

AFRICA NEWS

A Weekly Digest Of African Affairs

LIBYA

Close-Up, Part I A New Wave?

The election-year splash over Billy Carter and his dealings with Libya have probably generated more U.S. media coverage on that north African country than at any other time in recent history. Yet Libya, Africa's fourth largest state, remains little understood, most commonly comprehended in the superficial imagery of oil wealth and Islamic fanaticism, while the particulars of its dramatic political transformations over the past ten years are easily overlooked.

In spite of controversy over its unique policies — whether one regards them as radical or erratic — the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya remains intimately related to Western Europe and the United States; it is, at the very least, a vital trading partner, supplying as much as ten per cent of U.S. oil imports.

This is the first of a two-part series on Libya, taking a look at the political mood in Tripoli. Part II will examine how the changes at home are influencing Libyan foreign policy.

TRIPOLI [AN] The driver who whisks us away from Tripoli airport in his brand new Volvo sedan speaks English as if he had been raised in the United States. His name is Mahmoud, and when we question him about his skill with the English language, he tells us that for fourteen years he had been a driver for the U.S. military stationed at Wheelus airbase. (That job came to an end when the Revolutionary Command Council led by Muammar Qaddafi seized power in 1969 and ejected all foreign military personnel from Libyan soil.)

"I like Americans," he confesses with a sincere smile, "they are good people."

"But your government seems very anti-American," is my immediate response.

Mahmoud appears visibly saddened by this comment. "You don't understand," he pleads. "We have nothing against the American people, we want to be friends. It is your government and the monopolies who are the enemy."

During my stay in Libya, I hear this refrain many times from people with various social backgrounds. The general perception is that the U.S. government and big corporations are only interested in Third World countries when there is some valuable resource to be exploited. The fairly religious Libyans see this as nothing less than im-

moral. But they are always quick to argue that average Americans should not be blamed because they are not the ones who set these policies.

In this and other ways, the first-time American visitor to Libya is unprepared for what awaits. The people are open and friendly. One feels less tension walking the street here than in most major American cities. They are full of late-model cars, very few of which are American-made. Gasoline is abundant and reasonably priced, which helps make up for the lack of mass transit (though it does little for the air quality).

Of the families I meet, many own more than one car, and their homes are well-stocked with large Sony television sets, video cassette recorders, stereos and a host of other modern appliances. It is a bit strange to be sitting in someone's living room on a beautiful Persian carpet sipping Arab coffee watching Gilligan's Island with dubbed Arabic voices.

Everywhere one goes there is new construction. Houses, apartment buildings and highrise department stores are proliferating, often under the guidance of Yugoslavian or Romanian contractors.

One of the more noteworthy reforms of the Qaddafi government has been the elimination of rental housing and interest on mortgages. Families earning less than \$350 per month pay no rent, and those with higher salaries are provided subsidies to keep their housing costs down.

Other government benefits come in the form of free medical care and free education including university. The costs of college would be too expensive for many Libyan families were it not for the government subsidy, especially considering that many students go abroad for specialized training that as yet cannot be provided in Libya.

Although Libya is the fourth largest nation in Africa, its population only barely exceeds three million (plus a few hundred thousand foreign workers) and the per capita share of gross national product is estimated at over \$8,000. Traveling around the country it is easy to see that the sizeable revenues from petroleum exports have been widely distributed throughout the society.

Many Libyans are quick to point out that this is in high contrast to what life was like under the previous regime of King Idris. Until he was overthrown by a young officers' coup in 1969,

Sayyis Idris, along with a small elite group close to him, enjoyed a life of considerable luxury while most Libyans were plagued by illiteracy, ill-health and unemployment. As with the Shah of Iran, Idris received crucial support from the British and American governments, thus contributing to the popular distrust of these governments after his overthrow.

Under King Idris, the army had developed into a fairly representative social institution, attracting many members of the lower classes due to the relatively good wages and educational benefits. Also, in a society where labor unions and political parties were illegal, the military offered a means of exerting some political influence.

