

A new constituency for imperialism

Peter Schwarz
3 September 2011

“General enthusiasm over the prospects of imperialism, furious defence of it and painting it in the brightest colours—such are the signs of the times.” These words were written 95 years ago, but in today’s political environment are more apt than ever. A better description of the reaction of liberal journalists, left-wing intellectuals and former radicals to the war in Libya could not be found.

The quote is from Lenin’s “Imperialism,” in which the future leader of the October Revolution analyzed the causes of the First World War. Lenin did not limit himself to the study of the economic background, but also dealt with the social and political changes that preceded the greatest ever massacre in the history of mankind.

Concentrated in a few hands, the domination of finance capital over all sectors of the economy and the growing conflicts between the great powers as they sought to divide the world had “... caused the propertied classes to go over entirely to the side of imperialism.”

In Germany’s petty bourgeoisie it was then considered good form to support imperialist goals. Founded in 1898, the German Navy League, which lobbied for the construction of a German navy equal to the British, counted over one million members in 1908. All this led to the war fever that in 1914 also swept over the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and unleashed a continuing global disaster that only reached a temporary hiatus thirty years later with the end of World War II.

The hysteria and enthusiasm with which today’s European and American media and politicians respond to the rape of Libya evokes the period before the First World War. Many journalists and intellectuals who had maintained a cool head over the Afghanistan and Iraq wars have lost any critical discernment. Those who were previously moved by the drums of war have now

lost all inhibitions.

The belligerent powers have done little to conceal their predatory aims. The six-month bombardment of the country by NATO, the dubious composition of the National Transitional Council, the use of Islamist fighters and foreign elite troops on the rebels’ side, and the massacre of Gaddafi supporters and black Africans (about which the Western press is largely silent) are ill-suited to substantiating the official propaganda about the “protection of the civilian population” and a “democratic revolution.”

The international conference on Libya on Thursday in Paris, at which the assembled great powers openly haggled over the division of the country’s oil fields and billions in frozen assets, revealed the real war aims: oil, money, influence and the re-division of the entire Middle East.

But the war propagandists in the media and politics ignore everything that does not fit the image of the “liberation of Libya,” desperately closing their eyes to everything that they do not want to see.

In this regard, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, leader of the Greens in the European Parliament, is unsurpassed in his obsequiousness and arrogance. Cohn-Bendit, who came to prominence in 1968 as a spokesman for the Paris student revolt, praised the “successful military intervention,” which had “enhanced the reputation of the West in the Arab world.” He denounced his Green Party friends in Germany as “clever-dicks” and “wise guys” because they had not fully supported the war effort from the beginning. He demanded they apologize publicly to NATO.

The French Socialist Party excelled itself in its praise for President Sarkozy. It was “happy that France has taken this initiative,” said party chair Martine Aubry, and praised Sarkozy for “acting at the right moment.” Jack Lang, who previously headed the education and culture ministries and is regarded in the party as a great

intellectual, commented on the case of Tripoli with the words: “Today, everyone can congratulate the fact that France’s reputation has grown because it resolutely and successfully engaged in the battle for Libya’s freedom.”

The New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) has also signed up to the war propaganda. Its weekly *Hebdo Tout est à nous!* published discussion contributions that vigorously argued for supporting the NATO intervention. In late March, they wrote, “Those who today oppose the application of UN Resolution 1973, say directly to the insurgents in Benghazi and in the east of Libya, ‘We are sacrificing your life, your freedom and your hope to our anti-imperialism.’ Some of us will do that, I will not.”

After the fall of Tripoli, the NPA announced in an official press release: “The overthrow of the dictator Gaddafi is good news for the people. ... For the Libyan people, a new life is now opened up. Freedom, democratic rights and using the vast revenues from the commodity reserves to meet the basic needs of the people are now on the agenda.”

In official parlance, the NPA is usually described as part of the “extreme left.” “New Right” would be a better name for an organization that openly and brazenly justifies such an imperialist war.

A similar trend can also be observed in Germany. Whereas hundreds of thousands took to the streets against the Iraq war, not a single major demonstration has been called against the war in Libya. The so-called peace movement has gone into retirement.

Cohn-Bendit’s long-time friend and fellow Green Joschka Fischer, who as foreign minister in 1999 ensured Germany’s participation in the war against Yugoslavia, has castigated Berlin’s refusal to join the war in Libya as the “greatest foreign policy debacle since the founding of the Federal Republic.” The pro-SPD weekly *Die Zeit* called it “a German disgrace.” It is almost impossible to find a single voice in either the media or the establishment political parties defending Germany’s abstention from the NATO intervention.

In the US, prominent opponents of the wars of the Bush era enthusiastically support the war in Libya. A typical example is the historian Juan Cole of the University of Michigan, who made a name as a critic of the Iraq war, and now vehemently supports the war in Libya. The WSWS has subjected his evolution to

critical analysis in several articles.

The transition of former liberals and pacifists into the imperialist war camp is so widespread that one cannot treat it as an individual phenomenon. Great social struggles often announce themselves through such political transformations. Political parties are preparing for the role they will play in future class struggles.

The development is not new. During the Yugoslavia War twelve years ago, many elements from among the pacifists and the Greens supported the bombing of a defenceless country by NATO. But with the war in Libya, this development has reached a new stage.

It is mainly the representatives of well-off layers of the middle class who are bidding *adieu* to their former pacifist, liberal or “leftist” views. These layers are strongly represented in the milieu of the Greens, the Social Democrats, trade unions and the petty-bourgeois left *à la* NPA. They are responding to a sharp class polarization, which has deepened since the outbreak of the international financial and economic crisis three years ago. The support that racist demagogues like Geert Wilders or Thilo Sarrazin find in these layers is another side of the same political phenomenon.

The working class must prepare for the coming class struggles. With their support for the rape of Libya, the Greens, Social Democrats and groups like the NPA make perfectly clear where they will stand—on the side of the ruling class.

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) and the International Committee of the Fourth International is today the only political movement in the world which consistently advocates a socialist perspective and defends the interests of the international working class. The building of this party is the burning task of the hour.

Peter Schwarz



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact