

Gaddafi's dictatorship toppled

But Libyan workers, youth and poor must act independently of imperialism

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After six long months of bloody, protracted struggle the overthrow of the dictatorial Gaddafi regime was greeted with rejoicing by large numbers of, but by no means all, Libyans.

If this overthrow of another autocratic ruler had been purely the result of struggle by the Libyan working masses it would have been as widely acclaimed as Mubarak's was in Egypt, but the direct involvement of imperialism casts a dark shadow over the revolution's future.

Unfortunately the Libyan revolution that began last February has, in many ways, been thrown off course.

Role of Nato

Unlike the ousting of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, the way in which Gaddafi has been removed means that a victory for the Libyan people was also a success for imperialism. Without Nato acting as the rebels' airforce or the soldiers, weapons, organisation and training that Nato and some other countries like the feudal Qatar autocracy supplied, Tripoli would not have fallen to the rebels in the way that it did.

The imperialist powers are attempting to present Libya as a success for 'liberal interventionism', ie their right to intervene in other countries on 'humanitarian' or 'democratic' grounds. Of course, 'liberal interventionism' does not apply to imperialism's dictatorial friends and allies in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Yemen or elsewhere.

The Nato powers hope that, after the disasters of Afghanistan and Iraq, they can win justification for further interventions in defence of their own interests.

Despite the involvement of large numbers of Libyans in the fighting there are not, so far, any signs of Libyan workers, youth and poor establishing their own independent rule over society.

Unfortunately, Gaddafi's overthrow did not have the same character as the revolutions in Tunisia or Egypt, or even of the early days of the uprising in Benghazi when popular committees were established and briefly were the power in that city.

This was not simply due to the Gaddafi regime's brutal repression of the mid-February protests; repression has not immediately stopped the repeated demonstrations in Syria.

Transitional Council

Gaddafi, learning from the overthrow of Ben Ali and Mubarak, launched a counter-offensive against Benghazi and other centres of the revolution. These were certainly threatened but could have been protected by mass popular defence alongside a revolutionary appeal to workers, youth and the poor in the rest of Libya. But the self-appointed leadership of the uprising would not do such a thing.

Dominated by a combination of defectors from the regime and openly pro-imperialist elements, the Transitional National Council (TNC), pushing aside the initial popular mood against any foreign intervention, looked to the imperialist powers and semi-feudal Arab states for support.

The main imperialist powers seized this opportunity to step in,

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justifying their intervention on 'humanitarian' grounds to save lives. But these same powers adopted a mild approach to the Syrian regime's repression and maintained a virtual silence on the brutality of their close ally, the Bahraini regime. This simply confirmed that the Libyan intervention was based on a cynical calculation.

Some imperialist leaders, like Sarkozy in France, sought to gain advantages for themselves, but their general aims were to establish a more reliable, pro-imperialist regime in Libya, seize a more lucrative share of Libya's oil and gas wealth and, above all, intervene to seek to control the revolutions sweeping North Africa and the Middle East.

Intervention

Nato's intervention allowed Gaddafi to rally support against what some Libyans saw as an attempt by the US, Britain, France, and others to regain control over Libya's assets.

Against this, there can be no doubt that widespread illusions were created that Nato was acting in the interests of the anti-Gaddafi revolution, an illusion that the major capitalist powers are now using as they attempt to control developments in Libya and secure the country for further exploitation.

This is why the idea that the UN decision to intervene and Nato's actions could be supported meant accepting the derailing of the Libyan revolution. The idea that there was 'no alternative' to Nato was already disproved in the magnificent Egyptian movement that led to Mubarak's ousting.

The imperialist powers intervened for their own reasons, not in the interests of the Libyan working masses and youth. Any failure to explain this politically disarms the workers' movement, leaving it unable to warn of imperialism's intentions.

But what will happen now is not clear. The current situation indicates that there are some, whether for political or tribal reasons, continuing for now to fight against the TNC. At the same time, there is no real unity among the main elements that fought Gaddafi.

The population is also becoming heavily armed. This poses the possibility, even if the current battles end, of further fighting in the future, including tribal, national or religious conflicts.

Partly in view of this, alongside the start of a scramble for business and

trade contracts, the main imperialist countries are stepping up their intervention, including increasing talk of a 'stabilisation force'.

Diverted revolution

While Nato has been planning for Gaddafi's overthrow, including learning from what are now seen as the 'mistakes' made in Afghanistan and Iraq after the initial military victories, events will not necessarily go the way the imperialists hope.

Although the combination of Libya's small population and its oil and gas wealth will allow at least some rebuilding and social concessions, they will not automatically resolve all the issues now coming to the surface in Libya including potential regional and tribal tensions.

A possibly significant pointer to the future is the absence, so far, of truly mass celebrations in Tripoli of the end of Gaddafi's rule, the mood seems to be more a wish for an end to the fighting, a return to more normal life alongside both hopes and fears for the future.

There are also questions over the position of the Berber minority, about 10% of the population, and of those who continue to support Gaddafi or, at least, oppose foreign intervention.

The very fluid situation that has now developed is, to a great extent, a result of the way in which the revolution has been diverted from a developing mass movement, with its own organisations, debates and policies, into a purely military struggle under Nato tutelage.

Currently, the self-appointed TNC is attempting, with Nato help, to impose itself on the situation. But there is no guarantee that it can, in reality, do this.

The TNC is currently largely a fiction. For a time, it appointed a 'government', but that was dissolved after the still unexplained 28 July 'arrest' and subsequent killing of Younes, Gaddafi's former interior minister who became the TNC's top military commander.

Jibril, who is still being presented as the 'head of government', has generally been out of the country because "he fears for his own safety in Benghazi" [The Times, London, 23 August, 2011.]

The TNC, based in the east, clearly lacked standing in the west, as was shown by the fighters in Misrata who rejected its authority. Whether it can now build its position and, if so, for how long, are open questions.

For the Libyan masses, especially the youth, workers and poor, this revolution was for an end to oppression and the stifling, corrupt regime, and for higher living standards.

But despite any immediate oil-funded concessions and rebuilding, these aims will, in the long run, come into conflict with the reality of the crisis-ridden capitalist economy. A new world recession would hit Libya in the same way as in the 1980s when its gross domestic product collapsed by over 40% as the oil price fell.

But to prevent the danger of a new collapse of the economy and to block the asset stripping of the country, a break with capitalism is required. The TNC is not going to do this.

A programme for the Libyan revolution that will genuinely benefit the mass of the population would be based on winning and defending real democratic rights and a workers' and poor government that would end corruption and privilege.

It would safeguard and further develop the social gains made since the discovery of oil, oppose any form of re-colonisation and base itself on a democratically controlled, publicly owned economy planning the use of the country's resources for the future benefit of the mass of the people.

This is why Libyan workers and youth should have no illusions in Nato or put any trust in the TNC which is, in essence, tied to imperialism. This tie-up was illustrated in the TNC's draft Libyan constitution, first published by the British foreign ministry, which declares that "the interests and rights of foreign nationals and companies will be protected".

The creation of an independent movement of Libyan and migrant workers, poor and youth that could rely on its own action and struggles to implement a real revolutionary transformation of the country is the only way to thwart the imperialists' plans, end dictatorship and permanently transform the lives of the mass of the people.

As Tunisia and Egypt have shown, the mass overthrow of dictators is not the end of a revolution as the working masses strive to achieve their demands and aspirations. Although developments in Libya have taken a very different course, the demands of the masses have not gone away and in the struggle to win them lies the possibility of building a socialist movement that can truly transform the country.

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.

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