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Debate: Libya/Denmark

No to imperialist war in Libya

- Debate - Problems of the Arab and Middle East regions -

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The Red Green Alliance in Denmark decided to support Danish participation in the UN-NATO intervention in Libya. This support was later retracted. The SAP (Danish section of the Fourth International), which is part of the RGA, disagrees with the original position and considers the retraction insufficient, given the motivation. This resolution from their leadership explains why. The two statements from the RGA are published following the SAP resolution.

SAP welcomes the decision of the Red Green Alliances (RGA) PB and parliamentary group Wednesday 30th March to withdraw its support for the Danish government's participation in the war in Libya. This has created the possibility that the RGA finally can participate in the fight to stop the imperialist war in Libya.

The positive element of the new decision unfortunately is hampered by the related statement by the RGA: "The RGA will work to get the operation back on the UN track as soon as possible". Thus the parliamentary group focuses on a change in goals and methods of the Danish war effort instead of getting it stopped.

This uncertainty has already had as result that the RGA did not co-organize or mobilize for the demonstration against the war in Libya today.

Wrong Decision

At the same time we state that the decision to vote for the Danish war participation was wrong. It is not the task of socialists to assist the imperialist countries in their wars for influence, control and power around the world – not either when it comes to our own government.

Exceptions may be found in history or in the future, but in this situation there was no reason to abandon RGA's fundamental opposition to war and imperialism.

Imperialist motives

The motives of the Western governments were not to prevent Libyan civilians from being killed. It was not to abolish dictatorships. And it was not to strengthen the revolutionary processes in the Arab world.

Had that been the motives, there were scores of other countries, even in this region, where they could send the military off to protect citizens and combat dictatorship.

Instead they chose to intervene militarily:

• to gain a military bastion in the Arab world;

â€¢ to gain control of the Libyan oil;

â€¢ to be sure that Libya continues to function as the last outpost of Fortress Europe against the refugees;

â€¢ and in general in order to influence the regime that may take power after Gadaffi.

Thus this war is a classical imperialist war. As in all other imperialist wars there have not been lacking in the humanitarian and democratic justifications of governments and military.

No imperialist war with brakes

That the war-going governments and the military leaderships had other, more comprehensive goal than to protect the civilian population through a no-fly zone, they never concealed - even before the decision was taken. The line of events and numerous statements after the start of the war have confirmed this.

Nothing in the UN mandate could prevent this. No terms of the RGA or promises from the Danish government could prevent this.

As history has shown, it is impossible first to allow imperialist governments to go to war and then afterwards stop them when they pursue their own political power and economic interests to the end.

Risk of massacre versus more power to the imperialism

Most supporters of the war decision recognize that the war-going governments were not driven by the desire to protect the civilians and bring peace.

Instead they defend the decision with the argument that it was necessary to "do something" to prevent the residents of Benghazi and other threatened cities being massacred, and the argument that the opposition asked for military aid from the West.

The threat of a massacre may have been real but it reasonable doubts have been raised about some of the announcements and predictions that were made at that time. Widespread massacres of civilians had NOT taken place before the war decision. Representatives of the opposition failed to tell the truth in several other matters. Lessons from recent imperialist wars have shown us that the press has played a central role in winning support through false information at home in the war countries.

So what we faced was the risk of a massacre. We cannot blame those threatened in Benghazi that they were in panic and asked for help from anyone. And we can expect some parts of the leadership of even the most popular based rebellions to aim for power through support of Western capitalist governments.

Confronted with a risk like this we must - before we make a decision – assess the impact of an imperialist war in the short, medium and long term. In this case we can rightly expect:

â€¢ That what from the start was presented as a discrete flight ban action develops into a prolonged and escalating warfare with dead soldiers and dead civilians as a consequence;

â€¢ That the Western imperialist countries will gain control of Libya resulting in increased exploitation, increased poverty and misery and increased risk of having a new Western-friendly dictator. That was what was they sought to ensure by three days of negotiation meetings with leaders of the uprising before the military action, with their interference in decisions on who should represent the opposition and with the deployment of Danish ambassador to Benghazi to "clarify Libya's future after Gaddafi";

â€¢ That imperialism gain a powerful bastion in the middle of the Arab world – a bastion that who will function as a brake on the revolutionary processes in the region - and thus weaken the possibility of a victory over dictatorships and imperialist and capitalist exploitation and oppression;

â€¢ That it will be easier for the imperialist countries in the future to launch new military actions with humanistic and democratic fig leaves - and thus greater risk of a new Iraq, a new Afghanistan, a new Libya.

