

Liberty-Work-Dignity: Tunisia : The People's Revolution

Rene Wadlow*

The people's revolution is on the march. When the freedom-loving people march — when the farmers have an opportunity to buy land at reasonable prices and to sell the produce of their land through their own organizations, when workers have the opportunity to form unions and bargain through them collectively, and when the children of all the people have an opportunity to attend schools which teach them truths of the real world in which they live — when these opportunities are open to everyone, then the world moves straight ahead... The people are on the march toward ever fuller freedom, toward manifesting here on earth the dignity that is in every human soul. Henry A. Wallace, Vice-President of the United States, setting out US war aims in June 1942.

The wave of the people's revolution has swept over Tunisia and pushed President Ben Ali to exile in Saudi Arabia. A month of popular manifestations starting on 17 December 2010 with the suicide-protest of the young Mohamed Bouazizi, a college-educated street vender, and the police repression at his funeral has brought to an end the 23 years of control on Tunisian political and economic life of President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. He and his powerful wife Leila Trabelsi left Tunis on 14 January for exile in Saudi Arabia while other members of the extended family, who controlled large sectors of the economy, have arrived in Paris.

Tunisia under Ben Ali was a police-state in the literal sense of the word. There was a constant presence of the police with arrests, lengthy interrogations, torture and for those with luck, exile. The press and other media were closely watched and in some cases owned by the Ben Ali-Trabelsi family.

From an economic point of view, there was a migration to the cities and larger towns of the coastal area in a frustrating search for suitable occupations. The unemployment rate was high, and among the educated youth, unemployment, lack of social mobility and the flashy life-style of those with links to political power led to demands for change.

The demonstrations of the past month seemed to have begun spontaneously, led by the young but with no previously known leaders. The demonstrations had no links to opposition political parties, most of whose leaders were in exile, and there were few opposition political structures. There were no known Islamic groups in the demonstrations, and Islamic influence seems to have been completely absent from the demonstrations and from the demands of the demonstrators.

For most French commentators, the model was "May 1968" which led to the end of the government of Charles De Gaulle. Tunisia is a revolution of the people who wanted fundamental changes from the small political group governing, an end to wide-spread and highly-visible corruption, and the creation of jobs. Ben Ali, like De Gaulle, symbolized the system and so there was strong agreement on what everyone could agree upon: "Ben Ali must go". Unlike General De Gaulle, General Ben Ali had done nothing very special before becoming President. Although he tried to develop a "personality cult" around himself with large pictures of himself in the streets and ever-present praise on the TV, Ben Ali had no real personality around which to develop a cult.

Now the issue is what structures the people's revolution will give itself. If all goes as the constitutional order indicates, elections should be held within 60 days, the interim government being under the leadership of the Speaker of the Parliament. Since political parties had been prevented from operating — even the party of the President had only a name but no real structures — we will have to see how political factions are created prior to the elections. There are a good number of different ideological currents in the opposition to Ben Ali, and there is no opposition leader who stands out as a "natural" next President. There is always the danger that if there is too much disorder, revenge killings or armed groups forming the Army could step in.

The disintegration of Ben Ali's government and power base has been closely watched in the Arab world. Although Ben Ali was not particularly liked by his neighbours, political leaders in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Syria and Jordan can see the parallels without too much difficulty — a heavy-handed security state with diminishing popular support and growing demands from an educated, yet frustrated population. Recent demonstrations in Algeria and Jordan set off by higher food prices have been met by some government action to limit taxes of food. However, higher food prices are only one sign of broader socio-economic weaknesses that have led to high unemployment, high rents and yet a housing shortage.

Throughout the Arab world, governments have been unable or unwilling to open serious discussions on socio-economic policies and alternatives. Islamic-based groups have played some role in focusing protests but have not done much in presenting realistic alternative policies. The violence of some of the Islamic groups has served as a pretext for the governments to ban all policy discussions without too many protests from Western governments.

