

Comment

# Debate in the US left: Taking sides about Libya

Monday 14 March 2011, by [CHRETIEN Todd](#), [PLS](#), [WWP](#) (Date first published: 28 February 2011).

**Todd Chretien examines the attitude of the Workers World Party and Party for Liberation and Socialism toward Muammar el-Qaddafi's dictatorship in Libya.**

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*"Of all the struggles going on in North Africa and the Middle East right now, the most difficult to unravel is the one in Libya."*

— Workers World Party, February 23, 2011 [see below]

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— Party for Socialism and Liberation, February 24, 2011 [see below]

THOSE WERE the statements last week from two well-known U.S. socialist groups active in anti-imperialist movements. As madman Muammar el-Qaddafi ranted in his bunker about al-Qaeda slipping hallucinogens into young people's coffee in order to make them rebel, the Workers World Party (WWP) and Party for Liberation and Socialism (PSL) refused to take a stand with the Libyan people against a dictator.

These two organizations, part of the same group until 2004, have long accepted the Libyan dictatorship's claim to be progressive and anti-imperialist in spite of the corruption of the country's tiny elite around Qaddafi and the savagery of the regime's police-state repression and violence—now on sickening display for all the world to see.

As recently as 2009, the WWP, for example, published an article that spoke highly of the Qaddafi regime as it celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Libya's "revolution." [see below]

The article said the anniversary "has been acknowledged by governments throughout the African continent and the world"—with Zimbabwe's dictatorial President Robert Mugabe as example number one. The WWP even saluted Qaddafi's close relationship with the right-wing Italian government of Silvio Berlusconi, noting that Italy would "honor the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration [of Qaddafi's rule] with a display by its Air Force aerobatics team."

In its recent statement [see below], PSL noted that "developments in the last decade have greatly and understandably diminished [Qaddafi's] credibility among progressive and anti-imperialist forces

in the region, almost all of which have declared their solidarity with the Libyan revolt.”

That’s a huge understatement. Qaddafi has gone to great lengths to reverse his once-hostile relationship to Western governments.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Libya purchased large amounts of military equipment from the former USSR and Eastern Bloc countries, which were used to go to war with neighboring Chad and construct a vast police state. While the Cold War was still on, the U.S. considered Libya an enemy, and Ronald Reagan targeted the country in the 1980s, including an attempt to assassinate Qaddafi by bombing one of his residences (which killed his 15-month-old daughter).

But in the late 1990s, Qaddafi began to make peace with his former adversaries. And after 9/11, Qaddafi offered Libyan support for the U.S. government’s “war on terror” under George W. Bush. The regime restored diplomatic relations with the U.S., leading ExxonMobil, Chevron and other American corporations to rush into lucrative exploration and production deals.

Libya also reestablished ties to Western Europe, especially Berlusconi in Italy, which was once the colonial ruler of Libya. The Qaddafi-Berlusconi partnership is particularly close, ranging from multibillion-dollar oil deals to a shared affinity for young Italian fashion models.

But neither the lucrative business deals with the West nor revenues from Libya’s vast oil resources have trickled down to the majority of people in the country. Despite Libya’s small population of 6 million, unemployment has remained high (roughly 25 percent) and wages low (around \$250 a month). Meanwhile, Qaddafi’s immediate inner circle has squirreled away fortunes in foreign banks and overseas investments.

This is the regime that the WWP and PSL have supported as “progressive” for years—and which they now refuse to condemn for its savage assault on people demanding democracy.

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SO WHY can’t the PSL and WWP join “almost all progressive and anti-imperialist forces in the region”—and, I would add, around the world, with the notable exceptions of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez—in openly supporting the Libyan people in their rebellion against the dictatorship?

The answer lies in these groups’ view of social revolution.

The Workers World Party was founded in 1959 by Sam Marcy and other members of the Socialist Workers Party in the U.S. The SWP aligned itself with exiled Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky and his struggle against the Stalinist counterrevolution. Thus, when workers in Hungary rose up in 1956 against the so-called “Communist” police state that ruled over them, the SWP organized in solidarity with the workers.