Muammar Qaddafi, born in a bedouin tent to a family of nomadic farmers, was typical of the humble origins of many of the young soldiers (all under 30) who toppled King Idris in a bloodless coup on September 1, 1969.

Immediately upon coming to power, the Revolutionary Command Council began to implement policies designed to shift wealth away from the Western oil companies and the Libyan elite in the direction of wage workers and peasants. The minimum wage was doubled, and the new leaders made public the details of their families' property ownership so as to minimize opportunities for corruption.

This was followed by other changes which have radically altered Libya's role in the world as well as the structure of its society, among them: the expulsion of foreign military personnel (American and British) and the cancellation of contracts for Western military hardware; a change-over of public signs from English to Arabic; a push for the Libyanization of foreign business holdings (in 1969 roughly three-fourths of the nation's factories were owned by Italian interests); and the establishment of plans for diversifying the economy away from an over-reliance on petroleum.

Where the new government had its most significant impact internationally was in its policy toward oil pricing and production. Companies such as Exxon, Occidental, Texaco and Chevron made enormous profits in the 1960s under King Idris. After seizing power, the young radicals cut back overall production and negotiated new pricing agreements. The result: a greater share of Libya's oil-derived wealth remained within the country.

Following Libya's example, other oil producing countries also demanded price increases. When these were granted, Libya in turn pushed for even higher revenues.

The Libyans are rather proud of this tradition. At a recent oil-workers conference in Tripoli, a large banner hanging behind the podium proclaimed: "The Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya led the fight in the world of petroleum and urged peoples to claim their rights and wealth and reminded them of their lost rights and still leads the fighting until now."

Militancy on the issue of the nation's oil policy has filtered down into the general population. One young Libyan oil-worker told me that in his estimation, the United States government didn't have a correct understanding of how to do business: "Your President Carter talks about oil in the Arab Gulf and he calls it your oil. But it only becomes yours after you pay for it. What would Americans think if Colonel Qaddafi talked about sending troops to your country to protect our trucks in

Detroit simply because we need them and buy them?"

Currently Libyan society is undergoing a nationwide campaign to restructure the government and many other social institutions. In fact, according to the official ideology, there is no government, only the people ruling directly through the various "people's committees." On paper the scheme sounds very democratic: In their workplaces and neighborhoods citizens decide on local affairs and send representatives to regional and national "people's congresses" for larger-scale decision making. Whether this system works as smoothly as it is touted remains to be seen, however. Every time I told an official that I would like to see some of these people's committees in action I was met with vague promises which were never fulfilled.

The campaign to restructure the political institutions, along with many other changes currently taking place, comes under the general guidance of the Green Book, three slim volumes authored by Qaddafi and sub-titled, 1) *The Solution of the Problem of Democracy: The Authority of the People*; 2) *The Solution of the Economic Problem: Socialism*; and 3) *The Social Basis of the Third Universal Theory*.

Critical of communist regimes for not allowing enough direct democracy, Qaddafi also makes a frontal assault on capitalism, charging that "wage-workers are a type of slave, however improved their wages may be." In keeping with the Green Book's assertion that "the ultimate solution" to the problem of economic inequality "is to abolish the wage system," most Libyan businesses are being transformed into cooperatives managed by committees elected from among the workers.

With regard to the role of women in society, the Green Book takes a giant step backward into the realm of biological determinism: "A woman is tender. A woman is pretty. A woman weeps easily. A woman is easily frightened. In general woman is gentle and man is tough by virtue of their inbred nature." Hence, "if a woman carries out man's work, she will be transformed into a man, abandoning her role and her beauty."

But his conservative ideology is contradicted by the very real advances Libyan women have made in the past ten years. Women's participation in the labor force and political structure (although still disproportionately small) has increased considerably, and women have gained access to formal education, including university, to an extent unprecedented in Libya and most other Arab societies. Even the military has recently established an officer training school specifically for women. And I talked to women who, despite the Green Book's denunciation of public nurseries, reported that it was not difficult to find child-care facilities for their children while they worked.

