

# The left's foolish illusions in Benghazi's rebels

By Gerry Downing

Comment by redbedhead11 on Lenin's Tomb Blog:

"Even if the USA now departs the scene, they have stuck around - and bombed - long enough to undermine the revolution; to drain it of, as you call it, emancipatory content and turn it into a civil war. Gaddafi now has his anti-imperialist cred boosted enough to politically undermine opposition in areas under his control; the rebels are pushing aside the popular militias in favour of the professional forces led by former Gaddafi military leaders. The popular, political impetus has been frozen in aspic, as it were, pushed aside by a conflict within the ruling class of Libya."

The whole thread of this argument is based on two false premises:

1. That there is something called a 'democratic revolution' or 'Arab revolution' spreading in this whole region and every country's conflicts are basically national manifestations of this same pan-Arab phenomenon.
2. That the Libyan and maybe Syrian "revolutions" had had an "emancipatory content" from a 'popular militia' with a 'popular political impetus' from the beginning which may or may not now be gone in Libya because of the bombing but whose revival we must fervently wish and work towards.

The character of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt

Let us first look at the character of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. These revolutions were dominated from the beginning by the middle classes and by opportunist politicians, to a far greater extent in Egypt than in Tunisia. They sucked in big numbers of unemployed youth, who became the political playthings of these opportunists. They had an agenda; to use the radicalisation of the masses, the explosion of their suppressed outrage, for their own political ends; to allow a more 'democratic' and therefore better-functioning capitalist society, to allow more successful penetration of global finance capital from the US and EU the better to exploit the working class.

There were two barriers to this ambition, the existing regimes and the working class. The regimes have shown their flexibility on instructions from Obama after initial fierce resistance so the problem now remaining is how to manoeuvre themselves into power without awakening the sleeping giant of the working class, particularly the Egyptian working class and thus subvert the revolutionary potential of the movement.

One phenomenon has been remarkable by its absence in these revolutions which rendered them ideologically flaccid from the outset; there has been no burnings of the US and Israeli flags and almost no portraits of Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein (we have heard of just one) carried by the masses, not even in Cairo. There was therefore no solidarity expressed with the oppressed Palestinian masses and no rush to the border to liberate the besieged inhabitants of Gaza, as every leftist and revolutionary had envisaged would be the first task of any revolution in Egypt. In fact one of the first actions of the new Egyptian regime was to reaffirm its co-oppression of the Gaza strip and its total collaboration with the Israeli Zionist regime in this.

Of vital assistance in preventing this deepening of the revolution was the Muslim Brotherhood, who were prepared to sponsor such flag burning in angry demonstrations in the past in response to Zionist outrages, Lebanon, the bombing of Gaza, etc. But to sponsor such events now in the midst of this revolutionary upsurge would be to unleash the full force of the revolution; hence the caution and conservatism of the Brotherhood and the constant warnings from the imperialist mass media of the dangers of Islamic fundamentalist takeover of the revolution. The fear of Cairo's fifteen million who could annihilate the entire capitalist order in hours was palpable.

But in that chaos the only force who could take command to carry the revolution forwards was Egypt's powerful organised working class, in constant militant struggle for some five years now. And when they stirred in mass strike action Mubarak went and the regime almost immediately adapted its profile and introduced some reforms, the better to survive. But neither did the working class struggles make their connections with the Palestinians and anti-imperialism in general. The long dominance of the pro-regime trade union bureaucratic leadership had inculcated a syndicalist, workerist culture which ignored the Palestinians, in the name of opposition to Islamic fundamentalism, and the newly emerging independent trade unions have not proved capable of overcoming this.

Assisting the bureaucracy in this separation of militant trade unionism and revolutionary anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism was the fact that this latter was practically monopolised by the Brotherhood and there were a big proportion of working women in the cotton industry. These did not want the ideological subordination of women that the Brotherhood represented. It is therefore vital to fight for the working class movement in the shape of the new independent trade union federation, the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, champion the cause of women's oppression and equally the cause of the oppressed Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. [1] But the US AFL-CIO and the International Labor Organization (ILO) are working overtime to ensure that does not happen.

#### Powerful anti-imperialist sentiments

The collaboration between the secular pro-imperialist Mohamed Mustafa ElBaradei and what he represented and the Muslim Brotherhood has so far succeeded in suppressing these powerful anti-imperialist sentiments, which undoubtedly are deeply held in the working class and oppressed in Egypt and Tunisia and throughout the region. Their emergence would be heralded by that flag burning and the portraits of Nasser and chanting of "down with us imperialism, down with Zionism, long live the memory of Nasser".

Then the Permanent Revolution would be emerging in full flight, then revolutionary Trotskyism would be vindicated and the intervention of a revolutionary socialist Trotskyist party would be facilitated by events. But the ideological grip of the collaboration of the pro-imperialist secularists and the pro-imperialist Islamists (whose anti-imperialism has now shown itself to be purely opportunist, as distinct from that of the masses) has proved strong enough so far to blunt the revolutionary trust of the Egyptian masses and that of the rest of the region.