What is outstanding in the revolution in Tunisia is that Islamic groups played no part in the demonstrations and that none of the demands were expressed in Islamic terms. The people's revolution in Tunisia was based on the will of the people for change with a minimum of ideological coloring. It is likely that the people's revolution in other Arab countries will also marginalize Islamic currents in favour of this-worldly reforms. Events will be closely watched both by those who hope and those who fear. People's revolutions may be on the march in the Arab world.

Rene Wadlow, Representative to the United Nations, Geneva, Association of World Citizens. His web site is <http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/profile/ReneWadlow>



Ivory Coast: Sovereignty and the Price of Chocolate

Posted by [Firouzeh Afsharnia](#) on January 2, 2011; ([View Firouzeh Afsharnia's blog](#) <http://connect58.wordpress.com/2011/01/01/ivory-coast-sovereignty-a...>)

It has been almost a month since the elections in Ivory Coast produced not one – but two presidents – one sworn in ceremoniously, wrapped in a regal sash, gushing in front of cameras at the presidential palace – the other hunkered down at the Golf Hotel where he took the wise precaution to retreat days before the election, just in case his adversary was to get any bright ideas. The French press is calling the latter, President of the Republic of the Golf Hotel on account of not being able to emerge since the results were declared that first week of December. The only thing standing between him and the army are 800 U.N. peacekeepers; each force behind their respective barricades allowing no one in or out, leaving no choice but to airlift food and provisions, not to mention a healthy supply of chocolate for the crepe stand in the lobby of the hotel where the grounds have been transformed into makeshift ministries and cabinet offices.

As incumbent President Gbagbo clings to power in Abidjan with the help of the army and state media, President elect Ouattara continues to consolidate his gains in the international community. The U.S and the French were among the first to recognize him followed by the European Union, the United Nations and the West African economic block – ECOWAS. The IMF and World Bank have withdrawn support and the EU has placed travel restrictions as well as targeted sanctions on Mr. Gbagbo and close circle hoping to make a dent perhaps by denying his two wives and entourage their regular shopping sprees in the left bank boutiques of Paris. Just last week as a final show of no confidence the General

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Assembly voted 192-0 recognizing Mr. Ouattara as the rightful head of the Ivorian state and sent the resident ambassadorial mission of Mr. Gbagbo packing. They left in a huff, taking all the computer and office equipment as consolation prize. Things can be so simple when states have fields of cocoa instead of oil.

Looking for other means of practical resistance, the West African Central Bank has ceded control of the state funds to Mr. Ouattara in an effort to choke the life line of President Gbagbo who will soon be running on fumes if he does not play ball – preferably in someone else’s country. It will be interesting to see how loyal his ethnically stacked army will be once he runs out of money. History is full of lessons on the urgent merits of keeping armed young men well paid and well fed.

In further attempts to isolate Mr. Gbagbo, the African Union has suspended his membership and regional allies are now considering use of “legitimate force” to remove him. That sounds a lot like military intervention to me.

Some of my African friends shake their heads in disgust and say “pitoyable!” – lamenting the crisis as yet another example of Big Man politics, typical of the sad state of democracy on a continent that has given us the likes of Taylor, Bashir, Bongo and Mobutu. Others – echoing the nationalist refrains of Mr. Gbagbo are denouncing the impasse as yet another proof of foreign meddling in what they see as a sovereign matter. The U.N., the French and all the rest of them should get out, they say – Ivorian solutions for Ivorian problems. How convenient in this case, to be the ones picking and choosing who is a true Ivorian? Moreover; what exactly is it to be “sovereign” if not recognized by peer member states, or mandated by your citizens, half of whom were disqualified in this case.

All this talk of intervention raises the question: in an increasingly global and interdependent world where actions have far reaching consequences often implicating those who had no part in the decisions with enormous financial

and social burden; and world bodies are tasked to pick up the pieces, is the sovereign nation destined to become a relic of the past, to be relegated to text books along with medieval walled cities and moat floating feudal states?

