

# Stop the War leaders and Libya: you can't expel the truth



By attempting to unconstitutionally rescind CPGB-ML's affiliation to the Stop the War coalition, StW 'leaders' are behaving in a criminally sectarian and cowardly manner.

Cowardly, because the Labour party, Counterfire and CPB leaders who dominate our coalition's executive seek, by unconstitutionally expelling the CPGB-ML, to silence criticism and avoid having their *failed policies on Libya* in particular, and *lack of consistent anti-imperialism* more generally, scrutinised and overturned.

They seek to avoid answering to the coalition's membership and having the truth behind these failures exposed: that their cosy relations with 'left Labour' (German-Benn, Murray-Corbyn, etc) and their personal political stock-in-trade are more dear to them than the stated aims of the StW coalition they purport to uphold.

That is why, at the crucial moment, rather than leading British workers to *oppose Nato's genocide in Libya*, their personally cherished ideas and relations led StW to parrot the predatory propaganda of British imperialism, which was hell-bent on waging war upon Libya and the devastating this beautiful, historic, cultured and formerly most prosperous sovereign African nation – all in pursuit of Nato's strategy of capital aggrandisement, regional and world domination.

All of which begs the question: can an *anti-war* movement be effectively led by members and supporters of a party that condones and conducts those wars?

## Libya – a betrayal

Throughout the Libyan crisis, the conduct of the Stop the War Coalition was shameful, bringing us nothing but ignominy in the eyes of the world's oppressed and struggling masses.

Prior to Nato's bombardment, when US/British/French intervention was a little less blatant (very much in the vein of its current plot against Syria), conducted via MI6, CIA and other covert operatives, and through the funding of motley feudal and criminal elements, StW organised a demonstration. ***But this 'anti-war' demonstration was not against imperialism and its mercenaries in Benghazi, but against the Gaddafi government!***

Owen Jones wrote on the StW website: "*Let's be clear. Other than a few nutters, we all want Gaddafi overthrown, dead or alive. In both his anti-western and pro-*

*western incarnations, his record is that of a brutal and unquestionably slightly unhinged dictator. I will not caricature supporters of the bombing campaign as frothing-at-the-mouth neocons."*

Andrew Murray, wrote in the *Morning Star*, while Nato's blitzkrieg was underway, that "*it is wrong to assert that the rebellion based in Benghazi was some sort of pro-imperialist plot from the outset*".

Is that so?

CPGB-ML, a member of the Stop the War Coalition since its inception, did not fall for this pro-imperialist whitewash, and on 11 March 2011 we issued a leaflet calling for the defence of Libya and its government. This was a principled and coherent anti-imperialist stance, which has stood the test of time. We are proud to have promoted it among British workers and activists – including those of the StW coalition – as part of our activity to oppose illegal and genocidal Nato wars, in Libya and elsewhere.

The text of our March 2011 'Hands off Libya, victory to Gaddafi' statement is freely available at [cpgb-ml.org](http://cpgb-ml.org), as is the leaflet we issued in August calling on workers to "*support the resistance*" and "*denounce StW treachery*", which contained the following – remarkably restrained – criticism of StW's position:

*"Some people and organisations, such as Stop the War, have been bamboozled by the non-stop and ubiquitous Goebbelsian propaganda that has spewed forth from the imperialist media ever since Gaddafi's regime was put in place into believing that he is some kind of a monster who must be overthrown at all costs. In view of his record in defending the interests of the Libyan people, such an approach is absurd.*

*"Stop the War, dominated as it is by organisations that devote themselves to spreading illusions in social democracy (ie, futile hopes that solutions for the working class and oppressed people are to be found within capitalism), still finds itself cheerleading for Gaddafi's opponents: their only reason for opposing imperialist military intervention is that it may be harmful to the cause of imperialism's local agents in Libya!"*

## John Rees and the 'Don't Mention the War' campaign

With the lack of political will to defend Libya from imperialist attack, there was a corresponding dearth of activity on the ground. What happened to 'our' alleged ability to mobi-

lise 2-million-strong marches, like the one held in February 2003 before the invasion of Iraq, which is so often cited and trumpeted? This kind of capitulation before the Nato juggernaut has made us an increasing irrelevance to British workers.

