

A tool of imperialism: France's New Anti-Capitalist Party backs war on Libya

By Alex Lantier
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The New Anti-Capitalist Party and its co-thinkers in the Pabloite United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) have declared their support for the unprovoked military aggression against Libya by the US, Britain, and France. They have shamelessly aligned their policies with those of the major powers, explicitly arguing that the imperialist character of the assault on Libya is irrelevant.

The March 21 article (“Bombs over Libya”) by Bertil Videt, a fellow of the International Institute for Research and Education in the Netherlands, on the USFI’s web site *International Viewpoint* adopts entirely French imperialism’s rationale for the war—i.e., that the intervention to back the rebel National Council in Benghazi against the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi is motivated by “humanitarian” concerns.

He begins: “Is the military action against Libya necessary and helpful in order to stop Gaddafi’s regime’s onslaught on its opponent or is it an imperialist aggression driven by strategic self-interest, which will only make things worse for the Libyan people? The international left is split on this question. And the question is truly complex and cannot be answered by ready-made slogans about always being opposed to imperialist aggressions or unconditional support to the rebels.”

The question posed by Videt is in flagrant bad faith. The USFI is well aware that this war is an act of imperialist aggression, and supports it. Videt himself briefly acknowledges that, “of course we all know that France, UK, and the US are not driven by some sudden kindness—but by strategic interest in the oil-rich region.”

He even notes the “double standards of the West” in claiming that it is bombing Libya to save lives: “How can we trust [that] leaders who defended Mubarak till the last and who still even refuse to condemn the Bahraini kingdom’s use of lethal force against peaceful protestors [are] genuinely moved by the human rights situation in Libya?”

Having raised these arguments, Videt simply dismisses them altogether: “none of these points are, by themselves, arguments for opposing the no-fly zone over Libya. Rejecting Western military intervention in Libya requires a better analysis of the risks and possible scenarios on the ground. And we do need to address some rather difficult objections—namely the fact that the leaders of the opposition forces have been calling for a no-fly zone and that we have to come up with better alternatives than posting blogs of solidarity and anti-imperialism.”

With such a statement, the USFI is declaring its open hostility to Marxism, which insists that the attitude of a working class party towards a war must be based on the social and class character of the regimes waging it. In particular, Marxists oppose a war by leading imperialist powers such as the US, the UK and France against an oppressed, ex-colonial country like Libya on principle. Videt, on the other hand, is in far too much of a hurry to bother with political principles.

The “alternative” that he proposes, completely in line with the policies of the imperialist powers, is to arm the Western-backed forces in Libya: “We can and should argue for sending anti-aircraft defenses and other weaponry to the rebels—so they get a better chance of confronting the

Gaddafi forces, who have been armed by the West for decades. Luckily, the current interim administration in Egypt (whose border is near Benghazi) is shipping arms over the border.”

NPA spokesman Olivier Besancenot has made similar proposals, suggesting that France should run guns to the Libyan opposition: “Our full solidarity goes to the Libyan people, to whom we should give the means for self-defense and the weapons it needs to throw out the dictator and to conquer liberty and democracy.”

The USFI’s statements aim to reinforce the line of the government and media in France and beyond: no opposition to the principle of intervention is possible, because it is mounted with the sacred goal of defending “revolutionary” anti-Gaddafi forces. This position was expressed most crudely in an interview (“What’s happening in Libya?”) with Gilbert Achcar of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, published by the NPA and the USFI.

He said, “If Gaddafi were permitted to continue his military offensive and take Benghazi, there would be a major massacre. Here is a case where a population is truly in danger, and where there is no plausible alternative that could protect it. The attack by Gaddafi’s forces was hours or at most days away. You can’t in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians.”

The very terms the USFI uses stamp its outlook with a petty-bourgeois, pro-imperialist character. What is occurring in Libya is not a “human rights situation,” nor is the main aim of the Western powers to enforce a “no-fly zone” to keep the peace in Benghazi.

As Western forces destroy large sections of Libya’s air force and army, and rain bombs and cruise missiles on Tripoli and other Libyan cities, they are mounting a massive intervention into a civil war in Libya. Their goal is to use the right-wing clique that rules Benghazi, whom the USFI regularly presents as “the Libyan people” and on whose character it is virtually silent, to take over Libya. This will produce a pliant, pro-Western regime in a strategic, oil-rich region shaken by revolutionary struggles against Western-backed dictators.