Marcy and the founders of WWP did a somersault, calling the movement in Hungary a “full-scale, nationwide counterrevolution” and siding with the invading Russian tanks sent to suppress the rebellion. (V. Grey, “The Class Character of the Hungarian Uprising,” SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 18, No. 1, January 1957)

Since then, the WWP and the newer PSL (which broke away from the WWP organizationally in 2004, but maintained identical political beliefs) have consistently sided with Stalinist or “anti-imperialist” states against social struggles from below.

In 1968, for example, Marcy cheered on Russian tanks when they were sent into Eastern Europe

again, this time to smash a workers and student uprising in Czechoslovakia. As Marcy wrote, “We support the Warsaw Pact intervention under present circumstances.” [1]

In 1989, the WWP praised the suppression of the protests in Tiananmen Square. In response to a SocialistWorker.org article commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tiananmen rebellion [2], Richard Becker, a leading member of PSL, criticized the International Socialist Organization, writing, “Do they not recognize that the victory of the Tiananmen protesters and their supporters...would have made U.S. imperialism’s victory in 1989-91 even more complete?” [3]

In 1991, top bureaucrats, generals and KGB chiefs launched a military coup in a last-ditch effort to preserve their rule in the former USSR. They were defeated by massive demonstrations in the streets of Moscow. Marcy criticized the coup leaders for their *failure*, writing, “A coalition of military officers, party officials and security forces has made an ill-fated attempt to halt the process of capitalist restoration in the USSR.” [4]

The WWP’s and PSL’s enthusiasm for crackdowns has not diminished with the passage of time. Incredibly, they continue to defend the Chinese Communist Party as an “anti-imperialist” force. In 2008, PSL leader Brian Becker explained that the group must “offer militant political defense of the Chinese government” in the face of mass movements which are hostile to the Communist Party. [5]

In addition to their admiration for the rulers of China, the WWP and PSL extend their support of what might be called “regime socialism” to various less powerful governments, such as North Korea, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Iraq (under Saddam Hussein), Libya, Syria, and even to states they deem to be “anti-imperialist,” such as Iran.

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THE MAIN justification for this characterization is that these governments are (or at least have been) targets of U.S. imperialism.

All genuine socialists in the U.S. must unequivocally oppose all forms of intervention in these countries, whatever the character of their governments. Socialists never support their “own” government in its wars for power and profit. That’s why we call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. military, mercenary and intelligence forces from Iraq and Afghanistan; the end of all aid to Israel, Egypt, Colombia and Saudi Arabia; and the lifting of sanctions against Cuba, to name a few important anti-imperialist positions.

But genuine socialism and anti-imperialism requires more than a simple “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” approach. It requires organizing to link the interests of workers, students, the poor and the oppressed across the world, including to their brothers and sisters in the United States.

This necessitates organizing against the U.S. government’s military attacks on other nations and exposing the hypocrisy of its racist propaganda conducted against political leaders and peoples it decides to demonize. Thus, even though we in the ISO believed that Saddam Hussein of Iraq was a tyrant, we were 100 percent against both U.S. wars against Iraq under George Bush Sr. and Jr., and against Bill Clinton’s deadly sanctions regime.

However, opposing imperialist war and supporting the right of national self-determination does not mean that socialists should give, as Brian Becker puts it, “militant political defense” to every government the U.S. government declares to be its foe.

Instead, while we oppose U.S. (or European or Chinese or Russian) intervention, we also support the right of workers, students and poor people in these countries to rebel, to build social movements, to

fight for their democratic rights like freedom of speech, religion and assembly, and to struggle for union rights, women's and racial equality, and more.

In fact, we think U.S. imperialism is best opposed not by the continuing state power of decrepit, corrupt, bureaucratic rulers, but by rebellion from below.

U.S. imperialism can deal with losing a dictator or two in the Middle East and North Africa. What it can't handle is a region-wide social revolution that threatens its economic, political and military interests.

This is precisely what is happening across the region, and the workers, students and poor of North Africa and the Middle East don't care if the WWP and PSL have anointed the regime they happen to live under as "progressive" or not.

