

Should StopWar withdraw its invitation to Walden Bello?

On February 3, SANSAD received an appeal by BC Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines to support their demand that StopWar.ca, the anti-war coalition in Vancouver, BC, withdraw its invitation to Walden Bello to speak at its rally on March 18. SANSAD released the following statement at a meeting of StopWar to discuss this question.

SANSAD statement

StopWar invitation to Walden Bello

February 16, 2005

1. The Bello-Sison controversy needs to be viewed in the context of two absolutely opposed political tendencies and practices.

2. On the one hand, there is the view (held by Sison) that imperialism and its domination in a given country can be fought only through a National Liberation Struggle, which invariably requires - among other things - an armed struggle in the form of protracted people's war, and carried out by a people's army. The "other things" include legal and open struggles carried out through mass organizations of workers, peasants, women, students, etc., and a National Democratic Front.

3. On the other hand is the view as represented by Bello, for whom everything contained in point #2 above are "fossils stuck in the mud of the 20th century" (his own words). There is no need for armed struggle, national liberation struggle, or revolution. At least in the Philippines, again in his own words, change will come through democratic debates, through non-violent means.

4. While keeping the two different political tendencies in mind, it is also important to keep in perspective that the US Government in its efforts to terrorize the world had listed the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army, and Sison himself, as "Terrorist" - as it has done to many other revolutionary organizations around the world. This listing of the CPP, NPA, and Sison as "Terrorist" has also been done by EU, as well as Canada.

5. There is also pressure from the US Government on the Government of the Philippines to break off the negotiations that have been going on in Norway between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the Filipino government - negotiations that had already produced a Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. We are informed that this Comprehensive Agreement provides for the NDFP and the revolutionary forces to arrest suspected violators of human rights and international humanitarian law, investigate them and, if the evidence warrants, to prosecute and try them. This Agreement is being carried out through a Joint Monitoring Committee based in Manila.

Now to the present controversy.

6. To carry out polemics against organizations and people has long been a tradition in the communist and revolutionary movements. The production and publication of the Chart in the CPP Organ is consistent with that tradition.

7. We are not convinced that the appearance of some names in a polemical chart constitutes a "Hit List", even if it includes names of some who were supposedly arrested and punished by the NPA. By internationalizing a polemic that is specific to the Filipino situation, Mr. Bello has contributed to the divisions in the anti-war and anti-imperialist movements around the world.

8. In her note of Feb. 3 (to SANSAD and others), Barbara Waldern (on behalf of BC Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines) has alleged that Walden Bello concurs with the US, Holland, the EU, and the Philippines in declaring Jose Maria Sison and the CPP as terrorists, and supports the demand for Sison's deportation from Holland to face punishment in the Philippines. We have found no evidence for this allegation. But we believe that by Bello writing an open letter to Sison, and accusing him and the CPP for producing a "Hit List" could reinforce the US imperialist characterization of Sison, the CPP and the NPA as "terrorist".

9. We have also been informed that Focus on Global South, of which Bello is the Executive Director, is funded by Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. It has also been alleged that Global South is a beneficiary of money coming from US AID, International Organizations Department of the CIA, Asia Foundation, US Endowment for Democracy, US Institute of Peace and other agencies subsidized by the US government. But we have not yet seen any proof of that.

10. We do not believe that by inviting Walden Bello as one of their key-note speakers for the March 19-20 Rally, StopWar was deliberately trying to undermine the Filipino people's revolutionary struggles. For one thing, to the best of our knowledge, Bello was not even on the top of preferred invitees' list. Secondly, the decision to invite Bello was made long before the Sison-Bello controversy became public, at least here in Vancouver. However, we have two points of serious criticism of StopWar in this matter: (1) It does not attempt to inform its constituent members of speakers it plans to invite or seek input into the process. Had it been so attempted, divisive contention as is present today could have been avoided. And (2) it has itself become a signatory to the petition circulated by Bello against Sison and the CPP, without any democratic consultation with its constituents.

11. As an anti-war Coalition, StopWar is made of a diverse range of political tendencies in town. Its mandate is to arouse and politicize broad masses of people against the war machinery and empire-building agenda of the US imperialists, as well as demanding an end to the wars it is currently waging against the people in different parts of the world. We in SANSAD support this mandate. We also know that whoever was invited by StopWar would certainly make some sections of the people unhappy. We do not think that the withdrawal of the invitation to Mr. Bello - despite everything that he has been accused of - at this stage would serve the interests of the anti-war movement here.

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