And that was the great fear of imperialism and their stooges in region; the ideologues of imperialisms constantly propagated against this by warning of the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism (which they deny entirely in Libya). The entry onto the stage of the multi-million

oppressed masses had of necessity to contain Islamic prejudices along with anti-imperialism, to reject the whole movement because of this fear was to reject the revolution; that was how its entry had to be announced.

The Muslim masses would naturally look to the organised working class as leaders because they constitute a big part of their numbers and are the only really revolutionary force that can take the revolution to its conclusion. Therefore they would be directed in the direction of revolutionary Trotskyism and Permanent Revolution. That is only in a global struggle against the dominance of world imperialism and international finance capital can this revolution succeed. That is lodged in the consciousness of the masses; they realise their global dependence on world trade and finance capital. That is why 'democratic revolutions' and 'the Arab Revolution' are fraudulent conceptions, alien to Trotskyism. They are all versions of socialism in a single country, of a revolution in distinct and separated stages, which will herald ultimately the death of the revolutionary upsurge if this counterrevolutionary theory is not overcome.

This lack of open manifestations of anti-imperialism was a weakness that was to prove debilitating as events unfolded in Libya. Because if anti-imperialism, which has to be signalled in this region by support for the Palestinian masses and anti-Zionism, was not an indispensable part of this revolutionary upsurge how bad could pro-imperialism be, provided we accepted this was just a first stage; a 'democratic revolution'? Not so bad at all the imperialist mass media was able to shout, this really was a 'democratic revolution' against all the bad local despots, close friends or inconsistent foes of imperialist interests alike. As for that tyrant Gaddafi (foremost opponent of Zionism in the whole region), forget about anti-imperialism, what we need is "freedom, justice and democracy" and once we get that we can think about the bigger picture later. Gaddafi is "imperialism's strongman in the region", one former leftist confidently assured us just as they were about to bomb him. One wonders what they do to their enemies if this is what they do to their friends.

That is how the imperialist mass media propagated a separate and distinct stage in this revolution. Outrageously, in the name of the 'wider revolution in the region' we were asked by so-called orthodox Trotskyists to swallow all of this and not make the connection with the worldwide socialist revolution that Lenin made with the April Theses and Trotsky and genuine Trotskyists have made ever since via the theory of Permanent Revolution. Instead we must forget about our whole history of the fight for world revolution and the plight of the oppressed Palestinians and all the others and accept the humanitarian claptrap of world imperialism's mass media as the genuine article. We must concentrate instead on building, not socialism in a single country but democratic capitalism in a single country or at best in a single region via the 'democratic' or 'Arab revolution' as our first stage.

The ideological collapse from the standpoint of orthodox Trotskyism of those self-professed Trotskyists who took this line could not be greater. They completely ignore the fight for ideological leadership of the masses, have accepted outright reactionaries as leading a 'democratic revolution' far better than the much maligned Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel or Gerry Healy ever did. They, after all, chose leftist opponents of Stalinism and imperialism in the beginning as adequate substitutes for revolutionary Trotskyism to carry forward the objectively unfolding world revolution, at least until the late 70s when Healy picked Arafat and Saddam Hussein and he, the USFI and others backed the fundamentalist Ayatollah Khomeini, who propagated anti-imperialism as the source of their power. Our current jokers are telling us that outright, self-declared reactionary pro-imperialist are leading

this so-called revolution and implicitly that the movement is so powerful that it can do away with the need for conscious revolutionary leadership entirely and be represented adequately by its open opponents. A more foolish political scenario is impossible to imagine. Some ever warn us not to put any thrust in them (but, of course, do not fight to overthrow them, we cannot change horses in mid-stream, they are 'democrats' after all, are they not?) These former leftists are attempting to perpetrate wholesale fraud on the world working class.

#### Workers Power

The SWP and the SP are to the left of Workers Power on Libya, both being unwavering in opposing military intervention. Workers Power gave us this analysis by Pater Main on 19/3/2011:

"Victory to the Libyan Revolution!"

"The rebellion against Gadaffi's dictatorship deserves unconditional support and that is not altered by the UN decision. Those who oppose powerful states have the right to get hold of arms wherever they can and to take advantage of any weaknesses in their oppressors' situation. That remains true even where the weaknesses are the result of imperialist action. If, under cover of the no-fly zone, Libyan insurgents and revolutionaries can retake positions, undermine the morale or the loyalty of Gadaffi's troops and even advance on the capital, Tripoli, that is a step forward for the Libyan revolution and should be welcomed." [2]

It would certainly be welcomed by world imperialism and every reactionary state in the Gulf. But what of the politics of the leadership and where it was going politically and what about those black workers? This has escaped Workers Power entirely; another advocate of the anti-Trotskyist stagiest notion of the 'democratic revolution' and the 'Arab revolution'. No worries the 'Libyan revolution' (more of the same) is proceeding swimmingly, or would be if our plans, and those of the Benghazi reactionaries and world imperialism, were not being thwarted by that 'dictator' Gaddafi and his brainwashed followers. Their former comrades in Permanent Revolution have no doubts about supporting the reactionary rebels: *Libya: imperialists move to control uprising* (10 March 2011)