For the world’s largest cocoa producer, accounting for 40% of global supply, if you think that the price of chocolate is the only thing to consider, think again.

In the past month UNHCR has logged almost 20,000 refugees, mostly women and children fleeing the crisis to neighboring Liberia – itself a fragile state newly emerging from conflict and struggling to consolidate its peace dividends. Youth militia loyal to Gbagbo are mobilizing and if the nightly raids, abductions and torture in the opposition neighborhoods of Abidjan are any indication, the country could relapse into large scale violence with considerable human and economic costs spilling into the whole region which relies on this country’s commercial port. Fear of a \$30 million interest default has already made the international bond markets jittery.

The last century witnessed the creation of global intuitions – the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, the World Trade Organization and the many UN agencies; all supra national institutions with global mandates, yet subject to sovereign whims of national or personal interests. Consequently – Omar Bashir remains free in spite of the ICC indictments; the West Bank is fast becoming an Israeli colony in spite of the ICJ rulings; the West continues to push for agricultural subsidies that favor their own to the detriment of the poorer nations; and the U.N. in spite of the billions it spends in peacekeeping remains handcuffed by the narrow mandate it is given after the big five settle on the lowest common denominator on the security council.

And yet the stakes are higher than ever as the world is shrinking tighter. Forget the price of chocolate and consider the global financial Tsunami unleashed by the Sub Prime defaults and financial deregulation in the U.S – events

that may not have come to pass had international institutions had a vote in the matter.

Better yet – Bush Junior may not have been given a carte blanche, averting two disastrous terms and two costly wars that effectively defeated the empire better than Bin Laden could have ever in his wildest dreams imagined. Palestinians might have had their state long ago; Bashir, Blair and Cheney would be behind bars and The Eastern Congo would have been taken into receivership by international trustees long ago under the principles of Responsibility to Protect.

So, as the world connects tighter in a knot, sovereignty may be the last sacred cow offered at the altar of the juggernaut of globalization once it is clear that we can't have our cake and eat it too. In the meantime – as we witness our first test case in challenging sovereign identity in Ivory Coast – for now we may have to settle for cheese cake instead of chocolate.

Spotlight on: Passing the Peace

[Passing the Peace](#) is an interfaith, international organization that believes all people share the same dream: to live peacefully with our neighbor, to provide for ourselves and our children, and to work towards a brighter tomorrow.

***Our Mission:* Building a world of peace and justice for all of God's children.**

Our Two-Pronged Approach:

- Effective and efficient development projects in poor nations (the Global South) that support housing, education, agricultural and health projects and
- Prophetic witness through education and advocacy within the US in regards to reducing the budget, scope and influence of the US military as a foreign policy actor on the global stage.

Our Theory of Change: Passing the Peace believes that a two-pronged approach addresses two inexorably linked issues that prevent peace. Peace begins when the hungry are fed, the naked clothed and the thirsty receive

clean, potable water: peace begins when people have access to decent housing, education, health care and opportunities for meaningful employment. But in addition to development, the U.S. must address the cultural root issues that perpetuate war and violence.

The cost to prepare and wage wars far exceeds the cost to feed, clothe, house and educate all of the world's poor – hence, our goal of converting swords to plowshares, spears to pruning hooks, tanks to tractors and rifles to rakes. Further, we believe that the application of violence to solve or settle international conflict is barbaric, ineffective and, in fact, counter-productive in that it creates a cycle of violence that is difficult to stop.

Ultimately, the United States will be a more safe and secure nation – less vulnerable to attacks, as it decreases its military spending and shifts its vast political, economic and cultural powers into alleviating human suffering.

