

The Jamahiriya Experiment in Libya: Qadhafi and Rousseau

Author(s): Sami G. Hajjar

Source: *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Jun., 1980), pp. 181-200

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/160277>

Accessed: 21/03/2011 08:06

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Modern African Studies*.

The Jamahiriya Experiment in Libya: Qadhafi and Rousseau

by SAMI G. HAJJAR*

ONLY a few social scientists outside the field of Middle East studies are aware that in the sovereign state of Libya today there is no government. Indeed, it is not likely to have one so long as the country's strongman, Colonel Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi,¹ continues to be the leader of the Libyan revolution. This has been the case ever since 2 March 1977, when the institution of government in its traditional legal-bureaucratic sense was dismantled, and the people's authority, exercised through people's congresses and committees, was proclaimed. By this action, Libya initiated in practice the so-called era of *jamahiriya* – the era of the masses and the practice of direct democracy – and has taken a number of steps in that direction. A recent example was the renaming of some of its embassies overseas as 'people's bureaux', with Libyan students and citizens taking charge of their functions and management.² This action, instigated personally by Qadhafi, was intended to illustrate to the world that since Libya has no government, ordinary Libyan citizens overseas represent themselves directly to foreign peoples.

Qadhafi's action to proclaim and institute the people's authority has been judged by many observers as the work of a radical, almost 'a mad man', as President Sadat of Egypt once described him. The portrait of Qadhafi has, however, gradually changed, and while some scholars have paid attention to his thought for socio-political and economic reasons, Libya being a major oil-exporting nation, others, this writer included, are fascinated by the uniqueness of his political experiment.³

The intent of this article is to examine the political theory of Qadhafi as pronounced in his *Green Book*, which deals with the issue of democracy, and which is the driving force behind the *jamahiriya* experiment. It will

* Professor of Political Science, The University of Wyoming, Laramie. This study was presented at the 'Third World Ideologies' Panel, Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, San Francisco, March 1980.

¹ There is no standard and agreed-upon way to spell Qadhafi's name, and the same applies for the term *jamahiriya*.

² *New York Times*, 3 September 1979.

³ See the numerous comments by international personalities, and the mass media, in Charles Bezzina (ed.), *The Green Book: practice and commentary* (Malta, 1979), ch. 2.

be suggested that Qadhafi's political theory is part of a tradition of radical democratic thought initiated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and that the source of Qadhafi's ideas is the *Social Contract*, as the similarities between them are unmistakable.¹ Indeed, there is a sense in which it can be argued that Qadhafi is implementing in Libya what Rousseau once proposed for Corsica, a nation which he deemed potentially capable of expressing 'the general will'.² It should also be noted that Qadhafi did not come to power on the basis of his *jamahiriya* ideas, but that these were formulated during the first seven years of his rule. Clear evidence exists, however, that Qadhafi believed in a concept of popular sovereignty, and in the people's authority, from the very first when he assumed power in 1969, but that this was not then a mature theory. It became so when crystallised in 1976 with the publication of Part I of the *Green Book*, sub-titled 'The Solution of the Problem of Democracy: the Authority of the People'.³

THE MAKING OF A THEORY: HISTORICAL PHASES OF THE
LIBYAN REVOLUTION

On 1 September 1969, a group of 12 young soldiers, later known as the Free Unionist Officers, led by Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi, staged a blood-less coup which overthrew the monarchy of King Idris al-Sanusi, then on vacation in Ankara, Turkey. From the radio station in Benghazi, Qadhafi himself announced the news of the overthrow and proclaimed Libya a Republic. From that day and during the next few months, official statements and speeches made by the leaders of the new régime revealed a belief that political power belongs to the people who will ultimately exercise it. For instance, the Proclamation of the Republic, the first document issued on the day of the revolution, read in part:

The Libyan Arab Republic... guaranteeing the right of equality to its citizens, and opening before them the doors of honorable work – with none terrorized, none cheated, none oppressed, no master, no servant, but free brothers.⁴

¹ Libyan officials and scholars insist that the sources of Qadhafi's thought are Islamic and Arabic. For example, according to M. El-Shahat, *Libya Begins the Era of the Jamahiriyyat* (Rome, 1978), p. 80: 'The evidence forces us to conclude that Gaddafi's theory did not emanate from void but has its roots in a specifically Libyan reality'. During the international conference on the *Green Book* held in Libya, 1–3 October 1979, one participant in response to my talk on the subject stated simply, 'I am against the opinion that there is any kind of comparison between Qadhafi and Jean-Jacques Rousseau'; *Al-Nadwa* (Benghazi), 3 October 1979, p. 5.

² See Frederick Watkins (ed.), *Rousseau: political writings* (New York, 1953), p. 286.

³ Part II, 'Solution of the Economic Problem: Socialism', and Part III, 'The Social Basis of the Third Universal Theory', were published in 1978 and 1979, respectively.

⁴ 'Document: the Libyan revolution in the words of its leaders', in *Middle East Journal* (Washington, D.C.), 24, Spring 1970, p. 203.

