

# *Soviets Abandon Women, Leftists to Mujahedeen* Gorbachev's Afghan Sellout

On 15 May the USSR began a pullout of its 115,000 troops from Afghanistan. The withdrawal is being carried out as a result of an agreement signed in Geneva a month earlier by Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States. The accord commits the USSR to terminate its military presence entirely by February of next year. As of this writing, over half the Soviet force has already been sent home. Whatever unfortunate fate may befall those Afghans who identified themselves with the Kabul regime and its backers, the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan is not likely to be reversed. It is thus appropriate to draw up a balance sheet on the past eight-and-a-half years of Soviet intervention.

When the USSR dispatched its first combat divisions across the Afghan border in December 1979, the anti-Soviet din emanating from Washington and other imperialist capitals grew into a deafening clamor. The intervention, according to the Carter White House and various bourgeois media hacks, was the first step in a Soviet expansionist drive upon the oil lanes of the Persian Gulf. In response Carter slapped new trade restrictions on the Soviet Union, reinstated registration for the draft and boycotted the Moscow Olympics in the summer of 1980. As Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's chief anti-communist crusader, stood rifle-in-hand at the Khyber Pass to urge the Afghan rebels on against the "red menace," the western media sang paeans of praise to the "fierce," "loyal," and "heroic" Islamic "freedom fighters," defending Afghanistan's independence from "Soviet aggression."

What was the appropriate Trotskyist response to these cold war fulminations? It was necessary, in the first place, to counter the lie of Soviet expansionism with the simple truth that the Afghan intervention represented a defensive move on the Kremlin's part, aimed at protecting a client state on its southern flank against a threatened U.S.-sponsored, right-wing takeover. But even more important was the elementary duty of Trotskyists to denounce the hypocritical indignation over the violation of Afghanistan's "national sovereignty," shared by liberals, assorted Maoists, pro-Third World new leftists, and significant sections of the ostensible Trotskyist movement.

In general, Marxists do not advocate the imposition of social revolution upon nations by military force from without. The indigenous working class, even when a small minority of the population, is best capable of leading other oppressed classes forward in revolutionary struggle. Afghanistan, however, is so monumentally backward that the working class does not exist as a significant social force. In this situation, *some* kind

## Islamic fanatic: Afghani Contra

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of outside intervention is necessary to emancipate the Afghan masses from quasi-feudal despotism.

The Soviet intervention did not take place in the best of circumstances. The reformist, pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) had come to power in a military coup and had little support outside of a layer of the urban intelligentsia. The PDPA was faction-ridden from the outset, and ineptly attempted to implement its program of reforms with commandist methods. This fueled a popular rightist insurgency, which prompted the Soviets' attempted rescue of the regime.

There is no denying that the great majority of Afghanistan's population supports the *jihad* against the Soviets and their allies. Yet Marxists do not choose sides in social conflicts on the basis of the relative popularity of the opposing forces. Rather, we are guided by the social and political character of the antagonists.

The nature of the contending forces in the Afghan war could not have been clearer. On the one side was a government in Kabul which, through a modest program of land reform, a moratorium on peasant debt, a literacy campaign, and a ceiling on the bride price, was attempting to bring Afghanistan out of the feudal darkness in which it had languished. It was no coincidence that the reform-minded intellectuals and military officers of the PDPA took as their model the Soviet Union, which, since 1917, has acted as an emancipator of Moslem peoples on the Soviet side of the Afghan border. The opposing camp comprised as unsavory a collection of reactionaries as can be found on the face of the earth: tribal patriarchs, feudal landlords,

### Afghan soldiers left in the lurch by Gorbachev's pullout

fanatical mullahs and opium-smuggling brigands, whose legendary hatred of social progress is matched only by their reputation for barbaric cruelty. Taking up arms against such threats to their "traditional way of life" as the spread of literacy and the mitigation of female slavery, these champions of "self-determination" found their natural allies in the military dictatorship of Zia's Pakistan, Khomeini's Islamic Republic and, most significantly, in U.S. imperialism, the world's chief counterrevolutionary gendarme, which has lavished \$2 billion on the insurgents. Only those pseudo-Marxists who do not know the difference between progress and reaction could have any doubt about which side to take in the Afghan war.

The Kremlin bureaucracy did not intervene in order to liberate the Afghan masses, but to keep Afghanistan (a Soviet client state since 1921) from falling into imperialist hands at a time when Washington was beating its anti-Soviet war drums with renewed fervor. They also must have feared that the reactionary contagion of Islamic fundamentalism which had just conquered Iran might penetrate to the Moslem regions of the USSR. But, regardless of the subjective motives of the Soviet bureaucrats, the Soviet army had joined a life-and-death struggle against the forces of oppression. It was (and is) unthinkable that the religious fanatics of the mujahedeen would ever consent to share power with the existing regime in Kabul. Therefore, to prosecute the military struggle successfully, the Russian army could have been compelled to extend the remaining gains of the October Revolution to those areas under its control, thereby in effect imposing a social revolution from above. Such a development would have constituted an immense step forward for the Afghan masses, and a significant blow against imperialism. It was with these hopes in mind that the Bolshevik Tendency joined the international Spartacist tendency (to which the founding members of our group had previously belonged) in proclaiming the slogan "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" (see accompanying article).