In our view the impact of military intervention most likely will be worse than the consequences of not intervening militarily. In this light, we note that it is better not to do something than to contribute to something harmful.

Socialists and other anti-imperialists do not have much force in the current global balance of power. In these circumstances we must accept that we could point to immediate solutions, but only identify medium and long term solutions, such as:

â€¢ Working for a boycott and blockade of the Gaddafi regime;

â€¢ Working to provide material support for the popular uprisings, including weapons;

â€¢ Working to support a social and political radicalization of the Libyan revolution, which in itself would help to increase the number of Libyans actively fighting against Gaddafi;

â€¢ Working to support the revolutionary processes in the rest of the region - ultimately the best guarantee that the popular uprising in Libya can survive and triumph.

War support with inconsistencies

In addition, we note that there has been considerable ambiguity and inconsistency in the arguments for the RGA's support for the Danish war effort.

On the one hand it has been said that the Danish war effort was to ensure the civilian population from massacre. On the other hand it is insisted that it was not about removing Gaddafi, and it should not be a protracted military action. But how is the civilian population secured against the massacres, while Gaddafi is in power? A real security for civilians would precisely require a massive and/or protracted military action to remove Gaddafi.

On the one hand most supporters of the war effort in the RGA put decisive emphasis on the UN mandate stressing

that without it the RGA could never vote for the war. On the other hand, their main argument - as mentioned - was that it would be inhumane to not to intervene and prevent massacres. But, if Russia or China had voted against, instead of abstaining, would the UN mandate have been missing, and the RGA-majority apparently would have no trouble failing to intervene to prevent massacres.

RGA weakened

For the RGA in narrow terms the decisions were bad. First and foremost the party has undermined and perhaps lost its position as the dissident, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist party in Denmark. Moreover, the party has placed itself in contrast to SUF [Socialist Youth Front – trans.], most of the European left - and many of its own members.

Additionally, RGA has not obtained its stated goal: to be publically known for the position that the RGA wants to protect civilians, but not make war for oil and power. Instead they have left the impression of a party in great confusion:

– Friday the 18th March the RGA voted for war action – based on promises from the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister on certain RGA-conditions. The promises were not documented, and their content was only partially covered by the media. Instead the story of "historic unity" in parliament on the war dominated media coverage.

– Monday the 21st March Frank Aaen (Member of the Danish Parliament from the RGA) called for a stop a bombing and for an intensified effort for a ceasefire because Western powers now had reached the agreed target of military action. Later the same day the Foreign Minister reported - after a telephone conversation with Frank Aaen - that RGA still supported the war. This Frank Aaen had stated earlier the same day.

– Tuesday the 29th March Frank Aaen said that the war still was about protecting civilians, but "warned that time is approaching for a ceasefire." This day Frank Aaen also voiced his "concern" that the command was passed to NATO.

– Wednesday the 30th March the PB of RGA and Frank Aaen announced, that now the preconditions for supporting the war were violated, and thus the party withdrew its support. The reason given was unsatisfactory responses at a meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee the day before in relation to efforts to achieve a ceasefire and a lack of assurances that it was not turning into an offensive military action in support of rebel attacks. They also referred to reports that the Danish F16s the night before had participated in an attack in support of rebels near the town of Sirte, which had never been under rebel control. At the same time RGA said it will work to get the action "back on the UN track".

Tasks

In all aspects the chosen line has failed. It now requires a great and lengthy effort to bring the RGA back on track. The SAP will actively take part in this:

â€¢ We will work to ensure that RGA as a consequence of the withdrawal of support to the war instead will participate in the anti-war effort.

â€¢ We will ourselves participate in the struggle to demand Danish military out of Libya.

â€¢ We will support democratic forces in Libya - and the revolutionary forces that may be identified - and in other Arab countries and work for the RGA to do the same.

â€¢ We will work to rebuild the reputation of the RGA as a critical and anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist party.

Particularly, the left now has a task to catch up what has been lost. We must fully support the struggle for democracy. We must find ways to make this concrete going beyond political statements. This could happen by making connections to the exile communities and support their solidarity effort. It could be by establishing direct contacts with the forces leading the fight, at least to gain better information. Especially we must look for those who link the struggle for democracy with the struggle for social rights such as the Egyptian trade union movement. Likewise, we support the struggle for expanding democracy to the control of the resources of the country. We argue that agreements concluded by Gaddafi as well as by representatives of the rebels do not need to be respected by the Libyan people. Whatever the rebels have promised, they have been blackmailed as a condition for imperialist support. When hopefully there will be established organs expressing the the Libyan population, we must oppose every attempt to force them up to acknowledge past agreements with other countries.

