

Mobilization Against War & Occupation-MAWO

Open Letter to Stopwar.ca & the Canadian Peace Alliance (CPA)

To Stopwar.ca and the Canadian Peace Alliance (CPA),

I

We in Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) are sending you this open correspondence to express the grave concerns we have with your organizing of the April 9th demonstration in Vancouver. Your approach and politics on this day were without a doubt against the spirit of building an antiwar, anti-occupation movement not only in Canada but throughout the world. Imperialist countries and their military fronts such as NATO are beginning to sink their teeth into Libya while continuing the brutal wars and occupations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Somalia, Sudan, Palestine and beyond. This is a crucial time for the antiwar movement and we need an open and honest discussion or risk seeing further capitulation to the pro-imperialist political and military campaign against Libya.

The CPA's cross-Canada participation in the April 9th International Day of Action called by the United National Antiwar Committee (UNAC) in the U.S. was a breakthrough in cross-border unified action. We have been advocating for years that working with U.S. groups and coalitions is an essential aspect of a strategy to build a broad, united and effective antiwar movement.

Thousands rallied in New York and San Francisco, while coordinated rallies were held in 10 Canadian and 6 Pakistani cities, as well as demonstrations in Iraq on April 9th. These mobilizations built on the momentum of other successful coordinated rallies called by the ANSWER Coalition on March 19th. This broadly coordinated action has been missing for too long from the antiwar movement in Canada, and we fully endorse its continuation on a hopefully increasingly frequent basis. However, based on the events during the rally organized in Vancouver by Stopwar.ca and the CPA's public statements regarding the current crisis and NATO bombing in Libya, we are concerned that the political direction of these actions in Canada is unclear at best, and could even be understood at worst as pro-war.

At the Stopwar.ca rally in Vancouver we saw that two speakers invited by Stopwar.ca spent 15 minutes justifying and advocating IN FAVOUR of the current NATO bombing of Libya. Do the following quotations from the Stopwar.ca rally really have a place at an antiwar rally occurring in the midst of a bloody imperialist campaign to intervene in a civil war and overthrow the independent government of Libya?

- **"If you don't want war on Libya, what is your alternative?"**

- **"He [Gadhafi] has an unbelievable media machine, he spends billions and billions that tries to paint the picture that NATO is bombing Libyan people. NATO is not bombing Libyan people!"**

- **"This [the bombing of Libya] is not like Iraq, this is not like Afghanistan, this is not a foreign occupier coming onto our land!"**

- **"If you don't want those people [foreign forces] to get inside of Libya and you want to stop them you are saying, 'Let Ghadafi kill us!'"**

- **"You are giving us the wrong message. You are saying its okay for civilians to get killed but it is not okay for NATO to help us!"**

- **"Do you have a heart?!" (shouted at someone speaking against the bombing of Libya from the crowd)**

At least 10 people in the crowd responded to these pro-war speakers by shouting, "Stop bombing Libya!" while one of the more vocal critics of the pro-war speakers who is a long-time social justice organizer was surrounded and closed in on by three Stopwar.ca marshals. Even after it was clear to everyone involved what these pro-war Libyans were advocating, the Stopwar.ca MCs invited yet another one to speak!

Stopwar.ca and CPA co-chair Derrick O'Keefe spoke at the end of the rally to confirm that

they had invited these speakers knowing full well the pro-war message they were going to put forward. He said, "We invited the Libyan speakers who we've been in touch with even though there's a difference in opinion about NATO's intervention, we thought it was important for them to have their say." In fact, Derrick O'Keefe, and both of the Stopwar.ca MC's tried to justify this position to the rally, as if the pro-war position on Libya is somehow being unfairly under-represented. When Derrick O'Keefe said "We know its our job to stay on the streets and to bring the truth," this shouldn't mean the so-called "truth" that the government of Canada is putting forward by participating in bombing the Libyan people! Though Derrick O'Keefe mentioned that Stopwar.ca as a coalition had voted to oppose imperialist intervention in Libya, the time given to this supposed position was nothing compared to what was given to the pro-war Libyans. We must ask how Stopwar.ca can justify writing a statement which says they are "absolutely opposed to the NATO bombing of Libya, which is a shocking violation of the UN Charter and an act of war against a sovereign country" and then give such a huge amount of space to a pro-war message we can all hear 24/7 if we turn on CNN, FOX News, BBC or any of the other advocates of imperialist wars and occupations.