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IF the WWP and PSL issued mealy-mouthed statements about Libya that give the feeling they hope Qaddafi somehow hangs on to power, the two organizations continue to promote their loud and proud support of the Iranian regime's brutal crackdown on dissent. As PSL's Mazda Majidi wrote:

*"[T]here is one obvious difference between the revolutionary movement in Egypt and the Green opposition in Iran. In Egypt, the movement encompasses millions of people from different classes against the U.S. client Mubarak dictatorship. The dictatorship has very little social base left. There were no pro-Mubarak demonstrations, except for the few hundred hired thugs and policemen out of uniform that tried unsuccessfully to quash the protests. In contrast, in Iran, on many occasions, millions of predominantly working-class people have demonstrated in support of the Islamic Republic."* [6]

This is an incredible statement from beginning to end. Majidi dramatically underestimates the social base of the Egyptian regime, reducing it to a "few hundred hired thugs." In fact, tens of thousands of thugs were unleashed on Tahrir Square, resulting in many deaths, and tens of thousands more—the Mubarak regime's police and security service personnel numbered 1.7 million—launched attacks throughout the country. It was only through a heroic mass struggle that these forces were defeated.

Despite what Majidi claims, the "obvious difference" between Egypt and Iran was that the regime lost in Egypt, while the Iranian government of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has so far managed to repress the opposition.

But the simple fact is that the same underlying conditions of poverty, oppression and repression which drove millions to the streets in Iran in 2009 also sparked the revolution in Tunisia, the revolution in Egypt and the rebellion that will hopefully soon overthrow Qaddafi in Libya. The revolutionary wave is sure to continue—and it is bound to make its way back to Tehran, as evidenced by a series of demonstrations over the past month.

Why did it take more than a week for the WWP and PSL to make a statement about the Libyan revolution? Only now that the revolt has achieved mass proportions are these organizations beginning to hedge their bets in case Qaddafi falls, with some vague qualifications of their support for the regime.

Nevertheless, instead of standing forthrightly with the revolution spreading through the Arab world, these groups want to pick and choose which revolutions are "good" and which are "bad." Concretely, under PSL's influence, the ANSWER coalition in San Francisco refused to endorse a rally on February 26 in solidarity with the Libyan uprising. This allegiance to police states may make some

sense in the minds of the WWP and PSL theoreticians, but it has no place in the fight for social justice.

The leaderships of the WWP and PSL have had decades to reconsider their “militant” defense of Stalinism and supposedly “anti-imperialist” police states—and they have sided with the tanks every time.

That is their right. Everyone is free to think what they want. Fortunately, the workers, students and poor of North Africa and the Middle East are demonstrating a clearer understanding of the class struggle.

Of course, socialists and radicals of all stripes must continue to work together to oppose U.S. military intervention and the racist scapegoating that justifies it, despite our disagreements.

But this debate should not be papered over. For several generations, the dominant position among those who called themselves socialists was support for the kind of Stalinist regimes that the WWP and PSL back to this day. It is high time to clear away these distorted theories and recognize that Karl Marx’s commitment to revolution “from below” means supporting the mass struggles spreading from Tunisia to Egypt to Libya and beyond.

**Todd Chretien**

\* From Socialist Worker, February 28, 2011:

<http://socialistworker.org/2011/02/28/taking-sides-about-libya>

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## **EDITORIAL: Libya and imperialism**

### **Workers World Party**

Of all the struggles going on in North Africa and the Middle East right now, the most difficult to unravel is the one in Libya.

What is the character of the opposition to the Gadhafi regime, which reportedly now controls the eastern city of Benghazi?

Is it just coincidence that the rebellion started in Benghazi, which is north of Libya’s richest oil fields as well as close to most of its oil and gas pipelines, refineries and its LNG port? Is there a plan to partition the country?

What is the risk of imperialist military intervention, which poses the gravest danger for the people of the entire region?

Libya is not like Egypt. Its leader, Moammar al-Gadhafi, has not been an imperialist puppet like Hosni Mubarak. For many years, Gadhafi was allied to countries and movements fighting imperialism. On taking power in 1969 through a military coup, he nationalized Libya’s oil and used much of that money to develop the Libyan economy. Conditions of life improved dramatically for the people.

For that, the imperialists were determined to grind Libya down. The U.S. actually launched air strikes on Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986 that killed 60 people, including Gadhafi's infant daughter - which is rarely mentioned by the corporate media. Devastating sanctions were imposed by both the U.S. and the U.N. to wreck the Libyan economy.

After the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 and leveled much of Baghdad with a bombing campaign that the Pentagon exultantly called "shock and awe," Gadhafi tried to ward off further threatened aggression on Libya by making big political and economic concessions to the imperialists. He opened the economy to foreign banks and corporations; he agreed to IMF demands for "structural adjustment," privatizing many state-owned enterprises and cutting state subsidies on necessities like food and fuel.