Similarly, in a speech on 22 September 1969, Qadhafi said:

the revolution is a popular revolution... as far as could be from a military coup... The people is the teacher, the people is the pioneer, the people inspired the armed forces... and... the people is the ruler... the master... the 'king of kings'.¹

Other statements made during this early period ordered the abolishment of political parties; suggested that popular organisations would be established although their exact nature and powers were not delineated; and gave clues as to Qadhafi's brand of socialism whose basic character was to be detailed later in Part II of the *Green Book*.²

In the context of the politics of the Middle East, such verbal assurances and proclamations are rarely taken seriously, particularly when they are made by men who assumed power as a result of a military coup. Concepts and doctrines are often advanced, such as Nasser's 'positive neutrality', or 'Arab socialism', as a theoretical justification for a policy which has already been adopted. This has become a pattern which recently led two Middle Eastern scholars to argue that 'No one quite believes his own ideology! But it is useful to him, perhaps in his search for identity, to lose himself in the immensity of a faith that he does not quite believe.'³ The issue has been the sincerity and honesty of leaders, and also their inability to generate a philosophy of politics that would direct their political actions. The case of Qadhafi, however, was to be different in terms of his ability to articulate and implement a general theory of politics.

It is not certain whether Qadhafi was influenced by the ideas of Rousseau before or after the September revolution. What is known is that, in addition to his studies at the Military Academy in Benghazi, he attended the University of Benghazi in order to specialise in history. Also, as a student and young officer, Qadhafi was highly influenced by the ideas of Nasser and the Egyptian political experiment which emphasised the goals of Arab unity, socialism, and freedom.⁴ These goals became the very slogans of the Libyan revolution. Its ten-year history has been an attempt on the part of Qadhafi to put them into practice, and to restructure the political system in such a way as to bring about the 'people's authority'. This history can be divided into three phases,⁵ highlighted as follows:

¹ Ibid. p. 204.

² Ibid. pp. 206-9.

³ James Bill and Carl Leiden, *Politics in the Middle East* (Boston, 1979), p. 304.

⁴ See Frederick Muscat, *My President My Son* (Malta, 1974).

⁵ This division can be deduced by examining the sequence of events in Libya between 1969 and 1979, as reported in the 'Chronology' section of the *Middle East Journal* for this period. The events highlighted, unless otherwise noted, were reported by this quarterly publication.

1. *From 1 September 1969 to 15 April 1973*

This was the initial critical phase during which the Revolutionary Command Council (R.C.C.), made up of the Free Unionist Officers, under the chairmanship of Qadhafi, sought to transform Libya into an independent Republic, free from what was perceived to be the various foreign influences whose presence were permitted under the old monarchy. A series of measures, seemingly unco-ordinated, were embarked on by the R.C.C. They included the decisions to close down the United States Wheelus and the British Tobruk military bases (3 September 1969); the 'Libyanisation' of foreign banks (13 November 1969); the takeover of import, sale, and distribution of all petroleum products in the country (5 July 1970); the confiscation of the property of Italians and Jews (21 July 1970):¹ and the process of nationalising the oil industry, starting with British Petroleum (7 December 1971).

On the Arab front, and in pursuit of the slogan of unity, Libya joined with Syria and Egypt in an attempt to unite themselves in the Federation of Arab Republics (20 August 1970). This, as well as other attempts at Arab unity, particularly with Egypt, were a failure for which Qadhafi blamed President Sadat.

Domestically, the R.C.C. sought to directly involve the Libyan masses in the programmes of the revolution by organising them into a Nasser-style Arab Socialist Union which was an alliance of working people. The limited success of the R.C.C., however, led Qadhafi to announce (7 October 1971) that in September of that year he had offered his resignation in protest against 'bureaucratic inertia' and public apathy towards his revolutionary programme. In hindsight, this signalled a trend towards the ultimate transfer of power to the people. However, they had to be made ready for this trust.

2. *From 15 April 1973 to 2 March 1977*

During this phase, what could be called 'Qadhafism' began to take clear shape. By mid-1973, it must have appeared to Qadhafi that his revolutionary programmes on the Arab and domestic fronts (with the possible exception of Libyanisation and nationalisation) were not succeeding. Having laid down a three-year (1973-6) and a five-year (1976-80) comprehensive development plan, Qadhafi seized the oppor-

¹ The leaders of the revolution regarded both the Italian and Jewish communities as economically privileged, who under the monarchy were allowed to virtually monopolise segments of trade and commerce, and who prospered at the expense of Libyan citizens. See Ahmed A. Ashiurakis, *The Rise of Jamahereya* (Tripoli, 1977), pp. 26-7.

tunity of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday anniversary on 15 April 1973 to declare certain drastic measures to preserve the revolution. He proposed: (i) the abrogation of all 'reactionary laws'; (ii) the purging of the politically sick and the deviants who represented counter-revolutionary forces (communists, capitalists, and the Muslim Brotherhood); (iii) the distribution of weapons to the revolutionary masses; (iv) the undertaking of a bureaucratic and administrative revolution; and (v) the declaration of a cultural revolution.¹ These five measures were to become the pillars upon which the basic concepts of the *Green Book* were to be erected.

Following the speech, in June 1973, 450 people's committees were formed and took control over the national administration, universities, hospitals, schools, factories, and farms.² A form of direct democracy had emerged, and the next logical step was for the leader to provide his people with a succinct theoretical justification for the experiment.

On 6 April 1974, it was reported that Qadhafi had been relieved of his 'political, administrative, and traditional duties'.³ Naturally this led to speculation about a power change in Libya. The fact, however, was that Qadhafi was assuming a new rôle within the system, that of its theoretician and leader of the revolution.⁴ By 1976, the 'theoretician' Qadhafi published part one of the *Green Book*, and Libya was almost ready to launch the new era of *jamahiriya*.

