

Letters from our readers

16 July 2009

On “A war of colonial conquest in Afghanistan”

The article suggests that the real reasons for the ongoing occupation of Afghanistan relate to geopolitics and oil. I would add another, perhaps even more significant reason: opium.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Afghanistan currently supplies some 93 per cent of the world’s opium.” The UNODC’s 2008 Afghanistan Opium Survey noted that Helmand province “...produced 2/3 of all Afghan opium in 2008.” The Survey also noted that “...the farmgate value of the opium harvest amounted to US\$730 million in 2008.” This, in turn, feeds into a multibillion-dollar global narcotics/heroin market.

So it would appear that whoever controls Helmand province controls the main source of a very lucrative international drug trade. In this light, the WSWs report that “the largest military operation since the Obama administration took office is now underway in the southern Afghan province of Helmand” is not surprising.

Moreover, the US Army chief of staff Gen. George Casey’s warning that “there’s going to be a big fight in the south” takes on extra significance when considering that, according to the UNODC, “In 2008, 98% of opium cultivation was confined to seven provinces in the south and west, namely Hilmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul, Farah and Nimroz.”

The 2008 Afghanistan Opium Survey summarized, noting, “This geographical overlap between regions of opium and zones of insurgency shows the inextricable link between drugs and conflict.”

While opium cultivation appears inextricably linked to ongoing conflict and occupation, it may have also been the main source of the 2001 US-led invasion.

The UNODC’s 2001 report on Global Illicit Drug Trends noted, “On 27 July 2000, the Taleban [sic] supreme leader issued a decree imposing a total ban on opium poppy cultivation on the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Early reports from 2001 indicate that the Taleban ban is being enforced vigilantly.” In fact, opium cultivation in 2001 was reduced by about 90%.

This fits the timeline sketched out in the WSWs article: “When instability prevented the realisation of those plans, the presence of Al Qaeda was exploited, at least by 2000, to begin preparations for a direct US conquest of the country. The September 11 attacks provided the pretext to set the plan into operation.”

Opium cultivation rebounded to pre-ban levels in 2002 following the overthrow of the Taliban government and installation of a puppet regime.

So while the ongoing AfPak conflict involves geopolitics and oil,

there also seems to be good reason to believe that not only is the Obama administration protecting the drug trade, but that Obama is now the region’s drug-lord-in-chief.

Sources:

http://www.unodc.org/documents/cropmonitoring/Afghanistan_Opium_Survey_2008.pdf

http://www.unodc.org/pdf/report_2001-06-26_1/report_2001-06-26_1.pdf

Dan P

10 July 2009

On “Public Enemies and a pivotal moment in American history”

This review is the best I’ve read about this film, including those in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*. No doubt indeed that Dillinger was a cruel and in many ways a heartless sociopath, victim, if that’s what we can call it, of an antisocial personality disorder. However, he was nowhere near as dangerous as Hoover, or the parents of the institutions upon whom Dillinger preyed. Sadly, perhaps, Dillinger never made it from Main Street to Wall Street where nested the real and the worst culprits.

Worse, Hoover himself, America’s most horrendous antisexual closet case, went on, as Ms. Laurier points out, to become one of the most dangerous criminals of the 20th century, framing innocent people, burglarizing and wiretapping at will without warrants for a half century, instigating behind the scenes the Second Red Scare [1945-1959], and ending as the most powerful politician in Washington, unelected at that, and probably responsible for more deaths of innocent people than Dillinger ever was (someone should count them sometime).

Alas, in typical Hollywood mythological fashion, such films never portray either heroes or villains as they really are—Dillinger putting a gun to the stomach of one banker and pulling the trigger (the gun didn’t go off), or knocking out the teeth of a 70-year-old man with the barrel of his gun because the man was too frightened to follow the robber’s directions to move to a corner of the bank. He or members of his gang were also responsible for the deaths of numerous law enforcement people. But like a true sociopath, he was ever kind to his friends to whom he lent money freely, often showering them with gifts, forgiving debts, getting them out of jail, and staying loyal to them. A curious but dangerous character, a real American icon, someday we’ll see the truth of him in a film. This one isn’t it.

