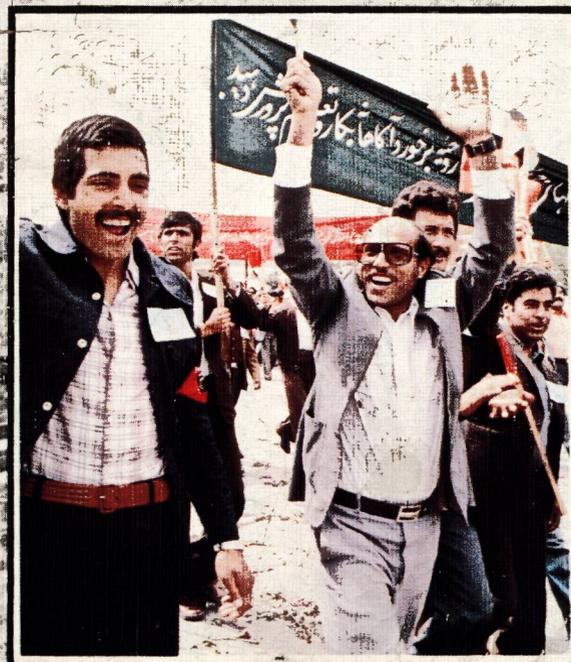


Lev Nikolayev  
**AFGHANISTAN**  
Between the Past  
and the Future



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Translated from the Russian by *Vic Schneierson*



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**Афганистан: между прошлым и будущим**

*На английском языке*

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## SO THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE LIKE, KABUL—

I jumped at the chance of seeing Afghanistan and writing a book about the new life which was being built there by a people that had shaken off medievalism in a matter of a few years and burst into the twentieth century. For a long time I had wanted to see the developments there since the April Revolution of 1978.

To understand what is going on in Afghan society one must scrutinise the facts, consider the age-old national traditions and, most important of all, keep one's eyes and ears open — see, observe, and listen.

The night before my departure I wandered about the streets of Moscow. We Muscovites are in the habit of visiting Red Square before a long journey. And I, too, came there.

The Moscow Kremlin rose before me in its splendid grandeur, its old towers reaching to the sky, its walls reposing in majestic silence. The Spassky Tower chimes rang the time of day, and I saw the honour guard filing past to replace the guards of the Lenin Mausoleum. Yes, Lenin —

He had been the first to extend a helping hand to independent Afghanistan. He had stood at the source of the friendship of the Soviet and Afghan peoples. His prophetic words have come true. "Russia," he had said, "will forever be the first friend of the Lofty Afghan State for the good of both peoples."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Works*, 5th Russ. ed., Vol. 52, Politizdat, Moscow, 1965, pp. 318-19.

I am on my way to Kabul. The time of the flight passed in quiet conversation with my companions. It wasn't until the stewardess announced we were about to land that I, fearing to miss my first glimpse of Kabul, glued my eyes to the porthole. A general view of the city opened beneath the wing of our plane — the houses quickly growing in size, cars becoming distinguishable on the roads, and even a caravan which was evidently approaching a bazaar.

I had seen Kabul in documentary films. I recalled the clay huts (called *havili*, as I learned later) on the hillsides surrounding Kabul, the mosques, the narrow streets, men in turbans and women wearing *yashmaks*. An ordinary Eastern town in short, with, of course, its own specific colour, though its hustle and bustle was the hustle and bustle of all other Eastern towns, as were its shrill noises and its sagesness.

The first thing I noticed as I stepped out of the plane was the high and pure light blue sky. The sun was blazing down, for March in Kabul is spring at its warmest.

People swarmed beside the airport building. Armed guards were to be seen everywhere. And small wonder. The country is at war, and the airport must be properly guarded.

There were Afghans and Russians among those who had come to meet the plane. People were shaking hands, saying something, and hurrying to pick up their baggage.

We emerged in the square outside the airport. A car was waiting for us. I was told I'd stay at Ariana Hotel.

The road leading from the airport was lined with *duvals*, which are clay walls. Soon, I glimpsed tall

modern houses on the left.

This was a housing development, I was told, that Soviet builders had helped to put up. Yes, I knew that a housebuilding plant had been constructed in Kabul with Soviet aid as far back as 1965. I knew, too, that the plant had a work force of 2,500, and that very soon its capacity would be doubled.

Was there much building done in Kabul, I asked. Not yet. But the housing shortage was acute, and more nine and twelve storied houses were going to be erected.

There were other Moscow guests in Ariana Hotel, I was told: the Moiseyev dance ensemble.

Igor Moiseyev's famous folk dancers had come to take part in the concert that would follow the closing of the First National Conference of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (March 14-15, 1982) attended by 841 delegates representing its 80,000-strong membership.

There were Party branches in all provincial cities and many other towns, counties, and districts. Party cadres were being trained at the Institute of Social Sciences in Kabul or at special schools in the socialist countries.

The Conference surveyed the four years of change and adopted the PDPA Action Programme for the national-democratic stage of the Revolution.

"In its Action Programme and all its activity," the document said, "the PDPA promotes the aims and sacred principles of peace, national independence, freedom and justice, equality and fraternity, and all-round social progress to which our people and their political vanguard, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, have always been dedicated."

The Programme set the aim of consolidating and

developing the gains of the April Revolution, safeguarding state sovereignty, and the rule of the people.

I had the good fortune of attending the Conference on its last day. There was complete unanimity and understanding among its delegates. Representatives of the country's various Party branches adopted decisions on a variety of urgent matters, and examined problems that faced Afghan society.

Later, Comrade Saleh Mohammad Zeray, a Secretary of the PDPA Central Committee, explained to me that the Action Programme adopted at the Conference was of exceptional importance for the progress of the Revolution.

"It will help consolidate and advance our Revolution," he said. "It will help crush the counter-revolution and create a climate of enduring and unbroken peace throughout Afghanistan."

Comrade Zeray called my attention to the imposing social transformations planned by the Party — improvements in the people's working and living conditions, more jobs, guaranteed wages in keeping with the quantity and quality of work, more state-run hospitals, out-patient clinics and pharmacies, and a system of state-operated health and life insurance.

He described the upcoming system of mother and child protection, and the pensions scheme for the aged and for the incapacitated, and the plan for aiding families of servicemen who had laid down their lives for the Revolution.

Then we spoke of the economy, and Comrade Zeray again referred to the Action Programme. "Have you noticed," he asked, "that the Party defined rapid rehabilitation of factories, mines, power stations and transport enterprises destroyed by *dushmans*, the counter-revolutionary bandits, as

the most urgent task?" He explained that it wasn't merely a matter of putting them back into operation, but of securing industrial growth to meet the country's needs in means of production and vital consumer goods.

"What about agriculture?" I asked.

The chief objective of Afghanistan's agrarian policy, Comrade Zeray said, was to wipe out the feudal system of farming. That would give fresh scope to the productive forces, and would guarantee that peasants fully enjoyed the fruits of their labour and, therefore, increased production in their own and society's interests.

We left the building of the Kabul Polytechnic Institute where the Conference had been held, well after dark.

Driving out of the Institute grounds I glimpsed the outlines of the Kabul Bread Factory on the right, and remembered that some time ago the United States had embargoed grain shipments to the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. But the Afghans did not suffer its effects, for grain was being brought in from the Soviet Union.

As we drove on I saw little bakeries here and there, those veterans of the bread-making trade in Afghanistan that were still at work despite the late hour. They were scattered all over the city, and supplied bread even to quarters where a bread-cart could not pass in bad weather.

Two bakers wearing flour-soiled aprons came out of a bakery. They stood by the wayside, enjoying a breath of fresh air after the heat beside the oven.

Only recently ovens were lit at a risk to their owners' life, I was told. Enemies of the Revolution made bakers close down their shops. If people went

without bread, they figured, unrest would break out. But the authorities saw to it that the bakeries were properly protected—

After a pause someone in the car added:

“It took time for people to realise that the April Revolution had no other aims but to give bread to the hungry, peace to the embattled, and land to the oppressed.”

Bread has always been the measure of all values. Small wonder Afghans say “I swear by my bread” if they want to give their words extra force.

Close to the hotel the road was bounded by an unbroken line of fences behind which I saw handsome villas with balconies and large windows. But houses like these, as I had observed, were rare in Kabul.

They belonged to former president Mohammad Daoud, someone explained. Daoud occupied one himself, the others had housed his relatives. No one remembered now who had lived in what villa. The president and the king were forgotten. There was no point in remembering them. People had had a hard life in their time—

On coming to the hotel I dug into books on pre-revolution Afghanistan.

For per capita national income, I read, Afghanistan ranked among the 25 least developed countries of the world. Seven thousand landlords owned 20 per cent of the cultivated land, while 600,000 poor peasant families held only 8 per cent. Tribalism survived in many parts of the country. As many as 96 per cent of the nation could neither read nor write. Afghanistan tailed behind all other countries for hospital beds per 1,000 population. Child mortality was as high as 200 per 1,000 infants. There was one doctor per 20,000 people. For literacy

the country ranked 127th, and for the number of doctors 119th. Eighty-six per cent of the population was rural, with nearly 2.5 million nomads and semi-nomads. Most of Afghanistan's gross national product originated from subsistence or small-scale farming.

These facts and figures were staggering. But I felt they were essential as a reproach to those who had for so many decades pitilessly maltreated the ancient land.

Sleep would not come to me. I went down to the lobby. Igor Moiseyev was there, seated in an armchair beside the doorman and watching TV.

"Fagged out?" I asked.

"No time for that. After the performance we had a press conference. And there'll be two performances tomorrow—one for Soviet specialists in Kabul, and another for Afghan servicemen. We've been promised that after the concerts they'll show us the town."

He smiled. "There's something attractive about Kabul: A warmth, perhaps, or a mystique. I've been to so many cities all over the world, and Kabul is unlike any of them."

\* \* \*

I had once been told that Eastern towns were startlingly alike but there was always someone who said, "Nonsense, the disparities strike the eye without fail."

Indeed, can Istanbul be compared to Delhi or Beirut to Baghdad? But the East is the East: the covert and the overt, the noisy and the quiet, the modest and the ostentatious—they coexist in any Eastern city. To the European eye it is an extraordinary spectacle the like of which he has never

seen before. He wants to understand the essence of what he sees. But the town does not reveal itself so easily; it raises its veils gradually. Strange as it may seem, it is the townsmen themselves who disclose its mysteries. They are identified by their dress, gait, and behaviour. Their walk of life, and their character, become identifiable too. A poor *dukan* trader is always fussy, while a rich one won't deign to move; a *nuker* servant will make himself as small as he can, while the master will stop in the middle of the street unhurriedly to straighten his belt or take a wad of *naswar* chewing tobacco.

The streets are crowded most of the time, but especially the bazaars, teahouses, and eating places. To be sure, not all people have something to do. Many wander about the streets without a purpose. They can't do without it—without the life of the town, its air, the noisy crowd, which are better for them than any medicine.

Eastern towns abound in donkeys, horses, and camels—mostly covered with colourful carpets or cloths, and wearing ribbons and little bells. An old-time horse-drawn carriage would pass, occupied by a venerable turbaned inmate, and people stepped out of its way respectfully.

In an Eastern town there is always something dating to a remote past—ancient walls, ancient fortresses, ancient towers. And everybody knows all about them. Though, to be sure, the stories one hears are often different.

They say the place which is now the site of Kabul was inhabited by a people which had assiduously begged Allah to move it closer to heaven for it was sure that life would then be better. And Allah responded to its prayers. He raised the place seven

times, and it became hotter, for the sun, too, was now closer. And people also say that Allah created a lake here, at the centre of which He put an island with people on it. Rumours about the island reached the country's ruler, and he wanted to see it. A caravan was fitted out, and he set out for the lake. On coming to its shore, he ordered his retinue to throw up a straw bridge to the island. He liked the island and wanted to build a town on it, and to call the town Kapol, which meant Straw Bridge. Later Kapol became Kabul.

But though heaven was now closer, the people's life did not improve. That, too, was part of the tale.

\* \* \*

Kabul wakes early. The first pedestrians, mainly men, appear long before sunrise. The *dukan* keepers open their little shops, street-vendors push carts with their wares, the bazaars come to life.

The bazaars are indissolubly part of Kabul. One can't help feeling that if they were removed there'd be no Kabul. Row upon row of little shops, stores, workshops, tea-houses and eateries. The wares ranging from meat and flour to leather goods and artefacts made of stone; in the shopwindows and on the counters are lighters and chewing gum, razor blades and cigarettes, belts and buttons; there are sheepskin coats on sale, and straw baskets, washbasins, teapots and kettles, and frying pans; you see bolts of heavy velvet and light brocade. Beside a little shop dealing in *karakul* lambskins, a baker sells flat cakes and rolls, and beside a fruit stall, a street barber has found a place for his meagre instruments.

The bazaars are alive from early morning until

long after dark. But that, to be sure, only for the customers. For the traders they continue on and on. Many spend their nights there, at the bazaar, for there is little point in going home late only to return early in the morning. That is why, indeed, Kabul bazaars have a life of their own at night, though much less vehement and noisy than in the daytime. Still, some of the *dukans* have a light burning, and people are heard to speak, and someone's shadow flits across the passage, vanishing in the dark. Mind you, it isn't entirely safe to walk about in the bazaars at nighttime.

The copper shops are the first to open in the morning, for they have to light the kilns and work the bellows. Thereupon the coppermen get down to work, and the blows of their heavy hammers let everyone know a new day has begun. The coppermen are good tinsmiths, they also solder, forge, and rivet, and sell their handiwork to passing customers. Looking at their shops you can't help thinking they produce much more than they sell, for their shop-windows and counters are piled high with goods. It looks as though the merchandise lies about in disorder. But that is not so. In fact, there is complete order established years and years ago, for the *dukans* are passed down from father to son and to grandson. And no grandson would think of altering the established order.

Oh, there are all sorts of bazaars in Kabul. The Green Bazaar deals in fruits and vegetables. Hence its name. Not more than ten of the *dukans* there handle other merchandise—meat, bread, and shish kebab, and, if you need them, even a leather suitcase or shoes. That's the custom of Kabul bazaars—to sell anything and everything. Compared with other

Kabul bazaars, the Green Bazaar is small. Unlike Mindawi! Mindawi resembles a trading town where you can buy practically anything from thread to an omnibus and from dried apricot to an ostrich egg. Kabul townsmen say if you haven't found what you want in Mindawi, then there is no such thing. Mindawi traders deal wholesale and retail. Watermelons, apples, and groats can be bought by the cartfull.

In Kabul streets and squares sleek Mercedes cars mingle with ancient lorries, canary yellow cabs, and buses that have long since served their time and from whose smashed windows stick out the heads of cows or bundles of firewood. Unconcerned about this motor-powered Babylon, camels walk staidly along the edge of the road, quick-stepping donkeys mince by, and even ponies of whose origins one can only wonder.

Afghans like to decorate their cars and buses. Even the windshields are hung with various charms, strips of shiny paper and colourful stickers, and one marvels how the driver can see the road ahead. Lines from the Koran in bold, elegant Kufic characters are inscribed on the vehicles. The sides of lorries are, indeed, often built up to take a bigger load. A lorry like that is like a house on the move.

At night Kabul looks spacious and empty. After sunrise, however, it seems that all its people, young and old, pour into the streets, squares, and bazaars, crowding them and filling them with noise. As the sun sets, the quiet returns. Curfew is at 10 p.m.

On the slopes of the As:nai and Shir-Darvaz, which are hills on the fringes of Kabul, the little windows of the *bavili* stay lit up until about midnight. Climbing up the hillside they create the impression in the dark of being the windows of a skyscraper.

Kabul people rise with the sun, which the turbid waters of the Kabul River rush eastwards to meet. In springtime they run full, taking in the waters of mountain brooks practically to overflowing—though the Kabul is not in the habit of leaving its banks. Once upon a time, they say, people bathed in it. But that was so long ago that hardly anyone remembers. Nowadays, owing to pollution, bathing in the river is not allowed. Nothing, however, can stop the town boys, who seem to be the same everywhere and who treat bans with the same disdain.

Many centuries ago, the valley of the Kabul had been an oasis. First mention of it is found in ancient Indian hymns dating to 2000 B.C. The Kabul oasis is also mentioned in the list of lands conquered by Darius, king of Persia, and in the notes of the ancient Greek astronomer and geographer Ptolemy. It is also common knowledge that the Kabul valley had been visited by Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Tamerlane, while Baber, founder of the Great Mogul dynasty, is even buried there. The Gardens of Baber, where his tomb is, lie high above the city. The medieval citadel of Bala Hisar, too, is a reminder of the mighty conqueror.

Then there is the unfinished ancient wall up on the hill. The story of its builders has become legend. Once upon a time, the legend says, a ruler had ordered the wall to be built round Kabul. How? he was asked, for the town stood upon hills. Build it across the hills, the ruler replied. All the males of the region were made to work on the building site. It was hard work, because all materials had to be carried uphill. Many could not stand the strain, and fell to the ground exhausted. For this they were immured alive.

One day a handsome youth was driven to the building site. He had a bride who loved him dearly. She sat and pondered how to save her sweetheart from certain death, then climbed the hill and joined the men in their hard work. The overseers saw her and brought her before the ruler.

"Why are you doing what men are meant to do?" he asked her.

"Men?" the girl smiled. "Those aren't men! Men wouldn't let you treat them as slaves." Thereupon, she picked up a stone and hurled it at the ruler, who fell to the ground dead. The ruler's bodyguards wanted to seize the girl, but men who heard her words came to her rescue. Their manly dignity was aroused, and they drove the ruler's cohorts out of the city.

Word of the ruler's death quickly spread to all corners of Kabul. Men carried the fearless girl on their hands, and it is said that on her wedding-day she received as many gifts as there were people in the city. While the wall remained unfinished.

On my second morning in Kabul I left the hotel early. My interpreter was already waiting for me in the yard. We left the car behind, and set out on foot in the direction of Arq Palace, the former residence of the Afghan kings and now the seat of the Revolutionary Council, the top body of the people's power.

A member of the Tsorandoi, the security force, who stood guard on the corner, clicked the bolt of his submachine gun, as though testing it at the outset of another day.

The sun, a scorching spring sun, peeked out from behind the hills. Sunny weather in Kabul

can run on and on for weeks, never changing, with the same merciless sun burning you day after day under the same limpidly blue sky in the same heated air. The grass in Kabul is always wiry, always half-dried, and the pines there never smell of conifers.

A platoon of soldiers marched across Pushtunistan Square. A Hazara youth walked by with a leather waterbag on his back. A bent old man pushed a loaded cart out of the gateway of a house. Above the gateway a signboard read, Co-operative.

"What are you carrying, old man?" someone in a turban asked him.

We waited for the answer.

"Seed grain," he said.

"Grain for seed?" the turbaned one asked in surprise. "Where d'you get it?"

"At the co-operative. Co-operatives are for us, peasants. Haven't you heard? They've been organised by the authorities to lend us seed, fertilizer, even implements—"

They kept moving away, immersed in a lively conversation.

We heard the *azan*, the call to prayer of the muezzin—a tall, desiccated man high up on the minaret. Passers-by turned, raised their heads, some stopped—then, remembering their many chores, continued on their way.

There were nearly 600 mosques in the city, my interpreter and guide told me. "When we come to Sharinaw, a specific quarter in Kabul," he said, "I'll show you a mosque the government built recently on its own funds. The authorities build mosques, rebuild those ruined by *dushman* counter-revolutionaries, and never fail to show their respect for the faithful and for Islam."

We came to Chicken Row, which is one of Kabul's bazaars. The stalls hugged each other closely, and in a way resembled a long train. Only the "cars" were small and many-coloured.

A loud friendly voice made me turn round.

A black-bearded man was hailing us from a nearby stall, waving his arm.

"We are being invited to enter," Poulad said.

We went into the *dukan*, and the stallkeeper became busy, picking up and showing us one vase after another.

"He says they are made of silver," Poulad interpreted.

"What's the price?" I said.

"To you, *mushaver*, Soviet man, I will sell cheap," the stallkeeper said.

"Why to me?"

A conversation ensued. The man's name, we learned, was Asad. He was of Kabul, and has been selling vases for the past twenty years.

"Now, after the Revolution," he said, "we *dukan* keepers can breathe more easily; business has improved."

He explained that the big merchants folded up and have thus stopped bankrupting small and medium-scale enterprises.

"It was no use trying to keep pace with them," the stallkeeper said. "All we could hope for was to survive one more day."

Asad touched his beard. He was pleased we were listening attentively, and continued his tale.

Things changed since the People's Government had begun helping *dukan* traders, he said. Entirely true. The People's Democratic Party promoted stable, long-term and honest co-operation with

traders and artisans in the interests of the mass of the people. "All small producers, artisans and traders," said its Action Programme, "may rest assured that the Party and the Revolutionary Government have a deep interest in seeing their production and trading increase. The Party and the Government hold that all the resources and the potential of small producers, traders and owners of transport vehicles can and must contribute to improving supplies for the people alongside the Government's efforts to the same effect."

That day we—Poulad and I—had another interesting encounter. This time with children.

"That's the Kabul House of Young Pioneers," the interpreter said to me, pointing to a few squat buildings. "The houses date back to the king's time."

"The king's time?"

"Sure. Only at that time they were the villas of wealthy families. After the Revolution all of them were turned over to the children."

Children were playing near the entrance to the House of Young Pioneers. We walked past them, went up a staircase, and came to a corridor where several boys were putting up a display.

"Heroes of the Revolution", said the inscription over the display.

We stopped. I picked up a few photographs from the table beside the display. They were of young men and women, their faces, so it seemed to me, expressing a common determination. One of the photos I had seen before. It was of Aisha—a fearless girl of whom I had heard back in Moscow. She used to go to a *dushman* encampment to pick up intelligence and speak in favour of the Revolution. Traitors gave her away. The *dushmans* took a long

time killing her—they first cut off her ears, then gouged out her eyes, and finally killed her—

Seeing I was interested in the pictures, one of the boys said they had many heroes of the Revolution—but not all were photographed.

“We don’t have his brother’s photo,” said another boy.

“What are your names?” I asked.

“I’m Fakhim and he’s Abdullo.”

“Is your brother really a hero?”

Fakhim lowered his eyes. “Yes, when he ran out of ammunition he charged the *dushmans* with a rock in his hand. They killed him—”

Speaking to Guldad, Deputy Chairman of the DRA Council of Ministers, I learned how much the People’s Government was doing for children. “I would say that children are our main concern,” he said. The Government was seeing to it that children’s living conditions should be improved. It was issuing assistance and allowances to large families. It was improving the educational system and medical services. “The family, motherhood and children are under the special care of the State,” say the Fundamental Principles of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

Guldad told me that before the Revolution most Afghan children grew up in the streets. “There was no question of going to school,” he sighed. “Schools were very few, and, moreover, children missed school because they helped their parents earn a living, and this from a tender age. The April Revolution gave the little Afghans back their lost childhood.”

## HOW IT ALL HAPPENED

A few days later, I had an appointment with Comrade Mahmoud Baryalai, a PDPA Central Committee Secretary, and took along a few unused notebooks in which I had put down a dozen or so questions that I meant to ask him.

Comrade Baryalai's charm and hospitality did not seem to accord with what I had heard about his unbending sternness and lack of pity for enemies of the Revolution.

"Did you attend the Party's first congress?" was my opening question.

"No. I was too young." Of course, the First Congress was in 1965. "But I was old enough to be a guard. The Congress opened underground in Kabul on the first of January."

Baryalai produced a photograph of the participants in the First Congress. Familiar faces—Babrak Karmal, General Secretary of the PDPA Central Committee and Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, Sultan Ali Keshtmand, Chairman of Afghanistan's Council of Ministers, and Saleh Zeray, Ghulam Panjsheri, and others, all members of the PDPA Central Committee's Political Bureau.

"Here's our first General Secretary, Noor Mohammad Taraki," Baryalai pointed to a man sitting in the centre of the picture. The Congress elected seven people to the Central Committee.

Baryalai began his story...

On the heels of the First Congress, the Party launched an active drive for influence. In the autumn

of 1965, it took part in elections to the parliament and won four seats in the Lower Chamber—taken by Babrak Karmal, Noor, Anahita Ratebzad, and Faizanul Khak. They used the parliament to criticise the anti-people policy of the country's ruling elite and to defend the rights of the working people. Their political activity added to the popularity of the PDPA and provoked the anger of reactionaries.

On April 11, 1966, the PDPA launched its first newspaper, *Khalq* (The People). Its first number contained the Party's programme, which called for, and showed the need of, a national-democratic government and social, economic and political changes of a non-capitalist nature. Soon the authorities closed down the paper.

In the spring of 1967, an underground edition of the Party Rules was published in Kabul, defining the PDPA as the vanguard of the working classes of Afghanistan and saying that the Party espoused the principles of Marxism-Leninism and sought a voluntary alliance of the advanced and politically conscious masses—workers, peasants, artisans, and the intelligentsia.

But in those early years, the PDPA consisted essentially of the intelligentsia. Members who were workers or peasants were considerably fewer in number. This was due to the underdeveloped state of the productive forces in feudal Afghanistan, and the strong influence of Islam. The diversity of the members' social background, lack of the necessary political experience, and the clan, tribal, religious, nationalist and other prejudices in society had a most negative effect on the Party's unity. As a result, the Party broke up into two factions. One of these, later known as *Khalq*, was headed by Noor

Mohammad Taraki, while Babrak Karmal's faction came to be known as Parcham (Banner), the name of the Party paper that was launched in 1968.

The two factions operated independently, though, in fact, they had a common programme and the same rules, and pursued the same aim.

The differences arose chiefly over tactical issues. By and large, the two wings of the Party fought for the interests of the people, for a democratic re-modelling of society.

Mass meetings and demonstrations protesting against the monarchic regime were a good political school for all members of the Party. And the PDPA organised and headed over 2,000 such meetings and demonstrations between 1965 and 1973, while also heading the workers' strike movement. The demands of the strikers of the 60s essentially concerned higher wages, extra pay for overtime, and better working conditions, while in the 70s the strikes were frequently political. For the first time in the country's history, the working class acted as an independent political force. The workers' actions were for democratic rights and freedoms, against the abuses practised by the regime, and for the unity of the working people in combatting national exploiters and their imperialist patrons.

On July 17, 1973, following a military anti-monarchic coup, the royal regime was deposed and Afghanistan became a republic.

After the overthrow of the king, both wings of the PDPA declared their support of the new republican system. On the Party's initiative, far-reaching changes occurred in the first few months after the coup: the working day on state-run enterprises was reduced, the minimum wage was raised, and pensions

were increased. Steps were taken to stabilise the price of necessities. Street committees of poor people were formed to verify fulfilment of adopted decisions.

The activity of the PDPA became a tangible threat to the social-economic and political power of the exploiting classes. They were especially disturbed by the Party's drive for a united democratic front. President Daoud, who had tremendous power and was pursuing a reactionary anti-people policy, saw the dangers to his regime and turned for support to imperialist elements in the United States, the monarchic regime of Saudi Arabia, and the Shah of Iran. The ruling circles in those countries made deft use of their political and financial resources to further the rightist trends in republican Afghanistan. Reactionaries from all over the world were dragging Afghanistan into the orbit of the imperialist powers, and tried to make it give up its traditional policy of positive neutrality, non-alignment, and good-neighbour relations with the Soviet Union.

From 1975 to 1977 the rightist tendencies kept growing stronger, with Daoud's republican system turning inexorably into an authoritarian regime. The democratic forces were again subjected to repressions. Many members and followers of the PDPA were arrested. The Party's leadership was imperilled.

In this troubled situation, the country's democrats produced the only right solution, aimed at building up the PDPA membership: in July 1977, a unity conference was called to reunite the Parcham and Khalq factions on a basis of equality and with the intention of drawing up a joint action programme.

A 30-member PDPA Central Committee was formed, as were the Central Committee's Political Bureau and Secretariat. Noor Mohammad Taraki was elected General Secretary, and Babrak Karmal Secretary of the PDPA Central Committee. Both were made members of the Central Committee's Political Bureau. The Conference raised the question of overthrowing Daoud's dictatorial regime.

After the unity conference, the Party mounted a propaganda campaign among industrial workers. Under the guise of mutual aid societies it promoted the revival of trade union organisations that had been outlawed by the Daoud regime. New joint Party branches sprang up in various cities and provinces. The influence of the PDPA increased visibly. By 1978 its membership was close to 26,000. Peasant, youth, women's and other mass organisations were set up across the country.

The attempts of the ruling regime to crush the mounting popular movement only added to its crisis.

The assassination of Comrade Mir Akbar Khyber, a prominent Party man and member of the PDPA Central Committee, in April 1978, stoked up additional tension. His funeral turned into a mass demonstration against the reactionary authorities and US domination. And the Daoud regime decided to eliminate the PDPA leadership. Taraki, Karmal, and other Party leaders were arrested on April 26, 1978. But this move precipitated an armed uprising, which took only a few hours to depose the Daoud dictatorship.

The uprising of April 27, 1978, had countrywide support. The insurrectionists met no serious resistance: military units in the capital and in the prov-

inces went over to their side. Save for the company of Daoud's bodyguards no one even tried to defend the regime.

On that April day, Comrade Baryalai related, the square outside Arq Palace was crowded with people. The crowd rejoiced, brought flowers, and put them beside the tank which had been the first to fire on the palace where Daoud had sought refuge. Then there was quiet. Noor Mohammad Taraki, the PDPA General Secretary, addressed the crowd.

"Dear countrymen," he said. "The armed rising of the 7th of Saur 1357 (April 27, 1978) by the Moslem calendar by patriotic officers and gallant soldiers, giving effect to the will of the working people of Afghanistan, under the leadership of the People's Democratic Party, signifies the beginning of a people's democratic revolution."

That was how the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan came into being. A Revolutionary Council and a government were formed. New governors and troop commanders were appointed. The Revolutionary Council and the DRA Government were headed by Comrade Taraki, General Secretary of the PDPA Central Committee. Comrade Karmal was made his first deputy.

Afghanistan's first revolutionary government was at once recognised by the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, India, Mongolia, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, and Poland. A few days later it won the official recognition of altogether 40 countries.

Democratic transformations were launched. The agrarian and water reform was started. The peasants' debt to landlords was written off. The sums paid for brides were reduced. A campaign was started against illiteracy. Measures were taken to win

believers, the middle and lower Moslem priesthood, to the side of the Revolution.

Comrade Baryalai's assistant came into the room and reminded him there would be a conference at four. It was a quarter to four then, and I rose to my feet. Comrade Baryalai stopped me: "Here, you are new to the country. Let me give you something to read. Your interpreter will translate it for you."

He gave me a pile of newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets.

"This is all about us, our Revolution, our Party."

Out of this printed selection I chose a piece entitled, "Mistakes and Deviations from the Basic Principles of the Party".

The article said that premature slogans were advanced in the course of the April Revolution. In disregard of the prevailing situation, there were slogans calling for rapid socialist construction in Afghanistan. There were people who said the dictatorship of the proletariat was already in charge, and that the nationalities question was already solved. Some Party leaders fenced themselves off from other democratic and national forces in the country, saying the PDPA had made the Revolution single-handed and did not want to co-operate with other organisations. This lost the Party the support of many people.