3. *From 2 March 1977 to the Present*

At the concluding meeting of the emergency session of the General People's Congress held in Sebha,⁵ 28 February–2 March 1977, Qadhafi declared:

From the same place, from Sebha, in the heart of the desert, where the idea of the revolution emanated, the Declaration of the Establishment of the People's Power was proclaimed. All corners of the world will respond to this

¹ The General Secretariat of the General People's Congress of Libya, 'Qadhafi's Historic Speech at Zawara', Tripoli, 15 April 1973, in Arabic. Note that with respect to the second of his five-point programme, Qadhafi was paving the road for the Third Universal Theory as an alternative to communist and capitalist doctrines.

² *New York Times*, 4 June 1973.

³ *Ibid.* 6 April 1974.

⁴ A prime example of a similar rôle was that of Chairman Mao. In the Arab world, the precedent was the rôle of 'theoretician' assumed by Michael Aflaq, co-founder of the Ba'th party, first in Ba'thist Syria and more recently in Ba'thist Iraq.

⁵ The General People's Congress, formerly the General National Congress, was convened in Sebha during January 1976 'to lay down the foundation of a new political and economic Libya and sketch the pattern the country has to follow during the period now being called the period of transition, and which is intended to take the Libyan Arab Republic from the stage of Revolution to what is now being referred to as the "state of the State".' Frederick Muscat, *Libya as I See It* (Malta, n.d.), pp. 43-4.

jamahiriya. From the desert a new era dawns on humanity... the era of the masses.

From the desert our people announce, at the end of the twentieth century, the end of the traditional republics just as the French people announced, in the eighteenth century, the end of the era of the monarchies and the beginning of the era of the republics.

Today, in a part of that same desert called 'The Great Sahara', the homeland of the Arabs... in that place the foundation is laid for the era of the *jamahiriya*, the era of the masses.¹

The wording of this declaration clearly reveals that the concept of *jamahiriya* was not being proclaimed for the sole benefit of the Libyan people, nor just for the Arab people, but for the world. It was intended to be universal by Qadhafi, whose precise political expression is what he termed in the *Green Book* the 'Third Universal Theory'. Libya, now officially renamed the Socialist People's Libyan Arab *Jamahiriya*, was to be the first nation to adopt this doctrine and to be its first laboratory.²

In essence, the Third Universal Theory in its political expression is no more than an organisational arrangement by which *jamahiriya*, direct democracy, is to be exercised. The arrangement is as follows:

First. People in their professional categories – labourers, peasants, students, employees etc. – are divided into basic popular congresses. Membership is the right of all citizens.

Second. Through interaction and direct expression by the masses, each basic popular congress chooses a working committee which selects its own secretary and assistant secretary.

The working committee is responsible for the administrative affairs of the congress. It arranges for meetings of the congress, follows up the daily activities of the people's committees, and drafts a comprehensive report to be submitted to the congress during its regular session. In accordance with that report, the people's committees within the area of that popular congress are called to account.

Third. The basic popular congress chooses directly the people's committees which replace government administration at various levels. They are responsible for carrying out the decisions of the basic popular congress.

¹ Quoted in Bezzina (ed.), op. cit. p. 25.

² Following the proclamation of *jamahiriya*, Libya's foreign policy has concentrated on 'exporting' this notion world-wide. During the October 1979 conference in Benghazi on the *Green Book*, Libyans emphasised that the theory is universal, while Qadhafi personally called upon the 500 present from many parts of the world to propagate the doctrine in their respective homelands.

In addition, *jamahiriya* has had a moderating effect on Libya's foreign policy in order to make Qadhafi appear in the eyes of the world as a responsible and respectable leader, whose *Green Book* is worthy of serious consideration. Hence, over the past four years, Libya has ratified the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (1975), adopted U.N. anti-terrorist resolutions (1976), mediated with rebels in Chad to free French hostages (1977), and publically executed Libyan citizens convicted of setting fire to a church in Benghazi (1977).

Fourth. In addition to being, as citizens, members of the basic popular congresses, each category, such as workers, peasants, students, merchants, craftsmen, officials and professionals, establishes its unions, syndicates or professional association.

Fifth. The basic popular congresses, the people's committees, the unions, syndicates and professional associations gather annually in the General People's Congress to give final shape to the people's decisions and recommendations.

Sixth. The decisions and recommendations approved by the General People's Congress will, in turn, be transferred to the popular congresses for execution by the people's committees.¹

It will be argued below that this organisational arrangement was designed by Qadhafi to overcome the shortcomings of exercising direct democracy that plagued 'the general will' theory of Rousseau.

The March 1977 session of the General People's Congress, on the basis of the Third Universal Theory, adopted measures to abolish the Revolutionary Command Council, which since the Constitutional Declaration of 11 December 1969 had been the highest political authority in the country. Political power was transferred to the basic people's congresses, their committees, and the General People's Congress. Also, the traditional form of government, along with the institutions and offices of the Cabinet, Ministers, Directors, etcetera, were abolished in favour of a General Secretariat of the General People's Congress, comprised of a Secretary-General and a number of other Secretaries, each responsible for one of the activities of the state – for example, agriculture, foreign affairs, labour – and to people's committees at the local level.² Lastly, the session also adopted a decision to elect 'the revolutionary intellectual and leader-educator Colonel Moammar Gaddafi as Secretary-General of the People's General Congress',³ a position which he held until 1 March 1979, when he relinquished all official titles except that of 'Leader of the Revolution'.

In concluding this brief historical survey, it should be noted that Qadhafi not only revolutionised Libya politically, but economically and culturally as well. Only half-way into the ten-year history of the Libyan revolution, it was possible to observe that

Within the space of 60 months, a group of young officers, their thinking influenced by Nasir and Tito, had moved a backward North African state step

¹ Bezzina (ed.), op. cit. p. 24. These points were officially incorporated in the First and Second 'Declarations of the Establishment of the People's Power', adopted by the People's General Congress in November 1976 and March 1977, respectively. See the text of both Declarations in El-Shahat, op. cit. pp. 126–31.

