

German Imperialism and the Crisis in Libya

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Global Research, March 03, 2011

[WSWS.org](#) 2 March 2011

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As Colonel Muammar Gaddafi has faced increasing internal opposition from the working masses and sections of his own regime, Germany has emerged as a full-fledged participant in the great power drive for imperialist intervention in Libya.

Already a week ago the German navy sent three warships with 600 soldiers on board to the Libyan coast—at a time when the United States was still contemplating its response. At the end of last week, two German military Transall planes flew from Crete to Libya, ostensibly to rescue EU citizens from the Al-Nafoura oil installation. Several paratroop units trained for covert operations behind enemy lines had joined the Transall units in Crete.

The German media has pushed for a Libyan no-fly zone. As in Iraq, this would be the first step towards targeting Libya's warplanes and seizing control of Libya's air space. The media has also pressed for the seizure of Libyan funds abroad.

These measures are justified on humanitarian grounds—to protect the insurgent population from the Gaddafi regime. Such humanitarian pretexts are utterly cynical and without any credibility. There were no similar proposals for German forces to be deployed to evacuate European civilians from other pro-Western regimes—such as Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain and Yemen—that fired upon their people in the course of the mass uprisings sweeping North Africa and the Middle East.

The reasons why media and state officials advocate different treatment for Libya are not hard to fathom. Libya is large, sparsely populated, and contains massive reserves of a critical commodity that it exports in large quantities to Europe—oil. It offers a more tempting target for direct plunder by Western imperialism, which continues to stagger under the shocks of the global economic crisis.

German corporations have developed extensive interests in Libya since 2004, when then Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, a Social Democrat, first visited Gaddafi. BASF subsidiary Wintershall, based on an investment of \$2 billion, has developed into the largest foreign oil producer in Libya. German industrial companies such as Siemens are also heavily involved in Libya, earning large sums from infrastructure projects financed by Libya's oil revenues.

Germany, no less than the United States and the other imperialist powers, fears the implications of a political vacuum should Gaddafi fall. It is currently unclear who is leading the opposition movement. In interviews from Benghazi and other cities held by anti-Gaddafi forces, many people have made clear that they oppose an intervention by the great powers.

Libya, which suffered heavily under the colonial rule of Italy, has a long tradition of anti-

imperialist struggle—a tradition that Gaddafi exploited before he made his peace with imperialism.

To defend the investments German corporations worked out with the Gaddafi dictatorship, Berlin must be able to threaten—and, therefore, to use—military force. This is a major reason why the German army and navy are sending forces to the region.

The open assertion of Berlin's imperialist appetites goes hand-in-hand with the resurgence of public rivalry with other imperialist powers for the division of the spoils. Commenting on Westerwelle's performance in Geneva, *Spiegel Online* wrote: "Germany is playing an active role in the Mediterranean and not conceding terrain to France and Italy, which are more compromised than Berlin due to their links with former and existing potentates in North Africa. After initial hesitation regarding the rulers in Tunisia and Egypt, the foreign minister was quite blunt in the case of Libya."

The precipitate and reckless haste of the German ruling elite to flex its military muscle in Libya suggests that it sees the crisis there as an opportunity to shed whatever remnants remain of the post-World War II restrictions on the German military.

For Germany, intervention in Libya represents a further step towards the country's full return to the circle of major powers. It follows the country's participation in both the 1999 Kosovo war and the NATO occupation of Afghanistan, and a concerted campaign by leading German politicians to overcome the anti-militarist sentiment in the German population—the product of the devastating experiences of Nazism and two world wars.

After German President Horst Köhler resigned last May to protest criticisms of his statement that Germany's Afghan deployment aimed to protect economic interests, Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg publicly advocated the use of military forces to defend German economic interests.

The main political brake preventing the spread of imperialist war throughout the Middle East, and ultimately the world, is opposition in the working masses. The great powers have not yet decided to openly dispatch troops to the Libyan mainland, fearing they could become trapped in an endless war against the population, as in Afghanistan, and that this could provoke popular opposition—both at home, where the wars are hated, and among the Middle Eastern masses who are now rising up against imperialist-backed dictatorships throughout the region.

This means, however, that the question of developing a new political perspective and political leadership for the rapidly developing struggles of the working class takes on the greatest urgency. The critical question is how the working class can fight the imperialist drive towards war.

Germany's conservative government has been able to pursue its military aims unhindered due to the lack of any opposition by the established political parties, which have adopted openly pro-militarist and pro-imperialist positions and suppressed mass anti-war sentiment.

The chair of the Social Democratic (SPD) parliamentary fraction and former foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, has expressly welcomed the UN Security Council sanctions and the German government's support for them. His vice-chairman, Gernot Erler, supports a flight ban and a mandate under Chapter 7 of the Charter of the United Nations. This clause was

used by the US government to justify the Iraq war.

Support has also come from the camp of the Greens. On February 25, Green Party leader Claudia Roth attacked the German government for being too soft on Libya. “The deliberations by the EU for sanctions against the Gaddafi regime come too late and are more than overdue,” Roth said. She criticized the inaction of the European Union and called upon the government “to help shape EU policy against Gaddafi with a clear plan of action” and “push for a unified, rapid and effective sanctions policy.”

The Left Party has notably held back from commenting on the situation in Libya and has refrained from criticizing the deployment of the German navy along the Libyan coast, in common with the SPD and Greens. Instead, it is preparing to undermine and demobilize any opposition to a new war.

Executive member Christine Buchholz, who entered the Left Party as a member of the Linksruck (International Socialist) fraction, issued a short statement entitled “Libya: No Military Intervention.” In it she calls for an arms embargo but advises against a military intervention, arguing that it would drive “the people behind the regime and cost a lot of lives.”

This demonstrates the unprincipled role of the Left Party, which functions as an adviser to the German government on the best tactics to defend its imperialist interests. Buchholz does not advance a principled opposition to imperialist intervention in Libya, warning of the colonialist character of any sanctions by the great powers and insisting that it is the task of the Libyan masses themselves, not imperialism, to rid themselves of both Gaddafi and the Libyan bourgeoisie as a whole.

She speaks on behalf of neither the Libyan nor the German working class, which must see in Westerwelle and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, as well as their counterparts in the SPD, their most bitter class enemies.

The social and political issues that have driven millions into the streets in the Maghreb and the Middle East—poverty, inequality, the lack of democratic rights—cannot be resolved within the framework of the capitalist system. These same issues are impelling millions of workers in Germany, Europe and throughout the world into struggle against the financial aristocracy and its ossified political system.

The struggle for democracy is inextricably linked to the struggle for workers’ power and the socialist transformation of society throughout the region and worldwide. German workers must demonstrate their solidarity with the Libyan and Arab workers by opposing any military intervention and mobilizing against the exploiters at home on the basis of socialist and internationalist policies.

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