RGA must make a balance sheet

Whatever position people have taken in the internal disagreements in RGA, it must be obvious that Libya issue has caused great controversy. The question of war has big consequences, and it has always been a major dividing line in the labor movement and the Left. Therefore, the disagreements have created wounds within the party.

The first step in order to heal wounds, to create unity in the party and restore a clear anti-imperialist profile must be an open and democratic debate on the decision. This debate has been lively in the electronic discussion forum, the R+G (membership magazine – translator) and at many branch meetings. This must continue. It is crucial that this debate is conducted respecting that everybody in the RGA has taken their positions in order to promote our common cause and for the best of the RGA - and everybody should avoid attributing to our opponents motives they cannot recognize themselves.

This debate must also be given the necessary time and space at the National Convention this May. The necessary waivers must be made so that resolution in the issue can be introduced. There must be enough time at the convention for arguments, and the delegates must be presented with clear alternatives to vote on. Short-term tactical considerations about the consequences for the RGA election campaign must not tempt the leadership to sweep this debate under the carpet. RGA can survive public disagreements. But if opponents of these decisions do not get the opportunity to present their views, to discuss and to try to win the majority, the party's capacity for electoral campaigning will be diminished.

As is evident from this text, it is the viewpoint of the SAP that the National Convention must draw the conclusion that the decision to support the war was a mistake. This decision should not be used to "take revenge" on those responsible or extort from them self-criticism and regrets. It must be used to restore the RGA profile and help prevent similar mistakes in future.

It should be clarified whether RGA consider opposition to the war - demanding that NATO troops be pulled back - as an important part of solidarity work with the continuing revolution in all of North Africa and Middle East.

Also a balance sheet of the procedures relating to the Libya decision must be drawn. Criticism has been raised from various members of the party about the way to take the decision of the 18th of March were taken. The necessity of the rush has also been questioned. There has been criticism against the treatment of critics and opponents of war in some branches and in the R+G. There have been difficulties in dealing with the disagreement between RGA and SUF in public, including handling the fact of double members. Again, the party needs to make a balance sheet and prepare for future critical situations and major disagreements.

The decision and the debate have not only emerged as tactical differences on the same basis. It has also revealed various basic approaches to western governments, war as a tool, uprisings in other countries, the UN and much more.

Therefore the National Convention must also decide to initiate further debate and education in the party on issues such as:

Â· governments and states class characters and the consequences for their actions;

Â· imperialism drivers, motives and actions;

Â· UN role in the international class struggle;

Â· RGA role in the international class struggle.

Also disagreement in SAP

The overall mission of SAP is to help build the RGA and SUF. This is being done based on the historical experiences of the labor movement and the Left historical and on the political discussions and concrete experience, we and others in the SUF and RGA are making in daily political struggle.

This role we haven't been able to play very well in this situation because SAP's members did not agree on the issue.

This disagreement was sharpened by the fact that we never got the opportunity to exchange knowledge and views with each other before each of us had to take a stance. Not only did decisions have to be taken quickly in parliament and thus in RGA. Very few really imagined that the RGA would support Danish participation in the war - and therefore we did not see any reason to discuss it.

From the beginning the PB of SAP agreed that the RGA should not support the war. But taking into consideration the fact that several members of the SAP voted for the war participation in the PB and the National Leadership of the RGA and the fact that some of them had the same opinion, when the SAP-PB were able to meet with them and other members of both the RGA and the SAP NL on Wednesday 23rd April we chose to publish a political comment (weekly regular) that called on the RGA to withdraw war support in the light of events in the days just after the military and the fact that the conditions put forward by the RGA's own assumptions were violated.

Regarding that the RGA has withdrawn its support for the war and after having had the opportunity for a thorough discussion with each other - combined with an extensive discussion with others outside the SAP - we have chosen to publish this text, stating our position on the war as such.

Some members of the SAP, including members of the National Leadership of SAP and members of the PB of the RGA still disagree with the majority. This means that this statement expresses the position of SAP and it is this political line that our organization and Socialist Information (Public magazine of SAP – translator) will propagate. It is not a precondition for being a member of SAP that you defend this view.

The operation is against the UN – we withdraw the support

Red-Green Alliance

30 March 2011

The leadership of Enhedslisten/the Red-Green Alliance has decided to withdraw their support of the military operation in Libya. On March 30, the following letter and email were sent by the RGA Parliamentary group and Executive Committee to the members of the party.