There is no justification for having pro-war speakers at an antiwar rally. There is no space for presenting such confusion in a public action that is supposed to be about taking a stand against war and occupation.

Unfortunately we have seen examples of this kind of behavior from Stopwar.ca over the past several years and in the weeks leading up to the demonstration. For instance, Stopwar.ca has invited speakers who advocate the overthrow of the independent government of Iran in the midst of an imperialist campaign demanding the same. They have also promoted other speakers who have compromised antiwar, anti-occupation political principles. Most recently, leading up to April 9th Stopwar.ca played an active role in weekly demonstrations organized by pro-war Libyans. In supporting these demonstrations Stopwar.ca showed a complete indifference and lack of responsibility for their actions as an antiwar coalition in the midst of a new war opening against the people of Libya.

Because of our experience in Vancouver we are concerned that similar events played out in other demonstrations across Canada. Did these other rallies also have pro-war speakers? The CPA, as an umbrella antiwar organization in Canada, has the responsibility to provide leadership and a clear political direction to its membership organizations, especially at such a crucial time.

We have read the statement released by the CPA "Support the Libyan people. Yes to freedom and democracy across the Arab World! No Military Intervention in Libya." The confused position that was presented at the April 9th demonstration reflects this confused statement, which concludes, "The best way to help the people of Libya is to show our solidarity with their struggle." Our role as antiwar coalitions is not to take sides in a civil war in an independent country under attack by imperialists, but to clearly oppose any form of foreign imperialist intervention which has never, and will never, benefit the people of that country. You can't have it both ways at once - to join in the imperialist campaign used to justify the bombings while saying that you oppose the bombings at the same time.

There is much to be learned from the coalitions that have organized rallies in the US since the imperialist campaign against Libya began. Through statements, as well as the March 19th, March 26th and April 9th mobilizations, organizations such as ANSWER, the International Action Center (IAC) and UNAC have taken a strong position against the current war on the people of Libya. The difference is that, in contrast to what we observed in Vancouver, in the US the actions of these antiwar and

social justice organizations match their words. From the lead banners to the signs and rally speakers, to the UNAC report from NYC which stated, "The new war in Libya has given rise to a new movement, as the largest anti-war demonstration New York has seen in years took to the streets of Manhattan." There was no contradiction or confusion as they had the leadership to take a strong stance against imperialist intervention in Libya. This is an example for all of us to follow.

II

MAWO has been participating in the same efforts, in the spirit of anti-imperialism, cooperation, and antiwar movement building. Starting from even before the bombing of Libya began we have organized 5 forums and 3 rallies, as well as produced 2 buttons and launched a petition campaign, all against foreign intervention in Libya. We have also produced 3 antiwar newsletters filled with news and analysis to counter the lies being spread by imperialist media on Libya and the uprisings and mass movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Within this newsletter are ideas and statements we think are crucial at this time and are much more appropriate be said at antiwar rallies:

"There is no saving of human lives or any humanitarian intervention on behalf of the Libyan people that can be performed by imperialist powers. Indeed, this is such an obvious hypocrisy by these war mongers because none of those precious human values mean anything to them. One, we haven't forgotten the killings of millions of people in Vietnam, more than a million people in Rwanda, killings of more than one million people in Iraq just from 2003 until now, as well as hundreds of thousands of innocent people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Congo, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia and many other poor and sovereign countries by the very same imperial powers."

"This is a time to abandon all illusions that there might be anything progressive and human to overthrowing the Libyan government or helping the opposition in Libya through imperialist intervention such as sanctions, a no-fly zone or military attacks...The unfolding mass revolutionary movement and ousting of Mubarak and Ben Ali in Egypt and Tunisia have been a fresh struggle for anti-imperialist movements in the region. It certainly reversed the setback imposed on the working and poor people of the world through the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. What the great masses of North Africa and the Middle East need to see is not another Iraq but rather another Egypt."