Jim C

New Jersey, USA 11 July 2009

On “New York state government uses budget crisis to attack pensions”

The Texas legislature did the same thing. You might want to

check with the Texas State Employees' Union for the details.

Michael C
13 July 2009

It can be added to this account of pension cuts that the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has also agreed to support legislation that will force new teachers to pay more for their pensions by extending a 3 percent deduction from salaries that ends for current teachers after 10 years. This is the fourth plan that has reduced teacher pensions since the cuts and layoffs during New York City's bankruptcy in 1975.

In an absurdist reversal of the real meaning of this action, UFT President Randi Weingarten, who is retiring to preside over the national American Federation of Teachers, stated, "The question we asked ourselves is do we want to control our destiny in this or do we want the situation we had in the 1970s when a new pension tier was imposed on us?" It must first be pointed out that the "we" she refers to is the union bureaucracy, since the Delegate Assembly, tightly controlled by Weingarten's Unity Caucus, voted without discussion among rank-and-file teachers.

The elimination of the 3 percent contribution was won in 2000 when the stock market was flush, and it is given up by the union in the face of declining revenues that forced increased employer contributions. This demonstrates that the labor bureaucracies' chief concern is to the protection of business and its profits, not the welfare of workers.

This is just one more attack on working and living conditions that is part of the corporate education "reforms" movement, which is indifferent if teachers are discouraged from working the years to gain experience and to reach retirement. It is part of the imposition of flexibility and temporization on the work force in general, even more now with the layoffs and furloughs in the crisis. As the Socialist Equality Party has pointed out, the bourgeoisie is taking advantage of the crisis to restructure class relations. And as the SEP has also pointed out, this requires that the working class fight against the union alliance with the political system of the bosses by the creation of a party based on socialist policies.

Thanks to the WSWS,

HL
13 July 2009

On "Australia: Victorian government attempts to pre-empt findings of bushfire investigation"

An excellent report by Margaret Rees into the political cover-up and maneuvers of Labor premier John Brumby to preempt the present Royal Commission.

She writes, "The commission will not resume public hearings until August 24. Irrespective of its findings, Brumby's actions over the past week highlight a stark truth: the government's central concern is to cover up its role, and that of its predecessors, in running down basic fire and emergency services, thus creating the conditions for the 'Black Saturday' catastrophe."

The deadly firestorm that claimed the lives of 173 people and destroyed more than 2,000 homes also exposed hundreds more to extreme life-threatening conditions whereby the fire could have easily engulfed them. Without any exaggeration, the fate of many

people depended on which way the wind was shifting. Much of the deaths are due to decades of sheer neglect and cost-cutting in the regional areas by the various politicians. So that the resident fire engine is basically a small truck or even less, from money the community raises from weekly raffles. And this equipment is plainly inadequate to fight a large bushfire or worse—many fires raging in the same area. Quite a few of the trees in the bush land were Eucalypts with their leaves rich in oils, creating conditions for exploding firestorms on a phenomenal scale. That aspect also put the firefighters (mostly voluntary) in danger. Many people are still traumatized and emotionally and distressed, in the wake of the nation's worst bushfire in recorded history. Experts too have come out, publicly warning, worse may yet come, due to climate change and drought that must increase the ferocity and frequency of bushfires.

However, after the deaths of 173 people, there will be neither increases in funding equipment improvements nor additional firemen on the ground—none! The Labor government, Liberal Government and the Greens have played a major and criminal role in the refusal to recognize that full-time professional firefighters and adequate fire engines are absolutely necessary, at hand and on call. Such a budget amount would be piddling considering the recent multibillions of dollars thrown at the cronies of politicians such as the finance swindlers: For them, it's another big payday that could easily include new Ferraris and a private Lear jet costing \$30 million over three years.

Justice Philip Woodward, who led a few Royal Commissions, intimated on TV that government commissions are designed to cover up more than they reveal.

John C
Australia
11 July 2009



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