

Libya: A fight to the finish

THE UPRISING against Libya's dictator Muammar Gaddafi has left at least 1,000 dead and led to thousands fleeing the fighting. Tens of thousands of migrants are stranded near Libya's Tunisian border.

Niall Mulholland,
Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

Many towns across Libya have fallen to the opposition in recent days. But Tripoli is still largely in the grip of the regime, with tanks and checkpoints guarding the main roads into the capital. The situation inside the city is becoming more chaotic and desperate.

Groups of heavily armed opposition forces, which are mainly made up of young people and former members of the security forces from Benghazi city and the east, are reportedly planning to march towards western Libya, to link up with opposition militias near Tripoli.

More tribes and former Gaddafi ministers, high ranking officials and diplomats denounce the Gaddafi regime and declare allegiance to the revolution.

However, the struggle for power can still be protracted and accompanied by much more bloodshed. Gaddafi forces are attempting to re-take rebel territory. Gaddafi makes blood-curdling threats against demonstrators, mixed with anti-imperialist phrases and attempts to foster divide and rule tactics - offering some tribes large amounts of money and land.

Western powers are now quickly publicly shedding their cosy links with the brutal Gaddafi regime. They are exploiting their past hostility to Gaddafi to present themselves as being on the side of the 'people', something they do not do in regard to the semi-feudal regimes of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

The western powers are scrambling to influence any post-Gaddafi regime, to ensure continuing preferential and lucrative big business access to Libya's oil fields and to safeguard imperialist interests in a vital geo-strategic region.

The US, in particular, is terrified that the Libyan events could be emu-



Children in Benghazi play on top of a disabled tank.

lated in oil-rich Saudi Arabia, where youth on the internet are calling 11 March the day of "revolution".

Imperialism

THE UN and EU have imposed sanctions against the Libyan dictator and his family. Western politicians call for a 'no-fly zone' over Libya. The US publicly backed anti-Gaddafi groups in eastern Libya and Cameron suggested Britain might arm Libyan rebels.

Some politicians go further and call for direct western military intervention, dressed up as 'humanitarian aid'. Yet Western leaders are very hesitant and divided about taking military action. They fear getting dragged into another prolonged conflict in the Middle East and facing the wrath of the Arab masses.

Workers and youth everywhere must oppose all attempts at Western armed intervention, which would be intended to safeguard vital imperialist interests and to cut across revolutionary movements in the region.

Amongst the Libyan masses there is opposition to imperialist intervention in the region. "Despite the heavy sacrifice they are offering every day, Libyans utterly reject any foreign intervention, even for their defence and protection," writes Mahmoud Al-Nakou, a Libyan au-

thor (Guardian 28/02/11). "The people are adamant that this revolution is theirs alone."

But various 'community committees' and 'councils of the elders' have been set up in Benghazi, Misrata and Zawiyah to 'restore order' and opposition forces controlling eastern cities have formed a 'national council' in expectation of the fall of Tripoli. The former justice minister, Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, announced that he would head an interim government, suggesting that it has the backing of the US. He also said an agreement could be reached with the sons of Gaddafi, echoing some Western politicians.

Although Mustafa Abdel-Jalil's comments are disputed by other opposition figures, they still intend to include him in an interim government. This should act as a warning to the Libyan masses - their revolution is in danger of being hijacked by remnants of the Gaddafi regime, pro-capitalist opposition leaders, reactionary tribal leaders and imperialist interests.

Committees vital

FOR THE revolution to win its goals - real democratic rights and a transformation in living standards - it needs democratically-elected committees that truly represent the interests of the mass of working

people, youth and the poor, in the neighbourhoods, workplaces and colleges, linked up at local, regional and national levels.

The masses armed, under democratic control, can defend themselves against Gaddafi's forces, march on his last bases of support, and sweep away the dictator and his entire regime while preventing the country once again falling under foreign control.

Such a mass movement would immediately introduce full democratic rights and oversee elections to a revolutionary constituent assembly.

