

The Protestor

Time magazine named **The Protestor** the 2011 Person of Year. The Protestor represents many global protest movements but primarily the *Arab Spring* or *Arab Awakening*, the revolutionary uprisings which roiled through the Middle East to end oppression and achieve democratic civil rights. Mohammed Bouazizi, a Tunisian fruit vendor who protested police indignities by burning himself to death on December 18, 2010, sparked countless demonstrations and protests which fanned the flames of revolution spreading like wildfire throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa.

The protestors' outcry against tyrannical dictators, government corruption, human rights oppression and poverty, not only caused the overthrow of three governments and hastened the removal of several unpopular leaders, but also drew the world's attention to this region of perpetual global unrest. Autocrats hoarding the country's wealth and oppressing the uneducated poor, kept themselves in power for decades. However, the recent rise in world literacy rates, coupled with a new dissatisfied, younger demographic provided the catalysts needed for revolution.

Many youthful protestors, as told through their Facebook and Twitter accounts, envisioned more modern, more western, more democratic secular governments. The idea of democracy has as many faces as the protestors themselves. In Egypt, after the ousting of Mubarak's corrupt regime, the political Islamic parties have gained more power than the secular, non-religious based political parties. This portends a government in Egypt that will be a democracy, but restricted within Islamic religious bounds. This is not the violent, radical Islam like Al-Qaeda, but rather, a more peaceful political Islam. Nonetheless, the liberal Egyptians are fearful that the poor, ill educated rural population will support the more hardline Islamic parties whose beliefs condemn pop music, western ideas, women's rights and Christians.

The seeds of change have been sewn in the blood of these protestors. Their legacy needs time to germinate and also time to grow. Dramatic transformations don't happen overnight but rather in fits and jerks. Education and a rising standard of living are the necessary ingredients to suppress persecution and achieve human rights and dignity. The *information age* with the advent of social networking conveyed by handheld devices is now fulfilling its promise of instant access to knowledge on a global scale. The US

declared the War on Terrorism, the war will not be won by armies but rather by courageous, educated protestors striving for a better world.

Here at home, basic human rights and freedom of speech are protected by our Constitution and protestors may be cuffed or pepper sprayed but aren't beaten or shot. However corporate greed and our dysfunctional political systems have brought multitudes to the street. The "*Occupy Wall Street*" protestors carry their posters bearing the catchy slogan *We are the 99%* to expose the concentration of wealth among the wealthiest 1% in America. Proving their point, the Gini index, a statistical index which quantifies income inequality, ranks the US among the worst in the developed world. Couple this with the financial suffering of many Americans due to unscrupulous Wall Street wiz kids' bogus sub-prime mortgage securities whose meltdown triggered the Great Recession and The Everyman took to the streets. The "*Occupy*" protest movement began a just few short months ago in New York City, but ignited by the escalation in income disparity and corporate greed, it spread throughout most major US cities.

On the other side of the isle, the Tea Party advocates reduced government spending and reduced taxation. Named for The Boston Tea Party whose battle cry protested British "*taxation without representation*" and which may feel familiar today with the **Political Paralysis** in our country. Many Americans feel neglected, even abandoned, by our politicians

who can't seem to look beyond their next election to make the hard decisions. The American people can rightfully blame politicians locked in partisan gridlock for the complete failure of the Super Committee to reach any kind of agreement to reduce the Federal Budget Deficit.

The Protestor has altered the global course toward a more democratic world, one in which the people rule. Here at home the protests have rekindled our belief in the exceptionalism of the American Way - in Yankee Ingenuity. The Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index reflects our improved optimism, especially looking forward to 2012. After a dismal start of the year, our economy posted a strong 4th quarter finish which may predict a better year ahead. Each new year brings new hopes. **The Protestor** will be our collective voice for equity, cooperation and fairness.