² Bezzina (ed.), op. cit. pp. 25–6.

³ El-Shahat, op. cit. p. 132. Of interest are the adjectives used to describe Qadhafi.

by step through 400 years of history. Even including the initial takeover, no single step has been world shattering. When added together, the changes had brought about a broad societal revolution. Politically, economically, culturally and in international relations. Libya had become a different country.¹

Politically, the revolution had been waged on the basis of a theoretical course first proposed by Rousseau in the *Social Contract*, revived and modernised by Qadhafi in the *Green Book*.

ROUSSEAU AND QADHAFI COMPARED

At the outset of this article, it was suggested that there are unmistakable similarities between Rousseau and Qadhafi. These can be discerned from the manner by which the French philosopher defines the basic political premise, the nature of the political problem, and its solution in the *Social Contract*,² all of which are viewed in essentially a like manner by Qadhafi in the *Green Book*.³

1. *The Basic Premise: the Need for Freedom*

In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau opens his discussion with the assertion that 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.' (L'Homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fers.) In Part I of the *Green Book*, Qadhafi asserts that 'All political systems in the world today are the product of the struggle for power between instruments of governing', and that 'The result is always the victory of an instrument of governing... i.e. the defeat of genuine democracy.' (pp. 7-8). These assertions are the basic political premises of both writers, and it is my contention that their meanings are similar.

Rousseau's assertion is revolutionary, and implies a pessimistic view of the evolution of human political history. If the statement 'L'Homme est né libre' is translated into English in the present tense, as used in the *Social Contract* – this makes his assertion 'revolutionary', in that every man now living is free, and yet is everywhere enslaved. Men need not accept this political fate which is contrary to their nature. On the other hand, if the statement is translated, as it has been, in the past tense, 'Man was born free', the assertion would then imply a pessimistic view

¹ Richard H. Sanger, 'Libya: conclusions on an unfinished revolution', in *Middle East Journal*, 29, Autumn 1975, p. 410. Sanger states on p. 417 that 'the events of 1969-1975 would deserve to be ranked as one of the world's useful revolutions'.

² Textual references are to the translated version of the *Social Contract* by Judith R. Masters, in Roger D. Masters (ed.), *Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the Social Contract* (New York, 1978).

³ All page references are to the English translation of the bilingual edition of Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi, *The Green Book*, Part 1, *The Solution of the Problem of Democracy* (London, 1976).

of the evolution of human political history whose outcome everywhere has been to enslave man. History then tends towards the corruption of man and to despotism.¹ In either case, Rousseau's assertion assumes that all existing governments are despotic, and his statement makes no exceptions or allowances for different types or forms. Despotism, and the concomitant lack of individual freedom under a government, are the major problem for politics – a problem which is universal and in need of a solution.

Qadhafi's assertion incorporates all the points associated with the assertion of Rousseau. His view of human political history is equally pessimistic in that he believes all existing governments represent the monopoly of power by one form or another over alternative types. An 'instrument of governing' establishes in society the interest of an individual, a group, a political party, or a class. It does so because, historically, such an instrument has always been victorious in the game of power politics. The outcome, in Rousseau's terms, is that it chains the rest of the populace. In Qadhafi's terms it 'defeats genuine democracy', a defeat that need not be accepted. The reason it need not be accepted can be deduced from what genuine democracy implies.

Genuine or direct democracy implies the equality of men, and based on this equality it implies the right of every man to govern himself. Qadhafi's belief in the equality of man is further manifest in his statement that 'Man is the same everywhere. His physical constitution is the same and so is his instinct.' (p. 32). This equality of men, also implied in Rousseau's assertion, has a levelling effect that by definition makes any government a negation of equality since it presents us with the dichotomy of rulers *versus* the ruled. It also negates man's freedom to govern himself directly. Hence, in so far as man need not accept any existing form of government, but rather should assert his right to directly govern himself, Qadhafi's assertion is revolutionary. Again, the problem for politics is to find an alternative to the despotism of government.

2. *The Problem: the State of Nature and the Instruments of Governing*

Rousseau's basic assertion logically led him to an enquiry into the origins of political society. This emerged, at least theoretically, from the state of nature, through the mechanism of a social contract. The rights that men possess in the state of nature are not, however, the grounds

¹ This is Rousseau's thesis in his 'Discourse on the Moral Effects of Arts and Sciences', and in his 'Discourse on the Origin of Inequality'. For a detailed discussion of this point, see Roger D. Masters, 'Introduction', in Masters (ed.), *op. cit.* pp. 10–12.

upon which a political society is established. In the early chapters of Book I (i–v), Rousseau identifies two main rights of nature: the right of a father who can, because of the natural bond between him and his children, command them; and the right of the strongest, who commands obedience by virtue of his force. But, neither of these natural rights can be transferred into a political right – ‘that is, a legitimate reason for obeying a government and laws’.¹ In the case of the father’s right, the bond between him and his children naturally dissolves itself as they cease to need him, after which the bond between them is maintained voluntarily, not naturally.² Likewise, the right of the strongest is not the basis of political right, for ‘Yielding to force is an act of necessity, not will’ (I, iii). Obligation is not freely tendered to the strongest; it is, by virtue of the fact of his force, extracted by him.