The agrarian and water reform, which was the central economic issue of the Revolution, made unsatisfactory headway. In the localities the reform was often carried out voluntaristically, in disregard of the conditions, of national traditions and the religious feelings of the people. This bred disaffection.

Hafizullah Amin's criminal activity did enormous harm to the Revolution. Winning Taraki's confidence, he had been appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the first revolutionary government. Backed by his followers, seeking personal power, he managed by intrigue and deception to wreck the PDPA Central Committee Conference's decision on unity, and removed a fairly large group of leaders devoted to the Revolution in the summer and autumn of 1978. Among them were Babrak Karmal, Sultan Ali Keshtmand, Noor, Abdul Qadir, Anahita Ratebzad, and others.

Making the most of his high post, Amin launched mass repressions that were mainly aimed against those who had earlier belonged to the Parcham faction, and also against that section of the Khalq who criticised his dictatorial ambitions.

In March 1979, Amin managed to seize the post of Defence Minister. In July, he also took over the post of Prime Minister. And in September, he forcibly removed from power, and then secretly assassinated, Taraki, usurping the posts of CC PDPA General Secretary and Chairman of the Revolutionary Council.

The criminal acts of Amin and his group followers augmented the country's political and economic difficulties, narrowed the social base of the Revolution, and created the danger of the Party losing the people's confidence.

The moment Amin seized power, he turned for support to counter-revolutionaries at home and abroad. Here are some of the facts: Amin's emissary called on Hikmatiar Ghulbiddin, leader of the Islami Party of Afghanistan, who had entrenched himself in Pakistan. Their talks concerned co-operation. At a

secret conference in Kabul, held in October 1979, the plan of a coup d'état was worked out, as a result of which Amin would remain President of the Republic while Ghulbiddin would be Prime Minister. More, Amin was promised that if necessary, the initiators of the coup would be backed by the armed forces of the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The putschists planned to dissolve the PDPA, assassinate the Party's leaders and activists, and jettison the slogans of the Afghan Revolution. The coup was to take place on December 29, 1979, but never came about thanks to the vigilance of those who were devoted to the Revolution. On December 27, 1979, the patriotic majority of the PDPA, the Revolutionary Council, and the armed forces of the DRA deposed the Amin regime.

On the following day, December 28, a new Central Committee, Political Bureau, Presidium of the Revolutionary Council, and Government were formed with Comrade Babrak Karmal at their head.

But the situation in the country was still highly complicated. A big part in normalising things was played by the assistance of the Soviet Union, which responded to the request of the Afghan leaders and sent a limited contingent of Soviet troops to the DRA in accordance with the provisions of the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of 1978.

In the West, a noisy propaganda campaign was launched against the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. The USSR was accused of interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. But let us look at the facts.

<sup>1</sup>*The Truth About Afghanistan*, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1980. p. 92.

Article 51 of the UN Charter entitles states to resort to both individual and collective self-defence, and to ask other countries for assistance. The 1978 Soviet-Afghan Treaty envisages extensive Soviet economic, political and military aid to the DRA. Its Article 4 says: "... acting in the spirit of the traditions of friendship and good-neighbourliness, and also in the spirit of the UN Charter, the two sides shall hold consultations and by common consent take appropriate measures to ensure the security, independence and territorial integrity of the two sides."

It is therefore wrong to allege that Soviet assistance to the people of Afghanistan was unwarranted. The Soviet Union fulfilled its commitments, and could not have done otherwise if it wished to abide by the letter and spirit of the Treaty.

People in the West forget that Soviet assistance to Afghanistan was granted at the request of the Afghan Government.

On January 10, 1980, speaking at a press conference in Kabul, Comrade Babrak Karmal, General Secretary of the CC PDPA and Chairman of the Republic's Revolutionary Council, stressed that Soviet troops had come to Afghanistan by a decision taken by the majority of the Revolutionary Council.<sup>1</sup> As Comrade Karmal pointed out, Soviet troops had been invited to protect Afghanistan against the danger of a foreign intervention. They would be withdrawn, he added, when the danger of an intervention was passed.

It had been no easy decision for the Soviet Government to send a limited military contingent to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

Afghanistan. The Soviet leaders acted in full cognisance of their responsibility, and took account of all circumstances. They took note of the international situation and the obviously large-scale imperialist aggression that was designed to partition Afghanistan and gain access to the Soviet Union's southern borders.

The events of December 1979 gained the support and understanding of progressives all over the world.

"The actions taken by the USSR," said O. Arevalo, Member of the Central Committee Executive of the Communist Party of Argentina, "in rendering disinterested aid to Afghanistan are of truly historic importance."<sup>1</sup>

Indira Gandhi, the late Prime Minister of India, said: "In the course of the last two years Afghanistan has faced a lot of problems both domestic and international.... The Afghan government referring to the provisions of the treaty signed with the USSR asked it to render Afghanistan military assistance to ward off the imminent danger."<sup>2</sup>

"Every nation, every government," said Louis Baillot, France's representative in the European Parliament, "has the right to ask its allies for assistance in repelling counter-revolutionary forces which are set on toppling the existing legitimate system. Proceeding from this principle, I fully recognise the right of the Afghan people and Afghan leaders to resort to the much-needed temporary and limited military aid from the USSR, as envisaged by the Soviet-Afghan treaty."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Truth About Afghanistan*, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

And Joel Harrison, a Malagasy journalist, said: "The Soviet Union's actions have not been prompted by a wish for domination, as the West alleges. The Soviet Union has always sought to fulfil its internationalist duty and effectively contribute to the establishment of a lasting and just peace in the whole world."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the obvious facts, however, Western mass media continued to incite an anti-Soviet and anti-Afghan hysteria. Their slanderous propaganda went counter to common sense. "*The Washington Post*," wrote Argentine journalist Rodolfo Medina, "reported from Kabul 'fierce fighting between Soviet and Afghan units opposite the Kabul Airport building' at a time when I surrounded by my colleagues and leafing through my notes on that cold but sunny day, was calmly waiting for a plane."

He wondered if the American journalists or the staff of the US Embassy had perhaps confused the twitter of birds with gun reports? Or the whine of airliners with the rumble of heavy artillery? Or the mist veiling the mountain peaks around the airport with the gun-powder smoke of "fierce battles"?

And Medina added: "There is only one answer to that: these are shameless and intentional lies. For the other journalists who were with me and myself they are no more than a figment of morbid imaginations. There can be only one truth: what we saw with our own eyes."<sup>2</sup>

Yet on January 18, 1980, the *International Herald Tribune* reported that diplomats in Pakistan

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

had evidence of a battle fought that day near the Kabul Airport between Soviet troops and units of the Afghan army. Unconfirmed reports said, it continued, that there were also clashes in the vicinity of Bala Hisar Citadel, where the Afghan army had rebelled in August of the year before. Embassies situated near the airport, the report went on to say, referred to the battle, with diplomats saying they heard planes flying and intensive firing, which, so they thought, came from the air force. But they were not sure, the report ended.

Referring to this report, Phillip Bonosky, special correspondent of the *Daily World*, the newspaper of the CPUSA, wrote:

“This is what passes for reporting! There is not a fact in it! I was in Kabul airport half the day when ‘fighting’ between Afghan and Soviet troops was ‘reported’ to ‘diplomats’ in—Pakistan! And I heard nothing—not even a bird chirping. Nor did any of the reporters who were with me hear anything, as commercial planes came in and out of the airport, as they had been doing all week.”<sup>1</sup>

Further comment, as the saying goes, is quite unnecessary.

<sup>1</sup> *The Truth About Afghanistan*, p. 100.

## UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

That day Ali went shooting alone. Usually he went with his father, but Father had fallen ill and was in bed for all of a week. And the mullah wanted the sack of grain they had borrowed from him a month before. There was no food in the house, and Father said: "Ali, you're a grown man now. Take my gun and go. And may Allah grant you good hunting."

The path wound steeply uphill. Ali was tired. The gun weighed heavily on his shoulder. Sweat streamed down his face. The boy sat down on a rock, but instantly jumped to his feet: some twenty yards away, a few partridges took to the air from the bushes. Ali raised his gun and fired without aim. A partridge somersaulted and fell into the grass.

"Got you!" Ali shouted joyfully and ran for the bird, leaving the gun beside the rock. Then, holding the dead bird in his hand, he returned to retrieve his gun, and saw a bearded man approaching. The man raised his rifle, pointing it at Ali.

"You shoot well," he said, and pulled a pistol from under his belt, firing it thrice into the air.

"You know how to shoot these?" he asked, pointing at the pistol. The appearance of the bearded one boded nothing but ill. Still, summoning his courage, Ali said yes, he knew how to shoot a pistol. Meanwhile, horsemen had appeared from behind a hillock. They were riding down the narrow road, prodding each other. Their horses were emaciated and unkempt. The horsemen surrounded Ali and the bearded one. The latter handed Ali's

gun hastily to a man wearing a rich gown, whose horse looked better than those of the others. Its harness glittered silver in the sun.

"A good gun, commander," the bearded one grinned.

The chief pulled out the breach, and tested the sights.

"Well," he said, his hand fondling the butt. "We can use it. Not just for partridges—"

The bandits laughed, glancing at Ali. The boy knew he would not get his gun back, but decided to try all the same.

"I go shooting with the gun. Me or Father. We bring food home. If you take it, we'll go hungry."

"So you eat meat," the bandit chief said. "They eat meet! Oh, Allah!" He raised his arms to heaven and looked at his cutthroats. "Meat! My people ate nothing but bread for five days.

"But Allah never forgets his loyal servants," the bandit chief chanted. "He guides their hand against the traitors of Islam, those who laid down their arms before the unfaithful. So may Allah help us!"

He pointed at two of the bandits: "You and you will cover us. Hey, help them."

The two got off their horses reluctantly. They dragged large machine guns to the edge of the road. There, they sat down, and let their mates chain them to their weapons.

"Forward!" the bandit chief dug in his spurs.

The horsemen galloped off, while Ali ran behind them shouting, "Give me back my gun!"

One of the bandits struck him with his whip. Ali put his hand to the hurt spot and sat down. But the wish to retrieve his gun made him forget the pain. Rising, he ran after the bandit chief.

"Give me back my gun!" the boy shouted, hanging on to the chief's stirrup and pounding the man's leg with his fists.

The man shouted something and drew his revolver. Ali had only time to let go and leap aside. Pieces of stone hit by the bullet stung his face.

The bandits galloped into the village at top speed. Seeing them, people ran for cover, locking the doors of their homes, looking for hiding places. The bandits got off their horses, broke down the doors, and entered the houses. There was a lot of shouting, loud weeping, the frightened screams of sheep and cows, and the barking of dogs. But loudest of all were the shots.

"Where's the mullah?" the bandit chief shouted near the mosque, firing his rifle into the air.

A frantic horse rose up on its hind legs, neighing loudly, while the horseman kept striking it with his whip.

Finally, the bandit chief saw a man in gown and turban hurrying towards the mosque.

"Salaam," the man said, breathing heavily, and bowing.

"Are you the mullah?" the bandit chief asked.

"Yes, thanks be to Allah, whom I serve most conscientiously," the mullah replied.

The bandit chief wanted to know if there were Party members in the village. No, said the mullah. But there were sympathisers.

"Name them. Where are they?"

The mullah came closer to the bandit chief and began reciting names, while pointing his finger in various directions. The first one he named was Turyan, who was deaf and dumb. In fact, he was considered the village fool who did not understand

what was happening around him. The revengeful mullah could not forget that years before, Turyan had not paid him his due.

When the bandits led Turyan into the street, he was calm and undisturbed. When he was put against the wall and a rifle was aimed at him he even smiled. Muttering something he stretched his hands out amicably. Not until the last moment did he realise that the bandits meant to do him harm. He leaped forward. Shots rang out, and Turyan fell.

A little boy stood in the middle of the road, weeping. His mother ran to him, but a bald bandit pushed her away with his submachine gun. "Where d'you hide the food? Where?" He pushed her into the yard. The woman fell, her nails scratching the earth. She began wailing. The bandit fired. An ominous silence followed. Only the little boy in the middle of the road continued weeping.

A grey-haired old man leaned against the door and watched the bandits dragging away a goose.

The bandit chief astride his horse was questioning Mirjan, Ali's father. Weakened by his illness, Mirjan could not stand. Two of the bandits held him up by his arms.

"When did people from the Party Committee come here last?" the bandit chief asked.

Mirjan kept silent.

"When did they come, I ask you?"

He did not wait for the answer, and struck Mirjan across the face with his whip. Mirjan lost consciousness.

All around shots resounded, men and women wailed, the bandits were dragging off sheep, hens, and geese, and loading sacks of flour and rice on carts.

"Time we left, commander," a bandit said to the

chief. "The guards may come."

The chief wheeled his horse and rode off. The other bandits followed.

On coming home, Ali barely recognised the place. Broken crockery lay all over the floor. The bed turned upside down. The door hung loose on one hinge. His father sat on a torn mat, holding his hand to his red cheek, and looking at his children.

Ali, Fadir and Gulshad stood silently beside their father, while Mother hovered near the window, weeping.

"We must leave," Mirjan said. "They won't leave us in peace. They will strip us of everything we have."

Shrugging her shoulders, Ali's mother turned.

"What woe! Why are they making war?"

"They're fighting against the People's Government," her husband explained. "It goes against them. It will distribute the land. It wants to make everybody equal."

"Father," Ali interrupted. "Why do they chain their men to machine guns? I saw it with my own eyes—"

"So they don't run away," Mirjan replied. "They are to shoot until their ammunition gives out. Not all of them are bandits of their own free will. Some were given rifles and forced to go into the hills."

"Who gave them the rifles?"

"The bandit chiefs—mostly former feudal lords. They make their peasants fight the new government. And if they refuse, they are killed. As for us, we must leave."

"Where to?" Mother asked.

"Kabul. It's quieter there. If I were younger, I'd join the army," Mirjan sighed. "Let's pack, and be off. If we leave today, we'll be in Kabul in four days."

Mother clasped her hands and whispered a prayer. "What about the mullah? He won't let us go," she said.

"He will," Mirjan replied confidently. "I'll pay him."<sup>1</sup>

Ali did not like the mullah. Nor did many others. He was a sly and revengeful old man. Besides, Ali could not forget how the mullah punished him—

It had been a few years before. Father had brought him to the mullah to learn. But Ali stayed for one day only, and not even a full day. He had been chewing a piece of bread during the lesson. It was a flat cake made by his mother. Ali bit off little pieces, so the mullah would not see him.

But Shafi, the miller's son, said loudly, "Ali is eating."

"Come here, Ali," the mullah ordered. He put his hand on Ali's head and recited something from the Koran. Then he chased him out of the classroom.

After the lesson, the mullah called Ali. Beside him stood three grown boys. Again, the mullah recited something, and walked away. The boys threw Ali to the ground. Two of them sat on his back, while the third, clasping Ali's legs between his knees, beat his bare soles with a cane. This went on for about ten minutes. At first, Ali could not stand. His father carried him home. And Ali never went to the mullah's classes again.

Mirjan paid the mullah, and the family set out for Kabul. They were en route for five days. Ali helped his father push the cart with their wretched belongings. Mother led the small children.

<sup>1</sup>It is an old Afghan custom to pay the mullah when leaving the village. — *L.N.*

In Kabul, they had a hard time finding a room. No rich man would let poor people into his house. Yet only the rich—the shopkeepers and prosperous artisans—had rooms to let. Two nights the family slept in the open air. That was probably when Gulshad fell ill. She had a high fever, her eyes shone, and she kept asking for water.

Finally, they had a stroke of luck. Uncle Qudus, whom a fellow villager they met at the bazaar advised them to visit, let them move into one of his two little houses. He lived in the upper one with his wife, and let the lower one at a reasonable price.

A few days later, Uncle Qudus helped Mirjan get a job with a wood merchant. The family had money now. Each evening they gathered round the table. And one night someone knocked at the door.

"Come in," Ali's father said.

The door opened, and Mahmud, member of the District Council, a young Party activist, entered.

"Salaam," he said to the family.

"Aleikum salaam, son of the venerable mullah," Ali's father replied.

Old Mirjan could not understand why Mahmud, born into the family of mullah Sahib, would want to be in the Council and, in general, be a Party member. But one does not ask these questions of people one respects. Instead, Mirjan asked: "What has made you come? What concerns have led you to the humble home of my family?"

"It's time your Ali went to school," Mahmud said. "I've come to get your consent."

Mirjan looked questioningly at his wife: "Did you hear? The mullah's son has come to take our Ali to school."

"What for?" Ali's mother was disconcerted.

"What do you mean?" Mahmud asked. The woman's question had caught him unawares. Often, Mahmud explained to people that the new government was fighting illiteracy, that schools for young and old were being opened all over the country, that education would help the Afghans stamp out poverty and build a happier life. But this time the requisite words escaped Mahmud. He stood confused in the middle of the room.

"What makes you worry about our Ali?" Mirjan asked.

"Nowadays, everyone must learn. So the People's Government has decided," Mahmud said, and added:

"We members of the People's Council are helping the kids go to school."

"Yes, I have heard that you, son of the revered mullah Sahib, are a member of the Council," Mirjan said slowly, "and I want to ask you: what does your father say to it?"

"Father does not forbid me to be on the Council. Our Council is doing nothing but good for people. And Father has stood for goodwill all his life," Mahmud replied proudly.

"That's so—," Mirjan said. "But your father is a mullah, and a servant of Allah. He must stand for the faith. And must teach his son to do the same."

"My father has always taught me to do good," Mahmud said. "Well, will you let Ali go to school?"

"He must have decent clothes to go to school, and we are poor. Ali has none. The others, I fear, will make fun of him."

Mahmud said firmly that no one would.

"Father, let Ali go to school," little Fadir cried. "I'll give him my galoshes—the ones you bought me.

They won't be too small, you'll see."

Everybody laughed.

"Well," Mahmud asked again.

The schoolhouse was an old building, whose walls had never been painted. The earthen floor was like old, cracked paving, and the ceiling, made of unplanned boards, had large cracks. But the building was good enough for a start. For housing in Kabul was scarce. There were several benches in the room, and the teacher's desk by the wall, and next to it a blackboard.

Though Mahmud brought Ali to the school long before lessons, the teacher had already arrived.

"Have you ever been to school before?" the teacher asked Ali.

"Yes, but only for a day," Ali replied. Instantly, he regretted saying it. Now he would be asked about it, and he did not know what to say. It was shameful saying he had been eating during lessons.

"Well, one day isn't much," the teacher smiled and gently stroked Ali's head.

The other pupils were beginning to arrive one by one, and looking at them Ali did not listen to what the teacher and Mahmud were talking about.

"You ought to take a pistol to school," Mahmud said. The teacher objected, but Mahmud insisted: "You can never tell."

A barefoot boy addressed the teacher that moment. He was holding a smaller boy by the hand.

"Can my little brother learn as well? He'll be six soon—"

The teacher and Mahmud looked at the little one with wonder.

"No, he's really almost six, and I can't leave him alone at home. Besides, he wants to learn. He's eager—"

The barefoot boy gave his little brother a gentle shove, and the little one nodded his head.

"Very well," the teacher said. "Though I'm sure he'll not be able to follow."

The room was quickly filling. There were no more vacant places on the benches, and Ali thought with alarm that perhaps there would be no room for him, and he would have to go home.

But he did get a place, and in the first row. The teacher had taken him by the hand and led to the bench. "Here, that'll be your place."

Mahmud waved to him, and said he would buy him an exercise-book and a pencil that very day.

The barefoot boy's little brother was seated beside Ali. He had no exercise-book and no pencil either. Fearing that he might miss some of the teacher's words, Ali sat very still, craning his neck and fixing his eyes on him. The teacher, who was standing beside the blackboard, said the first thing they would have to learn was the abc.

"To read you must know the letters—all the letters of the alphabet," he said.

He picked up a piece of chalk and wrote the first letter on the blackboard.

"That's *alif*," he said. "Repeat after me—*alif*."

It was followed by the second letter, *ba*, he said then.

And the pupils repeated it after him—*alif, ba ...*

After a while the teacher called some of the pupils to the blackboard and wanted them to write the two letters. Some produced a scrawl only remotely resembling them. Others did quite well.

But the teacher praised them all.

"Fine, well done." He said they should practise write *alif* and *ba* at home. Those who had no paper and pencil should draw the letters with a stick on the ground.

Khakim and Ali, who had become friends at school, followed the teacher's advice and went to the House of Young Pioneers. They had told each other of their life and were now exchanging impressions from the photographic exhibition called "Heroes of the Revolution".

The young faces of boys and girls looked at them from the photos.

"That's Aisha," said Khakim. "Teacher told us about her. She was a fearless girl and went to the bandit camps as a scout. Someone gave her away—"

All boys wanted to be heroes. Nor were Ali and Khakim an exception. They listened with rapt attention as the guide spoke of the young heroes of the April Revolution.

I never thought the Afghan schoolchildren whom I met at the Kabul House of Young Pioneers would be among the main characters of my book. I could not have foreseen that one of them would undergo an ordeal that called for the courage of an adult man, that called for fearlessness and resolve.

## THE DAYS OF THE REVOLUTION

The days went by. The PDPA began fulfilling the Action Programme of the First National PDPA Conference. Measures were taken to stabilise industry. The land and water reform was making progress in the rural areas. Various social measures were being put into effect.

The newspaper *Haqiqat-e-Engelabe Saur* reported that the PDPA Action Programme had aroused all Afghan working people. This was visible at the Kabul plant of prefabricated housing. It was also visible at the nitrogen fertilizer plant in Mazar-i-Sharif, and at the Naglu hydropower station. At meetings of the 112th anniversary of Lenin's birthday, industrial workers pledged to apply all their energy and fulfil production plans. Now, they launched a drive for fresh achievements for the 4th anniversary of the April Revolution and Mayday.

Efficiency was rising. People were summing up what had been attained in the four years, and ministries sent accounts to the government.

Just two examples: the Ministry of Mining and Industry had expanded its enterprises and launched development of new mineral deposits. The Ministry of Trade had sold well over five million karakul skins at some of the big fur auctions abroad, earning nearly 88 million dollars.

On April 27, 1982, there was music in the streets of Kabul all day long. Thousands flocked to Chaman-i-Khoduri Square. People were celebrating the fourth anniversary of the Revolution.

The celebrations began with a military parade. Soldiers marched by smartly. Military vehicles thundered past. Then came a demonstration. A most impressive and colourful spectacle. Men and women in their national costumes. Flags waved in the wind. Red streamers were inscribed, "Long live the PDPA!" and "Long live the Revolution!"

There was one more celebration: the railway and motor bridge across the Amu Darya on the border between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union had been completed on May 12, 1982, and the first train crossed the river from the Soviet Union as a symbol of Soviet-Afghan friendship.

The reinforced concrete plant in Poula Khumra began putting out pylons for power transmission lines. That was something! Power transmission lines across Afghanistan, where only recently people had thought electrification was a pipe dream.

One night, watching TV, I learned that an outpatient clinic for more than 500 patients daily, the biggest in the country, had been built and equipped with Soviet assistance next to the Central Military Hospital in Kabul. The report said, too, that in Kabul a hospital for infectious diseases, a maternity hospital, and a first aid hospital—the first in the country—had been opened since the Revolution. It also said more than 150 health centres and nearly 100 medical care wards had been opened in the provinces. More than 650 pharmacies were operating in the country now, selling medicines at cut prices.

News came from all parts of Afghanistan about the progress of the land and water reform, and

about newly opened farming co-operatives. The newspaper *Anis* carried an account of how joint peasant farms were formed in the provinces of Nangarhar, Herat and Jowzjan. The paper pointed out that another 150 farming co-operatives would soon begin operating in the country.

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One day I came upon a short story in a literary journal, which my interpreter, Poulad, was kind enough to translate for me.

"It's about land and water," he said. "Soldiers were chatting beside the factory gates, saying July was round the corner and the summer would be hotter than usual.

"This is nothing,' one of the men said. 'We in Kandahar are broiled alive, and there's no rain until late October.' 'Land needs water,' said a soldier. 'Where there's water there's life, a good harvest and plenty to eat. But mere rain isn't enough. What we in Afghanistan need is more rivers. If we only had more rivers!

"The speaker banged the earth with the butt of his submachine gun, as though he wanted it to confirm what he had said.

"That canals are all owned by *zamindars*,' a soldier said. 'They don't give water for nothing. You must pay for it.

"Water has to be paid for since times immemorial,' said someone. 'Father says water was cheaper before.'

"Water ought to be free, said another soldier.

"How's that?"

"Free,' a soldier said. 'Like air. No one pays for

air. Water, too, should be free.'

" 'But that's air—who would ever think of paying for air.'

" 'Water should be free,' soldier said again.

" 'They're going to parcel out the land among peasants,' said the one from Kandahar.

"That was exciting news.

" 'Can't be,' said one.

" 'When—when?' said another.

" 'Soon, I said. They'll first assess it, see how much everyone should get, then distribute—'

" 'How do they assess it?'

" 'No idea—but they'll do it, then distribute the land.'

"The conversation grew livelier.

" 'How much are they going to give?'

" 'That'll depend on the size of the family, but I've forgotten how many *jerib*<sup>1</sup> each—'

" 'Did you hear anything about water?' someone asked in a hoarse voice, and coughed.

" 'Water will be free—'

" 'So everyone will get land and water?'

" 'Yes,' said the one from Kandahar, and stroked the butt of his submachine gun.

"For some reason all the others also fondled their weapons.

"A soldier who had listened in silence before, now asked:

" 'But will the landlords let us take the land? They've got it all.'

" 'Why? There is a lot unoccupied,' said the others.

" 'But what sort of land? Nothing will grow on

<sup>1</sup> a *jerib* is equivalent to about half an acre. — Tr.

it. No, if peasants are to get land it must be good land. But it is owned by landlords. That's why I ask, will they give it up?

" 'They certainly will,' said the one from Kandahar... "

The rest of the story was missing.

My new Afghan acquaintance, Colonel Hafiz, said in the provinces peasants sometimes refused to take land that is due them under the reform.

"Don't you see," he said, "Most of the peasants are illiterate and benighted people, prey to all sorts of prejudices. Many think land is distributed by Allah. And what Allah gives is untouchable. If there is land, it is by the will of Allah. If there isn't, that, too, is by the will of Allah. In Afghanistan, land was handed down from heir to heir since times immemorial. No one could upset this order. If a landlord had a thousand *jerib*, they came down to his heirs. If a peasant had no land, his sons and grandsons had none too. The Koran says land is from Allah. And no true believer will dare alter what Allah willed. The mullah is sure to remind the peasants about it. So are the enemies of the Revolution. Peasants have been killed for taking land they were offered by the authorities. That's why many are afraid—

"One day I was in my office looking through the papers (Colonel Hafiz continued) when my orderly came in and said the chief of a Pushtu tribe wanted to see me. He had said he had important business. 'Well,' I thought, 'if it's the chief himself, I mustn't keep him waiting.'

"The venerable old man told me the tribe had sent him to Kabul owing to the troubles that had of late befallen the village.

"Strangers had come from across the border, he complained, and did the tribe untold harm. They set fire to the harvest, and blew up the water ditches. Since there was no landlord, there was no land, they said, though the land had just been redistributed by the new government. But the strangers had good weapons, and the tribe had none. That was why the chief had come to see me—he wanted submachine guns."

"I have no right to distribute arms," Colonel Hafiz added. "But I didn't want to send the old man away empty-handed, and called up the Ministry for Nationality and Tribal Affairs, asking them to help the Pushtu chief. He came again the following day to thank me. The Ministry had promised him arms."

The People's Government gave peasants arms to defend their villages, and also organised volunteer self-defence units.

A battle raged in a mountain ravine. Under pressure of an army patrol, a bandit gang was withdrawing to the Pakistani border, suffering heavy losses.

"They'll get away," thought the captain in command of the operation. "Then they'll come back to set fire to villages, to kill and plunder. We mustn't let 'em—"

He ordered the signalman to summon helicopters.

Keeping his binoculars fixed on the retreating band, he shouted to his men, "Keep them hugging the ground."

The patrol had been returning from a tour of duty on the border and would have reached its unit within less than six hours, when a horseman had

galloped up and leaped to the ground.

"Over there," he showed the direction by pointing his finger, "a bandit caravan is moving along the ravine with weapons packed in long green cases. There are about 150 men."

Within half an hour the patrol had crossed the mountain pass and taken positions on both sides of the exit from the ravine. Some twenty minutes later the caravan appeared, camels striding along calmly, each carrying two green cases. The first two had large machine guns mounted on their backs. Most of the bandits were astride the camels, and some thirty horsemen covered them in front and at the back.

The helicopters came in time. They cut off the caravan's route of escape, and a landing party gradually closed the ring around it. In another half an hour, having lost some fifty men dead or wounded, the bandits saw that further resistance was senseless, and surrendered. One by one they came, laid down their arms, and lined up in a column.

The man of the patrol opened a few of the green cases. One was full of ammunition for pistols, another full of hand-grenades. A few of the cases contained US-made M-16 rifles. One of the soldiers showed the commander an unusual weapon.

"That's an English rifle," the captain said. "It is accurate at a distance of a thousand five hundred metres."

In a white zinc-lined case the men found a dozen portable transmitters, micro-cameras, code-books, and other spying equipment. There were also neatly stacked leaflets. The captain picked one up. It read:

"Those who have radio sets are again advised, so that they should know, remember, and obey: it is a

sin to listen to Kabul broadcasts. Henceforth, the offence will be punished by a fine of 10,000 afghani the first time, and by beheading the second time."

"These leaflets are for villagers," said the captain. "The bandits don't want them to hear the truth."

It was July—scorching hot weather. And "A Hot Summer in Kabul" was being filmed in the capital. It was the first joint Soviet-Afghan full-length film venture, the script being by Vadim Trunin, a Soviet writer, and Asadullah Habib, an Afghan novelist. It was about Afghanistan ravaged by an undeclared war, about Soviet and Afghan doctors fighting for the lives of men and women and about the Revolution.

How different the filming was from anything I had seen before. There was no man-made scenery. Nor was there a lack of curious episodes. One day, for example, an armed clash was being filmed. Soldiers of the DRA Army had been invited as extras. Then, defying the director's orders, the Afghan major shouted, "Stop filming!" The soldiers were being urgently summoned on a combat mission.

There was an episode in the film where Soviet and Afghan doctors were compelled to engage the bandits. A battle scene was being filmed in natural surroundings up the mountains, while all around the locale a real battle was being fought with a gang of bandits who had come to wipe out the film people.

On July 27, 1982, the PDPA Central Committee convened a plenary meeting. It looked into the Party's task of enhancing political work among the masses. The April Revolution had come to a stage where the fight for people's minds, work with the

people, active political education, had become vitally important.

The international, military, economic, social and cultural problems facing Afghanistan called for the support of the mass of the people. And that meant political education of the masses.

The national-democratic revolution had occurred in a setting of extreme economic and social backwardness. The Revolution tackled economic, social, political, cultural, religious, tribal, national and many other problems that arose owing to the diversity of economic structures and the social diversity of the people, the sharp class struggle, and the influence of reactionary views.

