

Gadaffi tries to drown the revolution in blood

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The battle is on for the future of Libya, writes Simon Hardy

Muammar Abu al-Gaddafi, Libya's brutal dictator, is using the armed forces to slaughter the pro democracy movement into submission. All the talk of peaceful revolutions emanating from the west look like cruel jokes when confronted with a tyrant who hires mercenaries to butcher his own people. In a rambling TV address, raging against his rebellious people, he threatens to fight till the last bullet. Indeed there is no reason to doubt his murderous intentions.

Nevertheless his machinery of repression is already breaking apart under the pressure of the revolution ? in the east of the country many soldiers have joined the resistance, even senior army commanders sided with the movement. The minister of the interior is reported to have defied Gadaffi and gone over to the side of the revolution.

The east of Libya has completely fallen to the revolution, but not before paying a heavy price in lives lost and terrible suffering. Gadaffi ordered the air force to strafe and bomb anti government protesters, images have emerged from hospitals in cities like Benghazi of bodies ripped apart by heavy weapons fire.

In the west of the country too protests have started in every major city and town. An uprising in the capital Tripoli seems however to have been bloodily suppressed. Gadaffi is battling for control with those police and army units still loyal to him. He relies on the support of the so-called

Revolutionary Committees, the unelected state within a state which emerged in the 1960s when Gadaffi and sections of the military seized power. Then he claimed to be an Arab socialist and anti-imperialist like Egypt's Gamel Abdul Nasser but over the years his regime became more and more repressive and pro-imperialist, especially after making his peace with Britain, France and Italy in 2004.

Nevertheless the regime still has powerful repressive forces at its disposal, totalling 74,000, apart from the 45,000-strong army and the police, which Gadaffi has always feared as a possible source of coups. Amongst his most reliable supports are the Mukhabarat (the security services), the revolutionary committee militia which is recruited from his tribal allies, the Deterrent Battalion, and the notorious 32nd Brigade, commanded by Col Gaddafi's second-youngest son, Khemis. There is also an Islamic Legion, recruited from Muslims from the Sahel and probably behind the rumours of "African mercenaries," unable to speak Arabic. These have been unleashed on the Libyan people.

The tyrant maybe able to hold Tripoli for a time, but if so the cost for the people will be terrible indeed. The BBC reports that the city's population has been terrorised into keeping off the streets after many demonstrators were gunned down. But his regime is isolated and he can rely only on his extensive clique of family and tribal supporters with which he has surrounded himself. He has lost control of most of the country. Either someone in his entourage will betray him, or the resistance will seize Tripoli. Gadaffi will

either flee or fall victim to the justified rage of his victims.

The imperialists are terrified that the fall of Gaddafi will lead to the unravelling of complex relations with reactionary governments across Africa as well as stimulating further the toppling of regimes in the Arab world. Gaddafi, despite his verbal defiance of the west for decades, has recently acted as a useful ally of the imperialists by using his huge financial resources to fund the African Union 'peacekeepers' and support governments in countries like Mali and Niger. That is why he was visited and fettered. He may have been a persona non grata in western capitals for years but he was recently a valuable asset for France and Britain in the region, helping to stabilise situations which might otherwise have seen governments friendly to them overthrown.

Disgustingly some on the left - in the name of anti-imperialism - have rushed to the defence of Gaddafi's regime. In Britain the Workers Revolutionary Party - a tiny shrunken descendant of the organisation once led by Gerry Healy - has published a scandalous article arguing that Gaddafi should stand firm to preserve his rule, crushing the movement on the streets. They are following the road trodden by their founder Healy, who discovered in the 1970s that the 'Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya' was a socialist paradise; to which he rendered lucrative service by fawning on Gaddafi (and Saddam Hussein) in their daily paper.

The Communist Party of Britain have recently published a letter in their paper reminding us not to forget the great advances that were made under Gaddafi's rule. The old style Stalinists cannot get over the old habit of fawning on dictators, dressing them up in supposedly progressive colours because they instituted some welfare reform, and passing them off as benevolent leaders of the people.

Libya's revolution has not been treated by the world's media along the same lines as the struggle of the Egyptian people. Why? Because it has turned into an armed uprising, a civil war against the regime. Socialist must support this rising and wish it a speedy victory. The bloodshed which of course is not the fault of the Libyans may lead to some idiots on the left to claim they should have limited themselves to non-violence - like the Egyptians. Firstly this was not some sort of choice of tactics - hundreds died in Egypt not thousands because the generals dared not use the army for fear it would mutiny. Gaddafi has prepared a corrupt and criminalised machine of repression that is less open to pressure from below.

But when thousands of people are paying with their lives the price for their freedom they cannot let their sacrifice result in simply another branch of the military taking power or the UN arriving to usher in a 'stable transition government' one which will rob the people of the fruits of their victory. The liberated cities should elect delegates to a revolutionary constituent assembly to act as the new government, such a body should be based on the genuine revolutionary councils, set up to overthrow the dictatorship during struggle. Libyans need to beware of and oppose any intervention by European or US forces

Hopefully the battle of Tripoli will see another tyrant fall - spreading and deepening the revolution in the Arab world, perhaps Algeria being next - driving imperialism out of the region and opening the road for the working class to take the lead in the struggle for A Socialist United States of North Africa and the Middle East. Then at last it will be possible to lift the region out of poverty, using its huge mineral wealth for the benefit of the working people.

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