Through this process of elimination, Rousseau concludes that ‘Since no man has any natural authority over his fellow man, and since force produces no right, there remain only conventions as the basis of all legitimate authority among men’ (I, iv). The exception to this is that a people cannot, through a convention, enslave themselves to a government, for ‘To renounce one’s freedom is to renounce one’s status as a man, the rights of humanity and even its duties’ (I, iv).

The state of nature was a condition of absolute independence and happiness. However, for some reasons not clearly identified, it could ‘no longer subsist and the human race would perish if it did not change its way of life’ (I, vi).³ The alternative was to ‘find a form of association that defends and protects the person and goods of each associate with all the common force, and by means of which each one, uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before’ (I, vi). This is what the social contract produces. It is used by Rousseau to explain the origin of political society, and the significance of the contractual theory from this point on is downgraded, because ‘his true interest is not the contract, which is rapidly passed over, but the general will, in the existence of which he finds the essential characteristic of the state.’⁴

Qadhafi, unlike Rousseau, does not address the question of the origins of political society, perhaps because this is largely academic. His starting point is the observable fact of political societies, and their various instruments of governing. Rousseau begins, as we have seen, with the

¹ Ibid. p. 13.

² See *Social Contract*, Book I, ii.

³ Robert Derathé suggests that what threatened man in the state of nature were physical accidents such as earthquakes, floods, and volcanic eruptions; see *Rousseau et la science politique de son temps* (Paris, 1950).

⁴ Alfred Cobban, *Rousseau and the Modern State* (Hamden, Conn., 1964), p. 73.

hypothetical state of nature and, noting its threats to the human race, his discussion leads directly to his ideal political community erected on the basis of the concept of the general will – to be brought about by the social contract, whose basis is man's rational deliberation.

Existing instruments of governing considered by Qadhafi include those of parliaments, party, class, and plebiscites. All of these forms have created a political problem for man in the modern society. The first three alternatives falsify genuine democracy by placing power in the hands of a societal group smaller than society at large – i.e. a system of representation. Of these three, parliaments are the least democratic, for the members either have no 'organizational link with the electors' (p. 10), or they represent some form of a coalition or party which itself is only a small fraction of society. Furthermore, elected parliaments are based on a system of propaganda and thus are 'a demagogic system in the real sense of the word' (p. 11), while appointed parliaments, or those based on heredity succession, are dismissed as not falling under any form of democracy.

A party is also undemocratic for two reasons. First, society as a whole is by definition 'pluralistic' and is characterised by 'the diversity of interests, ideas, temperaments, localities and beliefs' (p. 14); while a party is composed of 'people who have common interests, a common outlook, or a common culture, or who belong to the same locality or have the same belief' (p. 13). A party, in a society, is a minority, and its rule is by definition undemocratic. Secondly, a party is a victim of the iron law of oligarchy in that while its original intent is to represent the people, a party hierarchy emerges along with a system of manoeuvres, tricks, and political games. The result is the rule of the very few, and Qadhafi concludes that the party system is the 'dictatorship of the modern age'.

According to the *Green Book*, an aggregation of economic interests, such as the type mostly found in industrial/capitalist societies, or a tribal coalition, such as those prevalent in Third-World nations, is 'better than a party coalition because the people consist originally of a group of tribes. One seldom finds people who do not belong to a tribe, and all people belong to a certain class' (p. 19). But, although a tribe or a class is more representative of the whole people than a party or a parliament, they nevertheless fall short of representing the whole of society which is made up of a multitude of parts. With respect to the Marxist concept of class, Qadhafi points out that 'if the working class crushes all other classes, for instance, it becomes heir of the society, that is, it becomes the material and social base of the society. The heir bears the traits of the one he inherits from, though they may not be evident at once'

(p. 20). Additionally, 'the working class turns out to be a separate society, showing the same contradictions as the old society' (pp. 20–1). Hence, for Qadhafi, history repeats itself, and 'the struggle for domination of society starts again' (p. 21). Indeed, Qadhafi adheres to the proposition that if the single material base of society becomes the instrument of governing, this situation may lead to a temporary stability only to collapse before new material and social standards that are bound to emerge from the original base. He states: 'Any society with class conflict was in the past a one-class society but, due to inevitable evolution, the conflicting class emerged from that one class' (p. 21). Clearly, this position denies the Marxist hypothesis that the dictatorship of the proletariat ushers in the end of class society.

Plebiscites, or referendums, raise political problems of a different nature. While these mechanisms, employed by some modern instruments of governing, permit participants to voice their approval or disapproval regarding a specific measure on the ballot, they do not allow the individual to make clear what he wants, and the reasons for his approval or disapproval. In other words, the individual is denied the opportunity through his arguments for or against a specific measure to influence the opinions of others – a denial of a basic democratic right.

Existing instruments of governing not only pose political problems, their threat goes beyond that, so that people today 'suffer from various risks and grave consequences'. Even the family institution is affected, so that 'the conflict within the family is, often, the result of this problem [of existing instruments of governing]' (p. 7). Although Qadhafi does not specify what exactly are these 'risks' and grave 'consequences' facing the human community, they can be taken to mean that the fabric of society is being threatened in ways more than just political. Faced with these challenges, Qadhafi concludes that 'the people have the right to struggle, through the popular revolution, to destroy instruments which usurp democracy and sovereignty and take them away from the masses' (p. 10). It is this popular revolution, then, which will bring about the new age, that of genuine democracy based on the concept of *jamahiriya* and its instrument, the Third Universal Theory, which is the 'final theoretical solution to the problem of the instrument of governing' (p. 7).¹

While this discussion reveals some differences between Rousseau and Qadhafi, it points out some important fundamental similarities in their logics. Their main differences lie in the fact that Rousseau views the threat to the human race in historical terms, in that this occurred in

¹ The English translation of the text omits the word 'final' (*nihai*), which is part of the original Arabic version.

man's distant past in the state of nature. To Qadhafi, the danger is more immediate and present. Also, to Rousseau, the nature of the threat is somewhat vague or else physical in character; to Qadhafi it is more specific, although largely political. In addition, Rousseau regards the social contract as the instrument by which the threat is met. To Qadhafi, the threat is to be met by the popular revolution.

