

SOVIET PUPPETS, NOT REBELS ARE AFGHAN REACTIONARIES



Afghan rebels, Fall 1979.

Dave Kline photo

How do you justify naked aggression?

In the case of Afghanistan, the Soviets along with a handful of apologists in the U.S. simply stand reality on its head. The invasion, they claim, was to defend a progressive people's government from feudal reactionaries and foreign interference. This is practically a case study in the Big Lie technique.

The regime the Soviets moved in to salvage took power in a military coup in April of 1978. It consisted solely of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, a small faction-ridden organization of a few thousand urban intellectuals who appointed themselves the leaders of the "Afghan revolution." The PDPA had no roots in the countryside, where 13.5 million of the country's 15.5 million people live.

WHAT REFORMS?

The regime, headed by Nur Mohammed Taraki, announced an elaborate program of social reforms designed to strengthen its hold on the population. Among its promises were land reform, a literacy campaign and an end to the dowery system which is the backbone of arranged marriage.

The land reform campaign lasted 8 months and, while it did break up some large estates, affected only 4% of the nation's farmland. In some instances families were forced to settle on land the government had assigned them hundreds of miles from their home

(Continued on page 19)

AFGHAN SOCIALISM?

(Continued from page 10)

villages. Nor did the program break the chain of debt to money-lenders and offer a substitute way to organize the rural economy.

Large landowners naturally felt threatened by the program. On the other hand, it offered the peasants nothing to rally around, particularly since they weren't mobilized by the urban PPDA cadre who bureaucratically instituted what little actual land reform there was from above.

THE REAL FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

Other reforms proved limited and top-down in character or were non-existent. They were accompanied by outright attacks on the people's Islamic faith. Youths with traditional Moslem names were told to change them. The old flag with its Islamic green was replaced by an all red flag to symbolize a so-called socialism the people neither understood nor supported. The nation's main religious leader, Muhammed Ibrahim, was jailed along with many others.

Galling, too, for the fiercely independent Afghans, was the unmistakable hand of the USSR behind the regime. The PDPA's power rested on Soviet bayonets. The Army was equipped with 700 T-62 tanks, 60 MiG-21 fighter bombers and similar hardware. Soviet "advisors" commanded the Army down to the company level.

A French journalist sympathetic to the regime reported, "Soviet experts, who are numerous in the mines, health and agriculture ministries in particular, directly influence political, social and economic options."

THE REBELS

What turned resistance to the PDPA

into full-fledged national rebellion was savage government repression. Urban opposition leaders were jailed, tortured and killed. Whole villages were destroyed for suspected opposition to government policies, like the town of Kerala where troops commanded by a Soviet officer rounded up over 1,000 men and machine-gunned them down, then plowed them under with bulldozers.

The rebel groups, most of them led by traditional tribal chiefs, grew rapidly and took control of more and more of the countryside. Large scale uprisings and desertions shook the Army. The crisis deepened divisions inside the PDPA. Taraki returned from a trip to the USSR and tried to do in his number two man, Hafizullah Amin. Amin drew first and became the new Prime Minister.

It didn't help. By December, the government had virtually no support--at least inside Afghanistan. Its policies and loyalty to foreign masters had alienated all sections of the people and driven them into rebellion or flight to Pakistan.

WHAT'S REALLY PROGRESSIVE?

The scenario the Soviets try to paint has a very familiar ring. It is exactly how Henry Kissinger and company used to portray the Shah of Iran, as an enlightened reformer whose "White Revolution" introduced land reform, increased literacy and liberated women. His opponents were slandered as feudal religious fanatics paid by Moscow and followed blindly by the more ignorant sections of the population.

It was a lie in Iran and it is a lie in Afghanistan. Phony reforms and real repression by foreign-backed dictators cannot be called progressive. The people rising up and taking up arms against oppression and foreign domination--that's progressive!