Eye-witness report from Libya

22 February 2011

Over the past days, the World Socialist Web Site *has received correspondence from a reader in Libya. These are some of his observations.*

February 18: Yesterday, there was a rally of police officers in plain clothes in the Green Square and Shara Omar Mokhtar area of the capital Tripoli. It was well known beforehand that this would be a stage-managed affair.

While the Green Square area is very much under control of the police, protestors and security agencies, there are many pockets of resistance within Tripoli suburbs.

Sebha-Jadieda suburb: This is a major vegetable market and there was a call for reinforcements there as a large gathering of anti-regime protestors has gathered.

Tajora-suburb: Armed reinforcements were being sent to this suburb around 20 kilometers from the main city, as large gatherings of anti-regime supporters have gathered.

Fashloom: This is a suburb within the main city and it is said that there were armed clashes between anti and pro regime people late night-early morning (17-18 February).

Eastern Libya is where the most violent protests have occurred to date. This area has been traditionally against the western-Tripoli region regime. Earlier there was even a movement to separate this region from Western Libya. The Snusis of Cyrenaica are a proud and militant people.

In the past some senior officers of the military who were from Eastern Libya have been killed for plotting to overthrow the regime. Their families have vowed never to forgive or forget their dead officers.

The fire is raging in Benghazi (On the first day when Fathi Terbil was arrested around 2,000 people came out, but now some news channels say around 20,000 have come out). Baida, Derna, Shahat, Tobruk—all are getting affected. This is a hilly area. The original Libyan resistance movement led by Omar Mokhtar had its roots amongst these very proud, fiercely independent, self-respecting people.

"Who is he to give us things?"

This is a question which is reverberating amongst many layers, when they were told that one of the sons will come and try to placate, reach out and offer things to the disgruntled people in Eastern Libya

While there is a lot of discontent against the regime, the people are scared. The society here is divided into clans. The tribal leaders have control over the families and these same leaders are part of the decision-making hierarchy in the regime and have been given grants to look after their people.

There is no history of republicanism, political parties, or any experienced tested leadership which has taken part in resistance movements, civil society initiatives.

Will the average Libyan fight it out like the Egyptian or Tunisian? It is difficult to say for the present but the gradually growing tide is that if they keep quiet now, they will have to suffer this regime for a long time.

New movements are waking up, searching for their lost time, remembering their lost generations, seeking their stolen destinies of the decades past. They come alive in many new forms across the region. The ghosts of the prisoners massacred brutally in 1996 are rising up to haunt the regime. The rising tide says, "Now or never."

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February 19: The regime is clamping down brutally. People are being rounded up in the middle of the night. Eastern Libya is in revolt and it is said that the army is not totally siding with the regime and they have brought in soldiers from some foreign African countries to quell the protests.

There is also a move from Benghazi to march towards Tripoli, where the protests are in isolated pockets and not very well organized. Early morning in Tripoli, policemen were seen painting white the walls which

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had anti-regime slogans.

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February 21: As you have heard—Benghazi has fallen to anti-regime fighters. Old news in a revolutionary situation! For first time I am directly witnessing what one reads in the books about revolutionary situations. Things are changing by the hour.

The fight for Tripoli is going on. Street fighting is going on in Tripoli. Yesterday night, pitched battles took place at Green Square and surrounding areas. At least 24 people were killed in the square. There are foreign mercenaries, snipers and this is putting off the regular police forces.

Police are shifting loyalties in and around the capital. The military training school has been burnt down.

This morning, one could see roads dug up—glass strewn, big dustbins used as road blocks so that large armored vehicles cannot come into the streets. This is insurrection. The Libyan people are waking up to claim their stolen destinies.

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