On the other hand, the similarities between them are more subtle than apparent. For both writers, there is an urgent necessity to restore (for Rousseau) and to correct (for Qadhafi) the human condition. Men must then act, either to form a social contract, or to wage a popular revolution, in order to avert the threat to themselves. In other words, history must be controlled by the action of men. In Machiavelli's terms, such action is a virtue which is inversely related to fortune or fate and which is consistent with necessity.

During the celebrations of the sixth anniversary of the September Revolution (1975), Qadhafi declared that the 'Revolution is not permanent. It is a passage from a state of underdevelopment to a more progressive one; from what it is to what it should be.'¹ From this quotation we can note another important similarity between Rousseau and Qadhafi, namely that the significance of the instruments for change – i.e. the social contract and the popular revolution – is downgraded by them, as their main interests are focused on the creation of mass sovereignty through the general will and the Third Universal Theory. It can then be stated that while Rousseau and Qadhafi differ on the particulars, the thrust of their arguments as to the nature of the problem, how, and why it should be solved, are fundamentally identical.

3. *The Solution: the General Will and the Third Universal Theory*

For Rousseau, the civil society or *civitas*, which was created by the social contract, does not itself institute a sovereign; rather the people, in acting to create, through the social contract, the civil society, become themselves sovereign, and will always continue to be so. Hence, the concept of popular sovereignty, and the general will is what expresses that sovereignty.²

Similarly, the people, through the popular revolution, in Qadhafi's thought seek the destruction of an instrument of governing, not to

¹ 'The Historical Speech Delivered by Colonel Muammar Qadhafi, Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council and Chairman of the People's General Congress of the Arab Socialist Union', Tripoli, 1 September 1975.

² See Thomas Hill Green, 'Precursor of Philosophical Idealism', in Guy H. Dodge (ed.), *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: authoritarian libertarian?* (Lexington, Mass., 1971), p. 41.

replace it with another, but to institute themselves as sovereign and to remain so. This is what *jamahiriya* means, and the Third Universal Theory is what expresses that *jamahiriya* or popular sovereignty. Now the concept needs no explanation. Suffice it to say that the people in the management of their public affairs are those who directly, and without any intermediary, propose, dispose, and impose. In other words, they are to practise genuine democracy.

Students of political theory are aware of the significance as well as the highly controversial nature of the concept of the general will in the annals of political thought. As noted above, the Third Universal Theory seeks to solve the problems associated with this problematic concept. Fundamentally, this is the meaning of Qadhafi's statement that 'The Green Book represents the theoretical solution to the problem of the instrument of governing.'

For Rousseau, as soon as the social compact is concluded and popular sovereignty is established, then 'Instantly, in place of the private person of each contracting party, this act of association produces a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as there are voices in the assembly, which receives from this same act its unity, its common self, its life, and its will' (I, vi). The general will then is the will of the collective body politic, and is something more than the mere sum total of the individual wills that make up the collective body politic. To this sovereign general will Rousseau ascribes the attributes of being infallible (II, iii), inalienable (II, i), indivisible (II, ii), and indestructible (IV, i). These attributes are explicit in Qadhafi's concept of *jamahiriya* and its expression through the Third Universal Theory.

The sovereign is infallible in that 'the general will is always right and always tends towards the public utility'. Likewise, *jamahiriya*, 'if realised in practice, is indisputable and non-controversial' (p. 28). The exercise of *jamahiriya* cannot, therefore, result in error, for dispute and controversy arise about things that are questionable.

The attribute of inalienability means that it 'can only be represented by itself', precisely what *jamahiriya* implies as being a direct democracy. Additionally, this means that sovereignty cannot be transferred to a public institution such as government. The sovereign and the government can never be the same thing. Again, this is the doctrine of *jamahiriya*, whereby government in its traditional conception has been replaced with the people's authority expressed through their popular congresses and committees.

Because sovereignty is inalienable, it is for the same reason indivisible: 'either the will is general or it is not'. What Rousseau is concerned about here is that sovereignty has been assumed to be divided 'into legislative

power and executive power; into rights of taxation, justice, and war', etcetera (II, ii). To him, the social body cannot be separated into parts. The source of the general will is the same, although its acts could be directed towards several objects. The same concern is manifest in Qadhafi's Third Universal Theory, whereby because 'sovereignty (*jamahiriya*) of the people is indivisible' (p. 16), the people are not only organised into congresses, but also into administrative committees whose primary function is to replace the governmental administration. The people, therefore, dictate and implement their own policies.

Thus, both the administration and the supervision become popular and the outdated definition of democracy as the supervision of the government by the people, comes to an end. It will be replaced by the right definition: DEMOCRACY IS THE SUPERVISION OF THE PEOPLE BY THE PEOPLE (p. 28).

Sovereignty then is indivisible.

The fourth attribute of indestructibility was deduced by Rousseau from his discussion of the 'degeneration' of the state:

When the State, close to its ruin, continues to subsist only in an illusory and ineffectual form; when the social bond is broken in all hearts; when the basest interest brazenly adopts the sacred name of the public good, then the general will becomes mute.

