

Libya: no to western military intervention

Build an independent movement of workers and youth!

The UN Security Council's majority decision to impose a 'no-fly zone', while greeted with joy on the streets of Benghazi and Tobruk, was in no way intended to defend the Libyan revolution. As ROBERT BECHERT, from the Committee for a Workers' International, writes, the air strikes' growing civilian toll is leading to increasing questioning of these attacks.

The longer this situation continues, the more questioning and opposition will develop. Already many are disgusted by the hypocrisy of governments proclaiming their willingness to defend Libyans while doing nothing when civilians are shot down in Yemen or attacked in Gaza.

The western powers' silence on Saudi Arabian backing for the Bahraini elite's repression confirms, in many people's eyes, that what they wish for in Libya is for that oil rich country to also become a client state.

Revolutionaries in Libya may think that this UN decision will help them, but they are mistaken. It is not a lifeline that could 'save' the revolution against Gaddafi. The major imperialist powers decided that they wanted to exploit the revolution, gain control over its leadership and thus try to replace Gaddafi with a more reliable (for them and their interests) regime. And they hoped that this demonstration of their military power would warn the Arab masses not to go 'too far' in their revolutions.

But it has already become clear that the imperialist powers' hope of a quick victory is disappearing. On the one hand, the forces around Gaddafi, for the moment, appear to be holding firm, while the rebel forces seem unable to advance around the Gulf of Sirte, let alone towards Tripoli.

This is the background to the growing tensions between the attacking powers, especially the arguments over who is controlling the operation, whether or not Nato should be involved and over what their overall aim should be. Some fear that they may get involved in a ground war, or that the country could break up.

Movement stalled

The stalling of the revolution is symbolised by the weakness of the self-appointed leadership of the Interim Transitional National Council (ITNC) which is dominated by recent defectors from Gaddafi and pro-capitalist elements. This body seems incapable of appealing to the masses in western Libya and is increasingly relying on the imperialist powers for aid.

While the intervention in Libya initially beat back an attack on Benghazi, it is clear that the attacking powers, with their growing calls for Gaddafi's removal, are already starting to try to shape the character of any post-Gaddafi Libya.

The regime was able to mount a counter-attack because the uprising's initial drive towards the west, where two-thirds of Libyans live, was not based on a clear revolutionary appeal. Despite popular support in the east, there was no organised mass movement, built upon popular, democratic committees that could offer a clear programme to

win support from the mass of the western population and rank and file soldiers while waging a revolutionary war. This gave Gaddafi an opportunity to regroup.

The growth in support for a no-fly zone was a reversal of the sentiment expressed in the English language posters put up in Benghazi in February declaring "No to Foreign Intervention - Libyans can do it by themselves!". This followed the wonderful examples of Tunisia and Egypt where sustained mass action completely undermined totalitarian regimes.

The Libyan opposition masses were confident that their momentum would secure victory. But, at least partly due to the character of the opposition's leadership, Gaddafi was able to retain a grip in Tripoli, the largest city, of nearly 1.8 million.

Gaddafi's counter-offensive led to a change in attitude among the opposition towards foreign intervention. That allowed the largely pro-Western ITNC to overcome youth opposition to asking the West for aid.

Now, if a stalemate develops and Gaddafi remains in power in Tripoli, it could mean a de facto breakup that goes back to the separate entities that existed before Italy first created Libya after 1912 and Britain recreated it in the late 1940s.

But, whatever effect this no-fly zone and military intervention have, any trust placed in either the UN or the imperialist powers threatens to undermine all the genuine hopes and aspirations of the revolution that began in February.

Until recently these Western powers were quite happy to deal with, and pander to, the murderous Gaddafi clique in order to maintain a partnership, especially in oil and gas. The day after the UN took its decision, the Murdoch-owned Wall Street Journal lamented that: "the close partnership between the Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's intelligence service and the CIA has been severed" (18/3/2011).

Now imperialism is trying to refurbish its 'democratic' image while working to help install a more 'reliable' regime in Libya, or at least a part of Libya. Libya, with its huge oil reserves, is a special prize as its small population and its geography make it easier to exploit.

