

Britain's Socialist Workers Party covers for imperialist regime change in Syria

Chris Marsden
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The first response of Washington, London, and Paris to the revolutionary overturns in Tunisia and Egypt was a pre-emptive campaign for regime change in Libya, working through local proxies whose task was to prepare the way for military intervention. The pattern is being repeated in Syria.

It falls to the various ex-left tendencies to conceal these preparations behind an uncritical endorsement of the Syrian opposition, vehemently denying that its leadership is in any way the political creature of Washington. Typical is the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, whose role is made more important only by its relatively large size and the fact that it has a sister organisation in Egypt, the Revolutionary Socialists.

Writing in the January 7 *Socialist Worker*, Simon Assaf argues that whereas “it is clear that Western powers hope to gain from Assad’s demise,” and that “Fears of Western interference were given credibility when the Arab League joined in the international campaign of sanctions against Syria,” there is in fact no such danger! Rather, “the notion that ordinary Syrians struggling to change their country are the pawns of a ‘Western plot’ is absurd” and “In fact the Arab League is attempting to throw the regime a lifeline.”

It is Assaf’s position on the Arab League that is patently absurd, given the body’s close collaboration with the United States, France and Britain, first in Libya and now Syria. It is presently headed by Qatar, whose emir wants to send Arab troops to Syria and throw a noose around Assad’s neck, not a lifeline. Moreover, it is not “ordinary Syrians” that are in question here, but the Syrian National Council (SNC), the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and other bodies with proven intimate ties to Washington and regional powers such as Turkey.

Throughout the tumultuous events in the Middle East, the SWP’s political line has dovetailed with the interests of the imperialist powers and opposed any independent action by the working class that might threaten their local proxies.

In Egypt, the Revolutionary Socialists group formed a political alliance with the liberal and Islamist groups. This served to discredit socialism through its association with the deeply discredited representatives of the bourgeoisie such as Mohamed El-Baradei, while strengthening the position of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists that now dominate the post-Mubarak government in an alliance with the military.

In Libya, the SWP insisted that the opposition National Transitional Council (NTC) was made up of two wings, one

revolutionary and one pro-Western. This enabled them to lend full support to the NTC, which was dominated by ex-Gaddafi regime stalwarts, CIA operatives and Islamists, while posing as opponents of Western intervention—even as the NTC provided the mechanism through which NATO conducted its war for regime change. It still to this day justifies the NTC’s call for NATO intervention as a popular response by the “revolution”. Assaf writes in the January 12, 2012 *International Socialism*, “For the Libyan Revolution to survive, it needed immediate practical support from its neighbours.... Beleaguered, the revolutionaries felt they had little option but to throw themselves on the mercy of the West. Despite the NTC’s position that there should be no foreign interference, it was forced to call for international sanctions, a no-fly zone, and then air strikes, in an attempt to halt Gaddafi’s offensive.”

The SWP’s line on Syria continues this counter-revolutionary record. But the obviously pro-imperialist character of the opposition movement’s leadership, together with the experience of Libya, has necessitated the many evasions and weasel formulations employed by the SWP to conceal the fact that a similar operation is being mounted against the Assad regime.

For months, the SWP barely wrote a word on the SNC and FSA and ignored their well-documented connections with the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. On November 3, *Socialist Worker* wrote of the FSA and SNC, “Thousands of defectors from the regular Syrian army have formed themselves into the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and have undertaken military operations to protect civilians from the regime’s security forces. So far, there are no formal ties between the FSA and the *civilian organisations of the revolution*, such as the Coordinating Committees, the Syrian Revolution General Commission and the Syrian National Council (SNC)” (emphasis added).

It was not until November 15 that it warned of the danger of the revolution “being hijacked—not just by the West, but by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.” But it did so while praising the FSA, a body based in Turkey and armed by Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar, as a protector of civilians from the regime.

On December 13, it noted in a bland one-liner, “Some in the SNC are keen to negotiate a settlement with older layers of the ruling class”. But it was only in Assaf’s previously cited January 7 article that he first acknowledged, “The appearance of the Free Syrian Army and the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) mark a dangerous development.”

Even then, he identifies the danger of the leadership of the opposition being constituted by pro-imperialist forces advocating Western military intervention only as being “a challenge to the grassroots revolutionary leadership inside the Local Coordinating Committees (LCC).”