III

Since our founding on October 29, 2003 MAWO has always endorsed and supported Stopwar.ca, the CPA and other groups whenever they have organized antiwar work. However, we are also clear that we don't feel that bringing occasional celebrity speakers and holding sporadic events not connected to consistent campaigns is enough to even begin scratching the surface of building a strong antiwar movement. This is unlike what we have seen in the U.S. where there is a constant effort by different political tendencies to improve and build new fronts against imperialist aggression. We have rarely spoken out publicly about the huge blocks and slander we have faced for years in our efforts to work in a united way either with Stopwar.ca or the CPA, but now is not the time to remain silent. Now is not the time to remain divided based on petty or sectarian differences, now is the time to learn from the people of the Middle East and North Africa as they rise up and counter the imperialist domination they have faced for decades. Interestingly and ironically, as a Canadian-based coalition, more so than in Canada, our efforts for unity have had a great welcoming by U.S. coalitions and social justice groups such as ANSWER, UNAC, IAC, the Stop War On Iran coalition, IFCO/Pastors for Peace and others.

We are making a strong call to Stopwar.ca and the CPA:

1- Stop taking the unclear middle of the road path and arm yourselves with a clear antiwar, anti-occupation platform by rejecting saying one thing and doing the opposite.

2- Organize an open, inclusive, broad and well organized public discussion

on how to build a united and effective antiwar movement in Canada and world-wide.

We believe these are the only serious options in response to the current situation. Today in a joint letter the presidents of the United States and France and the prime minister of Britain declared, "there can be no peace in Libya while Muammar Gaddafi stays in power," "Libyans in cities like Misrata and Ajdabiya continue to suffer 'terrible horrors at Gaddafi's hands';" "it is impossible to imagine a future for Libya with Gaddafi in power;" "To allow him to remain in power 'would be an unconscionable betrayal' of Libya's people," "So long as Gaddafi is in power, NATO and its coalition partners must maintain their operations so that civilians remain protected and the pressure on the regime builds," and finally "Then a genuine transition from dictatorship to an inclusive constitutional process can really begin, led by a new generation of leaders." All quotations are from the BBC, and the complete letter is in the Washington Post April 14, 2011. Isn't it clear what colonial powers are up to in Libya? Is this different than what the Libyan opposition or the pro-war Libyans that participated in your rally say? Where is this confusion of giving a big platform to pro-imperialist, pro-war Libyans coming from?

Let us discuss these issues out in the open. We cannot let the mistakes of April 9th keep us from moving forward. Those mistakes create confusion among the masses that we would like to take a stance against imperialist aggression around the world, and if continued they will indeed promote what imperialist countries are advocating. We must clearly oppose this new era of war and occupation which began in 2001 in Afghanistan, and do our part to counter it by organizing, educating and mobilizing masses with a clear antiwar, anti-occupation platform as the colonial powers continue on this bloody path today, in 2011, against Libya. We believe these politics, and this proposal for a public discussion, are the way to build a broad, united, and effective antiwar movement.

Mobilization Against War & Occupation (MAWO)
April 14, 2011
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

>> Two examples from an audio transcription of remarks by the organizers:

1- Derrick O'Keefe (Co-chair, Stopwar.ca and CPA)

"We've been working with the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan communities here to build solidarity for their uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. And we did today, we invited the Libyan speakers who we've been in touch with even though there's a difference in opinion about NATO's intervention, we thought it was important for them to have their say. So it was a decision that we made democratically as a coalition. We thank those of you that had a respectful dialogue when there was disagreement and we thank you for listening. Umm, and think it is important, umm and time over time, time will tell that NATO's intervention is not in good faith. And time will tell that NATO's intervention is going to bring more death and destruction to people in Libya who have already suffered so much for so many years."

2- Roger Annis (One of the MC's of the April 9th rally)

"But we're also aware of the fact that there is a significant body of opinion in Libya that we have heard today expressed in what they think is required to do - so we will continue to listen to that point of view, and we will continue to discuss and debate it. We hope to learn from the experiences and the opinions of our Libyan brothers and sisters - we expect that to be a mutual exchange as well. We are living in very very difficult times in Libya and throughout the Middle East. So one thing we can all agree on, and that's why we're here today - is to oppose war, to oppose military intervention, to support people's power, to support the great Arab awakenings of 2010-2011, and with its continuation in the years ahead. To support the right without condition of the people of the Middle East to freely determine their political future and the establishment of democracy."