

## **Stephen Harper Confronted by Antiwar Protest**

By Roger Annis, August 5, 2009

Yesterday evening, Canadian Prime Minister's summer speaking circuit was upset by a noisy and forceful protest action mounted by Stopwar.ca, Vancouver's antiwar coalition.

Stephen Harper was scheduled to speak to hundreds of his ruling Conservative Party supporters at an evening barbeque at the hobby farm of Senator Gerry St. Germain. Turns out the hobby farm was located directly on 8th Avenue in South Surrey, which gave close to 50 Stopwar activists a bird's eye view of the event and a prime opportunity to deliver a visual and verbal antiwar message. The podium where Harper spoke was some 1000 feet away from the edge of the road.

For two hours, including during Harper's 20-minute speech, we chanted "Stop the war now!", "Canada out of Afghanistan!", "Homes not bombs!", "Let war resisters stay!" and other timely slogans. Although organizers of the party event turned music loudspeakers toward us to try and drown us out, their music reverberated away from the event while our chants were directed toward it. Our voices easily got through. This was doubly true during the Harper speech itself and in the introductions leading to it because the music loudspeakers had to be turned off.

The Prime Minister's auto cavalcade was obliged to drive past our antiwar banners and placards while entering and leaving the event. Participants, too, got a good look, many of whom arrived by bus.

Canada's national police and other unknown police agencies were out in force but were obliged to permit us to stay on the public road and express our views. They did, however, force us to shut down our megaphone, issuing a municipal public nuisance summons in the process. That summons will be challenged in court. It will certainly be interesting to see how the court rules. We nonetheless used the megaphone for a good 30-45 minutes before it was shut down.

Our protest got good coverage on local radio and television news broadcasts, though it didn't earn a mention in the decrepit Vancouver Sun, Vancouver's largest daily newspaper. The CBC Radio One news report gave equal time to Harper's speech and an interview response by Stopwar co-coordinator Marla Renn.