In a February 7 appraisal of the groups making up the opposition, the LCC is dubbed as “the leadership on the ground” and a “grassroots” body that “has struggled to maintain its independence.”

Far from representing a danger, the FSA is back to being the defender of “neighbourhoods from the much feared security forces” and praised and for working “in coordination with the LCC”.

Only the SNC is described negatively as “composed of exiles, pro-Western groups, and [former] regime insiders,” whereas “The FSA has kept its distance from the SNC”.

Anyone who writes honestly about the FSA or the LCCs is slandered as being a defender of Assad, when the SWP writes, “Many supporters of the Syrian regime brush over the differences between the Western-backed SNC and the LCC leadership on the ground,” [emphasis added].

Writing on February 4, Siân Ruddick is more explicit in her denunciations, warning, “Some say the resistance is part of a ‘plot’ by the West, or that a victory for the movement will help Western imperialism. These are dangerous arguments.”

The danger posed is to those who advocate Western-backed regime change—or like the SWP, are intent on concealing their support for such an outcome.

The SWP whitewashing the FSA and building up the LCC as a supposed counterweight to the pro-imperialist SNC.

In fact, the FSA announced on December 1, 2011, that it would coordinate its activities with the SNC. And if the LCC is fighting to maintain its independence from the SNC, then it is not fighting very hard.

As far back as September 20, the LCC issued a statement proclaiming its support for the SNC “and its moves toward the formation of an overarching political council that includes the majority of political and revolutionary beliefs.”

“We support the SNC, *despite our comments on the work of the Council, the way it was formed, and the forces represented therein,*” it added (our emphasis).

The LCC does not oppose Western intervention. It issued a statement of November 5 that, considering “the grave and systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law” in Syria, set out its “vision for the requirements of any international move to stop such violations.”

The statement is a pathetic plea that intervention, based on United Nation’s “responsibility to protect” legislation, “should not hinder the aspiration of the Syrian people to cause peaceful change by its own forces; or lead to dealing with the Syrian people as yet another sphere of influence in the game of nations.”

Its list of demands on the West include guaranteeing “the safety of peaceful assembly and demonstration,” “safe passage of all United Nations humanitarian agencies” throughout Syria, an investigation into “crimes against humanity” leading to “prosecution at the International Criminal Court”, followed by a

“democratic transition” and “training and capacity-building assistance to the Syrian armed forces and security services.”

This is tantamount to the installation of a Western-backed regime that can only be accomplished through a military deployment, whatever the LCC might say.

In this regard, on October 21, the LCC issued a statement congratulating “the revolution of the brotherly Libyan people” for having ended “the Gaddafi era of its history of oppression, tyranny, corruption, and injustice.”

This panegyric to the “third great victory for the Arab Revolutions” has not one word to say about how Gaddafi’s downfall was secured, or the nature of the regime established under NATO’s whip hand.

The LCC is a petty bourgeois tendency that argues for a replacement of the Assad regime with a democratic bourgeois government. It is not a revolutionary leadership for the Syrian working class. The SWP knows this, which is why they never once seek to identify its class character or that of any of the forces within the opposition.

The SWP has never once addressed the role being played by the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. The Brotherhood is not only the dominant force in the SNC, but has a major local presence in an opposition that has assumed the character of a Sunni insurgency centered in its historic strongholds and focused on the mosques.

An article supportive of the opposition in the February 11 issue of *Time* magazine shows what the SWP is trying to hide. Reporting a meeting in Turkey of “rebels from northern Syria,” it cites the complaints of Abu Hikmat:

“We need money for supplies. The opposition that has money is the Muslim Brotherhood, [radical Saudi-based Sunni cleric Sheikh Adnan] Arour, and the Free Syrian Army command.”

Another oppositionist, a doctor and apparently a former supporter of the Brotherhood, replies, “[E]verybody knows that [Turkey-based FSA commander] Riad al-Asaad is controlled by the Turks,” while the Muslim Brotherhood “are counting on the revolution weakening and they will ride in on foreign tanks”.

The SWP has no intention of opposing war against Syria. This would cut across relations with the various petty bourgeois forces on which it is based, forces that are being swept up by imperialism’s hysterical media propaganda campaign. Its evasions, half-truths and lies are a conscious deception of the working class. They are disarming those workers and oppressed peasants in Syria that are opposing Assad’s brutal regime as to the fate being planned for them and all those throughout the world who seek genuine revolutionary change in the Middle East rather than a Libyan-style abortion.



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