Before this Simon Hardy had acknowledged a few problems in: "Libya - a revolutionary civil war"

"The lack of a revolutionary working class is a central factor why Libya was different to the other countries." Might be connected with those murders of black workers, Simon. And anyway we had a very adequate substitute; those CIA-sponsored reactionaries will do the job just as well. "As the fighting rages in Libya sinister forces in the western world gather" Indeed they so, Simon, those CIA agents plotting with their imperialist sponsored clients in Benghazi we suppose? 'Oh no, no', is the message he wants to convey, 'we must keep firmly in mind that the main enemy is Gaddafi not world imperialism. How could it be the latter as they are the main ally of our brave Benghazi 'revolutionaries'?"

Comrade Simon goes on to say, "Like a cornered rat Muammar Gadaffi is getting ever more vicious in his attempts to survive. The death toll is mounting as his fighter bombers attack rebel-held areas; tanks and fighters loyal to him have besieged and bombarded towns and cities whose population rose up to put an end to his rule. The numbers of casualties are uncounted but likely to be huge." [3]

Why do you spew out this imperialists/rebel lying propaganda comrade Hardy? Did you see any footage of this bombing by these fighter bombers on civilians or any photographs of it? No you did not because it never happened, you have swallowed whole their lies. Gaddafi is 'murdering his own people' and was about to massacre the entire population of Benghazi, we were told and must believe and so he must be bombed to save these innocent civilians. Presumably his supporters are 'guilty civilians' who don't matter a lot. What really happened is an armed uprising by imperialist sponsored gangs attacked the (very nasty) government of the most egalitarian and anti-imperialist country in region and your group supported it on the foolish notion that it was a fight for 'democracy'. If you were really interested in what was happening you could have googled. The following piece by Diana Johnson *Why are They Making War on Libya* might have moderated your strident pro-imperialism a little bit:

"False Pretext Number One: "to protect civilians".

"The falsity of this pretext is obvious, first of all, because the UN Resolution authorizing military action "to protect civilians" was drawn up by France – whose objective was clearly regime change – and its Western allies. Had the real concern of the UN Security Council been to "protect innocent lives" it would have, could have, should have sent a strong neutral observer mission to find out what was really happening in Libya. There was no proof of rebel claims that the Qaddafi regime was slaughtering civilians. Had there been visible proof of such atrocities, we can be sure that they would have been shown regularly on prime time television. We have seen no such proof. A UN fact-finding mission could have very rapidly set the record straight, and the Security Council could then have acted on the basis of factual information rather than of claims by rebels seeking international aid for their cause." [4]

'Democracy' here is the rights of finance capital

You see comrades by 'democracy' the imperialists mean the right of finance capital to penetrate that economy at will and exploit its people and rob its natural resources. If we had a real successful revolution in any or all of these countries it would not be called a 'democratic revolution' at all, but the dictatorship of the proletariat. And it would have to do many of the things that that old dictator Gaddafi has done in the past to ensure survival. That is it would have to execute the counter-revolutionaries, the CIA agents and their unfortunate deluded and confused followers just like the Bolsheviks had to do. Of course with the working class in the saddle it would be the majority class and would not suppress workers' organisations as he has done, but ensconce them as the ruling class.

And it would be the victim of vicious lying imperialist propaganda, just as the early Soviets were, just as Stalin's regime was and China, Cuba, North Korea and Libya are today. We would have to sort out the truth from the lies, to defend the gains of the revolutions whilst rejecting those leaderships who were merely protecting them as the source of their own privileges. And there would be plenty soft left groups like Workers Power to swallow whole the lies and regurgitate them for us with a leftist, 'Trotskyist' gloss.

The Workers Power stuff is an incredible mass of self contradictory nonsense, just like their line on the Balkans in the 1990s. The 'revolutionaries' who are led by reactionaries are fighting the reactionaries who are led by worse reactionaries, it seems. There is no revolutionary working class;

nevertheless this revolution is unfolding in a continuation of the struggles for 'democracy' and the 'democratic revolution' in Egypt and Tunisia, where the working class is playing a vital role. There is no mention that Gaddafi was a bulwark against imperialist finance capital and Zionism just some puerile tut-tuting about the pro-imperialism of the leaders these 'revolutionaries' unfortunately have got right now.

This is how Workers Power managed to support the KLA on Kosovo, and ended up with Camp Bondsteel[5] and a US colony in the heart of Europe led by CIA sponsored gangsters with close ties with the Italian and Albanian mafia who made their money harvesting the body parts of kidnapped opponents and friends in a clinic in Albania.[6] Take a look at where that support for 'democracy' got them:

"Florin Krasniqi, a Brooklyn-based businessman who raised large amounts of money for the KLA and shipped high-powered rifles from the United States to the KLA, said he has personally complained to senior State Department officials about corruption and crime at the top levels of government in Kosovo but he said he is routinely dismissed. "You can be corrupted as hell," Krasniqi said, "but as long as you keep the stability you are a friend." Krasniqi, who was recently elected to the Kosovo parliament, described his former KLA comrade Thaci as "the head of the mafia here"."[7]

Gaddafi is a bourgeois nationalist who is clearly one of the most substantial opponents of imperialism left, albeit in the interests of local, corrupt capitalists like his own family. The following story puts this in context: "Singer Nelly Furtado has said that she will give away \$1 million (£615,000) she was paid to perform for the family of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. The star said on Twitter she had given a private 45-minute show for Gaddafi's "clan" in 2007 at a hotel in Italy." So no political support for Gaddafi and his regime but unquestionably a united front with them against both imperialism and their local agents, the Benghazi rebels, who are clearly now one fighting force, one army with one goal and they are in total agreement; in return for installing them as their puppet government imperialist finance capital gets Libya.

Lastly let us quash the argument that this is really not about imperialism seizing the oil wealth of Libya and the 'democracy' of finance capital. This extract is from the What's Left blog by Stephen Gowans. It clearly ridicules those who labelled Gaddafi and the Libyan government as simply imperialist stooges:

"The Heritage Foundation provides a guide to how accommodating countries are to the profit-making interests of US corporations and investors. Every year the foundation publishes an Index of Economic Freedom, which ranks countries on how open they are to exports and foreign investment, how low their taxes are, how committed they are to protecting property rights, and so on; in short, how strongly a country favours foreign businesses and investors over its own people. Significantly, governments that are perennially targets of US government regime change efforts rank at or near the bottom of the index. This year's list identifies the following 10 countries as the least economically free (i.e., least accommodating to foreign businesses), in order, from worst to slightly better:

North Korea, Zimbabwe, Cuba, Eritrea, Venezuela, Myanmar, Libya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Timor-Leste

Seven of the bottom 10 (North Korea, Zimbabwe, Cuba, Venezuela, Myanmar, Libya and Iran) are the targets of open regime change operations by the United States and its allies, carried out ostensibly because the targeted countries are not protecting human rights, threaten regional stability, or in the case of Libya, because the government is said to be attacking its own people. That these countries happen to be considered the least accommodating of foreign business profit-making points to an ulterior motive on the part of Western governments to bring about regime change, and to use human rights and humanitarian rhetoric as a cover for pursuing the economic interests of Western corporate and investor elites.”[8]

The USFI, Fourth International

Most liberal and confused of all must be Socialist Resistance: Fourth International in Britain. In an article by ‘Terry’ on March 6, 2011, Support the Libyan revolution! Gaddafi out! she opines:

“Gaddafi takes control of the situation again, with thousands of deaths, the process (of the revolution) will be slowed down, contained or even blocked. If Gaddafi is overthrown, the whole movement will as a result be stimulated and amplified. For this reason, all the ruling classes, all the governments, all the reactionary regimes of the Arab world are more or less supporting the Libyan dictatorship.”

Obviously she has missed the newspapers and only heeds a bit of the ITN/Sky news on who was supporting who in this conflict as well as totally mistaking the intentions of imperialism.

Now the Italian Sinistra Critica (Critical Left), USFI section. Its slogans make clear its pro-imperialist policies. We (i.e. imperialism) must get rid of Gaddafi:

Gaddafi out! No to imperialist military intervention!, No to the military intervention! No to the use of Italian bases for the military intervention!. We demand that the regime’s armed forces end repression and aggression!, Gaddafi must go and the people must freely decide their own future as in Egypt and Tunisia!

Whilst the whole article makes the totally unwarranted assumption that the rebels are genuine revolutionaries, despite their leaders, the last is just a sick joke. A “Free Election” for a bourgeois parliament like we have in Iran and Afghanistan? Anti-imperialist forces will naturally be prohibited from standing in this capitalist democracy which is our goal now. This is an explicit repudiation of Trotskyism.[9]

The French Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) have called for UN recognition of the reactionary rebels as the government of Libya, in sync with Sarkozy:

“Support for the Libyan people against the dictatorship. The Libyan population which rose against Gaddafi faces today an outburst of fatal violence. The dictator would like to drown the revolt in a blood bath. Our full and total solidarity goes to the Libyan people who should be given the means to defend themselves, the weapons which it needs to drive out the dictator, to conquer freedom and democracy.”

This is just pathetic nonsense from our 'left turning' NPA, as Workers Power so badly characterised this group. The usual crap about 'freedom and democracy' as if the author had never turned a page of Trotsky or Lenin.

