

The struggle for democracy reaches Libya

Joana Ramiro Thu, 17/02/2011 - 14:32

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Colonel Gaddafi's regime is under threat, writes Joana Ramiro as the mass protests reach Libya

As Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak before him, today will see Libya's despotic ruler, Colonel Gaddafi, facing the anger and discontent of his people.

Echoing the protests in Egypt, the opposition groups have called a 'Day of Anger' which will mark the beginning of the Libyan uprising and the possible end of yet another Middle Eastern regime.

Clashes between young protestors and reactionary groups have already taken the life of four people on the streets of Al-Bayda, East Libya, in the last 24 hours. But while the European Union rushed to call the Libyan government to respect the right to assemble and the protestors to engage solely in peaceful action, the streets of Benghazi and Al-Bayda (second and third largest cities in the country) start filling with all of those clamouring to end 41 years of oppression.

After Egypt, Libyans seem to be the ones picking the Tunisian revolutionary torch with several thousand strong protests taking place across the main cities in recent weeks. A measure of the eccentricity and delusion of Gaddafi's regime is that he said he would even join in the protests against his rule.

In a country where signs of dissent are severely repressed, foreign based opposition website www.libya-watanona.com ^[1] encouraged Libyans to follow the Egyptian and Tunisian example and take the streets.

'From every square in our beloved country, people should all come together in one city and one square to make this regime and its supporters afraid, and force them to run away because they are cowards,' commented a reader, alluding to Cairo's Tahrir Square occupation.

Libya has been under Muammar al-Gaddafi's rule since 1969, when the then junior military officer led a bloodless coup d'état deposing King Idris. Imposing a supposedly 'direct, popular-democracy' and proclaiming Libya as the last bastion against imperialism, Gaddafi created his own Stalinistic empire. Drawing from a miscellany of political influences - from Mao to Nasser, with several stints of political Islamism - Gaddafi is also the ideological architect of the Third Universal Theory, in which he rejects both capitalism and communism as elitist systems.

During the time that he made regular outbursts against imperialism and he was considered an enemy of the west, but relations improved after 2007 when Gaddafi made it clear he wanted to come in from the cold and join the ranks of the pro imperialist regimes which cover the Arab world. He was rewarded with trade contracts and a small allowance of money every year to buy US military equipment.

For all the valuable reforms Colonel Gaddafi implemented (particularly within welfare, education and liberation), the regime is nonetheless ruled by a nepotistic political stratum and financial corruption. Libyans suffer from lack of political liberties and harsh censorship, high levels of unemployment and

ruthless inequalities in wealth distribution. In the last decade Gaddafi and his government have applied radical market reforms in a hypocritical attempt to ascend onto the stratosphere of Western capitalist state elites. The result is the exploitation of the Libyan working classes and even higher inequity between rich and poor.

The Libyan uprising faces several enemies within and outside the country. Reuters reports that ?Libya accounts for about 2 percent of the world's crude exports - Shell, BP and Eni have invested billions of dollars in tapping its oil fields?. Yet, in a time in which no one predicted the rapid toppling of Ben Ali and Mubarak, it is safe to say that even international corporation backed fat cats like Muammar al-Gaddafi, who describes himself as the ?Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution?, are moving a step closer to the end of their odious regimes.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.libya-watanona.com>