### Afghan Pullout: Humiliating Defeat for the USSR

Today those hopes are as far as ever from realization. The Soviet Union is leaving Afghanistan with nothing to show for

eight years of combat except tens of thousands of dead and wounded. Far from transforming Afghan society, the Soviet bureaucrats from the outset had as their objective merely restoring the *status quo ante*: a Moscow-friendly regime in Kabul. The Soviets paved the way for their intervention in 1979 by engineering the murder of the militantly reformist Afghan president, Hafizullah Amin, and replacing him with the more "moderate" Babrak Karmal. Since that time the original PDPA land reform decrees have been annulled, religious instruction has been reintroduced into the public schools, over one hundred new mosques have been built under government auspices, tribal chiefs and Moslem clerics have been "elected" to the government and the symbol of Islam has been restored to the Afghan flag. By attempting to

Dilip Mehta—Contact

conciliate the khans and mullahs, the Soviets deprived themselves of an important political weapon—measures aimed at social and economic emancipation—that could have infused their ranks with fighting ardor and won the support of a substantial section of the dispossessed peasantry. The result of the Stalinists' attempts to conciliate reaction was a debilitating military stalemate.

When Mikhail Gorbachev finally decided to throw in the towel, the agreement signed in Geneva held no guarantees for the present Soviet client government of Najibullah. It took only a little arm twisting from Moscow to persuade the Afghan leader to sign his name to a document that he no doubt perceived as his own political death warrant.

Throughout the negotiations leading to the Geneva accords, Gorbachev acceded to one demand after another from the White House. The Soviets had initially proposed to pull out of Afghanistan over a period of four years but, when the Americans and Pakistanis suggested that they were thinking of something more like four months, Moscow agreed to nine months. The U.S. then demanded that the Russians agree to pull out half the troops in the first six months, and again Moscow agreed.

The U.S. and Pakistan had initially agreed to cease all aid to the anti-Soviet mujahedeen guerrillas in exchange for the Soviet withdrawal. But before the Geneva accord was even signed, George Shultz stated that the U.S. would not stop supplying the mujahedeen unless the Soviet Union reciprocated by terminating all military support to Kabul. Even this outrageous demand, clearly designed to sabotage the negotiations, did not deter the Soviets from surrendering. The deadlock was finally broken with a codicil to the main accord in which the Russians accepted continued U.S.-Pakistani aid to the guerrillas as long as the Soviets continued to support the Afghan government. With a stroke of the pen, the Kremlin agreed to the continuation of a CIA operation on the southern border of the USSR that dwarfs U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras! (Meanwhile the U.S. continues to arrogantly threaten to bomb Nicaragua should a single Soviet MIG fighter jet arrive in its ports.) In short, American imperialism aimed for—and inflicted—a total humiliation on the Russians in Afghanistan.

A good indication of the fate in store for Afghanistan after the Russian withdrawal is given by the recent pronouncements of the Islamic fundamentalists who dominate the guerrilla coalition headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan. Their chief spokesman is Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who began his political career at the University of Kabul by throwing acid in the faces of female fellow students who declined to wear the veil. These “holy warriors” bridle at the suggestion that the old king, Zahir Shah (who is equivalent to a communist in their eyes) be summoned from exile in Rome to head a new government, and have vowed to fight on, even after the Russians have left, for a regime comprised exclusively of Koran-waving zealots. With apparent U.S. and Pakistani backing, the fundamentalists have already begun to impose a virtual reign of terror upon the “moderate” guerrilla factions. One such “moderate,” Bahauddin Majrooh, a former philosophy professor at Kabul University, was murdered by Hekmatyar’s men in Peshawar last February for publishing a poll showing widespread support for Zahir Shah. If Afghanistan’s traditional reactionary leaders are afraid to speak in public for fear of being next on the fundamentalists’ hit list, what kind of treatment can the pro-Soviet government in Kabul, and those who supported it, expect at the hands of the mujahadeen majority?

The withdrawal of Soviet troops will almost certainly be a prelude to a massacre. Among the victims will be women who disdain to enshroud themselves in the head-to-ankle veil, women who insist on their right to read, students, intellectuals and army officers, as well as anyone who refuses to bow five times a day to Mecca—in short, every progressive element in Afghanistan today.

### USec on Afghanistan: Menshevik Third Campism

While the bulk of the centrist and reformist currents which proclaim themselves Trotskyist have joined the imperialist-orchestrated chorus denouncing the Soviet intervention, probably the most cynical response has come from Ernest Mandel’s “United Secretariat.” An official USec statement issued on 21 March called for:

“a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan without negotiations between Moscow and Washington. The USSR must withdraw its forces from Afghanistan without delay, and continue to provide aid for the Afghan progressive forces struggling against the feudal-tribal and Islamic reactionaries....”