Statement of the Liaison Committee

In the Statement of the Liaison committee of the CWG (NZ) and HWRS (USA) Imperialism: Hands off Libya! The US and EU are planning a military intervention to protect their oil interests! (from the rebels??) we get the following:

"Libya is on a knife edge poised between victorious workers revolution that can defeat both the dictatorship and imperialism, and turn the Arab Revolution into socialist revolution in the whole region, and the counter-revolution that will halt, reverse and defeat the Arab Revolution and prevent the formation of a United Socialist States of North Africa and the Middle East. The outcome will depend on whether or not the international working class can stop the US and EU imperialists from invading Libya and imposing a new compliant national leadership. The aim of the Transitional National Council is to steer Libya during the interim period that will come after its complete liberation and the destruction of Gaddafi's oppressive regime. It will guide the country to free elections and the establishment of a constitution for Libya." [10]

This is a total capitulation to imperialist propaganda, particularly the ridiculous notion that not only was there something called "the Arab Revolution" which was above class, but that it moved forward of its own objective volition irrespective of the leadership that it had and that the counter-revolution was represented only by Gaddafi and not world imperialism. And why would they have to invade to "a new compliant national leadership" when they already had one? And the notion that the imperialist-sponsored and CIA directed and funded Interim Transitional National Council was going to "guide the country to free elections and the establishment of a constitution for Libya" is just too silly for words; an idealistic and unachievable aspiration for a bourgeois republic and a two stage revolution.

They repeat as fact the obvious lies of the rebels:

"Such was the ferocity of this repression, employing the Special Forces and foreign mercenaries, that its failure to intimidate and defeat the unemployed youth rebellion forced the military to split. The defection of the Generals who had long been cronies of Gaddafi was forced only by the rebellion of the rank and file soldiers who refused to fire on the masses and were in turn executed by the Gaddafi forces."

Where is the evidence for these lurid claims? There is none because it is a complete lie.

"We call on the Arab revolution that is under way in Egypt and Tunisia, and is beginning to rise up in Algeria and in the Middle East, to immediately send material and military aid to the liberated part of Libya to strengthen the revolution against the regime's extreme repression, to complete the revolution and stop mass murder of workers on an even greater scale."

No need for that, imperialism is on the case on your behalf.

“We call on the workers in the imperialist countries to take immediate steps to oppose the military intervention in whatever form in Libya. Imperialism is the No 1 enemy of the Libyan people. Gaddafi is a creature of imperialism. His 1969 revolution had the guise of a national socialist liberation but in reality it installed a national bourgeois crony capitalist regime to serve imperialism.”

This is the ‘there is nothing to defend and everything to gain by backing the imperialist sponsored rebels’ line, already refuted above and equivocated on by the SP above also. And now the biggest lie:

“Imperialism is the No 1 enemy of the Libyan people. Gaddafi is a creature of imperialism.”

The Liaison Committee cannot see the contradictions between imperialism and bourgeois nationalist regimes, the Leninist distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations, and can imagine no good reason apart from subverting the ‘revolution’ for them to sponsor the rebels. This is indeed becoming a very tangled web. The truth is that what the Liaison Committee correctly labels a “national bourgeois crony capitalist regime” is at severe odds with imperialism because there is a very great deal left of the Libyan revolution of 1969 worth defending and the masses now increasingly rallying to Gaddafi realise this. And the ranks of the rebels realise this also, they do not know why they are fighting, which is why they appear so cowardly and half-hearted in their struggle. Installing puppets for imperialism is not a strongly motivating ideal so they run away from the first sound of gunfire.

And now the slander directed at Socialist Fight and our fellow anti-imperialist revolutionaries (as if there was some other kind!):

“All those who on the left who gave support to Gaddafi in the name of Communism or Trotskyism and were responsible for disarming the Libyan people in their long resistance to Gaddafi must be exposed and condemned. They share a large part of the blame for the failure to build a revolutionary workers party in Libya and the others states of the region to play a leading role in the Arab Revolution.”

It is true that Gerry Healy and the WRP did capitulate to the Arab bourgeoisie and that the present-day WRP continues that line. But Healy’s most vociferous opponent before the 1985 split was Sean Matgamna of the AWL. His position was to support imperialism against the same Arab bourgeoisie and he has continued the same line ever since.

Although we totally denounced Vanessa Redgrave’s attempts to bring the AWL to court for this I and another leading Central Committee in the post-split WRP refused an invite from Matgamna to speak at a public meeting denouncing Redgrave because we would not be associated with an attack on Gaddafi from the right. The nonsense about “disarming the Libyan people’ from those who are now the spokespeople for imperialism is just total nonsense as is the rubbish about the “Arab Revolution”.

Alliance for Workers Liberty

Now we come to the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL). With some trepidation we opened the page and our worst expectations were met. Here it is:

“Any emergence of workers’ organisations in the free zone must exploit any democratic openings but there should be no illusions that the National Transitional Council will do much for workers’ rights. Nor for tribal minorities, minority faith groups, migrant workers, and for the large LGBT population in the cities which has been dreadfully treated under Qaddafi. There will be no “carnival of the oppressed” in the liberated areas, as the Libyan masses look towards military victory, military defeat or a tense and unsustainable stalemate. But there is real hope and excitement in the free cities. It may be that a potential No Fly Zone could tip the balance in the favour of the rebels — in that sense we should not take a stand against such a policy, even if we would not critically support it with all that that that implies.