As tomahawk cruise missiles, bunker busters, white phosphorous and depleted uranium rained down on Libya, pulverising Tripoli and Sirte, targeting all progressive Libyans, and in particular Col Muammar Gaddafi – whose infant grandchildren were among the early victims of Nato’s dark forces – John Rees apparently felt no shame, declaring (in a similar vein to Liam Fox and William Hague) on a *YouTube* interview that “nobody is going to shed a tear for the fall of this brutal dictator [Gaddafi]”.

He further advised the quisling ‘Transitional National Council’ (in reality a front for **Trans-National Corporations**) to gain credibility by “telling the major powers where to get off” – ie, to adopt his *own* tactic of dressing up an imperialist campaign in ‘anti-imperialist’ colours. No doubt this would have been convenient for Rees, but the heartless clerics had another agenda.

During the bombing campaign, StW leadership belatedly declared its half-hearted opposition to the imperialist bombing campaign – not because they disagreed with Nato’s aims, but because it believed their methods were *not effective enough*. Bombing, they said, “*would merely serve to bolster Gaddafi’s position, and thus undermine the cause of the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime*” – which principle aim of imperialism in Libya, ‘Stop the War’ leaders continued to cherish and support.

We published a statement on 8 September, pointing out that with ‘anti-war friends’ like these, the Libyan people might well ask, ‘Who needs enemies?’

StW leaders – as the 2012 national conference agenda attests – barely make reference to their betrayal of Libya, as despite some mild queasiness and reservations they remain broadly in support of Gaddafi’s lynching.

Nor is the struggle in Libya – like the struggle in Iraq – over. Resistance is regrouping, even after the wholesale slaughter of the flower of Libya’s anti-imperialist leadership. The Green flag has been raised in Bani Walid, Tripoli, Sirte and elsewhere – long after Hilary Clinton stopped cackling with glee over the gruesome imagery of Gaddafi’s murder.

For while the feudal thugs of Nato’s TNC run amok in Libya, committing mass violations of its citizens’ rights, including (among other things) kidnapping, raping and murdering Libyan women, and lynching anyone with black skin, while helping Nato bandits to help themselves to Libya’s oil and financial wealth, there can be no peace.

Let us all reflect – if there was previously any room for doubt – that these are not the actions of a popular-democratic revolution, but the pogroms of a decaying, imperialist-backed feudal movement attempting to divide and destroy the unity and progressive sentiment built

over 40 years among the formerly free Libyan people. Their gains can only be temporary; their ultimate defeat is certain.

Genocide and ethnic cleansing have been perpetrated, a nation stolen, its resources subsumed into the coffers of imperialist finance capital. The issue for us to address is that all the criticism from our ‘anti-war’ group was directed, not against Obama, Cameron, Clegg, Miliband, Balls, or the hosts of retainers without whom the war could not have been waged, but *against its victims*.

## A ‘broad’ movement – the cry was ‘Unity’!

StW leaders frequently call for unity. It is interesting to compare their words with their deeds. Their response to CPGB-ML criticism of their anti-Libya propaganda was not reason or even attempted justification, but sectarian bureaucracy.

On 23 September, the CPGB-ML received an email from the Stop the War Coalition informing us of a decision by the “*officers group*” to “*reject the affiliation*” of our party. We were told that this was on the basis that the CPGB-ML had been “*publicly attacking Stop the War Coalition*” in its publications.

We again brought the debate back to the real issues, in our October statement.

Lindsey German sent a follow-up email clarifying that “*the officers*” felt that our “*reported recent characterisation of some of them, including our chair Jeremy Corbyn, as ‘pro imperialists’ or ‘traitors’ was unacceptable from an affiliated organisation. We understand that sometimes debate on issues becomes heated, but feel that we could only consider affiliating you if there were assurances that you would not make such remarks in the future.*”

But when did StW declare its ‘officers group’ to be above criticism – on pain of expulsion? In what statute or officers group meeting minute is this ruling secreted away? We are certainly not aware of it. And how is the policy of a broad coalition to be corrected, if it errs, without criticism?