The hypocrisy of calling “for a defeat of the reactionary forces,” while at the same time demanding a pullout of the very forces which *could* defeat reaction, is appalling. To call for a Soviet withdrawal is in effect to call for victory to the imperialist-backed counterrevolution. The USec leaders are fully aware that the inevitable consequence of the Soviet pull-out will be a bloody carnival of reaction. These charlatans claim that while they would like to see a “genuine revolution” against the mujahadeen, unfortunately “the conditions for that are a long way from being assembled today in Afghanistan” and therefore the Soviets must withdraw in order to “improve the

chances for this [revolution] in the long term”! (*International Viewpoint*, 11 July). The cynicism inherent in describing the impending massacre of those Afghans who have thrown in their lot with the struggle against Islamic reaction, as a preparation for a “genuine revolution” at some point in the distant future, is breathtaking.

### Gorbachev’s Afghan withdrawal: appeasing imperialism

Trippett/SIPA

The Mandelites’ visceral anti-Sovietism has led them to revive the Menshevik/Stalinist theory of “stages,” which holds that every country around the globe must indigenously generate the conditions for socialism before the time is right for “genuine revolution.” But Professor Mandel and his coterie of flabby petty-bourgeois literary commentators and armchair “solidarity” specialists who constitute the USec leadership won’t be on the spot in Kabul when the mujahadeen arrive, and so won’t personally participate in “improv[ing] the chances” for revolution. Perhaps if they held tenure in Kabul instead of in Brussels and Paris they might view the prospect of a Soviet pullout with less equanimity.

Leon Trotsky, whose legacy the USec falsely claims, explicitly rejected such stagist notions. Trotsky was aware that despite the fundamentally counterrevolutionary role of the Stalinist ruling caste, it is occasionally forced to take steps to defend, and even extend, the social gains of the October Revolution upon which its rule rests. Had the Kremlin opted to crush the Afghan reactionaries and incorporate that wretched country into the USSR, genuine Marxists would have defended this as a step forward for the Afghan masses. In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky specifically addressed the relation between the survival of the social gains of the October Revolution and the backward peoples of Central Asia when he wrote that, despite “immoderate overhead expenses,” the Stalinist bureaucracy, “is laying down a bridge for them to the elementary benefits of bourgeois, and in part even pre-bourgeois, culture.” To be consistent the USec should logically reject the extension of the Russian Revolution throughout Soviet Central Asia and into Mongolia—after all, these areas had hardly as-

sembled the conditions for the “genuine revolution” which these modern-day Mensheviks advocate.

### **Afghan Pullout: Fruits of Perestroika**

The Soviet Union is not retreating from Afghanistan in the face of superior military force. By breaking the rebel siege of the provincial city of Khost in December, Soviet troops demonstrated that they are more than able to hold their own against the mujahedeen, even though the latter have recently been equipped with American Stinger missiles and British anti-aircraft guns. The Soviet decision to withdraw is only the most outstanding example to date of Gorbachev’s policy of global capitulation to U.S. imperialism and its allies.

The Soviet retreat from Afghanistan follows close on the heels of the INF treaty, in which the Soviet Union agreed to accept the “zero option” on intermediate-range missiles in Europe, at great military disadvantage to itself. Fidel Castro, at Gorbachev’s behest, is now offering to withdraw Cuban troops from Angola and accept a deal that would bring the rapacious cutthroats of Jonas Savimbi’s South African-backed UNITA forces into the government of that country. Aid to Nicaragua has been curtailed, and the Kremlin is bringing increased pressure on Vietnam to withdraw its forces from Kampuchea. And at the very moment when Israel is up to its elbows in the blood of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, the Kremlin has initiated moves toward the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Zionist state.

These betrayals are the reflection in foreign policy of the economic restructuring (*perestroika*) now under way in the

Soviet Union. Gorbachev has apparently decided that the USSR’s “foreign commitments” (read: aid to anti-imperialist struggles throughout the world) are incompatible with his efforts to modernize the Soviet economy. By placating the imperialists on the international front, Gorbachev hopes to undercut Reagan’s anti-Soviet war drive and reduce Western pressure on the Soviet Union. He thinks this will allow him to channel part of the resources now used for military production and foreign aid into the flagging Soviet domestic economy.

Such policies are a recipe for disaster. They can only succeed in convincing the imperialists that the “get-tough” approach to the Soviet Union has finally paid off. This will in turn whet their appetite for reconquest of the land of the October Revolution. The Soviet bureaucrats are practiced in the art of treachery. Just as the belief in economic autarky and “peaceful coexistence” led the Stalinists to betray revolutions in China in 1927, Spain in 1936, Greece in 1946, so it leads them today to deliver Afghanistan into the deadly embrace of khans and mulahs.

Gorbachev’s willingness to abandon the thousands of Afghan women, students and progressive intellectuals who trusted the Kremlin oligarchs, serves as a stark reminder that the rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy endangers the social gains upon which it rests. The defense of those gains, and their extension, ultimately depends on the success of a proletarian political revolution, led by a conscious Trotskyist party, which will obliterate the parasitic caste that Gorbachev represents and restore the internationalist and revolutionary mission of the state established by the October Revolution.■

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