WORKSHOPS, ETC. United States

[What Your Church Can Do RIGHT NOW For Peace:](#) A workshop from **Passing the Peace**

When: February 28 - March 2, 2011

Where: St. John's UMC, Hazlett, NJ

This two and one-half day event will focus on outreach ministries locally, nationally and globally as well as advocacy/prophetic work designed to foster a world of peace and justice for all God's people. (Important: This event has been recognized as a 2 unit continuing education event by the leaders of the New Jersey Board of Ordained Ministry for clergy participants).

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Publisher: Peacebuilding Institute, Editor: Victoria Medaglia, Founder: Jim Foster

[SO YOU MUST FORGIVE: A Conference for Peacemakers](#)

When: July 4 - 9, 2011
Where: Eastern Mennonite University,
Harrisonburg, VA

Forgiveness and reconciliation will be the theme for this annual gathering of people interested in peace rooted in justice. Keynote speaker will be **Kim Phuc**, Made famous as a young girl when she was photographed running naked and burning after a US napalm attack on her Vietnamese village, Kim has gone on to focus her life on forgiveness and helping children affected by war. Her keynote address will tell her story of overcoming pain and bitterness through forgiveness. Featured leader for the week will be **Rob Voyle** - an internationally-known trainer who uses a very active, participatory teaching style focused on being helpful, humorous, and healing. He invites us to come to leave behind shame, guilt, and resentment while becoming one with God's forgiveness. **Michael Blair**, head of Communities in Mission for the United Church of Canada, will serve as preacher. Born in Jamaica, Michael writes and speaks widely on the topic of cultural diversity. Asked why he does what he does, he says, "I love to help people expand their imagination." Worship services will be led by **Angela Yarber**, a pastor, artist, and dancer who holds a PhD in Art and Religion. With her background in arts and worship, we can expect rich, moving, multi-layered services which speak to all our senses. **Stan Dotson** will serve as the conference musician. His musical background includes stints in an R&B band, a KISS cover band, a bluegrass band, a jazz band, and as musical director for the Circle of Mercy Congregation in Asheville, NC. Stan has written two musicals for his church - "Experience Christmas: The Nativity Story Told Through the Music of Jimi Hendrix," and "Jesus Loves You, Yeah Yeah, Yeah: the Easter Story Told Through the Music of the Beatles." The week will also include workshops on a wide variety of topics, chances to tell your own peace-making stories, nurturing programs for chil-

dren and youth, and a supportive community with whom to share it all. The site is in the midst of Virginia's beautiful Shenandoah Valley.

VOUCHERS FOR REGISTRATION COSTS ARE AVAILABLE FOR SEMINARY STUDENTS, STAFF, AND FACULTY ATTENDING FOR THE FIRST TIME. Contact LeDayne McLeese Polaski at ledayne@bpfna.org for more information.

Since these events are a long way for many of our readers, people may consider carpooling. Contact Victoria (thepeacememo@gmail.com) and she'll put you in touch with each other so you can make your own arrangements. Please put "Travel networking" in the subject line of your email and include your ZIP code.

WORKSHOPS, ETC.

Africa

[CURE's 5th International Conference: From Retribution to Restoration, Rehabilitation and Reintegration](#) (Click title to download)

When: February 21 - 24, 2011

Where: Abuja, Nigeria

Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) is a grassroots organization that was founded in Texas in 1972. It became a national organization in 1985.

We believe that prisons should be used only for those who absolutely must be incarcerated and that those who are incarcerated should have all of the resources they need to turn their lives around. We also believe that human rights documents provide a sound basis for ensuring that criminal justice systems meet these goals.

CURE is a membership organization. We work hard to provide our members with the information and tools necessary to help them understand the criminal justice system and to advocate for changes.

See an introduction to CURE, by Charlie Sullivan, on:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7SKUeIX700>

Samuel Kawalila, a former SPI participant, is one of the panelist . He will address prison conditions in Africa. – ed.