This, however, does not mean that the general will has been annihilated or corrupted: 'No, it is always constant, unalterable, and pure' (IV, i). Consequently, it follows that the salvation of a degenerate state is to rediscover the general will. The same logic and conclusion, that sovereignty (*jamahiriya*) is indestructible, is explicit in the *Green Book* when Qadhafi discusses how society readjusts its direction in the case of deviation from its laws. Thus, for Qadhafi,

If a deviation from society's law takes place under this system, it indicates a complete departure that should be dealt with comprehensively through a democratic revision rather than by force. This is not a process of voluntary choice of the method of change or of treatment; rather it is an inevitable result of the nature of such a democratic system (p. 37).

It also follows here that because of the nature of the democratic system whose sovereignty is, in Rousseau's words, 'always constant, unalterable and pure', the cure for the deviation is built into the democratic system itself so that a 'voluntary choice of the method of change or treatment' does not exist.

From this discussion it is evident that Qadhafi and Rousseau attribute to popular sovereignty the same characteristics. They, however, part company from this point onwards. The reason is that the further development and implications of Rousseau's thought has produced a

number of problems that Qadhafi's Third Universal Theory attempts to deal with.

The further development of Rousseau's thought, given the characteristics of the general will and its centrality to the concept of popular sovereignty, has to do with the practical problem of how to make the general will operational in the body politic. This issue leads him to the following main conclusions. First, the general will has to be exercised in a popular assembly, whereby each citizen is to deliberate and vote. As a result, the body politic had to be sufficiently small to permit the assembly of the whole people, because 'in general, democratic government is suited to small states' (III, iii). Rousseau's preference then is a state similar to the ancient Greek city-state or *polis*. This is incongruent with the realities of the modern nation-state.

Secondly, given the distinction between the general and the particular will, Rousseau is led to the conclusion that 'the smaller the number of individuals and the more similar their situation, the less the "friction" or contradiction between private interests and their common interests'.¹ Organisations, such as unions, syndicates, or professional groups, should not exist, and if they do, then the more numerous they are the less the general will is endangered. Similarly, this proposition is not in tune with the complex reality of modern societies which are made up of pluralistic interests.

Thirdly, since the general will is the only legitimate source of all legislation in society, being always right and always tending towards public utility, and since 'it does not follow that the peoples' deliberations always have the same rectitude' (II, iii), how, then, is the general will to be discerned, and how can the people's deliberations be made to have, in the majority of cases, the same rectitude? The answer is found in Rousseau's concept of the 'legislator' and of the 'civil religion'. The former is some special person who, unlike the ordinary citizen, can somehow always know what the general will is; the latter, on the other hand, has the impact of diverting the citizens from their selfish interests and to focus on the common interests. Its effect is to make citizens virtuous, so that in their deliberations they are guided by a fundamental common moral code. It is these concepts that give despotic tones to Rousseau's theory.

How does Qadhafi's Third Universal Theory deal with these issues? The organisational arrangements proposed, as enumerated earlier, are designed to overcome the first two limitations of Rousseau's conclusions. On the one hand, the procedure of organising the people into basic popular congresses in each of the country's districts, supported by

¹ Masters (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 22

working committees, seeks to insure meaningful inputs from all the communities that make up the modern nation-state, hence overcoming the problem of size. On the other hand, the theory implies a recognition that the individual in contemporary society is not only a natural person – i.e. a member of a society, a citizen – but also a corporate person who belongs ‘professionally and functionally to different categories and sectors, such as workers, peasants, students, merchants, craftsmen, officials and professionals’ (p. 29). By organising these groups into unions, syndicates, and associations, in addition to their membership in the basic popular congresses, and in relating them to the General People’s Congress in the same manner, the theory overcomes Rousseau’s second conclusion in so far as the organisational procedure incorporates the pluralistic nature and interests of contemporary society.

As for Rousseau’s third conclusion, while Qadhafi likewise rejects the idea of a constitution in a system of popular sovereignty,¹ the Libyan leader recognises that a society has fundamental laws derived from either tradition or religion. This is what constitutes the moral code for a society that would direct the people in their practice of self-government so that the need for a man-made civil religion, for instance, is avoided. Furthermore, nowhere in the *Green Book* is there a reference to any individual similar to the ‘legislator’. In fact, the opposite is true. Anyone who has ‘the initiative and boldness to proclaim the will of the society’, opens ‘the way to dictatorship’ (p. 36). Since Qadhafi has relinquished all previously held titles and positions, limiting himself to that of the Leader of the Revolution; and since this is a passing, not a permanent, stage of development, eventually the people are completely left on their own to practice pure democracy. The Third Universal Theory is, therefore, an attempt to avoid the kinds of paradoxes that plagued Rousseau’s theory.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The brief historical survey of the Libyan revolution, the stated intent of its leader Qadhafi, its accomplishments in politically reorganising Libya, and the comparative analysis between Qadhafi’s political thought and that of Rousseau, leave no doubt that Qadhafi is a Rousseauian. He is so in two distinct and somewhat contradictory ways.