The kind of changes that women are undergoing are indicative of a society in rapid and constant flux. It is this dynamic that seems to be propelling Libya into an unorthodox and militant posture both internally and through its foreign policy.

NIGERIA
Wrestling With Multinationals
By Kevin Danaher
[AN] The success or failure of the eleven-month-old civilian government depends to a great degree on President Shehu Shagari's skill in maintaining and expanding Nigeria's cordial relation-



Independent Type

TALLAHASSEE, FLA. — "I work because it's right to work. That's what the Bible says. As long as you feel like work, then work. That way you stay off welfare checks. Give welfare to the people who need it." Those are some of the views of legless James Robinson, 84, who's cleaning mortar from dismantled sections of Florida's old Capitol building recently. Robinson lost his legs above the knees from the effects of diabetes. He's not sure when it was but thinks it was about 15 years ago. Robinson is paid two cents for each brick he chips clean. "I worked like hell yesterday and made \$15. You've got to clean a whole hundred to make \$2," he told a visitor. He receives Social Security from earlier work and supplements it with savings and his earnings at the old Capitol, which is behind a new 22-story Capitol. Bricks Robinson cleans are used in the 135-year-old Capitol, undergoing renovation for use as a museum. UPI Photo

ship with the multinational corporations that hold the technical keys to the country's future, while at the same time maintaining enough control over those corporations to insure that the principal benefits of Nigerian oil accrue to the nation and its development. Africa News here reviews two events of recent weeks that have provided Shagari with an opportunity to demonstrate his skill:

Earlier this month, Nigeria demanded that three oil companies — Shell, Gulf and Mobil — repay 182.95 million barrels of crude oil which, authorities say, should have been delivered to the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) in the years between 1975 and 1978. The demand for the oil, worth some \$6.1 billion at current prices, comes on the heels of the report of an official investigation into alleged mismanagement of funds by the NNPC itself.

The new conflict between the Shagari government and Shell, Gulf and Mobil stems from discord over implementation of Nigeria's participation agreements with the oil firms, contracts which granted Nigeria 55% of the petroleum yield.

During the period in question, because of an oversupply on the world market and the high price of Nigerian crude, the companies slowed production, at the suggestion of the Nigerian government. According to Nigerian authorities, however, the firms violated the agreement by taking a full 45% share of the oil scheduled to be produced, thereby giving themselves a larger than 45% share of actual production for that year.

The companies, for their part, contend that their actions were completely correct and done with the full knowledge of officials in Lagos. Nigeria's oil for those years, they say, remained in the ground.

The government's demand to the oil giants is a surprising and somewhat dramatic conclusion to the "oilgate scandal" that threatened the Shagari government during its first

months. The scandal had its origin in charges by the newspaper *Punch* that some \$5 billion was missing from NNPC accounts. The commission report, however, focused not on corruption but on the failings of the international oil companies. The panel found NNPC record-keeping to be totally inadequate, but it completely absolved officials of any wrongdoing.

President Shagari's message to the oil companies stated that the lost revenue could be repaid over several years. He also appointed yet another special panel to report to

him in October with a plan for the recovery of the funds.

In the talks last month during Vice President Mondale's visit to Lagos, the Nigerians made it clear that they must make optimum use of the twenty years worth of oil reserves left to them. They stressed the importance of increased technical assistance and training to help expand production of coal and natural gas and other potentially viable industries. The U.S. delegation, by contrast, put priority on opening export and investment outlets for U.S. agribusiness, for ex-

ample, as a means of easing the current trade imbalance that favors oil-exporting Nigeria.

In an effort to encourage American investors, restrictions on the repatriation of profits have now been liberalized and the "indigenization decree" of the military regime is under reconsideration.

For some individual Nigerians, this drive to attract foreign investors is proving quite profitable. Several government critics have charged that these wealthy Nigerians are using their influence with (Continued on Page 15)

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