The action in Libya is not any more just about obtaining a ceasefire and protecting civilians. Instead it is about taking part in a civil war, and that is something, The Red-green Alliance will not support.

“The direction that the action has taken is in clear opposition to the UN resolution, and there has been made no serious attempts to establish a ceasefire,” tells Frank Aaen, the defense policy spokesperson.

From protection to civil war

“Since last Friday they had succeeded in stopping the attacks from Gadaffi on the civilian population. It was a correct decision to stop his attack, and we are pleased to have been part of it,” Frank Aaen states.

But lately the operation has changed its character, so now we are involved in a civil war. The last couple of days the rebels had received air support to help them push forward, and even though we feel a great sympathy with the rebels, it is not the task of the military action to support one of the parties in a civil war.

No attempts on ceasefire

The development is, according to Frank Aaen, in clear conflict to the mandate that the UN and the Danish parliament (Folketinget) have granted. And that implies that the initial conditions of the Red-Green Alliance for supporting the operation are no longer fulfilled.

“It was crucial for us that the political goals were ceasefire and negotiations. And now we have to state that there has been made no serious effort in that direction whatsoever, even though it is point number one in the UN resolution,” Frank Aaen says.

Several nations, and the African Union have tried to boost the negotiations, but they obtained no support from NATO or the Foreign Ministers of the Alliance. They prefer to continue bombing.

The Red-Green Alliance will work to get the operation back on the UN-track as soon as possible. A civil war and external attempts to enforce a change of regime in Libya might last years and will cost the lives of many civilians.

Statement by the Red Green Alliance Executive Committee, Friday, March 18, 2011

The Executive Committee today held an extraordinary meeting to decide whether the Red Green Alliance can support a military action in Libya according to the decision of the UN. ?

The Executive Committee agreed that it is a very complicated situation and that there are no easy solutions. The Red Green Alliance is generally highly sceptical of the use of military means and interventions in other countries. ?

A Red Green Alliance National Congress has passed a resolution some years ago determining that in extreme cases the RGA may support a military action in cases to prevent serious crimes against humanity like genocide and ethnic cleansing. ? ?

It is the view of the Executive Committee that the UN decision may put pressure on the Libyan regime to agree to a ceasefire and talks, thus allowing for the Libyans themselves to decide on their future. And the Executive Committee considers it essential that the Libyan opposition has expressed their desire for an international humanitarian operation.

On this background, the EC decided the following: ?

1. The EC notes that UN Security Council has adopted a resolution calling for a military intervention in Libya, in order to protect the Libyan civilian population against attacks by the Gaddafi regime. ?

2. The EC finds that the adopted resolution and its content are meeting the preconditions set by the Executive Committee on Tuesday, March 15, for the Red Green Alliance to support participation in such an action:

a) There is a clear UN mandate.

b) Crimes against humanity are found to be happening or are in danger of happening. ?

c) There is a guarantee that Libya will not be occupied by foreign troops.

d) It is clear that Arab states will participate, and that the Arab League supports the no-fly zone.

Furthermore, the resolution includes further positive elements. Including:?

e) There is a call for an immediate ceasefire followed by negotiations on political reforms. ? ?

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3. The EC notes that the UN decision has had the positive result that the Libyan government has stated its willingness to declare a ceasefire. The Red Green Alliance sees a ceasefire followed by negotiations on political reforms as the best solution to the conflict.

4. The EC recognizes that there are problems associated with an attack on Libya. Particularly the risk that extensive bombing by the foreign coalition can cause extensive civilian casualties, and that the intervention ends in an occupation of Libya or the control of Libyan oil. ?

5. Therefore the EC has decided that it is a prerequisite for the support of the Red Green Alliance of the action that we are sure that the following requirements are met:
 - a) A guarantee that the attacks will be stopped if Gadaffi's regime accepts a ceasefire and halts its attacks.

 - b) A guarantee that the UN forces do not bomb residential areas with a civilian population.

 - c) A guarantee of full respect for Libya's future sovereignty, including control of its oil resources.??

6. If the RGA spokesperson on foreign policy (of the RGA parliamentary group ed.) evaluates these requirements to be met, the EC agrees that the Red Green Alliance votes in favour of the action in Libya. ?

7. If it later turns out that the action in Libya is developing in a way breaking those guarantees, the Red Green Alliance will demand that Denmark cease its support of the action.