THE SPARROW SINGS

December, 2010

True freedom depends on being truthful. If we have learned anything from the Wikileaks issue it is that the people of the world, especially Americans, receive very little truth about what their governments are doing in the world. We are not really free, and those who say that the military preserves our freedom are only deluding themselves. As seen in Wikileaks, our two recent invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan are based on lies and are illegal according to international human rights standards. Julian Assange says that the reason governments are so upset with Wikileaks is that much of what is exposed is embarrassing for them. It is the same reason why Amnesty International, which exposes human rights violations in the world, is not appreciated by governments who violate human rights. Governments do not like to be seen as human rights violators. Instead of admitting their failures and resolving to correct their behavior, governments often try to kill off the ones who expose the embarrassing truths. Assange has received death threats. Bradley Manning, the 22-year-old Army Private accused of leaking classified documents to Wikileaks, has never been convicted of any crime. Despite that, he has been detained at the U.S. Marine brig in Quantico VA for 5 months and 2 months before that in a military jail in Kuwait under conditions that constitute cruel and inhumane treatment.

Salon.org, 12/15/10 Secretary of State Clinton said that Mr. Assange should be prose-

cuted for exposing classified material. Just what is classified material? Is it not information that Americans should know? How can Americans approve the actions of their government if they are not privy to the information needed to determine whether or not the government actions are acceptable to them? Democracy without transparency is not democracy. It is an empty word. We need to support those who give us the truth, no matter from where it comes. Exposing the truth will not make our country vulnerable to attack. What our country does and covers up is what makes it vulnerable. If people really knew the misery and suffering of war people would not stand for it. They would stop the wars. Only the truth will make us free. ----

Don Timmerman

The Big Money economy is booming. According to a new Commerce Dept. Report, 2010 third-quarter profits of U.S. businesses rose at an annual record-breaking \$1.659 Trillion – besting even the boom year of 2006 (in nominal dollars). Executive pay is linked to profits so top pay is soaring as well. Bonuses on Wall Street are expected to rise about 5% this year. But nothing is trickling down to the average worker economy. --[Robert Reich's Blog](#)

Nigeria sits atop one of the largest most valuable oil stocks in the world yet 70% of its population lives in dire poverty. It supplies the U.S. with 8% of its oil. --[Wikileaks](#)

Out of the 1,583 U.S. contracts given out so far for rebuilding Haiti totaling \$267 million, only 20, worth \$4.3 million, are going to Haitian owned companies.

<http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/>

Please write on behalf of Private Bradley Manning who is still in solitary confinement without a trial in Quantico VA Marine Base Brig with his health deteriorating to: Hon. Mr. John M. McHugh, Secretary of the Army and General George kW. Casey, Jr., Chief of Staff of the Army at 101 Army Pentagon, Washington D.C. 20310-0200.

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR!!

When	Who	What	Where	Details
February 5	OREPA	Peacemaker Awards Ceremony	Oak Ridge, TN Call for more information	865-776-5050
February 10 7:00-9:00 PM	Tennessee Immigration and Refugee Rights Coalition	Program	Church of the Savior 934 N. Weisgarber Rd. Knoxville, TN	Welcoming the Stranger: a community forum on the situation of legal and undocumented immigrants.
February 13 2:00 PM	PIET	Planning Meeting	Church of the Savior 934 N. Weisgarber Rd. Knoxville, TN	Finalize plans for the Peacebuilder's Potluck
February 21 - 24	Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE)	CURE's 5th International Conference: From Retribution to Restoration, Rehabilitation and Reintegration	Abuja NIGERIA	See Peace Memo
February 28 - March 2	Passing the Peace	What Your Church Can Do RIGHT NOW For Peace	St. John's UMC Hazlett, NJ	See Peace Memo
: July 4 - 9	Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America	SO YOU MUST FORGIVE: A Conference for Peacemakers	Eastern Mennonite University Harrisonburg, VA	See Peace Memo