Let us look towards the elimination of the Qaddafi regime and its crimes. The vengeance of history is more powerful than the vengeance of the most powerful General Secretary, as Trotsky wrote in similar circumstances. Solidarity with the revenge of the Libyan working class!”[11]

Martyn has no illusions in what the leadership of the ‘rebels’ will do to the workers, nevertheless he has picked his (pro-imperialist naturally) side so he is for bombing by imperialist forces – won’t take a stand against it – but will not critically endorse it either. The three ‘that’s’ in the piece is him stuttering in amazement at what he was writing. If he keeps running into himself coming back like this he will end up up up his own rectum!

Here is the AWL in the shape of Clive Bradley on 20 March, 2011

“But the rebel forces in Benghazi greeted the UN decision with jubilation. Benghazi is a city where Qaddafi has, in the past, conducted the mass public execution of oppositionists. They knew what they could expect if Qaddafi triumphed. And it seemed likely that Qaddafi was on the verge of defeating the revolution, or at least inflicting terrible slaughter. To oppose – that is, demonstrate against, and make a serious effort to prevent – the limited military action against Qaddafi, is to tell the rebels in Benghazi “you’re on your own.” What socialist would want to send out such a message? Only one not deserving the name. But what issue of principle should make us demonstrate against the one thing which might prevent untold slaughter, prevent Qaddafi’s immediate bloody victory, and therefore a crushing defeat for the wave of revolutions?...instead, some socialists have responded to this crisis by putting their hostility to America above the lives of the Libyan rebels. And this is a shameful disgrace.” [12]

We will leave the reader to decide who is a shameful disgrace in this dispute – Bradley is objecting to the pacifist Stop the War picket against imperialist intervention!

The Socialist Party too capitulated

The Socialist Party too capitulated and sided with the rebels, as we would expect but it made some correct demands in The Socialist, 3 March 2011. If these demands, for committees to represent the workers, for independent trade unions, for a constituent assembly, etc. were equally pitched at Gaddafi’s supporters and called for a united front against the rebel leaders then they would form part of a programme for the Permanent Revolution. As it is they are simply a cover for imperialism.

Although they back the rebels, they do the more leftist thing of also opposing imperialist intervention. A survey of the left will show that only the AWL supports this, Workers Power is ambiguous, saying the rebels are right to take advantage of the bombing that they demanded but

which Workers Power oppose. Logically the AWL are right, then. If the 'revolution' is to succeed it can only do so with the assistance of 'the international community' so let us go with that. Hold on, treachery say our leftists, the imperialists intervened only to subvert the revolution not help it. Nonsense, the AWL might truthfully say, these people made their politics clear from the outset, they never wavered in their pro-imperialism and we have never wavered in our support of them, we are the real social imperialist, you are only shamefaced versions of us.

But the SP spot another problem.

"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."

There is something to defend in the Libyan which these rebels might be endangering, they imply. In fact they are immediately threatening all the gains of the 1969 revolution. But what revolution is the SP defending? They manage to fudge this because they are political enough to spot some problems coming up and do not want to be stranded on the wrong side completely.[14]

We got capitulation to imperialist propaganda from the SWP; opposed to imperialist intervention except in its proxy form of the ITNC: in online Issue: 2243, 19 March 2011 they castigated Obama for his lack of will in tackling Gaddafi: "If the US's motive was to see the revolution succeed, it would release Gaddafi's frozen assets to the interim government. But "No-fly zone' is no way to free Libya". However "People are prepared to die for this revolution and they are fighting for their freedom, not for the imperialist control of Libya." Sometimes "people" are conned by their leaders, we would suggest. But, in memory of Paul Foot, they acknowledged that sometimes imperialism too can be bad: "He also agreed to pay compensation to the families affected by the Lockerbie bombing, and accepted the false conviction of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi—the Libyan who was framed for the bombing." [13]

The Permanent Revolution Collective, CoReP

One group of comrades, the CoReP, with whom we have had fraternal relations, asked this of us: "We agree to support Gaddafi against imperialist armies. But we cannot agree to support any bourgeois despot coming from the army against his own people's upsurge, as Gerry did in name of SF well before imperialist intervention. If there was a real revolution led by Nasser or Gaddafi, who needs the permanent revolution strategy and a revolutionary workers party there?"

"His own people's upsurge" was a putsch organised by extreme reactionary leaders, whose political credentials these comrades did not even think worth checking. Because obviously this objectively unfolding revolution had no need of revolutionary leaders, reactionary ones were just as good. And then they accuse us of capitulating to Nasser and Gaddafi! Of course the Socialist Fight article did not give uncritical support to Gaddafi against the rebels, the support was critical and against the internal agents of imperialism as well as their allies, the imperialists bombers themselves.

These 'revolutionaries' (some still follow The Guardian in designating them thus) called in imperialist bombing of their own country and people, have made the country's oil resources available to imperialism in return for puppet status, just as their ideologue whose flag they wave, King Idris, did up to 1969. Neither did they enquire why these 'revolutionaries' felt it necessary to slaughter all those black workers. We would suggest it was because their leaders knew their racism and wished to encourage it by talk of 'black mercenaries' to ensure that the working class could not influence events in any way. Of course politically the working class could not have any independent existence when one group of workers were killing another, minority group. The working class was thereby ideologically defeated at the outset of this 'revolution'.

