

Correspondence on South Africa and Libya

17 November 2000

Dear Editor,

Thank you for Barbara Slaughter's article on the growing opposition to the ANC government in South Africa ["South Africa's ANC government faces growing opposition"]. Slaughter makes the point well that the ANC, along with its alliance partners, COSATU and the intellectually bankrupt South African Communist Party, are leading a sustained attack on the working class from behind a cloud of pseudo-socialist rhetoric. I would also like to point to certain developments in the field of land reform policy that support Slaughter's allegations against the ANC and its alliance partners.

South Africa's inequitable distribution of land, where 13 percent is occupied by the majority of the country's population whilst the remaining 87 percent is in the hands of a mainly white elite, has long been a source of deep conflict in the country. Recently the Land Affairs Ministry released a new policy document—the Integrated Programme for Land Reform and Agricultural Development. The main thrust of this new policy is the creation of a black commercial farming class in South Africa.

It is interesting that this project has been prioritised and promoted over a number of burning issues affecting millions of South Africans. One example is the phenomenon of landlessness, which affects large numbers of South Africans living in rural areas. State "betterment" policies implemented in the Apartheid-created "homelands" in the past resulted in the dispossession of large numbers of people at the expense of a small elite; in some rural areas, more than 50 percent of households (mostly headed by women) do not have access to land. It is ironic that some of the likely beneficiaries of the new Integrated Programme are precisely those that benefited from Apartheid-inspired betterment policies. It is notable that the creation of a commercial black farming class by means of market-based land reform has generally been welcomed by white commercial farmers and the South African business community.

Alleviation of rural poverty seems to have fallen off the

agenda with the inception of the GEAR economic policy. It is clear that the state's commitment to adhere to IMF guidelines obviates the possibility of state expenditure aimed at uplifting the poorest of the poor. However, the government is not prepared to be honest about this, for fear of the consequences. Instead, black empowerment and affirmative action are dished up as sops to be thrown to the masses in an attempt to stave off the inevitable. Increasingly, it is clear that the patience of the South African working class is wearing very thin.

Thank you once more for the excellent coverage your website gives to a wide range of issues.

Yours,
EG

Dear Editors,

There appears to be a conflict between the information presented in the article of October 28, 2000 by Trevor Johnson, "Ethnic violence and mass deportations of immigrants in Libya," (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/oct2000/liby-o28.shtml>) and that of an earlier article published by the WSWS in July of last year ("Libya's Colonel Gadhaffi—from pariah to African 'statesman'" <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/jul1999/gadh-j22.shtml>).

Mr. Johnson's article states:

"The mistreatment of immigrants reveals the real state of social relations in Libya. Gadhaffi has at times declared his regime to be "socialist", but an affluent elite rules Libya. Despite the country's oil wealth, the just over 5 million-strong Libyan population has received little of its benefits. According to the Economist magazine, a teacher is paid a mere \$1,200 a year and health care provision in the country is so bad that those who can afford to travel to Tunisia for treatment."

However the article of July 22, 1999 by John Farmer, "Libya's Colonel Gadhaffi-from pariah to African 'statesman,'" has this to say:

"At the age of 27, Gadhaffi came to power in a military coup on September 1, 1969, ending the 18-year rule of King Idris. He went on to nationalize the mainly US-owned oil fields, providing the financial means to rapidly

develop Libya's economy. Libya has the highest per capita income of any African country, and has no foreign debt. For example, its population of 5.6 million people and gross domestic product of \$23 billion compare favorably with Uganda (20.3 million people and only \$5.8 billion), or Kenya (27.8 million people and a GDP of \$8.7 billion)."

The article by Mr. Farmer gives the definite impression that the Libyan government has shared much of the oil wealth with the Libyan people.

However the article by Mr. Johnson clearly states that the "Libyan population has received little of (the oil wealth's) benefits"

What is the truth here? I can see that the Trotskyist view of Gadhaffi would have to be unfavorable since he has embarked on a course of closer economic collaboration with European capitalists, even with (or especially with) the Italians, Libya's former imperialist persecutors. Other articles in your archive also claim that he has abandoned the democratic, socialist Jamahiriya form of government. This is denied by Gadhaffi and other Libyans, such as those who contribute to the Libyan Mathaba.net website.

I would be grateful if someone at WWSW could explain the contradictions between the two articles above.

Your friend and reader,
DT

Dear DT

Thank you for your interest in our articles on Libya. I hope that our article of July 22, 1999, which said that Libya has the "highest income per capita" in Africa, did not mislead you. This meant the total income of the country (strictly speaking Gross National Product) is relatively quite high compared to the small population. It certainly did not mean that this income is shared out equally amongst the population. In the October 28, 2000 article the correct situation is made clear - i.e. the majority of the population have failed to benefit compared with a rich elite around Gadhaffi and his family.

As far as a "democratic, socialist Jamahiriya form of government" is concerned, I hope that none of our articles gave you the impression that the regime in Libya has ever been democratic or socialist— we were only suggesting he has abandoned what was always a thin veneer for his personal dictatorship. Like other nationalist regimes in the 1960s and 70s (Cuba, Algeria, etc), the Libyan regime carried out nationalisations and distanced itself from the imperialist countries to some extent by leaning towards the Soviet Union. The use of socialist rhetoric was part of this manoeuvre. With the end of the Cold War Gadhaffi,

like bourgeois nationalists and national liberation movements generally, has moved to closer economic collaboration with the West. He has made speeches saying that he no longer funds guerrilla movements and that he wants to establish trading relations with everyone, including Israel.

I was unable to find references to socialism by Gadhaffi on the website you refer to, apart from in the *Green Book* published a long time ago, but if the "General People's Congress", etc., is still in existence and if there is still some pretence of democracy and even socialism in the state-controlled media it does not appear in the speeches directed towards the Western press.

It is difficult to gain reliable information of the situation in Libya, given the media censorship and suppression of all political opposition. Neither are any social statistics available. Our intention in reporting the attacks on immigrants was to use the eye witness reports in the Nigerian and Ghanian press, which as far as could be ascertained were reliable, to shed some light on the oppressive Libyan regime.

Yours sincerely,
Chris Talbot

See Also:
South Africa

[WWSW Full Coverage]

<http://www.wsws.org/sections/category/news/af-za.shtml>

Libya

[WWSW Full Coverage]

<http://www.wsws.org/sections/category/news/me-lib.shtml>



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