

Meles and Gaddafi-partners in crime. By Yilma Bekele

They say 'in any relationship, if one party wants a change, that party needs to instigate change.' The Tunisian people felt change was necessary. The Egyptian people agreed. The Libyans, Yemenis, Algerians, Bahrainians and the Iranians are in the process of adapting the Tunisian model.

They wanted change because hopelessness and apathy were becoming the hallmark of the society their crude leaders were building. Today is like yesterday and tomorrow will be more of the same. They felt that is no way to build a country. They felt change was in order.

Ben Ali of Tunisia abused his people for over twenty years while Mubarak lingered around for thirty years. They both used the formidable power of the state for coercion. Both have no qualms about killing, jailing, bankrupting, exiling those they deemed a threat. As usual the difference between one dictator and another is in the degrees of their insanity and selfishness. If you notice both did not have any problem about sacrificing their close friends when the going got tough.

The Tunisians got the ball rolling. They had a lot of help. The rich experience of the Serbian youth movement called 'Otpor' with contribution from the 'Academy of Change' from Egypt was instrumental in the Tunisian victory. Their elegant design was based on the teachings of Gandhi, MLK and a generous dose of Gene Sharp.

The Egyptians were relentless in their pursuit of freedom. The chaotic situation we witnessed on television was a well-choreographed play directed behind the scene. The youth leaders were simple and clear on their demands. The ouster of the dictator was the core of their demands. As usual the dictator tried to pacify by promising to loosen his grip. Too little too late should be inscribed on his gravestone. He tried every trick in the book to deflect attention away from his failures. No stone was left unturned to find a way out of this calamity. He dusted old tricks from the attic, borrowed some from fellow tyrants, went along with enablers advice, invented a few himself but nothing seems to work this time.

Two lessons stand out when we look at the 'uprising' in both countries. Galvanizing the 'youth' was key. Their perseverance when faced by supposedly formidable coercive state power was vital. The fact that the leaders of the movement were those in their thirties was refreshing and a game changer. Both Ben Ali and Mubarak are incapable of understanding the fury of the youth. They were confused and unable to process the information that their subjects were rejecting them and have learnt the language of saying 'No' and 'Enough'.

As an Ethiopian I was awe struck. I laughed at the obstinate Mubarak acting belligerent as he was unrobed in public, I cried for those that lost their life for their country, I was filled with joy when I witnessed the raw hunger for freedom and dignity and I fantasized about the tsunami hitting my home land. The last two months have stirred our passion for freedom and self-determination.

So when is 'people power' scheduled to arrive in East Africa is a good question. The short answer is now. The freedom train is now boarding. It is up to each individual to board or not. The train will leave soon with or without any one of us. This train requires no fossil fuel. This train runs on raw human energy. It is the ultimate 'green energy' train. It is renewable, sustainable and abundant. Our freedom train is equipped with a large sweep in front of it. It sweeps tyrants, dictators and bullies out of sight.

Freedom train is coming to Ethiopia. This is the third appearance of the train in our country. We allowed some undesirable elements to board the last two times. They were able to contaminate the train with their toxic presence and hijack our precious cargo. Our train was derailed.

The Tunisians and Egyptians developed a new vaccine to overcome Fear. Fear is what paralyzes us. Fear is our number one enemy. We spend too much time trying to design a perfect plan. Fear compels us to fret about the little details even before we take the first step. We worry about the so-called lack of unity, we stress regarding the absence of a strong leader, we exaggerate the might of the enemy and we freeze with a sack full of uncertainty. Fear is our number one enemy.

Did you notice how centralized power was in both Tunisia and Egypt? Did you see both were one man shows? Does this kind of arrangement ring a bell? When we said Meles's Ethiopia was a one man show people doubted us. Tunisia and Egypt proved dictatorship is a solo affair. You slay the head and the body flails around. The yes people, the sycophants and the spineless around the tyrant burn away like the morning dew.

Today we got a reversal of circumstances. Ato Meles is the one in FEAR. He is the one unable to sleep. The last two months have been a time of round the clock meetings with his fellow criminals. Like Ben Ali and Mubarak he has been pouring over plans on how to instill more fear on his people. He has been working over time to transfer his overwhelming and paralyzing fear on to us. He has sent his Kebele tugs to warn mothers about the fate of their children if they dare to emulate Tunisia or Egypt and now Libya. He has indicated that snipers are stationed on top of every building and his Agazi force is deployed in every intersection. He has promised salary increases. He has invested on more technology to block our ESAT transmission, switched off the Internet and directed his agents in the Diaspora to shout louder and create confusion. He is a picture of a cornered rat.