There were psychological problems, too, which called for a realignment of Party cadres, because after the April Revolution the relationship between the PDPA and the mass of the people had acquired new features. The PDPA had become a ruling party, with all the responsibilities this implied. Besides, the April Revolution developed in most complicated surroundings at home and abroad. Imperialist and reactionary forces created a tense military and political situation. The class enemy had mounted a total, economic, political and ideological war.

And the more obvious were the successes of the April Revolution, the more viciously its enemies attacked Democratic Afghanistan, the more loudly they howled that the aims and purposes of the Revolution had nothing in common with the interests of the Afghan people. Imperialist propaganda sought to discredit the ideals of the Revolution and the achievements of the People's Government. It maligned the activity of the PDPA and minimised its role in the building of the new life.

Hand in hand with the counter-revolutionaries at home, the imperialists were out to impede any further stabilisation of the situation in Afghanistan, undermine and weaken the Revolution, prevent the new People's Government from consolidating itself, and sow enmity between tribes and between nationalities. In so doing, imperialist propaganda sought to incite hatred for the Soviet Union in disregard of the selfless Soviet assistance to the Afghan people. Foes of the April Revolution did what they could to prevent any normalisation of Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan and Iran. They distorted the human rights and civil freedoms issues in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, and raised a hue and cry over the so-called refugee problem that they had themselves created.

The First National Party Conference was gratified to note that much had been achieved in recent years to deepen the revolutionary process in the country and to enhance PDPA political work among the mass of the people. By virtue of the social transformations carried out in Afghanistan, the position of big landlords, the feudal ideology and survivals of national exclusiveness and separatism had lost considerable ground. Imperialism's ideological warfare was being countered with increasing success. But there was still a long way to go before the whole set of national-democratic changes would be accomplished. If there was to be progress, the political awareness of the masses would have to be raised to a new, higher standard, and people had to be drawn into active revolutionary struggle.

The July 1982 Plenum of the PDPA Central Committee stressed that the Party's political work

with the masses must be concentrated above all else on explaining the policy of the PDPA, demonstrating the results achieved so far in building the new life, showing why the fight against counter-revolutionaries had to be stepped up, why it was essential to end hostility between tribes and between nationalities, and why there had to be friendship and co-operation among them.

"The main thing now," the Plenum emphasised, "is to carry the truth about the aims and tasks of the Revolution to the remotest corners of our country, to every worker, peasant, nomad, intellectual, and petty trader, to all groups in our society. We have nothing to hide from the people. We have declared our aims and tasks when we carried out the Revolution. They are defined in our Action Programme, and we speak of them openly before the whole world.

"The truth is our strongest weapon in winning the trust of the masses, and it must be ever present in our work, because our truth is the truth of the working people who had striven for it throughout history."

Analysing the military situation, the Plenum observed that new tendencies had appeared among the insurgents. Many of those who had joined counter-revolutionary gangs have understood that they were deceived, and wanted to return to their families and to peaceful work.

"All over Afghanistan," the Plenum announced, "bandit leaders and their men enter into negotiations with the authorities, and cease their fight against the People's Government. But not all of them as yet. A considerable number of bandit units are continuing the armed fight against the People's Government. But the People's Government is looking for compromises with them, too, because it considers this

one of the forms of its explicative work among benighted, downtrodden, politically ignorant people.

"The PDPA and the Revolutionary Council want to meet these people halfway. It is essential, therefore, to mount a still more vigorous effort to convince the rebels to lay down their arms."

The Plenum also said: "Inasmuch as the peasantry is among the chief and the most numerous motive forces of the Revolution it is necessary to involve peasants in the fight against feudal relations and the survivals of serfdom on a still wider scale. The labouring peasant must become the chief object of the Party's political work."

This was, indeed, a most urgent need, because counter-revolutionaries had escalated their efforts in some parts of the country, with the result that the land reform had either slowed down or stopped. In Baghlan, Helmand, Kunar and Farah provinces many peasant families gave way to the pressure of counter-revolutionaries and landlords and gave up the plots of land they had been allotted after the Revolution. Meanwhile, pitiless exploitation of peasants was renewed in areas that came under enemy control.

The Plenum noted that the working class was growing continuously. At present, it said, more than 150,000 workers were employed at the country's 300 factory-type industrial enterprises, and that trade unions had been established at the plants, encompassing nearly all the working people.

To sharpen the industrial workers' political awareness, the Plenum said, it was essential to bring home to every worker that his labour was vital for the country, that the economic front was as important as the military, and that now workers should approach their work in a new way, that is,

safeguard and preserve public property, abide by the regulations, and learn to account for the overall results of their labour.

Referring to artisans, traders, and national entrepreneurs, the Plenum said: "We must enlighten them politically all the time, supplying information, telling them of what the Party and the Government are doing to promote foreign and home trade, and handicrafts, and to stabilise the situation in the country.

"Objectively, all sections of Afghan society have a stake in the success of the Revolution; they are jointly engaged in tearing down feudal relations, developing the country's productive forces, and overcoming the age-old backwardness of the Afghan people."

The Party is constantly engaged in demonstrating the policy of the PDPA and the revolutionary government towards Islam. From the first days of the Revolution, they showed respect for Islam, for all national, tribal, familial and religious traditions of the peoples and ethnic groups inhabiting Afghanistan.

A set of legislative and political principles has been worked out by the PDPA and the Government with regard to Islam and the Moslem priesthood. Much has been done to consolidate the democratic priesthood. An Administration for Islamic Affairs and an Ulema Council have been set up. The revolutionary government helped to preserve and restore mosques and shrines as places of worship, and gave the Moslem priesthood all manner of material and moral support. In 1981 alone, the sum expended on special aid to the priesthood and to religious institutions exceeded 25 million afghani. The revolutionary government left intact all land belonging to mosques, and set no limit on the land holdings of priests.

More, the government has adopted a decision on paying the salaries to patriotically minded mullahs.

The PDPA Central Committee Plenum reaffirmed the Party's respect for Islam and called on the Moslem priesthood to assist the Revolution in the name of the Afghan people.

The Plenum laid special emphasis on the fight against illiteracy.

"At present," the Plenum report said, "the country has 27,000 courses and study centres combatting illiteracy, with an enrolment of 500,000. Servicemen and security guards are all being taught to read and write. In this drive we expect every literate person to teach three to five illiterates to read and write. This applies to parents, neighbours, and workmates—everyone who can read and write must take part in it. And Party members should treat it as a most important Party assignment.

"But the drive against illiteracy should not be reduced to mere reading and writing. We must give people a certain sum of knowledge, cultivating in them a thirst for information and the wish to know what is happening at home and abroad.

"Having embarked on a new life, on the road of social progress, medieval Afghanistan needs political education and enlightenment. And we must provide it at all costs—in the name of the people and in the name of the Revolution which, despite all difficulties, is making good headway in building a new, national-democratic society."

"Medieval Afghanistan", the report had said! And no mistake. Afghanistan was a medieval land when it embarked upon its Revolution in 1978. The changes that have occurred there are truly staggering. And those about to occur are still more so.

## WHEN NIGHT FALLS

During the night counter-revolutionaries laid siege to the Kabul Bread Factory. They fired grenade-throwers and submachine guns from the bushes nearby and from the roofs of neighbouring cottages. They wanted to deprive the city of bread, to create panic, to hinder normalisation.

Bursts of machine-gun fire hit the factory walls. A few bullets struck the power lines. Sparks flew all round, the insulation began to smoulder. "Mustn't let a fire start," thought the captain in charge of the machine-gun team beside the factory gate.

The machine gunners fired short bursts, trying to hit the flashes on the roofs of the cottages on the other side of the highway.

A few of the flashes were indeed snuffed out, but there were still something like a score of snipers up there. It was hard hitting the target in the dark. Suddenly a grenade-thrower boomed, and an explosion followed somewhere near the factory warehouse...

An army unit arrived soon, followed by Soviet paratroopers in an armoured vehicle. A few snipers from among the paratroopers took up positions near the Afghan machine gunners. They were trained to hit "fire"—that was the term they used: "shooting fire". A flash—a shot—and the enemy's firing post was no more.

They silenced one submachine gun, then another, and one more. But on the right the bandits were still firing away from some shelter.

"Get ready to attack," the Soviet lieutenant said.

"Ready," came the reply. And three of the paratroopers set out in the direction of the flashes. They had been ordered to capture the bandits alive.

On reaching the other side of the highway, they took cover because the bandits had stopped shooting. The paratroopers lay motionless, listening to the sounds of the Kabul night.

It was a lovely night, really. The mountains were like motionless clouds that had sunk to the earth. The sky high above was studded with bright stars, and resembled a delicate Oriental shawl.

It was Sergei's second year in Afghanistan. He had learned a lot. He understood his commander's orders before they were spoken. Especially in a crunch.

"Where're we going?" he had asked the lieutenant when they were speeding through night-time Kabul half an hour before. The lieutenant had not replied. He compressed his lips with annoyance. When they reached their destination, Sergei saw it was a bread factory. He was from Moscow, where he lived near a flour factory and knew that the tall reinforced concrete towers contained grain. The Kabul Bread Factory was much like the one in Moscow. On hearing the firing, the paratroopers knew what mission they were on. They were always sent to the most dangerous spots. They knew it and were proud of it. It gave them a sense of responsibility—a most important ingredient of the paratroopers' traditions.

Sergei's platoon had had to repulse raids on the radio centre and the Ministry of Justice. It had taken part in fierce and hard-fought operations in the environs of the Afghan capital. Those had been full-scale battles. Now, there was a mere bread factory. How could the paratroopers know that

they were up against a dangerous, well-trained adversary who had put destroying the Kabul Bread Factory high up on the list of its targets. American instructors had trained the group for street-fighting at bases in Pakistan, and most of its men were fanatical enough to fling themselves under a tank with a live grenade.

Sergei strained his eyes to pierce the darkness, but the bandits, who had evidently sensed danger, lay low. Suddenly, Sergei remembered his first day in Afghanistan. His first hours, in fact. They were disembarking from the plane. The sun was beating down pitilessly. The only shade they saw was that made by the plane.

They lined up beside the landing strip, and opposite them were soldiers just like themselves, only in faded uniforms. They were ordered to stand at attention, and Sergei, who was watching the outgoing troop with interest, saw a red streamer inscribed, "Welcome" (that's for us, Sergei thought) and "Pleasant trip" (for the ones who were being replaced).

Sergei took one more look at those who were going home, and envied them a bit in his heart.

"Fall out!" And at once the two lines relaxed, began to mix and finding someone from the same region the men were patting each other's shoulder.

An army band played familiar tunes. The general, who stood beside a little table, was handing the departing soldiers their decorations, badges, and diplomas. There was none, practically, who had failed to distinguish himself in some way.

No one remembered how the tradition had originated for decorations and diplomas to be handed to those going home at the airfield in the presence of their replacements. But everyone liked the idea.

It was good for the newcomers' morale to see how well their predecessors had done.

Within a few hours of his arrival, while they were being driven from the airfield to their unit, Sergei first felt what war was like. Their vehicle was fired upon. The escorting armoured vehicle fired back, and tore into the village beside the highway.

There were no people around. The houses had been abandoned. Sergei was told bandits had driven them into the mountains, and had stayed behind in ambush. After firing a bit, they had departed. A dirty business—

Dirty business, indeed. Now, too, someone on the roofs of the cottages was doing the same dirty business. Sergei kept his eyes focused into the darkness. A submachine gun opened up. Strangely, Sergei was glad. Now, at least, he knew where the enemy was hiding.

"Let's go," he said to his mates. Bullets hit the scorched earth with a ring, raising sparks, hitting boulders.

So long as they don't have a spot light, Sergei thought. For if he and his mates were discovered, they'd be picked off without difficulty.

Something dug into the earth beside his arm, and he felt fire scorch his shoulder. He suddenly remembered the park his father used to take him to as a boy, the Ferris wheel turning faster and faster—until he lost consciousness.

The last of the bandit submachine guns fell silent half an hour later. A red flare shot up into the sky, signalling the end of the operation.

"Pick up the wounded," said the Afghan captain.

"What about the wounded bandits?" asked Mahmud, who had come with a few other Council

members to help out.

"We pick up all the wounded—our own and the others," the captain said.

"Mahmud," shouted Nasir. "Come here."

A wounded bandit lay on the ground with a pistol in his hand.

"Don't come any nearer. I'll shoot," he said hoarsely.

"You'll die if a doctor doesn't take care of you," Mahmud said, pulling out his own pistol for safety.

"Go away! I'll shoot," said the bandit, wheezing. He had probably been wounded in the neck.

"I'll kill you—" he said again, more quietly, and aimed the pistol at his own chest.

"Don't be foolish," Mahmud shouted, leaping to intervene. But too late. The *dushman* pulled to trigger.

"Young—" Mahmud observed, looking at the dead man's face.

"Many of them are young," said the chairman of the People's Council, who had walked up to them. "Young and confused..."

Many of the wounded, they learned on reaching the hospital, needed blood transfusions, but the supply of blood had run out. The surgeon said he would phone for more.

"What blood do you need?" Mahmud asked.

"All kinds. What's yours?"

Mahmud did not know, but said boldly:

"I'm ready, and they too." He pointed at the other members of the Council.

"Take as much as you need," Mahmud said in the surgery.

"We need a lot," the surgeon said. "We'll take 200 grammes or a little more. But you must eat well

after we take it, and rest."

"Take four hundred," Mahmud said, for he felt the surgeon was in a tight spot.

When he got up, his head felt light and everything looked white. The surgeon, Nasir, and the nurses—they all looked white, and so did the table with the instruments.

"Give them a good meal and drive them home," the medical officer said.

In the meantime, the Afghan soldiers were searching the cottages near the bread factory.

"Who is it?" Mirjan, who hadn't slept at all, asked and opened the door. The soldiers came in, and lit up the room with their torchlights. Mirjan was putting on his clothes. Rano, his wife, stood beside him and, raising her hands, prayed. Eerie shadows crept across the wall, running into each other. Then the light was turned on and they disappeared.

The officer glanced at Mirjan, who stood in the middle of the room at attention, pressing his arms to his sides: "Own up—where d'you hide the arms?"

"I have none," Mirjan replied quietly.

"We'll look—and if we find any, blame yourself," the officer replied.

"Search if you like, I have nothing," Mirjan said again.

The soldiers examined the corners of the room, looked into the kettle in the wall, and under the matting. Ali, Gulshad and Farid were asleep in their beds.

"Would you come here, Comrade Captain?" a soldier called quietly. He was on his knees beside one of the beds. In his hand, he held a cartridge and a pistol.

"Same caliber?"

The soldier pulled out the cartridge clip and nodded. "There's nothing out in the yard, Comrade Captain," said two other soldiers, entering the room. "Keep searching," their commander said. "Look everywhere."

It was getting light outside, the stars grew dim. A cock crowed in the distance. The search continued. Soldiers tapped the floorboards and looked into every nook and cranny.

Gulshad woke up and looked at the proceedings with wide-open eyes. Ali, too, was awake. Farid was the only one who still slept.

To Ali the soldiers looked kind. They were quick in their movements, and nimble. "I'll be a soldier when I grow up," Ali thought looking at them. "I'll wear the same uniform—it's nice, very nice."

Suddenly, Farid began to cry. But none of the soldiers paid any attention. Neither did Father. Mother continued to pray silently, moving her lips.

"Quiet, quiet," Gulshad said to her little brother. But Farid cried on.

The officer looked at Mother, and she, noticing this, moved her lips still faster. Father stood stock-still in the middle of the room. It seemed as though he had no interest in what was happening around him.

Finally, the mullah's call to prayer resounded. The people in the room heard it well. The officer came up to Father, and said: "You'll come with us."

Mother rushed to embrace her husband, but two of the soldiers stepped in her way.

"Don't take him," she pleaded with the officer.

Father cast a glance at the children and walked slowly to the door. Gulshad began to cry. So did Farid. Only Ali remained silent. It seemed to him that all this was a game, that no one would take

Father away, that the soldiers would go and not come back. But they took Father with them.

Helplessly, Mother sat down on the bed and folded her hands in her lap. No words could describe her state at that moment. She was a timid woman by nature, fearful of change; all her life there was nothing but monotony and tedium.

She grew up in a village. Father had three wives and twelve children. Rano was not allowed outside the courtyard until she was fifteen. "You must not," she was told. Those were words she had grown accustomed to from early childhood. You *must not* go outside the courtyard, you *must not* laugh loudly, you *must not* speak to strangers. She had absorbed these words from infancy. Father's wives often quarrelled among themselves. Sometimes they even fought. And the children, too, were beaten.

Rano remembered how Father's elder wife punished her cruelly. Father had been away several weeks— he had gone to Mecca. He had wanted to all his life, but never had enough money. Now, an old man, having saved a little, he had finally set out on his *badj*.

After Father's departure, life in the house changed at once. The elder wife began to order the others about, and was always irritable and dissatisfied.

"Peel the potatoes," she once said to Rano, and when Rano finished, shouted angrily: "You'll be the ruin of us! That's no way to peel potatoes! You've spoiled them!"

She took a handful of peelings and pressed them against Rano's mouth. "Eat!"

Rano compressed her lips.

"Eat," she said. The elder wife tried to stuff the peelings down the girl's throat. Rano resisted,

moved her head from side to side.

The angry elder wife then took a stick and beat the girl pitilessly, aiming for the head. Rano covered herself as best she could, and wept.

One day Father called Rano and gave her a package. He smiled, "Take it."

Rano unwrapped the package and saw it was a *yashmak* veil. One of the wives who stood beside her snatched it nimbly out of Rano's hands and tried it on. Rano was afraid she would not return the gift and took hold of the veil with both hands.

Father laughed—it was a good sign when a daughter fought for her *yashmak*.

Then the wives put the veil on Rano. Everything was fine, only the girl did not see as clearly as before—there was hair netting before her eyes.

Father then said Rano could now leave the courtyard for the *yashmak* would protect her.

"Where will she go?" one of the wives asked. "What business has she in village?" She giggled artificially, and Father rebuked her.

"You can go outside the courtyard as of tomorrow," he repeated. "I permit it."

The excited Rano did not at once understand that she had been granted her freedom—the long-awaited freedom after fourteen years of confinement in the house.

Then there was her wedding with Mirjan. They had walked under the Koran. The sounds of "aesta biru" (walk slowly) resounded quietly, and sugared almonds were thrown at them. The bride and groom had not seen each other often before the wedding. It the olden days, in fact, they did not see each other at all until the wedding day.

Of late, of course, the wedding ceremony has

been considerably changed, especially in the towns. No longer must the groom pay bride money, and the value of the dowry has become a minor point. But much of the wedding ritual has survived.

"Be happy, daughter," her Mother whispered in her ear. "May Allah be with you always. Submit and obey your husband."

Her first two children were girls—Anahita and Gulshad. Her husband was displeased. "Girls and girls all the time," he grumbled. "I'll have to take one more wife." But soon Ali and Farid were born.

Little Anahita fell sick and died. "Allah has punished you," neighbours said to Rano.

"What have I done wrong?" she was frightened and prayed fervently, trying to remember what she had done that may have caused Allah's disfavour.

Now, too, sitting on the bed, she thought there must have been something she had done wrong, for her husband had been taken away.

One night a few days later Poulad and I were on our way home from the Embassy. The car was driving through streets lined with squat cottages. Suddenly something changed: we heard peculiar pops and saw the radio receiver disintegrate. "Bullets!" I bent low for cover, and looked out. At first there was no one; then, as my glance swept along the fence, I saw him—a man with a submachine gun peering out from behind a brick wall. Then there were shots from the other side of the street. The burst shattered the windshield, and the bullets drove into the upholstery of the front seat. If there had been someone beside the driver, he would surely have been hit. Luckily, Poulad and I were in the back.

"The louts," the driver swore, and accelerated.

He had been in many such frays and knew what to do. There was a security station nearby. Our car stopped beside it. The guard got busy. He called for help.

Men with submachine guns came running. They boarded a lorry. A few minutes later they came to the place where we had been fired upon. The guards crashed through the wicket into the yard.

Strangely, the attacker was still there. Evidently, he did not expect a patrol to arrive so quickly. He surrendered without a murmur. The second attacker was led from across the street. Unlike the first one, he was cursing loudly.

Both of them, it was found, were former Daoud officials.

When I returned to the hotel, I was told Soviet Professor Victor Sarianidi was awaiting me.

I had known this pleasant, unusually vigorous, man. His diligence and his obsession with archaeology were truly enviable. He had known of the Tilla Tepe mound in Afghanistan for years, and was eager to start digging. Several expeditions had been fitted out, but each time something got in the way. Afghan archaeologists were as eager as he was to see what was in the mound, but the royal bureaucracy, and later Daoud's regime, created all sorts of obstacles for the Soviet scholars. Finally, the People's Government granted Victor Sarianidi's request.

"The area isn't safe," warned the professor. "Naturally, we'll give you guards, but anything can happen."

Despite the grave danger, the professor set out for the digs. Months passed, and the secrets of Tilla

Tepe gradually came to light. Antique articles made of gold many centuries before told a tale of mysterious nomads who had set up the state of the Qushans in Bactria at the dawn of our era.

Valuable bracelets, rings, belts and statuettes that had belonged to a princely clan were uncovered, and stored in the professor's tent. The Golden Mound of Tilla Tepe revealed the history of the ancient land chapter by chapter. One more blank space on the world's archaeological map was filled out.

Recently, Victor Sarianidi showed me the articles found at Tilla Tepe which are now on display in the Kabul History Museum.

"Look at these astonishing veins, at the muscles," he said pointing at a golden statuette. "And those corkscrew horns, the curved neck and thin legs—it's a mountain goat. The thing was made by an unknown craftsman two thousand years ago. And, beyond any question, it is the pearl of the twenty thousand gold articles that we found at Tilla Tepe."

The "find of the century" was how archaeologists all over the world described the Soviet-Afghan digs in legendary Bactria. The treasures found there could, indeed, rival those of Tutankhamen's tomb. They belonged to a prince who had led his nomads to destroy the prosperous Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, and built a new state on its ruins, whose history has puzzled archaeologists for now many many decades. The collection found by Sarianidi's group dated to the time of the inception of the Qushan state. For the first time the world learned about the culture of a people who came at the dawn of the new era to inhabit part of the territory of present-day Afghanistan.

"The expedition has found six graves," the pro-

fessor said to me. "And, can you imagine, the heads of nearly all the buried reposed in silver or golden vessels. One of them was a typically Greek vessel with an inscription in Greek."

When we returned to my room, the professor told me of the dangers that beset the excavations. Bandits had escalated their activity in the vicinity. And no one could tell what they would do if they managed to capture the digs.

But the professor's fears were in vain. The government saw to it that the bandits were routed. By that time, the bands in Baghlan and Nimruz provinces had been wiped out, and on July 7 at a press conference General Abdul Gafur, spokesman of the DRA Ministry of Defence, said in Panjshir another thirty bandit gangs had been wiped out. Their stores of arms and ammunition had all been captured.

\* \* \*

That morning, in Panjshir, Zafar's gang, too, was practically all destroyed. The survivors were in flight across the mountains. They rode their horses in silence, evading each other's eyes. Some were silently thanking Allah for having spared their lives, and also sent up prayers for those who died. Others were mulling over the thought that, in fact, they had been made to shoot at their fellow Afghans, while those shot at them. "How long will this go on? What do we want? What do they want? We are told they betrayed the Koran. That is bad, a great sin. But why and how did they do it? That no one has told us."

Those who had these thoughts took good care to conceal them from the others. No one would have

betrayed them even under torture, for that would have meant instant death.

Some of the *dushmans* dreamed of revenge. They could not forgive their chief for taking flight. Some damned the cowards. Some cursed the army and the *kafirs*. And all of them were depressed and hungry.

"Do you know if there is any water near by?" chief Zafar said to the bearded one riding beside him.

"No idea," the latter muttered.

The chief did not conceal his anger.

They found no water until dusk. They stopped beside it, changed the dressing of the wounded, chewed a bit of their stale bread, and moved on.

The sun quickly hid behind the mountains. In anticipation of the night, the cicadas started their shrill song. Pale stars appeared in the sky.

The bearded one asked where they would set up their base now. "We'll find a place," the chief replied angrily.

"Hah," the bearded one sighed. "If there had been more of us and if the unfaithful cowards hadn't turned tail owing to the machine guns, we might have won."

"Oh, shut your mouth."

But the bearded one gushed on.

"Nothing to eat. And practically no arms."

"We'll get them," the chief replied quietly. He was sure Allah would send them food and weapons.

But the thought of arms brought unpleasant recollections.

The year before, when the detachment had been much larger, the *dushmans* had been losing arms in the endless clashes with the army. The new weapons that had been promised them did not arrive for

some reason, and the absence of rifles was reducing the combat ability of his band. The chief had decided to send messengers to Pakistan. He knew the requisite addresses and names. But would they be given arms free, as before? Maybe something had changed? Maybe there were new people there? But he had to have arms, and, just in case, decided to give the messengers the valuables they had plundered during the raids. "If they won't give you anything free," he kept saying to the leader of the caravan, "then buy the arms, but see you get the right price."

"You'll be accountable to Allah for every piece of goods," the chief said. "And remember, I'm giving you the valuables just in case. I want you get the arms free, and to bring back the valuables."

Then he made the caravan leader swear on the Koran.

They fitted out the caravan—two donkeys and four camels. The box with the valuables was in the pack on the back of the second donkey.

The caravan set out on its journey, but near the Pakistani border men from another bandit gang attacked it. A battle ensued, during which the donkey with the valuables disappeared. The chief could not decide whether this had been an accident or an act of treachery, and for a long time took out his anger on the men who had been foolish enough to return. He executed the caravan leader, ordering his men to at first cut off his nose and ears, and then open up the stomach and fill it with grass. "Let him suffer before he dies," he thought, for that was the usual treatment reserved for enemies and traitors.

Their next meal was after dusk on the following day, when they attacked and plundered a village.

"Any casualties?" the chief asked the bearded

one. They were squatting beside a dried up brook and conversing.

"What casualties can there be in a village?"

"And what's the booty?"

"Some but not much."

The chief then said all the men should be searched lest they hid some of their plunder. "Allah knows, we need money."

The bearded one told the chief that the men were restless, and added that in the village they had learned that the new government had issued a law: those who lay down their arms and surrender will be pardoned.

The bandit chief frowned.

"I overheard a few of the men saying they might flee," the bearded one added.

The bright moon lit up the backs of the bandits sitting round the fire. One of them whose head was bandaged, was poking about in the flames, the bearded one was cleaning his pistol, while the others sat morosely, their eyes fixed on the fire. None of them spoke. They were all digesting their food—pilaff with meat and peas. True, there had not been much meat, but what there was had been well prepared. Fayim was a good cook. Before, he had been cook to a landlord. Then they had sipped green tea. They were short of bowls and drank it in turns, while the bearded one drank right from the pot. The chief came up to them, nervously fingering his belt. He stood for a while, glanced at the fire, and squatted beside them. They waited for what he would say. But he was in no hurry. He stretched out his hands, and rubbed his palms. Then he slowly raised his head.

"Get ready, my children," he said softly. "We'll go to Kabul. That's where we'll fight the new government."

None of the men said anything.

"Do you like the idea?" the chief asked, raising his voice.

No one replied, and the chief scowled evilly.

"Maybe you believe what the unfaithful write?" he finally said. "I'll show you how to behave!" He pulled out his pistol. All of them jumped to their feet and raised their guns.

"Stop, oh faithful ones!" the bearded one cried out. "Allah will never forgive you if you raise the sword against each other."

The chief looked deflated.

He could not stay in the mountains with a bare dozen of men. They had to go to Kabul. That was the only solution. Anger and a sense of futility gripped him. When it dawned, he would not even have tea, and climbed up the path, stopped and prayed assiduously amidst the grey boulders, bowing to Allah again and again, and begging for deliverance.

In Kabul, Zafar went to a man whose name and address the bearded one had given him. He knew it was one of the chiefs of the counter-revolutionary underground in the capital.

When he came to this man revered by counter-revolutionaries, the latter was sitting beside a table and drinking tea.

After the requisite greetings, the man told Zafar he had acted foolishly—cursing his men, treating them with disrespect, which was why most of them had fled. He said he knew everything and Zafar should listen and obey.

"You have to treat your people kindly. Threats and insults are out."

"But there was no other way with those who betrayed Allah," the humbled bandit chief replied.

"Those who betrayed Allah?" The man observed without raising his voice. "But what did you do to stop them?"

"I was like a father to them!"

"You were a bad father."

Zafar took offense. His face grew red.

"See the rest don't leave you," the man said quietly. "These are uneasy times. You must watch the uncertain."

The bandit chief's pride was hurt.

The man noticed it and began explaining Zafar's mission.

\* \* \*

A meeting was on at the District Council.

The chairman explained that the state security bodies had asked the Council for help. The security men had come upon the trail of a band that had recently arrived in Kabul.

The band had been routed, and there had been a split among the survivors. Many had surrendered to the government, but about ten, plus the chief, had gone to Kabul. "I will give you the photograph of the chief," the chairman said, "and if you see him try to apprehend him."

Then he told the Council members that the chief's name was Zafar, and that he was the son of a wealthy landlord. He had been tried for some crime before the Revolution, and after serving his sentence had lived in Kabul on money sent him by his father. He played games of chance and lost most of the money. Then came the Revolution, the land was taken from his father, and no more money was sent him. But he did not want to work. So he joined the fight against the People's Government.

## FAR FROM KABUL

I arrived at the airfield of a cool summer's morning. Autumn was round the corner—the best time in Afghanistan because of the moderate heat and what Afghans considered plentiful rain.

There were many military men in the plane heading north, a few engineers with what were evidently rolled-up blueprints, and young teachers going back to their schools. As I later learned, there was even a writer among us.

My thoughts were interrupted by Comrade Dekhneshin, Chief of the Propaganda and Education of the PDPA Central Committee, who was accompanying me.

“Our northern territories are rich,” he observed looking out of the porthole.

About 45, slim, smart, he was dressed in a nicely fitted suit. He had joined the Party before the Revolution. After it, he had served as diplomat, and was then shifted to the Central Committee. I knew he was assiduously learning Russian.

The plane was crossing Salang.

“This province is quiet,” Comrade Dekhneshin said. I understood that he was referring to the absence of bandits.

“Do you see the lorries? So many of them.” I did see a long line of lorries and cars of the mountain road below.

Not all vehicles were privately owned, Comrade Dekhneshin told me. Of late, the number of state-owned vehicles had increased considerably. The recently

established Afghan-Soviet Transport Company was carrying a large portion of the freight, and in Salang as well. Since there were no railways in Afghanistan, motor vehicles were the chief mode of transport.

"We'll fly on to Farjab by helicopter," Comrade Dekhneshin informed me after we had landed at the Mazar-i-Sharif airfield. A few minutes later we were airborne again—six of us: Comrade Dekhneshin, my interpreter Poulad, three guards, and I.

Mazar-i-Sharif quickly receded into the distance. It stood out on the sun-scorched plain as a neat green spot.

Lilac cloud shadows floated beneath us. There was another helicopter in the air. Hereabouts, they said, helicopters fly in pairs. No one can tell what might happen.

