

An open letter to Professor Juan Cole: A reply to a slander

By Bill Van Auken
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Professor Juan Cole:

In an August 5 posting on your blog *Informed Comment*, you claim that the *World Socialist Web Site* supports the Gaddafi regime's efforts to retake the east of Libya and would welcome the massacre of Libyans.

In a comment dealing with the potential outcome of the five-month-old US-NATO war on Libya, you write the following:

“The UN allies won't allow Gaddafi to take the east and massacre and imprison thousands, however much Alexander Cockburn, the Tea Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* would like to see that happen, or at least they object to practical steps to prevent it.”

This statement, as you must know, is a gross misrepresentation of the position taken by the WSWS in relation to the Libyan war.

You do not, and cannot, cite any statement or article posted on the *World Socialist Web Site* that supports such an outcome. From the outset of the US-NATO bombing of Libya, the WSWS has maintained a principled position of opposition to this imperialist war against a former colonial country, while providing no support to the right-wing bourgeois dictatorship of Muammar Gaddafi.

From the eve of the war onward, we have insisted that the instrument for the liberation of the Libyan people is not the bombs and missiles of United States and NATO, but the struggle of the Libyan working class in alliance with the working masses throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

At the same time, we have developed a thorough and clear analysis of the interests of US, French, British and Italian imperialism in waging this war. We have exposed the longstanding role that Libyan oil has played in the strategic calculations of the imperialist powers, as well as the increasing friction between these

powers and both China and Russia over their conflicting interests in Libya and the broader region.

To claim that we “would like to see” a massacre of Libyan civilians is a vicious lie. It also begs the question of what is going on right now in Libya as more and more Libyan civilians are massacred by NATO air strikes.

To further the false accusation against the WSWS, you employ the dishonest and crude method of a political amalgam. Not only do you falsify our stand on Libya, but in an attempt to make the lie stick, you lump it together with the wholly incompatible positions taken by other political forces.

The *World Socialist Web Site's* principled stand against imperialist war is profoundly rooted in the historical experience of colonialism and imperialism in the region and the longstanding principles of the international Marxist and socialist movement.

Alexander Cockburn, with whom we have many political differences, opposes the war as a left democrat, whose opposition to imperialist war is well established by his career as a radical journalist.

The Tea Party is a right-wing political instrument of the American ruling elite, whose differences with Obama on the Libyan war—as you yourself have noted—have nothing whatsoever to do with hostility to imperialism.

The transparent aim of this amalgam is to brand any criticism of the Obama administration's war policy as illegitimate. Its effect is to pollute public opinion, debase discussion of the real issues in the Libyan war and block any objective analysis of what is taking place. Only one narrative is permissible—the one you have adopted to justify this war—all else is beyond the pale.

The repugnance of this line of argumentation is

something with which you, Professor Cole, should be thoroughly familiar. After all, it has been used against you by those who have tried to equate your opposition to the policies of the Israeli state with anti-Semitism and even draw comparisons between your writings on Israeli policy and the infamous anti-Semitic forgery “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.”

Why do you now resort to similar disreputable methods? The answer is to be found in the progress over the past five months of the war that you so enthusiastically supported.

You were among those who allowed themselves to be deceived by the war propaganda of the Obama administration and the governments of France and Britain. You uncritically accepted the hypocritical claims that these powers were intervening in the oil-rich North African country out of concern for “human rights” and “democracy.” These claims were hardly original. Similar arguments have been used to justify every imperialist war from 1914 on, from the “Rape of Belgium” to the “rape rooms” of Saddam Hussein.

Your insistence that the Obama administration was acting solely out of an altruistic desire to rescue Libyan civilians was not shaken in the least by the fact that this same administration was simultaneously waging war against the civilian populations of Afghanistan and Pakistan, while supporting the Saudi-backed repression of the masses in Bahrain and the Israeli killing of Palestinians.

That Washington and the Western European powers were seizing upon the events in Libya as a pretext for a military intervention aimed at establishing more direct and unfettered control over the country’s sizable petroleum reserves and the world oil market as a whole was something you rejected out of hand.

Launched on the pretext of protecting Libyan civilians, this war has led to the death and injury of thousands of men, women and children, the destruction of the country’s infrastructure and the spread of economic suffering throughout the region as hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers have been forced to flee, many of them losing their lives in the process.

The elements that you refer to as the “Free Libya Forces” have been implicated in war crimes, including lynchings, torture and massacres. The internecine strife within the Benghazi-based Transitional National

Council, dominated by CIA “assets,” ex-Gaddafi officials and Al Qaeda elements, has burst to the surface with the recent assassination of its chief military commander, Gen. Abdul Fatah Younis, threatening to plunge the region into tribal warfare.

Meanwhile, the major powers conducting this war are simultaneously recognizing the Benghazi-based TNC as the “legitimate government” of Libya and conducting negotiations with the Tripoli regime. If a new regime ultimately emerges out of this sordid process, it will be one that suits the predatory interests of the imperialist powers and is directly opposed to the democratic and social aspirations of the Libyan people.

The arguments you made in your “Open Letter to the Left” issued after the launching of the Libyan war have been thoroughly discredited and the position you took then has become increasingly untenable.

Rather than correct your own errors, you lash out wildly with slanders directed against the *World Socialist Web Site*, which subjected your statement to a thorough critique (See “Libya, imperialism and the prostration of the ‘left’ intellectuals: The case of Professor Juan Cole”).

This response, in its own way, testifies to the political and intellectual bankruptcy of your position. You are entitled to defend your views, but you have no right to do so by smearing the *World Socialist Web Site*.

You are responsible for libeling the WSWS with the false allegation that it supports a massacre of the Libyan people. We demand that you post a full and public retraction on your *Informed Comment* blog.

Bill Van Auken

For the *World Socialist Web Site*

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>