

Mounting popular opposition to the war in Afghanistan

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A series of recent polls have shown growing popular opposition in Europe to the US-NATO war in Afghanistan.

One recent poll puts opposition in Germany to the presence of German troops in Afghanistan at 85 percent. The latest poll in France shows 55 percent opposed to the war and in favor of the immediate withdrawal of French soldiers.

In Britain, according to the latest ComRes poll, more than half of the people (52 percent) want troops to be withdrawn straight away, while some 64 percent say British forces should be removed “as quickly as possible.”

Former British Foreign Office minister Kim Howells recently warned that the tide was definitively turning against the war. “I don’t think the public are up for it anymore,” he told the BBC.

Similarly, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said last month in an interview: “After the Iraq experience, nobody is prepared to have a long slog where it is not apparent we are making headway. The troops are tired; the American people are pretty tired.”

Popular anti-war sentiment, however, finds no expression in the policies of governments or, for that matter, those of opposition parties within the bourgeois political establishment.

The US and European governments are making clear that their military intervention in the war-torn land is open-ended. Within the framework of official politics and the media, they are being criticized by their political opponents for not pursuing the war with sufficient ruthlessness.

In a surprise visit to Afghanistan just days after his official inauguration as new head of NATO, former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen appeared alongside the despised Afghan president, Hamid Karzai,

and declared, “We will stay and support you as long as it takes to finish our job...” Rasmussen’s comments follow Defense Secretary Gates remark last month that victory in Afghanistan is a “long-term prospect.”

The imperviousness of official politics to the will of the populace on war is an expression of a terminal decay of bourgeois democracy. The broad mass of the people are effectively disenfranchised.

The war in Afghanistan has already lasted two years longer than the US-led war against Iraq, and is ever more nakedly revealing itself to be a shabby and brutal attempt by the major powers to establish control over a country strategically situated in oil-rich Central Asia.

Launched in 2001 following the 9/11 hijack-bombings in the US, the operation in Afghanistan was originally justified as a reprisal against Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, who were held to be responsible for the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. The Taliban regime was targeted for overthrow on the grounds that it had rejected a US ultimatum to extradite bin Laden and his top lieutenants to the US.

In fact, the US-led invasion was the implementation of pre-existing plans to establish American hegemony over Afghanistan, for which 9/11 served as a convenient pretext. The current war is the culmination of US machinations that go back at least 30 years, beginning with CIA funding for the anti-Soviet mujahedeen, whose numbers included bin Laden.

Washington and its NATO allies have long since ceased justifying the war as a hunt for bin Laden. He is rarely mentioned, as is Al Qaeda. Instead, the all-purpose enemy is the Taliban, the name serving as a catch-all for all those in Afghanistan and Pakistan who are resisting foreign intervention.

The Obama administration has, moreover, unceremoniously dropped the Bush-era claim that the war is a crusade for democracy in Afghanistan. Just one week

after Obama's inauguration, Gates cynically told a Senate committee that the US was not aiming to establish a "Central Asian Valhalla" in the occupied country.

In the event, the puppet regime in Kabul is headed by a president whose name has become a byword for cronyism, nepotism and corruption.

Another argument thrown up by "leftist" supporters of the war, such as the German Greens, was the necessity to liberate Afghan women from the tyranny of the Taliban. The fact is, however, the situation for Afghan women under the occupation has worsened.

In a statement published in May, the Afghan women's organization RAWA declared, "The so-called 'new' strategy of Obama's administration" has only brought "increased killings and ever more horrifying oppression," and has "proved itself as much more war-mongering than Bush."

Having sidelined the legal and ideological pretexts that were used to launch the war, the Obama administration is left with nothing other than fear-mongering—the claim that unless Afghanistan and Pakistan are cleared of terrorists, those regions will serve as bases for new attacks on the US homeland. In reality, of course, the crimes being carried out by the United States and NATO against the Afghan and Pakistani people only increase the likelihood of terrorist reprisals against Americans and Europeans.

What remains is the reality of a colonial-style war to suppress popular resistance to imperialist domination and the poverty and tyranny that go with it.

While the political establishment excludes any expression of popular anti-war sentiment, it is bolstered by the decision of the middle-class "left" groups and publications that organized anti-war protests against Bush to wind up their anti-war activity under Obama.

It is a fact that even as Obama maintains 140,000 US troops in Iraq and plans to keep tens of thousands there indefinitely, and he expands US military violence in Afghanistan and spreads it into Pakistan—and in the face of continuing mass popular opposition to the wars in the US and Europe—there is virtually no organized expression of anti-war sentiment. The socio-political layer that long presided over middle-class protest politics has seized on the election of Obama to complete its movement into the camp of US imperialism. It tacitly, or in some cases openly, supports Obama's wars of aggression.

There are critical political lessons to be learned for all those who sincerely oppose and want to put an end to imperialist war. In February of 2003, millions took to the streets all over the world to oppose the imminent US

invasion of Iraq. It was the biggest international anti-war protest in history.

That mass opposition was, however, channeled by the protest leaders behind various bourgeois parties which claimed to oppose the war or had "anti-war" factions within them. In the US, mass opposition to the war was diverted into campaigns to elect Democrats to Congress and the White House.

In Europe, pacifist organizations, leftist groupings, the Attac movement and the Party of Democratic Socialism (predecessor of the Left Party) in Germany sought to encourage similar illusions in Social Democratic parties and in the Greens, which in Germany and other European countries had expressed reservations about the war in Iraq.

The anti-war movement was aborted through its political subordination to capitalist parties and politicians. Those who led it have since largely joined the camp of imperialist war.

What conclusions are to be drawn? First: The desertion of the middle-class opportunist groups means that the working class will emerge more directly and openly as the leading social force against imperialist war. Second: The struggle against war can be developed only on the basis of the independent mobilization of the working class against all factions of the ruling elite and the capitalist system itself, which is the root cause of war. The connection between the struggle against war and the struggle against capitalism will become increasingly clear as the working class moves into battle against the impact of the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression.

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