There is first the ‘thinker’ Qadhafi of the *Green Book*, who not only adopts the general will concept in the form of *jamahiriya*, but who by virtue of having mastered Rousseau’s thought, proposes the Third Universal Theory to overcome its limitations, and to make his ideas

¹ *Green Book*, Part 1, p. 32.

viable in the contemporary world. To Qadhafi, it seems, the validity and importance of the substance of Rousseau's ideas (the general will concept) as a solution to the world's basic political problem (freedom) cannot be dismissed because of its limitations, conceived as minor procedural problems. The Third Universal Theory, then, could be no more than a simplistic organisational arrangement to deal with difficulties of procedure. Viewed as such, Qadhafi cannot be regarded as a follower-revisionist of Rousseau as some of Marx's followers were, but a modern reincarnation of him.

There is, secondly, the 'ruler' Qadhafi, albeit with the seemingly innocuous title of the Leader of the Revolution, which enables him to occupy the most powerful and yet the most sheltered position within the restructured Libyan political system. This is the position of 'legislator' advocated by Rousseau. Qadhafi even uses Rousseauan terminology in describing his rôle:

when the people takes power it becomes its own government; and at that moment it is I who will find myself in opposition, in the sense that I shall have the right, for example, to tell the elected Popular Committees that they have not expressed the general will in a suitable manner.¹

The obvious paradox is that the 'ruler' Qadhafi assumes the rôle of 'legislator', whom the 'thinker' Qadhafi argues should not exist.

Beyond this ability to, in effect, articulate what the general will of the Libyan people should be, the system of 'no government' and the various basic popular congresses and committees may, as one observer noted, 'relieve the central government [substitute Qadhafi for 'central government'] of various responsibilities, so that it becomes a less visible target for any potential opponents'.² In its totality, Qadhafism, given the dual rôle of the Libyan leader, is an eclectic doctrine.



An evaluation of the *jamahiriya* experiment in Libya is a much more difficult task than an analysis of Qadhafi's thought. One reason is the novelty of the overall system which has only been implemented fully since 1977. More important, however, is the virtual lack of objective data pertaining to the inner workings of the various people's congresses and committees that are the heart of this extreme form of participatory democracy. Some general observations, can, nevertheless, be ventured.

According to C. B. MacPherson, 'the main problem about partici-

¹ Mirella Bianco, *Gadafi: voice from the desert* (London, 1975), p. 95, quoted by Clement Henry, 'Qadhafi as Rousseau's Legislator?', Conference on the *Green Book*, Benghazi, 1-3 October 1979. It is Henry's thesis that when Qadhafi plays Rousseau's rôle of legislator, this both legitimates his activities and shields him from criticism.

² Henry, op. cit. p. 10.

patory democracy is not how to run it but how to reach it'.¹ This proposition is then immediately qualified, and he suggests that in some Third-World countries, in contra-distinction to western liberal democracies, 'the road had already been travelled: I mean the road away from capitalist class-division and bourgeois ideology towards, in the one case, a Marxist humanism and, in the other, a Rousseauian concept of a society embodying a general will'.² MacPherson argues that as a prerequisite to reaching participatory democracy it is not only the problem of size that must be resolved; the image of man as a consumer must be replaced by that of an exerter (who enjoys his exertion and develops his own capacities), and there must also be a reduction of social and economic inequalities.³

All of these problems, at least theoretically, have been addressed by Qadhafi. I have elaborated on how the problem of size has been tackled by the Third Universal Theory. The economic version in Part II of the *Green Book* preaches the slogan of 'partners not wage earners', with the net effect of transforming earner-consumers to partner-producers who are rewarded to the extent of their exertion.⁴ In addition, by advocating socialism to meet the problem of economic need, Qadhafi seeks to resolve the issue of economic inequality. He writes, 'In a socialist society, there is no possibility for private production exceeding the satisfaction of individual needs, because satisfaction of needs at the expense of others is not allowed'.⁵ As for social inequalities, they are dealt with in Part III of the *Green Book*. For example, 'a minority has its own social rights. Any encroachment on these rights by any majority is an act of injustice'.⁶ Or, in the case of women, 'Discrimination between man and woman is a flagrant act of oppression without any justification',⁷ although differentiation of sex rôles is permitted so long as they can be justified in terms of natural law – for example, the maternal rôle.

In light of the fact that the new political, economic, and social arrangements are based on the teachings of the *Green Book*, and that these are being imposed and watched over by their 'Legislator', the question is not how can Libya reach participatory democracy; rather, it is how to run the *jamahiriya*, and how it has been run. As of now, no definitive answers are available. Two final and general observations can, however, be made.

On the negative side, it is relevant to mention that the overwhelming

¹ C. B. MacPherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (London, 1977), p. 98.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* pp. 94–100.

⁴ 'The Economic Aspect of the Third International Theory', in the *Green Book*, Part II, pp. 7–15.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 22.

⁶ *Green Book*, Part III, p. 46.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 27.

majority of individuals managing the system of *jamahiriya* are young adults. By its very nature, participatory democracy requires a high level of public involvement, a demand being met by the younger elements of the Libyan population. If this observation implies that the middle-aged and older citizens are either incapable of meeting the requirements of participation, or that they prefer to be ruled rather than take on the burden of self-management, then the system's longevity would depend on the enthusiasm of the youth which must be kept high at all times – a precarious condition.

On the positive side, there is the fact that Libya is a very rich nation, with one of the world's highest incomes *per capita*. This means that popular congresses and committees are capable of translating their decisions into actions, as witnessed by the massive construction and development programmes now taking place in Libya. But in view of the insistence of the universality of the doctrine of *jamahiriya*, one wonders whether such a system could run in a poor nation, where participatory democracy could hardly be anything more than an exercise in frustration. Consequently, the Libyan *jamahiriya* experiment is, in my view, a luxury that few nations, if any, can afford. It would be foolish social science to offer any future predictions.