What is clear is that internally weak regimes like Woyane do not become passive and tolerant when confronted but rather turn to proven method of belligerency. Notice Ben Ali killed a few, Mubarak sent hired tugs and the Monarchs of Bahrain went to the extreme to preserve their lifestyle and ultimately their neck and today tyrant Gaddafi has upped the ante by using helicopters and fighter jets against his own people.

Our tyrant who is in the same league as Gaddafi will not leave silently. Our little tyrant got lots of issues hanging around his neck. Our tyrant has spilled blood. His 2005 murder was duly noted by judge Woldemichael Meshesha. His ruthless act in the Ogaden has been complied and preserved by Human Right Watch. His massacre in Gambella will never be forgotten thanks to my friend Obang.

So one might ask what next? How do we get out of this nightmare? Let us just agree our leader for life does not have any incentive to leave gracefully. On the other hand the society he has built is not sustainable nor is it desirable. Twenty years have proven he is not capable of building a just and free society. No matter what yardstick one uses to measure progress his attempt has been an abject failure. Twenty years into his leadership we are still confronted with over two million in imminent starvation, double digits of unemployment and runaway inflation. The only accomplishment the TPLF regime boasts of is real estate development, even that is the result of Diaspora investment not home grown achievement.

What is needed today is a day, a week, and a month of 'rage' against Woyane brutality. Who better to do that than our young ones? Who better to lead us than our young and smart children? Our young people have a glorious history to fall back on. The young people of Ethiopia have always been instruments of change. I know the shoes left behind by the University and high school students of the 60's and 70's is hard to fill.

Despite the over forty years of anarchy and destruction our youth have stayed focused. Their strength is displayed all around us. The fact they have survived against all odds despite Woyane bullying is testimonial to their resiliency. All you have to do is look at those that have stayed at home. They wake up everyday in that hostile and hopeless Woyane environment but still manage to eek out a living. They leave no stone unturned in their attempt to make sense of a life that shows no promise of a better tomorrow.

We should also celebrate the determination of those that leave their family and their country to find a better life. How could we forget those that cross the shark infested waters to reach Yemen or those that drown in the process? We will always remember those that cross our frontiers in their trek to unknown destinations. They cross the jungles of Africa, find a miraculous way to fly to South America and cross the US borders by foot, containers trucks and any means to find a better life. Our young ones have been tested by Woyane caused calamity and emerged stronger and wiser.

It is part of Woyane strategy to marginalize the youth by subscribing and encouraging a culture of apathy. The rise in consumption of Khat, a known narcotic and importation of degenerate culture is part of Woyane's plan to contaminate our culture and identity. The Ethiopian youth have to overcome that. Rest assured our young ones are strong. Twenty years of organized propaganda to belittle our history, revise our glorious past, turn one ethnic against another have fallen on deaf ears.

Those of us in the Diaspora will continue our cry on behalf of our people that are silenced by the illegal regime. We will march, sign petitions, contribute money and work with Senators and Representatives to force the terrorist regime to relinquish power peacefully.

We urge the opposition to refrain from unilateral negotiations with the illegal regime. We want to put the opposition on notice that listening to the foreign diplomats and sitting down with the murderer regime is not part of our strategy to get rid of this cancer imposed on us. If the opposition wants to be included in this journey of liberation we are embarking, we hope they will read the heartbeat of our people and include the young people in their celebrations. If the opposition party's want respect from us then we expect that they will keep in mind that our respect is earned. It is not a right but a privilege. We hope the debacle of unilateral action like the recent election will not be repeated.

We are certain Ato Meles will follow the footsteps of Gaddafi and unleash unprecedented terror on our people. He will use ethnic divide, religious divide any and all divisive issues to confuse and set us up against each other. We are hopeful that we have learned a lesson from our mistakes in the past and refrain from cannibalizing each other but rather aim our collective fury at the evil regime.

Yes we can, yes we will Ethiopia will be free, that no one can change.