By advancing bogus “humanitarian” arguments to justify the Libyan war, the NPA and its co-thinkers in the USFI expose themselves as bourgeois, pro-imperialist parties.

Such “humanitarian” grounds for war have been invoked throughout the 20th century, often without any substantiation, to legitimize imperialist invasions. A recent example of this was the 1999 NATO bombing of Kosovo, justified with wildly inflated press claims that Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was massacring hundreds of thousands of Kosovo Albanians. Although the civilian death toll due to Yugoslav operations in Kosovo is now thought to have been in the hundreds, NATO used this as a pretext to bomb Serbia and Kosovo, while backing a criminal outfit, the Kosovo Liberation Army—now found to be active in the illegal organ trade.

Above all, if political principles are to be ignored and only the criterion of “saving lives” is to be retained in evaluating wars launched by the

Western powers, there is virtually no country in the Middle East, Africa, or Asia whose invasion the USFI cannot support. In regions where each country faces complex ethnic and sectarian conflicts, the Western powers can always sanctify invasion on the basis of saving the lives of the forces they are backing.

In the case of Libya, the USFI played its part from the beginning of the war propaganda campaign in the imperialist countries that began in early March.

On March 3—the day after the National Council called for Western military intervention in Libya—it published a statement, “Support the Libyan revolution! Gaddafi out,” praising the “fight to the death between the people and the dictatorship” taking place in Libya.

This aggressiveness in supporting the war was all the more significant in that French imperialism was playing a leading role in pushing for war. By merely reading the comments of the NPA or of the USFI, however, one would never know that the force they were claiming would assist a “revolution” in Libya is the bitterly unpopular, right-wing government of French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Significantly, such positions brought the USFI into conflict with political figures it has presented as models for decades: the Latin American bourgeois nationalist regimes of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Daniel Ortéga in Nicaragua, and Fidel Castro in Cuba. Speaking from a long experience with US-backed coups—the 2002 military coup against Chavez in Venezuela, the counter-revolutionary 1980s *Contras* insurgency in Nicaragua, and the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba—the Latin American regimes warned of the risk of Western intervention.

The USFI statement therefore also denounced the Latin American nationalists. It wrote: “we are in total disagreement with the positions adopted by Hugo Chavez, Daniel Ortéga, and Fidel Castro. Fidel Castro has denounced the risk of an intervention by American imperialism instead of supporting the struggle of the Libyan people. As for Hugo Chavez, he has reiterated his support for the dictator Gaddafi.”

It attempted to wrap its pro-imperialist line in pseudo-left jargon: “These positions are unacceptable for the revolutionary, progressive, and anti-imperialist forces of the whole world. You do not oppose imperialism by supporting dictators who massacre their people who are making a revolution. That can only reinforce imperialism. The fundamental task of the revolutionary movement on an international level is to defend these revolutions and to oppose imperialism by supporting these revolutions, not the dictators.”

This passage is a classic example of the USFI’s deceitful phrase-mongering. The statements of the Latin American nationalists were unacceptable to the USFI not because it spoke for “anti-imperialist forces,” but because it was preparing to support a reactionary war by Western imperialism.

To counteract the Latin American nationalists’ warnings of the risk of war, the USFI even published a statement specifically denouncing the “bankruptcy of Chavism” written by its Belgian party, the LCR-SAP (Revolutionary Communist League-Socialist Workers Party).

It condemned Chavez and Castro for implying that “it is not urgent to denounce the carnage committed by Gaddafi against his people and to choose the camp of the popular uprising, [but that] it is urgent to demonstrate against the future and hypothetical intervention of NATO. So in the name of the threat of a crime that remains a vague possibility, we should ‘be silent’ about a real crime that is actually taking place.”

As events have shown, there was nothing “vague” or “hypothetical” about the risk that NATO powers could attack Libya. Nonetheless, the USFI hysterically denied that imperialist intervention was a possibility.

Dismissing such warnings as “delirious conspiracy theories,” the LCR-SAP wrote: “there is nothing ‘singular’ or ‘particular’ about the revolution in Libya, no foreign plot directed by the CIA or Bin Laden; on the contrary, it is an integral part of the process of the Arab revolution

which is breaking out throughout the region.”

