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Defend the Libyan revolution

No to imperialist intervention

Build an independent force of workers and the poor

The Libyan revolution is at a crossroads. But the turning point is not simply the rapidly shifting battle lines around the Gulf of Sirte. No, we are witnessing a determined effort by the Western powers to seize control over the revolution and exploit it for their own ends.

This is something which could possibly strengthen the Gaddafi regime, if it has not yet exhausted its political capital in the country, particularly in the heavily populated areas controlled by him and his supporters.

It is absolutely clear that the Nato-led military intervention is not simply to 'save' the civilian population. Now they are effectively acting as the airforce of the rebels and, for example, did nothing to stop the shelling of the civilians in Sirte.

Wary of being involved in another Iraq or Afghanistan, Obama has ruled out sending in ground troops, unlike Cameron who has already sent small SAS units into the country. But this is a dangerous strategy, not just in Libya but also at home as polls in Britain and the US show rising doubts and opposition to any ground intervention.

The London conference on Libya on 29 March drew back from following in French premier Nicolas Sarkozy's footsteps and immediately recognising the self-appointed Interim Transitional National Council (ITNC) as the nucleus for a new government.

This was not possible as, at the time of writing, the ITNC only claims to control part of the country and a minority of the population. The conference itself was filled with hypocrisy. Its closing statement proclaims that "the Libyan people must be free to determine their own future", but the powers at the conference have, at very most, only mildly criticised the oppression and lack of democratic rights in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria or Yemen.

In truth the western powers are moving to steal the fruits of the popular uprising that began in February. This process has some

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similarities to the way, over 20 years ago, in which the mass movements for democratic rights and an end to privilege in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe were diverted into the channel of capitalist restoration in these countries, with catastrophic results for the mass of the population.

Today in Libya the absence of an independent movement of working people that could start to build a real, democratic alternative to Gaddafi's rule is allowing the combination of recent defectors from the regime and pro-western elements to attempt to build their power with the support of NATO.

The latest rebel field commander leader, Khalifa Hifter, is a former Gaddafi ally who, until a few weeks ago, had been allowed by the US government to live comfortably near Washington for almost 20 years. He has spent that time trying to build a military force to combat the regime. Presumably the Clinton and Bush administrations saw Hifter as an ally.

But neither the US nor the other western governments have any genuine concern for

the real interests of the majority of the Libyan people; on the contrary they are looking at regaining more control over Libya's oil and gas while also demonstrating their power in the Middle East. This is one reason why, right from the start, there has been open rivalry between the different powers.

The western powers have no fundamental interest in democracy. Look at how they support the rotten Saudi regime, only last September the US made a \$123 billion arms deal with the Saudi Arabian and the Gulf States' dictatorial regimes. These are the states that have no, or only very limited, democratic rights, yet they are armed to the teeth by the US, Britain and other countries.

The ITNC's limited programme is not certain to win support from the two-thirds of the Libyan population who live in the west of the country. It is simply relying on a combination of Nato air power and the masses' desire for change to secure victory. But this is making it easier for the Gaddafi regime to hang on to power. Gaddafi can correctly portray the ITNC as being in the lap of the western powers who

would like to exploit Libya more. At the same time even western journalists are reporting that many in western Libya fear what would happen if Gaddafi was overthrown; would Libya tend to break up like Somalia, would fundamentalism arise, what would happen to the large social advances in health, education, etc made over the last 40 years?

Admiral James Stavridis's testimony to the US Senate that rebel forces in Libya show "flickers" of possible al-Qa'ida presence could help make Gaddafi seem a 'lesser evil' to an alliance of the western powers and fundamentalists.

This is why the key to saving the Libyan revolution lies in the hands of the working masses. Tunisia and Egypt have already shown that determined struggle can overthrow dictatorships. However the events this year in these three countries have shown that, on its own, willingness to struggle is not enough.

The working masses need to be independently and democratically organised in trade unions and a mass party of workers and the poor with a clear programme. This is necessary to be able to struggle to prevent the gains of their revolutions being snatched away by elements of the old elite or a new elite developing in collaboration with imperialism.

Concretely in Libya the genuinely revolutionary forces of the working masses need to reject any reliance on the UN or Nato and demand an immediate end to this intervention. To defeat Gaddafi's regime, workers and youth need to build their own force that can carry the revolution to victory, a victory that not only wins democratic rights but which ensures that Libya's wealth is genuinely owned and democratically controlled and managed in the masses' interests.

This would lay the basis for liberation and a genuine socialism, not Gaddafi's fake version, that could appeal to the working masses in the Middle East, Africa and beyond.

Saltend workers stand firm

In a magnificent show of determination and solidarity, at 6am on Monday 28 March, 800 construction workers and other trade unionists assembled outside the gates of the Saltend construction site near Hull.

Many of the workers there were still recovering from the journey down to London and back on the previous Saturday to protest against the government's vicious cuts agenda.

But another early morning was needed as 400 construction workers have been locked out of the site by the contractor Redhall for nearly a fortnight.

Delegations from West Burton, Nottinghamshire, Pembroke in Wales and other construction sites, joined the mass picket.

Representatives of the West Burton site reported that all other workers on their site had downed tools on that day in solidarity with Saltend workers.

At midday, over 1,000 trade unionists, including public sector workers, joined the demonstration in the centre of Hull to support the locked-out Saltend workers and to protest about the cuts.

The protest was addressed by speakers from Unison and NUT representing public sector workers, as well as Keith Gibson from the Saltend Lock-out Committee and NSSN convenor Rob Williams.

The site is owned by Vivergo Fuels, who have closed the site "for a period of assessment". Redhall offered the workers £3,000 each in redundancy pay last week, but this was refused as workers



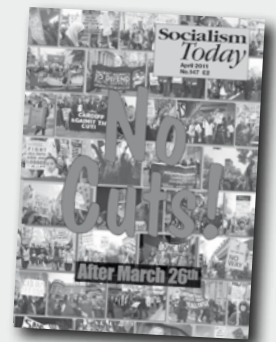
Marching through Hull from the site on 28 March photo Yorkshire SP

vowed to prevent their national agreement NAE-CI, from being undermined. This payment offer



has been increased to £3,300, but the workers are standing firm.

Socialism Today



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