Role of the working class

Gaddafi's first reaction to this year's dramatic revolutionary events was to side with the dictatorial, corrupt autocrats. Just after Ben Ali fled from Tunisia, Gaddafi told Tunisians that they had "suffered a great loss" because "there is none better than Ben Ali to govern". Perhaps revealing how he viewed his own future, Gaddafi added that he had hoped that Ben Ali would rule "for life".

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that, since 1969, on the basis of a large oil income and a small

The fate of the revolution will be decided in Libya itself

population, there has been a big improvement in most Libyans' lives, especially in education and health. This is something which at least partly explains why Gaddafi still has some basis of support amongst the population.

Unlike Egypt and Tunisia the working class in Libya has not, so far, begun to play an independent role in the revolution. Furthermore many workers in Libya are migrants who have fled the country in recent weeks.

The absence of a national focal point which, for example, the Tunisian UGTT trade union federation provided (despite its pro-Ben Ali national leadership), complicated the situation in Libya. The huge revolutionary enthusiasm of the population has not, so far, been given an independent organised expression.

Now, in addition to anti-imperialist rhetoric, Gaddafi has made concessions to maintain support. Each family has been given the equivalent of \$450. Some public sector workers have been given 150% wage increases and taxes and customs duties on food have been abolished.

But these steps do not wipe away all that has happened over the past years. Furthermore they do not answer the demands for real democratic rights or an end to the growing frustration of Libya's youthful population (average age of 24) against the regime's corruption and suffocating grip.

Gaddafi's use of the threat of imperialist intervention to divide the country did gather some support. Now it may gain more if the country does actually become divided, especially if the air attacks continue and widen out to civilian targets, as happened in Serbia in 1999.

Gaddafi's promise that, "If needs be, we will open all the arsenals", indicates that he can attempt to rest on anti-colonial feelings or simply try to threaten imperialism that it's 'me or chaos'. Gaddafi will try to make sure he or his family keeps hold of the reins of power, but impending defeat could persuade more of his top officials to jump ship and join the INTC. Internationally millions, who

have watched and supported the revolutions across the Middle East, will ask: 'what can be done to genuinely help the Libyan revolution internationally?' Firstly, there can be no support for the no-fly zone and military intervention. It is not in the interests of Libyan people.

On its own the no-fly zone will not automatically lead to the overthrow of Gaddafi. In fact, like Saddam Hussein, he could entrench his position for a time in those parts of the country that his regime controls, so long as the intervention did not go onto the offensive.

However, the growing unofficial calls for 'regime change' show that sections of the imperialist powers are looking to use their intervention to create a client regime that will, they hope, extinguish the fires of revolution, at least in Libya.

Those on the left who argue that 'there is no realistic alternative' to stop Gaddafi's attacks are precisely ignoring what happened in Tunisia and Egypt, namely that a determined mass movement of the working masses and youth can overthrow a dictatorship. A broad mobilisation of Benghazi's one million plus population could have blocked Gaddafi's small forces.

Active opposition to this imperialist attack and solidarity with the Libyan workers and youth needs to be organised. Trade unions internationally need to block the export of Libyan oil and gas. Bank workers should organise the freezing of all the Gaddafi regime's financial assets.

Revolutionary programme

The fate of the revolution will be decided inside Libya. Its victory requires a programme that can cut across tribal and regional divisions and unite the mass of the population against the Gaddafi clique and in the struggle for a better future.

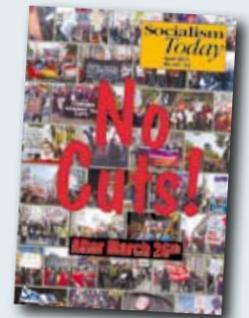
There can be no support for the imperialist intervention, despite its UN colouring. The Libyan working masses and youth should show no trust whatsoever in the so-called democratic Western powers.

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, an end to corruption and privilege, the safeguarding and further development of the social gains made since the discovery of oil, opposition to any form of re-colonisation and for a democratically controlled, publicly owned economy planned to use the country's resources for the future.

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

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