Even at the time, such comments were transparently false. In the week before the LCR-SAP document was published, the press was full of reports that British, Italian and French Special Forces troops were active in Libya under cover of “humanitarian” flights into Libya. With the outbreak of a mass bombing campaign by the Western powers, however, the USFI’s role as a propagandist of imperialist war stands exposed.

As the French government pressed for a UN resolution against Libya in the run-up to the war, the NPA collaborated with its usual partners in France’s bourgeois “left,” led by the Socialist Party (PS), as they tried to present a humanitarian argument for an attack on Libya.

The NPA co-signed declarations on Libya with the Collective for Solidarity with the Libyan People—a group consisting largely of smaller satellite parties of the PS.

Predictably enough, given the hypocrisy of France’s right-wing “left,” “solidarity with the Libyan people” means supporting a war waged against them. On March 17, the day that the UN Security Council voted resolution 1973, it issued a statement demanding the “recognition of the National Council” as the “only legitimate representative of the Libyan people.”

Several of the PS satellites that make up the Collective, such as Europe-Ecologie and the Left Party (PG) of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a recent split-off from the PS, have issued official statements endorsing the war on Libya. Europe-Ecologie, a long-time government partner with the PS, claimed that “international law is strengthened by it.”

As for Mélenchon, he told the daily *Libération* that he was “in favor of the military operation in Libya,” explaining: “We must break the tyrant to prevent the destruction of the revolution.”

In peddling the argument that the Western intervention in Libya aims to save lives, these parties are only recycling arguments made quite openly by leading strategists of French imperialism. Thus ex-Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine of PS, who oversaw France’s participation in the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, hailed UN resolution 1973—which the Western powers rammed through to justify their attack on Libya—as “historic.”

Védrine praised it for allowing the major powers to invade countries under the guise of protecting civilians. He told *Le Nouvel Observateur* that UN resolution 1973 was “the realization of a principle, elaborated by the UN some years ago under Kofi Annan, of the responsibility to protect: a concept on which the UN member states agreed to end the sensitive debate over the right to intervention.”

To put it more plainly, imperialist diplomats like Védrine have decided that it is best not to assert their right to attack and conquer countries at will. Instead, they prefer to dress this principle up with the cover of “protecting” civilians in the countries they are attacking. This formulation not only has the advantage of obscuring what is taking place, but allows the ruling class to mobilize the active support of an entire petty-bourgeois “humanitarian” social layer, represented by the USFI and the parties it collaborates with in France and internationally.

These forces support the wars, even though they are quite conscious of their right-wing motivations and the right-wing character of imperialism’s allies within Libya. This is most clearly illustrated by the contents of the Achcar interview published by the USFI.

Achcar commented that the opposition is “very heterogeneous.” He continued: “What unites all the disparate forces is a rejection of the dictatorship and a longing for democracy and human rights. Beyond that, there are many different perspectives. In Libya, more particularly, there is a mixture of human rights activists, democracy advocates, intellectuals, tribal elements, and Islamic forces—a very broad collection. ... The Libyan movement also includes sections of the government and the armed forces that have broken away and joined the opposition.”

This description of the social composition of the National Council demolishes the cynical claims of Achcar, Videt and Co. to be fighting for

revolution in Libya. In fact, the leaders of the rebel National Council include ex-Justice Minister Mustafa Abdul Jalil and General Abdel Fattah Younis al Obaidi, commander of the Libyan Thunderbolt unit that trained with British SAS Special Forces. Such individuals, like the various tribal leaders and Islamists on the National Council, hardly have a “longing” for democracy.

The National Council does not represent a continuation of the revolutionary working-class struggles in Egypt and Tunisia. To the extent that there were genuine popular protests in the initial days of the Libyan crisis—which saw reports of youth protests and oil strikes—the forces of the National Council steered them in an entirely different direction.

They sought not to develop a mass political movement against the regime, but a military struggle inside the regime against the Gaddafi loyalists, with the assistance of Western imperialism. They have issued repeated statements calling for air strikes and a NATO intervention in Libya, whose goal would be to install them in power.

Were the National Council to come to power, it would be a base of pro-imperialist reaction against the revolutionary working-class struggles developing in the region—most notably in Libya’s neighbors, Egypt and Tunisia. This is made most clear by its collaboration with the US-backed Egyptian army, which presides over a dictatorship attempting to end the massive strikes and protests that led to the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on February 11.