These comrades think that there is still a huge political difference between the imperialist war planes that bomb Gaddafi's army and civilian supporters and the rebels. But they are obviously part of the same war machine and are trying to win by following up the bombing as imperialism's foot soldiers, unfortunately for Sarkozy et al not very good ones.

The CoReP statement complains that "The threat of interference of the Western armies" ... has "politically strengthened Gaddafi." That might be because he is fighting imperialism and the rebels are supporting it. It makes a number of democratic demands, seemingly unaware that some of these have already been realised and under immediate threat from the imperialist-sponsored rebels, whom they are supporting. On the emancipation of women for instance, Libya has the most progressive laws on women's rights in the whole of the region. And we have seen above the real relationship between finance capital and Libya, it is severely inhibited and it wants its 'freedom and democracy' and it is confident that the rebels will give it to them.

The CoReP declares for a socialist revolution. But supporting the forces of imperialism in the form of the rebels can only strengthen the hand of reaction. The CoReP concludes:

"Thus, Libya workers will be able to defeat the bourgeois dictatorship and contribute to the Socialist Federation of the Middle East and North Africa where Arab, Berber, Turkish, Jewish, Kurds, Saharawis, Persian, etc. will remove all the borders inherited from colonialism."

Without fighting global imperialism, correctly identifying the local agents of imperialism and making a united front bloc with Gaddafi against it and its local agents the revolution cannot advance at all. You are only contributing to the political confusion and lining up with every imperialist power and every reactionary Gulf state who were slaughtering their own genuine revolutionaries.

The African Union

They were opposed by the African Union, the only group of countries against the bombing of Libya and for the very good reasons.[15]

According to Times Live;

"The AU as an organisation has benefited significantly from Kadhafi's wealth," said Fred Golooba Mutebi of the Institute of Social Research at Kampala's Makerere University. The pan-African body has taken a firmer stance on three West African crises: most recently Ivory Coast and previously Guinea and Niger. Handouts aside, Libya has invested billions of dollars in sub-Saharan Africa. It has interests in more than two dozen African countries, while its petroleum refining and distribution unit

Oil Libya has interests in at least as many. Libyan telecommunications unit LAP Green is present in five countries in the region and expanding rapidly.”[16]

This desperate anti-imperialist stance by Africa as shown by the squirming of Jean Ping, chairman of the Standing Commission of the AU in this BBC hardtalk video. How is he to defend African from the wrath of world imperialism and appease imperialism at the same time? They are humiliated by world imperialism yet again in alliance with our soft-left apologists and will now be opened to exploitation in more intensified forms if Gaddafi’s regime falls.[17] They have struck a big blow at the fight to reconstitute revolutionary Trotskyism but we know there will be enough who are appalled by their capitulation to begin the fight anew.

The WRP, Sparts, IBT and the CPGB

The stance of the WRP in calling for victory to Gaddafi has raised the hackles of many leftists. (The News Line: Editorial Friday, 11 March 2011 Defend Libyan revolution! Stop and bring down the oil thieves! Victory to Gadaffi!). But almost all these attacks are from the right. A leftist criticism would point out that the line does not counterpose the interests of the working class in Libya to this leftist bourgeois nationalist, who has moved to the right in recent years. They do make these criticisms but these is no political clarity; victory to Gaddafi certainly implies that he is capable of victory and puts faith in him they he will not sell out. Supposing he does, would it not have been better to urge the Libyan workers to defend the gains made since 1969 with their own methods of struggle and organs of power against Gaddafi, although in temporary alliance.

They say:

“It was a major mistake for Gadaffi not to place himself and Libya in the front line of those supporting the revolutions that began in Tunisia and spread to Egypt. In fact, he opposed them when he should have shown solidarity with them, and then urged the Libyan masses to say what changes they wanted to see in Libya, as part of the struggle for a socialist North Africa” (The News Line: Editorial, 23 February)

But Gaddafi opposed these revolutions because he is a bourgeois nationalist; asking him to urge “the Libyan masses to say what changes they wanted to see in Libya, as part of the struggle for a socialist North Africa” is to suppose he is some type of socialist or a blunted instrument of the socialist revolution, a very ‘Pabloite’ error. Politically Gaddafi is the same as Chiang Kai Shek and Trotsky’s attacks on Stalin before the 1927 massacre of the Shanghai soviet equally apply to the WRP today.

The Statement by the Revolutionary Marxist League, Greek section of the ICFI still has many old Healyisms in it (e.g. references to the above class ‘Libyan Revolution’) but it is still much better in terms of the independence of the working class:

“No to the imperialist interventions in Libya! Shut down the Souda Bay military base! ,

Forward with the permanent revolution in the Arab countries! For the victory of the socialist revolution!

