

# The pseudo-left and the Libyan catastrophe

Bill Van Auken  
21 April 2015

In addition to Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, France's Nicolas Sarkozy and the UK's David Cameron, there are others who bear political and moral responsibility for the human tragedy in the Mediterranean: an international fraternity of pseudo-left intellectuals and groups that served as cheerleaders for imperialist intervention, supporting the US-NATO war on Libya as a "humanitarian" rescue mission, and even proclaiming the events in Libya a "revolution."

Representative of this sociopolitical layer is University of Michigan Professor Juan Cole, who turned his widely read web site "Informed Comment" into an open propaganda vehicle for imperialist war.

"I am unabashedly cheering the liberation movement on and glad that the UNSC [United Nations Security Council]-authorized intervention has saved them from being crushed," Professor Cole wrote in March 2011 in an "An Open Letter to the Left."

He sarcastically wrote that he wanted to "urge the Left to learn to chew gum and walk at the same time," by which he meant learning to make pragmatic accommodations to imperialism, deciding which US wars for regime change it would support on what he termed a "case by case basis."

He dismissed any suggestion that his "liberation movement" was led by elements connected to Al Qaeda, despite ample evidence at the time, not to mention the bloody confirmation since. He likewise attacked any suggestion that the Obama administration had been moved by anything but the purest "humanitarian concerns." Charges that the US and its imperialist allies aimed at dominance over Libya and its oil reserves and the denial of these resources to their rivals, principally China, were described by Cole as "bizarre."

Leaving no doubt as to his loyalties, Cole proudly proclaimed, "If NATO needs me, I'm there."

Cole's last major article on Libya was written in June

2012. After spending a few days in the country, he wrote a glowing account, deriding "a kind of black legend about Libya, that it has become a failed state and is a mess, that there are armed militiamen everywhere, that everybody is a secessionist, that the transitional government is not doing anything, that people of sub-Saharan African heritage are bothered in the streets, etc., etc."

Now that every element of this "black legend" is manifest and incontrovertible, what is Cole's assessment?

Last February, in a cursory piece about the Egyptian bombing of Libya in response to the mass beheadings of the Coptic Christians, Cole wrote that ISIS had gained "small toeholds in Libya because of a power vacuum," adding reassuringly that "Revolutionary states often fall into political violence, as with France's Vendee after 1789, as part of the process of establishing new forms of legitimacy."

As a historian, Cole is shameless in prostituting his academic credentials to serve the propaganda needs of the US State Department. If there is a "power vacuum" in Libya, it is precisely because there is no "revolutionary state" that commands the allegiance of the Libyan people. And to compare the present multisided clash of Islamists and warlords for control of oil wells and territory in Libya with the Jacobins' suppression of the Catholic- and royalist-led peasant uprising against the French Revolution is an act of intellectual cretinism.

Cole was by no means alone in jumping on the US-NATO "humanitarian" war wagon. France's New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) was an enthusiastic supporter of the war on Libya. As the war ground toward its bloody conclusion, the NPA declared that as a result of this "revolutionary process," it was "a new life that is opening up for the Libyan people." It gushed, "Liberty, democratic rights, and the use of wealth produced by

natural resources to satisfy the fundamental needs of the people are now on the agenda.”

What does the NPA say now about its glowing predictions? The “new life” it promised for Libyans is a reality of unceasing violence, economic collapse and social devastation.

“Liberty and democratic rights”? Torture, summary executions and arbitrary imprisonment are rampant. As for “wealth produced by natural resources,” the economy is in free fall, having contracted 30 percent last year. Oil production, which accounts for some 80 percent of the country’s gross domestic product, has fallen to less than a fifth of what it was before the US-NATO war. Schools and hospitals, once the most advanced in the region, have been shut down by the fighting. Power outages are common, as are shortages of food, fuel and medical supplies.

The Left Party in Germany, the International Socialist Organization in the US, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and a number of other similar pseudo-left groups all provided service to imperialism, supporting the pro-imperialist “rebels” and helping to dress up a naked intervention for oil and geostrategic interests as a crusade to protect civilians and promote democracy and human rights.

This gravitation to “humanitarian” imperialism neither began nor ended with the criminal war in Libya. This new pseudo-left constituency for imperialism made its debut with these organizations’ support for the “humanitarian” US-NATO bombardment of the former Yugoslavia in 1999. Much as in the Libyan case, the intervention was staged on the pretext of saving Kosovar Albanians from a supposed massacre at the hands of the Serbs, and then resulted in a skyrocketing of the death toll.

What has been the result of this “humanitarian” war for “liberation” concluded 15 years ago? Kosovo, a territory of 1.8 million people, remains economically, politically and socially unviable, dominated by poverty, organized crime and corruption. The unemployment rate is 45 percent—60 percent for younger workers—and tens of thousands are streaming out of the country.

And, of course, in Syria, all of these political organizations lined up to support a proxy war for regime change backed by the US and its European allies along with the most reactionary monarchical regimes in the Middle East. Once again, they called an

imperialist dirty war a “revolution” and dismissed the overwhelming evidence that the principal armed forces mobilized against the Assad regime consisted of Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias. As in Libya, the result has been the devastation of an entire society.

The attempt by the pseudo-lefts to cast imperialist intervention as “revolution” reached its apogee—or, more precisely, its nadir—with the US-orchestrated coup in Kiev, which was backed by these groups as a “mass revolt for democracy,” in the words of the NPA. The leader of a Russian Pabloite organization went so far as to praise the neo-fascist thugs who spearheaded the coup as “the most combative and militant section of the movement.”

All of these organizations bear moral and political responsibility for the catastrophes these imperialist interventions have wrought in country after country. Their lining up behind the bloodthirsty “human rights” wars of aggression is no accident and cannot be ascribed to mere political stupidity. It reflects the alignment with imperialism of a privileged upper-middle class layer, including elements within academia and the media, whose social interests are expressed in the politics of these groups.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**