

Imperialist hypocrisy over Libya

Richard Brenner Wed, 31/08/2011 - 17:50

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Then Libya rose in revolt against a dictator who, for all his past clashes with them, was up till then a perfectly adequate guardian of their interests.

When Benghazi fell to the revolution, the Western powers had to intervene to preserve the concessions Gaddafi granted them, as well as to refurbish their democratic credentials in the Arab world. But even then, they still urged Gaddafi to reform and negotiate with the rebels.

Even after they began aerial attacks on the armoured columns threatening to massacre Benghazi, they refused to provide the rebels with arms, hoping for a deal to put 'responsible' elements of the old regime in charge.

Only after the battle for Misrata, when it became clear that no compromise was on offer from either side, did they send in covert Special Forces to help the rebel National Transitional Council (NTC) to victory. Now they want to create a pliant pro-imperialist regime in Tripoli.

Like the new regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, this regime will try to disarm and swindle the demonstrators of Benghazi, Misrata and Tripoli, and the young fighters of the rebel armies, of their hopes for democracy and social justice.

The pundits demand that 'the lessons of Iraq' be learned; that Gaddafi's police, army, militias, judiciary and civil service be lightly purged but restored to service. What they dare not say quite so openly is that the civilian fighters must be disarmed.

The triumph of the rebel forces 'thanks in large measure to imperialist military aid and under a cravenly pro-imperialist leadership' has thrown the left into confusion. Some big names on the populist left have always been pro-Gaddafi, like Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Jacob Zuma of South Africa's African National Congress. 'We can add the old Stalinist and Maoist Communist Parties, as well as those remnants of the Gerry Healy tradition that never fully shook off their master's venal attachment to the 'Libyan Socialist Jamahiriya.'

These worshipers of totalitarian regimes 'as long as they are in the US and EU's bad books' distinguish between 'good' or 'genuine' revolutions and 'fake' or 'CIA' revolutions. The first are directed against

pro-American tyrants like Mubarak or Ben Ali, while the second are against 'anti-imperialist' tyrants like Assad, Ahmadinejad or Mugabe. These latter struggles for democracy, they say, 'play into the hands of imperialism.'

As if the basic fight of the workers and poor against dictators should be sacrificed purely to prop up these butchers, who are themselves completely capitalist. A government of the workers and peasants in Syria, Iran or Zimbabwe would be a million times more of a threat to the multinationals of America and Europe than any number of so-called anti-imperialist bourgeois regimes.

Neutrality?

NATO's undoubted success in co-opting the rebel leadership to their purposes does not at all invalidate the struggle of the Libyan people to overthrow Gaddafi. But it does seem to have confused the Socialist Workers Party.

At first the SWP rightly supported the Libyan revolution, while at the same time correctly condemning the NATO bombing. But as the civil war dragged on and the NTC's pro-imperialist character became more obvious, the SWP decided to abandon the rebels for a more neutral line.

In its paper Socialist Worker Judith Orr argued on 27 August that 'the nature of the struggle in Libya is now fundamentally different from the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt that originally inspired it. It became so once Western forces decided to appropriate it. [?] This was no longer a rebellion that would challenge Western wealth and power.'

The SWP's cold feet leaves them dodging the whole issue revolutionaries need to be confronting head on. The fact that their leaders back NATO doesn't mean there can be no opposition to this from the rank and file of the revolution. Indeed, as we go to press, rebels in Misrata are in struggle against the NTC for appointing a Gaddafi thug as their security chief.

In democratic revolutions against dictators like in Libya, the job is not to declare the masses have already lost, or to equate them with their reactionary leaders, but to fight for the working class to come to the head of the struggle: to create a leadership that can fight off NTC and NATO control and turn the democratic revolution into a struggle for working class power and socialism.

That is the Trotskyist strategy of permanent revolution and socialists should not be deflected from it.

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