"Do you know why we are flying by helicopter?" Comrade Dekhneshin asked. "It has rained in Farjab, and the landing strip was washed away."

It was muddy and quiet in Meimen, the seat of Farjab Province.

"Please take cover at once," a young soldier said to us as we left the helicopter. "The airfield was fired upon a few minutes ago."

A minute later, we were heading for town in jeeps.

In the office of Faizullah Elburs, Secretary of the Farjab PDPA Provincial Committee, there was a banner, a clock on the wall, and a shaggy rug on the floor. In the corner, a submachine gunner sat silently. Elburs, tall, broad-shouldered, in an open-neck white shirt, at once asked Comrade Dekhneshin to speak before the elders, the storekeepers, and the Moslem priesthood.

"Tell them about the new government laws, and answer their questions. They'll be pleased to hear a

man from Kabul," the Secretary said.

Then he told us about the state of affairs in his province. Eighteen army men had been killed in a battle with two gangs of bandits. The bandits lost 68 killed. The survivors had escaped into the hills. They opened fire from time to time, as they did at the airfield that day.

The Secretary sighed.

"We've managed to build a defence line covering the hills," he said. "The local people donated two million afghani to fortify it. There are 14 peasant co-operatives in the province, and 88 literacy courses with nearly a thousand people learning to read and write. What we need are textbooks—"

He smiled and told us they were teaching people to read by the Koran.

"The Koran?"

Certainly, Faizullah Elburs said, for if one could read the Koran one could read anything. Besides, he added, people came in greater numbers.

The Secretary said propaganda groups had been formed in all provincial Party branches after the 9th PDPA Central Committee Plenum, that these groups were highly active, that they operated in all peasant co-operatives, that there were 1,500 trade union members in the province, that the National Fatherland Front had a branch in the province, and that there was also a council of ulemas.

As we were leaving Elburs's office, my interpreter showed me the local paper, with a report of a chess tournament.

"If they have time for chess," I said, "life here must be alright."

We came out into the street. It was unusually quiet, quiet unlike the hustle and bustle of Kabul.

A car or lorry was rare in Meimen. Passers-by were few. I saw no tall houses. It was an ordinary provincial seat.

"Before the Revolution," Comrade Dekhneshin said, "I was a Party functionary here, and criss-crossed nearly the whole province on foot."

He pointed to a sombre building that rose above the other houses, and smiled joylessly: "That's the local prison. Once, I barely escaped arrest. The PDPA was still underground then."

I observed that all women veiled their faces. "Yes," Comrade Dekhneshin nodded. "This isn't Kabul. New winds reach the provinces slowly. Age-old tradition fed by Islam wins out. If a woman took off her *yashmak* and went into the street with a bare face, she would be stoned."

The city cinema was so far privately operated. Faizullah Elburs told me, however, that the local authorities were buying it from its owner, so that they would control it.

A bright carpet lay out in the street beside the entrance to the cinema. But this surprised none of us. In Afghanistan you will see carpets spread beside a wall, in the middle of the pavement, or in front of a teahouse entrance. The more people walked on the carpet, the more vehicles drove over it, the better and softer it was said to become.

I have seen many magnificent Afghan carpets. I knew the respect and honour people lavished on those who made them. I heard numerous legends about carpets. One of them has remained in my memory.

Long long ago, there was a young emir. He liked hunting, and one day met a beautiful girl, the daughter of a carpetmaker, during a hunt in the mountains. He fell in love and decided to marry her. But

the proud girl said she would marry him only if he gave her a carpet he had made with his own hands. So the young emir summoned the finest carpetmakers to teach him their art. After a time, he gave the girl a carpet of his own making.

The girl married the emir, and nothing interfered with their happiness. One day, however, the emir was captured by robbers, who decided to kill him. He asked them to spare his life, and in return he would make carpets for them which they could sell for a high price at the market. The robbers agreed, and brought the emir to a faraway cave, where he would make carpets. Meanwhile, the emir's wife sent warriors to all parts of the country, promising them a generous reward if they found her husband. But in vain.

One day, however, she was informed that a carpet of extraordinary beauty was being sold at the market. She was advised to buy it for the palace. The emir's wife summoned the merchants. They came and showed her the carpet. The delicacy of the design was astonishing. And only the daughter of a carpetmaker was able to read the inscription ingeniously woven into the decorations saying where her husband was held prisoner. She sent her warriors there and they freed the emir. And they lived happily ever after...

After dinner we went into the yard, and lit our cigarettes. It seemed the silence held the town lightly in its embrace. Suddenly, explosions and shots were heard. A few minutes later a soldier came and told us *dushman* bandits had attacked a post on the fringe of the town.

"They have put up grenade-throwers in the cemetery."

The Secretary said the *dushmans* had chosen the cemetery deliberately, because they knew the soldiers would not fire on it.

“Why not?”

A cemetery was sacred, and the *dushmans* took advantage of this. He went back into the house and phoned the local garrison. He ordered it to reinforce the post, and to surround the cemetery. Then he got into a jeep and drove away.

He returned about two hours later. There were another three men with him—a young man in a shabby jacket with a shaved head, and two submachine gunners. The young man turned out to be a *dushman* prisoner.

Elburs said the prisoner had informed him the town would be attacked at night, and ordered him to be taken into the house.

“Yes, by three hundred people,” the prisoner said.

“There hundred?” Elburs muttered. “Where did they find so many?”

The door to the house closed. We remained outside. The firing on the edge of the town would quieten down for a time, then erupt again with new force. The guards stationed two machine guns beside the wall, and one more beside the gate. They also brought cases of ammunition.

Seeing that Comrade Dekhneshin had pulled out a cigarette, I stuck my hand into the pocket for my lighter. There was a flat box in the pocket. I took it out. It was a cartridge clip. I found cartridge clips in all the other pockets, and remembered that I was wearing Elburs’s military jacket instead of any own.

Six more Afghan soldiers arrived.

“Reinforcements?” Poulad, the interpreter, asked.

No one answered him. Hours of waiting followed. The firing near the cemetery stopped at two in the morning. The "attack on the town" promised by the prisoner was squashed. We went to bed.

The following day, Comrade Dekhneshin met the local Moslem priesthood. The meeting was in the town cinema. A fairly large crowd attended. I, too, wanted to come along. But Comrade Dekhneshin said I shouldn't—an infidel among ulemas. They would not understand.

But I did attend the meeting he had with the shopkeepers. Comrade Dekhneshin spoke for forty minutes, and answered questions for three hours. The shopkeepers seemed to be interested in everything, but chiefly where to get merchandise.

They complained that bandits had cut all roads and were attacking all caravans. If the government gave them arms, they said, they would know how to protect their caravans. "People have money," they complained, "but can buy nothing with it. The shelves in our shops are bare."

"So many shopkeepers in a little town?" I asked Faizullah Elburs when the meeting ended.

"Many are from the provinces. They came to hear the man from Kabul."

It had grown dark outside. Clouds covered the sky. Clearly, it would soon rain. I thought sadly that again the inclement weather would keep us grounded. It was the fourth day of our stay in Meimen.

One day, out in the street with Poulad, we had seen a procession of bullocks. Bullocks, Elburs explained, were the chief source of energy in the Afghan countryside. They helped peasants plough, sow, and turn the waterwheel. Nowadays, the bullocks, too, were having a better time of it. The

government's land and water reform was a great thing. In spite of various difficulties, it was making visible headway. "I have seen peasants weep with joy getting land," he said.

The Secretary told me that before the April Revolution tenants kept only one-sixth of the harvest, the rest going to the landlord.

I asked about the purchasing price of farm products. The Government had recently raised purchasing prices, he replied, and peasants were eager enough to sell their products to it.

On the fifth day, we flew to Shibarghan.

When we landed, a guard of honour was lined up for Comrade Dekhneshin, a member of the PDPA Central Committee. It was a joy to see the smartly marching soldiers. A military band played, creating a pleasant atmosphere. On shaking hands with the welcoming party, we drove to the hotel. As we got out of our car, a woman approached Comrade Dekhneshin. She had a paper in her hand.

"My husband was taken away," she whispered through her tears. "But he is not guilty. I swear by Allah, he is not guilty."

Comrade Dekhneshin took the paper from her and promised to look into the case.

"I am Tughuyan," a young man said. "Deputy Secretary of the PDPA Provincial Committee. There's no Secretary. He got killed—"

The week before, the Secretary was driving a car, accompanied by his seven-year-old daughter. When he noticed there was something wrong with the wheels, for the car had begun swerving from side to side, he stamped on the brake. It did not work. He managed to push his daughter out of the car before it overturned. She was badly bruised but alive. The

Secretary was killed in the crash. It turned out that someone had removed the nuts that hold the wheels and disconnected the brake.

In Juzqan, the seat of Shibarghan Province, I was introduced to a worker named Neimatullah, a Party member employed at the Shibarghan drilling office.

"Everything would be fine if it were not for the *dushmans*," was the first thing he said to me.

I inquired if the *dushmans* interfered with his work.

"You can say that again—they blow up derricks, attack people, and threaten us. Certainly, we try to defend ourselves. We have our guns close at hand when working and also at home. By now they know we are no cowards."

The provincial branch of the Party in Shibarghan consists 22 per cent of workers.

"That's a big force, isn't," I said.

"Certainly," Neimatullah replied. "In addition, we have groups of sympathisers." He explained that these were people who had not yet become probation members of the Party, but who accepted its programme and were its followers.

In Juzqan we had the good fortune of witnessing a *subbotnik*, a day of volunteer free labour, to improve the town.

The *subbotnik* began with prayers in the mosques. Then there were meetings. Comrade Dekhneshin spoke at four that day. Most of the people gathered at the stadium. They came with spades and shovels, rakes and hoes. They listened raptly to what was being said from the rostrum. And there was a festiveness about it. They were ready to work for nothing, and this added to their resolve to defend the people's revolution.

On that day we flew out of Juzqan. While waiting for the helicopter, I decided to walk about the field. But I was instantly stopped. The Afghan officer who stopped me said there might be mines in the field.

"None yesterday," he said, "but they could have been planted at night. And, in general, walking about the field is not advisable. There's the path to the landing strip. If you have to walk, walk along that."

Some time later we learned there would be no helicopter that day. Comrade Dekhneshin said he had spoken to the chief of the helicopter squadron. An operation against bandits was about to start, involving all helicopters.

So we returned to the hotel.

When drinking tea, Comrade Dekhneshin told me five thousand people had taken part in the *subbotnik*, and had done a million afghani worth of work. At some points, mullahs had taken charge.

"Mullahs?"

"Why should that surprise you? Progressively inclined mullahs have always helped the Revolution," Comrade Dekhneshin replied. He opened his leather briefcase and took out a paper. "Here—read this."

My interpreter Poulad translated:

"We ulemas, and members of the priesthood have gathered in the city of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, our beloved Motherland, and have, in the light of the teachings of the sacred religion of Islam, taking account of the real and incontrovertible realities, discussed the situation and, upon exchanging opinions, adopted the following resolution—"

Comrade Dekhneshin intervened, explaining that this was the text of a resolution adopted by a

conference of mullahs and ulemas held in Kabul. The resolution said the sabotage and crimes of certain persons who had fallen prey to deceit and were being egged on by internal and external enemies to commit fratricide, were wholly contrary to the principles of Islam. "He who deliberately kills a Mohammedan, may Allah damn him, for terrible torture is in store for the assassin," said the Prophet. Murderers and terrorists who were killing their brother Mohammedans on the pretext of a "holy war" could not be devotees of Islam, the resolution said, and their actions deserved harsh condemnation.

Thereupon, the resolution referred to Amin and how he and his retinue had by their crimes endangered the independence and national sovereignty of Afghanistan, and made these sacred concepts an object to which reactionaries falsely appealed.

"In order to stop this disastrous state of affairs, and to safeguard independence, national sovereignty and territorial immunity, to defend the gains of the April Revolution, the Government was compelled to take effective measures," the resolution went on to say. "It asked a friendly country, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, to send limited contingents of its Armed Forces to Afghanistan. This request was granted, which was a humane action performed for the good of the entire Moslem people of our country and of peace-loving mankind. As the Prophet said, 'the man is not ours who goes to bed sated while his neighbour is hungry'."

The resolution ended with the following words: "Unity must be tightened to deliver working Mohammedans and oppressed peoples from merciless exploitation, and to save humankind from wars. The rule of oppressors must be overthrown to go for-

ward to happiness and the well-being of working Mohammedans.

“Long live the free Moslem people of our country!  
“Death to the enemies of the April Revolution!”

I said it was a splendid resolution, and Comrades Dekhneshin and Tughuyan were clearly heartened by my reaction.

“Recently, our mullahs wrote a message to the *dushmans*,” Tughuyan said. “They called on them to lay down their arms and return to the embrace of Islam. Their words were profoundly sincere. The message began thus: ‘Errant son, return to the embrace of the sacred Islam...’ And recently I spoke with a mullah. I was on my way home from the committee, and heard someone trying to overtake me. I turned around and saw it was a mullah whom I knew. He came up and said he had a piece of advice—when going to a village I should put on a turban. I asked him how he knew I had been to the province without a turban, and he said a Party leader was conspicuous, and people knew everything about him. He said I should never forget to wear a turban when going to villages—‘You’ll show your respect to people by doing so, and they will listen to you better,’ he added.”

Comrade Dekhneshin said the mullah was probably right, and Party members should take this sort of thing into account. “We must reckon with traditions,” he added.

“The mullah also asked me to admit him to the Party,” Tughuyan said.

“Admit him to the Party? A mullah?” Comrade Dekhneshin asked.

“Sure, I told him it was impossible, and explained why. But just think of it—a mullah wants to be in the Party. That means he agrees with us, that he

agrees with our policy, with our programme.”

Our conversation focussed on Islam.

Comrade Dekhneshin said there were 40,000 mosques and prayer houses in Afghanistan, thousands of mausoleums, tombs, and various other “holy” places.

“As you know,” he glanced at me, “the Government has passed a decree on protecting these places, and on helping indigent believers to make their pilgrimage to Mecca.”

I remembered seeing an ulema speaking in TV, and seeing pictures of praying Mohammedans in the papers. Also, I had seen the religious journal published in the country, *Payam-i Haqq*.

Respect for Islam, Comrade Dekhneshin observed, was government policy. Measures have been taken since the April Revolution to work out the political principles and guidelines of the PDPA and the revolutionary government in relation to Islam, and to win the Moslem priesthood to the side of the Revolution. The Administration for Islamic Affairs, the governmental body assisting the activity of all Islamic organisations and institutions, set up Ulema Councils in the provinces and won over dozens, and in some cases hundreds, of mullahs. The ulema councils in the provinces of Nangarhar, Juzjan, Herat, and Baghlan were doing good work. They organised talks with the masses and propagated the laws of the People’s Government. “In some villages,” Comrade Dekhneshin added, “no one but the mullah can read the text of a law. All the others are illiterate.”

Mullahs preside at traditional Islamic holidays. They publicise them through the media. A pamphlet written in the traditional Islamic style, Comrade Dekhneshin related, has been put out with the description of the life, work, and services to the people

of the 19 ulemas and theologians who were killed by bandits for supporting the revolutionary government of Afghanistan.

I was also shown a pamphlet entitled, *The April Revolution and the Holy Religion of Islam*, which examined the basic principles and measures of the Party and Government with regard to Islam.

There were other books being put out on the subject, Comrade Dekhneshin told me: one of them was entitled *The April Revolution and Islam* and the other was a collection of PDPA and Government documents on Islam. Besides, it was usual practice to print articles on the democratic principles and laws of the revolutionary government with regard to Islam in the press on the eve of Islam holidays.

Thereupon our conversation drifted to the problem of tribes.

There would soon be a *jirgeh*, a gathering of tribal elders and chiefs, in Kabul, with representatives of tribes living on the Pakistani frontier—the Mangals, Totahels, Zurmats, and Ahmadzais—attending as well. The region where they live was highly important, because it adjoined Pakistan and most of the trouble originated there. I had the good fortune of attending the *jirgeh* held in late September 1982 and hearing the discussion. It revolved round the question of winning national minorities to the side of the revolution and turning the territory where they lived into a dependable barrier to counter-revolutionary gangs that were infiltrating the country from Pakistan.

Altogether, there had been more than three hundred *jirgehs* in 1982, with more than forty co-operation agreements being signed by tribes and clans with the People’s Government. The tribes in the provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar organised self-de-

fence units. The Pathan tribes, too, allowed their young men for the first time to serve in the regular army of the DRA.

In the past, under the monarchic and Daoud regimes, no Pathans had served in the army. Instead, the tribes were committed to guarding the border. Now the old arrangement had to change: the tribes understood the need for everybody to fight the *dushmans*.

"Comrade Tughuyan, she wouldn't take the money," said the driver as he entered the room.

He put a wad of afghani on the table. We glanced at Tughuyan questioningly.

"A woman's husband died today," he explained. "I knew him. He had a big family—five children. So I sent the driver with the money to her. For the funeral. But, as you see, she declined to take it."

"A proud woman," the driver said.

"Probably so," said Tughuyan.

Afghans say they are a proud people, and often relate the following legend.

Long long ago, the caid heard the case of a blind old man. The old man was poor, and considered his daughter, the beautiful Jamila, his only treasure. Though he could not see her beauty he loved the girl most fondly.

The old man's offence was unimportant: his sheep had strayed into the neighbour's garden, and the caid passed sentence, telling him to beg forgiveness from the owner of the garden. But the old man said he would not.

"How can you refuse if I tell you to do so," the caid said.

"I refuse. That's all. A sheep is a stupid beast. Why must I answer for it?"

"Then I will punish you more strictly," the caid warned him. "I will take away your daughter."

"Do as you think right, but I will not beg forgiveness."

The trial ended. Jamila was to be wedded to a son of the family from which the caid had just taken a wife for his son. (Not to pay bride-money it was customary to wed a girl with a son of the family from which a bride had just been taken. It was a kind of exchange.)

People were astonished at the caid's judgement. To take a loved daughter from a blind father meant he would go to seed. People asked the caid to change the sentence. But he refused.

"I am punishing him for more than just the goat," he said. "I am punishing him for disobedience and impertinence. Those are great sins, Allah said. The heavens will cave in if Mohammedans stop obeying. And I could have had his tongue cut out for being impertinent."

Thereupon, they say, the precious stone in the caid's ring began to weep. People begged the old man to ask his neighbour's and the caid's forgiveness. But the Pathan kept silent. So did Jamila. Then the father and daughter held hands and went to the village named by the caid. A few days later the old man was found dead in the mountains—his heart broke from grief over his daughter.

"That's how we are," Afghans usually say after relating this legend.

The following morning there was no flying weather again. We decided to drive round the town. The hospital was where we visited first.

The doctor in charge told us medical supplies were short and the hospital was short-handed.

I recalled having read in the newspapers that enemies of the Revolution had destroyed some thirty hospitals in the country. The shortage of doctors, too, had its reasons. Many Afghan doctors came from prosperous families and did not like the system of free medical care. There was disaffection among them, and even outright sabotage.

The republic was training new medical personnel. But its numbers were still small. Besides, military operations were under way, which meant that military doctors were required.

After the Revolution, some international organizations and Western countries declined to assist Afghanistan in health matters. This added to the difficulties.

Something that looked like a stone lay on the table beside the patient's bed.

"Didn't I tell you not to use this?" the doctor said, raising his voice.

"What was it?"

The doctor explained it was moutmie which people thought cured certain diseases. After we left ward the doctor said sadly that old traditions died slowly.

"Is that bad?" I asked. "Folk medicine isn't always wrong."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders: "I don't say it's always wrong. Our people have treated themselves since times immemorial. They found medicinal herbs. But they were not always right. It was hit and miss. Modern medicine has introduced order in healing."

Pointing at the ward which we had just left, he said he had every reason to think the patient would not benefit from taking moutmie.

From the hospital we drove to the army people. The unit we visited was stationed on the fringe of the town, left of the highway. The guard at the checkpoint examined our papers very carefully.

We were introduced to the commander, who came out to greet us beside the headquarters. He was Comrade Wali, and I noticed that he limped.

"He lost a leg fighting the *dishmans*," Tughuyan told me. "But he wouldn't leave the army. He has been decorated."

Comrade Wali took us on a tour of his unit. One of the places he showed us was a classroom where soldiers were taught to read and write. "An illiterate soldier is a scourge," he said. "But what to do? We have to teach them to read and write when they come to the army."

The classroom was a light place with benches and desks. The soldiers rose when we entered, and the officer saluted smartly and said how many were present and what they were learning. It turned out they were learning verbs.

To teach everybody reading and writing was one of the key tasks that the PDPA had set the people. Everybody was involved, including the armed forces, because learning was essential for the development and progress of Afghanistan.

Considerable headway was made since the Revolution to eliminate illiteracy. There were a central and provincial government commissions with official plans and schedules for eliminating illiteracy in urban and rural areas, and there was a special department engaged in the matter under the Ministry of Education. New programmes were being drawn up, and methods worked out in relation to various segments of the population, taking account of cus-

toms, traditions, and other specific features. Steps were being taken to enlist women in literacy courses on a voluntary basis. Other steps were to involve members of various ethnic groups and tribes. And though the drive to eliminate illiteracy was not yet grown to the dimensions of a universal movement, as conceived in PDPA and government policy papers, the process was making dynamic progress.

The PDPA Central Committee's Political Bureau and the DRA Council of Ministers passed a decision to step up the drive against illiteracy. The Executive Committee of the DRA Council of Ministers, and Party and mass organisations were to examine progress in the literacy drive and to introduce improvements, while the State Planning Board, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance were to draw up recommendations within three months on improving the technical, financial, personnel, and academic backing of illiteracy courses.

The National Fatherland Front, the democratic organisations of youth and women, the trade unions, the Union of Agricultural Co-operatives, the Higher Council of Ulemas and Priests were called upon to form bodies within their organisations to combat illiteracy and organise volunteer teams of teachers.

We were just leaving the classroom where the soldiers were declining verbs, when an alarm was sounded. The soldiers rushed to the quadrangle outside the building. Only now I noticed that they had their submachine guns with them.

"What's happened?"

"*Dushmans* attacked a village," an officer replied.

## THE ADVENTURES OF ALI

In the morning after Mirjan had been led away by the soldiers, Asiya, the wife of Qudus, appeared in Rano's house. She put a jar of milk on the floor and covered it with a flatcake.

Then she sat down on the bed listened to Rano's tale of sore. Though she could not make head or tail of Rano's confused story, she flung curses on the heads of those who had led away Mirjan.

Ali heard Asiya questioning Mother, but Mother kept weeping.

"How many soldiers came?" Asiya asked. "Soldiers must fight and not go from house to house at night --"

"How are we going to live without Mirjan?" Rano said tearfully. "There's no food in the house, nor any money."

"Ali must take a job. He's a big boy," Asiya said.

"A job? Where? Who'll take him?"

"Yes, you're right," Asiya said. "Hard for the boy to find a job. But he must work or you'll die of hunger. Well, I must go--I'll look in the day."

"Yes, of course," Rano replied. "Come again, kind woman. We are always glad to see you." She walked Asiya to the door.

As soon as Asiya left, Ali picked up the flatcake and wanted to break it into four parts, as Father used to but, unhappily, upset the jar of milk. Gulshad and Farid began to cry, and Mother looked at him reproachfully.

Taking fright, Ali rushed into the street. He just

would not believe that Father had been led away, and not want to remember the search, the officer's questions, and his mother praying.

Looking up, Ali saw a woman beating a carpet on the roof of the adjoining house. Noticing the boy, she looked at him with undisguised curiosity. Ali quickly crossed to the other side of the street, but again felt someone's eyes on him. He turned around: people were looking at him from other houses. Ali had never thought that people's curiosity could cause such unpleasant sensations. "Everybody seems to know the soldiers had come and taken Father," he thought sadly.

It was time to go to school, where they had already passed nearly the whole alphabet and were now being called to the blackboard in turn to write the letters which the teacher named. At the end of the lesson, the teacher said: "In the north, Afghanistan borders on a great neighbour, the Soviet Union. Next time I will tell you about that country."

Ali wished the teacher would tell them about the Soviet Union at once. But the teacher, as though guessing Ali's wish, explained that he had to go to the district Council on important and urgent business.

After lessons, Ali wandered about the town. The jar of milk he had upset in the morning weighed heavily on his mind and excited his appetite. Ali was deep in thought as he walked and a two-wheeled cart nearly knocked him over. He leaped aside and saw the angry eyes of its Hazara driver.

"May Allah punish you!" the man shouted hoarsely, pushing the cart loaded with cases of tomatoes.

Ali glanced at him, hoping a tomato would drop

from the cart so he could take and eat it.

"The Green Bazaar is near-by," he remembered suddenly. "I am sure to find something there. Pity I have no money—"

At the entrance to the bazaar a tall young man blocked Ali's way. "What business have you here?"

"Nothing in particular," Ali replied and was about to turn back when the man took him painfully by the arm.

"Don't go to the bazaar," the man said with sinister overtones. "You're a stranger and have no business here."

The young man was joined by two tough-looking boys. Now three pairs of angry and unfriendly eyes were fixed on Ali. Ali tried to smile, but it seemed the boys were ready to start punching. So Ali turned around and walked off. He wandered about the streets of the old city for another half an hour, and then felt unbearable hunger. "Perhaps I should go home," he thought, but remembering the milk decided against it.

Glimpsing a crowd of people, Ali wanted to see what was going on. On approaching, he realised that it was a funeral. He decided to wait for the *iskat*, the alms given to the poor at funerals. Ali knew the custom because when they were burying Anahita, Father had given money to people, too.

Suddenly there were shouts, and shrill howls. The mullah began singing. The weeping had begun.

Funerals in Afghanistan consist of the following ritual: the deceased is buried on the day of death. Prayers are said at home, in the mosque, or near the cemetery. The mullah who says the prayers, stands facing the West. The mourners, too, turn to the West, men and women

standing separately. The deceased is lowered into the grave wrapped in a shroud, and is thereupon covered with a blanket. Only the rich are buried in coffins. After the burial, the mullah stays behind alone beside the grave for a while. The belief is that angels descend at this time and question the deceased. The mullah is thought to hear everything and is expected to help the deceased answering the questions. The *iskat* is distributed among mourners after they return from the cemetery.

Ali changed his mind, and did not wait for the *iskat*. He remembered Father saying no man of pride would ask for alms. And Ali knew he was proud.

It was getting dark. Ali stood outside an eating place, but dared not enter. The provoking smell of mutton excited his appetite. Looking around, Ali realised that he had come to an unknown place. An overcrowded bus, with people clinging to the doors, drove past. Ali thought for a moment it would be a lark to ride a bus. But you had to have money.

Ali knew there had always been a shortage of money in the family. He also knew there would be still less money now, for Father was the only breadwinner.

The boy crossed the street and stood outside a bookshop. He approached the long table in the street on which books were piled. Their many-coloured covers drew his attention. He wanted to pick up a book, leaf through it, look at the now familiar letters. The shopkeeper came out, and asked what Ali wanted.

Ali did not answer and walked away.

When it was quite dark Ali decided to look for a place to sleep. He came to the ruins of an abandoned house. Suddenly a man ran by, then another.

Both of them disappeared among the ruins.

"Halt! We'll shoot!" Soldiers with submachine guns at the ready were running along the street. Shots rang out. The firing came from the abandoned house. The soldiers fired back.

Suddenly, Ali felt his head grow heavy. His body slumped. He saw dark rings, then red ones, everything began to reel, and he fell.

Ali did not hear the soldier stop beside him, bend over him, and say something.

The two bandits in the ruins shouted they were surrendering. The firing stopped.

The commander summoned the soldiers back into the lorry.

"What are we going to do about the boy?" asked the soldier who stood beside Ali.

"Take him along," the officer said.

It was dark in the armoured vehicle, with just the instruments glowing green on the panel before the driver. Ali regained consciousness, but could not make out where he was. He was sitting on a hard seat, the soldier held him tightly round the shoulders. There were bumps and noises—the armoured vehicle drove off.

Ali was brought to the barracks and put on a bed. Soldiers came to look at him. Someone gave him water. Someone else opened a tin of beef.

Ali took the tin and licked the beef.

"He's hungry, fellows! He's really hungry!" someone exclaimed and gave Ali a spoon.

They wanted to know who he was, and where he was from.

"Who knows? He was lying unconscious in the street, and we thought he was wounded."

An interpreter started speaking with Ali, and all

the others waited for the little Afghan's tale.

"He says he had walked about the town all day long, and had nothing to eat," the interpreter finally related. "He says he had not eaten the day before, and that, in general, they had nothing to eat at home."

Tins, packages, even a pot of soup appeared at once on the little table beside Ali's bed.

"Who does he live with? Who is his father?" the soldiers asked.

"He has a father, mother, sister, and brother. The father works in a timberyard," the interpreter said.

The soldiers thought the people at home were probably worried about Ali, and were going to take him home.

"Let him rest up a bit first."

"Right."

It was dark when the car turned into the street named by the boy. The headlights showed two women beside the wall, talking. Seeing the jeep, they darted into the courtyard. Ali noticed that they were Asiya and his mother. The jeep stopped beside the wicket.

Three soldiers left the car. One of them picked up Ali and put him on the ground. Another placed the bag with the food beside the wall.

"Well, good-bye," said the interpreter and shook Ali's hand. Ali noticed that his mother and Asiya were watching with interest through the open wicket, but evidently did not dare to come out into the street.

"Where have you been all night?" Mother said after the jeep drove off.

"I was with them", the boy pointed in the di-

rection of the receding jeep. "They gave me food to eat and to bring home. There's the bag—"

In the morning, Asiya's husband Qudus came and said he would find Ali a job.

"Do you want a job?" he asked Ali.

The boy nodded.

"They'll pay you every day for what you do if you work hard," Qudus said.

"He'll work hard, you'll see," Rano replied.

Ali wondered what would happen to his school. But Mother said he would have to give that up, until Father came back.

Next morning Ali went to work for the first time in his life. Qudus walked beside him. An endless flow of carts headed along the streets in the direction of the bazaar.

A boy selling cigarettes rushed up to them, offering his wares. Others came up offering sweets, medicinal herbs, chewing gum, and sherbet, a sweet drink. Qudus paid no attention to them and Ali made out he wasn't interested too. But when passing a wooden cart with *lavash*, a kind of flat bread, Ali began to drag his feet, and felt his mouth water.

Noticing the boy's hungry look, Qudus mumbled understandingly that he knew a nice place nearby—

It was a teahouse—of which there is one on every corner in Kabul.

"Don't you think it's a nice place?" Qudus said proudly. "Here we'll have a bite to eat."

Ali had never been in teahouses or restaurants. He did not know the difference between them. And this made him think still more highly of Uncle Qudus.

At the entrance to the teahouse two little boys were fanning a fire with straw fans. The moment Qudus and Ali entered, the owner of the eatery, who had a large dirty towel tucked under his belt, came up to them.

"Salaam," Qudus said. "And who are those?" he nodded at a few men sitting round a table.

"They're alright. Have no fear," the keeper of the teahouse replied.