The Libyan people are suffering from the same high prices and unemployment that underlie the rebellions elsewhere and that flow from the worldwide capitalist economic crisis.

There can be no doubt that the struggle sweeping the Arab world for political freedom and economic justice has also struck a chord in Libya. There can be no doubt that discontent with the Gadhafi regime is motivating a significant section of the population.

However, it is important for progressives to know that many of the people being promoted in the West as leaders of the opposition are long-time agents of imperialism. The BBC on Feb. 22 showed footage of crowds in Benghazi pulling down the green flag of the republic and replacing it with the flag of the overthrown monarch King Idris - who had been a puppet of U.S. and British imperialism.

The Western media are basing a great deal of their reporting on supposed facts provided by the exile group National Front for the Salvation of Libya, which was trained and financed by the U.S. CIA. Google the front's name plus CIA and you will find hundreds of references.

The Wall Street Journal in a Feb. 23 editorial wrote that "The U.S. and Europe should help Libyans overthrow the Gadhafi regime." There is no talk in the board rooms or the corridors of Washington about intervening to help the people of Kuwait or Saudi Arabia or Bahrain overthrow their dictatorial rulers. Even with all the lip service being paid to the mass struggles rocking the region right now, that would be unthinkable. As for Egypt and Tunisia, the imperialists are pulling every string they can to get the masses off the streets.

There was no talk of U.S. intervention to help the Palestinian people of Gaza when thousands died from being blockaded, bombed and invaded by Israel. Just the opposite. The U.S. intervened to prevent condemnation of the Zionist settler state.

Imperialism's interest in Libya is not hard to find. Bloomberg.com wrote on Feb. 22 that while Libya is Africa's third-largest producer of oil, it has the continent's largest proven reserves - 44.3 billion barrels. It is a country with a relatively small population but the potential to produce huge profits for the giant oil companies. That's how the super-rich look at it, and that's what underlies their professed concern for the people's democratic rights in Libya.

Getting concessions out of Gadhafi is not enough for the imperialist oil barons. They want a government that they can own outright, lock, stock and barrel. They have never forgiven Gadhafi for overthrowing the monarchy and nationalizing the oil. Fidel Castro of Cuba in his column "Reflections" takes note of imperialism's hunger for oil and warns that the U.S. is laying the basis for military intervention in Libya.

In the U.S., some forces are trying to mobilize a street-level campaign promoting such U.S. intervention. We should oppose this outright and remind any well-intentioned people of the millions

killed and displaced by U.S. intervention in Iraq.

Progressive people are in sympathy with what they see as a popular movement in Libya. We can help such a movement most by supporting its just demands while rejecting imperialist intervention, in whatever form it may take. It is the people of Libya who must decide their future.

\* Published Feb 23, 2011 4:32 PM:

[http://www.workers.org/2011/editorials/libya\\_0303/](http://www.workers.org/2011/editorials/libya_0303/)

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## **Libya and the Arab revolt in perspective**

### ***Imperialism has nothing to offer the Middle East***

**By the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL)**

February 24, 2011

“From the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli, we fight our country’s battles in the air, on land, and sea.” So begins the official hymn of the U.S. Marines, setting out in one short sentence the long history of U.S. expansionism and intervention across the globe. Tripoli, the current capital of Libya, has a special place in this history because of the Barbary Wars, the first wars waged by the U.S. government in the early 1800s to protect its commercial interests in the Mediterranean Sea.

Starting in the 1940s, the Middle East and North Africa—which hold two-thirds of the world’s known oil reserves—again assumed a central place in U.S. foreign policy and geopolitical strategy. Reading statements from the State Department and the White House, one might think that all Washington cares about is peace, democracy, human rights and freedom of speech. They have continuously expressed “alarm” and “disapproval” at the incidents of violence.

A quick review of U.S. foreign policy in the region reveals that the government has never had an interest in peace, democracy or universal rights. They care not one whit about the Arab masses. Every word out of their mouths, no matter how it is sugar-coated, flows from their desire to retain U.S. political and economic hegemony.