And it does not call for victory to Gaddafi. Instead it correctly charges Gaddafi with responsibility for the uprising:

“This uprising is due to the reactionary pro-imperialism policies of the Gaddafi regimes in recent years. This regime allowed the imperialist oil companies back into Libya and imposed privatisations; this brought riches to those sections of the ruling class doing business with the imperialist companies, while it drove workers and youth to unemployment and poverty. Gaddafi’s other big mistake was his support for Ben Ali and Mubarak. But the working masses in Libya must defend the gains and achievements of the 1969 Revolution against imperialism and the oil companies.”

Whilst correctly calling:

“To fight in a United Revolutionary Front against the leaders of the reactionary uprising and at the same time they must campaign for the political power of a workers’ and small peasants’ revolutionary alliance” (The News Line: Feature 8 March 2011 ).

The Statement of the Sparts on 20 March, “Defend Libya Against Imperialist Attack!” correctly calls for the defence of Libya against imperialist attack and makes a correct analysis of who the ‘rebels’ are and them astoundingly takes no side between Gaddafi and them, as if there was a total separation between imperialism and its open agents! Here is the relevant quote:

“Prior to the current attack, the conflict in Libya had taken the form of a low-intensity civil war, heavily overlaid by tribal and regional divisions, between the Tripoli-centred government of strongman Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi and imperialist-backed opposition forces concentrated in the country’s eastern areas. Workers Vanguard No. 976 (18 March), newspaper of the U.S. section of the ICL, noted that “Marxists presently have no side in this conflict.”

They have been saved somewhat by the imperialist intervention from facing the consequences of this appeasement of bourgeois public opinion.

In their statement of 1 April the International Bolshevik Tendency takes the same line as the Sparts:

“Unlike in Egypt and Tunisia, where the protests were mass popular expressions of opposition to brutal oppression, the conflict between Qaddafi loyalists and the rebels headquartered in Benghazi amounted to a small-scale civil war between qualitatively equivalent capitalist factions. Marxists take no side in such conflicts, although we of course oppose the killing of civilians by the combatants. The entry of the NATO powers, however, transformed this conflict into a struggle between a neo-colonial country and several imperialist powers (and their indigenous proxies). Class-conscious workers must oppose this reactionary colonial war in every possible way, including labor strikes against the production and transportation of war materiel”[18]

But how could these two forces be termed, “qualitatively equivalent capitalist factions”, the one, Gaddafi’s government, was still defending the gains of the 1969 revolution. As we show above, though under attack from the regime on behalf of imperialism in the last half-decade, these were still considerable, Libya still had the best standard of living for its citizens in Africa.

The rebels were prepared to give the imperialists everything in return for their patronage. Had they won in that first push imperialism would have gained a very cheap victory. Failure to make a bloc without political support to Gaddafi at this stage meant that the ‘Spart family’ still had illusions in the rebels and were victims of the propaganda war. The imperialists and their lackeys throughout

the world recognised their friends at once and chose sides without hesitation. The Sparts and the IBT choose no side; they took a third campist position.

But the CPGB are absolutely awful. Long time leader Eddie Ford in Weekly Worker 858 March 24 says the following:

“Imperialism out, down with the Gaddafi regime. Western intervention in Libya - and the rest of the Arab world - aims to subvert popular power and the Arab revolution. Unlike scabs such as the WRP, communists wholeheartedly backed the revolutionary democratic upsurge - the revolution - in Libya against the rotten regime, just as we did in the entire Arab world. We want to see all these regimes swept away by popular power, with the working class securing hegemony over the demonstrations, protests and uprisings.”

Again that non-class and above class democratic revolution – “the revolution” which can be going in any direction, with any allies fighting for any cause as long as it is in pursuit of “extreme democracy”. It allows us to forget about the ‘democracy’ of the black workers slaughtered by these ‘democrats’ and the Libyan workers who back Gaddafi because they see what these reactionaries real intentions are; to secure the leadership of a puppet government on the basis of betraying their own national interests and selling out the remaining gains of the 1969 bourgeois revolution. And the real ‘democracy’ contested here is the right of finance capital to exploit the Libyan economy and rob its oil without all those ‘undemocratic’ restrictions imposed on it by that ‘evil dictator’ the ‘madman’ Gaddafi.

The real scabs in this conflict are not the WRP and those Maoists and pan-Africanists who capitulate to the Bonapartist regime of Gaddafi but all those who call for the defeat of Gaddafi by the rebels in conjunction with world imperialism like the AWL. Those who equivocate on this by ignoring the political character of the rebels in the name of ‘the democratic revolution’ are at best imperialism’s unwitting stooges. Those who took a neutral stance between the rebels and Gaddafi despite correctly analysing the character of the rebels are also unable to fight imperialism by siding with and relating to the oppressed masses by correct transitional demands.

#### Endnotes

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[15] The AU consists of 53 African states formed in 1999 in Sirte on the initiative of Gaddafi. He had repeatedly proclaimed his "vision for a strong and united Africa."

[16] Times Live <http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/article977302.ece/AU-demands-immediate-halt-of-Libya-attacks>. March 20 2011

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