While Qudus conversed with the teahouse keeper, Ali looked curiously at the huge copper samovar in the corner—he had never seen anything like it before. Ali also looked at the two men sitting at the next table and drinking grape-pip vodka. Ali wondered how they could enjoy drinking that turbid liquid. Then Qudus and Ali were led to an oilcloth-covered table; a *bacha*, a boy waiter, brought plastic plates and a jug of water.

Qudus ordered *sbami kebab* made of minced meat steeped in vinegar. Waiting for it, Qudus read a newspaper, while Ali thought of his future job.

The *bacha* brought them the *kebab* and *lavash*. Ali and Qudus ate. Ali thought for a moment that Qudus wanted to say something, but then changed his mind.

"Well, let's go," Qudus said when he saw Ali finish the kebab.

"Uncle Qudus, where am I going to work?" Ali asked when they left the teahouse.

"A good place. He's a friend of mine. But you must obey him as you obey me."

"I will obey—"

"That's fine. Your elders would never teach you anything bad."

They came to the Green Bazaar, then turned right. Ali saw candy in bright wrappings on an open-air counter beside a shop. Put out your hand and take any package. The boy looked at the funny drawings on the wrappers: one of them showed a mouse beating a tomcat, another showed a smiling duck. Then Ali looked up and saw Qudus's back receding, and ran after him. A bull's head with closed eyes flashed by on his right, hanging on a butcher's hook. Ali took fright and ran faster still. He looked around and saw Qudus talking to a fat shopkeeper sitting on cases of potatoes.

"Why so late?" Ali heard the man say. "I begin at dawn. Don't you know, Qudus?"

The shopkeeper looked at Ali.

"So that's the boy?" There was disappointment in his voice.

"Yes, yes—it's him. Come here, Ali," Qudus said.

Ali walked up to them.

"This is Uncle Sahdi. You'll work for him. He has a fine big shop."

But to Ali the shop did not look big, nothing like the one selling candy. This one was small: dealing in potatoes and onions only.

Meanwhile, the shopkeeper felt the boy's shoulders and stomach, tested his elbows, and counted his fingers.

"Aya," he said after the inspection. "Feeble—"

Qudus was about to say something, but Sahdi interrupted him: "There's much work, and you've got to do it well," he looked strictly at Ali, and added: "Understand?"

That was how Ali got his job at the bazaar.

## AN OLD TOWN

It was a glorious day when we arrived in Mazar-i-Sharif. The mausoleum, its sparkling mosaics boasting all colours of the rainbow, was clearly visible from the helicopter. Thousands of pigeons were circling above it, and especially the holy pillar where the legendary Caliph Ali's clothes are hung each year.

I had already known before that the tomb of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Mohammed, who was assassinated at Al Kufa by enemy infiltrators, was in that old town, the seat of Balkh Province. They say that to prevent Ali's body from falling into the hands of enemies it was taken to the ancient town of Balkh, which was destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century.

In 1481-82 a magnificent mausoleum, *mazar* in Arabic, had been erected on Caliph Ali's tomb. Hence the town's name—Mazar-i-Sharif.

Modern-day Mazar-i-Sharif is a chemical centre. It has a mineral fertilizer plant, a plant making asphalt and reinforced concrete, automobile workshops, and a recently built bread factory.

But despite these shoots of civilisation that have sunk deep root in the old Moslem town, Mazar-i-Sharif is still a place where religious prejudice, Moslem ritual and custom, and the canons of the Koran govern the life of the vast majority of inhabitants and the hundreds of pilgrims who come to perform the *tawaf* beside Ali's mausoleum, a holy spot of Islam.

The square outside the main mosque, Rowzan-Sharif, is always crowded with believers. There are dervishes who for a coin will tell your fortune, venerable ulemas who administer blessings, muezzins from neighbouring provinces who come to hear a revered *batib* preacher, and simply religious fanatics who would travel a distance equivalent to a Moon merely to touch the caliph's holy tomb.

Few women in the old quarter of Mazar-i-Sharif would dare go out into the street without their *yashmak*. Disputes between townsmen are more frequently settled by the caid according to the shariat, the Mohammedan code of law, than at the town court. Parents prefer to send their children to the madrasseh rather than a secular school. And at the bazaar, pilgrims buy amulets and talismans, and bowls from which Caliph Ali is said to have drunk water, and scrolls of the Koran "sanctified" by none other than the Prophet Mohammed himself.

Party activists find it very hard to work in the old town. Still, the 20th century is gaining ground there slowly but surely.

On the day we arrived we visited the provincial branch of the Union of Writers. The middle-aged man who met us there, Muhammad Umar, said the branch had no paid staff yet.

Comrade Dekhneshin put something down in his notebook.

"How many writers are there in the province?"

"Oh, close to a hundred," Muhammad Umar said and, noticing that Comrade Dekhneshin was jotting something down, added: "And we ought to have a magazine of our own too. We need it very

much. Last year, I might add, we put out three collections of poetry."

He approached a bookcase, pulled out a little book, opened it, and began reciting poetry about the Revolution...

Later, Muhammad Sharif, secretary of the provincial PDPA committee, asked if I wanted to speak to a bandit chief.

"Who?" I asked in surprise.

"The bandit chief Wakil Hizamuddin or, more accurately, a former bandit chief who came over to the side of the People's Government with all members of his band."

I asked Wakil what had made him surrender. He took his time answering my question. First, he glanced at all the people around him as though he wanted to make sure there were none who had no business being there.

"All of us come from the land," he said. "We would rather work than fight. Besides, who are we to fight, and for what? The People's Government is looking after people. That means it is looking after us. So why fight it?"

In Muhammad Sharif's office we spoke of *dushmans*.

"The bandits are still doing the people a lot of harm," Sharif said. "They raid villages, and they cut off the water supply up in the hills; for that's where it flows from and where the bandits are hiding out. Besides, they mine roads, especially bad, rutted roads where it is easier to hide a mine."

He sipped some tea, which had grown cold by then, and paused.

"The bandits in the villages watch out for those who go to town," said a lean youth in eyeglasses,

a member of the local Party committee.

“Why?”

“Evidently, they don’t want farmers to have any contact with the townsmen. And that’s not all—they’re afraid that anyone going to town might inform on them.”

Muhammad Sharif amplified: “Nowadays, the bandits are afraid of their own shadow. They had been much more brazen before.”

He said there were more and more deserters from the bandit gangs, and the enemy was compelled to think of new tactics.

“Nowadays, the *dushmans* avoid full-scale engagements with regular troops; they prefer to operate in small groups, to attack from behind,” he added.

The people are less afraid of them, too. Formerly, I was told, the bandits would gallop full speed into a village and do whatever they wished—shooting people or punishing them publicly, and taking some along, giving them arms and making them join their bands.

“That has changed,” Sharif said. “In one village the bandits wanted to take along the young men, but the elders wouldn’t permit it. And the bandits left empty-handed.”

“There are also cases,” the slim youth related, “when women and children go to their fathers, husbands and brothers in the hills and ask them to return home—for you want a man in the house to work the land, to earn a living.”

Fragrant fresh tea had been served several times. It was a necessary attribute of all hearty conversation. The activists of the Mazar-i-Sharif Party Committee spoke of the difficulties and complica-

tions in their work, and of the innovations, the changes, that were occurring in the thinking of people.

In some villages, they said, the people's power was established peacefully, at the request of the peasants. Often, elders came to the Party Committee or the governor's office and asked for the new government to take control of their village.

I remembered that the tribes had consented to form guard regiments. I saw volunteers of one such regiment in Paktia Province formed by men of the Ahmadzei tribe.

It had grown dark outside, the air was fresher, easier to breathe.

"It's late," said Muhammad Sharif. "The curfew starts soon."

We went outdoors. It was quiet. The good people of Mazar-i-Sharif were sound asleep.

In the morning Muhammad took me to see the sights of the town.

He pointed at a stone building. "That's where we have our courses for illiterates," he said. "Before the Revolution it was a wool merchant's warehouse. He fled abroad and we adapted the building for our courses."

The secretary told me they needed many more courses if all those who wanted to learn to read and write were to be covered. Moreover, courses were needed in the villages as well.

Two lorries drove past. Behind them was a car with a loudspeaker.

"Our agitators going to the countryside," Muhammad commented. "We often send teams out to explain things to the populace."

The teams called meetings in the villages, had

talks with people, and usually brought a doctor along to render first aid and examine the sick. "We don't have many surgeries yet in the villages, and the doctor is most welcome. Often, too, the team takes along flour and salt, and other necessities—"

An elderly man approached Muhammad.

"Salaam aleikum, Secretary." He said he wanted to speak with him.

"Speak up then," Muhammad replied. The man glanced at me, and seeing that I cramped his style I walked away a few paces. But the old man still hesitated. It was obvious that he did not want to speak in my presence.

"I'll come to your office," he said.

"Fine."

The man bowed and crossed to the other side of the street.

In the plane returning to Kabul I met a most interesting fellow-traveller. He was in the seat beside mine, and was holding an open book. I glanced at its pages several times to see what he was reading. The Afghan noticed, and faced me.

"Do you know Afghan history?" he asked in Russian.

I was taken aback: "Where did you learn to speak Russian?"

"I studied in the Soviet Union—Moscow University."

Very soon we were immersed in a conversation. My travelling companion told me that the land we were crossing had been over-run by conquerors many many times: first in the 13th century, then by Tamerlane and his host in the 14th century; in the 16th to the 18th centuries, too, the land was

under a foreign boot.

The western part of Afghanistan, my companion informed me, had been conquered by the Safavid shahs, while the eastern regions fell to the Delhi emperors.

"Are you a historian?" I asked.

He nodded, and said for Afghanistan the 19th century had been a time of many wars. Having subjugated India, the British, started a campaign against the Afghans in 1832. It lasted four years. The British were defeated.

That I had known, as I did that in 1878 Britain had a second try at conquering Afghanistan, and was compelled to withdraw its troops after three years of fighting. Still, it managed to saddle Afghanistan with an unequal treaty. A sizable territory inhabited by Afghans became part of British India.

By the end of the 19th century, my companion was saying, barter had at last given way to cash trading. The economic ties between various regions grew stronger. Abdur Rahman, amir of Afghanistan, managed to build a fairly strong, centralised, feudal authoritarian state. But under him, and also under his successor Habibullah Khan, Afghanistan was isolated from the outside world.

In February 1919, Amanullah Khan assumed the crown, and the following month let the British Viceroy in India know that he had unilaterally annulled all treaties and agreements imposed on Afghanistan by the British. He proclaimed his country a sovereign and independent state.

"Britain was not about to swallow this brazen act," my historian said, "and began massing troops near the Afghan border.... That, in effect, would have been the beginning of a third Anglo-Afghan

war. To avoid it, Amanullah Khan addressed himself to Russia and Lenin—”

In due course I would come upon the text of Amanullah Khan's appeal.

“To His Majesty the President of the Great Russian State,” it said. “The King of Afghanistan, Amir Amanullah, sends you friendly greetings and his utmost respect.... I am informing you of my coronation and enthronement, which took place in Kabul, the capital of independent and free Afghanistan, on the 19th jemadi-ul-avval of the 1337th year of the hidjra, which corresponds to the 21st of February 1919 by the Christian calendar. I consider a statement of unity and friendship urgently necessary for the sake of unity, peace and the good of mankind.

“Though in spirit and nature Afghanistan has ever since its emergence and founding always been a supporter of freedom and equality, it was for certain reasons denied the chance of maintaining ties and communications with other like states and peoples.

“Since you, Your Majesty, my great and gracious friend, President of the Great Russian State, have, along with your comrades, friends of humanity, undertaken the honourable and noble task of caring for the peace and good of people and have declared the principle of freedom and the equality of countries and peoples of all the world, I am happy to send you this friendly message from independent and free Afghanistan for the first time in the name of the Afghan people aspiring to progress.

“I strongly hope and beg my highly-placed friend to accept my respects.

“Written on the 6th rajab-ul-muradjab of the 1337th year of the hidjra, corresponding to the 7th of April 1919 by the Christian calendar.

“Your friend,  
“Amanullah.”

The reply came at once. On behalf of the Soviet Government, Lenin proffered a hand of friendship to the southern neighbour.

“Britain’s third attempt to seize Afghanistan fell through ignominiously,” my companion said.

I recalled that a Treaty of Friendship was concluded between Afghanistan and the Russian Federation in 1921, based on the principles of equality and establishing diplomatic relations. The Soviet Government granted Afghanistan financial and technical aid.

Amir Amanullah Khan tried to build a centralised administration. He fought against extortionate duties and put an end to slavery, but the laws he enacted were not always consistent.

His successor Nadir Shah followed a similar policy until he was assassinated in November 1933. Zahir Shah assumed the crown. German penetration made itself felt during his reign. Nazi agents sought to establish themselves in the country under the guise of geologists, doctors, engineers, and teachers. All the same, as in World War I, Afghanistan was neutral in World War II.

By the end of the 1940s, Afghan society seemed to wake up to the facts of 20th-century life. The first political groups appeared. A democratic movement emerged, gaining strength by the 1960s.

I asked my new acquaintance for his name. He said what it was, but I could not hear it because an aircraft was revving its engine at that moment.

## THE ONES WHO SHOOT

In Kabul the Foreign Ministry held a press conference for foreign correspondents: a captured Pakistani agent, a stocky young man wearing a thin moustache, was brought before them—fidgety, nervous, brushing his hands against the table with the microphones.

His story:

"I was born in Pakistan. On finishing secondary school I joined a paratroopers' school, and was later sent to a special school in Quetta."

Asked what he was taught there, he said the art of spying—cryptography, radio transmission, coding, etc.

"Who were your instructors?"

"Mainly Americans."

"Their names?"

"I don't remember them."

Then he was asked what he did after finishing the Quetta school.

"Helped to deliver arms from Pakistan to Afghanistan, and earlier this year was dropped by parachute in Nimruz Province."

"What was your mission?"

"To gather intelligence about the location of Afghan troops, to contact the Kabul underground, to organise terrorist acts—"

When the press conference was over, the journalists were invited to inspect arms captured from enemy agents in the DRA: grenade-throwers, machine guns, and submachine guns, with brands

on them, saying: "Made in USA" or "Made in Israel".

Reactionaries generously supply Afghan counter-revolutionaries with modern arms, and teach *dushmans* the latest methods of subversive warfare, terrorist acts, and spying. Western intelligence services stick at nothing to organise subversive groups, *dushman* bands, and to try and destabilise the situation in Afghanistan. The moving spirit and organiser is the USA. Soon after the April Revolution of 1978 it drew up a large-scale action programme directed to overthrowing the new government. In June 1978 in Annapolis, Maryland, the NATO High Command held a symposium to discuss the revolutionary developments in Afghanistan and their "repercussions for America".<sup>1</sup> The symposium decided to give all-out support to the Afghan counter-revolutionaries.

In 1979, Zbigniew Brzezinski, then National Security adviser of the president, publicly admitted that he had set up the arms flow to Afghan counter-revolutionaries.<sup>2</sup> And in 1980, US journalist Tad Szulc reported that after dusk on January 9th a group of Senators had met officers of the Central Intelligence Agency in Room S-407 on the Senate side of the Capitol known as the "most 'secure' room in all of Congress", to discuss CIA plans of covert, paramilitary operations in Afghanistan. On the following day a participant in the meeting, CIA Deputy Director Carlucci briefed President Carter

<sup>1</sup>*Undeclared War. Armed Intervention and Other Forms of Interference in the Internal Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.* Information and Press Department, DRA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kabul, 1984, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>*Time*, No. 24, June 11, 1984, p. 10.

on its results and the latter signed a Presidential Decision setting the programme in motion.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that there was a secret anti-Afghan alliance was revealed shortly before his death by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in an interview to the National Broadcasting Corporation (USA). He said that the moment the counter-revolution reared its head in Afghanistan, the Americans made contact with him and began flying in arms to the *dushmans* in US planes from Cairo.

The USA motivated its help in organising the counter-revolution in Afghanistan by "strategic interests in the region", and, as later events showed, cast the CIA in the role of their main promoter. Soon after the April Revolution, CIA regional headquarters, staffed, among others, by Louis Adams, John J. Reagan, Robert Lessard, and Lee Robenson, CIA Asian affairs experts, was transferred from Teheran to Peshawar in Pakistan. With considerable financial and other resources at their disposal, the CIA agents set up a string of training camps along the Pakistani-Afghan border, which trained, armed and otherwise equipped nearly 30,000 counter-revolutionary bandits in just the few months between June and November 1979. Shipments of arms bought by the CIA arrived in this region of Pakistan. Initially, preference was given to Soviet-made arms or their imitations, so that when *dushmans* were arrested or *dushman* bands wiped out in Afghan territory, it could be said that the arms had been captured in battle from Afghan or, better still, Soviet troops.

By 1982, however, the undeclared war against

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times Magazine*, April 6, 1980, p. 28.

Democratic Afghanistan had escalated to a point where the CIA saw fit to supply the counter-revolutionaries with the latest Western arms.

Arms and ammunition reach Pakistan through a variety of channels. One such channel is the Interarms of Manchester corporation headed by Samuel Cummings, a CIA agent since 1950. Back on January 17, 1980, he told a group of US journalists that customers from Pakistan could get anything they wished from his company at any moment. His Manchester-Karachi-Peshawar-Parachinar arms bridge is functioning to this day.<sup>1</sup>

In its issue of June 11, 1984, *Time* described some of the CIA operations against Afghanistan in a feature entitled "Caravans on Moonless Nights". The weekly reported that the CIA supplied "rebels with grenades, RPG-7 rocket launchers and portable surface-to-air missiles, as well as with radio equipment and medicines".

The arms came from US Army ordnance depots in the USA or the territory of its NATO allies, chiefly the FRG. After erasing the trade mark, the arms were packed into special containers and shipped to one of the many CIA transit points in the Persian Gulf area, notably in Saudi Arabia and Oman. There the containers were camouflaged as ordinary commercial cargo and brought to Pakistan by sea, whence they were smuggled by secret mountain passes into Afghanistan.

The journal traces the carting of a lot of US mines to Afghan counter-revolutionaries. All US markings had been removed from them before they were shipped across the Atlantic to a CIA

<sup>1</sup>*The CIA in the Secret War Against Afghanistan*, Kabul, 1982.

depot near Stuttgart. There they were packed into special shock-absorbent material, with the invoices saying that they were telephone equipment for a certain religious organisation. From Stuttgart a CIA pilot in a special plane whisked the mines to a secret military airfield in Oman; whence they were shipped to Pakistan, and carted by *dushmans* to a deserted spot near the Afghan border.<sup>1</sup>

The CIA supplies the bandits with more than just arms. The counter-revolutionaries get paratroop equipment, concentrated foods, topographic maps showing targets for sabotage and subversion, army radio and space-communication stations.

Afghanistan's enemies also see to the military training of counter-revolutionaries. The CIA has a string of training centres teaching use of explosives and demolition, handling of all types of arms, and hand-to-hand combat.

Leaders of the larger *dushman* organisations are trained at Pakistan's regular higher and secondary military schools. Scouts, anti-aircraft gunners, saboteurs, mortar men, and radio operators are trained at special centres under officers and reservists of the Pakistani armed forces, and by experts from the USA, Iran, France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Britain, and Japan.

The bandit-training system in Pakistan was restructured under CIA guidance. CIA agents saw to it that the various camps should be "specialised": some began teaching bandits the use of recoilless guns against tanks and of other weapons. Some taught nothing but mine layers, etc. An Institute of New and National Languages has been founded

<sup>1</sup> *Time*, No. 24, June 11, 1984, p. 13.

near the Pakistani-Afghan border where CIA officers psychologically condition bandit chiefs before they are sneaked into Afghanistan. There are three- and six-month schools where trainees get a full course in guerrilla tactics originally designed for the Panama Canal Zone police school.

Early in 1985, the DRA Foreign Ministry published a White Book containing numerous facts about the anti-Afghan activity of the Pakistani military regime. A map shows the location of *dushman* training centres in Pakistani territory. They dot the Afghan border like wasps' nests, representing part of the many-phased training of professional assassins adept in the use of up-to-date weapons and in sabotage and terrorism. The training centre of the Islamic Society of Afghanistan, for example, 20 kilometres southwest of Peshawar, consists of a "military lyceum" training rank-and-file bandits and a "military school" for training the more capable bandit chiefs. Both are staffed by American and other Western instructors. Of late, too, *dushman* units have been receiving additional training with formations of the regular Pakistani army.

The White Book contains a list of arms depots in Pakistani territory. Zia-ul-Haq's regime provides ways and means for supplying *dushman* bands with foreign-made arms and other equipment. Pakistan's armed forces participate in building airfields, roads, approach routes and other installations for the Afghan counter-revolutionaries.

The Pakistani authorities have taken it upon themselves to deliver arms and ammunition for the *dushmans* directly to the border where caravans to Afghanistan are fitted out. Bands operating

in the northwestern regions get arms from Pakistan via Iran.

Of late, the Pakistani regime has begun increasingly to engage in direct armed provocations. Afghan villages near the border are being shelled, aircraft are attacked in Afghan air space, which is more and more frequently violated by the Pakistani air force. Pakistani servicemen keep crossing into Afghan territory.

The anti-Afghan policy of the Zia-ul-Haq regime, says the White Book, may be traced to Pakistan's dependent position in the coalition of forces active against the DRA. This explains its refusal to reach an all-embracing political normalisation of the situation around Afghanistan in the indirect Afghan-Pakistani negotiations in Geneva.

Ideologues of the counter-revolution portray the bandits fighting the People's Government of Afghanistan as "champions of the faith". But this term is at variance with the standards of international law under which these "champions" are nothing but hired killers.

UN Resolution 1303 adopted at the 28th General Assembly in December 1973 says: "The use of mercenaries ... against the national liberation movements struggling for their freedom and independence ... is considered to be a criminal act and the mercenaries should accordingly be punished as criminals."

The CIA spurns this resolution. It keeps raising the "Premium" it pays to mercenaries for each terrorist act or act of sabotage on Afghan soil—5,000 to 7,000 afghani for killing a soldier of the Afghan army, twice as much for killing a party activist or government employee, 30,000 for killing an officer,

and 100,000 afghani for destroying a tank.

In a bid to reanimate the "Afghan question", Washington is expanding the CIA-coordinated ideological warfare against the DRA. A variety of "information centres" have been set up in Pakistan to spread slanders about the situation in Afghanistan. But the main psychological warfare centre is the US Embassy in Pakistan. Here, US intelligence officers hold regular press conferences, at which they distribute printed matter containing malicious lies and referring to "trustworthy diplomatic sources" and the "evidence" of unnamed "witnesses".

The scale of these acts of psychological warfare is growing. Subversive radio stations broadcast to Afghanistan every day. In 1985, a new radio station, Free Afghanistan, was set up. Which is clear evidence of gross and undisguised US interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign democratic country with the unrestricted use of counter-revolutionary organisations fighting the People's Government of the DRA.

Recently the newspaper *Haqiqat-e-Engelabe Saur* reported that *dushmans* had stoned a woman and her daughter to death in Balkh Province because they had been learning to read and write; unconfirmed reports said the killers belonged to the Hezbe Islami Party of Afghanistan.

The Hezbe Islami Party of Afghanistan is one of the large counter-revolutionary organisations, formed in Pakistan in 1976 through the merger of several extremist groups on the extreme right wing of the international terrorist organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood and its youth division.

Among members of the Hezbe Islami Party are former government officials, traders, déclassé ele-

ments, and people misled by religious propaganda.

Those who want to join the Party must have an introduction from at least one of its members, and must pay an admission fee of 500 afghani. The neophyte swears allegiance on the Koran, and betrayal is punishable by death—often also the death of the “traitor’s” family as a warning to others.

The man at the head of the Hezbe Islami Party is Ghulbiddin Hikmatiar.

Born in 1944 in the family of a wealthy landlord, he was an activist and then leader of the Afghan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and was tried for having organised the killings of several progressive personalities in 1971. Hikmatiar is a zealous advocate of Islami “revival” on the Iranian model.

Among the other counter-revolutionary organisations fighting against the People’s Government is the Islamic Society of Afghanistan (Jamaat-i-Islami), formed in Pakistan in 1976 by reactionary emigres and consisting of a certain number of priests, and of former landlords, officials, and prosperous peasants. Its main bases and headquarters are in Pakistan, but it has agents in Iran too. Its leader, Rabbani Burhanuddin, born in 1940, is a bachelor of philosophy and has close ties with the CIA, which supports him financially.

A National Front of the Islamic Revolution in Afghanistan was formed in Pakistan in 1978. Its headquarters is staffed by trainees of the International Police Academy and a school for saboteurs, both in the United States.

The organisation has close ties with the spy services of Israel, the USA, and Egypt. Its leader, Sayed Ahmad Ghilani, comes from an influential feudal clan with large landed estates in different parts

of Afghanistan. The man is connected with the royal family, being married to the granddaughter of the former king, which fact he presents as one of his claims to being the "father" of the Afghan counter-revolution.

Most of Ghilani's followers are former landlords and government officials, and a mass of young men studying to be priests. Before the April Revolution, Ghilani operated a Peugeot agency in Kabul, and managed vast landed estates. After his land was confiscated in 1978 he fled to Pakistan, where he launched hostilities against the People's Government.

The National Liberation Front of Afghanistan was founded in 1978, uniting eight emigre groups of so-called "zealous Mohammedans". Its leader, Sabatullah Mojaddedi, born 1926, is a theologian and one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. He had been a moving spirit behind the establishment of an Afghan branch of that organisation, after whose split emerged the Hezbe Islami Party under Hikmatiar and the Society of Muslim Theologians under Mojaddedi.

The platform of the Movement of the Islamic Revolution in Afghanistan is fanatically religious. The Movement's leader, Muhammad Nabih Muhammad, born 1936, is a theologian, an orthodox Mohammedan, and an avowed monarchist.

Most members of the Movement are religious fanatics, and its bands are known to be especially brutal, which evokes disapprobation even among counter-revolutionaries.

There have been attempts to unite, to form a "united front" of all the counter-revolutionary organisations. But they were unsuccessful. There is an obvious split between anti-government

emigres into two opposite camps—monarchists and “Islami republicans”. There are also national and ethnic distinctions between them. Besides, organisations inclining towards Shia Islam are in most cases openly hostile to Sunni parties and groups.

Armed clashes have occurred and are becoming more frequent between bandits of different parties and ethnic backgrounds. The Afghan press has reported pitched battles between gangs belonging to the Hezbe Islami Party and the Movement of the Islamic Revolution, with hundreds of killed and wounded on both sides.

Pakistan is going out of its way in a bid to unite the Afghan counter-revolutionary groups. And for a reason. In April 1978, Afghan-Pakistani relations deteriorated. This was due in many ways to the activity of Afghan counter-revolutionary emigres, who installed themselves chiefly in the territory of the neighbour country. They began pouring into Pakistan right after the April Revolution, with their numbers growing as the social and economic transformations proceeded in the DRA.

That most emigres picked Pakistan is due to several reasons: first, the majority in the two countries belong to Sunni Islam; second, close ties had always prevailed between the Pathan and the Baluchi tribes living on both sides of the border, and, third, the authorities in Iran, which is Afghanistan’s neighbour in the west, restricted the influx of refugees owing to fear of the revolutionising influence of Afghan events. Furthermore, many stretches of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan had not been guarded until recently.

By the spring of 1979 Afghan refugees in Pakistan totalled between 35,000 and 40,000, and towards

the end of that year spiralled to more than 200,000.

Most Afghan emigres settled in the North-West Frontier Province, Baluchistan, and Chitral. They are closest to Afghanistan and their climate is much like that of Afghanistan. Besides, many of the emigres belong to tribes living on both sides of the border.

What was the emigres' social background? They were feudal lords, owners of big landed estates, wealthy merchants, smugglers, religious figures, former officers of the Daoud army and police, and members of a certain segment of the intelligentsia.

On January 18, 1979, in Lahore, leaders of various counter-revolutionary organisations held a conference and decided to form a Struggle Committee to co-ordinate resistance to the People's Government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in collaboration with representatives of "friendly powers".

In March 1979, leaders of the counter-revolutionary Hezbe Islami Party of Afghanistan, the Islamic Society of Afghanistan, and the Movement of the Islamic Revolution in Afghanistan announced at press conferences that they were starting a "holy war" against the DRA government with the goal of establishing an Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Pakistan's rightist clerical parties and organisations, such as Jamaat-i-Islami and Jamaat-i-Ulama-i-Islami, wholeheartedly approved of the activity of the Afghan counter-revolutionaries and demanded that Pakistan support them more vigorously in the "struggle against communism in Afghanistan"; they also called on other Moslem states and the UN to back their struggle.

The more moderate conservative elements in Pakistan, such as those in the Tehrik-i-Istiqlal party, who wanted no deterioration of relations with Afghanistan, on the one hand, and no strengthening of the clerical forces, on the other, favoured settling the refugee problem by negotiations with the Afghan government. The change of power-holders, they pointed out, was Afghanistan's internal affair, and suggested treating the refugee problem in a "humanitarian" context.

The left and democratic parties—the Pakistan Socialist, Pakistan People's and Pakistan Democratic—along with some trade unions and the student organisations considered the refugees enemies of the Afghan people, and held that they were a menace to stability in Pakistan and to security throughout the Middle East. They called on the authorities to forbid the refugees to conduct any activity hostile to the People's Government of Afghanistan, to close the Pakistani-Afghan border, and to expel political emigres. Islamabad, however, had other motives in its approach to the Afghan refugees. It had a stake in normal inter-state relations with the neighbouring country, for it knew full well that anything it did against the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan would affect its relations not only with that country, but also and inevitably with the Soviet Union, in which Pakistan's leaders were highly interested. Besides, the tens of thousands of aliens were creating a variety of social, economic, and other problems.

The reactionary Islamabad military junta, however, was naturally hostile to Democratic Afghanistan. It was prepared to back all subversion against the new Afghan government, and was being

egged on by rightist clerical elements inside the country, other conservative forces of the Moslem world, and by imperialist quarters, notably those of the USA.

As a result Ziaul-Haq's government settled for the two-faced policy of backing the counter-revolutionary activity of Afghan emigres, on the one hand, and pretending that there was no such activity, on the other. The official version was that Pakistan's authorities were suffering the stay of refugees exclusively for humanitarian reasons, giving them shelter but prohibiting political activity. The Pakistani government denied that there were camps where Afghan refugees were given military training. And when reports of Afghan counter-revolutionary acts of subversion from Pakistani territory appeared in the press, the authorities declared blandly that the refugees had settled in a zone inhabited by tribes, where it was hard to control them. It is all too well known, however, that Afghan emigres were active not only in the "tribal belt". The rebels, the US press reported, had their headquarters in Peshawar, while their leaders frequently held press conferences in Islamabad and Lahore.

It is an interesting point that the Pakistani authorities profited materially from the stay of Afghan emigres in the country. Exaggerating the difficulties created by the influx of refugees, they requested and received greater foreign economic and military aid.

After the requisite training, gangs of counter-revolutionaries were being smuggled into Afghan territory. By the end of 1979, armed gangs were active in 18 out of the 26 provinces of the DRA.