To maintain access to the region’s vast natural resources, the U.S. government has propped up the most violent dictatorships of all kinds, from secular to religious. It has poured in hundreds of millions of dollars to buy politicians and influence elections. It has carried out countless covert operations—sabotage, assassinations, infiltration—to undermine popular figures and movements that have resisted U.S. domination. It has armed the colonial-settler state of Israel to the teeth, allowing it to strike out against its Arab neighbors and suppress the Palestinian people’s struggle for self-determination. It has helped divide nations, artificially created new ones, fought against all attempts at real Arab unity, and worked tirelessly to prevent any strong, independent countries from emerging in the region.

Washington imposed sanctions that took the lives of over one million Iraqis, including hundreds of thousands of children before 2003. Well over 1.3 million Iraqis have died as a result of the current war and occupation. In addition, there are 2 million people displaced inside of Iraq, and 2.5 million who are refugees in neighboring Syria and Jordan.

There are no figures available for the number of Iraqis wounded, but the most conservative estimate would be twice the number killed. Altogether, nearly one in three Iraqis have been killed, wounded or displaced since 2003. The spirit of resistance has not died in the Iraqi people, but their nation has been torn apart.

### **A third wave of Arab revolution**

What is taking place across the Middle East and North Africa is the third great wave of revolts and revolutions against colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the regimes installed and sustained by imperialism. It is a reaffirmation that there is indeed an Arab Nation divided into many countries. While there are many differences between (and often within) Arab countries, there are also powerful elements of shared nationhood: language, common territory, culture and so on. How else can it be explained that the upheaval that started in Tunisia in January has spread to at least 10 other countries in the Arab world—and none outside?

The first revolutionary wave following World War I fought the takeover and division of the Middle East by British and French imperialism. The revolts were so strong in Egypt and Iraq that the British granted nominal independence to Egypt in 1922 and Iraq in 1932, while in reality retaining colonial control of both.

The second wave followed World War II with the overthrow of the old dependent regimes and monarchies in Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Libya in the 1950s and 1960s, the victorious anti-colonial wars in Algeria and Yemen in the 1960s, the rise of the Palestinian revolutionary movement in the late 1960s, and the civil war in Lebanon in the 1970s, where the progressive Lebanese National Movement/PLO alliance was on the verge of victory until Syria intervened against it. There were also mass Palestinian intifadas in 1936-39, 1987-1991 and 2000-2002.

During these first two waves, the U.S. government and its allies were able to preserve the police-state hereditary monarchies in Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and, above all in their estimation, Saudi Arabia. Starting with Anwar Sadat, and especially with his successor Hosni Mubarak, the U.S. government was able to buy off Egypt and bring it decisively into their sphere of influence.

These states became strategic beachheads for U.S. imperialism, especially important in checking the influence of Iran after its popular, nationalist revolution of 1979.

Taken collectively, the protest movements and uprisings today in the Arab world have threatened this whole arrangement of power. They have proven once again—to the dismay of Washington—that it is the masses of people who make and change history. The U.S. government is not in control of events, but is desperately trying to influence them behind the scenes to guarantee the preservation of its political and economic interests.

### **Yemen and Bahrain**

While the U.S. government now speaks about “universal rights” and “freedom of expression” in Yemen, just last year they were bombing it with drone attacks. In 2009, special-operations commandos began training President Ali Abdullah Saleh’s security forces—the same forces now firing on protesters.

In 2010, the U.S. government pumped in \$155 million in military aid to help the Yemeni president fight against two separate rebel movements. While all of this was justified under the “war on terror,” the U.S.-backed airstrike in December 2009 killed 42 civilians, the vast majority of whom were women and children. A released Wikileaks cable from 2009 revealed that Saleh gave the Pentagon



an “open door” to launch bombing assaults on any person or group deemed a “terrorist” by Washington.

The absolute monarchy in Bahrain has been fully backed by Washington for its entire existence.

Bahrain was a long-time protectorate of Britain, which exerted all of its pressure to keep the country from holding democratic elections. The majority Shia population occupies the lowest rungs in the Bahraini economy and is disenfranchised in every way. Until 2002, women could not vote. All political opposition has been suppressed. But the United States has protected the kingdom throughout. Why? Because of Bahrain’s oil wealth, its increasingly important role in regional and world finance, and its location on the geo-strategic Persian Gulf.