A government representing the interests of workers and small farmers would take the oil fields into public ownership, and other major planks of the economy, under democratic workers' control and management.

This would ensure that the country's huge natural riches serve the majority of society not only an elite around the corrupt Gaddafi family and giant multinational companies.

To ensure this, organisations of the working class need to be formed, including independent unions and a mass party of the working class, with bold socialist policies.

Such organisations would oppose not just Gaddafi and the remnants of his regime but all pro-capitalist and reactionary forces in Libya and meddling imperialism.

the **committee for a workers' international**

THE COMMITTEE for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

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Vincent Kolo, *Chinaworker.info*

Tunisia: Revolution and counter-revolution on the streets

PRIME MINISTER Mohamed Ghannouchi announced his resignation on Sunday 27 February after three days of mass protests in Tunis and despite fierce repression by police. Tear gas had filled the air, live ammunition was fired and another five people were killed.

CWI reporters,
(28 February)

Demonstrations and protests took place in many parts of the country but large numbers of people had decided to travel to Tunis to join and support the sit-down occupation in the Kasbah square and to take part in the huge 'day of anger' demonstration in Tunis on Friday.

100,000 protested on Tunis' streets - the biggest demonstrations since the departure of the dictator, Ben Ali, on 14 January.

Protesters entered the military zone and started to storm the interior ministry - important symbol of the dictatorship. Police unleashed heavy repression, shooting dead an 18-year-old on that night. This fuelled Saturday's anger and was the main reason why thousands of people, mainly youth, took to the streets on the following day.

The police repression, however, shocked many people. They saw a reminder of the brutal methods of the old regime.

In among a crowd fleeing from live ammunition rounds, a plain clothes police officer drew his revolver pointing it at people before running down an alley.

State media and the interior ministry are putting the blame for this violence on the protesters.

They are portraying them as hooligans and looters, in an attempt to isolate them and to gain points of support among small shopkeepers, and other middle class layers, under the cover of a 'return to law and order'.

However, responsibility lies with the extreme police provocation of peaceful protests and the undoubted use of provocateurs, against whom unarmed protesters tried to defend themselves with makeshift barricades and weapons.

The violence must serve as a warning to the revolutionary movement. Mass actions and demonstrations need to be properly defended. The organised workers' movement can play a key role in organising mass self-defence.

This would not only protect the protesters but also prevent some of

the most desperate sections from going down the blind alley of riots and individual acts of violence. This could also ensure the support of the middle classes for the revolution.

Clear calls need to be made to rank-and-file soldiers in order to win them over actively to the revolution's side, and assist in neutralising the forces of reaction.

Old regime

THE NEW prime minister, Béji Caïd Essebsi, is an old politician who held key ministerial positions under Habib Bourguiba's rule (first president of Tunisia from 1957 until 1987). By making this change, the regime hopes to cut across and divide the movement.

However, the initial response in the Kasbah is to continue the struggle. As long as many figures of the old regime are still in power, working people and poor still face a future of poverty and a lack of jobs and decent education.

It is therefore essential that the demand for economic and social change becomes an integral part of this struggle and is taken up by the trade union and workers' movement.

The executive committee of the

UGTT trade union has now called for the immediate resignation of the present government and the setting up of a government of 'technocrats' until elections are eventually held. But this is nowhere near enough. After all, the UGTT leaders supported the setting up of the present government with Ghannouchi at its head!

Working-class people and the youth are saying little has changed. A total clear out of the old regime is necessary and fair and free elections must be held. They want a government that genuinely represents their interests.

The revolution must be pushed on towards the establishment of a government of workers, young people, poor farmers and small traders elected from committees in the workplaces and neighbourhoods and also amongst the rank and file soldiers.

Such a government would complete the process of pushing out the old owners of industry and commerce and establishing control of the commanding heights of the economy and genuine democratic planning. In this way people's lives can be radically changed.

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