Their sabotage and terrorism spelled suffering and death to thousands of people. Considerable damage was done to the country's economy. The area sown to crops shrank by 9 per cent, grain harvests dropped by 10 per cent, and those of industrial crops by 25.

In addition to armed struggle, the Afghan counter-revolutionaries, who co-ordinated their activity closely with that of anti-communist centres in the USA and other imperialist countries, planned total "psychological warfare" against the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

From 1978 through 1982 the broadcasting time to Afghanistan of subversive radio stations increased 400 to 500 per cent. The Voice of America, the BBC, the Voice of Israel, and the Deutsche Welle increased their staffs broadcasting in Dari and Pushtu. A number of emigre radio stations were set up in Pakistan on money generously supplied by intelligence agencies of imperialist states.

Counter-revolutionary leaflets in Dari and Pushtu, and an avalanche of illustrated printed matter—from anti-government posters to matchbox labels—were being printed in the USA, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan. Widely used, too, was the spoken word, consisting of heart-to-heart and group talks, rumours and gossip, and tape recordings of proclamations calling for Islam unity against "enemies of Islam" and for the overthrow of the revolutionary authorities in Afghanistan.

Counter-revolutionaries tried time and again to infiltrate and influence the Afghan army, state security agencies, the Tsarandoi, and even Party organisations. In the summer of 1982, leaflets appeared in Herat calling on Party members to come out

against "mercenary Kabul", while other leaflets sought to discredit the programme of the 9th Plenum of the PDPA Central Committee.

Propaganda addressed to workers and townsmen drew attention to the country's economic difficulties. And addressing peasants, youth, and students, the counter-revolutionaries resorted to religious and nationalist arguments. By and large, counter-revolutionary propaganda made use of Islamic slogans about the "purity of Islamic society" and "Islamic justice". It was presented in the form of conversations with references to the Koran and examples from national history, to which Moslems are accustomed.

The counter-revolutionaries made the most of the Afghans' piousness, exploiting Islamic dogmas to the hilt. One such dogma is the *jihad* (holy war) which Mohammedans must fight against the unfaithful (the *kafirs*) until Islam's final victory throughout the world.

Dogma has it that all Moslems must take part in the *jihad*—men who can carry weapons, and also old men, women and children, who help them. The *jihad* requires all people either to take part in the war or to assist it materially. Dire punishment is to be meted out for insubordination or desertion. That is why the *jihad* is equivalent to total war.

Other terms associated with the *jihad* are *gbazi* (soldier of Allah) and *shahid* (faithful to Allah).

A *gbazi* is permitted to kill the unfaithful, which is said to be a pious act. A *gbazi* who has killed an unfaithful is forgiven all his sins and goes to paradise after death.

The *shahid* dogma is associated with the Koran's eternal sacredness. Moslem fanatics say the body

of a true believer sanctified by pronouncements from the Koran is invulnerable to bullets. That is why, indeed, bandits have lines from the Koran tattooed on their backs, chests, legs and arms, and why they carry talismans and amulets. It is hard to prove to these people that this is senseless. Disappointment in the *shabid* dogma usually comes after a wounding.

Leaders of counter-revolutionary gangs often distribute cartridges and handgrenades, sometimes simply rocks, saying they were sanctified by the Koran and possessed supernatural powers. The "champions of Islam" were to use them in critical and desperate situations only. "This will destroy enemies and save you," they said. But since people in desperate situations usually perished, no witnesses remained to deny the "miraculous" powers of "sanctified" weapons.

Islamic dogmas are extensively reflected in the rules and programmes of counter-revolutionary parties and organisations. Take the rules and the programme of the Hezbe Islami Party of Afghanistan.

The rules, officially named Duties of a Member of the Hezbe Islami Party of Afghanistan, are divided into two parts. The first says the seven Sunni dogmas are basic for all members, namely, faith in the one Lord, Allah, and in his power, in angels, divine books, prophets, the day of judgement, providence, and resurrection.

All these tenets are set out in theological texts and are Islam's basic requirement of the faithful. In the rules of the Hezbe Islami Party they are entrenched as a statutory demand, emphasising the organisation's Islamic nature.

On the basis of the above, the party's "theorists" draw political conclusions suiting its tasks. Elaborating on the first dogma of faith in the one Lord, Allah, and in his power, they stress that a member of the party must not only believe, but also fight for the faith, and that the Prophet Mohammed not only preached but also fought for Islam with arms in hand. The lot of an individual, they say, is predetermined by Allah, meaning that all events are ordained and the faithful must join the *jihad* without fear, for death in a holy war is the fulfilment of Allah's will.

In the second part of the rules, the obligations of the party member in his private, public and family life, and in his relations with other Moslems, are presented in the spirit of medieval Islami norms interwoven with the obligations of a member of the party. They essentially coincide with the obligations of any Moslem believer.

The other basic document of the Hezbe Islami Party is its programme. It explains the party's aims and objectives, and professes that it is fighting for the ideal of an Islamic world order.

The Hezbe Islami Party of Afghanistan, says the preamble to the programme, follows the principles of Islam and the way blazed by the pious khalifs to carry into effect all precepts of the Moslem religion—eliminate exploitation and oppression, root out corruption and evil, conduct life on Islamic principles and establish justice in various fields; introduce and perfect the good and fight the evil; depose despotic systems and establish power on the principle of service to the people; cultivate the Islamic mentality, the Islamic spirit, and religious feelings, and spread the appeals of Islam and the

divine word throughout the world.

To get down to the substance of the above, we would do well to glance at the comments given in the programme. The terms "exploitation" and "oppression" are interpreted as attributes of any system that is not based on the ideas of Islamic justice, such as all forms of colonialism, bourgeois democracy, and socialism. Islamic social justice is identified with the medieval Islamic theocratic system. Closest to this ideal are the present-day feudal regimes of the Persian Gulf emirates and sultanates, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, and, to some extent, Jordan and Morocco.

The terms "corruption" and "evil" are identified with present-day culture, both Western bourgeois and progressive, inasmuch as all cultures of the unfaithful are said to subvert the traditional pillars of Islam. The "ideologists" of the Hezbe Islami Party put many things under this head, such as modern education, women renouncing the veil, and the cinema, television, music and theatre if they allow the least departure from the postulates of Islamic morality.

The word "despotism" is identified with the power of monarchs who ignore the meaning and influence of Islam, and with socialism, communism, and the regimes in certain Mid-East republics following the non-capitalist way.

A prominent place in the programme of the Islamic Party is devoted to the idea of spreading Islam throughout the world. The idea had taken a long time to mature among Islamic radicals and was always expressed in most cautious terms. It was proclaimed publicly for the first time by Ayatollah Khomeini after the victory of the revolution in Iran.

In an interview to *Spiegel*, the West German weekly, Hezbe Islami Party leader Ghulbiddin Hikmatiar stressed that his aim was to first depose the people's power in Afghanistan and then "liberate" from "communist rule" the Moslem nations of the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union.

The basic documents of the other counter-revolutionary organisations of Afghan emigres are, in substance, much the same as those of the Islami Party.

\* \* \*

One morning Mother sent Ali to ask Aunt Asiya for some salt.

"Tell her we'll return it in a few days."

The door to Qudus's house was open, and Ali entered, heading for the steep stairway at the end of the short corridor. He stopped halfway up the stairs because he heard the radio say, "...Those who own land, houses, and shops in Afghanistan will soon lose everything because the present government is against the sacred right of private ownership". After a pause, he heard the following words, "You have been listening to a broadcast from Pakistan". Music followed, and Ali walked into the room. Asiya, who had just turned off the radio, appeared in the doorway.

"Mother said to ask you for some salt. She said we'll return it," Ali declaimed.

"Why return it? Bread and salt must always be shared," Asiya replied, suppressing her alarm at having possibly been heard listening to the Pakistan broadcast, and turning back into the kitchen.

A greedy woman by nature, Asiya would usually have turned down any request. But this time she gave Ali a whole jar of salt, not cheap at the price of that day. And Ali understood that Asiya was buying his silence so he would not tell about her listening to counter-revolutionary broadcasts. It was, indeed, news to Ali that Asiya, and consequently Qudus, took an interest in such broadcasts.

Qudus and Asiya were disliked by their neighbours. He was a taciturn person of whom people said even wild horses couldn't drag a word out of him. He owned three houses at different ends of the street. He and his wife occupied one of them (their children were grown up and had left the paternal home), and let the other two to tenants.

People recalled that when one of his houses was afire, he had said nothing too. He just stood there with lips compressed, watching. He did not even notice his wife entering the burning house at a risk to her life. It turned out that Asiya had a boxful of money hidden under the floorboards without his knowing it. It came from her village relatives in payment for fruit sold by Qudus. By tradition Qudus was head of the house, though, in fact, Asiya was in charge of all money. To be sure, this was natural for Qudus came from poor origins, while Asiya had rich parents.

... Forty years before, young Qudus, strong and likeable, caught the fancy of Asiya's parents. He was a keen worker, and sharp of brain. His poverty, they decided, was no obstacle to his marrying Asiya. They sent the young couple to live in town and gave Asia money to build a house and buy a shop. Qudus became a shopkeeper and sold fruits sent him from the village. Within three years, he

and Asiya built a second house, bought some livestock, and prospered...

After dark, Qudus came to Mirjan.

"Salaam aleikum," he said drily.

Mirjan invited him into the house.

"Need I be invited into my own house?" Qudus asked. "I'm no guest, I'm the landlord."

Glancing at the food on the mat, he added:

"Though it is said, 'First food, then words', I must talk to you, Mirjan. Let's go outside."

"Have a bite first," Mirjan said.

"No, let's talk first."

The two men went into the street, and Mirjan's family left the table for one didn't eat with Father out of the house...

It was some time before Mirjan and Qudus returned. Ali saw Qudus greedily attack the beef. Father's mind, on the other hand, was obviously not on eating. Having eaten his fill, Qudus said:

"Think it over, Mirjan, you'll not regret it--"

"No, I can't," Father replied firmly. "I definitely can't."

"Well, have it your way--"

Qudus was sipping his fourth bowl of tea. Mother served no sugar this time. There was none left.

"We Moslems must always help each other. So says the Koran." Qudus repeated this several times in the same dry tone of voice.

Afghans don't like to say things more than once. You speak once, and that is enough. But Qudus spoke the phrase again and again.

"I'm prepared to help, but not in this way," Father said firmly and, moving to the window,

drew the curtains.

"Maybe you'll think it over," Qudus said again.

"No."

"You're doing yourself harm, Mirjan. And the children."

Mother glanced in fright at Qudus and whispered a prayer.

Father went to see Qudus out. A pregnant silence fell upon the room. Only the flies could be heard buzzing. This time, Father was back quickly. Mother washed the plates. Ali went to the window, and saw Qudus returning. From behind the curtain he watched in wonder as Qudus hid something beneath the threshold of their house.

Some ten minutes later, Ali went outside and stuck his hand under the threshold. He found two pistols and a handgrenade. He put the pistols in his pockets, and the handgrenade under his shirt, and went to the gate. In a few minutes he reached an empty lot and concealed his find under a pile of stones, keeping one of the pistols for he remembered that his younger brother had found a cart-ridge in the street a few days before.

Seeing there was no one besides Farid in the room when he returned, Ali asked about the cartridge. Farid glanced at him in surprise and took it out of his pocket. Mother entered with a tray of freshly washed bowls. Ali was afraid she might see the pistol and cartridge and hid them quickly under the bed.

It was this pistol and cartridge that the soldiers had found when searching the house.

Qudus was responsible for the search. After failing to talk Mirjan into joining the attack on the bread factory, he took revenge. First he hid

the two pistols and the handgrenade under the threshold of Mirjan's home, and then called the security when the night-time shooting ended.

"I want to tell you who did the shooting at the bread factory," he said over the phone in a disguised voice. "It was Mirjan and his men--"

## HOW HEROES GROW UP

Ali sat on the ground beside the entrance to the shop, sorting onions. People passed by, dogs ran about, and tradesmen pulled their carts past the shop. Still more people came to market at midday. The passage where Sahdi had his shop, was crowded.

Suddenly the crowd began to seethe and stepped apart.

"What's happened?"

Ali saw people scurrying away from a man carrying a large basket.

The head of a snake looked out of it.

A few seconds later half the large cobra had risen out of the basket, poised in a striking position.

Ali had never seen a snake charmer at work before. He had been told it was a most interesting spectacle accompanied by flute music, and that the snake's venomous teeth were invariably missing. But this snake charmer, it appeared, had something else on his mind, and did not even collect money for his show.

Having frightened the crowd, the man deftly covered the snake with a white cloth, and went his way.

Recovering from their fright, people began to speak all at once, and seconds later everything was back to normal—people rushed up and down, carts squeaked, dogs ran about...

"Go get me some shashlik," Sahdi the shopkeeper said to Ali and pulled out a bundle of coins from under his shirt. "I haven't eaten today. Do you

know where to go?"

Ali did not, of course, but in fear of the shopkeeper he nodded, took the money, and plunged into the labyrinthine alleyways of the market.

Soon he found a man selling shashlik.

"What about the change?" Ali asked when the man who had roasted the meat over an open fire gave him the shashlik wrapped in a thin pancake.

"What change?" the man bellowed. "The price is exactly what you paid me."

"But that's much. Father bought shashlik for—"

The man interrupted Ali furiously:

"Your father? Why don't you buy it where your father bought it then? Why come to me?"

Ali was confused and soon other customers elbowed him away from the counter.

Sahdi was angry when Ali returned.

"What took you so long? Where's the change?"

"I was given no change," Ali mumbled.

"Why not?" Sahdi leaped to his feet. "Did you ask for it?"

"I did."

"Just look at it, good people," the shopkeeper raised the shashlik over his head. "A pile of money for a sour pancake and a few bits of meat. Just look at it, good people."

Suddenly, the shopkeeper glanced slyly at Ali.

"Perhaps you've hidden the change? Tell the truth. Did you hide it? Allah won't forgive you if you did."

"I didn't."

"You did, you did! "

If only Ali had had some money, he would have given it to the shopkeeper to shut his mouth.

But Ali had none, and listened to Sahdi's re-

proaches in silence. Finally the shopkeeper grew weary and tackled the shashlik, which had grown cold. He swallowed the bits of meat ravenously, smacking his lips, and his temper improved visibly.

People passed by Sahdi's stall, buying their wares from others. An old man in a white turban was the only one who had stopped and bought some onions.

Towards nightfall a Hazara brought a cartload of fresh onions and potatoes. Sahdi told Ali to move the sacks. The Hazara did not help. He only held the shafts of the cart to prevent it from overturning. The sacks were heavy and Ali tired quickly. The moment he finished carrying the goods, he sat down panting. The next minute, however, Sahdi was shouting that he should sweep the floor, for didn't he see how dirty it was.

Ali took the broom and did what he was told.

"For the love of Allah, is that the way to sweep floors," Sahdi yelled. "That way you'll never finish."

Ali kept sweeping, Sahdi was chewing *naswar* and talking to the rare customers.

"You haven't, by any chance, seen my son Azim?" asked a man with inflamed eyes.

"I haven't," Sahdi replied irritably. "You've asked already—"

The man hunched his back guiltily and raised his arms. There was desperation in his eyes; they were filled with tears.

It was Faizullah. The people at the bazaar knew his story well. He had been gardener at the house of Soviet journalists, looking after the flowers and sweeping the walks. Someone began dropping

notes with threat in them, "Give up hope if you work for the Russians. Quit." Faizullah had paid no attention to the first note. Why not work for the Russians, they were good people, respectful, and paid you well. The notes continued to arrive, and Faizullah meant to show them to one of the Soviet journalists, but had changed his mind, hoping the threats were empty. One day, however, on coming home from work he missed his son. The neighbours said they had seen strangers in his yard.

Now he trudged up and down Kabul in search of Azim, hoping he would find his son at one of the bazaars.

Seeing that Ali had finished arranging the onions, Sahdi said he should sort the potatoes, then take a bucket and wash them.

And Ali did what he was told.

Gradually, the bazaar grew quiet. There were fewer people, weary stallkeepers were counting the day's takings, putting away their wares, and shuttering up their shops.

When Ali returned with a bucket of water to wash the last lot of potatoes, he saw Sahdi closing up.

"See you come early tomorrow," the stallkeeper said to him and stalked off without a farewell. Ali looked sadly at his departing back. "What about the money? The money he was to have been paid each day? Had he been cheated?"

The boy stood irresolutely for a few minutes, then headed home.

On the way he stopped for a few minutes beside a butcher's stall. The butcher had a TV set, which he switched on after dusk, gathering a crowd

of bystanders. Ali gazed at the screen for a few minutes, was then brushed aside by grownups, one of whom even said goodnatureedly that it was a sin for children to look at the devilish contraption.

"The master didn't pay me," Ali announced at home.

"Didn't you work well?" Farid asked.

"I worked very hard. I did everything I was told."

Mother said to the younger boy he should bring his galoshes.

"The galoshes? Why do you want them?" Farid asked.

"We'll sell them, for we have no money," Mother replied.

Farid looked at his brother and sister, expecting them to come to his aid, but they kept their mouths shut.

"Don't, Mother. Don't," the boy cried out. "Don't sell them. They're good galoshes. Father bought them for me."

He got the galoshes from under the bed, and pressed them to his chest.

"We'll buy you new ones, Farid. When Father returns," Mother said. "We've got to sell these, there's no money in the house."

Mother shook Ali out of his sleep at dawn. Previously, he slept until nine in the morning. On going into the street, Ali saw the dawn in Kabul for the first time. The sky grew warmer, its colour changed slightly. Then the jagged contour of hills appeared against its pale white background, one hill reminding the boy of a two-humped camel. The stars vanished one by one. The awakening birds

chirped timidly. The sky grew lighter still. Now all the stars were gone, and the mountainside took on a rosy colour. It seemed as though a huge fire was alight on the other side of the mountains, the flames reaching in vain for the sky. The fire burned more and more brightly, its tongues reddening the horizon. Soon the air above the city was crimson from the sun. A huge red ball rose from behind the mountains, occupying nearly half the easterly side of the sky.

"Breakfast, Ali," Mother called from the room. She put a bowl of sour milk, called *mast*, before him.

"Where did you get the *mast*?" the boy asked.

Mother did not reply. She only said Ali should hurry lest he come late to work.

Ali drank his pale tea with a little piece of sugar, while his mother, leaning her head on her hand, sat and looked at him in silence. From time to time Ali glanced at the bundle of food lying beside the door, which they had not yet touched.

"Mummy, why did they take Father?" Ali asked, the question having bothered him all those days.

Mother glanced up in fright, then hid her eyes.

It looked as though this was the first time she had given the question any thought.

"I don't know, sonny. I simply don't know."

After a pause, she added:

"You're a big boy now. You earn your own money. And I can talk to you as I would with a grownup. I really don't know why Father was taken away, but I have a feeling that our landlords had something to do with it. You may remember that Uncle Qudus came to us that night.

And that he spoke to Father in the street. Father did not tell me what they spoke about, but I think Qudus asked him to do something bad."

Suddenly, Ali saw light. He pushed the bowl away. He did not want his mother to see his confusion.

"Well, I'll go," he said quietly, rose from his seat, and pulled up his trousers.

Ali set out for the house of his friend.

"Is Hakim at home?" he asked Aunt Mastura, who was puttering about in the yard.

"He's home alright," she replied. "Still asleep. Why are you so early?"

"I need him."

The manner in which Ali said this made Aunt Mastura take notice. She went into the house.

Sleepy-eyed Hakim appeared in the doorway a minute later.

"What's up?"

"My father was sold down the river by Uncle Qudus and Aunt Asiya."

"What? What did you say?"

"I said my father was sold down the river by Qudus and Asiya."

Ali said he wanted to watch the house, but could not because he had to go to work.

"Go and work," Hakim replied. "I'll keep an eye on them. If I see anything, I'll let you know. Don't worry."

On the way Ali was offered cigarettes, eastern candy, and even to have his fortune told.

Many people in Kabul were making their living by fortune-telling and quack healing. Times were still hard, and in distress people turned to fortune-tellers for solace. If they were ill, for a few coins

quacks promised them relief. Both the fortune-tellers and the quacks never said anything that would disturb people. On the contrary, they sought to comfort them with empty promises. There were those among the quacks whose fame had spread up and down Kabul. A man named Kerim, for example, was said to heal all ills. He was trusted, and people flocked to him. Even the papers mentioned his name.

Kerim usually treated his patients with herbs. He boiled the herbs in a pot of vegetable oil, then crushed them, and applied the ointment to the sore spot. While doing this, he chanted magic words. But the papers did not say whether any of his patients recovered.

When Ali came to the bazaar, Sahdi had not yet arrived. How come? the boy thought. It is light, and Sahdi has not come. Didn't he say he began the day at dawn?

When Sahdi arrived, he did not even nod to Ali, but approached the stall, and said:

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful..."

(These are the words Mohammedans speak before starting on any undertaking. They believe Allah will help them if they speak these words.)

Sahdi unhurriedly removed the shutters.

"Help me!" he shouted. "Don't you see what I'm doing?"

Suddenly a scream resounded. It came from the butcher's stall. Earlier, Ali had noticed that it was closed, then a boy had come up and banged on the door. But no one had opened it. Now the stall was open and someone was trying to drag the boy away. But the boy clung to the

threshold and screamed as loud as he could. People rushed up, and on looking inside the butcher's also began to scream. On one of the hooks, where a steer's head had hung the day before, someone had put a man's head. A terrifying spectacle.

It was the butcher's head, and the screaming boy was his son. He had come early in the morning to help his father, who usually slept in the stall.

At the sight of the chopped off head, Ali felt his hands turn to ice. He did not speak, asked no questions, returned to the stall and lowered himself on a box of potatoes. Soon the stallkeeper returned.

"That's what you get for disobeying," he said. "Ahmad-beg disobeyed, and that's what happened."

He was obviously referring to the butcher.

"Who did he disobey?"

Sahdi screwed up his eyes slyly.

"He was told to remove his TV from the stall, and he disobeyed."

"Who told him?"

Sahdi glanced sideways at Ali:

"There are people who warn us about everything. And they are right. They stand for our faith. For the Koran."

He raised his eyes to heaven, and while lowering them seemed to pierce Ali with an evil glance.

Soldiers appeared at the butcher's stall. They roped it off and said no one was to approach. They needn't have said so, for no one approached it anyway. The frightened men kept their distance. Later, two of the soldiers came to Sahdi's stall. They asked him when he had come to the bazaar that day, and when he had left the day before.

"It was dark when I left yesterday," Sahdi

lied, and Ali was on the point of denying what he said.

But the soldiers did not care when Sahdi came and when he left. They wanted to know if he had seen anyone. It turned out he had seen no one.

"I swear by Allah, I saw nothing."

The work Ali had to do was much the same as the day before. He washed, he swept the floor, he sorted, and he carried loads. The butcher's chopped off head had so affected him that, it seemed, hard work could not wipe the terrifying spectacle from his memory. He was surprised that Sahdi did not mention the morning's horror any more. He squatted with legs folded under him, as though nothing had happened. And he even bandied angry words with his neighbour who, he thought, had put his basket of tomatoes too close to his stall.

"Move them away at once," Sahdi yelled. "Or I'll throw your rotten tomatoes all over the market."

His neighbour tried to reason with him: "The place is unoccupied."

"What of it? It isn't yours, it's mine."

Sahdi came up to the basket and was about to kick it. But the neighbour was quicker—he picked up the tomatoes and removed them to his stall.

"Uncle Sahdi is angry," Ali thought. "Why is he angry? It's his own fault people don't come to him. You have to have more than onions and potatoes to attract customers. The neighbour—he has tomatoes, and onions, and apples, and many other things, as well as potatoes—"

Ali was right. Sahdi always envied his neighbour

and his ability to whip up trade. He had tried to catch up but invariably failed, for he was too lazy. So all Sahdi could do was envy his neighbour.

"Will Uncle Sahdi pay me today or cheat again?"

Ali thought as he glanced at the stallkeeper. "He'll probably pay—can't cheat every day, after all."

"Ali." This was the first time his master called him by his name, "I can see you are a lazybones."

"Why, Uncle Sahdi?" the frightened boy asked.

"Because half the day has passed and you haven't done anything yet."

That was untrue. Ali had cleaned the scales, washed the potatoes, swept the stalls, and sorted out the onions.

Having finished washing the potatoes, Ali got up from the ground to stretch his bones, but saw Sahdi looking at him harshly and began washing spuds for the third time. After that the potatoes had to be put into baskets and taken into the street to dry.

The baskets were old, and one of them broke. The potatoes rolled along the floor. Sahdi ran up to Ali and kicked him. The boy fell.

"That's for breaking a good basket," Sahdi yelled.

"It was an old basket," Ali retorted.

"Shut your mouth! How dare you reply?" Sahdi shouted. "I'll chase you out!"

Shots resounded. The bazaar came into motion, there were shouts and yells, shutters were being put up.

"Put the wares away," old Sahdi shouted, taking cover behind the cases in the stall.

The boy started carrying baskets full of potatoes inside.

"Hurry, hurry," the stallkeeper yelled from his hiding place.

People were rushing about, looking for cover.

Finally, the shooting stopped. The market returned to normal.

"You want your Father released from prison?" Sahdi asked the boy suddenly, and motioned him to come closer. Ali nodded hurriedly.

"Well, you can help him."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. And earn some money as you do," Sahdi added. "Do you know the Ariana Hotel?"

"Yes."

"There are tanks there now," Sahdi whispered. "Go and attach this device to one of them—"

Sahdi took a metal thing from his pocket resembling a flat tin.

"It's a mine, a magnetic mine that will stick. It explodes when shaken. As the tank starts moving the mine will blow up."

Ali had expected anything but this. And he took terrible fright. But the wish to help his father won out. He did not even remember the money Sahdi had promised, and only kept thinking to himself, "Really, will Father really return if I do this?"

Then a sudden thought struck him: What had the tank to do with it?

He looked at Sahdi.

"Why blow up the tank?"

Instead of answering, Sahdi took a wad of money from his pocket and showed Ali a thousand afghani.

"That's for now—and if you do what you're told, I'll give you more."

Ali meant to refuse, but somehow, against his will, the crisp banknotes were in his hand.

"Why must the tank blow up?" he asked again.

Sahdi looked at him closely.

"It seems to me you don't want your father to return."

"Why?"

"Because you're asking too many questions. Didn't I warn you? If you don't want to do what I told you, you needn't," Sahdi said with feigned indifference. "You needn't—but your father will stay in prison, your family will go hungry, there'll be no money, and you—you'll run around the streets as you have been before."

"Why should I run around the streets?" Ali asked. "Don't I have a job?"

"How stupid you are!" Sahdi muttered. He was about to say Ali should not come next day, but changed his mind.

At that instant Ali remembered how Mother had wept and how upset Farid was when they sold the galoshes.

He looked up at Sahdi, and whispered.

"Give it to me--"

"There's a good boy," Sahdi said. He looked at the tin and turned some sort of knob in it before giving it to Ali.

"You musn't attach the mine to the tank if you see people looking at you," he said to the boy. "But don't go away. Stand by and pick a moment when no one is looking."

Ali walked past the clay walls behind which were houses. The mine dragged heavily on his pocket. He wanted to get rid of the thing as quickly as he could.

Coming to the square, Ali glanced at the Ariana Hotel building, and at the four tanks beside it. Nothing easier than attaching the magnetic mine to one of them, Ali thought. He would cross the square, reach the other side, come to the tank on the flank, and slap the mine to it. The main thing was that no one should see him. Ali looked at the tanks again and suddenly remembered the night when he had lost consciousness from hunger and had been picked up by Soviet soldiers. He would never forget how they fed him, how delicious the meat was, how they brought him home and gave him a bag of products. Ali also remembered what the teacher had said about the enemies of the April Revolution who want to prevent Afghans from building a new, happier life. They were doing everything to turn back the clock, the teacher said, so that plain people would for ever remain poor and illiterate, and only the rich could read and write...

After a while, unconsciously, Ali found himself on a bridge. He looked round. He was out of sight of the tanks, stopped and looked down at the water, which barely covered the river bed.

People passed by. Oh, if they only knew how heavy Ali's heart was!

He went down to the river and walked along its dusty bank. It did not take long to find the right place—taking a few steps along the silt-covered river bed, he crouched, laid the mine down in the water, and walked back to the bank.

He was some three hundred metres past the bridge when he heard an explosion. It was his mine. He could only guess that Sahdi had lied—it did not

explode when shaken; it had a time mechanism.

"If I hadn't got rid of it, the mine would have blown me up," Ali thought. He sat down on a rock made hot by the sun, and recalled Sahdi's words, "If you see people looking at you or passing by... don't go away. Stand by—"

Ali felt his throat go dry. He got up and walked on.

The boy stopped beside a fence made of iron bars. He touched one of the bars and remembered that there were bars on prison windows. The image of his father arose before his eyes.

"It was all a lie. I would not have helped Father if I had attached the mine to a tank," Ali thought. "Sahdi wanted one of the tanks blown up, that was all. Even if it blew up with me beside it."

Ali felt hate stir inside him for the stallkeeper.

Back in the square outside Ariana Hotel, Ali saw the same four tanks and headed for them.

An hour later, Sahdi learned that the tanks outside the hotel were intact, that none had exploded, and ran off in search of Qudus.

"You say he lowered the mine into the river?" Qudus asked him.

"The river, the river," Sahdi mumbled. "So I was told. I have three men at the bazaar whom I feed sometimes. I sent one of them after Ali—to see how the boy handled the mine. And he told me. I gave him ten afghani for it."

Qudus said the father had been punished, and it was the son's turn now.

... Just a few hours before, Mirjan had been in a room with bars on its window. An armed soldier had stood beside him.

"One thing we can't understand—where did the pistol come from?"

"I don't know. Believe me, I just don't know," Mirjan replied.

"A regular mystery. But we'll find out sooner or later."

The interrogator got up from his chair, and walked up and down the room.

"You can be sure we'll find out," he said to Mirjan, and added: "You can go now."

"What?" Mirjan asked.

"You are free. You can go home."

Mirjan did not seem to understand, and the soldier touched him on the shoulder.

"You're free, free... Get up."

Farid wouldn't leave his father's side, stroking his unshaved cheeks.

"How did you make out?" Mirjan asked his wife.

"Very badly."

"Once, Ali brought a bundle of food. Much food. A whole bundle," Farid said.

"Where did he get it?"

"Soviet soldiers gave it to him. They brought him home in a car."

"But we didn't eat any of it," his wife said.

"Why not?"

"Qudus said it was inedible. So we didn't eat it."

Father looked at the tins and biscuits. It was good, wholesome food, and certainly edible.

"Edible?" Farid asked, and added, "Aunt Asiya brought us milk."

"Yes, good people didn't abandon us," Rano said. "They helped us as they could. See that

you thank them for it.”

“Are you free for good, Father?” Farid asked, touching Mirjan’s arm.

“For good, of course.”

“They’ll never take you away again?”

“Never again,” Mirjan said, turning to his wife. “Why should they. I’ve done nothing wrong. I told them everything I knew—how Qudus came to me, how he wanted me to go shooting, and how I refused—”

Suddenly the door opened with a crash. Qudus and Sahdi stood in the doorway.