### **Does Washington care about democracy in the Middle East? Hardly!**

The White House declares its concern for the protesters only to protect their own image and mythology. In reality, it is an enemy of the Arab masses who have taken it upon themselves to reclaim their countries and their destinies. To the extent that the people succeed in defeating the dictatorships and replacing them with freer and more just societies, they will have to confront the Empire. It will not, and cannot, be an honest partner in this process. The Arab people, of course, know this all too well. From Tunisia to Yemen, the deep skepticism and hostility toward Western governments is well-deserved.

### **Western powers bring death and destruction, nothing else**

This must be a starting point for activists located in the United States and Europe when it comes to the Libyan revolt.

Unlike in Egypt, where it was clear that all of society with the exception of a tiny comprador elite opposed Mubarak, there is comparatively little information about the remaining base of support for Col. Moammar Gaddafi. If it is substantial, the country could fall into civil war with a scale of violence that far exceeds that seen in Egypt. If such a tragedy ensues, a variety of political forces—from liberal to neoconservative—will begin to call for the U.S. government to “do something.” This could take the form of sanctions, U.N. intervention, or the imposition of no-fly zones.

Already some, like neoconservative Paul Wolfowitz, an architect of the Iraqi genocide, are advocating for such a “pro-active” approach. Sen. John Kerry, another pro-imperialist politician, is calling for sanctions, despite the horrific toll such a policy took on the Iraqi people during the 1990s.

Such threats must be absolutely rejected by progressive people. For one, the West would love to get boots on the ground in the region, with which they could influence and pressure the emerging Arab revolution. Secondly, these measures would be perceived as, and amount to, acts of war. The “peacekeeping” missions of the United States in Somalia and Yugoslavia were nothing other than bloody and destructive wars that widened conflict instead of solving it. Ask the people’s movements in Haiti or Palestine if the United Nation’s blue-helmeted occupations are any better.

The language of “we have to do something” is based on a fundamental misconception; the U.S., U.N. and NATO militaries are not “ours” to begin with, so “we” cannot use them for progressive aims.

### **The Libyan revolt**

The revolt in Libya appears to have started among the long-time opposition to Gaddafi in the city of Benghazi. Initial reports indicated that the movement in Libya was primarily composed of lawyers,

judges, doctors and police officers. Very early on, it appeared that the defection of police and military units provided the anti-Gaddafi movement with arms. The fact that they have now reportedly “seized” entire cities in both the east and west of the country reflects a high degree of military sophistication.

Libya sits between Tunisia and Egypt, and it was only natural that the Arab revolt would draw in and inspire discontented youth in Libya. Their protest against Gaddafi undoubtedly has different roots than that of the middle-class opposition, which for decades resented Gaddafi’s formerly anti-imperialist stances. Like their counterparts elsewhere, many youth are in the streets because of high unemployment, inequality, and to demand a more open political system. The Libyan state’s military response—which, according to Al-Jazeera, included indiscriminate bombing of certain sections of Tripoli where protesters had gathered—appears to have only intensified opposition to the regime. As we write, the revolt appears to have control over broad sections of Libyan territory.

At present, the revolt has not produced any organizational form or leader that would make it possible to characterize it politically. It does not appear to be led or directed by “foreign forces.”

The National Front for the Salvation of Libya, an exile group that has been interviewed constantly by foreign media as a leading opposition force, was for decades trained by the CIA. They are loudly demanding that the imperialist countries “take action” against Gaddafi, and have appeared frustrated that the West has so far only issued statements. It is unclear what the NFSL has on the ground in Libya, and what role they are playing in the revolt.

Protesters have hoisted Libya’s first national flag, that of the exploitative, U.S.-backed monarch King Idris (1951-1969) over the areas they have seized. Some in the Libyan exile community consciously call for the return of the Idris monarchy, but it is unclear how deeply this sentiment runs among those in revolt.

Until the 1969 revolution, Libya was home to the U.S. Wheelus Air Force base—the largest airbase in the world at the time—and the average Libyan lived in dire poverty. For these reasons, there was essentially no resistance when Gaddafi and other military officers overthrew Idris. To return to such a kingdom—the goal of opportunistic monarchists in exile—could only be considered a step backward for the Libyan people, and would stand opposed to those striving for democracy.

