th. Within days the revolution was over, Dubček and the other reformers were arrested and flown to Moscow and within weeks the reforms were reversed.

The Prague Spring didn’t have an immediate effect but, with emigration from Czechoslovakia and the East on the increase as a result, it was one of the first blows to the iron Soviet grip over Eastern Europe culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, 5 days after Turner and Taylor goals saw the City win 2-0 at Walsall in that promotion season. Not that these two events were related.

Warsaw Pact tanks enter Czechoslovakia

2010-the present: The Arab Spring
Familiar to us all, recent as it is, The Arab Spring began, some commentators argue, with Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi setting himself alight in Tunis market, in protest at his treatment at the hands of officials. A domino effect ensued, with revolution spreading across northern Africa into the Middle East, deposing tyrannical dictators such as Colonel Gadaffi and Hosni Mubarek along the way. Unlike the Prague Spring, these uprisings have had immediate and profound effects and look set to further change the political, social, moral and cultural landscape of the Arab world and even beyond.

Left: Mohamed Bouazizi's protest

2014: The Steve Cotterill Spring?
Things have been rubbish here in BS3, too, although admittedly not bad enough to make us want to stand in front of tanks or resort to self-immolation. But things have been bad. For longer than we care to remember since the heady days of Wembley in 2008. But do the three images above, of our win at Shrewsbury, show that Lady Luck is on our side and we are about to enter our own ‘spring’? Full-backs slipping over and headers crossing/not crossing the line. Are we going to get the rub of the green a little more now? Is this to be the Cotterill Spring, where Frank Fielding leads the squad in rising up against the military might of Stevenage and Crawley, rising up the League One table to finish 19th?

Is it? Only time will tell. But there’ll only be one winner. Thank Dubček that Steve Cotterill is a winner, then.