“Ha! You’ve sold out! They’ve let you go! ” Qudus hissed. “And where’s your son Ali?”

“I don’t know. Haven’t seen him yet.”

Qudus struck Mirjan in the face. Sahdi pulled out a pistol.

Approaching his house, Ali heard them shouting:

“We’ll kill you! We’ll kill you on the spot if you don’t tell us! ”

Ali looked inside through the window, and understood. A few moments later he came to the place where he had hidden the second pistol and the handgrenade.

Returning to the window, Ali saw the back of Qudus’s head close by. He raised the pistol and fired. Then, seeing Sahdi run to the door, he fired again. Twice.

An unpleasant thing had happened to Hakim that day. He had been watching Qudus’s house as he had promised Ali, and did not see a taxi stop some distance away. Two men pulled him into the car. The taxi turned around and headed

out of the city. Some 30 minutes later, in a village, Hakim was dragged into a house.

In the room he saw Asiya.

"You were watching us," she shouted, and struck the boy in the face. "Who told you to? Who?"

Hakim kept his mouth shut, and Asiya punched him again.

"Who told you to?"

"No one," Hakim said. "No one."

The woman shut the boy's mouth with the palm of one hand, and began slapping his cheeks with the other. Hakim wrenched himself out of her grip.

"You won't get a bite to eat until you tell us everything," Asiya said and went out...

The doors squeaked. The boy heard cows mooing. It grew light in the room where Hakim had slept on the floor. He wondered if the night were over, and at once recalled the events of the day before. He knew now: Asiya was an enemy, a traitor. Though she always posed as a kind-hearted person. How come no one had found her out before? Then Hakim wondered what they would do to him. Would they kill him? He was frightened, and thought of his mother, and then also of his father who had died a hero's death fighting counter-revolutionaries. A few more agonising hours passed. He was hungry. And thirsty.

Suddenly a loud voice resounded in the street:

"People of the kishlak, esteemed Mohammedans, come to the square. Representatives of the People's Government will address you."

The announcement was repeated several times.

Hakim wanted to look out of the window,

but it was too high for him. He stood on his toes and jumped, catching hold of the edge of the window-sill. Then he pulled himself up, until he could peer into the street. He saw cars and soldiers in the village square. A man in a leather jacket stood on top of an armoured car and said to the people gathered in the square:

“People of the kishlak, enemies of the Revolution have robbed you of all your food. We’ve brought you flour, sugar, and so on—”

Hakim managed to get his leg up on the sill. One of his hands was free now, and he could open the window. He clambered over it, and jumped down into the street. Then he ran for the armoured car. He felt safe when he touched its side.

## THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES

When Zafar learned of what had happened, he thought: "Qudus, why did you have anything to do with that boy? Now you are dead, and have failed us—"

Qudus was Zafar's liaison with the Kabul counter-revolutionary underground. Zafar had been introduced to him at the home of the man whose address he had had.

"Never come here again," the man had said when they parted. "I don't live here. Forget this place. You'll communicate with me through Qudus." He called someone through the open door, and in came Qudus, who had supplied Zafar and his men with arms, money, and instructions ever since.

Now Qudus was dead. Asiya, who was Qudus's wife, had disappeared on the very same day. Without even locking the door of her house. After nightfall, a lorryload of soldiers had come and searched it, and found an arms cache in the yard.

To be on the safe side, Zafar decided to go into hiding for a few days. On the edge of the city he found a cemetery with a "holy place"<sup>1</sup>, and settled there with the bearded one. They reckoned no one would see them there.

<sup>1</sup>"Holy place" — a necessary attribute of any Moslem graveyard. It is a small adobe edifice erected over the grave of a holy man — a mullah or a preacher. Under Moslem law, disturbing the peace of a "holy place" is a sin. The faithful therefore avoid coming near it. It is a perfect hiding place.

Zafar weighed a mine in the palm of his hand, and asked the bearded one:

“Do you know the old school?”

When the latter nodded affirmatively, Zafar said he should go and tell the others to be ready—

The school was blown up in the middle of the day, but after classes. The bandits had tried planting the mine during lessons, but a police patrol had interfered.

Minutes after the explosion, the People’s Council of the district called an emergency meeting.

“Let’s repair the school on our own,” its chairman said. “We’ll get the people together, ask the housebuilding factory to help out with materials, and go to work. Let’s vote on this. Those in favour please raise your hands—”

The next moment something heavy wrapped in paper flew in through the open window. It fell at Mahmoud’s feet. Everyone watched him with bated breath as he picked up the object, unwrapped it and placed a large stone on the desk. The wrapping had writing on it.

“If you try repairing the school, ” Mahmoud read aloud, “we’ll blow up your committee.”

The chairman rushed to the door, pulling out his pistol on the run. The others followed on his heels. On reaching the street, they saw a taxi driving away.

The chairman took the note, read it again, and tore it up.

He paused a minute, then smiled and said: “Well, those in favour of repairing the school on our own please raise your hands.” All of them did.

On November 16, 1982, the streets of Kabul

were crowded with marching people. They were on a peace march.

The peace march organised by the National Fatherland Front had visited all provinces in two months and was now in the capital.

At meetings and demonstrations in towns and villages, Afghans passed resolutions backing the struggle for peace and international detente, condemning imperialist interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs, and calling on all nations to close their ranks and fight the nuclear threat that originated with imperialist and reactionary forces.

Delegates of an international conference, "Social and Economic Development and the War Danger", which had gathered in the Afghan capital, took part in the peace march across Kabul.

The march demonstrated the unity of the Afghan working people and the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. It was also evidence of the wish of the Afghans to live in peace, and of their determination to safeguard the gains of the April Revolution. Afghan film-makers produced a documentary, "Afghanistan Speaks", using the reels filmed at this mammoth demonstration.

On November 23, 1982, this film, a reflection of the mood of the Afghan people, was endorsed as an official document by the Council of the National Fatherland Front, and thereupon forwarded to the United Nations. It reached UN Headquarters together with the Appeal of the Afghan People to the Peoples of the World.

The Appeal, which reproduced the content of numerous resolutions and decisions adopted at mass meetings and demonstrations, said:

"People of the planet, worthy people of Asia

and Africa, Europe and America, Australia and Oceania, children of various races and dialects, the faithful and the unbelievers, from the crystal heights of the Hindu Kush and the Pamirs, we Afghans address you:

"The hurricane of the 1978 April Revolution swept the feudalists and reactionaries, those blood-stained oppressors who had kept the people in darkness, backwardness, and misery, out of our ancient and sacred land.

"But the April Revolution, which was to revive and advance our long-suffering people, to attain the age-old aspirations of the Moslem masses, evoked the hatred of the imperialists, the reactionaries of the world headed by the United States of America. They started an undeclared war against us and have now for almost five years been arming and supporting the counter-revolution.

"From the high UN rostrum and at many international forums and conferences, through diplomatic and other channels, our government has tirelessly addressed the governments of the USA and the NATO countries with appeals to end the interference in the internal affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, to stop their anti-Afghan scheming.

"No reply had come to these sincere appeals. The exponents of an anti-people militarist policy in world affairs are deaf to the voice of our country. The blood of guiltless people continues to flow on Afghan soil.

"People of the planet, noble nations of the world, now we appeal to you, to your reason, to your hearts!

"We people of Democratic Afghanistan, we

fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters of those who fell in the imperialist-inspired undeclared war, we the youth, the rising generation of New Afghanistan, joined in unity with the National Fatherland Front, call on you to take effective measures in support of our sacred and just cause! By standing up for us you will safeguard peace in Asia and the rest of the world.

“We long-suffering Afghans know what war is like. We know the worth of imperialist interference and the brutal imperialist assault on freedom and independence. That is exactly why, responding to the call of our National Fatherland Front, the call of reason and of our freedom-loving spirit, we have held meetings and *jirgebs*, forums and conferences, marches and processions, calling for an end to the interference in our affairs, demanding that we should be allowed to decide our future for ourselves and to base the country’s policy on the lofty principles of cooperation and friendship among nations. We are united in these demands as we are in our ardent appeal to you, to the peoples of the world, to raise your voice in defence of all those who have risen in battle for their national and social liberation and the right to life and progress, for the peoples of Palestine and Namibia, Guatemala and El Salvador, for all the awakened peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America!

“Multiply your efforts in all corners of the world to consolidate international security, to prevent imperialist interference in the internal affairs of countries and peoples, to prevent conflicts and dastardly plots. Let no nation be goaded against another nation!

“Down with war! Down with the warmongers!  
No to the arms race! No to the nuclear insanity!  
Long live everlasting world peace.”

Tape recordings of statements made by Afghans in favour of the People's Government, of demands to stop interfering in Afghan internal affairs, of calls for world peace, were forwarded together with the above Appeal and the film to UN Headquarters, and also to the World Peace Council, the International Organisation of Journalists, the World Federation of Trade Unions, other international organisations, and various governments.

The National Fatherland Front of Afghanistan, which represents the country's progressive forces, has become the bearer of the people's interests, sentiments, and aspirations.

The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan looks to the future with confidence.

Newspapers reported that the Industrial Development Bank of Afghanistan provided credits for the construction of 57 new industrial projects, that the land and water reform was making good headway, and that various other social transformations were taking place in the country. To meet the needs of the country's economy and culture, medium-level personnel was to be trained under a single state-operated system of technical and specialised secondary education.

The State Planning Committee, the Central Administration of Labour and Social Security, the Ministry of Higher and Specialised Education, other ministries and governmental agencies were required to draw up a comprehensive plan for the building of higher and specialised secondary schools in order to meet the economy's demand in personnel.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Higher and Specialised Education and the Ministry of Public Education were required to improve the secondary-school level training of specialists with a working-class or peasant background. To carry this decision into effect, 12-month preparatory courses were opened at the Kabul lyceums and the Kabul Mechanical School for workers with six or seven years of schooling.

The Tenth PDPA Central Committee Plenum, held in December 1982, looked into the Party's organisational work, worked out long-term guidelines for Party building, and called on Party members to improve the standard of educational work among the masses.

In the meantime, outside interference in the affairs of the Afghan Revolution continued...

A counter-revolutionary gathering known as the Afghan Tribunal was being organised in Paris on December 16 through 22 by imperialists and reactionaries with the immediate participation of the Zionists, various Western secret services, and representatives of Afghan counter-revolutionaries abroad. The DRA government countered this by drawing up a comprehensive plan for exposing and neutralising the hostile acts of imperialist propaganda. Documentary films, photographs, and other illustrative material were being produced. A group of Afghan comrades was sent to Paris to supply the mass media of France and other European countries with the documents of Afghan public organisations, Bakhtar News Agency statements, and other material exposing the counter-revolutionary anti-Afghan gathering. Jointly with the DRA Embassy in France, the propaganda group held a series

of press conferences. The designs of the enemies of the April Revolution were thus reduced to naught.

Winter had come to Kabul. It was strange to see the city that had languished in the summer's scorching heat, wearing its winter garb. Snow lay in the streets. Snowflakes got under the collars of pedestrians. They shrugged their shoulders, but smiled.

The Kabul snow is prickly. Winters here are cold and windless. The piles of snow are deep, and the air dry. Kabul people say the city can survive without gold but not without snow. They are glad when it snows because much snow means a bountiful harvest.

I turned on my TV set. The first Afghan TV feature, "Retribution", was being shown. Someone knocked on my door—it was a journalist from the Soviet correspondents' pool.

"The Japanese broke their promise and published a report about the Soviet-Afghan dig in Tilla Tepe," he said. "They came, took pictures, and published the whole thing."

"What about our esteemed professor?"

"He wasn't there. He was away in Moscow to report to the Academy of Sciences on the results of the dig. The Japanese asked to be shown round the museum and then broke their word—"

Our professor, I learned, had written to the Japanese archaeologist who was responsible. I was shown the magazine which had printed his letter.

"Esteemed professor," the Soviet scholar wrote to his Japanese colleague. "Thank you for the letter in which you inform me that your delegation photographed in the Kabul museum the collection of gold objects found at Tilla Tepe by the joint

Soviet-Afghan archaeological expedition. In your letter to me you explain why you published the photographs. You refer to the 'big interest of the Japanese in the Tilla Tepe treasures' and to the fact that some information about the dig had already filtered into various magazines.

"Let me assure you, dear colleague, that the interest in the treasures of Tilla Tepe is just as great in other countries, whose scholars, however, acknowledge and respect the author's rights and patiently wait for the publication of the collection now being prepared by us—"

"Good for the professor," I said.

"Certainly. The Japanese professor has been injudicious to say the least."

We watched the TV film, set in a distant mountain village. Its people were being terrorised by a gang whose chief hated the People's Government. His son, who saw the suffering of the villagers and was outraged by the brutality of his father's men, sided with the people. He showed the security men the way to the bandit camp.

After the film we watched a broadcast called, "The Minister Replies to Questions". It was a new thing, with a member of the government answering people's questions.

Afghan TV broadcasts have of late improved in quality. There is more information about home and international affairs, the life of the Republic is getting better coverage, and there is a programme called "Viewers' Letters". Television is steadily gaining in popularity among the people of Kabul.

The 22nd of February was approaching. On that day in 1980 Kabul had lived through trou-

blous events. Falling for counter-revolutionary slogans, errant people had gone into the streets shouting, "Allah akbar! Allah is great!" Shops closed. Traffic stopped. There were disorders, assassinations, acts of sabotage and subversion.

The bourgeois press was in raptures: "The days of the Afghan government are numbered. The revolution in Afghanistan has broken down. All Kabul protests against the new regime. Nothing can stop this process—"

But the reports were premature. The power of the people managed to overcome the counter-revolution, to restore order, to normalise life in the city.

Attempts at organising disorders were made on February 22 in 1981 and 1982. But they were unsuccessful. Now it was February 22, 1983.

The day before, leaflets had been spread in the city, threats had resounded, and calls for disorder. "Plunge Kabul into darkness!", "Cut off the electricity!", "Shut the shops!", "Stop the trading!"—all this in leaflets. And, as usual, the warning: "Death to those who disobey!"

I spent the night of February 21/22 in the home of my interpreter.

In the morning, we went out on the balcony.

Spring was in the air. The sun shone brightly. People were hurrying to work, a new day was beginning. Suddenly, an explosion.

The concussion was terrific. Window-panes were shattered, shouts resounded. "Has it really begun?" I thought to myself, but was mistaken. It was the only explosion of the day. Shops were open for business as usual, cars rolled up and down the streets, no one switched off the

lights. Once again, the counter-revolution had been baulked.

On March 9, a plane from Moscow brought the Soviet writers Boris Leonov and Nikolai Kuzmin, film-makers Valentin Chernykh and Arkady Inin, and popular TV observer Alexander Kaverznev. Each had his own programme. Leonov and Kuzmin were to help organise the Union of Writers of the DRA, and to meet Afghan intellectuals and students. Chernykh and Inin had come to conduct a seminar with the Afghan film people, and Kaverznev had returned for fresh material for a film he intended to call "Afghan Diary".

In Afghanistan, film-making is a new industry. But the interest in films is tremendous. People are interested in features, documentaries, and travelogues. They are especially eager to see films made by Afghan film-makers. They also like Soviet films, especially those by studios of the Soviet Central Asian republics, based on the life of Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmen.

One day Kuzmin and I spoke of the DRA Union of Writers and other unions of creative workers. There were three such unions in the country—those of writers, journalists, and art workers. The Union of Writers numbered 350 novelists, poets, and literary critics; the Union of Journalists had 720 members, and the Union of Art Workers approximately the same number. The unions had branches in some provinces. The Union of Writers was divided into sections for those who wrote children's books and folklore, and for young writers and army writers; the Union of Journalists was divided into sections for people working on the radio, in newspapers, magazines, and on television. The Union of

Art Workers had commissions for film-makers, architects, musicians, and for fine arts.

The sections conduct educational work among their members, propagate the work of progressive writers and poets, artists and musicians, architects and film directors.

The Union of Writers holds poetry nights for workers, students, and senior schoolchildren.

Literary courses are run for young writers at lyceums. The Union has assumed stewardship over a children's home (orphanage), is constantly helping the children's journal *Pioneer*, and takes part in various functions, such as the Girls' Festival in Kabul, and Palestine Week.

The Union of Art Workers recently held two exhibitions of political posters at the Amoni Lyceum, and an exhibition of portraits of the proletarian leaders Marx, Engels and Lenin by Afghan artists.

The PDPA works hard with the intelligentsia. The conventions of teachers and doctors made a strong impact on life in the country. Their resolutions were discussed at conferences and meetings of teachers and medical workers in the provinces. People working in the press, and on radio and television, the Institute of Social Sciences, the Kabul Polytechnic Institute, and the Maimanogi Art School were highly active. The DRA Academy of Sciences has built up the structure of science institutions, is supervising research, and stabilising personnel.

The Party has called on the mass media to show the achievements of the April Revolution, and to propagate the right to work, education, free medical care, and other social benefits. Countering enemy propaganda is a special assignment.

Considerable organisational work has been carried out in the mass media. Average daily broadcasting time on Afghan television totals 5.5 hours, on the first radio channel 18 hours, and 3.5 hours on the second channel. Broadcasting abroad is in Russian, English, German and Arabic. A special two-hour daily broadcast, entitled *Voice of the Motherland*, is for Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan, Iran and India. Altogether, 16 newspapers and 47 magazines are being published in the Republic.

A *jirgeh* of former bandit chiefs who had gone over to the side of the government was being held in Kabul. Boris Leonov asked Poulad and me to take him along to it. The writer wanted to see those who had fought against the Revolution arms in hand just a few days before.

The conference-hall of the National Fatherland Front was filled to overcrowding.

"How many can the hall seat?" Leonov asked. "Five hundred or six hundred?"

And, taking in the whole picture, he asked again:

"Are all these people former gang chiefs?"

"Yes."

Poulad translated some of the speeches for us. Speakers succeeded each other. Their voices differed, but not what they said—that they were mistaken, that they were deceived, that now they were wholly behind the People's Government.

"Not all have laid down their arms, not all have understood that they are wrong," said Comrade Ghafari, a Central Committee official, when we left the hall. "There are those who will never understand, and those who cannot be forgiven, those who

have shed much blood, the blood of innocent people."

The 11th PDPA Central Committee Plenum gathered in March 1983. It dealt with economic development, with the Party's role in economic work. The state of the economy did not satisfy the Party. The economy failed to meet all the needs of the state and people in farm and industrial goods. Nor was it up to the mark financially. Certainly, in the five years since the April Revolution progress was obvious. But if the economic development rate did not rise, it would be impossible to continue the advance. Besides, some members of the Party held that the main thing now was to crush the counter-revolution, while the economy could wait until better tranquil times. The Plenum opposed this view. It stressed that the battle against the counter-revolution itself required economic and material resources as well as manpower. "In this sense," it was said at the Plenum, "each economic achievement is also a blow at the enemy, and often has the same importance as a successful military operation."

The situation was highly complicated. Backed extensively by outside imperialist and reactionary forces, the counter-revolution did its utmost to upset the country's economic life, disorganise production and supplies, create hunger, and thereby disrupt the people's trust in the revolutionary government.

The damage inflicted by the counter-revolution since the People's Government came to power, the Plenum noted, exceeded 24,000 million afghani.

Naturally, this held back the country's development in many ways, and prevented Afghanistan

from fulfilling its plans. On the whole, however, imperialism's designs had fallen through. The tactic of economic sabotage and disruption had failed. The counter-revolution did not succeed in paralysing agriculture and industry, transport and communications.

Restoring industry and agriculture was named the chief task of the next few years. The Plenum also stressed the need for a further expansion of the state sector in the economy, called attention to thrift and planning, and set targets for greater output of gas, oil, coal, electric power, and manufactured goods, and for improving the building industry and ensuring safe and uninterrupted traffic along the main arteries between provincial centres and within provinces.

The 11th Central Committee Plenum called for the consistent and continuous fulfilment of the land and water reform, maintaining justice and abiding by the law in the distribution and use of land and water, increasing state assistance to peasants, enlarging purchases of farm products, and consolidating peasant co-operatives.

April in Afghanistan is *hasbar* time. The *hasbars*, which literally mean "helping the neighbour", were dedicated to the fifth anniversary of the April Revolution. The splendid custom of helping each other has existed among Afghans since times immemorial, generated by the need to combat the powers of nature, the eternal poverty and frequent famines. That is why the whole village helps someone build a house, or dig an irrigation ditch, or whatever.

But since the Revolution, the age-old custom has gained a new meaning. Now *hasbar* is a fes-

tival of unpaid collective labour whereby Afghans express their support for the People's Government and their aspirations to a new life.

... On that April day, it seemed the entire populace of Kabul had gone into the streets. Men, women, young people, and schoolchildren carried crimson streamers, inscribed, "Long Live Revolutionary Afghanistan!" and "Long Live the PDPA!" They carried spades and shovels, and pickaxes. Then they got busy—repairing roads and schools, planting trees, and giving fresh coats of paint to houses.

Preparations for the fifth anniversary of the April Revolution were going on apace...

Rehearsals of the holiday parade began. In addition to the army parade and the people's demonstration it was also decided to hold the first ever sports parade.

Before the Revolution there had been no physical culture in the country. Sports were within reach of just the wealthy few.

But right after the Revolution, the People's Government turned its attention to the physical development of young people. Football and wrestling gained in popularity. Wrestling, to be sure, had been part of all holidays for many centuries, while football was one of the most popular modern games.

Yet in 1983 as many as 19 sports were cultivated in Afghanistan. What was more, there were six national women's teams. Women's sports teams in a traditionally Moslem country!

Apart from Kabul, physical culture and sports departments were set up under the city governments of Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar, and Kunduz. The Central Trade Union Council, too, established a department for physical culture

and sports. Its purpose was to promote physical culture groups at enterprises.

The participation of Afghan sportsmen in the 1980 Moscow Olympics was a big event. Twenty-six young men represented Afghanistan in Moscow. It will be remembered that the Olympic national team ran into difficulties on its way to the Soviet Union: en route it was attacked by a counter-revolutionary band...

Nearly every day I went to see the training of sportsmen who were to march across Chaman-i Khozur Square on April 27. It was no simple matter, after all, to march while doing exercises.

Girls and young women would march with the boys. And that, too, for the first time. More, they would wear up-to-date sports garb—trunks and singlets, with arms and legs bare. That was something Afghanistan had never seen before.

A theoretical conference that was to discuss the DRA's new political system and the Party's task of consolidating it was down in the programme of preparations for the fifth anniversary of the April Revolution. It would look into the economic, social and ideological work of the PDPA, determine the place of the April Revolution in the world revolutionary process, and so on.

Envisaged as a serious collective theoretical study, the conference gathered on April 25, 1983.

The following day an anniversary meeting was held in Kabul. When the main report was over, people came to the rostrum and spoke. What I remember best is the greeting of the young people. There were three on the stage—a worker, a peasant, and a schoolboy...

"We young workers," said the worker, "have

started a contest in honour of the fifth anniversary of the April Revolution at factories, mines and building sites. The young Kar-Kar miners are showing models of selfless labour. So are the young people of the Baghrami Textile Factory, the Jowzjan gas workers, and the Kabul building workers. We are doing our best to heighten our proficiency and raise our qualification. All over the country, at building sites and factories, youth collectives are being formed--to do new, free, creative labour for the good of our dear country. We swear on this festive day that we will devote all our strength, all the ardour of our young hearts, to building the radiant future, and promise that we young workers will always hold high the banner of the April Revolution."

"Young people in the countryside are helping to build a new life in Afghan villages," said the young peasant. "We take an active part in setting up agricultural co-operatives; we organise youth teams; we do our utmost to master farming techniques, and to learn to be tractor and combine operators. We know full well that our conscientious labour, that all our successes, are a deadly blow to the enemies of the April Revolution. May our enemies know that our hands are holding not only farm tools or the steering wheels of tractors or combines, but also rifles, for we are always ready to sweep those who want to hinder us from building a new life out of our way. We want the Party and the people to know that we young farm workers will do everything to make our native land a flourishing garden."

The pupil said: "On behalf of all pupils, I express deep gratitude to the Party and the People's Govern-

ment for their constant care of the younger generation. Preparing for the fifth anniversary of the April Revolution, we are learning diligently. Our motto is, 'Learn, work, defend the Revolution'. And we are learning a lot by helping our brother workers and peasants with our voluntary labour teams. We are protecting the Revolution by forming public order squads. We want to assure our dear Party and the People's Government that we are devoting all our energy and knowledge to the struggle for the happiness of the Afghan people."

## THE PEOPLE WILL OVERCOME

The military parade and displays by physical culture adepts were followed by a demonstration of the working people. This was in Kabul on April 27, 1983, and was broadcast direct over the Afghan radio and television.

The spectacle was captivating. Watching file after file of people marching across the parade ground, I felt certain that people who have taken power into their own hands are sure to overcome, for they have had a taste of freedom. After the demonstration hundreds of people headed for the burial ground of those who fell for the Revolution on Tappa-i Shuhado hill. That, indeed, had become a tradition—visiting the fallen on holidays.

People. Many of them. They brought flowers and wreaths. Their hearts cherished the memory of the dead heroes.

Later a big holiday concert was held in Kabul Nandery Theatre, in which representatives of various tribes and nationalities took part.

After dusk, when the Kabul sky grew dark and a fresh breeze floated in from the mountains, fireworks lit up the sky to the delight of onlookers. The festivities continued...

Zafar got caught after all. He couldn't wait to go into the town. Sitting it out in what was really a crypt was too much for him. He was spotted by Mahmud in Pushtunistan Square. To make sure, Mahmud looked at the photograph of the bandit

which he carried in his pocket.

Mahmud wasn't alone. Hakim was with him. So he sent the boy to call the security guards on the corner.

"I'll wait here," he said.

Zafar felt the danger. He looked around uncertainly, and headed in the direction of Italy Street. Mahmud hurried after him, for it was easy for the bandit to escape among the many little shops and stalls. Zafar had, in fact, practically disappeared. There was nothing left for Mahmud but to pull out his pistol and fire into the air.

"Halt!"

People stopped. They looked after the running man. Zafar got his pistol out on the run.

"He's an enemy," Mahmud shouted, racing after Zafar.

People regained their senses. Zafar had his pistol pointed at Mahmud. He was about to fire. But someone pushed him in the back, someone seized his hand, someone twisted his arm. The pistol fell to the ground.

Security men arrived...

As you read these lines, dear reader, the revolution in Afghanistan is still continuing...

The Afghan army is operating successfully against imperialist mercenaries smuggled into the Republic.

Up in the high-altitude Panjshir valley the troops have crushed Ahmad Shah Masud's bandit gang.

I recall the fear his cutthroats inspired in people. Ensnconced in a hard-to-approach valley surrounded by mountain ranges, and supplied arms, ammunition and provisions by secret trails from behind the mountains, they had raided towns

and villages in the surrounding countryside.

Two gangs of mercenaries were wiped out in Herat and Balkh provinces, where the army was assisted by squads of champions of the Revolution, who were local people formed into volunteer detachments. A caravan of Western-made arms heading from Pakistan to the interior, was intercepted.

New victories. New documents exposing those backing the Afghan counter-revolution, those who hypocritically declare the bandits to be "defenders" of the Afghan people and of Islam.

Copies of letters and messages have come to hand that they sent their patrons and protectors through the diplomatic missions of certain Western countries in Pakistan.

A message from a counter-revolutionary organisation, the Ittehad Islami Mujaheddin Afghanistan, informed the US Ambassador that one more American instructor had been smuggled into Afghanistan to train hired killers.

"Dear Sir," the message said. "This is to inform you that Major Charles Peter has safely arrived in Panjshir. We hope you will be good enough to send us air defence experts with the requisite equipment."

In another message, this time to the French Ambassador, this organisation reported that it was prepared to receive "guests" from France "to observe the holy war at first hand".

There were messages asking for new lots of arms and equipment. One of them I want to quote in full:

"Hezbe Islami Party of Afghanistan, February 29th, 1984,

"Your Excellency Ambassador of the Unit-

ed States,

“Your Excellency Ambassador of France,

“Your Excellency Ambassador of Egypt,

“Your Excellency Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China,

“This is to let you know that the arms and ammunition you have assigned to our Party are not enough for the defence of Panjshir.

“As we have informed you before, the adversary is reinforcing the troops that will attack Panjshir. We beg you, therefore, to let us have anti-aircraft weapons (to knock down helicopters) and toxic chemicals (to use against infantry).

“Lt.-Col. Alam Shah Khan, Chairman of the Military Committee, Hezbe Islami Party of Afghanistan.”

Those are just some documents testifying to direct imperialist interference in the internal affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

Counter-revolutionaries are getting financial, military and political aid from imperialist states. The lion’s share is spent on bands of assassins and on arms. Considerable sums flow into the pockets of the chiefs. Among those who “donate” funds to Afghan counter-revolutionaries are the USA, Japan, Australia, and the EEC countries. Which only shows that the imperialist aggression against the DRA is co-ordinated.

In March 1981, President Reagan admitted publicly that the USA was involved in the undeclared war. More, he said Washington intended to escalate its military aid to Afghan counter-revolutionaries. In 1981 through 1983, the USA allocated more than 300 million dollars to finance the bands of killers. Not the CIA alone,

but also the Pentagon, the State Department, and various "foundations" are involved in subversive activities against the DRA. *Newsweek* reported that the Defense Department budget for fiscal 1984 had 125 million dollars down for aid to Afghan counter-revolutionaries. All in all, the US press reports, nearly a billion dollars has already been spent by the USA on the undeclared war in Afghanistan.

Even the Western press noted that in 1985 alone this will cost American taxpayers as much as 280 million dollars. The weekly recalled that the Commission on Human Rights rightly described the activity of the CIA-backed Afghan *dushmans* as nothing short of "violence and murder".

Alongside undisguised incitement of bandits and cynical slander of the DRA and the USSR, the public pronouncements of high-ranking Western statesmen contain professions of their "love of peace". They say they are for settling what they call the Afghan question by political means. And immediately specify: "by withdrawing Soviet troops from Afghanistan". Veritably, the peak of hypocrisy and duplicity! The Soviet position is crystal clear. Soviet leaders have said time and again that the limited troop contingent sent to Afghanistan at the request of the Afghan government in complete accord with the bilateral Soviet-Afghan Treaty of Friendship signed in 1978, was temporary and would be withdrawn, with the consent of the Afghans, when the outside armed intervention is stopped and is guaranteed not to be renewed.

Abdul Majid Sarboland, Deputy Chairman of the DRA Council of Ministers, observed in passing once

that the howl over the "Afghan question" is nothing but an attempt of imperialists and reactionaries all over the world at escalating "psychological warfare" against revolutionary Afghanistan. Its purpose is to mislead the world public about the true events in Afghanistan, distort the policy of the PDPA and the DRA Government upholding the interests of the vast majority of Afghans, and encourage those who betrayed their country and are trying to restore its old, semifeudal order.

"Often," Sarboland said, "the organisers of the psychological warfare against the DRA try to pass off the opinion of a few dissenters, members of reactionary counter-revolutionary organisations, as the opinion of the entire Afghan people. Remember the testimony of one Abdul Wahed at the 'Afghanistan Hearings' in Oslo in 1983. Western mass media portrayed the bandit chief as a hero who was defending 'freedom and Islam in Afghanistan'. The texts of his speeches were prefabricated by CIA agent Michael B., a specialist in producing that sort of bilge. Abdul Wahed, arrested by DRA security men, disclosed this at a press conference in Kabul that summer."

