

## Protests demand Canadian troops out of Afghanistan

### The political issues in the fight against war

By the Socialist Equality Party (Canada)

27 October 2006

Two thousand three hundred Canadian Armed Forces troops, backed by Leopard tanks and NATO warplanes, are waging a colonial-style war in southern Afghanistan in support of the US-installed regime of Hamid Karzai.

Last month Canadian troops killed hundreds of villagers in Panjwayi district who had risen up in protest against local Afghan police and security forces who were extorting, robbing, and abusing them. This week saw a fresh atrocity: NATO warplanes reportedly killed dozens of villagers in Panjwayi and in a second district of Kandahar province, Pashmul.

The Canadian mission in Afghanistan is directly tied to the illegal US occupation of Iraq. The deployment of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel in southern Afghanistan was undertaken at Washington's request and with the definite aim of enabling the Pentagon to concentrate its forces on subjugating Iraq.

While ordinary Canadians are angered by their government's efforts to help the Bush administration extricate itself from its Iraq quagmire and by the atrocities committed in their name, the corporate media and political establishment have enthusiastically supported the CAF counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan, hailing it as proof that Canada is once again a "player" in global affairs.

Last May parliament endorsed the minority Conservative government's plans to extend the CAF mission in southern Afghanistan for at least two more years, until early 2009, and to expand it to include Canada assuming overall command of the NATO occupation of Afghanistan for one year starting in February 2008.

#### Preparing for future wars

Undoubtedly, among the calculations that have led Ottawa to seek a major role in the Afghan counter-insurgency war is that Afghanistan abuts and lies near Central Asian countries with vast reserves of oil and natural gas. Jean Chretien, the Liberal Prime Minister who in 2001 first deployed Canadian troops to Afghanistan, has been involved, since retiring from office, in efforts to secure Canadian corporate participation in pipeline projects that would access Central Asian energy resources via Afghanistan.

But the CAF's Afghan counter-insurgency mission is also about preparing for further wars. In this it is similar to the US invasion of Afghanistan, which was plotted as the stepping stone to the war on Iraq. Through the current intervention in Afghanistan, Canada's corporate and political elite are seeking to manufacture a militarist ethos, acclimatize the public to war fatalities, and justify a rapid expansion and

rearmament of the military. In particular, the most powerful sections of the Canadian ruling class are determined to put paid to the notion that Canada is a "peacekeeping nation," for they view it as an obstacle to their plans to use the CAF to aggressively assert their predatory interests on the world stage.

The CAF's prosecution of a colonial-style counter-insurgency war in Afghanistan represents a significant and ominous political shift. Not since the Korean War have Canadian ground troops been involved in offensive operations.

But just as the Harper government's socio-economic agenda of tax and social and public service cuts only builds on the rightwing policies pursued by the Chretien-Martin Liberal government and at the provincial level by all parties, including the trade union-supported New Democratic Party and Parti Quebecois, so the path for the current Afghan mission was blazed by previous federal governments. In the past fifteen years, Canada has repeatedly been at war or involved in punitive military operations, including the 1991 Gulf War, the 12-year UN sanction regime against Iraq, the 1999 NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, and the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. Only at the eleventh-hour did the Chretien Liberal government decide not to deploy CAF personnel in support of the US invasion of Iraq. In February-March 2004, Canadian troops were deployed alongside French and US military personnel to secure the ousting of Haiti's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The SEP welcomes the October 28 anti-war demonstrations and their demand for the immediate withdrawal of all Canadian troops from Afghanistan. But we warn against their leadership, which is telling workers and youth that militarism can be opposed through the existing political framework and that the Canadian government can be pressured to act as a force for peace and democracy in world affairs.

#### A systemic crisis

The fight against imperialist war is bound up with a struggle against the entire political and social structure of Canada and of world capitalism as a whole.

The 15 years since the end of the Cold War have not seen the promised spread of peace and prosperity, but rather the rehabilitation of war as an instrument of state policy and a never-ending assault on the social gains of the working-class and democratic rights.

These two phenomena are in fact expressions of the same crisis of the profit system. Transnational corporations scour the globe in search of natural resources and reserves of cheap labour to exploit. Organized on a global scale, they systematically transfer production where labor costs are the cheapest. The war on the working class thus constitutes the

consummate expression of the ever-intensifying corporate struggle for profits and investment.

Likewise, rival national-blocs of capitalists are locked in a geo-political struggle for advantage, seeking to bolster their position through economic and geo-political alliances and by securing through economic, political, and military means control over vital resources and strategic areas.