During its leftist phase after 1969, the Libyan government used the country’s vast oil resources to carry out profound economic and social development, including in the fields of education, health care, nutrition, and a massive water project. In its proclamations, the Libyan government placed the country’s development within a radical and populist context, and promoted semi-socialist political and economic concepts.

Whereas in the 1950s over 80 percent of the population could not read or write, illiteracy was almost completely wiped out by the early 1970s. The Gaddafi government also provided significant aid to neighboring states and to national liberation movements around the world. Libya is still ranked the highest among African countries in the Human Development Index—which includes such factors as living conditions, life expectancy and education.

It was during the 1970s and 1980s that Libya was demonized, sanctioned and attacked by the U.S. government and its allies. In 1986, President Reagan ordered the bombing of downtown Tripoli in an attempt to assassinate Gaddafi. Gaddafi survived, but his infant daughter and more than 300 others were killed in this murderous assault. Many more were maimed and wounded.

Although the Libyan regime appealed to the popular masses in its political program, the regime also

included bourgeois forces within both the military and civilian sectors. Over time and under relentless pressure from western imperialism, these bourgeois forces—many of whom looked to the West—strengthened. In recent years, inequality has increased as the Libyan government has ushered in neoliberal reforms that have stripped social programs and subsidies for the poor and increasingly turned over the country's oil wealth to foreign corporations.

Gaddafi is not a puppet of imperialism like Mubarak was, but he has decisively broken with the Arab popular liberation movements and has made many concessions to imperialism over the past decade. He has dismantled Libya's weapons programs, officially supported the U.S. "war on terror," and grown increasingly close to Italy, the former colonizer. In 2008, Gaddafi signed an accord with right-wing Italian leader Silvio Berlusconi to stop African immigrants from entering Italy in exchange for \$5 billion in assistance over 25 years. While continuing to condemn Israel rhetorically, he expelled Palestinian migrant workers in the 1990s.

Gaddafi praised the popular uprising in Egypt, while also praising Tunisia's former dictator Ben Ali after he was overthrown.

The developments in the last decade have greatly and understandably diminished his credibility among progressive and anti-imperialist forces in the region, almost all of which have declared their solidarity with the Libyan revolt.

While the U.S. media is in a particular frenzy against Gaddafi—speaking very suggestively about military intervention—Washington's official line on Libya is at present similar to their messages regarding their puppets in Bahrain and Yemen. But as the revolt continues, taking on the characteristics of a civil war, U.S. policy may be shifting.

President Obama said about Libya on Feb. 23: "I have also asked my administration to prepare the full range of options that we have to respond to this crisis. This includes those actions we may take and those we will coordinate with our allies and partners or those that we'll carry out through multilateral institutions." Secretary of State Hillary Clinton echoed this: "Everything will be on the table. We will look at all options."

While the U.S. policymakers dream about owning Libya outright, and replacing Gaddafi with a client regime, their main concern is now, as it has always been, stable and guaranteed control over Middle East oil resources. To the extent Washington becomes more "pro-active" against Libya, it will mean they have devised a plan—or found someone better—to do that job.

As the third wave of revolution spreads, deepens, and faces new contradictions, it is the people of Libya and the Arab world who will determine their future. For activists here, our main task is to mobilize in opposition to any and all U.S. threats against Libya and the other countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

\* <http://www.pslweb.org/liberationnews/news/libya-and-the-arab-revolt-in.html>

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## **Amid corporate-generated hysteria: Libya's Qaddafi to visit New York**

**By Abayomi Azikiwe**

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Libyan leader Mummar Qaddafi will attend the annual United Nations General Assembly in New York City later this month amid a corporate-media provoked racist campaign to prevent him from staying in Englewood, N.J., on a plot of land owned by Libya's U.N. Mission. Libya's government announced on Aug. 31 that Qaddafi, who is also chairperson of the continental African Union, would not stay in Englewood but remain in New York City during the General Assembly gathering of over 150 heads of state from around the globe.

This campaign of anti-Libyan hysteria is part of the fallout emanating from the Scottish government's decision to release Libyan Abdel Basset al-Megrahi from prison Aug. 20 on humanitarian grounds, as al-Megrahi was recently diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer. Al-Megrahi had been convicted in connection with the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1998. A former airline executive, al-Megrahi has always maintained his innocence, and was in the process of appealing his conviction when he was released.