The National Council would also, as the NPA well knows, be a party to an oil grab by Western corporations. Achcar noted that “The Western response, of course, smacks of oil,” adding: “Only France emerged as very much in favor of strong action, which might well be connected to the fact that France—unlike Germany (which abstained from the [UN Security Council] vote [on resolution 1973]), Britain, and above all Italy—does not have a major stake in Libyan oil, and certainly hopes to get a greater share post-Gaddafi.”

This article makes clear that the NPA’s claims that the Western powers are attacking Libya to save lives are a cynical and conscious fraud. They know that the Western powers’ goal is regime change or, as Achcar puts it, a “post-Gaddafi” Libya. This will allow France and other powers to loot Libya’s oil sector, which was largely nationalized by Gaddafi from 1971 to 1974, and to install a right-wing client state in Tripoli.

Achcar—and in this he speaks for all of the “humanitarian” and “revolutionary” elements of the NPA and USFI as well—nonetheless applauded the Western war on Libya, oil grab and all.

The NPA’s and the USFI’s support for the imperialist intervention in Libya marks a fundamental turning point in the evolution of these parties, revealing more clearly the character of the Pabloite forces that split from the Fourth International in 1953. Beginning as a revision of Trotskyism—a political adaptation to Stalinism and Third World nationalism, claiming that these forces could be pressured to adopt a revolutionary policy—it grew in the petty-bourgeois social milieu of the 1960s and 1970s radical movements.

At this time in France, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR)—the precursor of today’s NPA, which was founded in 2009—was based largely on “Trotsky-Guevarist” student radicals. Members of this generation still provide the NPA with its top leadership (figures like Alain Krivine and François Sabado) as well as former members who are its contacts in the ruling parties, like Henri Weber of the PS.

The political evolution of these tendencies and the individuals who lead them reflects the trajectory of an entire layer of middle-class ex-radicals—such as, in the Green movement, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and ex-German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer—who evolved from discontented student radicals into affluent political careerists.

For a historical precursor to the figures now in the NPA leadership, one would have to return to figures such as Pierre Laval. He began as a social democrat, and even for a time considered whether joining the Communist

Party might benefit his political career, before joining the right and becoming the prime minister of the pro-Nazi Vichy collaborationist regime during World War II.

The leaders of the LCR and now the NPA have taken a similarly cynical and career-minded approach to political life and ideas, adapting them to the changing needs of the ruling class—even when, as now, this involves backing wars of aggression.

This casts in an even harsher light the political rebranding of the LCR as the NPA in 2009, on the basis of an explicit rejection of the altogether false association with Trotskyism the LCR retained due to the long-past “Trotsky-Guevarist” origins of its leading cadre. Prepared over a period of decades, it announced that movement’s full integration into bourgeois politics, the orbit of the PS, and French imperialism.

The International Committee of the Fourth International wrote at the time: “The LCR’s real target in liquidating itself is, in fact, Trotsky’s political heritage: an insistence on the complete political independence of the working class, revolutionary internationalism, and an irreconcilable opposition to collaboration with the bourgeois state, the Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies, and all brands of bourgeois nationalism and petty-bourgeois radicalism.

“The LCR’s selection of anti-capitalism as its guiding ideology is, in the context of European and especially French politics, a colossal step backwards and to the right, towards the cheapest coin of the realm. Politically indistinct, it embraces all manners of social discontent, regardless of class basis or orientation. It is a term that can be embraced in large sections of the petty-bourgeoisie, both left and right—everything from the anarchism proposed by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in the mid-19th century to the violent right-populist protests of Pierre Poujade of the mid-20th.”

In its writings and statements, the NPA now flies a false flag. To facilitate its domestic negotiations with the trade unions and other bourgeois parties in France—with whom it works out various electoral deals and backs trade union sellouts of workers’ struggles—it explicitly denies that it is a Trotskyist party. Nonetheless, it presents itself as the “Fourth International” on its web sites dealing with international issues, like *International Viewpoint* and *Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières*.

The goal of this operation is to falsely assume the persona of a Trotskyist party to gain “left” credibility abroad. Its conscious support for imperialist war shows, however, that this party no longer has any connection with socialist, working-class politics of any sort. The NPA, like the broader group of so-called “left” parties in France in which it operates and its co-thinkers in the USFI, has moved into the camp of social reaction.

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