John Rees, speaking at StW’s 2010 conference, which had just passed the CPGB-ML’s ‘No cooperation with war crimes’ resolution thundered:

“*I personally support the call for victory to the resistance in Iraq and Afghanistan – but I also know that the strength of our campaign comes from its breadth ... And if this slogan puts off our affiliates – like the Quakers – then I am against it, and oppose the resolution.*” (From memory)

Here is a fine thing. Counterfire leader John Rees opposing his own fervently held beliefs to hold a broad coalition together – for how can we have an anti-war movement without Quakers? (Incidentally, no Quaker we have ever spoken to – and we have spoken to a surprising number, although admittedly not at StW meetings – disagrees with

the idea that an oppressed nation or people has the right to defend itself.)

Consistent anti-imperialism is just too far ahead of the curve, you see. Obviously, Rees is well up for the fight against British imperialism, but you know, these Quakers just aren't gonna go for it, so – regrettably – the deal's off. His speech, delivered to a carefully managed but highly spirited conference, was just enough to (narrowly) defeat the motion.

## The choice: oppose Nato or compromise with imperialism

The real choice, of course, is not 'Quakers or communists', but whether the aim of StW can be reconciled with the class interests of the capitalists who wage these wars. If we are serious about actually *stopping* war, the CPGB-ML believes that we must oppose the capitalist imperialist system that on a daily and weekly basis engenders war – and campaign to raise British workers' awareness of the actions of their own ruling class at home and abroad. This inevitably involves confronting groups and cliques that directly or indirectly support social democracy with the contradictions in their own political position.

Logically, that includes challenging the social-democratic 'leaders' of left Labour who *talk* of their opposition to war while *in practice* make their careers out of sitting in the parties of war and asking workers to support those parties at every juncture. *We cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.*

## Learning lessons for the future – defend Syria!

All this is not simply an academic exercise in point scoring. There are very real practical consequences for our work next week, next month and next year, which make it of vital importance that the coalition should learn lessons and correct its stance.

Since the fall of Libya, all Stop the War's national efforts have been directed at pointing out the threat of war against Iran. And while that threat is very real, and must certainly be mobilised against, such activity cannot be allowed to act as a cover for ignoring the *much more imminent threat* against that other sovereign anti-imperialist nation in the Middle East: Syria.

As well as carving out an independent economic path free from the diktat of the IMF and World Bank, Syria is home to the headquarters of many Palestinian resistance movements, and a firm supporter of Lebanon's anti-imperialist resistance movement, Hizbollah. Millions of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees have made their homes

there, and the country is Iran's strongest regional ally, as well as being an implacable foe of Israel. Although described by western media as a 'dictator', President Bashar al-Assad is actually the leader of a broad-based coalition government of national unity, which comprises many political parties, including communists. All of which makes the country a prime target for imperialism's guns.

The aggressive war being prepared by Nato and its regional stooges against Syria is using all the same tricks that were applied in the case of Libya. Nato is funding, training and arming disparate opposition and terrorist groups and parachuting in covert special forces to give them vital support, while Nato's leaders push through UN resolutions about 'democracy' and the 'safety of the people' and, of course, orchestrate a hysterical media campaign of lies and disinformation.

And while some people do seem to have learned a lesson from the carnage in Libya, the Stop the War leadership does not yet seem to be among their number. Yet again, the coalition's leaders are failing to take a consistently anti-imperialist and anti-war position; yet again, they are failing to stand up against the media lies and declare themselves to be on the side of the Syrian masses against Nato imperialism.

Instead of standing firmly against war on Syria, Stop the War leaders prefer not to talk about it. The recent picket for Iran and Syria didn't feature a single speaker for Syria on the platform, and its recent emails refer to Syria only in passing.

Instead of standing up to imperialist propaganda, the Stop the War website carries articles referring to "*Bashar al-Assad's killing machine*" while John Rees uses his television show to consistently denounce the legitimate government and legitimise Nato's stooges, including the MI6-backed 'Syrian Observatory for Human Rights'. Once more, Stop the War's 'opposition' to Nato seems to be based more on tactical grounds than on any real ideological difference.

Let no-one be under any illusion: not only is a beautiful, cultured, independent country and its people under threat, but the illegal war already being waged by covert forces in Syria is a stepping-stone to even bloodier war against Iran, and from there to war against China and Russia. In a very real sense, Syria today stands in the same place as did the Spanish republic in 1936. British workers and progressive people need to stand side by side with the Syrian masses, demanding: Hands off Syria! Victory to Assad!

And above all, we must start to use our collective power to prevent the British ruling class from taking part in this criminal and barbaric conflagration.

1 March 2012