In response to al-Megrahi's release, Washington has resumed political attacks on the Libyan government. President Barack Obama said that the Libyan government should have placed al-Megrahi under house arrest and that welcoming him by the people of this North African country was a "mistake."

Some Englewood residents and its mayor said they would protest Qaddafi's visit and even block him from setting up a tent on the land the Libyans own. These efforts illustrate the renewed attacks on the Libyan government, which U.S. imperialism has for years called a "terrorist state."

Under former President Ronald Reagan, the U.S. bombed Libya in April 1986, killing scores of people and attacking Qaddafi's family, even killing one of his daughters. The African country had been subjected to economic sanctions and a ban on flights from other nations.

In a letter published in the New York Times on Aug. 30, Saif Al-Islam El-Qaddafi, the son of the Libyan leader, disputed Western press reports that the former political prisoner was given a "hero's welcome." He said that the people who welcomed al-Megrahi were largely his relatives and clan members.

He wrote that "Libya has worked with Britain, the United States and other Western countries for more than five years now to defuse the tensions of earlier times, and to promote trade, security and improved relations. I believe that clarifying the facts in the Lockerbie case can only further assist this process."

### **Libya commemorates 40 years of revolution**

Libya had been colonized by Italy during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even though it was granted formal independence in 1951, Libya remained largely under the influence of the West. On Sept. 1, 1969, Col. Mummar Qaddafi led a popular coup against the Western-backed monarchy of King Idris and the situation changed.

Qaddafi headed a group within the military—the Revolutionary Command Council—which in 1969 proclaimed the Libya Arab Republic. The motto of the RCC was "freedom, socialism, and unity" and the group pledged itself to eliminating injustice and backwardness. After negotiating with Washington, the RCC government told U.S. military forces to leave Libya and close Wheelus Air Base.

Libya also provided assistance to various national liberation movements and progressive governments throughout the Arab world and Africa. The government Qaddafi heads has utilized the vast oil reserves in the country to build up the national infrastructure and to provide education for the Libyan masses and other visitors from throughout the world.

"In recent years the entire country has slowly begun to resemble one massive construction site. 'Flats are going up all over Libya,' says business consultant Sami Zaptia. 'After September 1, we expect some announcements as to who exactly is going to get the houses.'" (BBC, Aug. 31)

A special African Union meeting in Libya as well as the erection of large-scale housing developments marked Libya's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

According to the Energy Information Administration, "Libya, a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), holds the largest proven oil reserves in Africa, followed by Nigeria and Algeria. The Oil and Gas Journal (OGJ) says that Libya had total proven oil reserves of 43.7 billion barrels as of January 2009, up from 41.5 billion barrels in 2008. About 80 percent of Libya's proven oil reserves are located in the Sirte basin, which is responsible for 90 percent of the country's oil output." (Official energy statistics from the U.S. government)

In recent years Libya has emerged from the U.S.- and British-imposed sanctions and isolation. Italy, Libya's former colonial ruler, will honor the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration with a display by its Air Force aerobatics team. Trade between Libya and Italy has expanded significantly over the last few years.

Libya has also extended its economic cooperation agreements with other countries throughout the European continent. The country provides 20 percent of the natural gas supplies to Switzerland. It has agreements to supply natural gas to Spain and Italy as well.

The Libyans have also held discussions with Britain and the United States about resuming economic cooperation. It was reported that the release of al-Megrahi was related to ongoing negotiations involving oil exploration and importation.

Libya's celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution has been acknowledged by governments throughout the African continent and the world. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe traveled to Libya to participate in the AU meeting there and to recognize the achievements of the country over the last four decades.

Libyan special envoy Mukthar Ganas visited Zimbabwe in early August to invite President Mugabe to the AU summit and the revolutionary festivities.

\* [http://www.workers.org/2009/world/libya\\_0924/index.html](http://www.workers.org/2009/world/libya_0924/index.html)

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## Footnotes

[1] <http://www.workers.org/marcy/cd/samczech/czech/czech03.htm>

[2] <http://socialistworker.org/2009/06/04/twenty-years-after-tiananmen>

[3] <http://www2.pslweb.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=12341>

[4] <http://www.workers.org/marcy/cd/sam91/1991html/s910829.htm>

[5] <http://www2.pslweb.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=12205>

[6] <http://www.pslweb.org/liberationnews/news/iran-green-movement-vs-egypt-revolution.html>