In pursuit of wars aimed at ensuring its domination over the world's oil supplies, the United States, the most powerful capitalist country, has trashed the system of international relations and multilateral alliances it helped create in an earlier period to mitigate inter-imperialist antagonisms and underpin its own domination. This only underscores that the current crisis is systemic.

In response to the US's illegal war of plunder against Iraq, all the great powers have undertaken to rearm. World geopolitics are characterized by a state of fluidity, rivalry, and anxiety not seen the 1930s. Even where the great capitalist powers appear to be allied, as in the campaign to bully Iran over its nuclear program, there are huge tensions and conflicts simmering just below the surface.

It is now conceded by virtually the entire US establishment that the Iraq War has turned into a debacle of historic proportions. But there is effective unanimity in the US elite that there can be no turning back. This was clearly demonstrated this week when the *New York Times*, the traditional organ of US liberalism, published an editorial calling for an intensification of the war in Iraq. According to the *Times*, US withdrawal would result in "the terrible consequences"—that is "terrible consequences" for US imperialism.

Among the chief fears animating the *Times* and the entire US elite is that the American working class, which under the leadership of an ossified and violently anti-socialist union bureaucracy has suffered a catastrophic decline in its social position, is increasingly alienated from the entire political structure, including the Democratic Party, the ruling class party that has postured as friend of the common man.

### **Canadian Imperialism**

As an imperialist power of the second or third rank, Canadian capital must often defer, even genuflect, to its powerful southern neighbour. But its instincts and ambitions are no different.

Canada was a major belligerent in both of the imperialist world wars of the last century and its rulers are determined that they will be at the table in any future division of the world. As Prime Minister Harper said in a major foreign policy speech in Calgary earlier this month, "Just take a look around the room, we're among Canadians who lead corporations that do business in every corner of the planet." In the same speech, Harper bluntly declared the Canadian troop fatalities in Afghanistan are "the price" of reviving "Canadian leadership in the world."

The *National Post*, the newspaper closest to the current government, meanwhile, has unabashedly proclaimed that Ottawa should press Washington to accept Canada's claim to a vast and potentially mineral-rich swathe of the Arctic Ocean in return for Canada's support for the US in other parts of the

world.

Over the past quarter century the ostensible leadership of the working class—the trade unions and the social democratic NDP—have suppressed the class struggle, imposing job and wage cuts and derailing working class upsurges against the destruction of the public and social services. They have been equally complicit in the Canadian bourgeoisie's turn to militarism. The NDP supported the UN sanction regime against Iraq for a decade, even as it was costing hundreds of thousands of Iraqis their lives. It supported the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, and until this past August it supported Canada's military intervention in Afghanistan. In fact, the NDP was propping up the Paul Martin Liberal government in parliament when it decided to deploy the CAF to wage war in southern Afghanistan. Even now the NDP supports keeping a contingent of Canadian troops in Kabul.

As for the Bloc Québécois, the *indépendantiste* party supported by the Quebec unions, it has denounced the NDP's call for the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan as "irresponsible".

The unions and NDP are now trying to place themselves at the head of—or at least associate themselves with—the anti-war movement. Both the NDP and the BQ hope to garner votes by appealing to the opposition to Harper and Bush. But they are equally concerned with politically emasculating the antiwar movement. They and the unions are united in calling for the resurrection of the "independent foreign policy" pursued by Liberal governments of the 1960s and 1970s.

The reality is that throughout the Cold War Canada was a partner of NATO and NORAD. "Peacekeeping" was a way the Canadian ruling class could gain some leverage on the world stage, in pursuit of the interests of Canadian capital, and just as importantly was a means of refashioning Canadian nationalism to make it a more effective instrument for harnessing working people to the objectives of the Canadian ruling class.

The struggle against war will not be advanced through appeals to the capitalist politicians and the ruling class, or by counterposing to the program of the bourgeoisie of today its program of yesteryear.

Rather it requires the independent political mobilization of the working class on a socialist and internationalist program. Imperialist war and the war on workers and democratic rights are rooted in a crisis of the profit system. The struggle against one is inseparable from the struggle against the other, and both require the international mobilization of the working class against the domination of the world economy by giant, privately-owned corporations and the division of the world into a system of competing nation-states.

Workers in Canada given their long history of common struggle with workers in the US and the close integration of the North American economy have an especial responsibility in assisting workers in the US to break from the Democratic Party and organize themselves as an independent political force in opposition to US imperialism.

It is for this program that the SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* fight.