But for all the schemes of international reaction, the revolution in Afghanistan continues. It is an irreversible process, and can no longer be halted.

Welcoming the Revolution, Afghan poet Mir 'Abar wrote:

*Troubled Afghanistan is aroused  
By April's ferocious firing.  
The hour of revival  
Has struck in the land of my fathers:  
Its Springtime has come...*

Springtime. The winds of springtime blow everywhere in Afghanistan, bringing people good tidings—in the hills and the valleys, and the cities and villages. By now more than 300,000 of the formerly land-hungry peasant families have received plots of land expropriated from feudal lords and landowners. The living standard and social condition of wage-earners and the salaried is steadily improving. The cultural revolution is gaining momentum, with tens of thousands attending courses where they learn to read and write. The People's Government is doing all it can to remove the barriers that fenced Afghan women from public life.

But the Republic still faces many unsettled problems. The new society is being built in a most complicated setting. And that is understandable. The more radical the break with the past, the more bitterly the forces doomed by history are resisting the change. The obsolete and reactionary is dead set against the power of the people. Feudal lords and monarchists are fighting fiercely. Stripped of power, they are banking on the backwardness and ignorance of people. Bands of counter-revolutionaries attack and destroy plants and property, intimidate villagers, and commit terrorist acts against activists and officials.

But the ideas of the April Revolution and the tasks set by the PDPA have won the support of most sections of the people and have become their common and vital cause. This we can see from the emergence and successful activity of the National Fatherland Front, the trade unions, and other mass organisations.

Before the Revolution most mass organisations, including the trade unions, had been banned.

Today, the unions are helping to organise the Afghan working class. The newspaper *Hiwad* reports that as many as 170,000 have already joined the unions. That is no small figure, if we consider that only slightly more than 550,000 are employed in industry, building, transport and communications.

The working class, none too numerous so far, is called upon to play a most conspicuous role in building the new Afghanistan. The *Haqiqat-e-Enge-labe Saur*, central organ of the PDPA Central Committee, noted that "the working class marches in the front ranks of the revolutionary struggle, and is playing a big positive role in expediting the revolutionary process".

The Jangalak Motor Repair Works has one of the foremost detachments of the Afghan proletariat. In the days of the monarchy, and then during Daoud's mercenary regime, the workers of the plant were often initiators of strikes, political walkouts, and demonstrations. This we learned from the plant's chief engineer, Azaz-zada. He told us, too, that the workers had been led by the PDPA underground.

"Our plant, which is in effect unique for Afghanistan," Azaz-zada said, "puts out all kinds of metal items, and plays an important role. We of Jangalak see our duty above all in filling the orders we get from the state. The plant has been producing more than required by the plan year after year."

The administration and the PDPA branch at the plant are assisted by the trade union, said Ghulam Ghauth, the union chairman. Workers are competing for quality and economy. And the union's care for the workers' needs has created a sound atmosphere—which contributes to the plant's good perfor-

mance. The union has seen to it that the personnel should have a cafeteria, an out-patient clinic, a kindergarten, and vehicles to drive workers to and from work. The administration pays a 20-per cent premium to those working on health-hazardous jobs. A hostel will soon be ready for unmarried workers, and new housing is down in the plan. As much as 98 per cent of the plant's workforce are members of the trade union.

The founding of the Democratic Women's Organisation of Afghanistan was a big event. A progressive organisation of women in a Moslem country! It takes a truly democratic system, a genuine people's government, to make this possible.

By the time I came to Afghanistan the Women's Organisation had 28 provincial, 21 town, 21 district, 20 county and 498 primary branches with a membership of more than 15,000 and another 60,000 supporters.

They laid the emphasis on carrying out the decisions of the 1st All-Afghan Conference of Women, the PDPA National Conference and Central Committee plenums.

Constant efforts were made to strengthen the organisation, to build up its ranks, create more branches, enhance its influence on various groups of women, and improve its methods of work.

Much effort was being put into enlisting peasant women in the co-operative movement and in the land and water reform, in furthering various economic innovations, and in defending the country. Groups of women defenders of the Revolution were formed on the initiative of the women themselves in Jowzjan, Baghlan, Kunar, Samangan, and Kabul.

The Women's Organisation is a patron of 5,000 families of those who fell in the April Revolution, and of a children's boarding school in Kabul.

The first festival of girl students and school-girls, held under the auspices of the Women's Organisation, attracted some 50,000 participants and made an unforgettable impression. The girls met heroes of the Revolution, Party and government leaders, heads of mass organisations, scientists, and culture workers.

Women organised mass campaigns to mark red-letter days in the life of the PDPA and the state, and held thousands of meetings, conferences, *jirgehs*, and other functions. Circles were formed, where women learned to read and write, to run their households, and bring up children.

To combat women's illiteracy was, indeed, one of the most important and urgent tasks of the Women's Organisation. In February 1983, women activists held a conference in Kabul to discuss the fight against illiteracy. They worked out a programme to improve the counter-illiteracy drive, with the Women's Organisation sponsoring 320 courses, and also teaching individuals.

The Women's Organisation co-operated most effectively with the mass media. Special programmes were broadcast on the radio and TV, and there were regular features, such as "Woman and Society", "The Woman and Current Affairs", and so on.

At first, the Women's Organisation had contacts with 36 countries. Now its contacts extend to as many as 80 countries, and to four international organisations. Of late, Afghan women have taken part in many international assemblies and forums.

There is also the Democratic Youth Organi-

sation of Afghanistan, with an initial membership of 110,000 young people. The Youth Organisation propagates the gains of the April Revolution. It conducts political training through circles, and puts out publications, such as the *Political Textbook* and a pamphlet entitled, *What Young People Must Know About the Revolution*. Youth centres have been set up in towns and districts, with libraries of political books. A youth newspaper, *Derafsbeh Javanon*, regularly carries political articles.

Local Youth Organisation committees maintain over a hundred agitation and propaganda teams and eight motorised groups. They have mobile clubs that move around, bringing political knowledge to people in out-of-the way places. The number of youth clubs is rising steadily.

Seeing the young people's predilection for poetry and art, the Youth Organisation has sponsored poets' and artists' clubs and seminars. Recently, a collection of poetry was put out, *Verse as Sharp as a Dagger*, and a collection of prose, *Tales of the Revolution*.

But the Youth Organisation's attention is focused mainly on work and jobs, education, and young people's participation in defending the gains of the April Revolution.

The National Fatherland Front is doing an immense amount of work with the country's mass organisations. Founded in June 1981, it has grown into a truly popular organisation, with the following among its collective members:

People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan,  
trade unions,  
Democratic Youth Organisation,

Democratic Women's Organisation,  
co-operative leagues and co-operatives,  
Union of Writers,  
Journalists' Union,  
Art Workers' Union,  
Peace, Solidarity and Friendship Organisation  
of Afghanistan,  
DRA Chamber of Commerce and Trade,  
Council of Ulemas and Priests,  
*Jirgehs* of tribes and ethnic groups, and others.

All in all, the collective members of the National Fatherland Front represent more than 500,000 people. In addition, the Front has more than 100,000 individual members.

More than 400 National Fatherland Front councils have been set up, including 24 provincial, 15 city, 19 county, 25 district and town, 26 rural, and 297 residential neighbourhood cells.

The central offices and provincial councils of the National Fatherland Front are staffed by cadres with experience in Party and government work. The organisation has united various segments of the Afghan nation for joint defence of the gains of the April Revolution. It has become a pillar of strength backing the DRA government. The Front also engages in extensive explicative and propaganda work: NFF groups have been formed for this purpose; special broadcasts are organised over the radio and TV; the newspapers joined in, too, and special pamphlets, bulletins, and leaflets are being put out. The NFF also organises meetings and talks with representatives of tribes and ethnic groups; nor does it forego international contacts, with a special accent on ties with socialist countries—notably the

Soviet Union, which has always cherished friendship with the Afghan people and never failed to aid its southern neighbour.

In May 1984 it was 65 years since diplomatic relations were established between the USSR and Afghanistan. On that occasion the CPSU Central Committee, USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium and USSR Council of Ministers sent a telegram to the Revolutionary Council of the DRA, which said in part:

“Soviet-Afghan relations were since the very beginning based on the principles of complete equality and mutual respect. Their foundations were laid by V. I. Lenin, the founder of the world’s first socialist state, at a time when the October Revolution had triumphed in the Soviet land and the people of Afghanistan had after a long and heroic struggle won their national independence.

“The April Revolution carried out by the Afghans under the leadership of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan has opened new perspectives for the old-time friendly and good-neighbour Soviet-Afghan relations. They have gained new scope and new fields of bilateral co-operation.

“We are sure that the lasting friendship of the Soviet Union and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan will continue to develop in the interests of the two peoples, of peace and international security.

“We wish the Afghans and the leadership of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan new success in the struggle for their country’s happiness and prosperity, in the building of the new society based on the principles of justice and social progress.”

The telegram sent by the PDPA Central Committee, Presidium of the Revolutionary Council and Council of Ministers of the DRA, said:

"The establishment of diplomatic relations and the recognition of the independence and complete sovereignty of Afghanistan by Soviet Russia was for our country an act of tremendous historical importance. Relying on the friendly and disinterested support of its great northern neighbour, the Afghan people gained an opportunity to multiply their strength in the just struggle for the recovery of their national independence. The friendship of our peoples has stood the test of time with honour, and has grown still stronger.

"The Afghan people, the PDPA, and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan are deeply and sincerely grateful for the Soviet Union's fraternal support of the April Revolution and its cause, of our struggle against the interference and intervention of reactionary and imperialist forces..."

The time-tested friendship of the Soviet and Afghan peoples is a sample of a new type of international relations based on the Leninist principles of peace, equality and mutual respect.

No few large enterprises that are pillars of the national economy were built with Soviet assistance in various parts of the country. Among them is the chemical fertilizer plant in Mazar-i-Sharif, the pioneer of the Afghan chemical industry, 1,600 km of modern motor roads, one of them across the Salang pass of the Hindu Kush at over 3,000 metres above sea level, several power stations, including a big one in Naglu, the Nangarhar irrigation scheme, and a few agricultural farms. A mechanical plant, a

housebuilding combine, a bread factory, and new housing developments have been built in Kabul, as well as several servicing stations for heavy-duty lorries. A space communications system, Intersputnik, has been commissioned. Soviet prospectors have helped to locate oil and gas fields, coal and copper ore deposits. A Polytechnic Institute and secondary mechanical and mining technical schools have been built and equipped.

"There have been all sorts of times in Afghanistan," Babrak Karmal, CC PDPA General Secretary and Chairman of the DRA Revolutionary Council, noted. "But the Soviet Union has always been a friend of the Afghan people and has rendered it truly internationalist support. It structured its co-operation with Afghanistan to meet the needs and interests of the Afghans, and to further the country's freedom and independence. The Afghans appreciate this greatly."

Other socialist countries, too, are affording Afghanistan considerable economic and technical aid. A trolleybus line in Kabul, equipment for coalmines and a cement factory in Herat, were financed with Czechoslovak credits.

Bulgaria helped to set up a poultry farm, a sheep-breeding farm, and a silkworm farm. It is also helping to build a brick factory, tannery, and dairy farm. The two fishery farms that it helped to build have already been commissioned.

The German Democratic Republic is assisting in the construction of a large telephone exchange in Kabul, helping to lay cables, and to expand the power supply system in various other towns.

Specialists from Hungary are taking part in a number of projects provided for in Afghanis-

tan's first five-year plan.

Nowadays, foreigners visiting Afghanistan do not fail to note the progress achieved since the April Revolution.

"The national-democratic revolution of 1978 was a natural development," Russell Carr, president of the British Society of Friends of the DRA, noted in April 1983. "It set in motion various socio-economic innovations that are helping to raise the living standard and cultural level of the working people."<sup>1</sup>

Whatever your ideological orientation may be, wrote D. R. Goyal, political commentator of the *National Herald* of India, who visited the DRA at the end of 1983, you cannot deny that Afghanistan threw off the shroud of medieval darkness when it performed the April Revolution of 1978.

It is a pity, he observed, that so many people in the world do not see the developments there in this light. In fact, as far as one can judge, they join the opinion expressed by President Nixon that Afghanistan should be preserved as a museum of the Middle Ages. The revolution has refuted this cynical drivel.<sup>2</sup>

"The progressive developments seen in the DRA today are irreversible," said Toshio Tanaka, president of the Japanese Society of Afghanistan Studies, who visited the DRA in March 1984. "I have been to the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in 1980, and can see the considerable change that has occurred in the country since then. The

<sup>1</sup>Bakhtar News Agency, May 2, 1983.

<sup>2</sup>See: *National Herald*, December 26, 1983.

People's Government has grown stronger. Its social base is now wider. I visited an exhibition illustrating Afghanistan's social and economic progress, and saw what the Republic has achieved in five years of revolution."<sup>1</sup>

The promoter and organiser of the victories of the Afghan people is the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan which celebrated its 20th anniversary in January 1985.

The Afghan people see from their own experience that the policy of the PDPA and the DRA Government meets their interests. The enemies of the April Revolution will never succeed in diverting them from the chosen path. The revolutionary process in Afghanistan is irreversible. Its people will overcome.

<sup>1</sup>Bakhtar News Agency, May 30, 1984.

## IN LIEU OF AN AFTERWORD

In conclusion I want to cite a few figures, facts, and events speaking of the successful development of the revolutionary process in Afghanistan, and showing how the gains of the April Revolution are taking ever deeper root.

But first of all I want to stress once more that the new society in Afghanistan is making headway in incredibly difficult conditions, in unbelievably difficult surroundings.

The undeclared war started by the imperialists, with the USA at their head, is continuing. In 1984, the "secret" US military aid to Afghan counter-revolutionaries was more than doubled. In 1985 it climbed to 280 million dollars, the total so far spent for this purpose by the USA coming to 625 million dollars. Besides, as much as 80 per cent of the CIA "covert operations" funding out of the Pentagon budget is being spent in aid to the rebels.

In April 1985, US Congress voted for direct and open aid to rebels to the tune of 15 million dollars, thus officially legitimising the US intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, a sovereign state and member of the UN.

Apart from direct aid to Afghan counter-revolutionaries via government channels, Washington encourages numerous US "public" and "private" organisations to collect funds for subversion and interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

At present, anti-Afghan propaganda is being in-

tensified in the USA, countries of the capitalist West, and elsewhere. In the USA, for example, the Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe corporations have allocated 450,000 and 250,000 dollars respectively in their 1986/1987 budgets for a new station, Radio Free Afghanistan, which will engage exclusively in subversive activity against the DRA.

Recently, US Congress approved a 500,000-dollar appropriation to the US Information Agency (USIA) for teaching Afghan rebels how to conduct propaganda.

The policy of the United States and other capitalist states is directed to sustaining a seat of tension in the region and creating an atmosphere of distrust in relations between states. Especially close attention is being devoted to Pakistan which as everybody knows, is still the chief base of Afghan counter-revolution. The USA, for example, supplies Pakistan with arms, which are subsequently smuggled into Afghanistan for use against the Revolution. US instructors train bandits thereupon smuggled into the DRA at special camps in Pakistan: at a centre of the Islamic Society of Afghanistan 35 km south-east of Peshavar, a training centre of the Islamic Party of Afghanistan, a training centre near Quetta, a commando leaders training centre at Besai, the military academy at Rawalpindi, and elsewhere.

DRA armed forces are repulsing the counter-revolutionary incursions. Writing in the newspaper *Haqiqat-e-Engelabe Saur* on August 5, 1985, Lieutenant-General Nabi Azzimi, First Deputy Defence Minister of the DRA, pointed out that in the first six months of 1985 the DRA army destroyed 1,168 "committees" of counter-revolutionaries,

captured 5,000 firearms, 595 arms caches and stores of food and ammunition, and took hundreds of bandits prisoner.

This list is growing steadily.

But the counter-revolution has not laid down its arms. It seeks revenge for its defeats, and perpetrates provocations, sabotage, and murder.

The hearts of Afghans throbbed with anger when *dushmans* exploded a bomb in a Kabul shopping centre in the summer of 1985, and when an Afghan Air Lines passenger liner on the Kabul-Kandahar-Farah flight was shot down by a US-made ground-to-air missile on September 4, 1985, causing the death of all its 47 passengers, including women and children, and the five-man crew.

“Counter Dushman Terrorism With Fortitude” and “Fight Enemies of the Revolution Still More Resolutely”—those were the inscriptions of streamers that Afghan citizens brought to the public trial of enemies of the Revolution in Kabul in September 1985.

A wretched handful of renegades, the gang that had exploded the bomb in the Kabul shopping centre, huddled miserably on a platform erected in a city square. “Death!”, “Death!” angry voices shouted in the crowd. The bandits fell to their knees and pleaded for mercy. No, there was no mercy to enemies of the Revolution.

In the several years of the undeclared war, counter-revolutionaries have burnt or otherwise destroyed nearly 2,000 schools, tens of hospitals and surgeries, hundreds of bridges, dams and other irrigation structures, and exploded bombs in cinemas and mosques, public vehicles, and so on.

In the circumstances, a considerable part of the

budget is being spent on military needs—strengthening the army, and reinforcing interior guard troops and detachments of volunteer defenders of the Revolution.

In spite of this, by 1984 the Afghan people managed to basically equal the pre-revolution gross national product, and to enliven the economy.

The share of the state sector in the country's economy is growing steadily. In the autumn of 1985 it accounted for about 80 per cent of factory industries, 100 per cent in building, more than 20 per cent in transport, and for half the turnover in foreign trade.

Indeed, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan considers the state sector the chief economic base of the Revolution and its main social base. But the Party also supports the national bourgeoisie which has joined the drive to overcome the country's socio-economic backwardness. More than 20 various new enterprises began operating in the private sector in 1984 and 1985, and application for another 50 have been filed.

The life of workers and salary-earners in Afghanistan is improving. Their earnings have gone up by one-third since the people took power. These days, working people buy flour, oil, tea and many other necessities in state-operated shops at reduced prices. The state also subsidises many community services, medical care, education, city transport, printed matter, use of electric power, and the like. In 1984-1985 alone, the DRA government allocated 2.5 billion afghani for these purposes.

A few words about the improvement of working conditions. In, say, the Jangalak Car Repair Plant...

The plant has car repair and mechanical work-

shops and a foundry, and puts out a range of metal products: bridge girders, tunnel columns, check valves for hydraulic installations, construction machinery spares, and so on. It plays a conspicuous part in building up the country's productive forces. In the past five years it has increased output 22 per cent, with four-fifths of the accretion resulting from a heightening of the productivity of labour. At present, the plant has its own dining-room, kindergarten, and out-patient clinic. Workers who live far from the plant are taken to and from work in buses. Construction is also under way of two hostels and a housing development for plant personnel, and the like.

Or take agriculture.

A decree of the Revolutionary Council annulled the debts to feudal lords and usurers of 11 million peasants. (The debts totalled over 30 billion afghani.) More than 320,000 families have been given land. In 1985, the number of consumer, artisan, and supply co-operatives rose to nearly 450, with a membership of more than 90,000.

Other figures, too, show the concern of the DRA government for the growth of agriculture. In 1985, for example, peasant farms and agricultural co-operatives were granted loans totalling more than 143 million afghani. They were supplied more than 60 tons of fertilizer, and 45 million afghani worth of pesticides, a highly important thing in Afghan conditions. Besides, peasant farms and co-operatives were provided 5,000 tons of selected wheat seeds and 6,650 tons of beet seeds. To assist farmers, the government lowered the price of a 50-kg sack of fertilizer by 100 afghani.

Following adoption of the amended Land Law

in February 1984, the progress of the land and water reform picked up pace across the country. Started in 1979, the reform hit out hard against landlords and usurers, but was not carried out with equal thoroughness in all parts of the country. Islamic dogmas saying land is given by Allah and only those who have always had it, i.e. feudal lords, could own it, fear of the *dushman* counter-revolutionaries who fiercely "punished" peasants who took land, and the mistakes of local authorities—all this worked against mass support of the reform.

Taking account of the acute class struggle, the need for rallying all patriotic forces in the country to fight the counter-revolution, and the faults committed in the past, the authors of the amended Land Law considered the interests not only of the poorest peasants, but also those of other allies of the Revolution, such as the middle and part of the prosperous peasantry, and even the interests of those individual landlords who turned over their products to government purchasing agencies under contract.

Furthermore, the conduct of the agrarian reform became more democratic. Previously, it was carried out mainly from above through the government apparatus, and mainly by government personnel; now the accent is being made first of all on the initiative of the masses. Local distinctions and national traditions are being taken into account, too. Control over the reform, over compliance with its rules and terms, is in the hands of *kishlak* (village) councils, which are vested with extensive rights.

Transport, too, is making headway. In 1985, the AFSOTR joint-stock company alone more than doubled haulage over the 1980 figure. Now, total

haulage has gone up to 320,000 tons from 121,000 tons in 1980.

The cultural revolution is being conducted on a grand scale. The principle of compulsory and free primary schooling has been introduced for children, and all citizens have been made equal in the educational field irrespective of their social status, sex, and nationality.

More than 800 new schools have been founded in the years of the Revolution, some 300 different textbooks and teaching aids have been published, new curricula have been drawn up, and the number of teachers has been increased.

As many as 254 of the school buildings demolished by counter-revolutionaries have been rebuilt at a cost of 187 million afghani. The number of schoolchildren has risen to 64,600.

The system of higher and specialised secondary education is also expanding. There are five university-level establishments, 23 colleges, 24 lyceums, 7 secondary technical schools, and 2 technical colleges. The fight against illiteracy among adults continues, and political education is being expanded.

Mass media, which were restructured from the bottom up after the April Revolution, hold an important role. Newspapers, radio and television are winning ever greater popularity, and are helping to organise the masses. They keep people informed of events at home and abroad, and provide varied political news.

Among the pavilions at the 5th International Book Fair (Moscow, September 1985), in which 140 countries participated, Number 272 stood for the Afghan exposition, which attracted a great deal of attention. Deputy Chairman of the DRA Com-

mittee for Book Publishing, Rakhgozar, said:

"In the past few years the interest in books has increased very greatly in my country. And small wonder. People are learning to read, and the demand for books, that universal source of knowledge, has gone up. This has been made possible through the April Revolution."

Someone asked how many books there were in the Afghan exposition.

"Two hundred and thirty," he said.

"And how many were there at the previous fair?" someone asked.

"A hundred and ten."

Not a bad growth rate, I thought to myself.

"Apart from fiction and children's books," Rakhgozar said, "we concentrate on publishing socio-political books. That is highly important for us at present. The mass of the people must have access to political information. We must explain our policy to them tell them of the meaning behind the ongoing socio-political and economic changes. Or take the elections to local councils..."

I knew this. I knew that in the summer of 1985, an important socio-political campaign was launched in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. For the first time in history, Afghans were electing deputies to local governments. The elections were universal and equal, irrespective of class, social, national, tribal and religious distinctions. All citizens of 18 and over were entitled to vote.

I had been told that the elections, which began in one of the districts of Kabul and simultaneously in six kishlaks of Baghrami county, involved traditional rituals and customs.

Shortly before the elections to local govern-

ments or jirgehs, as they are called in Afghanistan, Babrak Karmal, General Secretary of the PDPA Central Committee and President of the DRA Revolutionary Council, addressed the people. He said Afghans were about to exercise their most important right and to perform their civic duty—electing people's representatives and thereby putting into effect one of the main gains of the April Revolution. And the Afghan people responded to his address with enthusiasm. The elections opened in a good socio-political climate.

People from all walks of life—workers, peasants, intellectuals, representatives of private enterprise, and religious leaders, including many women and young people—were elected to the jirgehs.

A few words, too, about another important socio-political event that took place in September 1985: the Big Jirgeh (All-Afghan Council) of representatives of tribes living in the border zones.

It goes without saying that the tribes have always played a conspicuous role in the life of Afghanistan, especially the border tribes. From times immemorial they have guarded the Afghan border, and were at once border guards, customs officers, and sanitary inspectors. It was they who decided who could be allowed into the country and who could not, and if a herdsman came from across the border with a sick sheep or cow—they would never allow him to pass.

The Afghan king never took young men of the border tribes to serve in the army. Their guarding the border was equated to military service.

Some of the people of those tribes did not immediately take to the April Revolution. Neither did some of the tribal chiefs. And this was not surprising. Tribesmen are usually illiterate and sus-

ceptible to the influence of tradition and to prejudices. Nor did information about what was going on in the country reach them quickly enough. A radio receiver was rare, a TV set non-existent. Besides, enemies of the Revolution did their dirty work, distorting events, intimidating people, seeing to it that people should not get to know the truth about the Revolution. But you cannot hide the truth all of the time. It will find its way past all barriers and obstacles. And that was what happened with the border tribes: there came a day when they finally understood the sense and aims of the April Revolution, accepted it, and sent their representatives to Kabul to the Big Jirgeh.

The DRA flag waved above the Kabul Polytechnic. National music resounded everywhere, and a procession of men, representatives of border tribes, headed for the Polytechnic's assembly hall, where the Big Jirgeh was about to open. A festive atmosphere reigned all round.

Plenipotentiary envoys had gathered that day in Kabul from Pathan, Baluchi, Nuristan and other tribes to discuss crucial issues of DRA home and foreign policy. More than 2,000 delegates had come, and all of them were ready to speak at the Big Jirgeh and declare that their tribe was eager to take part in strengthening and defending the border of the Republic, to fight the counter-revolution, and to take part in the socio-economic and cultural renovation of the regions concerned.

Babrak Karmal, General Secretary of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and President of the DRA Revolutionary Council, addressed the Big Jirgeh, noting the important part played by the border tribes in safeguarding the freedom and

independence of Afghanistan.

The founding of the PDPA, Babrak Karmal said, was a major event in the country's current history. From the first day, it has worked consistently for peace and security, for freedom and independence, and for social justice. What the Party was doing, he said, embodied into practice the age-long aspirations of the working people. And the facts showed beyond a doubt, he added, that the Party and the people were united. The PDPA had built its membership to 140,000 since the April Revolution. It had applied the maximum effort to tighten the alliance and unity of all tribes and nationalities inhabiting Afghanistan. Under its leadership, the people had embarked on socio-economic and cultural advancement, and were building a new, progressive society.

Babrak Karmal showed that it was a patriotic duty to defend and buttress the country's borders in face of the continuing undeclared war, and outlined to the envoys of the border tribes a concrete programme for ensuring the security of the frontier.

And the Big Jirgeh responded to his words with complete accord!

The tribal chiefs and elders whose grandfathers and fathers had in the past fought heroically against English colonialists, assured the Party and the people that their tribes would do their utmost to safeguard the borders with Pakistan and Iran, to consolidate peace and security in the tribal regions, and to speed up the socio-economic and cultural development of their regions, which had at all times before been the most backward in the country.

The Big Jirgeh unanimously adopted a few policy documents. Its resolution stressed that only

co-operation with the lawful central authority could ensure the well-being and speedier socio-economic development of the tribes, and guarantee their traditions and self-government. The tribal envoys said that attempts at using their territory and people to smuggle arms and counter-revolutionary terrorist gangs into Afghan provinces from abroad would be halted. The tribal Big Jirgeh declared its single-minded support for the Supreme Assembly of the people of Afghanistan that had gathered in the spring of 1985. The Big Jirgeh resolution expressed gratitude to the Soviet Union for its selfless political, economic, social, cultural and military aid.

The Big Jirgeh called on the people of Afghanistan to work peacefully and render all-out support to the PDPA and the revolutionary government. Addressing countrymen who for various reasons were outside the country, the Big Jirgeh called on them to come home, and those who had been persuaded to join the counter-revolutionary activities by deceit, to stop the fratricide and opt in favour of their revolutionary motherland.

The Big Jirgeh elected a standing tribal consultative council, which became a collective member of the DRA National Fatherland Front. The council will deal with matters concerning relations between tribes and the government, and the conduct of the nationalities policy.

In his concluding remarks, Babrak Karmal said the historic importance of the Big Jirgeh was that it had given the question of defending the country's borders and border areas a new, revolutionary dimension. The borders of Afghanistan, he added, would be open to friends and closed to enemies.

Good changes are seen in Afghanistan's position on the international scene. Already, it has diplomatic relations with more than 80 countries. A member of the non-aligned movement, the DRA pursues an active foreign policy, acting for world peace and security, and against imperialism, neocolonialism and racism in all their shapes and forms.

Babrak Karmal stressed that independent Afghanistan is an active member of the non-aligned movement and followed the principle of peaceful coexistence in its foreign policy. The people of Afghanistan, he said, would never tolerate foreign interference in their internal affairs—which, he added, the American and other imperialists, and the Pakistani and Iranian reactionaries, would do well to remember.

But, while repulsing counter-revolutionaries, the DRA government is seeking to normalise relations with its neighbours—Iran and Pakistan. Three rounds of indirect Afghan-Pakistani negotiations have taken place in Geneva in 1982, 1983 and 1984 with the mediation of a personal representative of the UN Secretary-General. Unfortunately, they did not yield the desired results. The reason, in the opinion of Sh. M. Dost, the DRA Foreign Minister, was that Pakistan did not try to find common ground at the talks, taking part in them essentially to avoid being blamed for their breakdown.

Giving added impulse to its international activities, the Central Committee of the People's Democratic Party and the government of Afghanistan are expanding contacts with the socialist countries, above all, the Soviet Union.

Replying to the Soviet leadership's message on the 66th anniversary of Afghanistan's recovery of

its independence, CC PDPA General Secretary and Revolutionary Council President Babrak Karmal and Chairman of the DRA Council of Ministers Sultan Ali Keshtmand pointed out that "with the victory of the April Revolution in Afghanistan, the relations of our two countries and peoples entered a qualitatively new stage. The main factor determining their content is indestructible fraternal friendship and revolutionary solidarity, and close co-operation in all spheres.

"The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, the DRA government, and the people of Afghanistan are grateful to the heroic Soviet people for their diverse selfless assistance in repulsing the aggression inspired by imperialist and reactionary forces against the gains of the April Revolution, the independence of our Motherland. Your great country's aid in advancing Afghan economy and culture, and securing conditions for the Afghan people's peaceful and constructive life, has been invaluable.

"The people of Afghanistan are determined to safeguard and strengthen fraternal friendship with the great Soviet Union, the buttress of all those who aspire to peace, independence and progress."

Lev Nikolayev  
**AFGHANISTAN**  
**Between the Past  
and the Future**

In the spring of 1978, Afghanistan, which had been considered one of the world's most backward countries, performed a leap from medievalism to the 20th century. "Co-operative", "agrarian reform", and "elimination of illiteracy" — those were the slogans that determined the choice made by millions of Afghans for whom the April Revolution opened the doors to a new life. This book by Lev Nikolayev, a witness of many of Afghanistan's revolutionary transformations, shows how this choice was made — a choice that aroused the hatred of reactionaries at home and imperialists abroad, and spurred them to launch an undeclared war against the new people's government.

